

## **Identity of the Individual and Society in the *Joker* Film Franchise / *Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City and Sure Ain't No Pity***

**Abstract:** The film narratives *Joker* and *Joker: Folie à Deux* depict a schism between modernist and postmodernist approaches to storytelling. This form of fragmentation is examined in both the narrative identity of the films and the personal identity of the character, Arthur Fleck, as he transitions into the persona of Joker. The multilayered narrative structure is complemented by semantic and semiotic dimensions, which converge within the thematic trajectory detailing Fleck's metamorphosis into his Joker identity. The concept of dual artistic expression embodied in the "Joker" character across both cinematic narratives is analysed on several levels: the narrative "fracture," the split in personal identity between soul and body, and the dialectical relationship between the ostensibly "unified" self and the individual's positioning vis-à-vis society. This exploration is underpinned by the theoretical contributions of P. Janet, A. Fouillée, S. Freud, J. Lacan, H. Bergson, F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger, M. Foucault, R. Barthes, J.-F. Lyotard, J. Derrida, U. Eco, and others, with the objective of demonstrating the pervasive fragmentation and "division" within the individual, contextualised within the broader social milieu, while also addressing the systemic violence perpetrated by society against individuals who deviate from its normative frameworks. Fragmentation is evident on every level: within the cinematic units themselves, which reflect temporal and causal divisions; within the individual, where the ostensibly unified synthesis of body and spirit is subverted; and within the dual societal perspective on individuality, wherein conformity to societal norms predicates the degree of societal acceptance. Furthermore, the paper interrogates the representation of the "comic" within the trope of the clown's entourage, which serves as an exaggerated reflection of the interplay between self and society. This complex narrative addresses the status of memory in relation to the physical and spiritual forms of the self, as well as the broader role of memory in shaping personal and societal identity. Identity is traced across these interconnected layers, illustrating how contemporary society is reflected in the dual narratives of *Joker* and *Joker: Folie à Deux*.

**Keywords:** film/literary narrative, laughter, violence, empathy, identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2766-8011>; [milena.vladicjovanov@live.fr](mailto:milena.vladicjovanov@live.fr), [milnavladicjovanov@fil.bg.ac.rs](mailto:milnavladicjovanov@fil.bg.ac.rs)

Paper received on March 4, 2025

Paper accepted on May 12, 2025

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Fragmented Interrelations Between Individual and Society: Toward a Possible Reconciliation of Selfhood and Social Structure*

In the film narratives *Joker* (2019) and *Joker: Folie à Deux* (2024), directed by Todd Phillips, a complex structure of relationships between temporal instances, narrative loops, and thematic cycles is observed. These temporal relations suggest that *Joker: Folie à Deux* should be viewed first, as it serves as a commentary on or an explanation of *Joker*. The film's engagement with antimimesis – where the logic of chronological order is subverted – necessitates a reconsideration of filmic elements through the lens of *différance*, particularly in relation to the “blank space” between units (Derrida, 1992). This gap not only destabilises meaning but also gestures toward an inexhaustible “reservoir of meaning” and the fluid positioning of the viewer as an interpretative agent (Eco, 1984). Such fragmentation within the story of the Joker is also evident in the development of the Joker's self. For some viewers, the character presented is Arthur Fleck, while for others, it is the Joker. How, then, is the Joker to be recognised and distinguished from Arthur Fleck, if at all?

Since Plato, there has been a tendency to consider the personality as harmonious, striving to “unite” the body and the mind, with the mind often taking precedence over the body. In the 19th century, Pierre Janet suggested that multiple personalities could achieve harmony between body and spirit (Janet, 1998). Opposing<sup>2</sup> “solutions” emerged from thinkers such as Victor Cousin (Cousin, 1841), Émile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1951; 1982), and Maurice Barrès (Barrès, 1910; 1911; 1912). These alternative perspectives later informed the studies of 20th-century philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who, for instance, drew upon these opposing viewpoints in their research. By the end of the 19th century, a need arose to connect social ties with individual relationships in the construction of identity, both as individual elements and in the form of a collective identity. The relationship between society and personality is established as a relation to a multiple personality rather than one unified in its singularity. This raises the question of how such a relationship can be achieved and what the consequences of such a

<sup>2</sup> To consider the opposition in the formation of the self in nineteenth-century France see: Jan Goldstein, “Foucault and the Post-Revolutionary Self: The Uses of Cousinian Pedagogy in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Foucault and the Writing of History*, edited by Jan Goldstein (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1994a), 99–115; and Jan Goldstein, “Saying ‘I’: Victor Cousin, Caroline Angebert, and the Politics of Selfhood in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche*, edited by Michael S. Roth (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994b), 321–336.

relationship might be. Barrès discusses the multiplicity of moral life, identifying within the individual self an absence of unity, which can be linked to Bourget's (Bourget, 1920) perspective on societal decadence. The common denominator here is the idea that each element has, in contemporary theoretical terms, a Deleuzian individual and separate path of development within the personality. Bourget was particularly interested in the individual, a person defined as an intersection of social and individual elements. He did not view decadence as merely a "decline" in the general sense but rather as "a loss of integration between the personal and social within an individual, thereby pointing to a state in which, as he emphasises, the parts of the organism no longer serve the whole but instead separate and follow their own trajectories" (Bourget, 1920: 20–24). While many considered this state to be negative, Bourget believed that his contemporaries understood it positively, viewing social influence not as a limitation but as an enabler for individuals to pursue their own choices. According to this perspective, the weakening of boundaries between society and the individual would result in avoiding the need for rebellion, while simultaneously reducing the danger of social conformity, which often accompanied revolts in the past. Countless times, from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution, the consequences of these upheavals, rather than achieving the liberation they aimed for, instead resulted in entrapment and a powerful, "iron" fist guiding society toward a better future while leading the individual, if not adaptable to this "ironness," to ruin. Such maladapted personalities, whether poets, artists, or the subjects they depict, are ultimately lost.<sup>3</sup>

### *1.2. Foundational Structures of Personality and Society*

Reflections on the self from the late 19th century, such as Janet's ideas, were often compared by theorists with those of Sigmund Freud, who, in turn, expressed disapproval of Janet's research, particularly regarding hysteria as a psychological process in which emotions from the environment and society are transferred onto the individual, who adopts them as a form of defense to maintain their distinctiveness in relation to that same environment. Freud stated:

I think that no one could have a true understanding of the complexity of psychic processes in hysteria, of the parallel existence of the most diverse impulses, the mutual interconnection of opposites, repressions, displacements, etc. Janet's emphasis on the *idée fixe* that transforms into a symptom is nothing but a truly pitiable attempt at schematization<sup>4</sup> (Freud, 1987: 114).

---

<sup>3</sup> For further reference see: Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880–1900* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Translated by the author, Milena Vladić Jovanov.

The atmosphere that prevails between the identity of the individual and the identity of society prompts reflections on the fluidity of personality, wherein the bodily organisation of elements becomes separated from the mental. Scientists of the 19th and 20th centuries often linked the separation of the individual and society to the disintegration of the physical and mental as a cause of various forms of psychological disorders, such as “multiplicity” in the form of personality division, memory loss, and other related phenomena. By considering these three concepts – mental illness, memory loss, and multiplicity of personality interpreted as a split personality – it becomes evident that Arthur Fleck exhibits symptoms of each to some extent. Is there a behavioural pattern in Arthur Fleck’s character that suggests he cannot distinguish objective reality from his own subjective reality? Put differently, standpoint of textual and literary-cinematic analysis, does he distinguish between reality and fiction?<sup>5</sup> Given that film is being discussed as an art form, it might be more appropriate to consider this distinction as *fiction within fiction* – a narrative element that points the viewer toward an awareness of recipient reality. In this sense, Arthur Fleck, within the narrative of *Joker*, *gradually* differentiates reality and pieces together knowledge about his own reality over time. A key moment of truth for Arthur is discovering that he is not the son of Mr. Wayne, father of Bruce Wayne (Batman). This revelation – that his entire world, centred on caring for his ailing mother, is essentially false, imaginary, and lacking any real foundation – represents a crucial event. This event ties together other occurrences into a cohesive system of interrelated elements, forming a complex structure of Arthur Fleck’s personality and his relationship with the society around him. When Arthur learns that he was abused as a child, that he was adopted, and that his mother never truly – practically or fundamentally – cared for him, he ceases to see himself as a street clown. He instead begins to construct the persona of a comedian who, dressed in clown attire and telling jokes, transforms into the Joker – a figure who brings fear instead of humour, using laughter as an unsettling, destabilizing element. The image within an image, fiction within fiction, and laughter within grotesque laughter led Arthur Fleck to transform from “Happy”, as his mother called him, into the Joker.

Several key events highlight the interrelationship between Happy and the Joker. The first event involves the kindhearted way in which Arthur attempts to amuse a young boy on public transport. Although the boy laughs at Arthur’s *repeated* clownish gestures, marked by a twisted and *distorted* expression, the boy’s mother pulls him away from Arthur, deeming him a strange man with a distorted face. The second event occurs during Arthur’s performance at a hospital, where he accidentally drops a gun while entertaining children, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between

<sup>5</sup> Of course, the character of any narrative, whether literary or cinematic, cannot distinguish reality. Their reality is the one presented within the artistic work. However, here we depict reality in multiple ways: the reality as experienced by multiple personalities, that is, how they perceive it, and the reality of fiction itself as perceived by the viewer or reader – in other words, the recipient.

society and the individual. Notably, Arthur received the gun from his street—clown colleague, who gave him the weapon so that he could defend himself against attackers. This incident references a prior assault in which street thugs tore the sign Arthur carried as a clown advertising merchandise and violently beat him. The third event underscores Arthur Fleck's individual actions as reactions to the injustices of society and, above all, the sense of misunderstanding he experiences as a person within that society. Whether Arthur Fleck's actions are of a *mental* or *physical* nature remains to be seen in the narrative of *Joker: Folie à Deux*. Humiliated, Arthur enters the subway, where he observes three young bankers harassing a woman who has done nothing to provoke them. Sensing an injustice, Arthur redirects their attention to himself, dressed in his clown costume. Armed with a gun, he kills the three arrogant, socially acceptable bankers when they start to assault him. These three events together form a coherent system within the narrative, united by the common thread of “double laughter” with “physiological characteristics” that Arthur Fleck cannot control. He carries a card that states he cannot stop laughing and that this is a form of illness. The question that arises in the film's narrative is: When does this laughter, characterised as an uncontrollable condition, occur? Does it truly happen uncontrollably, disconnected from preceding events? In the first scene, Arthur tries to amuse a young boy. When his attempt fails, he experiences a laughing fit. It is only then that the boy's mother interprets Arthur as an abnormal person and pulls her child away from him. However, the line between Arthur's attempt to entertain the child, to be socially accepted and become part of society rather than just a lonely outsider, and the duality inherent in the concept of laughter is exceedingly thin. The film's narrative points towards the genesis of Arthur's laughter, either as an involuntary response or a complex reaction to the tension between acceptance and rejection, amusement and alienation. This blurred boundary underlines the duality of laughter as both a physiological reaction and a manifestation of *social struggle*.

In terms of temporal markers, the boy metaphorically represents society, which responds to the acceptable act of provoking laughter performed through Arthur Fleck's clownish behaviour. The mother, on the other hand, represents the other side of a mirrored society – a society with elements incompatible with the individual. On a linguistic level, the first is *proper*, while the second is *im-proper*, signifying Arthur Fleck's behaviour as non-conventional and inappropriate.<sup>6</sup> Without delving into the traditional relationship

---

<sup>6</sup> Etymologically, *proper* is linguistically connected to *property*. What is deemed appropriate is simultaneously socially and morally acceptable and, therefore, belongs as a form of ownership to a particular culture, behavioural model, or identity – especially when understood in a traditional sense. If tradition, derived from the Latin *traditio*, is transferred in the sense of passing down material goods, behaviours, customs, and ultimately the accepted norms sanctioned by society *as a whole*, then its implications extend beyond mere linguistic association. (See Giovanni Cianci & Jason Harding. *T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

between socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, it is not to be overlooked that, in one instance, Fleck behaves acceptably. However, after being rejected by society, he experiences an uncontrollable laughter that induces fear and rejection in others. This type of laughter follows Fleck from a state of consciousness to self-awareness. In *Joker: Folie à Deux*, he uses this laughter as a form of resistance against the society that fails to accept him, particularly during his time in a psychiatric institution. There, he laughs at the guards as well as at his own condition, which demonstrates a higher level of self-awareness and differentiates it from the uncontrollable laughter with the boy. According to narrative theory, this earlier laughter can be understood as an associative and impulsive response to social contact and communication – a common situation in which any person might try to make a child laugh on public transport. The subsequent events reveal the genesis of the *proper-improper* relationship between society and the individual. *Proper* indicates an acceptable social and moral identity, while *im-proper* points to a fragmentation between the individual and society.

## *2. Narrative as a Mechanism of Dynamic Structuration in the Re/Presentation of Society and the Individual*

Now, it is necessary to create a narrative scale of four events in the transition from Fleck to Joker. The first two events connect as the third and fourth. However, in the complex system, the third connects with the first, and the fourth with the second, creating an entirely new structure. By connecting them, the whole picture can be formed. The first event is when A. Fleck laughs and hands a card to the woman with the child, explaining with the card that he has a condition of “uncontrollable laughter.” At that moment, he experiences social rejection. The mother pulls her child away, which produces a fragmentation in A. Fleck’s personality. The second event refers to A. Fleck’s performance at a children’s hospital when his gun accidentally falls out. The intermediate event that Barthes would describe as a catalysis<sup>7</sup> is that he received

---

Tradition, in this sense, is crucial because laughter does not merely affirm acceptability; rather, it simultaneously evokes both acceptability and unacceptability – in other words, a deviation from the acceptable. This explains the emphasis on the corporeal in the figure of the clown and the exaggeration inherent in it: oversized shoes, baggy trousers, an exaggerated smile. Similar to the mechanism of Derrida’s double gesture, the comic act dismantles its own foundation even as it enacts itself. At the same time, it erases itself as comic, for while it provokes laughter, it does so through an excess that deviates from societal norms – norms that, as formalised rules, occupy a structured hierarchy. Thus, the clown can only appear with features that are recognisable, almost painterly in their hyperbolic and caricatural execution – exaggerated both in behaviour and in appearance. This exaggerated form serves as a symptom, pointing toward social behaviour that the individual merely performs in a native, cinematic mode of representation, one that rests on a monotonous underlying structure. Deconstruction situates this within a binary framework of acceptable/unacceptable.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, in what is considered a biblical text for structuralist theory, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative” (Barthes, 1977), stated that kernels are the key elements of the plot,

the gun from his colleague, who mocked him and gave him the gun to protect himself from those who broke his clown advertising sign. Now, the gun falls out in the middle of the act, which results in Fleck getting fired. In relation to the intermediate event, it shows the relationship between personality and society. There is a deep rupture between society and the individual, as Fleck's colleague mocks him. When the gun carelessly falls, the expectation is for society to laugh at such a mistake. There is no laughter because the only representation of society in the hospital is children. Of course, both society and Fleck's personality have different and multiple facets. However, here the analysis follows the thread of society that transforms Fleck into Joker. While, as Fleck, he had doubts that the mockery from the young men on the street, the destruction of his advertising sign, and the distancing of the child on public transport were transitions toward becoming the Joker, the other two events show that he is increasingly aware of the Joker's presence within himself. The outward appearance of the clown conceals an underlying theme as a substructure that leads the main thread of why Fleck transformed from Arthur to the Joker, namely love – or one of its characteristics, empathy. The outward appearance of the clown merges into Fleck's interior when, on the subway, a sense of justice awakens in him as he defends a humiliated woman. The reader follows his anger with understanding but does not laugh at all, as Fleck kills the bankers. At that moment, Fleck is no longer Arthur Fleck but a “clown” who fights for justice, particularly for the justice of the humiliated. In them, he recognises himself and offers an unexpected resistance that provokes surprise, as no one expects such behaviour from a clown.

The familiar element in society was made *foreign* by Brecht (Brecht, 1966), creating a contemporary social V-effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*). The fourth part introduces the clown's exterior that resides within Fleck's personality. This involves the murder of his friend who sold him the gun, all while Fleck — now the Joker — prepares for a recording where a shred of objectivity and reality remains in the anticipation of participating in his favourite show that he watched with his mother as an evening of TV entertainment. It is only during the show that Fleck fully becomes the Joker after yet another round of mockery and humiliation.

These four events represent the identity of the Joker, which follows a narrative line that the viewer has connected. However, is the story actually structured this way? According to Barthes' proairetic code, it appears so, as it is linked by causal connections. Yet, each event carries a Barthesian code that indicates a complex system, or as Barthes (Barthes, 1974) stated, it feels as if an earthquake has struck. Is there any “meaning” in or action, while catalyses, as units of signification within the hierarchical structuralist network, hold a subordinate function, serving to maintain and “wind up” the narrative – emphasizing suspense and tension until the arrival of the main events that constitute the story. Of course, since meaning in a structuralist hierarchical network is determined by the placement of units and their interrelations, catalyses can also function as kernels if they contain the germ of eventfulness.

this film narrative when all meaning has disappeared, or as Poirier (Poirier, 1992) notes, when one searches for meaning and hopes for it? It is therefore necessary to follow the fragmentation of the personality, which is divided by its relationship to social events.

Janet suggests that fragmentation is either hypnotic or part of a divided personality, which can be seen in the way Fleck looks at the TV show host, Murray, representing the fifth event in the narrative line. As Joker, Fleck kills Murray without shedding a tear, inciting rebellion in society – not because he lacks emotions but because he is indifferent toward himself. Alienation from the human begins with Fleck distancing himself from the human nature within him before alienating himself from society. Joker’s alienation from the human within himself, however, has a more complex nature. Although he feels no emotion during the murder and even tells the joke, “Knock, knock, Who’s there?” he does not completely extinguish his feelings. Instead, he partially obscures them until he perceives, as depicted in the film’s narrative, approval from Quinn, which appears genuine to him. Janet argues that hypnotic and catatonic states, as well as manifestations of multiple personalities, are part of personality fragmentation and “lie within the unity of personality as parts” (Janet, 1898: 39). Although personality can be either introverted or extroverted, “The idea of the self is a very complex phenomenon that includes past memories and actions, the notion of our situation, our powers, our body, even our name, and which, uniting all these scattered ideas, plays a large role in understanding the personality” (Janet, 1898: 116–118). When the body as an element of unified personality is mentioned, Henri Bergson comes to mind. For him, matter has memory (Bergson, 2013). A. Fleck dresses in the attire of an ordinary person, then as a person who dreams and fantasises about being a comedian, and finally in the costume of a clown who advertises products and entertains the audience with his gestures. The materiality of A. Fleck’s body holds multiple memories, each leaving an imprint on his identity. One of the substructures within his body is play, and through play, he reaches the level of art, as seen in the film narrative of *Joker: Folie à Deux*, where his performance not only reaches the level of a musical but surpasses it. The musical serves not only as a form and genre but also as a means of expressing identity. While singing, he becomes something entirely *other*, or as Emmanuel Levinas (Levinas, 2006) would put it, the Other within himself. The communication he establishes between the ordinary Fleck and the Joker represents a game between the created piece, the song, and the performer who dances to its notes and words. The boundary is indivisible. There is Joker within Fleck and vice versa, as is clearly seen in *Joker: Folie à Deux* when he attempts to tell a joke, believing that he has connected with society, i.e., the guards at Arkham Asylum. However, the moment he delivers the joke, the guards beat him, as they are simultaneously close to him as fellow humans and distant as guards. The distance between consciousness and awareness, perception, observation, and conscious acknowledgment, between the mental and the form of thought, is transitional and thin for A. Fleck, existing between the human within himself and the human in society. He

distances himself first from the human within and then from society. His alienation is therefore also dual. When he pats a guard on the shoulder, he is immediately reminded that he does not belong. He is a killer and a man who cannot make a joke, despite being a “comedian.” It is precisely this *inability* that defines his identity. He cannot be an ordinary person, a comedian, or a street clown; for himself and others, he is “nothing”. It is in this negation that he finds himself. In all his performances, Arthur Fleck moves along a dynamic path of if I could not mean something, I could be anything. In the present, Fleck means nothing, consistent with the verb mean (to signify something), as he has no meaning. However, through transformations across different temporal distances, he gains the meaning of a comedian who brings reality to the point of absurdity with the joke “Knock, knock! Who’s there,?”, followed by a gesture presented as fiction within fiction. This refers to the scene in the elevator where Fleck encounters the neighbour from his floor, whom the viewer initially does not perceive as a fiction until the narrative of *Joker* is followed by the narrative of *Joker: Folie à Deux*. In her statement during Arthur Fleck’s trial, she claims that no such gesture occurred and denies having a romantic relationship with Fleck, which the viewer saw through his eyes, influenced by the director’s choices. After the gesture of the gunshot to his head, a real shot follows, accompanied by the joke “Knock, knock! Who’s there,?” in the scene from *Joker* during the TV show with Murray, whom Fleck kills with a direct gunshot. In this postmodernist, but also modernist, approach, a philosophical category of repetition is revealed. The gesture of the “gunshot to the head” is repeated as fiction within fiction in the narrative of *Joker*, and likewise, in *Joker: Folie à Deux*, the gesture of the “gunshot to the head” is performed as “objective” fiction, as Harley Quinn demonstrates it realistically within the narrative. However, there is a difference between postmodernism, which lies at the heart of modernism, and its metatextual quality. Postmodernism points to the openness of the approach, as Lyotard states (Lyotard, 2004), while also asserting that the modernist approach is concealed, albeit abstractly, as it refers to the question of process and execution within the narrative, regardless of the type of art. On the other hand, postmodernism entails a dual gesture of a deconstructionist type. Although the message is open, it is, as Eco notes (Eco, 1998), intended only for the semiotic reader – one who will recognise it. In other words, the duality of the concept of openness in approach is contradictory in its very foundation of openness. Regarding modernism, the filmic gesture of the “gunshot to the head” is marked by causally disrupted temporal instances. In the film narrative of *Joker*, the scene of the “gunshot to the head” gesture is presented, but it is only explained later in the narrative of *Joker: Folie à Deux*. Thus, the “second” part, *Joker: Folie à Deux*, reveals the emotional side of Arthur Fleck. On a narrative level, the timelines are shifted and unconventional. In this context, the film narrative serves as a commentary. Although temporally distant from the first scene, it shows that the timelines are detached from the story of the Joker itself.

In the mentioned film narratives, the “commentary” comes after the scene presented in the first part of the film narrative. The temporal instances indicate that both film narratives are connected in a postmodernist and modernist manner. This suggests that the fragmentation of the narrative in shaping Arthur Fleck’s life story involves an *antimimesis* of events that the viewer must perceive in order to arrive at Fleck’s unified self. The first thing to note is the need for the unification of Fleck’s spirit and body, and then, within the complex system, to define his identity in relation to society. Further interpretation of the “gesture” of the gunshot to the head and the joke performed by Arthur Fleck as a prisoner inevitably encounters the influence of Harley Quinn. In that “joke”, Harley Quinn follows him to the end, and only that fantasy enables the action. The viewer once again finds themselves within the artistic approach of *fiction within fiction*, as they cannot draw a clear line between the prisoner and the fantasy that Quinn has constructed about Fleck. In this fairytale-like world, he is a comedian, a lover, a man desired by someone until the moment of death when he becomes aware that he is neither a lover, nor a protector, nor a man whom anyone would want near them, i.e., an individual with whom someone would build a real love story. In his final moments, he is not merely the criminal that society perceives but rather a betrayed individual, both within the cinematic narrative and the personal story that emerges through the viewer’s interpretation as scenes from the two film narratives interweave. This leads to the fifth event: the murder of television host Murray. With this murder, the first act concludes like a drama, and the second act begins, which is the film narrative *Joker: Folie à Deux*.

In Lacanian terms (Lacan, 2008), desire is inherently unfulfilled in itself, and the moment it is fulfilled, it loses its quality as desire. This concept, similar to Derridean understandings of conceptual determinacy, is internally contradictory. In striving for fulfilment, Fleck loses himself. While he is Joker, he loses Arthur Fleck, and vice versa. This duality is depicted to viewers in the final scenes of the winding staircase, which itself serves as a metaphorical fabric of character development in relation to the action. Fleck’s ascent up the stairs, characterised by the drab greyness of the scenes, contrasts with Joker’s descent down the same stairs. Joker’s descent destroys the grayness with his colourful attire and playful movements, transforming the somber and insecure Fleck into the confident Joker. Arthur Fleck loses Joker on the “winding” staircase, representing his longing for recognition in a violent and unaccepting society. Arthur Fleck is depicted through the metaphor of the winding staircase. At times, he achieves self-awareness, while at other times, he loses it. Although portrayed as steep in the film narrative, for both Arthur Fleck and Joker, the stairs are winding and concealed. As he ascends, Arthur Fleck appears hunched, an ordinary, small man without meaning. In contrast, as he descends, he is Joker in a colourful suit. Though he appears as a clown, he is not merely a clown, but a victor over society, as he embraces himself

as both identities within the film narratives. Although the stairs are visually presented as straight, they are metaphorically winding because the resolution lies in the divided personality of Fleck and Joker. Neither of them manages to reveal a unified personality on the steep stairs; instead, they achieve this only on the winding stairs with transitions, where Fleck is rejected as Fleck in the narrative of *Joker: Folie à Deux*, while Joker is not accepted as a comedian in *Joker* and ultimately ends up in prison. The metaphor of the winding staircase is accompanied by a play of light and darkness. Darkness envelops Arthur Fleck and everything connected to his life in both film narratives, while light surrounds Joker, who truly shines through colour, music, and dance. The viewer is presented with an intense binary opposition of emotions. Arthur Fleck is associated with sadness, despair, and the meaninglessness of everyday life, while Joker is linked to feelings of self-satisfaction, awareness, and a sense of control over his situation.

A return to the division between the soul and the body is required to consider how mental images influence the personality, which unconsciously accepts mental images of its own awareness and consciousness. In “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (Freud, 1987), Freud asserts that attention must be paid to the *transference* of the unconscious in shaping mental, conscious images of oneself as a personality, which Janet and Follié viewed as part of a multiple, yet divided, personality in cases of hysteria and ultimate personality fragmentation. This results in a dual perspective of oneself and society, i.e., the reality surrounding oneself. Freud argued that the root of the disorder lies in sexual fantasy, which leads to psychoneurosis and manifests as forms of hysteria. This can be seen in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1999), particularly in specific passages. In this essay, Freud analyses the dreams of Dora, who suffered from hysteria, and emphasises that *transference* is of crucial importance, deducing that fantasies are aroused during psychoanalysis and that, in this process, they are brought to consciousness, or as he puts it: “a whole series of earlier psychic experiences is relived, but not as the past, rather as a current relationship with the person of the doctor” (Freud, 1987: 116). An examination of the category of transference in the character of Arthur Fleck, as presented in the film narratives, reveals multiple instances of its occurrence. Our *insights*<sup>8</sup> in interpretation remain *blind* to all those moments that a repeated viewing might reveal.

When applied to the film narrative, this perspective reveals Quinn as a doctor with expertise in psychiatric approaches, positioning her as the one who holds the threads of Fleck’s life in the moments where his personality manifests as the Joker.

<sup>8</sup> Insights are simultaneously blind spots in any form of interpretation, as interpretation, according to Paul de Man, is inherently and paradoxically unified in its constitutive concept. For interpretation to exist, it must be guided by the principles of insight. In doing so, it aspires to a singular truth, yet it remains blind to all semantic – and, in this case, also structural – plays that influence a broader understanding of meaning, that is, the “truth” within the interpretation of a work. Paul de Man articulated his views on the dual constitution of artistic interpretation in *Blindness and Insight* (de Man, 1971).

However, he writes his own *script*, yet within that script, the viewer also sees that he determines his own *ending*. Fleck transfers his sexual fantasy onto Quinn. She awakens the Joker in him, a personality that attracts attention in society. However, he has not become aware of this fantasy of love, as he still believes that Quinn could love him for who he is *now*, even if that means a Heideggerian<sup>9</sup> divided and vulgar present, which represents the other side of his personality, Arthur Fleck. In the film narrative *Joker: Folie à Deux*, he transfers his fantasy, which is now once again narratively presented as *fiction within fiction*, but in a different genre – the musical. The viewer is now faced with a modernist encounter of cultural models, transformations, and genre intersections, as Fleck lives in his own understanding of love through the songs. This approach, as Lyotard notes in *The Postmodern Condition* (2004), searches for itself within the work, which results in a postmodernist ironic twist. At the end, when Quinn rejects Joker and, as his imagined love, suggests they could live freely because of the rebellion he sparked after escaping prison, Fleck abandons all his “prestige” as a rebel against the capitalist consumerist society. For the third time, he finds himself on the staircase that leads him to Quinn, where he confesses his love, believing that she is now, for the first time, someone who loves him – Arthur Fleck – for who he truly is, with Joker being nothing more than a shadow. He encounters disappointment because, in the Freudian sense of transference, he is not transferring unconscious desires but rather those he believed could be fulfilled through his thoughts and emotions. He is surprised by the transference of his consciousness onto the unconscious because Quinn rejects him as Fleck, loving only the part of him that is Joker. He is no longer *himself*, but rather the *one* who inspires the masses, who rebels, who challenges society. However, when considering the narrative artistic approach that disrupts chronological causal relationships, Fleck has already experienced his death as the Joker. In the musical, which now represents an alternate reality for the viewer, he experiences death. His death on the staircase, where he ascends for the last time, is experienced as Fleck, who is aware of himself, and also aware of Joker within him. Nonetheless, he dies as Fleck, even though Quinn does not kill him, but rather an absurdly ill inmate from the prison who craves attention because they claim to have killed Joker. For the viewer, this *repeated* death now becomes a new approach of fiction within fiction, changing its meaning through repetition across

9 M. Heidegger considered Aristotle’s and Hegel’s interpretations of the present – where the rupture of the present is understood in terms of Aristotle’s stigma, the mark as a point, which Hegel interprets as *Jetzt*, meaning “now, in this moment” – to be vulgar. Of course, neither *Nun* nor *Jetzt* can serve as a definitive determination of time. In Derridean readings of Husserl’s theory of language expression, time is displaced, as it cannot express itself independently, even if it were to attempt to do so, without the aid of the other. Nevertheless, the “rupture” of the present persists within these cinematic narratives, with the viewer actively reconstructing these discontinuities into the story of Arthur Fleck, simultaneously reflecting and shaping the image of the Joker – not only within the analyzed narratives but also in those deconstructively left “on hold.” This is not merely a Derridean context but an ever-present one, marking the inherent blindness in our insights in this paper.

different genres in which Fleck expresses himself as a personality – from a clown to a comedian, lover, and a loser of meaning, or at least of the meaning that matters to him. For him, Quinn represented a substitute, a form of self-protection, a replacement for an authentic love from which he could not aporetically hide (Derrida, 1993).

### 3. *The Dialectics of Laughter and the Specular Construction of Society and the Self: Ethical Implications and the Question of Responsibility*

However, what separates Fleck and what every viewer knows or has heard about the Joker is, of course, his laughter. Although laughter is a philosophical category broader than the comic, H. Bergson, in his study, states that laughter occurs when the *living* spirit, through its fluidity, points to the relationship between spirit and body, i.e., when the rigidity of the body indicates the impotence of the living. The liveliness of the spirit turns into the mechanicalness of the movements performed by the body (Bergson, 1913). The mechanism and automatism of a body that imitates the rules of society provoke laughter. For example, when a man wearing a top hat falls backward because society does not expect that from him. Laughter is a *social phenomenon* because, when observing from a platform how people in a compartment are laughing, an individual will not laugh because laughter is a shared joke.

Our laughter is always the laughter of a group. It may, perchance, have happened to you, when seated in a railway carriage or at *table d'hôte*, to hear travellers relating to one another stories which must have been comic to them, for they laughed heartily. Had you been one of their company, you would have laughed like them, but, as you were not, you had no desire whatever to do so. A man who was once asked why he did not weep at a sermon when everybody else was shedding tears replied: 'I don't belong to the parish!' What that man thought of tears would be still more true of laughter  
(Bergson, 1913: 6).

The concept of laughter and its dual nature are associated with characteristics relationally linked to the identity of society. The very notion of laughter is reached through the relationship between other concepts, such as the living and the mechanical, which are not inherently comic by themselves. Similarly, the identity of the individual and society is a relational concept because it is connected to other notions. The relationships in the identity of the individual and society through laughter, as represented in the role of the clown, establish the character of Arthur Fleck in relation to Joker. The laughter and the role of the clown, through the place and manner in which they are phenomenologically depicted, reveal the complexity of the Fleck-Joker character. According to Bergson, laughter has the quality of insensitivity. In order to achieve a

complete effect, “the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart” (Bergson, 1913: 5). This mental anesthesia of the heart, or *absence of feeling*, primarily refers to the separation that occurs in empathy towards what is human. Laughter arises when the living acquires the quality of automatism, when a social rule of behaviour exceeds its limits, when clothing appears incongruous with the individual, or when a face loses its human characteristics, transforming into a caricature. However, for that transformation to occur, the *face* must first be human, as it must possess something to distort. Therefore, it must be close to the ordinary human being. Laughter plays an old game of cards: “I hide everything, I reveal nothing on my face, yet I hold other cards under the table.” Thus, Bergson states that the source of the comic is that “the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human” (Bergson, 1913: 3). In other words, laughter is directed at the human when it loses its human characteristics – when it falls into mechanisms, *rigidity* of mechanics, awkwardness, or excessiveness that society punishes precisely for being overly *exaggerated* behaviour that would otherwise be socially acceptable.

Disguise is another characteristic of laughter, in the sense that the spirit disguises itself as the body, or when an attempt is made to direct the viewer’s attention to the spirit, while it is entirely synchronised with the body. In this regard, Bergson states that “any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned” (Bergson, 1913: 51). Arthur Fleck is never a good comedian, as he constantly redirects the viewer’s gaze, not to the body – let’s call it the social body – but to his own spirit. Consequently, by drawing attention to his own spirit, there arises the rebellion and ridicule of Joker in his occupation as a comedian, clown, and comic. The first gaze, as Derrida noted, exists in an aporia when one is observed but cannot see whom they are observed by, referring, of course, to God – metaphorically represented here as society. Fleck behaves as someone who wants attention directed toward him, and thus his comedy is both clearly defined and entirely unclear to those who listen and watch him. In *The Gift of Death* (Derrida, 1995), Derrida emphasises the duality of the gaze. When someone observes you, and you are unable to respond, repression occurs – a form of violence to which Arthur Fleck responds by disguising himself as Joker. However, as Derrida states, “Repression doesn’t destroy, it displaces something from one place to another within the system” (Derrida, 1995: 8). This is precisely about *displacement* as a deconstructionist approach to understanding identity, both individual and social, through the method of a *dual act of knowledge*.

Look closely: you will find that the art of the comic poet consists in making us so well acquainted with the particular vice, in introducing us, the spectators, to such a degree of intimacy with it, that in the end we get hold of some of the strings of the marionette with which he is playing, and actually work them ourselves; this it is that explains part of the pleasure we feel. Here, too, it is really a kind of automatism that makes us laugh – an automatism, as we have already remarked, closely akin to mere absentmindedness (Bergson, 1913: 16).

The comic poet – here understood as the one who devises the clown’s movements, jokes, and mannerisms – must bring the *marionette*, i.e., the clown or comic character, so close to the audience that the mechanical nature of the marionette awakens something similar within the viewer. In other words, the spring within the marionette is dual: in laughing at the clown, we simultaneously laugh at ourselves, both as individuals and as members of society. Is this not, in a way, a form of empathy – one that arises from recognizing similarity without fear? Unlike Aristotelian catharsis (Aristotle, 1980), where fear emerges in response to a character whose actions transcend the boundaries of usual behaviour – actions that are morally justified in every sense – this form of recognition fosters connection rather than apprehension. *Empathy*, as a form of complicity in laughter, arises in a different way than Aristotelian compassion for a tragic hero, which awakens a feeling of fear in the audience, yet both operate according to the same relation: *similarity*. Naturally, it is difficult to imagine a clown as being similar to an ordinary person, so his similarity is initially imagined, making laughter much harder to achieve than the feeling aroused by a tragic hero. However, laughter is a philosophical category in that it points to gradualness and universality in its creation, but it is also a moral category because it implies the correction of behaviours that an ordinary person does not wish to perform or possess as part of their identity. “Indeed, it is in this sense only that laughter ‘corrects men’s manners.’ It makes us at once endeavour to appear what we ought to be, what some day we shall perhaps end in being” (Bergson, 1913: 17). Comic elements possess yet another characteristic that leads them to a duality in constituting laughter, as well as the feeling of empathy – feeling-with both oneself and others. This duality is visible to others, yet invisible to the one performing it. As Bergson emphasises:

To realise this more fully, it need only be noted that a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his *ignorance* of himself. The comic person is *unconscious*. As though wearing the ring of Gyges with reverse effect, he becomes *invisible* to himself while remaining *visible* to all the world. A character in a tragedy will make no change in his conduct because he will *know* how it is judged by us; he may continue therein even though fully conscious of what he is and feeling keenly the horror he inspires in us<sup>10</sup> (Bergson, 1913: 16–17).

The binary opposition of visible/invisible influences another form of duality that is linked through laughter, connecting laughter to the concept of identity, and within the concept of identity, to consciousness and self-consciousness. This duality of the visible and invisible points to a broader perspective when considering the film narratives about Joker, or Arthur Fleck. The visible aspect leads to the flaws that contemporary society observes, can observe, but just as often chooses to ignore, neglecting even a minimal

<sup>10</sup> All emphasis added by the author.

attempt at warning, reproach, or correction. The invisible aspect in contemporary society becomes an irrational part, which, by including this irrational moment, absolves society of any *responsibility*.

In other words, laughter is, in its conceptual sense, a dual phenomenon. It is unconscious in its display, conscious in the *attempt* at display, and conscious in the *results* of the display. Laughter directed at oneself, laughter directed at society, laughter directed at the individual identity of a person, or at the identity of society as a whole. In this sense, the eye that observes the comedian and the joke he performs is dual. It sees the joke because it creates it, but it does not see how society responds to that joke unless the individual is fully aligned with society. In this context, is Fleck a tragic or comic character? Is he perceived as a tragic figure in the pursuit of justice, or does society reject and ridicule him for exceeding the boundaries of his profession, as reflected in Murray's assertion that Arthur Fleck is not a comedian? The social function of laughter is evident both in defining Fleck's identity as an individual and in defining the identity of the community that laughs at him. However, society is no longer laughing at caricature, exaggeration, disguise, automatism, or stepping out of a role, but is instead laughing at Arthur Fleck as a person. Certainly, such a form of laughter provokes anger. That anger is reflected in the film narrative through numerous groups of people on the streets who feel threatened as individuals and who seek to change not only the system of laughter but also the societal system that mocks them for their appearance, lack of material means, or their failure and inability to truly be part of a society that *imposes* its rules. Thus, Thomas Wayne, father of Bruce Wayne, states that the rebel figure is an "ordinary clown" who attacks socially recognised young people – individuals who make society secure in terms of rules and professions that are socially acceptable and valued. Derrida points out that this involves the absence of a gaze that is not simultaneous. In fact, it is unequal when society, in this sense – or God in a religious sense – can see someone who does not see it in return. In this relationship, the question of responsibility arises between religion and the individual, or here, between society and the individual.

In the proper sense of the word, religion exists once the secret of the sacred, orgiastic, or demonic mystery has been, if not destroyed, at least integrated and finally subjected to the sphere of *responsibility*. The subject of responsibility will be the subject that has managed to make the orgiastic or demonic mystery *subject to itself*; and has done that in order to freely *subject itself to the wholly and infinitely other that sees without being seen*<sup>11</sup> (Derrida, 1995: 2).

It is not about comparing religion to society, nor about equating them in any way. Rather, it is about the fact that both religion and society are systems, and within these systems, certain rules prevail. Additionally, elements of irrationality appear in both

<sup>11</sup> All emphasis added by the author.

systems. In religion, the irrational manifests as orgiastic forces, which are products of behaviour beyond the rational. In society, the irrational is related to laughter, as defined by Bergson, who associates laughter with the unconscious. In other words, while the unconscious is not necessarily irrational, it is certainly in opposition to the conscious and the rational. In the unconscious and the irrational, particularly when it involves orgiastic forces, there is no empathy. In this sense, without empathy, there is no responsibility. For responsibility to be established and for the system to function – whether social or religious – it is necessary to overcome the irrational. In other words, it requires a deconstructionist approach to find a *passage* through which the irrational can be channeled, and in the process of channeling the irrational, responsibility is achieved, since, as Derrida notes, “religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all” (Derrida, 1995: 2).

Is society built upon the concept of responsibility? Although Derrida’s reasoning is no less dual than Bergson’s definition of laughter, it is evident that both approaches to defining systems of laughter are fluid. Is only Arthur Fleck, whose alter ego is Joker, responsible, or, perhaps, as Jung (Jung, 1996) suggests with the concept of the *shadow*, is there also a responsibility on the part of society? In the animated version of the film, the Joker appears initially as a shadow of the already existing Fleck the clown. Is responsibility shared by society, which is composed of individuals who follow the rules of appropriate behaviour and reject Fleck? Is responsibility, from a deconstructionist perspective, located *between* Fleck as an individual and society, such that the identities of both the individual and society overlap? The murders that Fleck commits – whether as a clown in the subway, while putting on makeup for his appearance on the popular TV show, or during his participation in the show when he kills the host Murray – belong to the realm of both his individual and social responsibility. He admits to them during the trial. At no point does he respond negatively, nor does he reject the claims of witnesses regarding the events of the murders. The only thing he presents, from a legal standpoint, are the causes behind these events. In other words, he highlights the tenuous connection between the individual and society in terms of identity. The connection between the individual and society in Fleck’s occupation, which is inherently tied to laughter, is, according to Bergson’s understanding, an *agreement* in which laughter conceals various characteristics of duality within itself. He states:

“However spontaneous it seems, laughter always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary. [...] It is through not understanding the importance of this *doublefact*<sup>12</sup> that the comic has been looked upon as a mere curiosity in which the mind finds amusement, and laughter itself as a strange, isolated phenomenon, without any bearing on the rest of human activity” (Bergson, 1913: 6–7).

---

12 Emphasis added by the author.

The laughers represent society. In other words, a dual agreement is formed. If laughter strikes at the very nerve of society, yet the laughers, the members of society, laugh along, then the agreement has been reached. However, in the case of Fleck, if laughter strikes at the nerve of society but other laughers do not laugh along, then laughter becomes a destructive effect of the duality that society carries within itself. If an individual points out this duality, they will certainly be punished with an absence of emotion and insensitivity to ridicule, and there will be punishment for such behaviour that turns the mirror back on society, forcing it to look at itself and realise that there is a passage between the image, the reflection in the mirror, and society that it refuses to acknowledge. Derrida notes that such a passage “involves traversing or enduring the test by means of which the ethical conscience will be delivered of the demonic, the mystagogic and the enthusiastic, of the initiatory and the esoteric. In the authentic sense of the word, religion comes into being *the moment that the experience of responsibility extracts itself*<sup>13</sup> from that form of secrecy called demonic mystery” (Derrida, 1995: 2–3). In other words, the experience of responsibility must extract itself from the irrational, and the irrational is an integral part of the human experience, of laughter, society, systems, and the identity of both individuals and society. In this sense, responsibility appears alongside moral responsibility, or conscience, which is a question that remains open for both the individual Arthur Fleck and the society to which he belongs, both as Fleck and as Joker. Is moral comedy, laughter, and the comic as a gesture and representation of laughter inherently perceived as ugly? Does the moral response elicited by laughter function as a criterion that designates something as ugly, considering the dual nature of laughter in relation to both society and the individual, as well as its role in shaping and being shaped by the societal structures within which it defines its own concept?

Bergson responds that laughter is not the opposition to ugliness, but rather to the rigidity of society, which is revealed through laughter. It is essential to note that a comedian must strike at the center of “social empathy”, which pertains to society itself – one that, within its own framework, has only appropriate rules. Any individual who points out the crooked lines of society, whether through repetition or disguising society as something else (which is objectively shown in its image, such as the clown who disguises himself), cannot achieve or hit the target without ultimately being punished. The type of laughter provoked by ugliness is not related to morality or caricature. As Bergson notes:

However regular we may imagine a face to be, however harmonious its lines and supple its movements, their adjustment is never altogether perfect: there will always be discoverable the signs of some impending bias, the vague suggestion of a possible *grimace*, in short, some favourite *distortion* towards which nature seems to be particularly inclined<sup>14</sup> (Bergson, 1913: 26).

<sup>13</sup> Emphasis added by the author.

<sup>14</sup> All emphasis added by the author.

He also emphasises that nature “assumes harmonious lines [...] a balance that is never perfect. There will always be a sign of a crease appearing, the outline of a possible grimace, finally a chosen distortion where nature would rather bend itself” (Bergson, 1993: 16). Bergson states that the opposite of the comic should not be defined as beauty, but rather as charm, because it is more about rigidity than ugliness. “It partakes rather of the unsprightly than of the unsightly, of rigidity rather than of ugliness” (Bergson, 1913: 29).

In this sense, one might say that Nature herself often meets with the successes of a caricaturist. In the movement through which she has slit that mouth, curtailed that chin and bulged out that cheek, she would appear to have succeeded in completing the intended grimace, thus outwitting the restraining supervision of a more reasonable force. In that case, the face we laugh at is, so to speak, its own caricature (Bergson, 1913: 27–28).

Henceforth, nature itself is caricatural, though, for Umberto Eco, it is not the opposite of ugliness and immorality since “caricature is certainly a form of the comic. The concept of caricature is, all things considered, modern, and some believe that its origins lie in certain grotesque portraits by Leonardo [...] Caricature is often directed towards exaggerating a person’s characteristics to achieve a deeper understanding of their character (Eco, 2007: 152). Caricature is not merely a swollen cheek; it conveys more than that. The distortion within society is a caricature that is visually and cinematically depicted through the character of Arthur Fleck. Laughter arises when a face becomes a caricature of itself. Through his swollen cheeks and stretched lips, he reveals ourselves as a society devoid of compassion.

#### 4. Concluding Reflections

The character of Arthur Fleck is also distinguished in the language through which he reveals the division between society and the individual in identity and their mutual relationship. Martin Heidegger speaks of eventness (*Ereignis*), which establishes the relationship between Sein and Dasein by suggesting that something is “borrowed” from the phenomenological appearance of Dasein to create Sein, and that what has been appropriated by Sein has a final version that nonetheless changes because the event itself changes.<sup>15</sup> What is the event that transformed Fleck into Joker, or vice versa? What forces compelled him to depict the destruction of Gotham City? There is no single

---

<sup>15</sup> It is instructive to examine the work: Milena Vladić Jovanov. [*Aporije stvaranja*] u egzilu. V. B. Jejs / Dante / Priča o Avramu i Isaku / Š. Bodler / V. P. Dis / F. Kafka. Događaj, biće i vreme, identitet i priča, fikcija i stvarnost, oprostaj i dar, savez istoriji, priči, identitetu i ne/mogućem, eho i slika. (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2021).

or clear answer. Perhaps the answer lies in the veiled explanations of Maurice Blanchot (Blanchot, 1995), who suggests that only from nothingness, from death, can something new and living be created. Or perhaps it is related to Nietzsche's (Nietzsche, 1968) and Schopenhauer's (Schopenhauer, 2010) reflections on will. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche articulates two foundational principles of Greek culture: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The former is associated with beauty, reason, and the rational dimension of existence – it emphasises order, form, and clarity, all of which are, by virtue of their structure, readily apprehensible and acceptable to the recipient. In contrast, the Dionysian principle embraces irrationality, collectivity, and communal experience – that is, society itself – where the individualism underscored by the Apollonian is suspended in favour of a shared, ecstatic unity. Yet Nietzsche, in a manner reminiscent of Derrida – who, notably, regarded Nietzsche as a major influence – destabilises this binary opposition. He does not maintain the Apollonian and Dionysian as mutually exclusive categories, but instead establishes a dialectical interplay wherein community gives rise to individuality, and individuality is constituted through community. In the essay “Schopenhauer as Educator“, Nietzsche pays tribute to Schopenhauer's emphasis on the autonomy of the individual and on the individual as such. However, in later works – *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Will to Power* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* – Nietzsche foregrounds a concept of individualism that is inherently fractured, once again returning to the realm of internal contradictions. Crucially, Nietzsche no longer links the will with the self or with an “I” that might justify its own actions. Rather, he suggests that the privileging of one aspect of the self inevitably leads to the occlusion of another. In *The Will to Power*, he asserts unequivocally: “The ‘ego’ – which is *not* one with the central government of our nature! – is, indeed, only a conceptual synthesis – thus there *are* no actions prompted by ‘egoism’.” Preceding this, he similarly states: “The ‘subject’ is only a fiction: the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all” (Nietzsche, 1968: §§370–371).

All of this may remain a theoretical-philosophical “fog” unless considered in relation to the final scene, where Fleck/Joker meets his end within his Jungian shadow (Jung, 1971) and Lacanian image – constructed across temporal distances long before his death unfolds on the staircase. This very staircase, where he both ascended and descended as Fleck and Joker, becomes the inevitable site of his fall when Quinn leaves him in *Folie à Deux*. Fleck dies when the Joker within him is killed, as Quinn desires him only for the image of Joker and offers him her love in the musical, but in the end, he perishes precisely because he is Joker. The question remains: to what extent is the society in which he lived – and the society in which we now live – willing to abandon countless individual Jokers to death? Is everything Fleck did equivalent to the death in which the protagonist, in a Blanchotian sense, ultimately finds himself in the film narratives *Joker* and *Joker: Folie à Deux*?

## REFERENCES:

1. Abbott, Porter H. 2008. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Aristotel. 1980. *O pjesničkom umeću*. Zagreb: August Cesarec.
3. Aristotel. 2007. *Metafizika*. Beograd: Paideia.
4. Barrès, Maurice. 1910. *Le culte du moi. Le jardin de Bérénice*. Paris: Emile-Paul, Éditeur.
5. —. 1911. *Le culte du moi. Sous l'œil de barbares*. Paris: Emile-Paul, Éditeur.
6. —. 1912. *Le culte du moi. Un homme libre*. Paris: Emile-Paul, Éditeurs.
7. Barthes, Roland. 1974. *S/Z*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
8. —. 1975. „An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative.” *New Literary History*, 6(2): 237–272.
9. Bergson, Henri. 1913. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. New York: The MacMillan Company.
10. Bergson, Anri. 2013. *Materija i pamćenje*. Beograd: Fedon.
11. —. 2016. *Stvaralačka evolucija*. Beograd: Algoritam.
12. Blanchot, Maurice. 1995. “Literature and the Right to Death” in *The Work of Fire*, 300–344. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
13. Bourget, Paul. 1920. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*. Paris: Plon-Nourrit.
14. Breht, Bertolt. 1966. *Dijalektika u teatru*. Beograd: Nolit.
15. Brecht, Bertolt. 1966. *Brecht on Theatre. The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill and Wang.
16. Cianci, Giovanni, Jason Harding. 2007. *T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.
17. Cousin, Victor. 1841. *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie: introduction à l'histoire de la philosophie*. Paris: Didier Libraire-Éditeur.
18. Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
19. De Man, Paul. 1971. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
20. Derrida, Jacques. 1973. *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
21. —. 1991. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
22. —. 1992. *Acts of Literature*. London: Routledge.
23. —. 1993. *Aporias*. California: Stanford University Press.
24. —. 1995. *The Gift of Death*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
25. Durkheim, Émile. 1951. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. London and New York: Routledge.
26. —. 1982. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: The Free Press.
27. Eco, Umberto. 1984. *The Role of the Reader*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
28. —. 2007. *Istorija ružnoće*. Beograd: Plato.
29. Fouillée, Alfred. 1891. “Les grandes conclusions de la psychologie contemporaine: La conscience et ses transformations”, in *Revue des deux mondes*, 107(3), 788–816.
30. Freud, Sigmund. 1982. *Studienausgabe. Band VI, Hysterie und Angst*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.
31. Frojd, Sigmund. 1987. *Pronađena psihoanaliza*. Zagreb: Naprijed.

32. Freud, Sigmund. 1999. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
33. Goldstein, Jan. 1994a. "Foucault and the Post-Revolutionary Self: The Uses of Cousinian Pedagogy in Nineteenth-Century France" in *Foucault and the Writing of History*, edited by Jan Goldstein, Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell.
34. —. 1994b. "Saying 'I': Victor Cousin, Caroline Angebert, and the Politics of Selfhood in Nineteenth-Century France" in *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics and the Psyche*, edited by Michael S. Roth. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
35. Heidegger, Martin. 2010. *Being and Time*. New York: State University of New York Press.
36. —. 2012. *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*. Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
37. Janet, Pierre. 1889. *L'automatisme psychologique*. Paris: Félix Alcan.
38. Jung, Carl. 1971. "Aion: Phenomenology of the Self (The Ego, the Shadow, the Syzygy: Anima / Animus)" in *The Portable Jung*, edited by Joseph Campbell. New York: The Viking Press.
39. Jung, Karl. 1996. *Čovek i njegovi simboli*. Beograd: Narodna knjiga, Alfa.
40. —. 2003. *Psihološki likovi*. Beograd: Dereta.
41. Lacan, Jacques. 2004. *Écrits*. New York, London: W. W. Norton and Company.
42. Levinas, Emmanuel. 2006. *Totalitet i beskonačnost*. Beograd: Službeni list.
43. Levinas, Emmanuel. 1991. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
44. —. 2006. *Humanism of the Other*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
45. —. 1986. "The Trace of the Other" in *Deconstruction in Context*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
46. —. 1987. *Time and the other [and additional essays]*. United States of America: Duquesne University Press.
47. Lyotard, Jean-François. 2004. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. UK: Manchester University Press.
48. Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1968. *The Will to Power*. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc.
49. —. 1989. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. New York: Random House, Inc.
50. —. 1997. "Schopenhauer as Educator" in *Untimely Meditations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
51. —. 2000. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
52. —. 2006. *On Genealogy of Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
53. Pierrot, Jean. 1981. *The Decadent Imagination, 1880–1900*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
54. Poirier, Richard. 1992. *Poetry and Pragmatism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
55. Schopenhauer, Arthur. 2010. *The World as Will and Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
56. Vlačić Jovanov, Milena. 2021. *[Aporije stvaranja] u egzilu*. V. B. Jejs / Dante / Priča o Avramu i Isaku / Š. Bodler / V. P. Dis / F. Kafka. Događaj, biće i vreme, identitet i priča, fikcija i stvarnost, oprostaj i dar, savez u istoriji, priči, identitetu i ne/mogućem, eho i slika. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

### **Identitet pojedinca i društva u filmskoj franšizi *Džoker* / *Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City and Sure Ain't No Pity***

**Apstrakt:** U filmskim narativima *Džoker* i *Džoker: ludilo u dvoje* prikazana je rascepljenost između samih narativa na modernistički i postmodernistički način. Takav oblik rascepljenosti pratićemo u identitetu kako filmskog narativa, tako i u identitetu ličnosti u prikazu lika A. Fleka, tj. Džokera. Narativne nivoe prate i semantičko-semiotičke ravni, uklapajući se u tematsku ravan koja prati preobražaj lika A. Fleka u lik Džokera. Pojam dvostrukog umetničkog postupka koji se pojavljuje u liku „Džokera” u oba filmska narativa pratićemo na više nivoa. Jedan je narativni „rascep”, drugi je rascepljenost u identitetu ličnosti na dušu i telo, dok je odnos „ujedinjenog” selfa, ličnosti pojedinca u odnosu na društvo treći nivo. U tom smislu, koristićemo se postavkama mislilaca poput P. Žanea, A. Fujea, S. Frojda, Ž. Lakana, A. Bergsona, F. Ničea, M. Hajdegera, M. Fukoa, R. Barta, J. F. Liotara, Ž. Deride, U. Eka i dr. Cilj rada je da pokaže rascepljenost i „podelu” u ličnosti koju prati odnos prema društvu, čime se prikazuje i nasilje koje društvo iskazuje prema individui koja ne prati društvena pravila. Na svakom nivou se pokazuje rascepljenost: u odnosu u samim filmskim jedinicama koje prati vremenska i kauzalna podeljenost, te i u ličnosti koja se smatra udjedinjenjem tela i duha, s tim što se u filmskim narativima pokazuje dvostuki odnos društva prema ličnosti na osnovu toga koliko je ličnost prihvatljiva prema pravilima društva. U radu se prikazuje i pojam „smešnog” u klovnovskoj „sviti” koja ukazuje na pojam selfa i društva u svojim preterivanjima. Pratimo u ovoj složenoj priči i status memorije prema telesnom i duhovnom obliku selfa, kao i sam status memorije u odnosu na sećanja i prisećanja koja formiraju ličnost u društvu i samo društvo. Identitet pratimo na svim nivoima koje smo naveli i prikazujemo koliko je savremeno društvo oslikano u oba filmska narativa *Džoker* i *Džoker: ludilo u dvoje*.

**Ključne reči:** filmska/književna naracija, smeh, nasilje, empatija, identitet