





‘Is it me, or is it getting crazier out there?’: The psyche of the interior in *Joker*: An analysis of psychological space in Todd Phillips *Joker* (2019) through collage

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Abstract

Encounters with interior spaces are influenced by past experiences and state of mind. Much of how architecture is experienced therefore is not readily apparent and is sensed rather than seen. Psyche impacts this experience of lived space, from an individual’s awareness of themselves within it, to the perception of space itself. Film offers a distinctive representation of this subjective experience through its narrative form and command of visual, audio and temporal language. The emotive and visceral power of film render it an accessible and immersive medium, and as such make it uniquely placed to communicate less tangible qualities of space and character. This paper analyses the use of interior space in the film *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019). The acutely intimate discernment of the protagonist’s interior environment is the result of environmental and psychological disruption, where boundaries break down between the real and imaginary, and the surreal intrudes upon the tangible depiction of the interior. The exposition of the character’s damaged psyche within space is analysed at key points within the narrative, using collage as an exploratory, visual methodology to analyse and experiment with, to potentially reveal the less perceivable, yet invasive intangible layers of lived space. This article addresses the frequent oversight of psychological qualities of the interior in architectural discourse, through an analytical and experimental method rendering the psychological content of space visible. Defining this intangible nature of architecture as the psychosphere (or the psychological atmosphere), I term this technique the ‘psychospheric collage method’. The process consists of interrogating expressive film language and content through an architectural lens documented through sketching, storyboarding and textual enquiry. From these fragmented components I compose a new visual language capable of signifying the layered psychological atmosphere in which a character resides, thus facilitating its consideration within architectural design and enabling articulation of our intimate encounter with the interior.

Keywords: collage, film, interior, lived space, psyche.

1. Introduction

It was not accidental that the language of the movies, especially the expressive qualities of the image, developed in tandem with the psychoanalytical concept of the unconscious, where subjectivity involves what is elusive, shadowy, unfocused.

Amy Taubin (2012, p. 10).

Architecture’s traditional role of imposing order takes on different meanings with different diseases.

Beatriz Colomina (2019, p. 19).

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Recognition of the role of the spaces we inhabit in affecting sense of self and how we respond within them can be facilitated through studying film from an architectural perspective. Certain films have attempted to communicate hidden layers, the lesser-seen traces of association and memory that are undefinable in words, which lurk just beyond the realm of language; detected through sound, light, shape, or movement – or a combination of all the senses. Film has evolved over the years to blur the boundaries between the tangible and intangible, giving an insight into the psyche of characters who react to situations and cross boundaries in ways we never would, and yet they are made relatable. What really enables us to get inside the head of the protagonist is when we see them in their own domain, when they close the door and truly occupy their home space, dropping any masks or pretensions, as can be seen in this case. This paper analyses the recent film *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019), depicting the origin of the Joker character in terms of the relationship between interior space and the psyche of the occupant. The Batman franchise is part of the DC series of comics, television series and films, in which the character of Joker is a primary antagonist. The film portrays a highly intimate character story of a man attempting to cope during a personal and cultural crisis. Joker is particularly pertinent due its resonance with contemporary urban psychological maladies.

2. The History of Joker

The character of Joker was created by Jerry Robinson, Bill Finger and Bob Kane and first appears in *Batman #1* in 1940. Many different iterations have evolved over the eighty years since, with the general consensus that he is primarily an anarchic, psychotic and chaotic character, possessing a twisted sense of humour and no trace of empathy. *Batman: The Killing Joke*, Alan Moore's graphic novel published by DC Comics in 1988, was the first origin story proposed for the character. Moore cites German Expressionist director, Paul Leni's adaptation of Victor Hugo's 1869 novel, *The Man Who Laughs* (1928) as a key influence. Todd Phillips also credits Leni's characterisation as the starting point for his 2019 film, in seeking a way to convey the simultaneous pain and humour of the character. Cesar Romero played the first Joker, in the 1966 – 1968 television series and in the film *Batman* (Leslie H. Martinson, 1966). A talented dancer and actor, Romero brought playfulness and energy to the character, as well as the signature purple suit and green shirt, which became his uniform in many subsequent cases. Tim Burton's film, *Batman* (1989), featured Jack Nicholson as the Joker and offered something of a backstory. He fell into a vat of acid and survived with facial scarring giving him a permanent smile-like grimace, white skin and green hair (Figures 1-2). Burton's animated style built on Romero's theatricality and Nicholson developed the character's playful menace, while introducing an uneasy sense of semi-dormant violence, constantly on the verge of eruption. Consistent with Burton's film language, the spatial qualities in the film are dramatic, with high contrast and colour and these are reflected in how the Joker is presented. In addition to his brightly coloured tailored suits, the character's presence is frequently accompanied by flashing lights, explosions and is highly performative. Nicholson's portrayal endured in cultural memory for almost twenty years before Joker made his next on-screen appearance.



Figures 1-2 The Joker (Jack Nicholson) in highly expressive setting in *Batman* (1989)

Christopher Nolan took over as director of a trilogy of Batman films with Christian Bale in the titular role. His first film, *Batman Begins* (2005), delivered a dark turn from the earlier Batman movies. Using the widespread attraction of the superhero genre, Nolan explored the identity of the

characters as the driving force behind the narrative. The British filmmaker focused on the loss and grief that Bruce Wayne endured by losing his parents at a young age, and the resulting underlying anger he battles to control. In an interview before the release of his second Batman film *The Dark Knight* (2008), Nolan stated that his approach to the film was to 'take the tropes and iconography of the action-hero genre and ground it in a reality. Real life is more tactile, more threatening, more emotional. The experience is amplified' (Boucher, 2008). This was an intention Phillips later maintained in his rendition of the genre. Heath Ledger played the role of Joker in *The Dark Knight*. Nolan and Ledger were both keen to portray an original Joker embodiment – younger, and with more of a punk aesthetic. Ledger's untimely death before the film's release undoubtedly lent the performance an added depth and resonance, and after 2008, the name Joker was synonymous with Ledger. The character was not included in Nolan's next Batman film, *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), the conclusion to his Dark Knight trilogy. Ledger's Joker is frequently presented in a central position within a space in playful but menacing pose (Figure 5). In several cases he infiltrates a space unexpectedly and uninvited, often adopting a guise or mask in addition to his usual clown makeup. Aligning with his intrusive and highly disruptive character, the spaces around Ledger's Joker often display stark contrast, making him seem forever out of place (Figures 3-4).



Figures 3-4 Joker (Heath Ledger) eternally displaced in *The Dark Knight* (2008)



Figure 5 Layered setting simulating the Joker's layered personas in *The Dark Knight*

In 2019 Todd Phillips directed the most recent film featuring Joker. This time he is the protagonist. A consistent back story for the character of Joker has never existed. Each time his background is questioned, Joker has offered a different explanation for his appearance and motivations. Whereas Nolan looks on Batman as somewhat of an anti-hero or flawed hero (hero by default), Phillips points the lens firmly on the 'bad guy' and builds him up with tender attention to detail of every characteristic the Joker possesses, which leads to him becoming the villain. Resonant of Nolan's statement regarding his grounding the superhero story in some semblance of reality – the opposite of Burton's agenda, and indeed the majority of the superhero genre – Phillips stated his intention to 'run...everything through as realistic a lens as possible' (2019). His film presents plausible explanations for what have become the recognisable characteristics of the Joker – the white face and green hair are make-up for his day job as a clown, the uncontrollable laughter is a mental illness, known as pseudobulbar affect. This is also the first time the character clearly has a

name¹, Arthur Fleck. Phillips classifies his film as a character study, inspired by films of the late nineteen-seventies and eighties, like *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975) and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), whose influence is apparent throughout (even to the presence of Robert de Niro portraying Murray Franklin).



Figure 6 The Language of Phillips' Joker

3. The Story of *Joker* (2019)

The narrative follows a protagonist of psychological fragility whose circumstances result in the disruption of the delicate balance that existed to keep him functioning in a harsh world. *Joker* highlights the effect of an individual at the mercy of these characteristics and contexts and takes them to a visual and narrative extreme. Directed by Todd Phillips, and released to significantly divided reaction in 2019, *Joker* focuses on the effects of capitalist domination of society on a broken city, a divided populous and a disregarded individual. The film deals more with the consequences of the permeating sense of isolation, which this environment has nurtured - a breed of inhabitant deprived of sympathy and eventually, empathy. Set in the fictional city of Gotham, of the Batman universe, Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix) is a product of the environment he occupies in the past (abused physically and psychologically, without attention or affection), present (depressed, with unaddressed psychological issues, living in a squalid apartment with a challenging mother), and future (no employment, no medical assistance).

Lawrence Sher, director of photography for *Joker*, worked on five previous films with Phillips. A number of these were comedies including *The Hangover* (2009), which Sher (2019a) explains influenced their speed of working, noting the high level of energy that it is necessary to maintain on a shoot for the content to come across as fresh. Likely influenced by this experience, very little was rehearsed or marked out and storyboards were not used in the realisation of *Joker*. Within this set up, Phoenix was given the freedom to improvise within the scenes. As mentioned earlier in relation to the inspiration for the original *Joker*, Phillips also drew upon Paul Leni's German Expressionist melodrama, *The Man Who Laughs* (1928), where Conrad Veidt plays Gwynplaine, a

¹ The *Joker*'s true name has never been made clear. In *Batman: Curse of the White Knight* (Sean Murphy, 2019 – 2020) he claims to hold the name Jack Napier. In the more recent series *Gotham* (Bruno Heller, 2014 – 2019) *Joker* is portrayed as identical twins named Jerome and Jeremiah Valeska.

man cursed with a constant smile or grimace. Film critic Roger Ebert notes the salient role of the set in portraying the disturbing tone of the film, referencing Lotte Eisner's detailed analysis of German silent cinema in *The Haunted Screen*:

The low ceilings and vaults oblige the characters to stoop and force them into those jerky movements and broken gestures which produce the extravagant curves and diagonals [of] the Expressionist precept.

(Eisner, 1965, p. 120)

Expressionists often used unusually low ceilings and doorways in order to force their characters to walk stooped over or sideways. Their staircases rarely climbed frankly from floor to floor, but seemed to twist away into mystery. Dramatic lighting left much of the screen in darkness. Concealment and enhancement, not revelation, was the assignment of the camera.

(Ebert, 2004, p. 1)

Leni had developed the 'moving restrictive architecture' used in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* in his previous film *Waxworks* (1924), where he claimed his visual style sought to embody 'an indescribable fluidity of light, moving shapes, shadows, lines, and curves. It is not extreme reality that the camera perceives, but the reality of the inner event, which is more profound, effective and moving than what we see through everyday eyes, and ... cinema can reproduce this truth, heightened effectively' (Leni, 1924 in Eisner, 1965, p. 127). This reached a new level of expression in *The Man Who Laughs* and in developing the character of Arthur Fleck, Phillips drew from the ambiguous character of Gwynplaine who laughed through pain, and more vitally, from his resulting emotional conflict.

In general, the visual language of the film is based on the contrast of extremes, with wide angled compositions followed by extreme close-ups. 'One of the reasons we shot large format [was] to draw the audience in psychologically to this character and feel empathy and really feel this transition that he was going through and his descent into chaos and madness' (Sher, 2019a, 3:39 – 3:50). The early wide shots show Arthur through a long lens, as a small insignificant figure within a larger environment, surrounded by people and objects that are separated from him (for instance, on the street as he swings the sign, or sitting on the bus). Later, when he is alone in his apartment this is contrasted with proximal shots of Arthur as 'true' self, transitioning from 'lonely' in the early scenes to 'flamboyant' in the later ones (Figures 8-9). Expanding on this notion of contrast, Sher describes *Joker* as a film about 'opposite ends of the spectrum, two sides of yourself - the shadow and the light...Those contrasting colours are a lot like what's going on internally with Arthur' (2019b, 9:48-9:55). In terms of camera movement, the question was 'where is the camera and what psychological effect does that have on the audience?' (Sher, 2019b, 9:26). In several scenes the frame is divided through contrasting colour or focus, communicating some sort of dichotomy – the battle between harmony and chaos, peace and madness.



Figures 7-9 Invisible in Gotham city; Arthur as his 'lonely' self and 'flamboyant' self

3.1. Body and Disruption



Figure 10 Shot immediately preceding refrigerator scene

The psychological state of the character was the main motivation behind the scene structure in *Joker*. For example, the unscripted scene where Arthur crawls into the refrigerator was the result of shooting extra footage to explore his insomnia (Sher, 2019c). Arthur maintains the same position as the scene changes from the performance hall bathroom to his mother's kitchen. This suggests his bent form is being acted on from internal rather than external forces. The environment changes, but he cannot. He is centred within the composition (framed unusually as a square) his skeletal form is framed by the orange hue of the streetlights through the curtains. His body and the

surrounding kitchen units are bathed in cold blue light, emphasising his frailty and isolating the elements from each other.



Figures 11-14 Refrigerator scene composition in *Joker*

As in other scenes, Sher left the camera rolling and watched Phoenix move around the apartment at night. At one point he empties the contents of the fridge and climbs inside, closing the door. The camera moves slowly closer to the fridge door, lit up in blue. It does not reopen. This is another extremely character driven scene, included in this case to convey the irrationality and random actions of the mind of an insomniac character. Viewed in sequence the shots look like film negatives. The complimentary colours blue and orange are used, creating depth within the dimly lit apartment. The colour difference makes a dramatic impact on the scene, evident when the colour is removed (Figure 15). Reflecting the internal conflict going on within his psyche, the contrast between the colours creates separation within the space. The uncorrected fluorescent cyan blue of the kitchen space contrasts with the warmer sodium vapour behind, coming from streetlights and shopfronts in the world outside (Sher, 2019c).



Figure 15 Colour removed. Depth of contrast minimised, as well as impact of complimentary blue and orange



Figures 16-17 Arthur Fleck's skeletal body in *Joker*; Trevor Reznik's (Christian Bale) emaciated frame in *The Machinist* (Brad Anderson, 2004) which also deals with a man struggling with psychological disruption in this case, insomnia and repressed guilt for a hit and run incident resulting in the death of a child

Phoenix describes how he saw the foundation of the character as very damaged and fragile. '[Arthur] experienced childhood trauma and that, more than anything shapes his perception of the world. [which leaves you in a] highly reactive state in which you perceive and look for threat everywhere' (2019, 2:35-2:50). He lost 52lbs for the role making him aware of his body in a different way and influencing the movement of the character, so that he seemed 'never satisfied...in a perpetual state of yearning' (6:10). 'I felt like I could move my body in ways that I hadn't been able to before. And I think that really lent itself to some of the physical movement that started to emerge as an important part of the character,' (Phoenix in Smith, 2020, p. 1).



Figures 18-21 Colour and light in the apartment

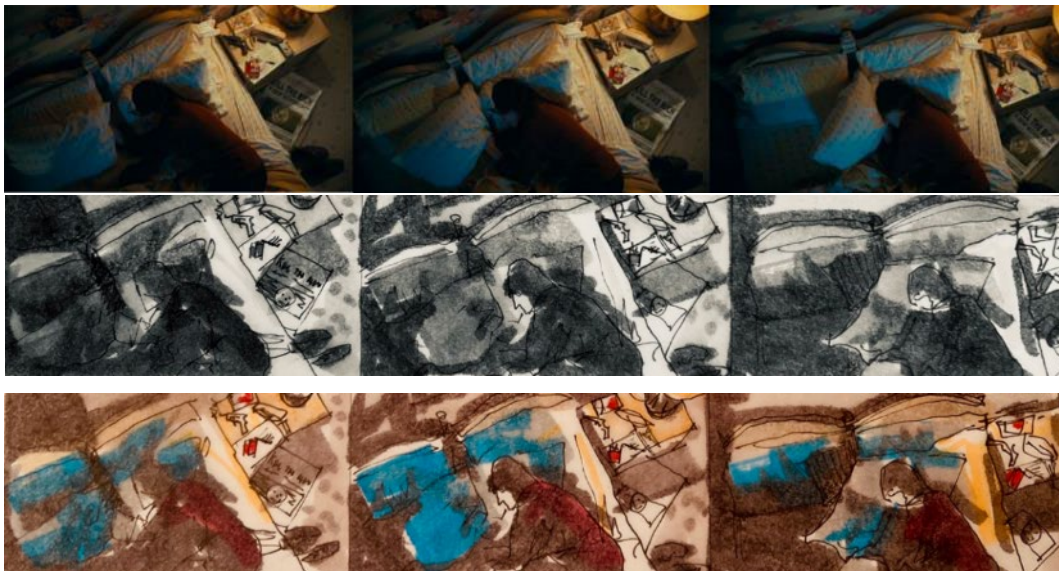
This sequence of shots presents an example of the powerful effect of colour within a scene. The scene in the bathroom and bedroom are brighter since his mother has left the apartment. Sun streams in the window and the apartment glows warmly. Arthur dances maniacally to music on the radio. He has purpose in this scene – his focus is clear through his actions and his gaze (Figures 18-21). He has taken over his mother's bedroom and paints his face, his Joker face reflected in the mirror and the mask hanging on it.



Figure 22 Study of light and shadow and the viewer's constantly changing perspective of Arthur



Figure 23 Detail of storyboard compiled of mask scene



Figures 24-26 Overhead shots: Analysis of sequence through contrast and colour. Mother's bedroom

The soft, comforting tones of the bedroom are permeated by the strong blue green angled light falling across him (Figures. 24-26). Activities outside the frame make their presence felt through the lights of the city coming through the window as well as the television screen intruding visually and audibly, underlining the newspaper headline on the floor. The camera hovers over his inactive form, accentuating his impotence and isolation. All of these forces combine to express the impossibility of Arthur's escape from the external city and its impact on his fragile psyche.

3.2. Movement

Unable to psychologically reconcile his violent reactions with his usual mode of dealing with conflict through retreat or submission, Arthur releases his heretofore inexpressible emotions through movement. His mind is still in turmoil, searching for right or wrong, and his body comes to grips with expressing his conflicting emotions before his mind. The moment he looks one way, then the other, and pauses, his face darkens and his acceptance of his actions is evident, and irreversible. His previously pitiable self-confidence has broken through and he is forever changed. He has crossed an invisible line and there is no going back. The shadow, Joker is revealed. This scene can also be read as a refinement of Caesar Romero's dancing Joker, gleeful way of moving, like Gwynplaine's frozen smile originating in mock triumph over terrible pain. The playfulness of the movement however, is tinged with menace. This ambiguity is characteristic of the trickster archetype, with which the character of Joker has frequently displayed alignment.



Figures 27-30 Inner conflict expressed through Arthur's movement in space



Figure 31 Composition of shots from the Metamorphosis scene in Joker



Figures 32-33 Analysis of Metamorphosis scene showing Arthur's reinvention of the space through the movement of his body within it

3.3. Camera Movement and Colour

Sher describes how Arthur's psychological state was always foremost in executing the cinematography: 'Static shots were...observing him objectively in his world, in his space. [W]e wanted to align ourselves emotionally with him and the handheld camera allowed us the freedom to move with him [and be] more emotionally connected' (2019b, 29:01 to 29:10). Fixed cameras are used towards the beginning of the film, with very deliberate, slow movement (Cosoli, 2019, 27:17). Handheld camera is used when Arthur is alone, the strength of which is demonstrated in this scene. Running on the street, griptrix (cameras on wheels) are used, gliding smoothly in front of Arthur as he sprints. Once he ducks inside the public bathroom, the camera switches to handheld. The fact that this transformation takes place under the city, in a basement, resonates with the notion of unconscious gaining more power and revealing itself. The entire space was lit rather than the individual character, which gave Phoenix freedom to move around within the space and allowed the camera to move with him. Sher let the camera roll all the time and ran the scene top to bottom over and over. There could be improvisation within the scene, but that structure existed (Sher, 2019b).



Figures 34-37 Low camera angles highlighting the dominance of the emerging Joker persona

The psychological influence on the spectator is felt on an emotional level and contributes, along with sound and music, to the searing effect of this scene drenched in green – a monster being birthed. The night streets and beneath the bridge are lit with orange streetlights. Once inside however, the metamorphosis scene relies almost entirely on the fluorescent green hue, with the accompanying hum of the lighting under the bridge into which natural light never penetrates. This replaces the ringing in Arthur's ears that begins with the gunshots he fired, giving the sense that it will never leave him. The black and white diamond patterned tile on the floor resembles a joker playing card.

3.4. Sound and Music

The filmed version differs from the script due to the openness of filming to the instinctual reactions of Phoenix within the set. In the written script, the song *Send in the Clowns* – which commenced with the Wall Street thugs on the train – continues until after Arthur enters the bathroom. In the film, all the sound is diegetic until he enters the bathroom and Guðnadóttir's instrumental piece begins. Arthur's psyche is given form through the cello, which begins as a thin solitary note. The echo of the Wall Street man singing *Send in the Clowns* is fresh in our memory, along with the train clanging through the station. Non-diegetic music recalling the intonations of Al Bowlly's *Midnight, the Stars and You*, as used in *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), sets an ironic elegance against an inevitable and undesirable outcome. In a recent interview at the Berlinale, Guðnadóttir described her sense of the film and the inspiration for the music as a 'very current character study; a very intense journey [where] a lot happens internally' (2020). She played all the cello music in the film, recorded from live performance which lends it a distinctly unique and intimate tone. The script for this scene was quite straightforward, but her music adds tone, depth and meaning, backgrounding the lyrical movement of Arthur going through his transformation.

The next section focuses on two key scenes in the film. The first on is the 'Journal scene' when Arthur's interior psychological state becomes externalised. Whereas the 'Metamorphosis scene' is the point at which the boundary of Arthur's identity breaks down and permits the Joker persona to claim control.

4. Journal Scene

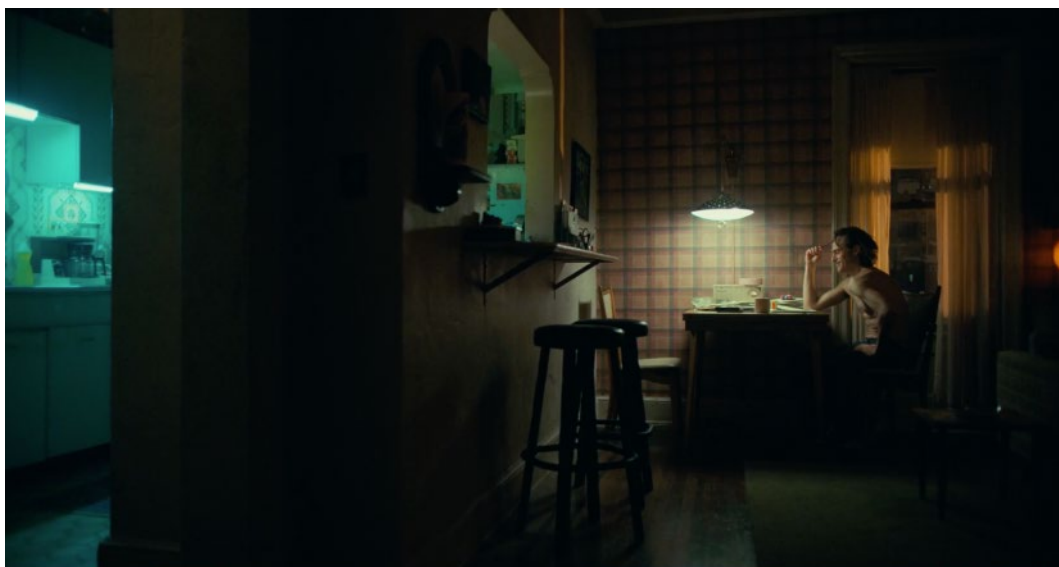


Figure 38 Journal scene

This two-minute scene runs from 00:26:01 to 00:27:59 so the audience is already familiar with the character. It opens in darkness except for this welcoming lamp-glow illuminating the seated

figure of Arthur as he writes in his journal². The scene transitions on Arthur's journal from the previous scene at the comedy club. We see the space, with gentle side lighting giving the apartment a feeling of warmth. Arthur sits at the dining table by the window to the city – a small figure to the far right of the screen. A warm orange wall-light sits at the same height as his dark head, but the front of his torso is lit up by a bright white pendulum-light over the small table. It also illuminates part of the grid-patterned wallpaper behind. The camera slowly moves towards him, switches to follow his point of view of the text as he scrawls about his daily struggle to be accepted, which he intends to present as comedic. He switches writing with his right hand to his left, amusing himself to counteract the immense despair of his isolation. His smile more closely resembles a grimace as he completes the sentence, amused either by his joke or his perverse attempt at ambidexterity.



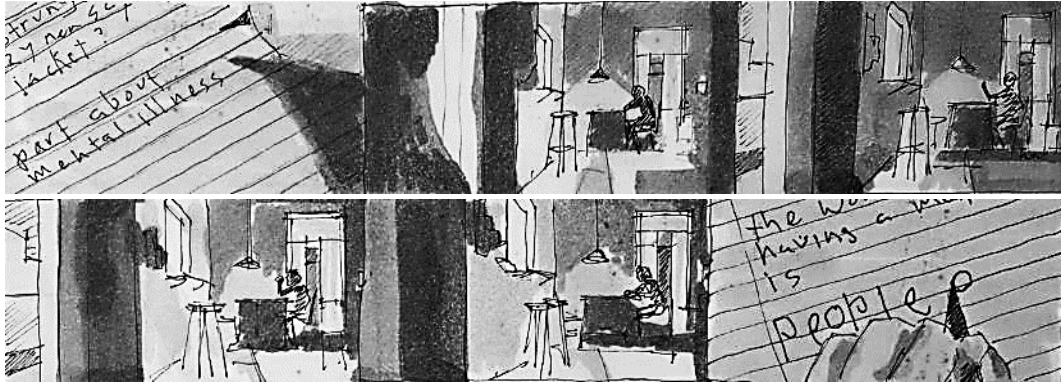
Figures 39-41 Storyboard sequence: Arthur's internal psyche is rendered visible



Figure 42 Overhead shot of Arthur's focus

The sudden switch to an overhead shot draws the viewer directly into Arthur's perspective, the objects of his life on display as if in a museum exhibit: journal, pill bottle, cigarette lighter, pen. As in the overall language of the film, this scene is a combination of long shots and extreme close-ups. There is also a distinct contrast between light and shade in the scene, which works alongside the contrast in colour tone. The process of writing is frequently used in therapy to separate oneself from their thoughts by externalising them. In this case, through this act Arthur seems transported to a new reality. There is a knock at the door; it is his neighbour Sophie Dumond (Zazie Beetz). His sense of self is elevated to someone who has an effortlessly good relationship and their conversation ends with a future date.

² Arthur refers to his notebook in the early scene with his therapist as both his 'journal' and his 'joke diary'. The term journal is used in the text to signify both.



Figures 43-48 Study of depth and contrast of light and shadow in the Journal scene



Figure 49 Journal Collage 1: The first *Joker* collage is a digital composite of images which emphasise the journal as a central component and introduces layers representing conscious and unconscious thought, gradually becoming expressed within the space.

Contrast is also evident in the sound within the scene, between diegetic and non-diegetic sources³. Cello is present from the start of the scene, high and grating, increasing in shrillness as the scene progresses, and retreating when the doorbell rings and the scene concludes. The score by Finnish composer Hildur Guðnadóttir conveys tones of unrest, melancholy, isolation, searching. A police siren fights the notes of the cello. One is steady and growing, straying into shrillness and back again, the other a pulsating urgent slow and steady tone. The doorbell buzzes and the music stops. Only voices are heard. The harsh cello surfaces only when he is alone. Is this the voice of his unconscious, his repressed shadow making his presence felt? The entire scene is excruciatingly intimate. The audience is permitted full access to Arthur's pain and loneliness and also the way he has learned to deal with it, through humour. It is deeply uncomfortable as the sentiments he writes reveal his true feelings, writing with his non-dominant left hand smiling in amusement, almost to spite his pain.

³ In this case the diegetic sounds are the police siren, the vague sound of traffic on the street below, the doorbell, and Arthur's brief conversation with Sophie (although that occurs in his mind). In this scene the non-diegetic sound is instrumental, primarily Guðnadóttir's cello, which we begin to associate with Arthur's inner psyche being expressed.



Figure 50 The composition of this shot at the end of the Journal scene amplifies Arthur's isolation, with dominant negative space and short siding at play



Figure 51 Journal Collage 2: Exposed layers of intrusion on Arthur's psyche

The collage reveals the irrepressible nature of the continuous noise inside Arthur's head, growing in presence as he opens the door to his inner thoughts through his writing. The scalpel cuts also allow access to a layer of sequential stills of the scene beneath, calling attention to the repetitive nature of his daily routine, indicating that this has happened many times before, and the ripped sections convey the sense of something building up and starting to break through, disrupting the apparently serene setting.



Figure 52 Journal Collage 3

Journal collage 3 (Figure 52) connects more apparently to the unconscious and hidden persona. The layers are more ambiguous here, making it harder to decipher what is at the forefront. The warmer tones of the space in the scene are invaded by the green of the later scene where Joker is fully born and accepted. This aquamarine colour appears in the kitchen space of this scene, and is glimpsed through the servery wall from the living room, contrasting with the warm orange, which surrounds Arthur. More of the surrounding space is visible in this collage; the empty chair and stools standing starkly, his thin frame appearing isolated, with the window to the dark city behind him. As he smokes, looking off in the direction of the kitchen's green glow, his gaze aligns with that of Joker. This helps plant the notion that Joker was fully formed in Arthur's mind before he is revealed to the audience. He had been evolving there slowly and unconsciously as an antidote to Arthur's timidity. His visible presence makes the red paint take on a more sinister tone, and it is permeated to reveal a hazy image of the Joker's visage. The white sections are more intrusive and disordered in this version, forming a chaotic frame around the moment.

Although voiceover is not used in *Joker*, the content of his journal is essential in making his inner psyche visible within this scene. The poignant tone in his writing is incorporated through the visceral language of the composition, which expresses the dialectic intimacy and immensity of the psychological burden Arthur is carrying.

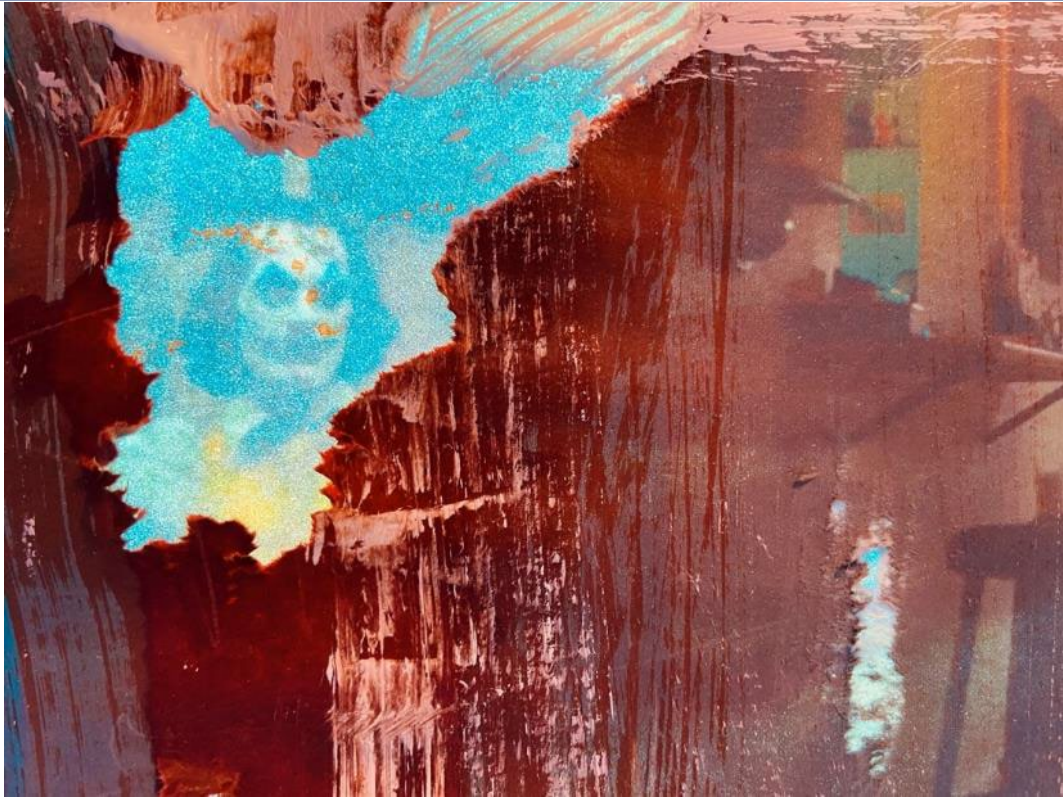


Figure 53 Journal Collage 3 (detail) Illuminated layers are revealed



Figure 54 Journal Collage 2 (detail)



Figure 55 Journal Collage 3 (detail)

The analysis through the storyboards identifies the components of the space Arthur occupies: architectural elements of enclosing walls, floor and ceiling, the small table and chairs, high stools at the counter and sources of artificial light at points around the kitchen and living room. Drawing the storyboards also helped isolate zones and proportions of light and shadow as well as hierarchy created through dominant colours within the space. The narrative to this point and the content of his writing inform the psychological motivation within the scene, which intensifies as the camera slowly zooms closer to his frail figure. The collages harness this powerful intensity through their acceptance of some of the isolated elements comprising the space, and the introduction of layers of intrusion above and beneath them. Past, present and future merge as he allows his innermost thoughts to be externalised on paper. The viewer has seen enough to recognise the pain that exposes itself through the guise of his unamusing ‘jokes’, which is rendered visible through the multiple layers of the collage. Amplification of certain architectural elements through scale or light mimics the behaviour of the psyche experiencing disruption, where perception is distorted and the familiar becomes the uncanny. The dialectic between the homeliness of the interior space and the searing emotional pain of the contents of his journal are the most powerful of the intangible forces revealed through the collage method.

5. Metamorphosis Scene



Figure 56 Digital collage of the Metamorphosis scene

(00:34:31 to 00:36:14) The undertones of the city's transport system are muted as Arthur pushes the door shut, breathing against it for a moment. He exhales; trying to process what has just happened and what his next move should be. The fluorescent lights flicker, cello music begins: a single note. He holds his breath. Something inside him is stirred. His foot slides along the floor, his body moving slowly to the music inside his head. Maybe it is not all wrong and senseless; something seems to click into place; something feels right. His movements morph into a graceful and flowing dance. The note is joined by a second in harmonious alignment. His eyes are downcast; arms move above his head and draw his gaze upwards. He continues his slow, smooth, all-encompassing movements; he turns one way, then the other. He pauses and his face vaguely darkens. He reaches downwards, one hand following the other, tightened into fists, searching. They find a new rhythm, arms sliding over each other expressing another side of his self, neither frail nor hesitant. His face changes again, registering acceptance. He straightens his body, arms outstretched, and presents his new face to his reflection. Joker is revealed.

This scene marks the crossing of a threshold where the shadow archetype comes to the fore. The 'metamorphosis' scene takes place in a public bathroom at the crux of the movie where Arthur evolves into Joker, or finally accepts the character that becomes Joker. The scene immediately preceding this takes place in the subway. Arthur is still dressed as a clown and has just been fired. Three young Wall Street type businessmen are hassling a woman in the same carriage, when Arthur's discomfort erupts as uncontrollable laughter, drawing the men's attention to him. He shoots two of them in self-defence and chases the injured third one from the train, shooting him several times on the platform. Arthur runs up the steps in the subway station and out into the city. His footsteps pound loudly on the street as his shadow precedes him, black and growing larger on the wall of the tunnel, in a highly noiresque shot. This highly emotionally-charged scene is full of frantic energy, communicated through his exaggerated manner of running, arms flailing, terrified, feet slapping through the damp street. This transition between two highly charged scenes is vital to framing the significance of the metamorphosis scene. Thoughts are suspended and there is only unconscious movement, from when Arthur runs up the subway steps until he ducks into the public bathroom. He slams the door behind him, breathing against it. Charged by the emotion of the previous scene Arthur finds himself entrapped within a strange paradox of terror and exhilaration, which matches the discomfort of the audience, at a moment when their understanding of who he is has just been thrown starkly into question.



Figures 57-59 Unconscious action

6. Conclusion to the Joker Analysis

My analysis of *Joker* is primarily based around two key disruptive events in Arthur's life. The first allows his inner psyche to become externalised through his journal writing. The second scene depicts the acceptance and reveal of the Joker persona. *Joker* engages vivid colour to convey the sense of the intangible. Storyboards were used to analyse tangible and intangible qualities of the scenes (including position of character within the frame, elements composing the space, light, contrast and colour). The collages were essentially an intuitive response to the expression of Arthur's experience in the film. His set-upon character feels the world closing in around him and Gotham city falling apart without even noticing him, uncannily resonant of certain aspects of our experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each collage began with a structured interior environment and through building up layers, gradually became more visceral and chaotic to reveal Arthur's underlying psyche. Viewing the collages as a work in continuous progress, it is expected that any following iterations might result in the complete obliteration of the original image, obscured by the overlying presence of the new persona of Joker.

In my analysis, *Joker* has provided a contemporary film language describing the existence of a character within a harsh urban and social context, which gradually drives him to a psychological break in order to deal with his perceived surroundings. Visually, the film can be viewed as the story of two separate characters: Initially, Arthur's psychological state of dislocation and hopelessness is conveyed through strategic cinematic language. The interior spaces he occupies seem to possess a claustrophobic sense of restriction, as for example, in his mother's apartment, the therapist's office, and the stairwell in Arkham asylum. Sound is also a contributory factor to the sense of unease and underlying discomfort. The instrumental cello soundtrack establishes a particularly strong alignment of psychological fragility within a restricted space. Even the vast scale of the city feels like its grey walls are closing in on him when their image is accompanied by the thin wails of the cello. From the scrawny appearance of his diminutive form within the composition, to the use of colour connected to his mood, and close alignment of sound with the inner psyche, the unfortunate environments Arthur continually finds himself in, feel like they are carried around with him. Arthur's inner shadow cannot be held inside for long, which brings us to his other persona, Joker, whom we catch glimpses of before he erupts into dominance in the Metamorphosis scene. His actions and violence are sudden and extreme as a reaction to a lifetime of Arthur's unconscious repressed anger, shame and hurt. The collages depict aspects of each persona, rendering their meaning ambiguous. They each show the presence of the underlying rage lying at the deepest layer, overlaid with a façade of daily existence with a vague order. The topmost layer represents Arthur's ever-shifting inner state, rife with conflict and disorder.



Figure 60 Arthur's sense of lack of control over his world reflected in the claustrophobia of the therapist's office

Joker builds intensity through the cramped, claustrophobic, object-filled interiors that Arthur is depicted in from the start. The walls of his therapist's office give the impression of a world closing in on him, with books and paperwork filed high in stacks from floor to ceiling. Mimicking the memory of him in a holding cell in the psychiatric hospital, the clock in each interior reads ten past eleven, intoning the interminable ticking as each second passes. The décor of the small one-bedroom apartment he shares with his cruel mother is that of an elderly lady, with nothing of his personality or preference apparent. The colours are bright and almost garish at times, dull and lifeless in other light. In contrast, *The Murray Franklin Show* beams in through the television full of colour, light and sound. In person, *Joker* is first revealed to the public in this circus-like space, fragmented and dispersed to millions of television sets around the city, where he can no longer be overlooked. In the *Metamorphosis* scene his appropriation of an urban interior space gives value to an otherwise anonymous public bathroom, where the persona of *Joker* is first revealed to himself. The sense of ambiguity also resurfaces as a vital quality suggesting more than the visual. Associations with certain colours, and the presence and location of objects in the environment which can be interpreted as being symbolic, suggest a further layer of meaning held within the interior, reflecting the inhabitant's internal mind.

6.1. Final observations

Film has proved to be an invaluable resource for multiple examples of lived space, affording a foundation for a language to open up discourse on its representation in architecture. A palpable connection exists between a character's psyche and the interiors in which they are depicted. Analysing extreme perceptions of ordinary spaces revealed aspects of film language that can be adopted to potentially inform a richer definition of lived space in architecture. As film and television continue to evolve alongside visual, aural and haptic technological advancements, we can further adopt their expressive syntax to inform means of representing our personal encounter with space. As a materialisation of the subjective encounter between a human and space, the collage can be viewed as a visible exchange between the psychological interior and the physical interior, with all that connotes. The collage therefore permits a discussion of architecture which is inseparable from its psychological effect. It is unrealistic to believe that Covid-19 is the last pandemic that will impact us. These critical physical, psychological and cultural outcomes highlight the importance of interdisciplinary research as well as the usefulness of collage, in providing a language with which to enunciate and potentially even address the mental implications of lockdown. The severe collective disruption of the pandemic opened eyes to the potential adaptability of interior space when necessary, and to realise that we can demand more from our interior space. This notion of drawing

together our intentions and expectations of our spaces through a method such as the psychospheric collage, can be a powerful tool facilitating the recognition of connections between our spaces and how we feel in them, and how even small changes can result in positive impact on our psychological state and ongoing psychological health and resilience.

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Resume

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