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Representations of Mental Illness in *Joker*: The Form of Madness

Master's Thesis

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Introduction

Commercially successful films that come together under “Hollywood”, a metonym for the American film industry, reach global audiences. One of the oldest film industries in the world, Hollywood’s history stretches back to the early 20th century. Following WWI, the United States became a major supplier of films to the world market, (Bordwell 2003: 56). During the period of WWII, the “big five” studios were established: Paramount, Warner Bros, MGM, 20th Century Fox, RKO, (Bordwell 2003: 215-216). An analysis performed by UNESCO reveals that Hollywood remains one of the top producers and distributors of films worldwide, rivalled by the film industries of India and China, (UNESCO 2016: 8-9). Given the number of audiences that the US film industry has reached over the 20th century, the changing political and cultural landscape of the world, as well as the many technological advancements that have changed film, Hollywood represents a global phenomenon that can be tied to current trends in art, culture, politics, and technology. Hence, the cultural knowledge that it distributes is far from negligible. For the public health industry, the knowledge that is introduced to wide audiences concerning mental health can negatively impact perception of mental illness (Ma 2017).

Mental illness does not imply violent behaviour (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Despite this, Hollywood films have a tendency of portraying the mentally ill as dangerous to society (Stout et al. 2004; Hyler 2003). Research in psychology on commercially successful fiction films reveals that fictional films can impact audiences' knowledge and attitudes towards mental illness, leading to bias that can translate into rejection of real sufferers (Kimmerle and Cress 2013; Smith et al. 2019). In all categories of fictional films there is a cumulative effect of representations of mental illness on public perceptions (Pirkis et al. 2006). The link between representations of mental illness and cinematic representations of behaviour that is dangerous to society is confirmed by several studies (Hyler 2003; Stout et al. 2004; Rosenstock 2003; Brayton 2017). Hence, films are instrumental in cultivating potentially damaging attitudes towards sufferers of mental illness. The wider socio-cultural problem of discrimination against mental illness is a clearly complex problem – it encompasses many aspects. Three clear aspects connected to the general problem emerge from the above studies: (i) that mental illness is portrayed negatively on-screen, (ii) representations of mental illness introduce bias, and (iii) that cinematic representations of mental illness are not accurate when compared with clinical diagnosis based on the fourth and

fifth editions of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The *Diagnostic and Statistical manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) offer a definition of mental disorder that underlines psychiatric practice:

A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 20).

Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities (ibid: 20), and the DSM-V distinguishes mental disorders from deviant behaviour that is not internally linked to dysfunction (ibid: 20). This means that conflicts between individual and society due to conflicting values or beliefs are not mental disorders according to the DSM-V. In sum, based on the DSM-V, three key features of mental disorders can be distinguished: clinically significant disturbances, dysfunction that suggests biological or physical elements and distress and/or disability (ibid: 20). The domain of irrationality, or “madness” should not be confused with mental disorder. This distinction is important since madness remains a colloquial term distinct from mental illness—in Chapter 1, a discussion of what mental illness is will be offered with the purposes of identifying it pertinently in film. For the purposes of this thesis, mental illness and mental disorder are to be considered synonymous, but distinct from madness.

The object of study of this thesis is the film *Joker* by Todd Phillips. In *Joker* there are clear examples of cinematic representations of mental illness. Words such as “mental illness”, “narcissistic personality disorder”, “delusional psychosis”, “crazy”, “sick” are used to describe characters. Some of these terms are colloquial, others can be traced to clinical diagnosis. Arthur Fleck, the main character of the film, is a failed comedian that endures significant abuse throughout the film and refers to himself as “living with a mental illness”. Arthur lives with his adoptive mother Penny Fleck. Since Arthur Fleck is Penny Fleck’s adoptive son, any genetic component of mental illness between the two can be ruled out. The mental illness from which Arthur suffers remains unspecified. The film clearly shows that his adoptive mother has been diagnosed as mentally ill: she suffers from mental disorders, that are explicitly labelled “narcissistic personality disorder” and “delusional psychosis”.

The film is an interesting example of the link between cinematic representations of mental illness and cinematic representations of violence. This is so because of how *Joker* has been

treated from perspectives associated to (i) psychiatric literature and (ii) film studies literature. From the point of view of psychiatric literature, attempts to establish diagnosis for the character have been made. One study, for example, proposes that a complex fuzzy psychopathology, based on the DSM-V, can be attributed to Arthur Fleck; according to Skryabin the character Arthur Fleck meets diagnosis criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, while diagnosis of schizophrenia or psychotic disorder is unclear (Skryabin 2021). Arthur Fleck/Joker also shows symptoms of pseudobulbar affect, a neurological condition, according to Skryabin (ibid, 1). In film studies, *Joker* by Todd Philips has been studied from the point of view of loneliness, one study hinting at a bio-political perspective in explaining the stripping of Joker's self to bare life (Redmond 2021: 72). A study conducted by Kerins, that examines the ambiance of the fictional Gotham in relation to socio-economic inequalities, proposed an interesting perspective on the evolution of the main character: the Joker has a specific sensitivity that allows him to perceive the failings of the social structure, and, as a consequence, he proves to be of an exceptional rationality - he is the only one aware of society's rules no longer apply (Kerins 2021: 97-98).

The two perspectives paint a problematic picture of the representation of mental illness in *Joker*, as the message of the film with regards to how mental illness emerges as violent is not clear. There are several variables connected to Arthur Fleck, the most obvious being socio-economic status, as well as a deep concern for others, and each of these variables could influence the nature of the link between mental illness and violence. There is a connection between mental illness and violence realized in the protagonist Arthur Fleck because he eventually becomes a murderer. However, his life is spent in the shadow of his mother. As the plot unfolds, it is revealed that Arthur suffered abuse and neglect as a child due to Penny, because of her mental illness. Penny becomes an interesting variable, because her mental illness is specific, and her influence on the course of life of Arthur is obvious. During the events of the film, it is Arthur who becomes a killer, while Penny does not commit any acts of violence. However, Penny becomes an interesting variable, who could have influenced Arthur's downfall. Given the many variables connected to Arthur's life, it becomes unclear how the evolution of Arthur from living with a mental illness to becoming a criminal can be structured. Is it mental illness that is causing the eventual transformation of Arthur into a violent criminal, is it loneliness, is it low socio-economic status, is the lack of human connections, is it the influence of Arthur's mother that cause his transformation? What does the film propose? This is the problem that this thesis is aiming to solve: how are the different

variables connected to stressors that can influence the course of Arthur's life, who becomes violent. Within the larger landscape of Hollywood films about mental illness, can *Joker* be considered a normative example of film about mental illness?

Since the film presents the lives of at least two mentally ill people, their development within a particular cultural setting, and the transformation of the main protagonist from an unassertive, easily abused, failed comedian to the violent alter-Ego Joker, I propose that the meanings ascribed to mental illness can be understood through analysing the identity transformation of Arthur Fleck by connecting it to the plot development. In this thesis, I plan to use forms of life (Fontanille, 2015) to conceptualize Arthur's transformation of identity in the context of collective life, underlying the pattern manifested in his life. By considering the interactions he has with other characters, particularly with his mentally ill adoptive mother Penny Fleck, I plan to identify the stressors, as proposed by the film, that cause Arthur Fleck to adopt a new identity: the Joker.

Forms of life (*formes de vie*) follow from the analytical philosophy developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, given a generalised pragmatic of language (Fontanille 2015: location 171). They are abstract configurations, that are manifested through use, and show coherence and congruence on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of the semiotic function that unites a plane of expression with a plane of content (Fontanille 2015). In the framework developed by Jacques Fontanille, forms of life represent a particular type of semiosis that can occur within the semiosphere (ibid, 1: location 171-184). Connections between theories underlying forms of life and elements of film semiotic theories will justify the use of forms of life in film analysis. Forms of life will be developed also within theories of discourse developed by Fontanille (Fontanille 2006), which include concepts such as the body proper, field of presence and signifying perception. As such, forms of life, semiotic arrangements underlying the existence of syntagmatic schemes of life, can be found at different levels of audio-visual discourse; audio-visual discourse will be developed by connecting elements of Fontanille's theories of discourse and forms of life with elements of semiotic film theories (Chatman 1974).

Concretely, forms of life will be associated to the actions of the characters referred to as "mentally ill": Penny Fleck Arthur Fleck/Joker. The existence of competing forms of life is a methodological principle – as it will be discussed in Chapter 2, forms of life exist and act together. Given that various layers of analysis, corresponding to different socio-cultural factors, can be attributed to the transformation between the two identities, Arthur Fleck, and

Joker, I will study how the meaning of this form of life is grasped through transformation, uncovering the qualities of Arthur that are connected to his transformation into Joker.

The chief research aim of this thesis is to uncover qualities that can condition the nature of the link between the representations of mental illness and representations of violence in *Joker*, the context of the already established link between representations of mental illness and representations of violence in Hollywood films. Naturally, the analysis of *Joker* cannot be duplicated to describe all films about mental illness. However, it can provide an approach that is novel due to focusing on identifying qualities pertaining to the character's social identity, and so it could be extended to similar cinematic representations of mental illness that present mental illness as developing in society. Concerning the choice of film, I propose two reasons for which *Joker* is excellent material for the application of forms of life.

First, the application of forms of life to Todd Phillips's 2019 film *Joker* promises identifying semiotic abstract configurations, modelled by forms of life, that are manifested through use, but are distinguished from users – in the case of films the users can be identified with actors, in the sense of figurative instances, that are affected by tensions provided by the fictional world in which they find themselves. Forms of life presuppose the binding together of phenomenological theories concerning actants that are manifested through actors on the surface. This means that there is a “deep sensibility” which is manifested in discursive construction and that can be uncovered at the level of forms of life. This “deep sensibility” is anchored in concepts provided by Jacques Fontanille in *The Semiotics of Discourse* (Fontanille 2006), *Corps et sens* (Fontanille 2011) and *Formes de vie* (Fontanille, 2015).

Second, *Joker* represents excellent material to identify the transformation of the character from non-violent to violent in the context of multiple representations connected to mental illness. As discussed in the above, *Joker* not only depicts a highly complex and rather fuzzy example of representations of mental illness, but the mental illnesses are being portrayed as evolving and moulding each other as the plot unfolds, revealing a certain “life” to mental illness. Further, Arthur Fleck displays some resistance against his diagnosis, and against the labels attributed to him by society, which further shows that his mental illness can be well conceptualised as form of life due to the principle of perseverance, which is discussed by Fontanille as a necessary condition for the recognition of forms of life (Fontanille 2015: location 638 of 5124).

By making use of structural and formalist semiotic concept, a language of film rooted in theories of Christian Metz (Metz, 1982) and David Bordwell (Bordwell, 2017) will be theorized. In addition, based on theories presented by Seymour Chatman (Chatman, 1978) and Jacques Fontanille (Fontanille 2015; Fontanille 2011; Fontanille 2006) a concept of discourse of film will be proposed that will establish the method for extracting the data from the film. Based on the data, forms of life can be identified. The forms of life that the film produces will be under investigation to elucidate the progression/regression of violent behaviour connected to signs of transformation/ revelation that describe social identities revealed by figurative expressions in both Arthur Fleck/Joker and Penny Fleck. On the paradigmatic plane of content, a model of identity that rests upon the body actant (Fontanille 2011) will be considered – the methodological foundation of this will be treated in detail in Chapter 2 of the methodology section.

The research hypothesis is that the regression/progression of violence as committed by the outside world on main character, Arthur Fleck, and as committed by Fleck on the outside world, can reveal an underlying form of life in competition to the one associated to the character's adoptive mother, Penny Fleck. This form of life can be used in gathering insight on the variables that influence the transformation of mental illness into violence. As shown by the story line, Arthur Fleck's form of life eventually overcomes and replaces Penny Fleck's form of life as the dominant form of life attributed to mental illness. Both the characters and the world in which they develop, are to be taken as dynamic entities, constantly moulding each other: signs of cinematic violence are connected to signs of transformation between two states of the main character that reveal different patterns of behaviour and emotions. Through forms of life, such transformations between the main character and the cinematic world can be treated in dynamic form. Mental illness in this film can be identified by (i) the attribution, as per signs, of terms related to the psychiatric concept of mental illness proposed by the DSM-V being distinct from madness, a colloquial term, that can be identified by the attribution of (ii) signs connected to chaotic behaviour. To examine this research hypothesis, there are three research questions under investigation:

- A) Does the film present a causal link between mental illness and violence; is mental illness dangerous?
- B) Does the film present a causal link between socio-economic conditions and violence?

C) How is the link between mental illness and violence realized: through some third variable, or due to some specific stressors?

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. There are two sections, each with three chapters, and each of the chapters are divided into several sub-chapters. Section I, titled Methodology, will be organized in three chapters. Chapter 1 concerns the recognition of mental illness in film through the identification of medical criteria that allow mental illness to be traced to a clinical concept provided by the DSM-V, or to colloquial notion of madness. Chapter 2 introduces the concept of form of life, while considering the wider semiotic landscape of semiotic notions in which forms of life can be placed. Chapter 3 develops and explain the theory of forms of life in connection to film theories, while outlining a concrete method of analysis. Section II concerns the segmentation and analysis part. In this section, Chapter 4 will segment the film into three parts, outlining recognizable patterns on the plane of expression that will allow the construction of a plane of content that is relational to the plane of expression. Based on the data collected in chapter 4, Chapter 5 will examine the elements on the plane of expression while connecting them with elements on the plane of content, resulting in concrete forms of life associated to mental illness. As such, the analysis in Chapter 5 will be focused on two distinct aspects: the tensions between different facets of the I attributed to the split between two contrasting identities Arthur Fleck/Joker by using the concept of the actant body, and the evolving relationship between Arthur Fleck/Joker and Penny Fleck.

Section I: Methodology

Chapter 1: Mental Illness in Film

1.1 Mental Illness as a Public Issue

In the following, I aim to present how representations of mental illness in film and various media have been treated in health and psychiatric studies and how their impact has been evaluated. To do so, I will focus on developing a literature review based on two directions: (i) the polarity of representations of mental illness in cinema and (ii) delimitation and assessment of the impact of mental illness as a public problem. The landscape of representations of mental illness in film together with the problems that they pose will serve to delimit a landscape of current knowledge concerning cinematic representations of mental illness. Outside of this current knowledge, there are possible ways in which representations of mental illness can be examined to reveal interesting new ways to connect them. I argue that the application of forms of life to mental illness provides a novel approach to study representations of mental illness in the film *Joker*, and that this method of analysis can be extended to other media.

An analysis of 34 manuscripts published between 1990 and 2003, presented in an article conducted by Stout et al., reveals that a strong link between representations of mental illness, and violent behaviour exists across various media: film, newspapers, mass media and television (Stout et al. 2004: 546-551). The article by Stout et al. did not aim at producing a definition of mental illness, but it catalogues the nature of empirical studies to understand mental illness. The methods used in these empirical studies included content analysis and discourse analysis: the aim of the methods was to reveal the link between mental illness and negative attitudes (ibid, 1). Based on the results of the study it was noted that only a handful of the studies presented in the article have identified specific mental illnesses, using medical terms such as schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder (ibid, 2: 545), signalling that mental illness has a broader scope in culture. In this case, the films show mental illness through the language and attitudes of the characters within the film world. An analysis by Hyler of several stereotypes produced in film, reveals that stereotypes of mental illness have an important and underestimated negative effect on the perception of people with mental

disorders, leading to stigmatization of various illnesses (Hyler 2003). In addition, in popular media, representations of mental illness as dangerous to society can be constructed in an ideological manner via polarised talk that rests upon the binary division of “Us” and “Them” (Olstead 2002). This polarisation of representations of mental illness seems to pose interesting new problems, from the point of view of acknowledging a present ideology that can attribute values to mental illnesses. Consider for example the series *Elementary*. In the context of capitalism, Brayton investigates the character of Sherlock Holmes from the CBS series *Elementary* (Brayton 2017). While the series manages to portray Holmes’s lack of empathy in a nuanced and more realistic way, *Elementary* seems to polarise mental illness (Brayton 2017: 292). Depending on whether the subject is useful/productive to society, mental illness is portrayed in a positive/negative light; this polarisation helps to reinforce existing stereotypes associated with bipolar disorder, manic depression, schizophrenia, sadistic tendencies, and symptoms of psychopathy (ibid, 1). In his study, Brayton also demonstrates that representations of mental illness do not have to be simplistic for them to reinforce stereotypes associated to key words such as “mental defective” or “insane” (ibid, 2).

Representations of mental illness in film do not always carry connotations of danger to society, as demonstrated in *Mental Illness in Motion Pictures*, where the authors discuss a wide range of films that include neurodevelopmental disorders as well as substance related disorders (Wedding, Niemec 2014). The author's treatment of mental illness in films includes diverse film genres such as horror, drama, and suspense films, while the historical range of their selected film stretches from the early 20th century to contemporary films (ibid, 1: 8-9). From the research conducted by Wedding and Niemec, it becomes clear that some films portray psychopathology while emphasising the character’s strengths and virtues (ibid, 2: 12-13). While Niemec and Wedding show that mental illness can have multiple representations, the focus of their work remains the accuracy of such representations, with many representations of mental illness remaining highly inaccurate. The standard for evaluating the accuracy of mental illness representations, in Niemec and Wedding’s book, is the fifth edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (ibid, 3: 8-9). Given that film is an immensely powerful medium for shaping’s viewers from Wedding’s and Niemec’s perspective (ibid, 4: 2-4), it can be inferred that representations of mentally ill can have far-reaching consequences, potentially leading to mislabelling. Despite this potentially harmful mislabelling, some commercially successful films remain accurate examples of the mental disorders they represent. For example, consider a notable exception to most representations

of schizophrenia: *A Beautiful Mind*. This film depicts the life and struggles of mathematician John Nash, and due to its accurate portrayal of schizophrenia the film remains a suitable choice for psychiatrists in teaching audiences about schizophrenia (Rosenstock 2003). However, even John Nash's representation in *A Beautiful Mind*, reinforces the link between madness and genius, constructing a genius outcast, condemned to live at the fringes of society because of his exceptionalism.

In sum, there seems to be a trend in the current knowledge concerning representations of mental illness. The mentally ill can be traced to stereotypes that can lead to exclusion. While such links seem to exist widely in various media, empirical studies have so far focused on establishing that negative bias exists towards sufferers due to such representations. However, what the previously mentioned studies did not reveal is the more exact construction of such links in connection to other mental illnesses, when these mental illnesses are co-present within the same fictional universe. It is for this reason that, in the present work, I analyse the specific link between mental illnesses in *Joker* by considering two carriers of forms of life: Arthur Fleck/Joker and Penny Fleck. To better understand the nature of representations, I will also consider (i) the issue of clinical diagnosis as per DSM-V and (ii) literature connected to philosophical discussion concerning mental health. Thus, the scope of "harm" that is connected to inaccurate representations can be better contextualized via the pathology paradigm and competing paradigms.

1.2 Behind the scenes: Clinical diagnosis

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the criteria of diagnosis of mental illnesses based on descriptions of criteria found in the DSM-V. These criteria will be used to trace the mental illnesses referred to in *Joker* back to clinical diagnosis. The analysis proposed in this sub-chapter is conducted to identify a landscape of notions connected to "mental illness" that have their origin in psychiatric treatment. To exemplify criteria and to show how these criteria are being framed, a few mental illnesses will be discussed, including schizophrenia and personality disorders. There are two directions that are being proposed. First, to identify underlying criteria for mental illness by considering guidelines provided by the American Psychiatric Association. Second, to identify some key properties of the pathological paradigm that underlines psychiatric diagnosis. This will be done by offering a brief discussion of the theories of Michel Foucault, who belongs to the anti-psychiatrist movement, and the neurodiversity paradigm. As such, the delimitation of principles concerning mental illness will serve to identify whether a clinical concept of mental illnesses exists in *Joker*.

The American Psychiatric Association uses the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, abbreviated to DSM, to classify and categorise mental illnesses. There are five editions, the most current being DSM-5, which is the fifth edition. Because of these different editions, the evolution of psychiatric diseases can be traced. Due to the breadth of clinical diagnoses for mental disorders, no definition can be sufficiently encompassing to account for all possible variants of mental disorder (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 20).

However, there are several requirements for mental illness to exist and these include disruption in cognition, emotion regulation, together with significant distress in social and occupational abilities (ibid, 1). Social deviance is not to be confused with mental illness since social deviance must result from a disturbance within the individual to be considered mental illness (ibid, 2). The distinction between social deviance and mental illness is important for recognizing the mentally ill in *Joker*, due to at least two reasons.

On the one hand, criminality, a specific sub-case of social deviance that is clearly represented in *Joker* cannot be taken as a sign for mental illness. According to the DSM-5 such an association is not implied. This association exists in *Joker* since Arthur Fleck, who is represented as mentally ill, becomes a murderer. The point of view presented in this thesis is that criminal behaviour, a subcase of socially deviant behaviour, must not be confused with mental illness. Thus, any signs of criminality will not be considered as signifying mental illness. On the other hand, many representations of mental illness in popular cinema connect mental illness to violence, where violence can also be associated with social deviance. In *Joker*, violence is presented in several examples as characters are violent both physically and verbally. While both violent people and mentally ill people can be labelled as social deviants, in this thesis the distinction between the two is crucial. Hence, acts of violence, even in the absence of reason, will not be considered pertinent in identifying mental illness. This point of view is concurrent with the explanation provided in the DSM-5: considering social deviance, in the case of mental illness the disturbance comes from within and must be subject to several criteria of diagnosis by clinicians (American Psychiatric Association 2013:20).

To understand how film representations of mental illness can be traced to clinical diagnosis, it is necessary to understand that the criterion of clinical diagnosis is a historical concept – this will be treated in more detail in the next sub-chapter via the theories of Michel Foucault. For example, consider the example of schizophrenia: the criteria for clinical diagnosis have changed since the 1994 edition of the DSM, although the criteria for diagnosis have not been completely altered (American Psychiatric Association 1994; American Psychiatric

Association 2013). In the following, I will aim to provide a summary of the concept of schizophrenia, as presented in the fourth and fifth edition of the DSM. This summary would help isolate characteristics of schizophrenia that remain unchanged as well as characteristics that have been added or removed.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, (DSM-IV) schizophrenia can be classified based on more general psychotic symptoms (American Psychiatric Association 1994: 273), meaning that schizophrenia is a psychotic disorder. Despite this, the term 'psychotic' cannot be used as a substitute for 'schizophrenia' in its clinical definition, since, according to the 1994 edition of the DSM, schizophrenia is a specific case of psychotic diseases. As such, schizophrenia is indicated by a cluster of signs and symptoms, which must be present over a period of at least one month, the so-called active phase. Characteristic symptoms are delusions, hallucinations, disorganised speech, grossly disorganised or catatonic behaviour, and negative symptoms that include affective flattening, alogia or avolition (ibid, 1: 285). In the case of a valid diagnosis of schizophrenia, cognitive and emotional dysfunction, according to the authors of the Fourth DSM edition, can occur at different levels: "perception, inferential thinking, language and communication, behavioural monitoring, affect, fluency and productivity of thought and speech, hedonic capacity, volition and drive, and attention" (ibid, 2: 274). Perhaps the most important feature of schizophrenia is that no single symptom is particularly characteristic of it, but a "constellation of signs and symptoms" must be considered for reliable clinical diagnosis (ibid, 3: 274). Characteristic symptoms are categorised as positive and negative, so named because they respectively signal distortion (positive symptoms) and diminution of normal functions (negative symptoms). The fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, describes schizophrenia as a spectrum, and as a case of psychotic disorder (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 87). The fifth edition of the DSM is also the most recent, which means it can be used as reference for understanding the most current conceptualization of schizophrenia. There are five domains used to diagnose schizophrenia: delusions, hallucinations, disorganised thinking, abnormal motor behaviour that includes catatonia and negative symptoms; abnormalities in any of these domains can lead to a clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia (ibid, 1: 87). Negative symptoms are defined as diminished emotional expression, avolition, alogia (diminished speech output) and anhedonia (decreased ability to experience pleasure) and asociality (apparent lack of interest in social interactions) (ibid: 88).

More importantly, a diagnosis of schizophrenia must exclude other psychotic symptoms (ibid: 88).

From this brief analysis, it becomes clear that the diagnostic of mental illness is not only tied to a “historical time” but it is tied to a certain paradigm. This paradigm has been discussed in the context of the neurodiversity movement (Chapman 2019). The neurodiversity paradigm proposes a shift from the pathology paradigm that is used in psychiatry (Chapman 2019: 372-373). This does not mean that the neurodiversity movement rejects psychiatric classification, but rather considers different psychiatric types not as “mentally ill” but as belonging to subcultures that are oppressed by a hegemonical “neuro-typicality”, which encompasses groups that have behaviours and cognitions that are not stigmatized (ibid, 1). In sum, according to the neurodiversity movement, many types that currently fall under psychiatric classification are oppressed by the cultural and social systems in which they exist, which means that any disability is socio-cultural (ibid, 2). The pathology paradigm is based on two axioms: there is one “right” normal way for human brains to be, and substantial deviations from normality indicate mental illness (ibid, 3: 373). The neurodiversity movement lies on three axioms: that neurodiversity is natural and valuable, the notion of “healthy” is culturally constructed, and the social dynamics of neurodiversity showcase various inequalities that are analogous to the ones that exist to other organizing dimensions such as gender, or ethnicity (ibid, 4: 374). This is fundamentally different from the pathology paradigm that underlines psychiatric practice. What I will retain from this analysis is that the DSM-V operates within the realm of pathology, where significant deviations from “normal” can be classified as mentally ill.

Hence, within this general pathological paradigm, that I retain from the above analysis, a diagnostic of mental illness can be made based on specific clinically specific features that define specific mental disorders. The presence of any of the medical terms in film signals mental illness. The comparison between the two most recent editions of the DSM is also useful for understanding how representations of schizophrenia in Hollywood films are similar or different from clinical diagnosis for films released before the appearance of the DSM-V. These two periods must be considered distinct because the way schizophrenia has been defined from a clinical perception has changed. For example, the fourth edition of the DSM identifies five subtypes of schizophrenia: paranoid, disorganized, catatonic, undifferentiated, and residual (American Psychiatric Association 1994: 286-290). These subtypes are eliminated from the fifth edition of the DSM. The fifth edition of the DSM also stresses that

there is a strong genetic component to schizophrenia (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 103).

Concerning personality disorders, which are a subset of mental disorders, the DSM-V categorises them based on a pattern of behaviour, motivated from within the inner world of the individual, that deviates from the expectations of one's culture (American Psychiatric Association 2016: 646). Personality disorders are varied, and their diagnosis is qualitatively different from that of other mental disorders. As a tendency, the disorders are diagnosed because of a prevailing pattern that disables the sufferer socially (ibid, 1: 646-684). For example, narcissistic personality disorder is diagnosed based on having a grand sense of self-importance, need for admiration, and lack of empathy (ibid, 2: 669-670). This personality disorder is important for the purposes of this thesis, because the association between narcissistic personality disorder and Penny Fleck is done explicitly in *Joker* – she is presented as diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder.

In Sum, DSM-IV and DSM-V offer criteria of clinical diagnosis of mental illness. For the purposes of this thesis, understanding the criteria of clinical diagnosis can only serve to trace back mental illness to diagnostic. However, one further distinction must be made: that between mental illness, and madness. As such, by using the theories of Michel Foucault, in the next subchapter I aim to give an overview of mental illness and madness. The argument that mental illness is a historical construct, proposed by Foucault, represents not only a famous argument from the anti-psychiatry movement, but also an epistemological treatment aimed to understand how mental illness is connected to the concept of madness. This is useful because an association between mental illness and madness already exists in culture.

1.3 Mental illness as madness in film

The purpose of this subchapter is to explain madness, which can be used to understand how “mental illness” is referred to colloquially. Below, a short analysis of madness in relation with mental illness will be provided to clarify how can mental illness be understood based on the historical concept of madness. In other words, does the historical emergence of mental illness leave out attributes that can be classified under a general concept of madness? By mapping out the domain between madness and mental illness, in this subchapter I aim to show that attributes of the mentally ill cannot be confused with erratic or violent behaviour in the absence of clinical diagnosis.

Madness and its medicalisation has been given significant attention in the works of the philosopher Michel Foucault, who has written extensively about the history of madness (Foucault 2015). In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault analyses the history of madness, and its eventual institutionalization. Madness, starting with the end of the Middle Ages, was associated with “strange” forms of knowledge, and linked to “man, to his weaknesses, dreams and illusions” (Foucault 1965: 26). While the “mad” did not fully belong to society, they were subject to little surveillance and their social exclusion would serve as spiritual reintegration. With the renaissance, the exclusion of the mad had the imaginary analogue of a metaphorical journey represented by a meaningful vehicle: “The ship of fools” (Foucault 1965: 7). In the seventeenth century, when the institution of the Hôpital Général came into being, the poor, the mad, and generally social rejects became part of it. As Foucault writes: “From the middle of the seventeenth century, madness was linked with this country of confinement [...]” (Foucault 1965: 39). While madness and mental illness not being mutually exclusive, it becomes clear from Foucault’s analysis that they are distinct notions. The distinction lies in that mental illness or mental disorder is a medical term, while madness is a colloquial term. Hence, before the advent of psychiatry, madness encompassed people that were considered undesirable for the system, while the modern psychiatry advocates for treatment for mental illness. For the purposes of this thesis, the distinction between madness and mental illness is useful in conceptualising mental illness across more general lines, that can be used to identify the nature of mental illness in the film *Joker*.

The people subjected to confinement in the General Hospital included, in Foucault’s words, “the debauched, spendthrift fathers, prodigal sons”, but also “the insane”, demented men, individuals of “wandering mind” (Foucault 1965: 65). The insane would be the ones without thought, and the ones who would be beyond reason inciting to public scandal. In *Joker*, Arthur Fleck’s mental illness seemingly spirals out of control into insanity, since his actions inspire a revolution that incites to public scandal in a fashion that is similar to Foucault’s definition of the “insane”.

For Foucault, madness would not be a natural thing, but rather a construct which is bound by the rationality of its time. Hence, looking at madness through the Foucauldian lens, it becomes clear that “mad” signifies sources of social disequilibrium, potentially threatening social order, while being distinct from the mentally ill, which are suffering from potentially debilitating conditions without having to pose the threat that the “mad” do.

While the theories of Foucault are useful in understanding that mental illness emerged from madness, it should be noted that Foucault's treatment of mental illness can be understood as conflicting with the DSM – Foucault remains a famous anti-psychiatrist. Hence, what I retain from Foucault is that disorganized and dangerous behaviour that can be characteristic of madness, precedes and connects with current definitions of mental illness. Despite this, mental illness should not be recognized by signs related to madness: “crazy”, “insane”. As these words are used in film to describe mental illness, it is important to consider that they will be dismissed in understanding forms of life connected to mental illness. Hence to recognize mental illness and madness, there are specific signs that can be used:

Mental illness: is recognized via terms that can specifically be found in the DSM-V, or by being referred to as “mental illness”

Madness: is recognized by colloquial terms in the absence of medical terms found in the DSM-V, and in the presence of terms that are colloquial: “insanity”, “mad”, “crazy”

In conclusion, this chapter outlines the methodological principles for recognizing mental illness in *Joker*. Considering the distinction between mental illness, that belongs to psychiatry and madness that belongs to the recognition of mental illness from a colloquial point of view, forms of life connected to mental illness will consider only those signs that either (i) explicitly present obvious associations between character and mental illness and/or (ii) offer specific conditions or symptoms that can be traced to clinical diagnosis. Based on these criteria, the forms of life of mental illness, associated to Arthur Fleck/Joker and Penny Fleck are identified. People who incite to public scandal with no reason can be referred to colloquially as “mad”, however, this cannot be a diagnostic for mental illness and therefore no mental illness will be inferred in the study of *Joker* based solely on actions that seem irrational or labels that include colloquial terms associated to madness. This leads to the necessity of having two different forms of life, one based on “madness” (which does not exclude any potential diagnosis) and one attributed to “mental illness” that can be traced back to clinical diagnosis and is attributed to Penny Fleck, who is shown from medical records reproduced in the film world to have suffered from narcissistic personality disorder and delusional psychosis.

Chapter 2: Forms of Life

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the notion of forms of life (Fontanille 2015) and to describe its applicability to representations of mental illness in *Joker*. As such, this chapter outlines the methodological principles for finding the forms of life that describe mental illness and madness in *Joker*.

This chapter has several aims. First, to give a theoretical overview of the concept of forms of life, as it is presented by Jacques Fontanille, while identifying some adjacent concepts that Fontanille discusses in several other works. Second, to identify the semiotic properties of forms of life and to explain them. Third, to elaborate on semiotic properties of forms of life by illustrating them with a concrete example, that is treated in *Formes de vie* (Fontanille 2015) – the literary genre of the absurd. Following this, explicit connections with film theories will be made, the aim being to make of the concept of forms of life a suitable tool for analysing representations of mental illness and madness in *Joker*. As the strongest theoretical contribution will be that of forms of life, this will be treated in significant detail compared to film theories.

2.1 Theoretical overview of forms of life

In his book, *Formes de vie* (Fontanille 2015), Jacques Fontanille introduces forms of life, a concept rooted in the analytical tradition. Forms of life are “signifying sets” composed of signs, texts and practices and they exist within the semiosphere (ibid, 1). They can be recognized in symbolic attitudes and expressions, being responsible for the formation of identities (ibid, 2). Moreover, forms of life can be recognized by their transformations and by their contrast with other forms of life (ibid, 3: location 140 of 5124). Importantly, they are not restricted to one domain of activity, as they come in various guises: they can find themselves in various types of discourse (ibid, 4: location 140 of 5124).

To illustrate their distinguishing characteristics, Fontanille establishes the landscape of notions that concern collective systems capable of providing meaning. These notions comprise: (i) modes of identification proposed by the anthropologist Phillippe Descola, (ii) modes of existence proposed by the sociologist Bruno Latour, (iii) “styles of life” proposed by socio-semiotician Eric Landowski, and (iv) the semiosphere proposed by Juri Lotman

(Fontanille 2015: location 171 of 5124). Forms of life are defined as semiotically organized structures, labelled “langages” (languages) that refer to social and cultural identities (ibid, 1: location 206 of 5124).

Referring to Lotman’s semiosphere, Fontanille explains that the semiosphere provides “languages” as specific entities that exist within it, whereas the biosphere refers to living organisms (Fontanille 2015: location 308 of 5124). The semiosphere therefore encompasses the forms of life proposed by Fontanille, where these forms remain in dialogue with living organisms (ibid, 1: location 327 of 5124). In a similar way to Landowski’s lifestyles, forms of life concern themselves with styles of behaviour, but they are characteristic of social and cultural identities which can function autonomously within the semiosphere (ibid: location 206 of 5124). Thus, forms of life are different from physical, chemical, and biological types of existence: they are semiotic existents (ibid, 2: location 292 of 5124).

Fontanille also discusses how forms of life are connected to the concept proposed by Wittgenstein, emphasizing that despite their original grounding in “ways of acting” that are common to humanity (ibid, 3: location 364 of 5124), forms of life can be envisaged within a broader mode of existence than “living with language”; a mode of existence that encompasses entities that satisfy two conditions, (i) one of existence together and (ii) the other one of acting together (ibid, 4: location 468 of 5124), the latter condition signalling that the entities are to some extent interdependent. Discussing Wittgenstein’s concept of forms of life, which concerns the formation of forms of life from “language games” Fontanille explains that “forms of life” are linked to the formation of classes of words that stem from language games (ibid, 5: location 382 of 5124). For Fontanille, the interactions that take place in collective life form a set of “substances of experience” that allows for the formation of semiotic objects and these substances receive a set of forms (shapes) that allow them to be grouped based on (human) norms, values, and passions (ibid, 6: location 418 of 5124). The question of forms and substance will be elaborated in more detail in sub-chapter 2.2. For the purposes of locating them in signifying configurations, one can distinguish within this general mode of existence of “being and acting together” patterns established within interactions of all sorts of entities (forms of life pertaining to humans being one very specific case!) (ibid, 7). This is described in the quote below:

“C’est pourquoi nous opposons à une conception qui ferait de la vie le terme générique un autre raisonnement : le mode d’existence générique est celui de l’« être ensemble » (exister et agir avec, ou contre) (ibid, 8: location 468 of 5124).”

“This is why we oppose a conception that would make life the generic term with another reasoning: the generic mode of existence is that of "being together" (existing and acting with, or against) (ibid, 9: location 468 of 5124)”

By the above quote, Fontanille means that forms of life presuppose living and non-living entities in interaction: it is sufficient to identify a semiotic schema of existence that is iconic or potentially made iconic for the necessary substances to exist, and following this, to become forms of life. For example, forms of life can arise from machines in interaction, if such interactions can be localised in time and space and if they are described by certain rhythmic movements (Fontanille 2015: location 442-448 of 5124). This implies that forms of life can go through phases as they arise out of collective experiences: invention, creation, development, dissemination, generalisation, stereotypical freezing, decline. Hence, a form of life can develop, it can compete with other life forms of life, it can spread and invade an entire culture, but it can also weaken and die – all possible stages through which their meaning can be grasped. The possible stages through which forms of life can go illustrate that they can be considered (a) species-specific, arising from individual entities that are part of the same “species” or “kind”, (b) individualistic, as it exists in relation to other forms of life within the same semiosphere, and (c) changing, recognizable as process entities and not as static configurations. Forms of life can be recognized by their syntagmatic form, that Fontanille terms “a figurative style of an existential schema”, which receives contents that are characteristic of human life (emotions, norms etc) (ibid, 1). Hence, according to Fontanille, forms of life have a syntagmatic axis that organizes the development of life in time, and a paradigmatic axis represented by a congruent set of properties that concern the “meaning” of life (ibid: location 183). While having a syntagmatic and a paradigmatic dimension is a property of forms of life, it is also a property of signs – more specific ways in which forms of life differ from signs, will be treated in more detail in the next sub-chapter. For the purposes of situating forms of life within the wider landscape of semiotic notions, it becomes essential to recognize that they are forms of persistence (there must be an obstacle that allows them to struggle, to persist) shaped by collective interactions (ibid, 2: location 427 of 5124).

Moreover, according to Fontanille, a form of life can be situated in connection to the modes of existence proposed by Bruno Latour, and they are to be distinguished from the semiotic modes of existence which describe epistemological phases that lead to manifestations:

“La notion de « modes d’existence » proposée par Latour étant maintenant située par rapport à celle de « formes de vie », et dans la perspective de leur construction sémiotique, nous proposons désormais de les dénommer formes d’existence sociales, en référence à leur rôle de conditions particulières pour la

constitution des formes de vie, mais également pour les distinguer clairement des modes d'existence sémiotiques (virtuel, potentiel, actuel et réel) qui décrivent les phases épistémologiques qui conduisent du système immanent à la manifestation.” (Fontanille 2015: location 556 of 5124).

“The concept of “modes of existence” proposed by Latour is now positioned with respect to the concept of “form of life”, and from the point of view of their semiotic construction, we propose from now on to name them forms of social existence, referring to their role of specific conditions for the constitution of forms of life, and equally to distinguish them clearly from the semiotic modes of existence (virtual, potential, actual and real) which describe the epistemological stages that lead from the immanent system to manifestation. (Fontanille 2015: location 556 of 5124).

In the context of existing theories of language developed by Saussure (virtual, realized) and Hjelmslev (the realizable and the realized), Fontanille frames the semiotic modes of existence as epistemological levels necessary for a theory of language (Fontanille 2006: 34). As such, a theory of modes of existence must be connected to a theory of language such that the objects being manipulated are understood (ibid). Hence, forms of life cannot be reduced to ways in which societies of the “living” (human and/or non-human) organize themselves, and they are not in themselves stages that describe the evolution of systems. As seen in the above discussion, forms of life are conditioned by a mode of existence, “existing and acting with/against”. This means they are ultimately recognizable languages that develop thanks to systems of interdependent entities (which can be alive or not) through their patterns of mutual action. Therefore, the substances of “life”, from the point of view of forms of life, are given by interactions that can result from interdependent entities that exist together, and these substances can be given recognizable shape by parameters that include expression and content, as well as a syntagmatic and a paradigmatic axis.

2.2 Forms of life and their contiguities

The concept of forms of life, presupposes a concept of life, as well as the semiotic concept of form. Retaining a simplified definition of forms of life as semiotic functions that unite a plan of expression with a plane of content (Fontanille 2015: location 213 of 5124) can help identify them as semiotic notions. Although true, this definition is problematic, as mentioned before, because it does not distinguish between forms of life and signs. In the following, I will elaborate more precisely how forms of life unfold.

Roland Barthes discusses in *Elements of Semiology* that sign, a compound of signifier and signified in Saussure’s conception, unfolds along a plane of expression and a plane of content (Barthes, 1964: 39). Equally, Barthes discusses the dichotomy of form/substance by referring to Hjelmslev’s use of forms and substance as strata found on each plane: the form is described due to epistemological criteria based on linguistic criteria, while substance can only be described by extra-linguistic criteria (ibid, 1: 40). Considering the signified, Barthes argues

that the notion of substance, that can be present on the level of form or content, must be distinguished from matter (ibid, 2: 47). However, while a substance can be immaterial, the substance of the signifier is always material (ibid). This implies that substance is formed matter. As Fontanille explains, a syntagmatic form of life can be placed under the constraints of narrativity (Fontanille 2015: location 742 of 5124). One must acknowledge that from the point of view of “experiencing life”, the substance is shaped on the plane of expression, and this substance is recognized through the form given by narrativity (ibid: location 759 of 5124). This is well illustrated by the quote below:

“Du côté de la substance, en effet, la première étape de la vie est la naissance, et la dernière est la mort ; du côté de la forme (le schéma narratif canonique), la première étape est la qualification, et la dernière la sanction. Naître à la vie en tant que substance n’est qu’une borne initiale, et il faut y projeter une forme syntagmatique particulière pour qu’elle devienne significative; la forme syntagmatique projetée par le schéma narratif canonique en décide spécifiquement : elle neutralise la valeur de la borne initiale, et ne prend en compte que l’ensemble des phases d’acquisition de la compétence” (Fontanille 2015: location 759 of 5124)

“With regards to substance, indeed, the first stage of life is birth, and the last is death; on the side of the form (the canonical narrative schema), the first step is qualification, and the last is sanction. To be born into life as a substance is only an initial "boundary", and a particular syntagmatic form must be projected onto it for it to become meaningful; the syntagmatic form projected by the canonical narrative scheme decides this meaning of the boundary specifically: it neutralizes the value of the initial boundary, and only considers all the phases of acquiring "modalities of competence Fontanille 2015: location 759 of 5124) ”.

The syntagmatic dimension is associated to an order of steps, or stages, that allow the progression of a narrative giving it shape (Fontanille 2015: location 796 of 5124). Life, from the perspective of forms of life is associated with a collection of indeterminate, ambiguous, and unarticulated substances, where these substances consist of elements which are perceptible, located in time and space: from beginning (birth) and to an end (death) (ibid). The syntagmatic dimension is the attribution of a succession of generative stages, well-delineated stages that act as a “mould” to be placed on “life” (ibid). These stages bring about “modalities of competence” that exist the plane of expression and can be used to project values on the subject or object of the action on the plane of content (Fontanille 2015: location 773 of 5124). The values that are projected on a subject or object imply the existence of a narrative journey, and these values constitute a plane of content. Hence, a syntagmatic schema of existence is chosen on the level of expression while projected onto the course of life, such that modal, passionate and thematic configurations are associated to it on the plane of content (ibid: location 794 of 5124).

The two dimensions of syntagmatic and paradigmatic, as well as their relationship, are presented by Roland Barthes in *Elements of Semiology*. Barthes discusses syntagmatic and

associative relationships based on concept from Saussure (Barthes 1964: 58). In Barthes' interpretation, Saussure distinguishes two planes of language: one of syntagms, and one of associations (ibid). The plane of syntagms (the syntagmatic plane) can only progress by taking units from a relation of substitution that is associative (ibid, 1: 59). The associative plane, according to Barthes, later became the paradigmatic plane (ibid, 2: 59). This distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic seems to be inspired from the concept of grammar in linguistics. In grammar, one can distinguish between morphology (paradigmatic) and syntax (syntagmatic). According to Spencer and Zwicky, "Morphology is at the conceptual centre of linguistics. This is because morphology is the study of word structure, and words are at the interface between phonology, syntax, and semantics." (Spencer and Zwicky 1998: 1) To illustrate the existence of syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis, consider the following examples.

First, consider the use of adjectives in various utterances in English. The choice of adjectives implies two distinct preconditions. On the one hand, one must choose an adjective category that suits the context, and the noun to which this adjective is applied. A "porcelain dish" would rather be associated with "decorated" than with "happy". On the other hand, one must choose a place in the syntactic organisation of the sentence: In English, for example, an adjective will be placed before the noun, but not at the beginning of a sentence or before the article attributed to the system. This distinction implies a particular concept of a language system, that is structural: there would be two major types of relations in the structure, paradigmatic relations (one element is chosen from among other differentiated equivalents; for example, the choice of the adjective "decorated" rather than "happy"), and syntagmatic relations (revealed by choosing placing in linear or multi-dimensional structures, for example "decorated porcelain" and not "porcelain decorated"). As another example, consider the Greimasian (semiotic) square (Fontanille 2006: 27-32). In the semiotic square, there are four terms that mark the corners of the square (ibid, 1: 27). These are defined by semantic relations of contrariety, contradiction, and complementarity, but also various "operations" concerning the transformations between the terms, or the navigation from one position to another (ibid: 27-28). The transformative operations are described as affirmations or negations allowing the passage from one position to another (ibid, 2: 30-31). When applied to narrative content, the square models the narrative trajectory of the observer of semantic intent (ibid, 3: 31), the syntagmatic axis presupposed conjunctions and disjunctions between actants, such as acquisitions and losses of modalities (ibid). The distinction between actors and actants

becomes clear: such-and-such actor may play the role of object in a place of the syntagmatic axis (corresponding to a phase in the development of narrative), then the role of subject in another narrative phase (ibid).

In *The Semiotics of Discourse*, Jacques Fontanille discusses the notion of actants, (Fontanille 2006: 95-112). Both actors and actants can be recognizable due to having a specific type of identity or permanence (ibid, 1: 97). While the identity or permanence of actants can be recognized due to their predicative isotopies, the permanence of actors can be identified by figurative and thematic isotopies (ibid, 2). It is important to note that both actors and actants, operating on different levels of discourse, allow for a global narrative to develop. Fontanille uses this model for narrative semiotics, keeping an author and an audience in mind, however the actantial model that Fontanille proposes in his book is a development that stems from Greimas' work (Greimas 1987). The semiotic theories developed by Greimas, were deeply rooted in structuralist assumptions (ibid, 1). For Greimas, "Deep structures define the fundamental mode of existence of an individual or a society, and subsequently the conditions of existence of semiotic objects" (ibid, 2: 48). According to Greimas, an actant is "responsible for the human imaginary" (ibid, 3: 107) and constitutes a distinct level that bears no direct equivalence to the notion of actor, where actor is treated under the concept of actorial structure (Greimas 1987: 111). In sum, Greimas conceptualizes "deep forces" that allows for the realization of figurative elements that can be conceptualized by actors: one level, which is immanent, is responsible for what happens on a sort of "surface" level. In Fontanille's treatment, actors and actants are elements of discourse (Fontanille 2006: 59), and they allow for different levels of analysis on a given text – Fontanille retains the differentiation of levels that Greimas postulates. What is significantly different is that Fontanille includes phenomenological dimensions, especially to the dimension of actant. Prior to *Formes de vie* (Fontanille 2015), Fontanille asserts in *The Semiotics of Discourse* that "living signification" is difficult to understand, however, since semiotics is practiced in discourse and not in sign, it is the perspective of living signification that he considers (Fontanille 2006: 1). By "living signification", Fontanille refers to actants that become bodies- this is where phenomenology and actantial structures merge. To clarify this connection, I will discuss in the following the relationship between expression and content, via the concept of the body proper.

Expression and content signify two separate planes that group objects that belong to an interior domain (proper to a body that "takes position") and to an exterior domain (what is non-proper to the body), and it is through the proprioceptive body that the planes are united

into a language (ibid: 2). When Fontanille conceptualizes the body, the plane of expression already is called exteroceptive, while the plane of content is interoceptive and the distinction between an “interior” and an “exterior” world is made not due to a “physical body”, but an imaginary body that takes a proprioceptive position (ibid: 12). As Fontanille summarises it: “the body proper is a sensory envelope (a boundary), which thus determines an exterior domain and an interior domain” (ibid). The body proper is not a simple boundary. From the point of view of logic of the sensible, it is sensible to factors from the outside or from the inside, but it can also be a driving force (Fontanille 2006: 13). From the perspective of semiotic articulation of perception, the plane of expression will contain elements that are named sensible, that is, elements that can be perceived with various degrees of intensity (ibid: 14). Depending on the object that is under analysis, and of the perceiver, sensible elements can take different shapes. For example, in the case of contemplating a visual landscape, sensible fall under “plastic elements”: the chromatic dominants, lines, and contours as well as spatial arrangements. In the case of viewing films, the plane of expression contains elements of dialogue, utterances spoken by actors as well as stylistic elements. Thus, in analysing a film, no “a priori” interpretation will be attributed to the elements situated on a plane of expression, their role being that of a possible foundation for the plane of content. On the other hand, the plane of content will contain elements that are considered intelligible, that is elements that results from comparing variations within the same field of presence (ibid: 15). For Fontanille, any entity, prior to its categorization, is a “sensible presence”, which is expressed in terms of intensity and in terms of extent and quantity (ibid: 37). Extensity thus refers to apprehensible quantifiable aspects such that are static, such as numbers of given types, number of colours, numbers of same positions, while intensity refers to processes that allow for “movement”, that is, for transformation (ibid: 37-38) – this latter property Fontanille associates with energy, which in physics, represents a set of quantifiable formulae that measure the potential of movement of various objects in the physical world. Here, Fontanille uses ‘energy’ to signify movement, but no precise, mathematical formula is given; ‘energy’ is used to signal the potential of transformation of states, and it does not quantify this potential. Thus, the sensible body is the semiotic function that unites expression and content. (ibid: 17). The body proper should be considered as the semiotic relationship (and not the body of a psychological subject) between expression and content, that contains an interiority (which contains the potential for movement, change) and an exteriority that can be apprehended one instant at a time, due to its quantifiable, extensive qualities (ibid: 38).

For the purposes of analysing the film, I will retain from Fontanille that in delimiting the two planes associated to forms of life, nothing from the audio-visual elements collected from the semiotic object (in this case representations of mental illness in *Joker*) can be regarded as belonging entirely to a plane of expression or to a plane of content. The two planes are not fixed, but relational. They can only exist if a boundary between expression and content is chosen. Therefore, choosing a boundary that will come to define the plane of expression and that of content is, of course, choosing to differentiate between an “exterior world” and an “interior world”, that belong to the body in question. The connection with forms of life is that based at least on an expression (the syntagmatic arrangement of behaviours) and on a content (values, semantic contents, particularities in perception, action.), specific forms of life can be identified.

It is useful to treat the concept of the body in more detail, to understand how Fontanille constructs his concept of forms of life. To link the concept of the body and to semiotic perception, I will make use of the concept of “corps de l’actant”, for which I shall use the translated term “the actant’s body” (Fontanille 2011). Fontanille discusses the associations between “Moi” and “Soi” and “chair” and “corps propre”, terms that can be translated into English as “I”, “Self”, “Flesh” and “Body Proper” respectively (Fontanille 2011: location 63-83 of 3582). In *Corps et sens* (Fontanille 2011), the question of the fusion between the body and the actant is framed as “body of the actant”, under the expression “body-actant” (Fontanille, 2011: location 333 of 3582). This refers to a theoretical process of embodiment of structures and meaning. First, one must acknowledge that Fontanille uses a principle mentioned in the semiotics of discourse: semiosis, the connection of the plane of expression and the plane of content, is not a simple logical function of presupposition, but also and above all an act carried out by a body which takes a position, which is subjected to variations of tensions (Fontanille 2006). One of the consequences, developed in *Corps et sens*, (Fontanille 2011) is that since every actant participates in semiosis through its action, every actant is also a body. The idea of considering that an actant is not only an abstract function, but also and above all a body that composes matter and energy (substance and force) modifies the definition of actors: in this perspective, the “sensible” is not reserved for the figurative and actorial dimension. Therefore, there is a “deep sensibility”, on the actantial dimension, which roughly corresponds to sensory-motricity and proprioception, in a way in which the actant feels (bodily) in action.

The question of “deep sensibility” of the actantial dimensions can be linked with the notion of modality, developed by Fontanille in *The Semiotics of Discourse* (Fontanille 2006: 113).

Modalities are defined by Fontanille as modal predicates (ibid, 1). From the point of view of the actants, they create relationships between a subject actant and other predicates (ibid, 2).

Fontanille establishes a typology of modalities that account for the logic of places by considering semiotic modes of existence: virtualized mode (wanting, having-to), potentialized mode (believing, adhering), actualized mode (knowing, being able) (Fontanille 2006: 118).

They are present on number (extensivity) and intensity (ibid, 1: 117). The key features that I retain from Fontanille’s treatment of modalities, is that they can be used to construct a modal identity attributed to the actant (ibid, 2: 120).

Now, proprioception, as discussed in the above, is also linked to the tensive hypothesis. The tensive structure is a model built upon the correlation of qualities which are attributed to “the body proper”, which through taking position into the world it divides into an internal domain, called interoceptive, and an external domain called exteroceptive (Fontanille 2006: 36-42).

The qualities that correspond to each of these domains are “the sensible” and the “intelligible” (ibid, 1). The “sensible” corresponds to the perceptual and sensory attributes of a sensing body and it is characterized by an axis of intensity, the intensity of the sensing body of the stimuli coming from the outside world (ibid, 2: 37). The “intelligible” is related to a domain of extent, of qualities that can be connected to the sensible domain and thus become signifying (ibid: 38). Otherwise said, the tensive structure uses an axis of “Extent” which characterizes the external domain and an “Intensity” axis which characterizes the internal domain, while the relationship between the two is determined by ‘the body proper’, which serves also as an envelope which delimits what is internal from what is external (ibid: 38-39). Therefore, proprioceptivity is the complex term encompassing “interoceptivity” and “exteroceptivity”; in the perceptual experience of meaning, one's own body (proprioception) is the only entity common to the self (interoception) and the world (exteroception); and, in the construction of signification, the operation of semiosis, the folding back of exteroception onto interoception, thanks to the mediation of the body proper, allows the linking of a plane of expression (of exteroceptive origin) and a content plane (of interoceptive origin).

This means that the effects of interiority and exteriority then depend entirely on the position that the proprioceptive body-flesh (the I) adopts for itself an enunciating instance. Each utterance produces a semiosis, insofar as it proceeds from a position taken by the body in the world, a position which determines an interior domain and an exterior domain: the proper and

the non-proper. As for Fontanille an actant becomes a body, there are other distinctions to be made as follows. On the one hand, Fontanille distinguishes the flesh, as the seat of the sensory-motor core of semiotic experience (Fontanille 2011: location 63 of 3582). On the other hand, Fontanille distinguishes the body proper, which is discussed in the above, which carries with it the formation of identity through its two manifestations: the body-self in connection to the body-flesh. By convention, Fontanille considers that the flesh is the I of the actant, and that the body proper is the Self of the actant (Fontanille 2011: location 63 of 3582).

This distinction can articulate the formal definition and the carnal definition of the actant, as Fontanille discusses in *Corps et sens* (Fontanille 2011: location 333 of 3582). The two instances, the I-flesh and the Self-body proper of the actant, presuppose and define each other reciprocally (ibid: location 364 of 3582). In *Joker*, TheI of Arthur Fleck provides the Self with the impetus and motivation which allow it to put itself into becoming; the Self provides the Ego with the reflexivity it needs to measure itself against itself in change. The I poses a problem to the Self that it never ceases to solve: the I moves and deforms, and forces the Self to confront its own otherness, a problem that the I strives to solve either by repetition of ultimately self-defeating behaviours, or by breaking this pattern only to show a “true” Self that is bound by chaos. The act will then result from the tensive correlation between the pressures exerted on the I-flesh (of the sensory-motor and proprioceptive type) and the pressures exerted on the Self-body proper (remaining the same or breaking into a new form). Fontanille further distinguishes two types of Self-body proper (Fontanille 2011: location 83 of 3582):

-the Self, produced by identical recovery and repetition: Self-*idem*

-the Self, produced by the tension towards a goal, by the maintenance in a direction, by the resistance to all the diversions: Self-*ipse*

The “Self” as defined above, is linked to Paul Ricouer’s notions of “*ipse*” and “*idem*”. Ricouer hypothesises that there are two models of permanence that can be applied to the identity of an actor: an “*idem-identity*”, which corresponds to the idea of sameness, and an “*ipse-identity*”, which is tied to the idea of becoming: the “*ipse*” represents an attitude, of a becoming subject, which “announces itself as *idem*” (Ricouer 1992: 121). Hence, for the purposes of this analysis, I will differentiate the “Self” into a “Self-*idem*” which is established through repetitiveness and “Self-*ipse*”, which is established by a tension towards a goal, by resistance to diversions.

Returning to forms of life, the paradigmatic axis must be congruent, while the syntagmatic arrangement must be coherent. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic are elaborated by Fontanille in connection with coherence and congruence, as follows:

“La cohérence est une propriété de l’axe syntagmatique : elle se déploie en quelque sorte « à l’horizontale », par récurrence et recouvrement des unités d’un parcours syntagmatique quelconque.. (Fontanille 2015: location 810 of 5124)”

“Coherence belongs to the syntagmatic axis, and it is deployed somewhat on the “horizontal” by recurrence and regrouping of the units of a syntagmatic trajectory”

“La congruence est en revanche une propriété de l’axe paradigmatique, dès lors que les différents paradigmes et les différentes catégories, disposés en strates hiérarchisées, sont supposés participer à un même processus de génération de la signification, chacun et chacune étant convertis d’un niveau à l’autre (Fontanille 2015: location 810 of 5124)”

“Congruence is on the other hand a property of the paradigmatic axis, since the different paradigms and different categories, situated on hierarchical strata, are supposed to participate in one process of generating signification, each being converted from one level to another (Fontanille 2015: location 810 of 5124)”

One key property of forms of life emerges in the following: the paradigmatic axis must be congruent (which can be tested by commutations) while the syntagmatic axis must be coherent, where coherence is maintained by permutations. From the point of view of film, the coherence of the syntagmatic axis can be intuitively tied to expressions (of audio-visual type) that are rhythmical and recognizable, while the congruence of paradigmatic axis implies that the properties of forms of life can be found at various levels of the semiotic object (surface level and deep level), objects that are multi-layered, such that the different paradigms that are employed generate the same process of signification on different layers. However, more on the connections between forms of life and film will be discussed in Chapter 3. Returning to the paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions, the essential features applicable to forms of life that I retain in this work is the coherence of a syntagmatic chain, and the congruence of a paradigmatic axis that encompasses at least two distinct paradigms. The connection of this feature of forms of life, with the apparatus of cinema, will be made in Chapter 3.

2.3 The absurd as form of life

Since the various layers of theory presented in the above subchapters may be difficult to grasp without concrete examples, I will illustrate and develop one of the examples provided by Fontanille in *Formes de vie*. As such, before proceeding to connect forms of life with theories used in film analysis, I will illustrate how Fontanille exemplifies one form of life: the absurd. The absurd as a literary genre – which is treated in *Formes de vie* – will be exemplified by the

play *Rhinocéros* by Eugene Ionesco. Some aspects of *Rhinocéros* are also treated in some detail in *The Semiotics of Discourse* (Fontanille 2006).

Fontanille develops a form of life of the absurd by considering various dimensions of the aesthetic and ethical style of four literary works: *L'absurd*, *La Nausée*, *Rhinocéros*, and *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Fontanille 2015: location 862 of 5124). As such he identifies several congruent properties that describe the “meaning of the absurd” and are manifested in the relationship between two poles of the semiotic function that is the form of life – a certain disequilibrium found between the plane of expression and the plane of content is recognizable at the level of the body proper (which includes the field of presence of the sensible subject) the narrative dimension, and the modal and passional dimensions (Fontanille 2015: location 862-879 of 5124).

At the level of body proper, there is lack of equilibrium between the two planes: proliferations of signifiers on the plane of expression (the rhinoceros in *Rhinocéros*, the misfortunes in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*) and diminishing of signified on the plane of content (ibid: location 862). This is of course from the point of view taken by utterances spoken by the actors. For example, on the plane of content the values of humanity are being relinquished in *Rhinocéros* while the rhinoceros multiply on the plane of expression. In *Voyage au bout de la nuit* the emotions of the protagonist are being gradually turned into cynical indifference on the plane of content, resulting in a reduction of interior states that are signified, while on the plane of expression there is a proliferation of misfortunes as the story advances. Regarding the field of presence of the sensible subject, from the point of view of the exteroceptive and interoceptive dimensions, the body proper cannot successfully reunite these two worlds into one reasonable experience-no meaning can be found by correlating the two dimensions(ibid). Concerning the narrative dimension, the iteration-amplification found on the syntagmatic level, points towards the lack of equilibrium, as, with each stage of the quest, there only gains in frustration and conflicts – nothing is resolved (ibid). Finally, on the modal and passional dimension, there is the proliferation of modalities related “will” and “duty”, while the subject generally has the choice to blend into the absurd world, or to live on its fringes constantly in despair (ibid). Now, recalling the definition of congruence offered in the previous sub-chapter:

“Congruence is on the other hand a property of the paradigmatic axis, since the different paradigms and different categories, situated on hierarchical strata, are supposed to participate in one process of generating signification, each being converted from one level to another”

It is easy to identify the different paradigms as (i) the body proper with its associated field of presence and its exteroceptive/interoceptive worlds, (ii) the narrative dimension and the (iii) passionate and modal dimension. The process of generating signification, for the genre of the absurd, is thus continued if one moves from one paradigm to another: the impossibility of the body in reuniting the two worlds (interoceptive/exteroceptive) can be carried over to the consistent gains in frustration and conflicts that are present on the narrative dimension and finally, this lack of equilibrium is also translated onto the modal and passionate dimension, where there is a clear disequilibrium between the various modalities connected to will (which signals individualism) and duty (which signals collective binding).

To illustrate the absurd as a form of life, I will refer to the work *Rhinocéros*, by Eugène Ionesco, which is only briefly analysed as an example of form of life in *Formes de vie* (Fontanille 2015). The initial impression of the protagonist of having another self (unresolved doubling between I and Self), revealed via the conversation between him and his friend Jean at the café (Fontanille 2006: 148) presupposes a disequilibrium that is found at the level of the body proper that can be carried across different levels of analysis. The doubling of Berenger's identity is connected to him feeling his body as another body, which is dissociated from him (ibid). This initial "felt" doubling is translated into conflicts that are repeatedly amplified due to this reflexive tension between I and Self, which further give rise to passionate states (ibid). At the end of the play, the tension between his new-found humanity - which from the point of view of the modal identity constructed via modalities of knowing and doing - and the impossibility of belonging to a humanity since everyone in the world becomes rhinoceros. Hence, the tensions between the double identity experiences by the protagonist, are responsible for the failure to connect an exteroceptive world with an interoceptive world (the failure to connect the diminishing humanity with the growing numbers of rhinoceroses) which translate into the same type of disequilibrium being present at the level of narrative development, and at the level of the body-actant that is constructed via modalities - this shows that the paradigmatic axis is coherent. The coherence of the syntagmatic axis is revealed by the iteration-amplification of the rhinoceros on the plane of expression: as the numbers of rhinoceros grow, there are less and less manifestations of values that belong to the culture of humanity (vacuity of signified on the plane of content). The symmetry of the play is also perfect: in the first act there is one rhinoceros that disturbs the equilibrium of the human society, while at the end there is one human (Bérenger) who is the sole intruder into the world of rhinos, and the variations on this syntagmatic arrangement are connected to congruent

choices on the paradigmatic axis (unresolved doubling), which gives the form of life of the absurd in *Rhinocéros*. Concerning the attribution of an actant-body, this can be done by considering an actantial series of source, control, target (Fontanille 2006: 105) where the source is identified with the initial taking of position of the actant-body: the initial dedoublement that is uttered by Bérenger to his friend Jean. Hence the positional series of actants (source, target, control) which are defined according to the structure of the place, and they describe place and movement (ibid). Positional actant, according to Fontanille, underline the syntax of discourse, having the status of a schematic image (ibid). Thus, in *Rhinocéros*, the source refers to the initial sender, to humanity in each state, which is being split by the actant of control into rhinoceroses and one last veritable human being, Bérenger.

Chapter 3: Film and Forms of life – A Method of analysis

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I aim to describe film, and isolate its properties such that areas of application of forms of life can be illustrated. In doing so, I will begin by making a comparison between film and other forms of art to isolate intuitively specific features of the film's medium that are relevant for forms of life. Following this, I will explain how the different theoretical layers of forms of life can be connected to elements of film theories developed by three authors: David Bordwell, Christian Metz, and Seymour Chatman. The reason for selecting these authors is because their theories have been situated within the general landscape of structural semiotics that is compatible to the post-Greimasian tradition in which Fontanille's work can be situated. Therefore, the connection between their theories and the contiguous concepts of forms of life can be made within the wider landscape of structuralist and post-Greimasian semiotic theories. Second, I will aim to illustrate the method for prompting *Joker*, such that the forms of life connected to mental illness can be found, and their relationships determined. The illustration of the method for collecting the data from the film will be done by selecting elements of Bordwell, Metz and Chatman and illustrating how this will be done while referring to specific elements of Fontanille's theories. The chapter ends with concluding remarks concerning the method.

3.1 Substances for a language of film

The issue of substances of film, which are a precondition of films transmitting meaning will be examined in two stages: on the one hand, through the careful positioning of film with respect to other art media, several properties of film will be examined, and on the other hand, a discussion of the expressive elements of film will be given. Thus, the discussion will begin by examining the hybrid nature of the film medium. It should be noted that the present discussion does not aim to produce a fixed theory of film language, but rather to prepare the ground for a method of analysing representations of mental illness film.

Film is an art medium that creates the illusion of continuity through moving a series of discrete images in front of an audience (Nowell-Smith 1996). Moving pictures at a high

enough frequency creates the illusion of continuity, which implies that films can simulate unrealized realities, capturing the imagination of viewers. The viewer, the target audience of the film, is prone to assimilating meaning. In the following, I argue for the positioning of forms of life into broader theories of film, while explaining, from a theoretical point of view, how forms of life can model the transmission of emotional tensions between a “model reader”, an idealized member of the audience, and a film that the “model reader” watches. As such, the reasons for using forms of life to conceptualize mental illness will be developed and explained in more detail.

First, films do not develop in vacuum. This principle seems to be well supported by the concept of remediation, developed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Grusin, Bolter 2020). In their discussion concerning hypermediacy and remediation, Bolter and Grusin explain how artistic media are not inherently pure, with elements from one medium frequently repurposed in another. Remediation can be understood as the borrowing or repurposing of content from one medium from another (Grusin, Bolter 2020: 45-49). Intuitive examples of remediation include the adaptation of novels into films and the adaptation of films into video games. In many of these cases, the change of medium does not mean that the content must be refashioned. For example, many narrative structures and operations are imported into films, and various cinematic effects that were developed in film can be found in video games. This means that properties of film should not be understood as pertaining to film alone, film itself being a hybrid medium that can borrow properties from media as diverse as photography, literature, painting and influencing media that precede it, such as video games. Films are hybrid media. And the hybrid nature of film is an essential part of the following argument as it helps to recognize that substances of film manifest themselves through various devices that function well in media deemed artistic and ideological. The following treatment aims at identifying the features of films that can be considered under forms of life. Because films about mental illness are a subset of film, it is proposed that the meaning transmitting properties of films about mental illness are the same as those of film in general. Hence, this chapter aims to grasp the semiotic concepts pertaining to film and the locus of forms of life in representations of mental illness in film.

As discussed in the previous chapter, forms of life appear due to interactions of entities that exist together, and they have the potential to “invade” various cultures. From a theoretical point of view, this means that any specific form of life, although depending on the nature of

their users, can appear in various media. The opening discussion of this chapter is organizing along two directions. First, forms of life that would exist in film, could also exist in various other cultural texts – they can exist within culture more generally. Second, since forms of life are recognized by their plane of expression which is organized according to a coherent schema of representations, in analysing forms of life present in film, it is important to grasp how the sensory stimulations of films (images, sound, text) can be connected to a possible plane of content. As such, by considering the concept of the body proper as the semiotic function of expression and content, in the following, I will proceed with a comparison between parameters pertaining to film and parameters pertaining to videogames and works of literature, to frame possible ways of meaningful interactions between a model reader and the medium of film.

To understand how film compares to other media, consider its historical emergence. Works of literature have appeared before film due to the technology invention of writing, while video games have appeared after films with the invention and proliferation of computers. Quite clearly, technology plays a crucial part in creating new media. Films borrow from works of literature, and video games borrow from film- it is easy to see how film is well positioned between the two. Hence film represents an important historical link between works of literature and video games, while retaining a distinctive mark, that of presenting a series of successive pictures. To better contextualize the “moving-picture” attribute of film, I will analyse several properties of film, as follows.

Films are audio-visual media. While video games are likewise audio-visual media, films are not playable; the experience of a video game is specific due to its playability which is realized through a console, and interface linking player and played, such that the player can take actions towards the audio-visual spectacle which they “play” (Keogh 2018). Now this is relevant from the point of view of forms of life because they can only exist as “used”. Hollywood films about mental illness do not have to only be “passively” interacted with even if there is no console that links the film with the viewer, there must be another type of material device that facilitates the connection of the viewer with the film. As for literary works, films are clearly different from them because due to employing visual language. Work of literature may use imagery and narrative, but there are generally no dynamic images that are already realized in visual form, apart from the ones that are formed by conscious imaginative effort by their readers. Of course, if one considers the example of media such as comic books, images and text are clearly co-present (as it can be the case with films that

emulate comic books). Despite this, comic books remain clearly distinct from film due to not having an attached apparatus that moves images without the reader's volition—the reader traverses the medium through their own conscious efforts. Generally, films do share many attributes with written works of fiction: films often present stories, with codes and underlying meaning. Hence, from this brief analysis, films are distinctive due to their audio-visual medium, and the connection between film and an abstract (model) viewer can be realized via some “imaginary bubble”—I will return to this in latter, when I model the imaginary bubble based on proprioception and the theories of cinema proposed by Christian Metz. In conclusion, by placing film in opposition to video games and to written literary works, emphasises the qualities of film that makes it unique: its “moving-picture” attribute, its dynamism, and its ability to represent worlds. The “moving-picture” attribute and the “audio-visual” characteristic of film become the guiding principle for collecting data.

3.2 David Bordwell

David Bordwell, in the 11th edition of his book *Art Film* (2017), proposes an interesting way to look at films: vehicles for conveying meaning. Form is of central importance to film, according to Bordwell, because the artist has created a pattern so that the audience has a structured experience (Bordwell 2017: 51). It is important that the audience feels an emotional response to the pattern (ibid, 1: 52). Bordwell defines form in film as the overall set of relationships between its parts (ibid, 2: 53). In his treatment of film, Bordwell explains the use of “form” and “content”, while promoting the view that “forms” (in his terminology this is different from forms of life” can be associated with emotions and passional states that are deeply interconnected with the underlying pattern proposed by film (ibid, 3: 55). This means that films have recurring patterns that create expectations that elicit certain emotions from the viewer (ibid, 4: 57). However, these recurring patterns also exist within the larger culture, such that the expectations that are being created depend in a great degree by the previous experience of the viewers (ibid, 5: 55-56). The most interesting feature of Bordwell's analysis is that the film's form (in Bordwell's terminology) can elicit a particular ideology which is culture dependent. Consider the following passage concerning symptomatic meaning:

“We can call this symptomatic meaning, and the set of values that get revealed can be considered a social ideology. Symptomatic meanings remind us that meaning of all sorts is largely a social phenomenon. Many meanings of films are ultimately ideological; that is, they spring from systems of culturally specific beliefs about the world. Religious beliefs, political opinions, conceptions of race or gender or social class, even our most deeply seated notions of life's values—all these constitute our ideological frame of reference” (Bordwell 2017: 60).

From the point of view of forms of life, as treated by Fontanille, the relation between meaning and form takes has a similar connection. Hence, what is retained from Bordwell, is that the visual plane and the subject matter - in Bordwell's terminology, "form" and "content - constitute the plane of expression. The "form" and "content" as named by Bordwell, should not be confused by the semiotic concepts of "plane of content" or "form of life". Hence, the plane of expression, as discussed in the previous chapter, will be structured considering not only the visual configurations of actors and objects on set, but also the most general cultural interpretations that together with the scenes can form syntagmatic units arranged in a coherent chain. As such, film, through its expressive form can justify the existence of a syntagmatic axis, which is the first element from a semiotic theory of film that will be retained. Moreover, in identifying patterns in *Joker*, that belong to a syntagmatic chain of events, I will use recurring motifs (Bordwell 2017: 63). According to Bordwell, motifs are "any significant repeated element that contributes to the overall form" (ibid). Considering that the form of the film is simply the set of relationships between parts, the method of forming the syntagms will be based on identifying motifs across the development of the film and understanding whether they can be grouped into recurring syntagms on the plane of expression, such that a plane of content can be attributed to this plane of expression.

Since these motifs imply an interpretative component, it is important that any interpretation associated to them remains (i) as universal as possible to account for cultural differences associated to global audiences and (ii) in line with the encompassing mode of existence associated to forms of life: "existing and acting with". Hence, the motifs will be those elements that are connected to clear and general interpretations of actions that exist in collective life.

3.3 Christian Metz

By reading a book, by attending a show or a film, at the same time as we perceive and construct its meaning, there is the impression of wrapping and isolating the object in a "bubble" of thoughts and of emotions, the centre of which is the reflexive sensibility of the spectator's body. As a methodological principle, the spectator's body, serves as a reference of sensitivity that allows for meanings to emerge from films, and based on this, Fontanille's use of the body proper can help delimit sensible elements on the plane of expression, and intelligible elements on the plane of content. The justification of integrating the body proper for delimiting the two planes lies in the concrete experience that consists of curling up in an armchair, settling in a sheltered place, or watching a film in a dark room. In the following, I

argue that this experience can be conceptualized as a sort of material device that allows the establishment of the "imaginary bubble". This "imaginary bubble", which was referred to at the beginning of Chapter 3, can be connected to the semiotics of film proposed by Christian Metz.

Metz, in his work *The Imaginary Signifier* (1982), conceives "film" like a mirror (Metz, 1982: 45). According to Metz, the film differs from a mirror in one essential aspect: the body of the spectator is not reflected in it (ibid, 1). When confronted with a mirror, one is looking at an object, which is not oneself, but gazes back at oneself. The film takes one's own gaze from the reflected image, but the primary identification mechanism that is learned by a child through the experience of looking in to a "true mirror" remains present for the adult that can identify with an actor on screen, that is, another human being, which is like the adult (ibid, 2). The mirror presupposes an opposition, and value of this opposition is seen as taking form in the distinction between viewer and mirror image, entities which are in dialogue being separated by the screen (ibid,3: 46) . According to Metz: "the constitution of the signified depends on a series of mirror effects organised in a chain" (Metz, 1982 :51). This chain of mirror effects, based on the analogy with a mirror, proves interesting and useful in conceptualising the effect of film, because the subject is mirrored in ideology and by identification can retain the model of the world proposed by film. To understand how this may happen, consider a brief description of the experience of placing oneself in front of a mirror.

From the point of view of the physics situation, every mirror placed in front of a human subject can segment the space in three areas: a cone of 'vision' into which the subject is placed, the space situated outside of this 'cone', where the reflected light escapes the visual field of the subject that directs its look in the mirror, and the space behind the mirror which is unreachable due to the reflecting surface of the mirror that acts as a boundary. The 'cone' of vision can be considered a world of objects, into which the subject can already feel his or her body as existing. This existence can be captured as an abstract space of virtual objects into which the 'other', the reflection of the body, takes position. Now, the film does not reflect the body of the viewer, but the primary mechanism that allows identification remains. The essential difference between film and a "true mirror" is that the world of objects is simply simulated in the film, and the viewer must identify with another, which is presented on screen. The adult takes place in a reflected world, which bears resemblance to the real world, to find oneself and possibly to partially become oneself. This conceptual example can offer a logic

based upon identification can occur, but why is there a reflexive relationship between model viewer and film.

The question of the socio-political dimension can be traced back to the projection of the “imaginary bubble” that needs a precise material device to be possible. By precise material device I mean the concrete activity that makes possible the intimate experience of viewing of a film. This might depend on the characteristics of the space where a film is viewed, but this is beyond the scope of the current work. For the purposes of this thesis, it does not matter where the film is viewed: whether in a theatre, in the comfort of one’s home or elsewhere. This is because the model of the imaginary bubble simply needs a material device that facilitates the realization of an intimate atmosphere, singular or collective, between model audience and film. Therefore, the question treated here is: how can the “imaginary bubble” be described in very general terms such that it takes into consideration the model audience and the film watched?

I propose that the question can be framed, more precisely, in terms of the impact on each person's own body: consider the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on habitus and bodily hexis (Bourdieu 1990: 71). Social habitus is inscribed in the corporeal hexis configures the individual bodies by modifying, for example, their muscle tone, their sensitivity to rhythm, their body postures (ibid). This conceptual proposition has been widely taken up in sociolinguistics, including for the sociolinguistic analysis of pronunciation variants: it has been demonstrated by Labov (Hazen, 2010) that the different ways of articulating the sounds of the language, the variations of intonation, the regional and social "accents" corresponded to differences in muscle tone in the phonatory apparatus, and that these bodily differences are correlated with specific socio-cultural differences.

Hence, under the effect of film, I propose that the sensitivity of the model audience can be impacted by the expressions situated on a plane of expression associated to film. On the level of the spectator, the body proper, one of the paradigms underlining the existence of form of life, would then involve the separation of an interior world, which is represented by a collection of thoughts and feelings (immediately formed impressions, signifieds) formed by patterns of that are sensible and find themselves in an exterior world (colors, sounds, physical shapes in connection to the subject matter). This separation can be used to account for the formation of semiosis by considering the model of proprioception. However, for this process of meaning transmission, it is useful to consider that the audio-visual substances of film contain what Fontanille refers to “living signification”. The body proper is therefore not only

present on the level of the spectator, but on the level of film. It is film that through audio-visual discourse, contains a deep sensibility which can be understood by referring to paradigm of the body proper. This, in my view, can be used to further justify that a plane of expression can be provided by the audio-visual medium that is specific to film that has attached the subject matter, while the content plane, from a methodological point of view, can be identified by tensions to which the body proper is subjected to. As such a form of life of mental illness can be justifiably understood and “felt” by the spectator, who thanks to a proprioceptive body proper, can feel the tensions produced by the sensitivity present in the body proper of film, which is manifested in the structure of the ‘body-actant’ that changes throughout the development of the stages of the quest that is presented in the film. This means that the experience of watching the life of the mentally ill characters, as it unfolds and transforms itself, can be felt via the tensions corresponding to the form of life of mental illness, where form of life is the last level of analysis of film that emerges as a type of language rooted in the discourse of film. For the subsequent analysis, I will take the point of view that there is a body proper associated to the ideal spectator, which is dialogue with the body proper of film, and that the body proper of the spectator may adopt, if necessary, the position of one or more actors. In practice, the “users” of mental illness are represented by characters that are mentally ill or can be labelled under the more colloquial term madness. The mentally ill characters will be focus of the following analysis. In sum, the ideal proper body of spectator instance is "mobile"-it "navigates" according to the solicitations of the object read, seen, and/or analysed, which in this case it is the film with its discursive enunciation. The concept of discourse will thus be further elaborated by considering not only Jacques Fontanille’s general theory of discourse, but also elements from Seymour Chatman.

3.4 Seymour Chatman

Seymour Chatman proposes that in addition to story and the content of events, every narrative has (i) existents and (ii) discourse (Chatman 1978: 19). Discourse according to Chatman corresponds to expression, where expression is the basis upon which content is communicated (ibid). Quoting Ferdinand de Saussure and Louis Hjelmslev, Chatman conceptualizes narrative as a semiotic structure, that can be treated according to two different dichotomies: form/substance and expression/content (ibid: 22-23). The former are conditioning variables for the latter: there is form of expression and substance of expression, form of content and substance of content (ibid). Narrative is divided into story (connected to content) and discourse (connected to expression); on the level of discourse, the form of expression is the

structure of narrative transmission: in other words, what structure underlines the development of the narrative (ibid: 26). In the following, when I refer to discourse, I will retain from Chatman that discourse refers to abstract structures that allow the narrative to develop, but in themselves are not the narrative. This discussion brings another element, that will be retained, into the discussion: the concept of substance. For Chatman, substance describes the medium (ibid). In the analysis of the film, I will consider that to identify forms of life specific to film, substances represent all audio-visual elements (sound juxtaposed to visual configurations) and out of these substances only some participate in the types of semiosis called forms of life. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, film are hybrid media, that are characterised by an “audio-visual” component. While films cannot be reduced to “audio-visuality” (as per the discussion comparing them with videogames), for the purposes of this thesis, “audio-visuality” will characterise the substances of film. This means that the elements situated on the plane of expression will be of audio-visual type. This will be tied to discourse, mentioned in the above, which for Chatman represents “formal expression element” (Chatman 1978: 31). Discourse operates at a deeper level than plot, allowing for various arrangements of elements (and thus various plots) to emerge (ibid: 43). However, to this notion of discourse, I will consider Fontanille’s point of view, which is best summarised as follows: “in a discourse, meaning is only graspable through its transformation” (Fontanille 2006: 48-49). Moreover, discourse for Fontanille is an “enunciation in action”, “a human presence”, “a sensing body that expresses itself” (ibid, 1: 45). As discussed in Chapter 2, the body proper one of the paradigms that Fontanille employs in the process of signification, and this is crucial for the conception of discourse, because through its taking of position the body proper “perceives” and as Fontanille explains: “from the semiotic point of view, perception is already a language, because it is signifying” (ibid, 2: 56). Hence, from the level of discourse of film, there are recurring “deep elements” that allow for various arrangements that can be categorized as plot. Finally, there is the question of “carriers” of forms of life, and these are the characters, represented by human actors, who are “moved” by the actant-body. In summarizing the point of view of formalists and structuralists, Chatman writes that the formalists argue that plots produce characters such that characters are also participants or actants (Chatman 1978: 111). Therefore, it is what characters do in story that matters (ibid). This point is relevant from the point of view of forms of life because the mode of existence that encompasses these configurations have a signifying acting dimension – without action, there are no forms of life.

However, in the following, the characters in *Joker* will signal the presence of actants that become embodied through the characters, who have a figurative permanence.

3.5 General conclusions for method

In conclusion, this chapter aims in outlining, based on the various methodological principles that were outlined in Chapter 2 a concrete method of identifying forms of life based on (i) recognizing, on the level of visual discourse, a syntagmatic arrangement on the level of a life trajectory and (ii) examining the construction of the modal identity and passionate identity of the actant. The method of analysis will thus unfold along three layers: (i) segmentation of plot, (ii) selection of syntagms that are indicative of a schematic representation of life at the level of discourse that can be connected to (iii) the modal construction of an actant's identity. Importantly, the division between actant and actors will be considered, such that actants are abstract configurations that can be realized at the figurative level. In the case of this film, the actors are identified as characters, being distinct from the profession of actor. Hence Arthur Fleck is an actor, from the point of view of discursive activity of the film, which is played by a person, Joaquin Phoenix, who works as an actor. Evidently, Joaquin Phoenix, or any other professional actors, are not included in the analysis.

Concerning actants, there is the positional series actants: source, target, control. The pair source/target models the direction of transformation between Arthur Fleck and its alter Ego Joker. The source actant is represented through the body of reference in discourse. The body of Arthur Fleck as presented in the film by the actor is initially taking a position within discourse as it is represented in the first scene. The actant of control refers to instances that transform, regulate, or change the identities presented by the actors. In the film, there are many instances of violence: the violence represents a control that is applied to characters within the film, such that it separates those that became violent from those who do not. The target is the outcome of the transformation, in the case of Fleck, this is Joker, which is the final identity carried by the actor.

Second, there is the instance of discourse, which is organized as having an exteroceptive and an interoceptive dimension. With reference to the actors, the exteroceptive means everything that is external to them, and the viewer can identify through visual elements, while interoceptive represents elements such as modalities, that can be inferred based on the existence of dialogue and on various other representations that can be attributed to actors: .

Elements of discourse will be audio-visual types, which in this thesis will be represented by screenshot that contain visuals and the dialogue uttered during the scene in written text. This method eliminates elements as music or general ambiance to be treated, however it permits the recognition of a body, based on an exterior world and an interior world, that is manifested at various levels of analysis: the manifestation of the “body-actant” through actor-instances as well as the transformation at the level of narrative development and through its modal identity.

Elements of discourse will be represented through various instances, singles taken from the film, that refer to visual configurations as well as to elements of dialogue; in this analysis, elements of dialogue are reproduced at the level of subtitles. The selection of elements of discourse (Chatman 1978) will be considered by identifying recurrent objects and situations that have significant value from the point of view of development of the plot, which Bordwell refers to as motifs (Bordwell 2017).

Considering the syntagmatic and paradigmatic by considering: (i) the progression-regression of violence manifested in visual images and utterances that show an amplification-iteration of mental illness will be attributed to a plane of expression (ii) the identities of Arthur Fleck and Penny Fleck through the prism of Fontanille’s theory of body actant on the paradigmatic level. Identifying a coherent syntagmatic form that can be linked to a congruent paradigmatic form for mental illness means that a form of life of mental illness exists in this film. The syntagmatic and the paradigmatic dimensions must be considered together, as in the case of linguistic signs, to describe the existence of the form of life which reveals meanings based on correlations found between the plane of expression and the plane of content – it is in the correlations, in this semiosis that forms of life exist.

Section II: Analysis

Chapter 4: A sensible presence caught between worlds

4.1 Mirror, mirror: Put on a happy face

I will start with the opening scene of *Joker*. As I will demonstrate, this contains expressive elements that allow the recognition of initial actant that can be recurrently identified throughout the film. The iteration of these elements constitutes a syntagmatic form that can be connected to the construction of the actant's modal identity on the plane of content. This first scene (i) represents the initial taking of position of a body proper (ii) it stands in relation to a world of objects in which it not only finds itself but is affected by. Thus, through the taking a position, the actant doubles and has an exterior domain (world of objects depicted and reflected by the mirror) and an interior domain (passional states connected to the oscillations between happy and sad). As seen in Figure 1, The film opens with showing us Arthur Fleck, preparing his make-up in front of a mirror. There is a gradual zoom of the camera, introducing the audience to the world of reflections and doubling- the principle that organizes forms of life in *Joker*.

Figure 1. Arthur prepares his clown make-up in front of a mirror.



Following this, the camera shifts to a lateral view; almost as if imposing an artificial barrier between us and the character. We, the audience, find ourselves watching safely, from a distance, the change from sadness, an expression that seems genuine, to a forced smile of the clown identity. The smile, however forced, does not pose a convincing mask. From the point of view of the audience, this change is clearly seen through the falling of one tear through the make-up, a metaphor or sadness ruining the “happy mask” which is required for the profession of clown/comedian. The doubling of the actant is present here again, but this time to surface emotions that show a deep interior conflict: “happy” and “sad”.

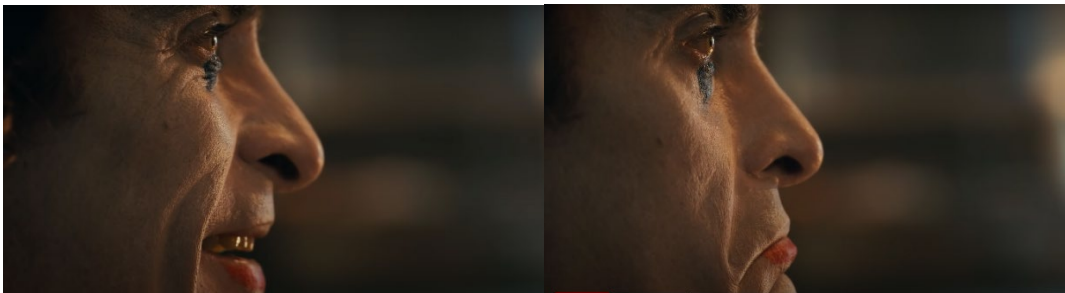


Figure 2. The lateral shot shows the oscillation between happy/sad face.

The camera moves again, this time showing the mirror image from the front. The mirror becomes a means of knowing, that allows Arthur to see himself moving from “sadness” to “forced happiness”. We are invited to see a reflection, a doubling of the character’s I which is presented to us from the beginning. From a downward sad face, in the reflective surface, there is the forceful expression of a smile. This time forced by Arthur Fleck, who props the two fingers to paint a smile.



Figure 3. Arthur dramatically “forces” the corners of his mouth into a smile.

The first scene presents to us a clear opposition of signified binaries, which can be labelled “happy” and “sad”, opposition that structure the subsequent categorization of the character’s identity. The pair “happy/sad” thus become semantic values that can be considered as a criterion for organizing the forms of life. The reason why this scene can be organized along dimensions of duality is two-fold. On the one hand, the “happy face”, “the sad face”, “the

mirror image” are all elements that are clearly occurring as motifs. In the first scene, this becomes obvious as these formal elements are repeated from different perspectives. The first perspective is given by the initial close-up that introduces the viewer into the world of *Joker* can be seen showing a character looking into a mirror, the presence of the mirror already acting as doubling operator for the separation of two bodies: the sensitive “I” which is connected (by identification) with the “Self-body proper”, where the reflexive relationship between them is already given a direction: from “sadness” to “putting a happy face”. Figure 2 shows that the change in perspective also puts into place a boundary, but now the boundary is between audience and character: “the happy face” falls into a genuine expression of sadness, and it is through this pairs of binaries that we, the audience, are invited to see Arthur Fleck. Arthur Fleck, a character in the film, is seen “forcing himself” into happiness. It is the I-Flesh, which is connected to the happy-sad oscillations, where “happy” is a forced mask. The problem is that the Self-Body proper, both as experienced by Arthur and by the spectators that see Arthur’s changes, informs the sensitive I that the “true” situation is that of sadness, which the sensitive “I” tries to force into “happiness”, the forcing being apparent by the dramatic lifting of the two corners of his mouth with the fingers.

This first scene establishes the first mode of instance of audio-visual discourse, a sensible presence that can be described in terms of intensity and extent. One character (Arthur Fleck) oscillates between putting a happy face, from what seems to be genuinely a sad facial expression, in two different occurrences belonging to the same scene, varying in intensity, with figure 3 depicting a more intense expressions of the happy/sad emotions that are also presented in Figure 2.

The working hypothesis, that will be examined through the rest of this analysis is that the emergence of the Joker can be represented by the various violent actions that impose a sort of control (an actant of control), between the source actant (the world) and the target actant (Arthur). The actor that is recognized as Arthur is recognizable due to the physical characteristics of the person playing the character, however, this “surface level” element is the realization of a more general actant, that establishes a division between the “exteroceptive world” and the “interoceptive world”, elements of the body proper that are signified as different based on the reflective surface of the mirror that contains (i) the world of objects that are seen in the mirror facing Arthur and (ii) Arthur’s reflection which cannot be resolved in the world of objects. The reflection of objects, including the masked appearance of Arthur, seem to impose a force on the sensible body of Arthur, who becomes the target of the world’s

pressures. The source is the “world” that Arthur navigates, and the control is represented by those specific actions that come from the external environment such that his eventually troublesome identity is resolved as Joker. This is because Arthur cannot form a genuine happy smile, the force of his interiority being overwhelmed by the reflection of the world imposed on him. Therefore, the mirror not only signifies the deep divide between Arthur’s projected outward appearance and his “interoceptive world” that is marked by deep state of sadness that Arthur tries to forcefully change. Arthur, it is the initial source of intent: the sensible body is seen intending its happiness, but the mirror only reflects this back into him, to neutralize the intention. Arthur’s sensing body, with its attached passions, is the first form of the actant of enunciation. This initial taking of position is an intent, where the body proper turns toward mirrors, that reflect a sensible presence, and recognition of an impossibility to intend happiness in the world. The world, represented by the mirror with its landscape of objects where Arthur must find himself, posits a double entendre: the character must be found in a world of object, in the same way that the viewer of the film must find themselves in a world of objects containing the protagonist.

One can identify, mirrors as operators that connect elementary semantic structures “happy/sad”, where these semantic structures become realized as emotions that are described by various degrees of intensity. The reason why this scene can be considered an instance of discourse, is because it is a specific occurrence that is directed towards an audience by the film, which through its camera, communicates these elements of expressions that have the place of “utterances”. In a similar way that a human speaker, utters sentences to a hearer, the camera utters audio-visual syntagms to the member of the audience, and these audio-visual syntagms belong to the plane of expression, that is, to the plane of discourse.

In the next scene Arthur’s work life is revealed. Once we see the clown working, the first contact he has with the world is violence: first, he is taunted by various passers-by and soon after a group of young men steal his sign. Arthur chases them desperately wanting to recover his sign, but the group ambush him and beat him, while referring to himself as “weak” and considering him unable to do anything (“he can’t do nothing”). This inability of the character to re-act is further confirmed by the character’s resigned pose.



Figure 4. Arthur is being taunted and then kicked down and beaten.

This scene is interesting, particularly from the point of view of positional actants that were identified in the first scene. Arthur, the target actant, loses the sign that he has been entrusted to him, and he is beaten down by a group of teenagers, which are elements of the surrounding world. Although not inanimate objects, the role of the teenagers is simple: perpetrators of violence to the sensible body attributed to Arthur Fleck. The violence, which is expressed physically, is reinforced by the dialogue of the teenagers: “This guy’s weak”, “He can’t do nothing”. The actant’s body is clearly numbed, signified by the resigned pose of the actor (present on the figurative level). This remark, “he can’t do nothing” can be associated with the first step in constructing a modal identity corresponding to the actant. The actant is now modalized according to “being-able-to”. This inability to do anything, is found doubly on the level of discursive articulations: (i) on the one hand, the resigned pose that can be identified visually which is complemented on the level of the audio with (i) “he can’t do nothing. This is also present on the level of the construction of self. The self-ipse acquires this element of passivity, which is recognized also in the modal identity. This is because ability to do nothing, implies ability to be passive, to be acted upon, rather than to act upon.

The third scene introduced the connection between the character and the state of his mental health. He is presented in an office, having a conversation with a health worker. Here, again, he is represented as having no power over his circumstances. The office meeting is the first instance where he refers to the “world” being crazy. The response of the health worker represents a confirmation of Arthur’s sensitivity to the outside world: economic conditions are harsh in Gotham; people are struggling to find work.

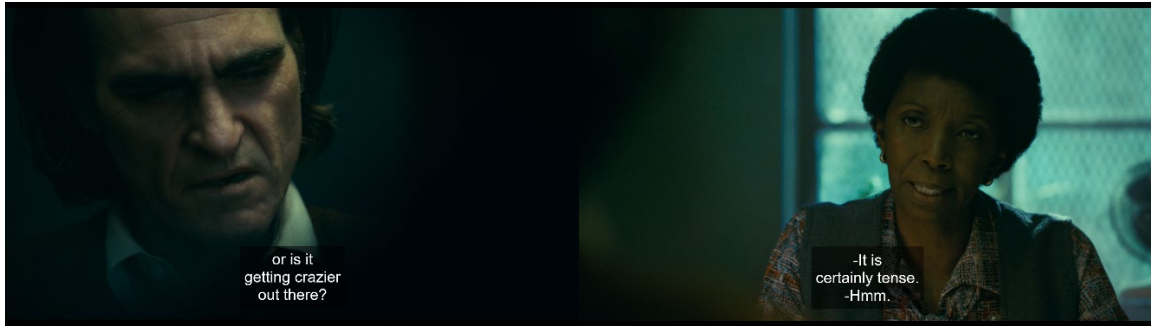


Figure 5. Arthur at the social worker's office discusses mental health status.

Arthur clearly asks a question: “Is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?”. From the point of view of modalities, this can be characterized by “knowing”. Arthur’s knowledge is flexible, subject to change. This signals awareness of himself as having “subjective” knowledge, as opposed to the knowledge of the health worker that utters “It is certainly tense”. The type of “knowing” that belongs to the health worker is of the rigid type.

The fourth scene reveals Arthur’s neurological condition. While trying to entertain a child on a bus, the mother chastises Arthur. Following this he bursts into laughter - a condition that he cannot control.

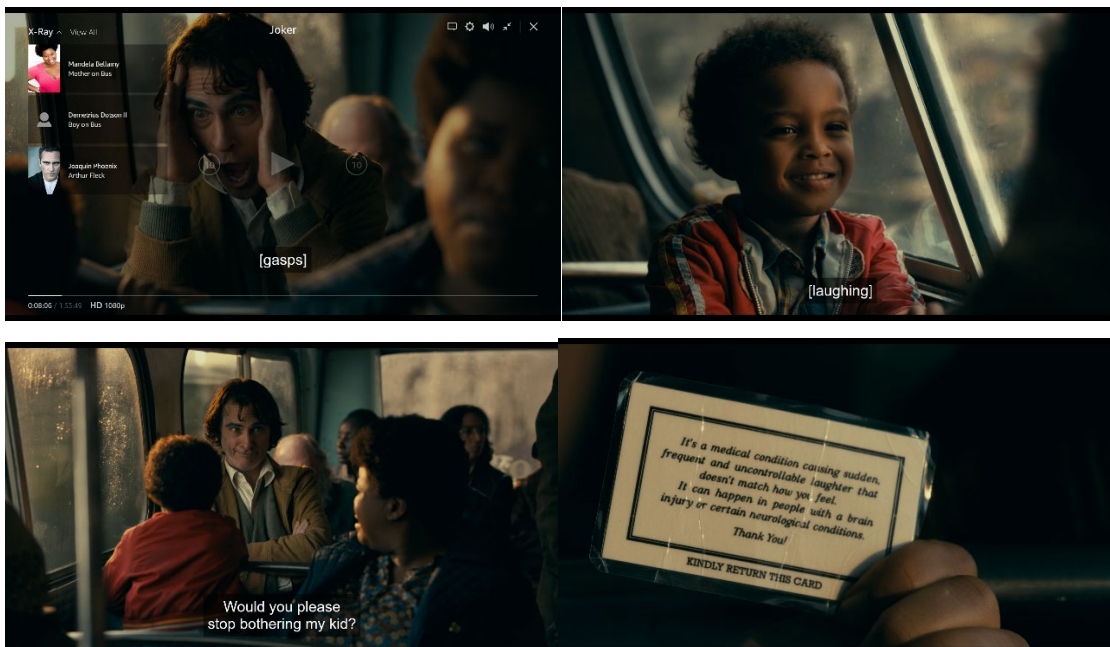


Figure 6. Arthur interacts with a child on the bus; his pathological laughter is revealed.

The scene depicted in Figure 6 represents another key moment of the film, where we learn that Arthur suffers from brain injury, implying that he might have been a victim of abuse long before the events of the film. The kind of knowledge that is revealed on the card is medical knowledge, that is definite and rigid. The condition is “medical” but, based on the discussion offered in Chapter 1, it rather belongs to mental health, without being mental (psychiatric) disorder. It can also be distinguished by madness because there is a reason for the uncontrolled laughter – poor mental health.

In the fifth scene, we finally see that Arthur lives with his mother, Penny Fleck. The two of them watch a show hosted by a famous comedian named Murray Franklin. During the show Arthur projects himself into the show, where we learn that he has been left by his father, and he sees Murray Franklin as a father figure. In his fantasy, depicted in Figure 7, Arthur is invited on the stage, where he receives a standing ovation after he explains that he is “the man of the house”, taking care of his mother. This scene is interesting, because Arthur fantasises that he receives recognition for a moral responsibility – not only he works a hard job, but he does so to take care of his mother. Being “man of the house” implies a knowledge of responsibility and of morals: Arthur knows that he is doing the right thing, but the only appreciation he receives is in a fantasy world, motivated by Arthur’s interior values.



Figure 7. Arthur fantasizes about being appreciated on Murray’s show.

The above elements form a syntagmatic chain, that can be best described as a collection of interrelated elements that form a chain that is schematic of Arthur’s life trajectory. These are instances that re-occur (as it will be discussed in the next sub-chapter), they are formed by interactions of collective life, and they characterise a social identity that is associated to Arthur Fleck. I propose that the context of the places that mark the development of the character illustrate a syntagm: dualistic opposition-violence-mental health -interior world. On the level of the plane of content, I have identified several modalities that construct the modal identities and they are deployed I tandem with each of the identified syntagms: Arthur takes

position in a field of objects that suppress the force of his interiority (dualistic opposition), he is unable to resist the world (violence), he knows he is medically ill, but he also demonstrates flexible knowledge of the surrounding world (mental health), and his only definite knowledge comes from fantasy (interior world).

This syntagm reveals a deep identity which is marked by lack of power and submission, but also shows clearly that Arthur cares deeply about others: he works a difficult job, aspiring to be a comedian, and he takes care of his mother. Therefore, while seen as powerless, Arthur demonstrates from his escapist fantasy that he wants to be appreciated by the love and care he shows others. He wants to be recognized by who he convinces himself he is - a loving son, and an ambitious comedian struggling due to objective conditions of economic hardship. Despite his unspecified mental illness, he demonstrates a certain lucidity. His question to the social worker, “is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?”, followed by the social worker’s answer, demonstrates that he perceives a deeper layer linked to the violence he witnesses and the harsh economic conditions: a lack of order and rules, which he terms “crazy”. Hence, the analysis reveals on the plane of expression a given syntagm that underlines the course of life of Arthur Fleck: (i) a deep caring identity that manifests through the caring actions towards his mother and (ii) a lack of ability and definite knowledge in the exterior world, which is complemented by ability and knowledge in an imaginary space that belongs to his interior world. Arthur is aware that he does not live in the best of all possible worlds, and he chooses to escape in fantasy. From the first scene, we also get the distinct impression that Arthur is separated from his “real self”, as if by means of a metaphorical mirror, in the same way in which the happy-sad oscillation indicates a divide. His relationship with his mother is interesting, as he struggles to take care of her, while he himself being on medications. Interestingly, the discursive syntagmatic chain I defined above, is broken only to be re-arranged when his change in identity-from Arthur Fleck to Joker-is beginning to take form.

4.2 A deeper look, a reverse gaze

The first plot twist, that indicates the destabilization of Arthur’s life and his eventual transformation into Joker, is him receiving a gun. Arthur receives a gun from one of his fellow clowns, Randall, his co-worker. Randall, who heard that Arthur was ambushed by the young men, offers him the gun for protection. The exchange happens in the same room where the film starts, next to the mirror, marking the beginning of a new stage in the character’s development and corresponding to the dualistic opposition, the first place in the syntagmatic

arrangement. The gun is therefore an object that is acquired by the actant, but it is hidden by the world of objects signified by the mirror, as seen in Figure 8, this exchange is not mirrored. The dualistic opposition here still manifests itself, but through the dialogue of the two characters. The empathetic Arthur tries to excuse the young men that assaulted him, since they are “just kids”, while Randall enforces a more pragmatic view: “you gotta protect yourself”



Figure 8. The exchange

The knowledge that Randall expresses, through “you gotta protect yourself out there”, implies a necessity, a type of fixed knowledge. Arthur takes the gun reluctantly: “I’m not supposed to have a gun”. There are two modalities deducible from this utterance: on the one hand, Arthur believes that he is not supposed to have a gun, but it is implied that the gun is wanted, for protection. Therefore, from believing and wanting, the actant has almost a full identity: he starts sensing that his trajectory will be one of defence. But using the gun implies violence. Therefore, Arthur is beginning to accept the possibility of becoming violent.

This moment also marks an important shift on the level of the plot. From this moment, Arthur’s life seems to lose the little stability it has, and the progression of this destabilization clearly follows the same syntagmatic arrangement: Arthur is berated by his boss who refers to his personality attributes (mental health), while accusing him of stealing the sign that was broken in the initial assault. Figure 9 reveals this development, where Arthur’s identity is attributed the label of “freak”, marking his outsider status; Arthur is thus seen as the product of knowing, where this knowing belongs to his co-workers and it is exclusionary. Following this passive exchange (he receives the abuse), he is then seen punching a bin outside (violence).



Figure 9. Arthur being berated by his boss

As he returns to his apartment block where he lives with his mother, he imagines (as it will be later revealed in the film) that he attracts the romantic attention of single mother Sophie Drummond, who is his neighbour (interior world). Following a brief exchange between the Arthur and Sophie, where Arthur imitates a gunshot, he is seen interacting with his mother back at home. Figure 10, showcases an example of the conversation between the two. Penny believes that she and Thomas Wayne, a member of the Gotham wealthy elite, have been involved in a relationship when she was working at his estate. She writes him letters, begging him to help her and Arthur, who are struggling financially.

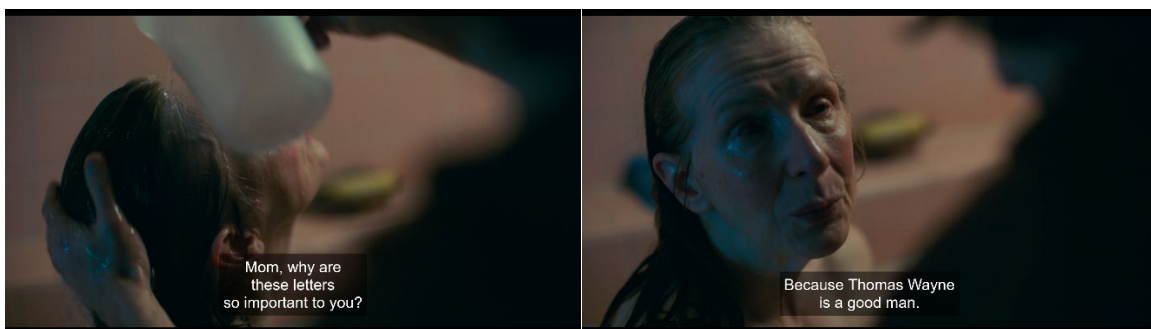


Figure 10. Penny Fleck discusses her thoughts with Arthur.

Penny's knowledge is of a rigid type, which is illustrated by the style of her speech. As seen in Figure 10, she knows that "Thomas Wayne is a good man", there is no doubt about that in her mind. Interestingly, she also doubts her son's ability to become successful. When Arthur assures her that there is no need to worry about money as his stand ups are ready for the big clubs, she implies that he is not funny – a remark that can be interpreted as cruel.



Figure 11. Penny Fleck questions her son's ability for comedy.

The transition towards the emergence of the *Joker*, is marked by him losing his job due to bringing the gun offered by his co-worker Randal to a children's hospital. Shortly afterwards, he is found in the subway, where three, seemingly wealthy, inebriated men harass a young woman. What follows marks the beginning of his identity change. Due to his unnamed condition, Arthur bursts into uncontrollable laughter. This scene is interesting, since the same syntagm manifests itself, only to be disturbed by Arthur firing the gun. The gun is the new element, which has the potential to change things for Arthur. We see the lights in the subway switching on and off. In the framework of this light-dark oscillation (first position in the syntagmatic structure: dualistic opposition) we see the three young wealthy men approach Arthur with violent intent, their approach being triggered by Arthur's laughter condition (mental health), followed by the men beating Arthur (kicking), followed by Arthur shooting two men in self-defence and following and executing the third one.



Figure 12. Arthur kills the last of the three men that assaulted him.

Following his third kill, Arthur identity of Joker can clearly be seen as emerging. After the runs from the crime scene, Fleck comes across what seems to be a public lavatory. There, in front of a mirror, he performs an intricate dance, moving left to right before stopping with his arms wide to contemplate himself in the mirror (dualistic opposition) -this is presented in Figure 13.



Figure 13. Arthur performs an intricate dance in front of the lavatory mirror.

The symmetry of this scene in comparison to the opening scene is striking: the audience sees Arthur dancing parallel to the plane of the mirror, with his body always located in front of it. There is no dialogue, simply the taking of a position by the actant's body. There is a movement from right to left, followed by a change in direction from right to left. There is nothing holding his interiority inside, the mirror does not reflect Arthur's body until the final pose in which Arthur does not force himself to smile. This is a key moment: Arthur is liberated following his act of committing violence. The action he took on the world, killing as a response to violence, is the act that liberates him from the metaphorical constraints imposed by the mirror.

Shortly after, Arthur is shown visiting Sophie Drummond. At this point, the viewer is not aware that the romantic relationship between Arthur and Sophie is simply Arthur's fantasy as this will be revealed at a subsequent stage in the film. The visit to Sophie corresponds to the "interior world" position in the syntagm chain -Arthur retreats in his interior world.



Figure 14. Arthur visits Sophie, his imagined romantic interest.

This transformation is relevant because the coherence of the syntagmatic arrangement that corresponds to Arthur's Fleck forms of life is interrupted by him firing the gun, an act which, on the figurative level, reverses the violence that is done on him by the world. By striking back, Arthur reverses the influence of the world, similarly to the light being reflected out of a mirror: the violence that was cast on him takes hold of him and he casts it back, but now through the force of his interiority; his form of life that of Arthur Fleck, caring son and struggling comedian is inverted and this inversion is marked by the disruption of the syntagmatic arrangement. The act of killing is followed by the dramatic dance that Arthur performs in front of a mirror (see Figure 13) which marks the beginning of a different form of life. Interestingly, this is also the moment where a new opposition is made manifest: the wealthy and the poor, the upper class, and the underclass.

4.3 Through the looking glass?

The killings mark the end of Arthur Fleck's original appearance of his form of life associated to mental illness. This is illustrated by Arthur Fleck's departure from his workplace, where the proliferation of clowns is first announced. On his way out, Arthur denounces Randall as the one who gave him the gun (the reason he lost his job) and he also violently punches a station as illustrated in Figure 14. This is also the last time when the audience sees him in front of the original mirror.



Figure 15. The proliferation of clowns is first announced

In its place, a new form of life emerges, which on the level of the plot development is manifested through the opposition between the poor and the rich, the ones with power and the ones without power. This is highlighted in key moments of the plot, that start from the statement made by businessman Thomas Wayne about the subway killings: it is about social division, where the ones that “have made something of themselves” will look on those who haven’t as “nothing but clowns”.



Figure 16. Arthur and Penny watch Thomas Wayne criticize the poor.

From here, Arthur becomes sensitive to the inequality of resources of the business elite, and his own conditions. This is also when Penny comments following Arthur’s laughter: It’s not funny. This is represented in Figure 16. Following this, one key scene that marks the

development of Arthur Fleck is his final conversation with the social worker. As seen in Figure 17, Arthur displays for the first time a definite knowing: he knows and believes that he exists, that he matters. His existence is connected to the real world. The social worker makes him aware that “they” cut their funding. Lacking financial resources, can no longer access his medication for his unspecified mental illness, once the funding of the social services he visits are cut, presumably leaving his mental illness unchecked. He desires to take his medication, the modality wanting is manifested through the question: “How am I supposed to get my medication?”. This is an important moment, because it is clear evidence that (i) Arthur became violent before his access to medication was cut and (ii) he wants to take his medication (modality wanting) while at the same time being unable do to so due to limited financial resources (being able to do).



Figure 17. Arthur visits the social worker for the last time.

From this moment, there is a proliferation of clowns in the film that places Arthur Fleck in the position of vigilante, a people’s hero. Arthur sees the clowns everywhere: in taxis, in the newspapers, as depicted in the singles contained in Figure 18. His (imaginary) relationship with Sophie seems to flourish. In parallel, Arthur finds his mother’s letters. According to her, Arthur is Thomas Wayne’s son. Penny believes that she and Thomas Wayne were in love, and that Arthur is Thomas’s son. Hence, this is the reason she writes letters to Wayne, asking for money. Following this, Arthur decides to find and confront Thomas Wayne.



Figure 18. The proliferation of masked “clowns” following Arthur’s kill.

During this time, Arthur goes to Wayne’s house, where he meets his son, Bruce. After an altercation with Alfred, the butler, Arthur finds out that his mother, who worked for Wayne, is mentally ill: Alfred refers to her as “sick”. At this point, her alleged mental illness remains unspecified. Eventually Arthur manages to find Wayne at an event, where he confronts him. Wayne tells him that his mother is mentally ill and that he was adopted while she was working for him. Arthur eventually steals his mother’s records from Arkham Hospital, where the portrayal of his mother’s mental illness is revealed clearly from the records:

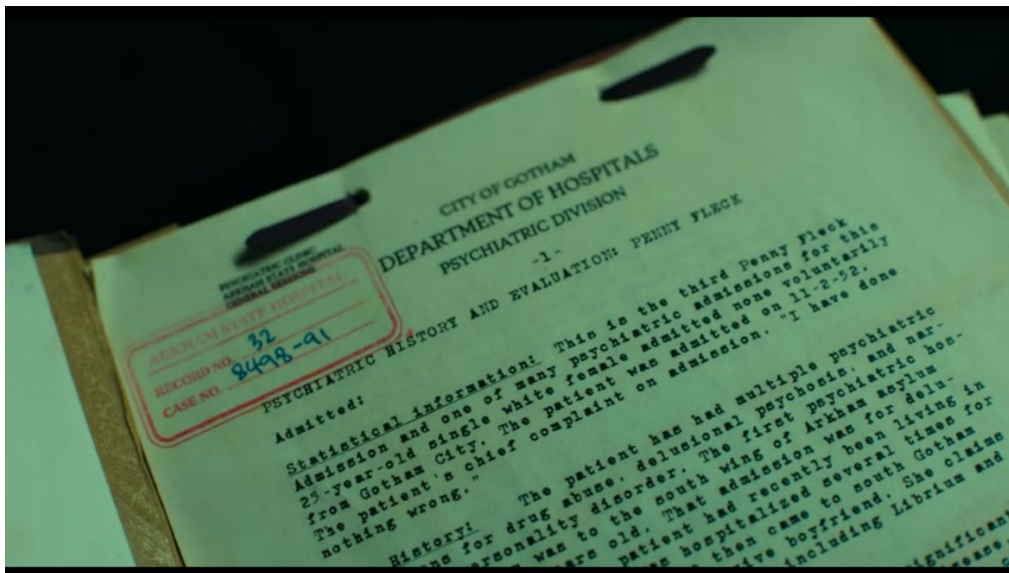


Figure 19. Stolen psychiatric records showing Penny Fleck’s diagnosis

Based on the information provided by the records he stole, Arthur’s mother was diagnosed with “delusional psychosis” and “narcissistic personality disorder”, both which are mental disorders under the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Interestingly, as Arthur

reads this information, he projects himself into the past, imagining his mother and her doctor discussing issues related to abuse and neglect: it is revealed not only that Arthur was adopted, but that he clear signs of violence were found on his body. There are two links that are made clear during this scene, as seen in the singles in Figure 20.

This is a crucial scene, not only because Penny's diagnostic is revealed, but the film proposes a clear link between mental illness (Penny Fleck) and violence (abuse and neglect of a child she cares for - her adopted son, Arthur). Since no possible genetic cause of mental illness exists between Penny Fleck and Arthur Fleck, which leads to the possibility that Arthur Fleck's mental illness is due to environmental stressors.



Figure 20. Arthur's abuse due to his mother is revealed through imaginary projection

This scene carries important significations for the remainder of the film. Through flashback, the story of Penny Fleck's delusion is revealed: She let her boyfriend abuse both Arthur and her, with Arthur being diagnosed with "severe head trauma". Not only is Arthur's condition represented as the resulting from violence, manifested through neglect and abuse, this neglect and abused is seen as caused specifically by the absent-minded mentally ill mother. But this projection into a "past reality" represents coming to terms with the world and (perhaps) the end of his imaginary projections. It is soon revealed, when he visits the apartment of Sophie, that they do not have a relationship. She is scared when he finds him waiting in her apartment, she only later recognizing him as her neighbour. While Sophie exists, it becomes clear through a series of flashbacks that Arthur simply imagined their relationship. Once Arthur accepts reality, his identity as a killer emerges. Arthur is seen as killing both his mother, who was in a hospital, and fellow clown Randal, after making statements that indicate his transformation.



Figure 21. Arthur's self-reflections marking his transformation.

Arthur refers to his “real self”, which is unhappy, and he mentions his pathological laughter. He also admits to Randall that he has stopped taking his medications, moments after killing him. His knowledge becomes modalized differently: now he is certain of who he is, there is no confusion: his life a comedy, and not a tragedy, as he previously thought. His realization of the nature of his life, is a joke. This admission is made moments before smothering his mother to death. This is well connected with the first scene, where Arthur oscillates between his forced smile and otherwise sad face. Arthur's admission changes the pressure he feels from the world, revealing a choice to accept his life as a comedy, free from responsibility. The death of his mother, the only person he took care of, also reveals this transition. A comedy thus becomes worse than the tragedy, since in tragedy one can at least find meaning, while in comedy, everything is to be rejected as having any meaning. Arthur's laugh becomes the ultimate expression of rejection which realizes in brutal killing that he dismisses as “funny”, on the grounds that humour is subjective.

This last remark is seen in the last scene of the film, where he is invited to his Murray's show, his idol where he is first seen. The circumstances of this invitation are real, from the point of view of the plot of the film, and somewhat ironic: Murray shows clips of Arthur's disastrous stand-up to make fun of him, only for those clips to increase the ratings of the show. Based on this, Arthur, who initially dreams to be on set with Murray Franklin, finally is invited on the show. Introduced as Joker, Arthur admitting to the killings, and the chaos that ensues due to the riots caused by the underclass (dressed as clowns). Murray blames him for all the troubles, moments before Arthur shoots Murray live – this is shown in Figure 22.



Figure 22. Murray shifts the blame on Arthur, moments before Arthur kills him.

The transformation is complete, as he delivers his (subjectively) macabre jokes. “That’s life”, a reference to the name of the show that Murray runs, becomes a half-finished macabre punchline uttered after the killing of Murray on public television, as in Figure 23.

Interestingly, this is linked to the uprisings on the streets: the underclass, dressed as clowns, now engage in widespread acts of violence.



Figure 23. Arthur, finally on Murray’s show, has revealed himself as Joker.

It is perhaps in the scene close the end of the film, where Joker, who is under arrest and in a police car, manages to escape: the police car is crashed due to the riots and Joker is now freed by the “clowns”, who uplift him as their leader in a dramatic act. Using some of the blood from the car crash, Joker paints himself a red smile, surrounded by a crowd of cheering masked residents who recognize him as their hero. The “real” Arthur emerges, as in this final

act, the red smile of the murderer is genuine, and there is no mirror, except for the social mirror.



Figure 24. Arthur draws a smile surrounded by cheering protesters dressed as clowns.

This scene is very important, because it is the moment where Arthur reverses the action. The target of violence, Arthur breaks free from the world by instituting his own field of presence. At the beginning of the field, the world of objects, represented by the mirror, stopped the force of Arthur's interior world: his smile was forced, every time reverting to the sad expression. In this last scene, Arthur (now Joker) draws a smile of his own blood, surrounded by protesters dressed as clowns. There is no field of presence on him as he becomes the field of presence: his brand of violence, that of the clowns, is the one that he projects.

Chapter 5: Results: forms of mental illness and madness

The purpose of this chapter is to precisely identify the forms of life based on the data obtained in the previous chapter. The analysis conducted in chapter 4 revealed that there are several elements that can be found on the level of visual discourse. First, on the level of discursive activity there are three positional actant that are defined as:

Source: the source of sensible presence, that acts and modifies the target. It determined the sensitivity of bodies. It takes two actorial manifestations: initially Arthur Fleck, and subsequently the mirror

Target: the target of transformation, represented first by Arthur who is subjected to violent acts coming from the world (represented by mirror, teenagers, wealthy inebriated aggressors), and then by the mirror, who becomes subjected to acts of violence from Arthur

Control: A filter, that acts as a controller between source and target. It is represented by the body proper of Arthur, and the body proper of the world. The control is determined by the degree of presence of elements situated along the two dimensions of the body proper, between real/imagined. Real belongs to the outside world, and belongs to objective events, imagined belongs to the inside world, and refers to projection (without considering delusions), to imaginary events. The proportion of real/imaginary acts as a buffer and controller to the number and intensity of violent acts that it lets through. The control is responsible for the transformation of Arthur's passive identity into Joker; it is also present on the dimension of world, which is transformed from peaceful to violent.

These three actants are positioned of discourse that allow for situating the direction of violent acts, and their effect from source to target: from the source (first actantial position), violence is filtered by the mixture of interiority/exteriority of the body proper of the target (second actantial position), while the target is the one subjected to pressures that ultimately transform it (third actantial position). It becomes clear that the body-actant, that feels itself under tensions between a source and a target, is the actant corresponding to the intermediate position: the actant of control.

Further, I have identified three binary oppositions, that are characteristic of forms of life: happy/sad, poor/rich and interior/exterior. For each of the oppositions, there are semantically opposed terms that act as criteria for the recognition of forms of life.

To the character Arthur Fleck, there are two form of life that are associated: **Supressed**, which is opposed to the form of life that is characteristic of the emergence of the Joker, **Expressed**. These forms of life are recognized by their syntagmatic arrangement, which is manifested on the plane of expression, that can be connected to a modal identity described by specific combinations of modalities of knowing and being able to on the plane of content. Both forms of life belong to Arthur Fleck/Joker and the elements that are correlated on the plane of expression and on the plane of content are provided below, in table 25.

	Plane of expression	Plane of content
Supressed	mental health status- imaginary world	Uncertain knowledge (wanting)-and ability to act constructively (being able to)
Expressed	Justice monologue-real world	Certain knowledge (knowing)- ability to act destructively (being able to)

Table 25. Schema allowing the correlations between expression/content

The data in Table 1, allows for relational characteristic of forms of life situated on the syntagms that can be correlated to modal identities of the actant. Hence, for each form of life: **Supressed**: the recurrence of two ordered stages of Arthur’s life, his visit to the mental health worker, followed by his retreat into his imaginary world constitute a coherent schema for his life: these two elements occur in the same order, throughout his days, representing a coherent arrangement of “life situations”. This is connected to the modalized of the construction of the actant’s body: in the field of presence of the world, his knowledge is always uncertain, he *wants* to know the nature of the world, and his place in it, but he is blinded by it (“is it going

crazy, or is it just me”), this wanting is combined to *being able to*, which is only found in his imaginations, where he is loved, appreciated, recognized – but this is not actualized. This form of life is also characterized by a numbed sensitivity, which results in abusive acts towards him. The force of his interiority is suppressed, and the general passivity is well modelled by the actant of control: the desire for action is directed inwards, which constitutes a barrier between him and the world, which makes him resilient to abusive acts, but also insensitive to the potential of his interiority. This the principle of his perseverance. This form of life is manifested congruently at the following levels:

- a) **Body Proper:** The experience of the body is balanced, and it can reunite exteroceptivity with interoceptivity: the feelings of belonging to interoceptivity, are brought together with the abusive acts on exteroceptivity. This leads to an experience of the body that is balanced and favours fair exchanges between fortunes and misfortunes
- b) **Narrative dimension:** there is an exact balance between the number of acts of physical or verbal violence directed towards Arthur, and the intensity of his retreats. The first beating made him imagine he is respected on Murray’s show, the verbal abuse he endures from his boss is balanced by him imagining that he attracts the romantic interest of Sophie Drummond
- c) **The fields of presence:** his sensitivity is suppressed by the forces of the world, and this is manifested on the actorial direction by the initial position the world (mirror) takes with respect to (Arthur) who is unable to “put on a happy face”

Expressed: The expressed form of life is manifested by the recurrence of two instances: a moralizing instance delivered to the person to be killed, followed by the punchline (the kill). For example, the killing of Randall, Penny, Murray, are all preceded by monologues of certain knowledge regarding his nature, followed by lethal action in the real world. This is the coherent arrangement of life situations that underline the identity of the Joker. The modal identity of the actant is realized in two stages corresponding to the coherent succession of expressive “life elements”: there is definite knowing and there is definite ability to destroy. The actant of control is now represented by the world, the target of distraction, where there is a correlation of Arthur’s individual killings and the increase in clowns. The desire of action is directed outwards, and the world is subjected to Arthur’s interior force. Paradigmatically:

- a) On the level of body proper, Arthur reunites definite knowing with definite attacks. The experience on the exteroceptive is problematic and imbalanced, being described

by a certain loss: on the level of interoceptive, the proliferation of clowns leads to a vacuity of the internal domain and enrichment of the exteroceptive world.

- b) Narrative dimension: there is no balance between acts of physical violence and intensity of retreats. The violence he inflicts on the world, is gained by the world, which only increase in chaos
- c) The field of presence: the world's sensitivity is suppressed by Arthur's destructive force, he dances, moves in intricate ways, causing chaos on the otherwise ordered world.

Penny Fleck appears considerably less frequently than Arthur, and as a result a coherent schema of her life can consist of analysing the whole of instances in which she appears. When she is confronted by questions, she retreats in a phantasy world. In the phantasy world, her knowing is certain, and it is manifested by lack of action on the exterior world. When Arthur suggests that his stand-ups are ready for the big clubs, she dismissed his claims on the basis that he is not "funny" (see Figure 11), when Arthur laughs at the reported killing, she dismissed his emotion, on the basis that "it is not funny (see Figure 16). Penny is seen to have a form of life that represents a project of life of avoidance by retreat into an interior world, one of delusion, where delusion neutralizes the contact between her and the world. She is a passer-by, always absent minded, doing harm by negligence. But this negligence, based on her form of life, which could be labelled **otherworldly**, manifests itself through actions of no consequence on the greater world: she simply sends letters to Thomas Wayne, asking for money. The real consequence of her actions is echoing in the present, but her actions were realized in the past, by neglecting Arthur. Her form of life belongs to another world, and it is deduced mainly through Arthur's imaginary projection: abused by her boyfriend, imagining that she has a relationship with Thomas Wayne, and failing to see that a 4-year old Arthur was beaten so severely he has head trauma. Hence, Arthur replaces her through his own adaptation to the present world, the forms of life connected to his unspecified mental illness being connected to him creating a specific type of semiosis: connecting the brutality of the abuse he suffered from the negligence of his mother, illustrated in the medical records, on his plane of exteroception, with the otherwise comforting medium of his interior world, which is contaminated by the knowledge. This shuts completely his ability to retreat to his interior world, releasing the accumulated violence on the world.

This treatment of forms of life, can reveal answers to the three research questions, as follows:

A) Does the film present a causal link between mental illness and violence; is mental illness dangerous?

Through the study of forms of life, the connection between mental illness and violence is correlated to the changes in identity of the actors Arthur Fleck, and of the actant of control that controls the flow of information between two “worlds”: an interior one and an exterior one. Mental illness, as traced directly to the DSM-V, is dangerous, while the link is causal when applied to the representation of Penny Fleck. Her form of life indicates that there is a schema of her existence, best described by: prompting – retreating – negligence. The danger that she poses is to her son, and to no one else.

B) Does the film present a causal link between socio-economic conditions and violence?

The film presents this link via the opposition between rich and poor. The clowns, that start rioting following the killing of the three wealthy men by Arthur, are marked by low-socio economic status and violent acts towards the rich. The development of these acts is interestingly correlated with the transformation of Arthur in Joker. The more violent Arthur becomes, the more intense the riots become. Arthur himself comments that the destruction of the city by the clown is “beautiful” while being escorted by policemen that specific that this is his fault, moments before the police officer is killed in a car crash caused by the “clowns”. There is no implication that low-socio economic status causes mental illness, but there is a parallel development, a sort of semi-symbolic system that takes the form:

Arthur/intensity of Killings //Clowns/riot intensity

C) How is the link between mental illness and violence realized: through some third variable, or due to some specific stressors?

The mental illness of Arthur transforms into the madness of Joker and this madness is expressed through the assimilation of truth into his phantasy world. Arthur learning of the truth about his mother: that she is mentally ill and that she let him be abused as a child, facilitates his identity change, but it is not the catalyst. Specific stressors such as beatings, and lack of medications, are not causally connected to Arthur’s transformation. The first such connection is losing his job in conjunction to being attacked, which led him to the first act of violence: killing the three men on the subway.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis analysed the film *Joker* to understand how mental illness is connected to violence in the film world. It was found that the application of forms of life to conceptualize the identity transformation well, and it reveals the reasons for the Joker's violence according to the film: Arthur finds out about his abuse, and he loses his job. The meaning of mental illness is associated with a parallel development, the rise of the poor against the rich. The message of the film, concerning mental illness is not a simple one: mental illness is dangerous, threatening to destabilize the social structure around it.

Kokkuvõte

Vaimuhaiguste kujutamine filmis “Jokker”: hullumeelsuse vorm.

Hollywoodi filmid on pikalt kujutanud vaimuhaigusi negatiivsel viisil: vaimselt haigeid näidatakse kui ohtu enesele ja teistele. Antud töö eesmärk on analüüsida vaimuhaiguste kujutamist Todd Phillipsi filmis “Jokker”. “Jokkerit” on varasemalt uuritud, toetudes filmiuuringutele ning psühhiaatriale. Kui film pöörab tähelepanu vägivallategude kasvule kahe vaimselt haige tegelase, Arthur Flecki ja Penny Flecki juuresolekul, luuakse selge seos vaimuhaiguste ning vägivalla vahel. Loodud vaimuhaiguste ja vägivalla seos lubab tõstatada mitu küsimust: 1) Kas filmiga tahetakse öelda, et vaimuhaigused on ohtlikud?; 2) On need sotsiaal-majanduslikud tingimused, mis viivad vägivallani?; 3) Või luuakse seos vaimuhaigustega läbi mingite kolmandate muutujate? Probleem, mis tõstatub, on ebaselgus stressorites, mis kutsuvad esile Arthur Flecki vägivaldset käitumist. Eluvormide mõistet (*formes de vie*), mis on loodud algselt Ludwig Wittgensteini poolt analüütilise filosoofia raamistikus määramaks kultuuriliste vormide mõju keelte tõlgendamisel, on antud töös kasutatud lähtuvalt Jacques Fontanille’ 2015. a tööst *Formes de vie*. Analüüsimeetod toetub Christian Metzsi, David Bordwelli ja Seymour Chatmani filmiteooriatele, mis on lõimitud Jacques Fontanille’ mõistetega – oma keha (*the body proper*), aktant-keha (*the actant-body*), diskursus –, mis toetuvad Greimasi-järgsele semiootikatraditsioonile. Lisaks on analüüsis toetutud DSM-V-le ning Michel Foucault teooriatele, et mõista, kuidas seostada vaimse tervise probleeme kliinilise diagnoosiga. Töös arutletakse mõiste ‘hullumeelsus’ ning kliinilise mõiste ‘vaimuhaigus’ tähenduste üle. Tulemustest selgub, et peategelasele saab omistada kaks hullumeelsusele viitavat eluvormi, mis kirjeldavad ta identiteedi kujunemist. Need eluvormid on omavahel pidevas võitluses ning võitlevad ka Penny Flecki poolt kujutatud eluvormiga. Jokker tõuseb esile domineeriva eluvormina.

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