A Joke Without a Clear Punchline: *Joker* as a Supervillain to Linearity

Amanda Piazza

English

Before winning multiple Oscars at the 92nd Academy Awards and gaining a fanbase of dedicated cinephiles, showings of the 2019 film *Joker* required a police presence, bag checks, and costume limitations, all due to the volatile panic created around the controversial depictions of violence and terrorist empathizing strewn within and around the film. Director Todd Phillips' film sets its fictionalized 1981 Gotham City against a backdrop eerily similar to the crime-ridden New York streets of the 1980s (Tietze 32). The mental state of clown-for-hire Arthur Fleck, played by Joaquin Phoenix, deteriorates along with the crumbling city around him, where piles of trash pave the streets and graffiti becomes part of the gritty architecture. The film is a character study situated on a man rejected by society- and the very mental health services meant to help him- which leads to his transformation into the hyperviolent and charismatic Joker.

Although Todd Phillips clarified that the movie is, "about childhood trauma, a movie about the lack of love in the world, a movie about the loss of empathy in society" (Gross) and not a love letter to self-pitying white extremists, some still believe, whether intentional or not, the film alludes to specific, current issues and can incite violence among the marginalized. Critics and viewers alike see the film as a conglomeration of present issues and ideas, subliminally integrating the white supremacist implications associated with the Incel movement and glamorizing mass gun violence. Critic David Ehrlich even went as far as saying the film is, "a toxic rallying cry for self-pitying Incels" (qtd. in Kaushik). However, the film does not display any mass shootings or refer specifically to Incels, leading thinkers to wonder if such ideas are anachronistic within the past setting of the film and if the film can be historicized despite

implications of presentism allegedly integrated within. The film's ambiguity suggests the possibility of historicization but does not require it, for *Joker*, much like its central character, stands in a league of its own, creating as well as destroying how one considers causal signification.

Genre, the Contemporary, and Time

Joker is a variant origin story for DC Comics' Joker character, setting itself apart from the traditional superhero film by focusing not on a superhero but a "supervillain" as an attempt to subvert the workings of the genre. As Theodore Martin states in *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, And The Problem Of The Present*, "Genres explain how aesthetic and cultural categories become recognizable as well as reproducible in a given moment, and they demonstrate how the conventions and expectations that make up those categories are sedimented over time" (6). The film strays from following a traditional morally immaculate, tights-wearing lead, and instead focuses on an unlikeable and corrupt outcast. Yet, the film is still recognizable as part of the superhero genre since it contains tropes specific to the genre, including "vigilante archetypes, urban crime, action sequences, and heightened reality" (Burke 98). Before assassinating his former idol Murray Franklin, who mocked him on a previous episode of his talk show, Joker announces, "You get what you fucking deserve!" as he pulls the trigger. Much like a traditional comic book "hero," he enacts his own form of justice through vigilantism. Perhaps the most common and defining trope of the genre is having a protagonist that, "[hopes] to prevent or rectify perceived transgressions against themselves, their homes, or their loved ones" (Burke 100). Arthur Fleck is motivated not by morally idealistic character strengths that define most comic book superhero protagonists but is consumed by a narcissistic form of "justice," only wanting to purge himself of the constant degradation he experiences due to the unjust systems

around him. His actions may be self-serving and destitute, but they still fit into one of a superhero film protagonist, simultaneously morphing *Joker* into a film that both subverts *and* develops its given genre into a contemporary entity.

Martin argues how the contemporary, "both is and isn't specific to our current moment" (3). *Joker* was released in 2019, but placing the events within the 1980s frames the film as existing not entirely in one time; it is a product of the present yet influenced by the past, gesturing to the transhistorical quality of the film. Thinking of time as a chronological, linear occurrence where the present replaces the past (Lim 1) implies a temporality where "the present is all that exists and the past has elapsed and is gone" (Lim 15), which fails to consider history as evolving and continuing within the so-called present. The past may still exist because "in every seeming instant of the present there is already a 'continuous thread of memory,' a durative 'depth of time.' If the past is not dead, but instead paradoxically coexists alongside the present, then the very notion of contemporaneousness- as a single, self-consistent meanwhile-starts to fray" (Lim 2). If true, determining events as isolated fixtures tied to specified periods *historicizes* time, disregarding the constant movement of occurrences and the continuum of "time."

Even when creating something "new," history prevails, for "The past lingers in the present even as it is erased" (Niemeyer 218). *Joker* reinvents the past through an emulation of the 1980s and by blatantly "borrowing most directly from the films of Martin Scorsese- *King of Comedy* (1982) and *Taxi Driver* (1976)" (Kaushik)*,* all of which is possible because of the industry's dependence on "cultural amnesia" (Niemeyer 212). Creating new films in the place of past ones perpetuates the erasure of history and establishes the text as a reflection produced by the present.

The constant replacement of history with an analogous present also points to consumer culture's reliance on the "evaporation of the past" (Niemeyer 215) to establish marketability. The process sustains the "cinematic repetition and return" (Lim 15) created by the recognizability and progress of genre, which utilizes form to create the seemingly new through a masked redundancy of mimicry. The film's release in 2019 "compels us to think, above all, about the politics of how we think about the present" (Martin 5). A contemporary film such as *Joker* relies on the modern audience's acceptance and/or ignorance towards the replacement of the past with the present, which, in turn, aids in categorizing certain qualities as time specific rather than as timeless entities.

Joker's violent sequences shocked audiences, such as when the enraged Fleck shoots three Wall Street men on the subway. He chases one down who attempts to crawl away, shooting him multiple times in the back even after he ceases moving. Fleck even goes as far as puncturing his former co-worker's throat and stabbing him in the eye for getting him fired from his clown gig. Robbie Collin, of *The Telegraph*, voices the main concern of most critics, stating, "This is a film that is going to stir up trouble- in the consciences of everyone who watches it, and almost certainly in the outside world as well" (Tietze 33). However, "The film's director (Todd Phillips) felt that the film had been unfairly criticized for promoting violence and defended it by saying that the display of violence in *Joker* is 'nothing new'" (Kaushik). The superhero genre is no stranger to violence. In 2008, Heath Ledger's version of the Joker stabbed a gangster in the eye with a pencil and blew up a hospital in *The Dark Knight.* Violence is a staple of the superhero film genre, but the scenes in *Joker* could be said to be more intense than those of past films due to the hyperrealism attached to the otherwise fantastical genre, for "Genres lead distinctly double lives, with one foot in the past and the other in the present; they contain the entire abridged

history of an aesthetic form while also staking a claim to the form's contemporary relevance"

(Martin 6). *Joker* deploys a series of violent action scenes, a recognizable and frequent feature of

any past superhero film, but develops such depictions into a more realistic and fresh form. The

psychotic breakdown of a mentally ill man whose medication and therapeutic services are cut off

because of government funding cancellations is more than plausible in the real world, especially

in a present where mental health services are still criticized for their failure to provide proper and

accessible treatment methods. Fleck's is a victim "of neo-liberal policies implemented and

initiated in America in the 1980s, that benefit the rich" (Kaushik), which are still recognizable in

the capitalist atmosphere of the 2010s. He is a character of the past and present, identifiable as a

classic comic book villain but also as a newer figure who challenges what makes someone a

supervillain.

If the film exists across time instead of *at* a certain point in linear time, historicizing

Joker becomes a complicated endeavor. The final script clarifies, "This film takes place in its

own universe […] Although it is never mentioned in the film, this story takes place in the past.

Let's call it 1981" (Phillips & Silver ii). The film's past setting positions it as a documentation of

what once *was*, but releasing it in 2019 makes it part of what *is* occurring. Accordingly, "when

compelled by an ethical imperative to read the past *on its own terms*, the practice of historical

criticism is impossible *on its own terms*" (Rohy 68). How an audience views a periodized film is

influenced by the moment it is being viewed, revealing the impossibility of interacting with

history as an isolated fixture.

Incels and Superfans: The Dangerous Application of Historicism and Presentism

Regardless of its 1980s context, many critics mark the film as a mimetic image of the

Trump era, where "it was claimed not only Trump was leading a fascist-style movement (with

his raucous campaign rallies seen as harbingers of mob violence); he was also 'emboldening' a

rapidly growing far-right and creating a toxic atmosphere that was inspiring politically

motivated, right-wing mass shooters" (Tietze 34). Like Trump, Fleck's actions inspired

followers, within the film, with a relentless mob-mentality. Fleck's subway shootings spurred the

onslaught of riots and rallies, where people in clown attire rebelled against the rich, believing it

to be their right to enact violence against those with power. The year 1981 marked the era of

Ronald Reagan's presidency. In the same year, John Hinckley attempted to assassinate President

Reagan to reenact the occurrences of his favorite film, *Taxi Driver,* where the nihilistic loner

protagonist tries to assassinate a presidential candidate ("President Reagan Shot"). *Joker*, which

takes much inspiration from *Taxi Driver*, has Fleck, who has transformed into Joker, assassinate

Murray Franklin because the show host fails to see the suffering of common people like him.

Joker asks Franklin, "Have you seen what it's like out there, Murray? Do you ever actually leave

this studio? Everybody just yells and screams at each other. Nobody's civil anymore. Nobody

thinks what it's like to be the other guy. You think men like Thomas Wayne ever think what it's

like to be a guy like me? To be anybody but themselves?" When *Joker* hit theaters, the

character's violent, self-pitying actions were considered a romanticization of "violent 'incels'

(involuntary celibates, young men enraged by being denied their absolute right to have sex with

women), and that it 'champions' Arthur's crimes" (Tietze 33). Any thought of the film

referencing similarly thematic instances from *Taxi Driver* and the assassination attempt on

Reagan were largely overlooked and instead tied to present issues, disregarding the film's subtle

attempts to historicize itself, verifying philosopher Gilles Deleuze's sentiment, "We are too

accustomed to thinking in terms of the 'present'" (qtd. in Lim 1). As soon as someone from the

present views the historical, the moment of interaction becomes part of the present, solidifying

the argument "there is not truly historical historicism" (Rohy 69). The present is a constant

influence on how audiences observe the past, especially when the past holds blatant similarities

to the present, the only difference is the names given to these commonalities.

Even so, employing strategic presentism and deeming *Joker* as a product of such a study

is yet another dangerous approach to categorizing the film within linear temporality. J.M Tyree

argues in his review *Is It OK to Talk about Joker Now*?, "*Joker* is not a film about mass

shootings. We know this because there are no mass shootings in the film." He continues, "*Joker*

is not about 'incels' or 'alt-right' radicalization. We know this because there is not a threat of

'alt-right' radicalization or displays of the trappings of 'incel culture' in the film. Joker is not a

white supremacist- he does not feel much 'white fragility.'" Still, many critics call Fleck an

"Incel," a term nonexistent in 1981- an anachronistic term that is "out of step with the times"

(Rohy 67). Perhaps Flecks' most definably "Incel-esque" trait is his obsessive harping on an

unavailable woman. After an encounter in his apartment elevator with his neighbor Sophie, a

young mother who lives doors away from Fleck, he becomes infatuated with the woman, even

going as far as stalking her as she drops her daughter off at school and heads to work. After his

pursuits, Sophie approaches Fleck at his apartment and asks, "Were you following me today?"

When he admits his actions, she brushes the situation off with a joke, saying, "I thought that was

you. I was hoping you'd come in and rob the place" a response oddly reflecting Fleck's own

intrusive thoughts. The two then organize a date and are depicted throughout the film together,

including at Fleck's dying mother's bedside.

During the film's climax, where Fleck discovers his repressed past as a battered child and

his adopted mother's involvement, the audience learns that after the elevator encounter with

Sophie, Fleck had created the other encounters in his head. He enters her apartment soaking wet

from the rain, disturbed by the information gained, but when Sophie enters the living room to find him dripping on her coach, she is frazzled saying, "Your name's Arthur, right? You live down the hall." A series of flashbacks ensue, omitting Sophie's prior presence within the scenes and revealing their relationship as a fantasy, one he crafted out of obsession. Fleck's narcissism convinced him that his relationship with Sophie was real, a sign his life was finally going in the right direction, since he claims to his therapist, "For my whole life I didn't know if I even really existed. But I do. And people are starting to notice." Before vocalizing this revelation, he kills the three men on the subway and is shown entering Sophie's apartment, kissing her, which she accepts. Unearthing the truth of his relationship reveals Fleck's longing to be accepted within society and by those within it, believing attention is owed to him based on the mere fact that he exists and refuses to remain invisible, a trait 'Incels" share.

Terminology aside, ideas associated with "Incels" were common in the 1980s. Hinckley could very well be associated with predating Incel culture, since "He identified with the film's [*Taxi Driver*] central character, violent loner Travis Bickle, who sought to gain a woman's affection by trying to assassinate a presidential candidate" (Klein). Hinckley wanted to gain the attention of the lead actress of the film, Jodie Foster, who had ignored his previous attempts of contact with her. In this sense, "presentism might help us better understand and address the ways the past is at work in the exigencies of the present" (Coombs and Coriale 88). Those like Hinckley and Fleck may not hold the title of "Incel" in their dated contexts due to the modernity of the term, but they set the stage for the definition and formation of the phrase, allowing theorists to track the existence of the newly defined. *Joker* shows how, "Films, along with other cultural productions, are not simply manufactured as static objects within a mobile historical context or situation, they are themselves part of the history that is going on, part of the

movement, processes within the larger, more complex process" (Beck 12). The film documents time as a movement- something which cannot be tracked through the tendency to assign differentiation; time is in a constant process of development, reconfiguring presences and how people define them. Films may *allude* to time but they are not entirely *specific* to time, or, "Film remains isolated amid the network of practices that frame and fashion it, independently perceived as the "effect" of so many configurations of causes" (Beck 9). *Joker* gestures to the tendency to differentiate and assign a presence, such as the Incel, as time-specific, but reveals how presence is an ever-evolving constant *not* a unique feature of an isolated moment in time. The film is a suspended entity rejecting the historicization of time and subverts the concept of linear temporality to create a separated vision of time as well as of "meaning" itself.

Dancing Around the Stairs of Meaning: Deconstruction, Limitation, and Perspective

Despite the adoption of Fleck's clown persona for an anarchical political movement, Fleck himself lacks political motivation. When Murray Franklin asks if the clown makeup he dons to the studio is an act of protest, Fleck states, "No, I don't believe in any of that. I don't believe in anything." Fleck's murder of Franklin, his mother, his coworker, and the three Wall Street men consequently crafts him into an emblem of the political, for "even if, as he says, no political ideas are guiding him, he still rejects the system that has made his life impossible; therefore, his revolt is political" (Senesi). Assigning political motivation to Fleck's actions is possible due to the inherent lack he and the film embodies, allowing the viewers to project their politics onto the character and the film. As reviewer Ritika Kaushik says, "*Joker*'s politics is deliberately designed to appear vague and benign" and "the character of Joker never signifies any particular ideological position at any time." Fleck nor the film can be attributed to a specific

political or historical presence, leaving the audience with "an empty signifier in a painted face

and a red suit" (Kaushik).

The concept of the "empty signifier" is explicitly Derridean, who theorizes the role of the

signified and signifier in creating meaning within linguistic systems. In Derridean terms, *Joker*

seeks to be metaphorical. In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida distinguished the metaphor as follows:

> Metaphor is the relation between signifier and signified within the order of ideas
> and of things, according to what links the idea with that of which it is the idea,
> that is to say, of which it is already the representative sign. Then, the literal or
> proper meaning will be the relationship of the idea to the affect that it *expresses.*
> And it is the *inadequation of the designation* (metaphor) which *properly*
> *expresses* the passion (300).

In a lingual system, Derrida believes signs are determined based on their relation to other

existing signs within the system, or "each [discipline of writing] is a system of signs, and each

sign gets its meaning not by latching onto some extra-linguistic entity which it then signifies, but

from its relationship to other signs within this system" (Novitz 104). Texts attempt to assert a

stable meaning by creating signifiers that will point to the signified, but this is problematized by

the instability of signifiers in relation to the signified. There is an inherent lack of universal signs

that connote certain meanings, so all is determined by the system it is placed in. A metaphor uses

a relation of signs in the form of the literal to refer to a variable, seeking to make the literal a

transcendent abstraction of truth. This forces a myriad of meanings to become attached to the

metaphor:

> Since each sign in a language gets whatever sense it has from the relationships in
> which it stands to each other sign, and since there are no facts of the matter which
> tell us how these signs are related to each other, it turns out that even the most
> straightforward speech act or text can be variously construed, and so carries with
> it a surplus of meaning (Novitz 104).

 There is a multiplicity in meaning, and no singular truth is revealed by the sign in linguistics.

Therefore, "Deconstruction contends that in any text, there are inevitably points of equivocation

and 'undecidability' that betray any stable meaning that an author might seek to impose upon his or her text" (Reynolds). Although Todd Phillips says, "The whole M.O. of the film was, let's make a comic book film where we run everything through as realistic a lens as possible" and asserts his intentions of depicting unchecked mental illness (Gross), his attempt to simply create a realistic yet fictional villain origin story was still not seen as such from critics who believed it to be a glamorizing rally-cry for violence. Much of the controversy around the film subsided once more people saw the film resulting in a mix of reactions:

> For some on the left, it came instead to be seen as a powerful indictment of how austerity robs people of essential mental-health care... For others, the "true villain" of the film was not Arthur Fleck but "neoliberalism" or "gangster capitalism." A politically reductive panic had suddenly given way to equally politically reductive defenses of the film, which sometimes even edged toward sympathy for the appalling individual and mob behavior depicted" (Tietze 35-36).

The film allows for varied interpretations and "makes room for attaching one's preferred interpretation to the film's premise, ranging from a plethora of relations like its correlation to Incel violence, a critique of neoliberalism, a standard-bearer for left politics, and so on" (Kaushik). These meanings may not be inherently visible, but the prospect of unearthing these ideas from the metaphor is assumed, for "metaphors are not made by mistake. We assume that those who coin them intend to do so, and hence that they are perfectly familiar with the literal meanings of the words that they use non-literally. In a nutshell, we must assume the linguistic competence of the speaker whose utterance is construed as metaphor" (Novitz 103). For example, the presence of music and dance linger as defining motifs, or signs, attached to Fleck, hinting at the charisma of his alter ego Joker breaking through. Speaking about the notorious scene where Arthur dances in a bathroom after murdering the three Wall Street men, Phillips claims, "When I first met Joaquin, I told him Arthur is one of those people who has music in him. Music and dance became a theme in the film. This is the second time we see him dancing

and it's a little bit of Joker coming out" (Sharf). Fleck only ever appears confident when dancing,

exuding a carelessness that is most noticeable in another dance scene, this one depicting the

clown dancing down a set of steep stairs after stabbing his coworker to death. The scene is

scripted as follows: "Arthur, Now 'Joker' Dancing His Way Down The Long Staircase, doing his

own Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson stair dance... Skipping and twirling down four steps, dancing and

singing along to the music in his head (and on the soundtrack) … Hopping back three...Shuffling

on a step for a beat or two or three... Sun setting in the sky" (Phillips & Silver 81). As he dances,

the upbeat instrumental of Gary Glitter's "Rock n' Roll" plays in the background, crafting an

upbeat display of Arthur's transformation into Joker; he finally embraces the hidden part of

himself through dance. Creating a picture with the "sun setting in the sky" and a clown "skipping

and twirling down four steps, dancing and singing along to the music in his head" generates quite

a rejoicing setting for someone who just murdered a man with a pair of scissors. Attaching an

upbeat scene to a horrific event signifies a celebration, glamorizing Fleck's violent actions.

The scene can also stand for something just as empty as the actions of the clown-faced

perpetrator. The joyous dance sequence can conversely signify the meaninglessness in action and

having Fleck dance despite his violence epitomizes the emptiness. As Kaushik concludes, "The

two dance sequences in the film turn Joker's persona into an empty signifier, untethering the

character from the traces of violence he has committed." The sign, dancing, does not connote to

a stable signified. When referring to the differing treatment of the metaphor on the writing of

truth in Plato's *Phaedrus,* Derrida remarks, "We must avoid neglecting the profound differences

which mark all these treatments of the same metaphor" (17). The same can be said for the

dancing metaphor in *Joker* since the sign prompts various interpretations of his rhythmic

motions. Derrida's sentiment is, "The key to a text is never even present to the author

themselves, for the written always defers its meaning" (Reynolds). Phillips wanted dancing to hint at Fleck's hidden yet present Joker persona, but how the character's movements are calculated in terms of his motives is left to the viewers. Critics claiming Phillips' film incites violence or sympathy for criminal perpetrators are based on *their* interpretation of the metaphorical attributes of the film, an unreliable and systematically flawed means of garnering truth.

   Joker stands for presence and absence, a conditional truth defined by those participating in the system the film is created within and against. Signs are as unreliable in creating sole differentiation as time is. The film complicates time by relying on an unreliable narrator to recount the story, which influences the presented order of scenes. Scenes track a specific progression of time through their alignment and order, showing the audience visuals based on the projection of how the story is told, holding "cinema itself as a clockwork mechanism" (Lim 11). At the beginning of the film, Fleck tells his therapist, "I think I felt better when I was locked up in the hospital" to which she responds, "And have you thought more about why you were "locked up?" Upon asking the question, the scene suddenly shifts to one of Fleck banging his head against the door of a white-tiled room marked "Observation Room" over the door frame. The scene shifts back to the therapy office with Fleck taking a hit of his cigarette and responding, "Who knows?" At the end of the film, Fleck is placed in a similar white-tiled room, sitting across from a doctor who bears a striking resemblance to the therapist in the beginning, nodding to the possibility of most scenes situated before his crime at Murray Franklin's show being a figment produced by Fleck's imagination, all created to rationalize why he has been locked up and his inability to properly recognize time. He is laughing, as he was in the first therapy scene, and once he stops laughing, the doctor asks, "What's so funny?" Fleck responds, "Just thinking of this

joke," and the scene cuts to a young Bruce Wayne standing over his parents, who were gunned down by a rioter in a clown mask. The scene cuts back to the doctor and Arthur, with the doctor asking, "Do you want to tell it to me?" Joker simply claims, "You wouldn't get it." Placing a visual of Bruce Wayne as the subject of the joke serves as a subtle wink to the audience, who are aware of Bruce Wayne's mythologized destiny of becoming Batman after the death of his parents. There is no way Joker could know such a fact, but having the snapshot placed within the final scene of the movie alludes to the film's knowledge of the future. Or, the placement could be gesturing to the meaningless of the joke and the audience's need to tie it to a punchline. The character is irrational and the shot of Bruce Wayne gestures to the human proclivity to attach meaning to the inexplicable, for maybe Joker is right, the doctor, as well as the audience, simply would not get it.

Both language and the language *of* time are circumscribed by regimented systems that fail to consider the multiplicity of each concept. People tend to view time as a "homogeneous medium," which "consists of 'project[ing] time into space,' inaccurately representing time as a simultaneous juxtaposition of distinct instants" (qtd. in Lim). *Joker* projects the past, present, and future into a space that complicates their order and problematizes chronology. The film creates a form of storytelling by establishing a clear line of consequential events for "narrative structure serves as the patterning of human actions through time" (qtd. in Shamir 37). The circumscription of time into a linear system of cause and effect only complicates the deduction of its functionality and complexity, which Joker signals by attempting to constrict the indefinable into a structure assigned as the definitive. *Joker* creates its own timeline through the linear- an alien and unclear nuance of structure yet one logical to a narrator the audience themselves must define, which reveals the multiplicity not only of time but how time and signification are tracked.

So, what and when exactly is *Joker*?

American philosopher Stanley Cavell believes, "any serious film resists interpretation and must be taken on its own terms" (Shamir 41). Despite taking home two Academy Awards for Best Actor and Best Original Score as well as earning a total of eleven nominations at the Oscars, the most of any comic book movie ever (Couch), many believe the film did not deserve the accolades and praise attached. Kaushik sums up one such criticism, claiming, "It seems that *Joker* desires to be appreciated as a prestige film for its social gritty aesthetic, but at the same time does not want the burden of social responsibility that comes with it." *Joker* initiates the possibility that the film is not saying anything, as much as it may appear that way. Tyree sums up the attitude, claiming, "its incoherence stems from its status as a genre film- it is really only an origin story from a long chain of comic book movies- with its generic elements pulling away from any clear statement on, well, much of anything at all." The film may be "neither good nor bad but rather intriguing, disturbing, and resonant" (Tyree), a creation resisting the definition assigned to the form it exists in and breaks from while also forcing those who watch the film to decide its meaning for themselves.

By presenting itself as a modification of genre, a warped lens for time, and as a floating "empty signifier," *Joker* points to the existence of entities transcending lingual and chronological structure but can only be referred to through the terms in command due to the inability for objects to be viewed outside of these structures. The film is itself a lack- a void with no real teleological "history" or consistent significance. It demands significance be thrust upon it, enveloping interpretation and projecting whatever is poured into it as intentional. Calling the film ahistorical or timeless reiterates the presence of the structures in place, for such words attempt to define that which *Joker* resists. The film can be historicized or emblemize the present, but

neither quality is an inherent fixture because the film uses time to reject the very mechanics in

control. Whether the film is successful is as subjective as time itself. *Joker* is pure dance, moving

between everything and nothing.

Works Cited

Beck, Philip. "Historicism and Historism In Recent Film Historiography." *Journal of Film and Video,* vol. 37, no.1, 1985.

Burke, Liam. *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre*, University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Coombs, David Sweeney, and Danielle Coriale. "V21 Forum on Strategic Presentism: Introduction." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2017, pp. 87–89.

Couch, Aaron. "Oscars: 'Joker' First Comic Book Movie to Lead in Nominations." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 13 Jan. 2020.

Derrida, Jacques, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Of Grammatology*. Fortieth-Anniversary Edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

Gross, Terry. "'The System's Broken' And 'Joker' Director Aimed To Explore That On Screen." *NPR*, 6 Jan. 2020.

Joker. Directed by Todd Phillips, performances by Joaquin Phoenix, Robert De Niro, Zazie Beetz, Frances Conroy, Warner Brothers, 2019.

Kaushik, R "Dancing between charisma and politics: An analysis of Joker (2019)." *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 55, no. 12, 2020.

Klein, Christopher. "John Hinckley, Jr. Tried to Assassinate Ronald Reagan Because He Was Obsessed with Jodie Foster." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 1 June 2018.

Lim, Bliss Cua. *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique.* Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2011.

Martin, Theodore. *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Niemeyer, Katharina. *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Novitz, David. "Metaphor, Derrida, and Davidson." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 44, no. 2, 1985.

Phillips, Todd & Scott Silver. *Joker: An Origin*. Film Script. 2018.

"President Reagan Shot." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 24 Nov. 2009.

Reynolds, Jack. "Jacques Derrida (1930—2004)." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1995.

Rohy, V. "Ahistorical." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2006, pp. 61–83.

Senesi, Lucia. "Swept Away by Inequality: *Joker* as Neorealism." *Film International*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 7–11.

Shamir, Tal S. "The Intimate Relationship Between Art and Truth." *Cinematic Philosophy,* 2016, pp. 135-149.

Sharf, Zack. "'Joker': Here's the Original Bathroom Scene Joaquin Phoenix Threw Out with His Improvisation." *IndieWire*, IndieWire, 10 Oct. 2019.

Tietze, Tad. "Populist Panic at the Movies." *Modern Age*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2020.

Tyree, J. M. "Is It OK to Talk about *Joker* Now?" *Film International*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2020, pp. 133–137.