

A Multimodal Approach to the Investigation of the Representation of Character Alienation in Todd Phillips' Film *Joker* (2019)

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ABSTRACT

*Alienation is known to be the state of one's estrangement from their world or the society they live in, and it is usually reflected in how characters behave in and how they interact with their surroundings. In the context of films, one of the ways with which alienation is conveyed to viewers is through non-verbal techniques. Moreover, film discourse is a rich epitome for the field of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as it is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on multiple modes of communication. The corpus used in the current research is the film *Joker* (2019) which is directed by Todd Phillips. The focus of this research falls on the eccentric mind style (Fowler 1989) of the anti-hero, Arthur Fleck, who is later identified as the Joker. The emphasis of the study falls on the non-verbal plane of the American feature film. Accordingly, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) grammar of visual design is used to analyse how the character's mind style is portrayed and communicated via Phillips' use of cinematic techniques. The analysis has revealed that the representation of Arthur's character alienation is seen through certain camera techniques such as oblique angle, demand and offer gaze, and framing elements which have been used consistently to alienate the anti-hero from both the represented and interactive participants in addition to heighten his odd behaviour.*

Keywords: Alienation, Mind style, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of Discourse Analysis (DA) kept developing throughout the years until it became an essential field that includes interests in images, videos and sounds. It became multimodal in its nature when it is used to analyse communication. Furthermore, it became an academic field during the 1970s in which it studied the language used between people, whether spoken or written. With the rapid development in all aspects of life, communication has changed, and meanings are not only transferred through spoken or written language,

but they have taken other forms such as images, sounds and colours, with which one communicates information. Meanings are conveyed in all types of semiotic resources. These types of communication are vital, especially when they are used in mass media communication, such as feature films.

Accordingly, DA has widened its parameters to include multimodal communication. It has developed from studying spoken and written language only into studying language while including other modes such as gestures, images, sounds, etc. O'Halloran (2011, 1) describes Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as

a “paradigm in discourse studies” that covers “the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound”. Therefore, MDA became a rich field combining more than one academic discipline. It became interdisciplinary in nature because it involves Media Studies, Semiotics, and Linguistics. This field, having a variety of different modes, is a result of the rapid changes that are happening and affecting how everyone is communicating. How humans express themselves has been enriched with the development of technology. Whenever the source has a variety of different expressive means, the communication possesses the feature of multimodality.

Since film is multimodal in nature for having more than one mode of communication working together to create meaning, MDA plays an important role in understanding and analysing films from a linguistic perspective since it studies spoken language, as well as sound, images, videos, gestures, etc. Through MDA, one can have a complete understanding of feature films as they add a comprehensive appreciation of created meanings that are based in both linguistic and non-linguistic forms.

Focusing on the cinematic discourse, it carries the functionality of communication. Filmmakers use certain tools, such as lighting, camera angles, and scripts to convey their ideas to their audience. Thus, cinematic discourse turns into a way of communication between filmmakers and viewers. Janney (2012, 86) elaborates that the communicative form is given because of “the audiovisual discourse of film narration itself”. Filmmakers use the audiovisual tools to communicate with their audience about their characters’ portrayal and dramatic events, and how to interpret those in order to understand the main goal of the film and the triggered inferences. Viewers use the available verbal and non-verbal elements to understand the meanings in film. The reason why cinematic discourse is realised as a form of communication is because films are created to be seen and understood by viewers.

Cinematography contributes to representing relationships between the characters and the situation’s dynamics. As mentioned earlier, cinematography is the tool that helps filmmakers project their ideas on the audience whether they try to portray a certain character, their relationships and interactions with other characters, or the dynamics of certain events. Filmmakers motivate viewers to understand their ideas in a certain way by giving them specific tools to use while unfolding the events of the feature film. This takes place through the lighting, gestures, sound effects and camera angles. Having this in mind, the audience has no other option

but to use what is available to facilitate a successful communication process. Through cinematic discourse, the audience uses the available tools to analyse the characters and understand how their mentalities function.

One can understand the mentality of a character when provided with a description that reflects the character’s worldview. This description can be through verbal and non-verbal elements. The individuals’ minds are understood through their language and paralinguistic which is any other form of communication that does not have any verbal qualities. In other words, one can fully understand how a character’s mentality works by analysing how they use their language or paralinguistic in communication. In linguistics, Fowler (2007) coined the term “mind style” to refer to a character’s idiosyncratic mental view of the world. A character to be portrayed as odd or having a peculiar way of thinking is usually shown through their odd language and paralinguistic that reflects their mental instability. Mind style projects the mentality of a character, as well as their psychological and cognitive abilities. For it to be eccentric, their language or paralinguistic needs to reflect that. Thus, the force of the “mind style” concept increases as the linguistic and paralinguistic choices move towards peculiarity. It increases as the other increases leading those deviant characters to stand out from normal societies.

1.2 Scope of the Study

This study aims to discern the eccentric mind of the American feature film *Joker’s* (2019) anti-hero Arthur Fleck, who is also known as Joker, which leads to his alienation from the society he lives in. The study uses MDA tools to understand the representation of character alienation. It uses Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) model of grammar of visual design to illustrate how filmmakers use cinematic tools to guide the audience’s interpretation of the feature film. Accordingly, the model is used to understand how the representation of Arthur’s alienation is portrayed through cinematic techniques. As mentioned by the film’s director Todd Phillips in a Warner Brothers Entertainment interview (2020), the feature film was built upon the idea of character study; what made that character in such a way, or what led him to act that way.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of interdisciplinary studies by using multimodal tools of analysis to have

an in-depth understanding of the communicative processes that are presented through more than one mode. Therefore, the researchers perceive that it can be presented through the investigation of the representation of the character's alienation of the American feature film *Joker* (2019).

1.4 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: How is the anti-hero's eccentric mind that is manifested through Fowler's model represented through the grammar of visual design?

RQ 2: What are the cinematic techniques that contribute to the representation of Arthur's alienation?

The coordination between stylistics and MDA is very important for one to have a full understanding of a multimodal communicative process. Since film is a prime example of a multimodal communicative process, a multimodal approach is needed for a complete interpretation. As previously discussed, stylistics has recently become a multidisciplinary field in nature that includes linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines that help with understanding the linguistic features present in different types of texts. It includes mind style as a part of one of its sub-disciplines. One can have access to the minds of language producers through their verbal and non-verbal communication. Hence, the coordination between both branches is necessary to have a better understanding of the character's alienation in Todd Phillips' feature film *Joker*.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Stylistics

Leech (1969, 1-2) refers to literary stylistics as the "the study of the use of language in literature". Leech (1969, 1-2) defines stylistics as the place or ground where both linguistics and literature meet because it focuses on the style of literary texts as it shows its value and explains its meaning. This can be realised through studying the interrelations between the characteristics of a text. Thus, stylistics acts as a bridge between literature and linguistics. Furthermore, there have been arguments that stylistics does not only focus on literary works; it analyses different types of texts. Stylisticians focus on the language of texts and explain how meanings are formed using linguistic models (Norgaard, Montoro and Busse, 2010, 1). Its primary focus is on the linguistic features of different

types of texts explaining their significance for a valid interpretation process.

2.1.1 Mind Style

Semino (2002) explains that cognitive stylistics connects linguistic theories with cognitive theories to access the characters' minds and understand their worldviews. Semino and Culpeper (2002) suggest using cognitive stylistics in approaching characterisation when it comes to analyzing a fictional character. They (2002) explain that the combination of linguistic analysis and cognitive concerns helps in revealing a character's behavior and construction. In addition, Semino (2002, 97) elaborates that the concept of mind style reflects "an individual's characteristic cognitive habits, abilities and limitations". She (2002) argues that the diverse aspects of an individual's worldviews are all considered to be cognitive processes.

Earlier, Halliday (1971) puts a base to the concept of mind style without referring to the term itself. He relates the notion to the transitivity framework discussing that there is a cognitive meaning in all linguistic functions. Moreover, language producers express the experiences of their consciousness or "internal world" through their language. From language, one can understand how the speaker or writer perceives the world. Later, Fowler (2007, 103) coined the term "mind style" "to refer to any distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental self". He believes a speaker's utterance can reflect their worldview; cognitive tendencies can be reflected through language producers' utterances or written sentences which have significant effects on the recipients. Thus, how their thoughts are structured, or ideas are expressed, reflects their mind style.

2.2 Alienation

Encyclopedia Britannica (2021) defines alienation as when a person goes into a state of feeling estrangement or disconnection from their self or their society. People who show signs of alienation withdraw from their environment and show signs of rejection towards the people surrounding them. It is a common condition in contemporary life; it is a complex concept because it has roots in both disciplines; sociology and psychology. Alienation can negatively impact one's health or worsen an existing medical condition. In support of that, Oxford Reference (n.d.) adds that alienation can be a result of mental disorder or of social or political dissatisfaction. In addition to feeling disconnected or alienated from work, family, or the surrounding environment, alienated people suffer from other symptoms as well. Brown, Higgins and Paulson

(2003) mention that alienated people could suffer from the feeling of helplessness, a feeling that the world has no meaning, they cannot relate to anyone and cannot take part in group conversations, they feel different from the people around them which leads to difficulty approaching them, and they refuse to follow the rules.

2.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodality as a term is commonly discussed by linguists and semioticians (Liu, 2013, 1259). A communicative process is said to have the feature of multimodality when combining more than one semiotic mode together to construct meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, 28). It is when a variety of semiotic resources is intertwined to create a text-specific meaning. Accordingly, Adami (2017, 451) explains that it is a phenomenon of communication that includes the combination of different modes and semiotic resources such as "still and moving image, speech, writing, layout, gesture, and/or proxemics". Proxemics is known to be the study that focuses on the social or personal spatial division between people (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Multimodality is, therefore, what represents the different semiotic modes using the rules that help the viewers interpret the potential meanings since it sheds light on the variety of semiotic modes that interrelate to create meanings (Machin, 2007).

On a non-verbal plane, Montoro (2011) works on nonlinguistic mind style indicators. He comments that mind style is projected through the meanings that are transferred from one semiotic mean on to another. In his analysis of *Enduring Love*, Montoro (2011, 69-70) implements a multimodal approach to shed light on how mind style works, and how the verbal and non-verbal elements are used to project it. He believes that multimodality can help with the audience's comprehension "of how certain stylistic phenomena... can explain the way film narratives work."

2.4 Previous Studies

Montoro (2011) focuses on how verbal and non-verbal markers are used in Ian McEwan's novel *Enduring Love* (1997) and its cinematic adaptation by Roger Michell (2004) to create a deviant mind style. He investigates which verbal signs project the character's mind style and their multimodal equivalents that are found in gestures and via archetypal cinematic devices. The investigation takes place through applying a multimodal approach which sheds light on how mind

style works by helping readers and viewers enter the eccentric worldviews of the characters using the available verbal and nonverbal tools. *Enduring Love* (1997) tells the story of how a balloon incident in which people are trying to help and save a young boy's life end up impacting some of the lives of the people who are trying to help. One of the two main characters who were affected by the incident already shows marks of psychological idiosyncrasy at the beginning of the film. His case is described as erotomania or De Clérambault syndrome which states that he owns an unconventional mind style. As for the other character, he develops a post traumatic mind style that is reflected in his behaviour and way of thinking after the hot air balloon incident. Montoro comments on the use of certain unconventional camera techniques that project the unconventionality of both characters' eccentric mind styles. Certain camera techniques are used to project the sense of stalking and hunting as if one of the characters is prey and the other is the predator. Additionally, they are focusing on the iconicity of one of the characters' gestures via close-up shots. Montoro believes that only through applying a multimodal approach that one can fully understand the representation of odd mind styles.

Piazza (2011) focuses on the way serial killers are portrayed as deviant characters using pragmatics to investigate their divergence from conventional norms of speech. She argues that the connection between words and images plays a crucial role in determining the relationship between the actors and viewers. Furthermore, Piazza (2011) discusses that communicative deviance is a significant feature in horror feature films including verbal and nonverbal planes. Piazza's (2011) findings suggest that serial killers are characterised as unconventional in that they do not abide by the conventional conversational practices. They indicate that the pragmatic deviance occurs because of the gap between the unconventional mind of the serial killer and the conventional mainstream mind of their victim. Moreover, she sheds the light on the importance of the deviant visual markers that complete the representation of the characters' eccentric mind style. The filmmaker deploys camera techniques that violates the cooperative principles on a visual level. For example, the camera angles that show certain parts of the represented participants violate the maxim of quantity.

Jaafar (2019) in her study examines the mind style of the main character in the 1997 film *As Good as It Gets*. She investigates the mind-modelling of the character's mind for his unique eccentric mind style by applying corpus and cognitive stylistics. The main character is a novelist who is characterised as a misanthrope and

suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He struggles when socialising with the people around him due to his rude attitude and preference to be alone. The results show certain details of the main character's issue with OCD. Identifying body parts such as faces or hands are correlated with recurrent actions which is a typical feature of this disorder. In addition, it is shown that his keywords retrieval is bound to a certain person which adds to his alienation from his society. This is another feature of OCD.

There is insufficient research that discusses feature films with characters that have psychological issues and mental disorders using multimodal discourse analysis. Most of the multimodal discourse studies focus on feature film posters or TV ads (e.g. Hu 2019; Milani 2021; Peng 2022; Veranda 2022). Thus, this study contributes to feature films scholarship by providing an in-depth understanding of film discourse from a multimodal lens. This is carried through the analysis of the representation of character alienation of the anti-hero of the feature film *Joker*.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research conducts a qualitative, descriptive approach to investigate the mind style of the *Joker's* anti-hero Arthur Fleck who is also known as the Joker. The investigation of the character's mind style is conducted through the non-verbal plane to fully comprehend how the character's alienation from his society is represented linguistically. The analytical framework applies Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) model of visual design to analyse the frames that include features of alienation or shows the character's eccentric mind which in turn led to his alienation. Also, Fowler's (2007) concept of mind style is used as a reference to explain the eccentric mind of the character.

3.1 Kress and van Leeuwen's Model of Visual Grammar

Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (2014), Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006, 2021) model of visual design is used to analyse the visual data. Building on Halliday's metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual), Kress and van Leeuwen developed their model to fit the visual data analysis. Their three metafunctions are representational, interactive, and compositional.

The representational metafunction involves two types of images: narrative image and conceptual image. This metafunction focuses on the participants' relations to each other, and how their interactive processes are recognised through visual data using vectors. Characters are connected via vectors and portrayed doing something for or to each other while certain events and actions unfold. The narrative image only is adopted from this metafunction due to its alignment with the research's scope.

There are six types of narrative structures but only four types are used due to their relevance. These are action, reactional, speech and mental, and circumstances. Action processes are when the vectors are in the form of actions done by the participants. Reactional processes are when vectors are created through looks from the participants. As for the speech and mental processes, they take place when there are linguistic dialogues and when there are cinematic techniques that show the character's mental processes respectively. Finally, circumstances processes are secondary participants that give additional information which could be in the form of a tool, location, or secondary participants.

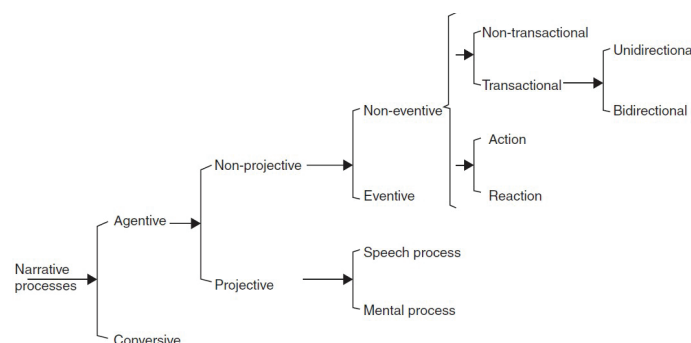


Figure 1. "Narrative Structure in Visual Communication," (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021, 74)

The interactive metafunction focuses on the interpersonal relations between the sign producer and the sign receiver. Certain non-verbal features, such as the demand and offer gaze, the social distance of the represented participant on the screen, and the attitude or the camera angles, allow the viewers, or as Kress and van Leeuwen say, "interactive participants" to analyse the actors or "represented participants".

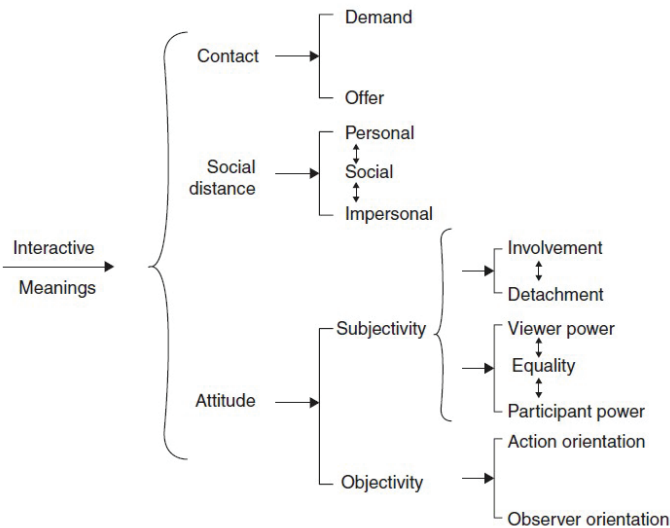


Figure 2. "Interactive Meanings in Images," (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021, 149)

Lastly, the compositional metafunction focuses on "the realisation of different textual meanings" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021, 43). The meaning of text depends on the position of the object in a composition, the meaning changes according to the object's position. This metafunction includes three main points: information value, salience, and framing. From the object's position in a composition, the interactive participant knows the value of the information whether it is new or given, ideal or real, and important or not. As for the salience, Kress and van Leeuwen comment that regardless of the object's position in a composition, salience "can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements" through a variety of different factors such as, the size, colour contrast, focus, and perspective. Finally, the framing in a composition can show whether the elements that are present in the frame are connected or disconnected, whether they belong together or not.

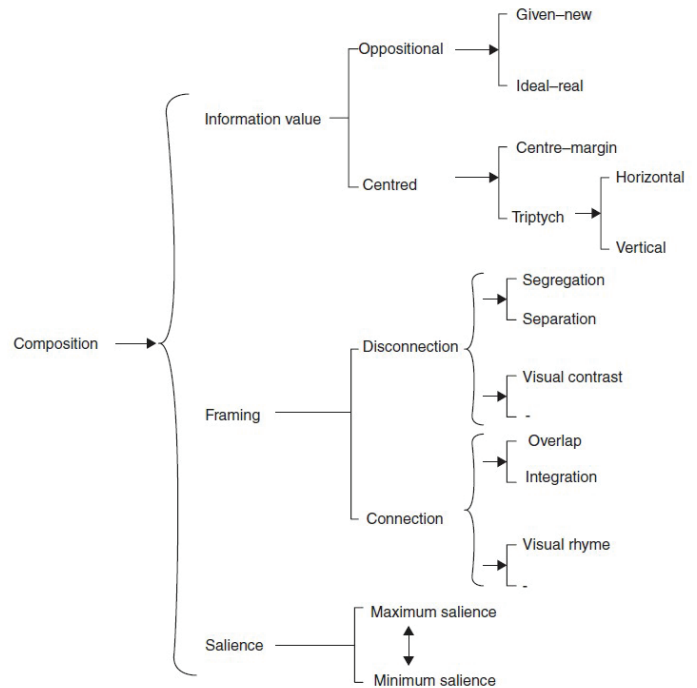


Figure 3. "The Meaning of Composition," (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021, 210)

Moreover, Kress and van Leeuwen discuss that there are two types of participants which are interactive and represented participants. The former refers to the viewers or the readers, while the latter refers to the characters that are in the text. The represented participants' degree of significance varies from one another, and this is portrayed through the salience, colour, size, and place of the character on the visual plane.

3.2 Fowler's Mind Style

Fowler (2007) suggests that cognitive and logical distinctions are conveyed via deep sentence structures. The speaker's worldview is reflected and expressed in their deep sentence structures. Thus, language and the representation of reality are interrelated together. Furthermore, the connection between language and worldview through linguistics has some prominent implications when it comes to the study of fiction. First, how characters and occurrences in fiction may bear a resemblance to the standard of "predicate-types and noun-types". Second, how within a sentence, a writer's word choices may reflect certain cognitive tendencies whether to the writers themselves or their characters. Finally, a writer may manipulate the depth of their sentences, whether make it a deep or a surface structure, which thoroughly affect the receiver's comprehension of the text's propositional meaning.

Fowler (2007) comments on how language techniques can control the audience's experiences while reading or watching a fictional work. He says that the audience may sympathise with the fortunes of the fictional characters, but in the end, the content is nothing but a mere representation of reality. Representation is certainly an expressive process via language. Hence, language proves to be a powerful committing space to work in. The words and sentences that are produced from a speaker or a writer usually have a significant effect on its receivers. Fowler mentions that one does not say something without having an "attitude towards" it. According to Fowler (2007), when a speaker or a writer uses a consistent language style or they present their ideas and how they see things in a certain pattern, this usually sheds light on their worldview; it reflects their mind style.

The term mind style is coined by Fowler (2007) to refer to any odd or distinguishing linguistic presentation of one's mental self. A character's mental life can be analysed through their mind style. How their conscious thoughts are structured and how they present and discuss topics. Besides, their display of personal perspectives, prejudices and values reflect their worldview. Whether the character has cognitive limitations or a conventional mind style, in all cases this is reflected in their language.

3.3 Corpus of the Research

The corpus used in this research is the feature film *Joker*. It was initially released in 2019 and is directed and produced by Todd Phillips who co-wrote the screenplay as well. The focus of the study is the feature film's anti-hero Arthur Fleck who is also known as Joker as the feature film develops. The anti-hero is known to be a mentally ill character who is struggling to be a comedian. He is treated by the society he loves as an outcast which explains the society's bullying and neglect towards him.

Arthur suffers from pseudobulbar affect which is also known as Involuntary Emotional Expression Disorder (IEED) that occurred due to his severe traumatic brain injury when he was severely abused by his adoptive parents as a child. Since this condition impairs the convenient psychological functioning, it is considered a mental illness. People with such disorder have episodes of pathological laughter. In other words, they suffer from uncontrollable laughing fits which are an outcome of anger, anxiety, or depression. Through the feature film, the audience learns about Arthur's medical condition when he suffers from an episode

of pathological laughing on a public transportation. He later hands a card to one of the passengers that explains that he has a medical condition that causes sudden or uncontrollable laughing. It further explains that the condition that he has is a result of a neurological disorder or a brain injury.

The feature film's plot takes place in 1981 in Gotham city. Arthur Fleck who is also known as the film's Joker lives with his sick mother. He strives to be a stand-up comedian, but as the feature film develops, the audience can see that Arthur who works as a clown is being abused and bullied by everyone, both, the people around him in the society, as well as his colleagues. Arthur gets into a fight with three Wallstreet men which leads to him killing them all with his gun. It was at this moment that Arthur's alter ego, which is the opposite side of him that people do not usually see, Joker, starts to take control of him.

3.4 Rationale for Data Selection

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) model of visual design is applied on five frames. These frames are chosen based on having salient features of alienation or highlighting unconventional attitudes by the anti-hero that leads to his alienation. Such salient, unconventional features are created by the director Todd Phillips through cinematic techniques to portray an odd character and guide the audience's interpretation.

The study uses two tools which are Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) model of visual grammar and Fowler's (2007) mind style. They are used to discern the deviant mind of the main character of the feature film *Joker* to understand the representation of his character alienation. Such cooperation between these frameworks provides one to have a full understanding of the character's odd worldview. Thus, this helps in having an in-depth analysis in understanding the communicative processes that are presented through more than one mode.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following section attempts to answer the research questions that are guiding the whole research. First, it discusses how the character's mind style is portrayed nonverbally using Kress and van Leeuwen's model. Second, it sheds light on the cinematic techniques that contribute to the representation of Arthur's alienation. Thus, the detailed analysis in the following

section provides an insight into the representation of the Joker's character alienation.

4.1 The Representation of Character Alienation Through the Non-Verbal Plane

Filmmakers use non-verbal tools to communicate with their audience. Accordingly, Todd Phillips makes use of certain cinematic tools to project his ideas on the interactive participants. The model of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) shows the representation of Arthur's alienation from the society. The feature film is constructed in a way to help guide the interactive participants understand Arthur's deviant mind style. It is through certain visual elements in the film that the picture of Arthur's eccentric mind style is created and thus becomes the reason behind his alienation. The cinematic techniques project his deviance to put emphasis on the abnormality that led to his alienation.



Figure 4. "The opening scene" (Phillips 2019, 00:00:20 min)

Figure 4 is the opening scene to the feature film *Joker* where the audience is first introduced to the anti-hero Arthur Fleck. Arthur is the character who is putting on clown make up and is in the centre of the visual plane. He works as a clown at a company called HA-HAs. Moreover, he is surrounded by his colleagues; one of them is doing the same as Arthur on the other side of the visual plane, and others are just sitting together at a table. The narrative process in the shot represented in figure 4 is a bidirectional transactional action process because Arthur is both the Actor and the Goal. He is putting on his clown makeup. His colleagues act as a circumstance of locative. They are secondary represented participants who contribute to the setting. The camera angle used is an oblique angle, in addition, the size of the frame is a very long shot. Arthur is put in the centre of the frame with a sharp focus on him. Finally, the last element in the Kress and van Leeuwen's model, framing, is seen in the shot where there is a line between Arthur and

his colleagues, and it is created through the window frame.

Todd Phillips, the director, uses cinematic techniques to represent the character's alienation from his colleagues, the represented participants, and at the same time the interactive participants. Phillips uses the oblique angle in the shot to create a sense of detachment between the anti-hero and the interactive participants. It is a way to express that they are not part of the anti-hero's world. In addition, he uses a very long shot to make the social distance a public one where the interactive participants and Arthur are complete strangers at this moment. The interactive participants are aware that Arthur is the most salient character because of his centre position in the frame, in addition to having the focus on him. As Phillips separates Arthur from the audience using an oblique angle, he uses a framing element to separate him from his colleagues. The window frame on Arthur's left acts as a separation tool between him and the others who are all together taking the left side of the frame. Phillips is showing how Arthur is disconnected and acts as a separate entity from both the represented and the interactive participants.



Figure 5. "Arthur is forcing a smile on his face" (Phillips 2019, 00:01:21 min)

Figure 5 takes the same place as figure 4. While Arthur is putting on his clown make up, he is represented as forcing a smile on his face, yet a tear drops on his cheek. This illustrates the magnitude of his unhappiness. Playing the role of a clown, he believes that he should always wear a smile on his face. Since this contradicts how he feels, a tear drops because of feeling frustrated that he cannot be happy.

Moreover, Phillips is using more than one element to represent Arthur's struggle with trying to be happy and his true emotions of depression because he cannot accept his true nature. He deploys gestures to depict how Arthur strives to keep a smile on his face by forcing it. This is portrayed by foregrounding Arthur's

facial expressions with the use of an extreme close-up shot that sharply focuses on his eyes displaying the details of the hand gestures that force a smile on his face. This is considered a bidirectional transactional action process because Arthur is both the Actor and Goal in which he is doing the action on himself.

Furthermore, the shot is a non-transactional reaction because there is only the Reactor and the vector. Arthur is the Reactor, but the Phenomenon is absent in this shot. Using an offer gaze and an oblique angle, Phillips detaches the interactive participants from Arthur's world. He depicts Arthur as an abnormal character that does not belong to the normal people's social circle; he belongs to the 'others' category.



Figure 6. "Arthur fantasising about being on *The Murray Franklin Show*," (Phillips 2019, 00:14:03 min)

Arthur has a favourite show called *The Murray Franklin Show* which he watches with his mother. The host of the show is called Murray Franklin who Arthur idolizes and wishes to meet one day. At home, Arthur is represented as sitting with his mother on bed watching the show. As they watch, Arthur phases out fantasising his being on the show where he has a warm conversation with Murray as shown in figure 6. Not only does he fantasise this scene, but he also imagines himself sitting amongst the audience who looks at him with acceptance and in admiration.

Throughout the feature film, Arthur sometimes has fantasies about being accepted by the society he lives in. Since he longs for the warm feeling of having a group identity, he creates unrealistic scenarios that are impossible to materialise. Arthur fantasises about being a normal person who belongs to a typical social circle who admire him for taking good care of his mother.

The narrative process is a non-transactional reaction. The interactive participants can see that Arthur talks to someone, but the Phenomenon is not present in the frame. As for the audience who sits around Arthur,

they act as a circumstance of locative because they are secondary represented participants that are part of the setting. Arthur's fantasy of being accepted is highly salient. The focus of the shot only falls on Arthur which foregrounds him from the secondary participants. Thus, he stands out from the crowd that he seeks acceptance from. Moreover, his place on the plane is centralised which emphasises the importance of the character, in addition, the strength of his fantasy. Arthur desperately seeks the attention and acceptance of the people around him. Finally, Phillips constructs this shot with no frame lines separating Arthur and the secondary represented participants, in addition, the angle in which the shot is taken from is a horizontal one. Thus, Arthur is connected to the audience, and at the same time, the interactive participants who are involved in his world. In this fantasy, Arthur is represented as a normal person, thus, there is no need to disconnect him from the interactive and represented participants.



Figure 7. "Arthur sitting by himself at his workplace" (Phillips 2019, 00:15:47 min)

Arthur is represented at his workplace sitting on his own on the right side of the visual plane. He does not seem to be feeling well because of what happened the previous day at work. This was during his last clown gig when some kids jumped on him on the street, stole the sign he was using, and escaped. He ran after them to get the sign back, but they hit him with it, and then started beating him up, leaving him on the ground with the destroyed sign.

The following scene is another example of how Phillips represents Arthur's alienation. Arthur is positioned on the far right of the visual plane separated from his colleagues by the beginning of a column. The framing signifies differentiation from others while others do not have any frame lines separating them from each other which signifies their group identity. The narrative process in the following shot is a mental process. Arthur is represented as feeling down and

frustrated; however, no one heeds him any attention or acknowledges his feelings. Some of them laugh and play cards, while another gets ready for a gig by putting clown makeup on. This shot emphasises how Arthur is all alone and that he is discarded by the people around him.

Not only is Arthur disconnected from his colleagues through the presence of frame lines in the shot, but he is disconnected from the interactive participants as well. The angle in which the shot is taken from is oblique which creates a sense of detachment between Arthur and the interactive participants. Additionally, the size of the frame is a very long shot which states that the social distance is a public one. Hence, the interactive participants just observe Arthur's state from afar as strangers.



Figure 8. "Arthur Pointing a gun at the wall" (Phillips 2019, 00:23:10 min)

Figure 8 shows how Arthur is portrayed as watching a musical film on TV at home. He goes through one of his phasing out moments and starts imagining himself with a company who dance together. As he is having a conversation with one of his imaginary people, the conversation escalates to the point that Arthur is confident enough about his dancing skills, and judges that there is another imaginary person in the room who does not know how to dance. He then uses the gun he is holding and shoots that imaginary person because of his poor dancing skills as if he is not good enough to be alive.

There are multiple cinematic techniques present in the shot that emphasise Arthur's deviant mind style. First, the salience of the character's act is high. Arthur is sharply focused on. Such foregrounding heightens the abnormality of what he is doing as exemplified in his acts of having a conversation with imaginary people and then shooting one of them because of his poor dancing skills. Another element that intensifies his odd behaviour is his place on the visual plane. Arthur is configured on the left side of the frame with no other

characters on the other side. Thus, there is asymmetry in the shot that emphasises the heaviness of the character's abnormality. Moreover, the character is represented as powerful which is realised through the low angle from which the shot is taken. This signifies that Arthur feels powerful when he acts as his true self. Being himself is something he does not experience when he is around people and that leads to him always feeling weak. Thus, he fantasises about the power of being his true self.

Finally, because of the high peculiarity of the scene, Phillips detaches the interactive participants from Arthur's deviant world. This occurs through two elements. First, he uses an oblique angle so that the interactive participants act as onlookers who witness the oddity of Arthur and keep their distance at the same time. The other element that is used in the shot is the offer gaze. Arthur does not look at the interactive participants which affords him to eschew any social bonds with them. They are to remain strangers since they do not belong to his world.



Figure 9. "After Arthur kills Randall" (Phillips 2019, 01:29:01 min)

Figure 9 is after Arthur murders Randall, his colleague. Arthur proceeds to speak casually to Gary, another colleague of Arthur, about him being a guest on The Murray Franklin Show as if nothing happened. He treats the situation in which he kills Randall as if it is a normal thing since Randall deserves it. When Arthur notices how terrified Gary is, he reassures him that he will not hurt him and that he can leave if he wants.

Throughout the feature film Arthur is represented as only hurting the people who betray his trust. When he avenges himself by murdering these people, he does not feel bothered with these killings. This signifies his eccentricity. It is signified even more throughout the cinematic techniques where the salience of Arthur's odd mind style is heavy due to the foregrounding and sharp focus on his smile after brutally murdering Randall. In addition, his presence on the left side

of the visual plane creates asymmetry in the frame which increases the heaviness of the character and increases the salience of the odd act he did. Finally, the two important elements that detach the interactive participants from Arthur are present in the shot which are the oblique angle and the offer gaze. The shot shows a lot about Arthur's mind style and gives enough information for the interactive participants to understand why Arthur's society is alienating him.



Figure 10. "Arthur in a police car watching the world go into chaos" (Phillips 2019, 01:47:01 min)

After Arthur kills Murray Franklin on live tv and creates chaos on set, he gets arrested by the police. The following scene portrays Arthur at the back of a police car watching the chaos that unfolds everywhere where there is fire, people vandalising the streets and robberies taking place. Arthur is represented as enjoying such view where he witnesses a chaotic world. He is portrayed as smiling as he watches everything getting destroyed particularly when he is the main reason behind it.

The narrative process in the following shot is a mental narrative process. The foregrounding and sharp focus on Arthur's eyes and smile, in addition to the close up shot increase the salience of his eccentric mind. Phillips foregrounds Arthur's features to emphasise his admiration of chaos as he appreciates it as amiable. This signifies the eccentricity of his mind style and how the representation of Arthur's mental illness was awarded in the feature film *Joker*. Furthermore, Arthur throughout the feature film is shown to be depressed whenever he looks out of the window where he watches the society that he does not belong to. However, this time when there is chaos, he looks out of the window with admiration and happiness because he knows that this is the world he belongs to and that his true self will be accepted amongst these people who are seen and treated as 'other'. The interactive participants are still observers of Arthur's abnormal, chaotic world and this takes place through the oblique angle and the offer gaze.

In conclusion, Phillips uses mostly the oblique angle, the offer gaze, and positioning Arthur in the centre of the frame. These three techniques are used consistently throughout the feature film to emphasise the idea that the interactive participants do not belong to Arthur's world, to not have a close relationship with him, and to emphasise the significance of Arthur's abnormal behaviour respectively. In addition, the representation of Arthur's mental illness was awarded in this feature film through close up shots that highlighted Arthur's abnormal features and eccentric mind style. These cinematic techniques are how Phillips converses with the interactive participants about Arthur's alienation and engages them in his violent behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION

It is contended that in cinematic discourse, feature films convey different meanings to the audience. It is construed through different visual and auditory elements that include how visual elements are configured in a certain order within a frame, how the camera works, and how to put the shot in a sequence that is coherent. All these elements contribute together to create a feature film that has an impact on the audience. Thus, a multimodal approach is much needed to understand how different modes of communication are co-deployed to create meaning. Hence, this paper has attempted to answer how a non-verbal approach is used to investigate the representation of the character's alienation in Todd Phillips' film *Joker* from a linguistic perspective through the application of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) model of visual grammar. The model's three metafunctions: representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions overlap in the frames to deliver the representation of Arthur's alienation from the society, and how he was rejected by his own society which intensified his sense of alienation and negatively affected his health as well as worsened his condition. In other words, the audience is likely to discern how a mentally ill loner being crossed by a merciless society that is on the verge of chaos can lead to monstrous savagery.

Phillips uses certain recurrent cinematic techniques to represent the anti-hero's alienation. First, the long shots are sometimes used to represent the far social relationship between Arthur and the audience. In addition to this, he uses the offer gaze and oblique angles. These three techniques are to emphasise that the audience and Arthur do not belong to the same world due to having different worldviews. Moreover, Phillips deploys frame lines to separate Arthur from the other interactive participants to show that they as

well do not belong to the same world and are different. Close up shots are used throughout the feature film *Joker* to highlight certain emotions of struggle and abnormality that make Arthur who he is, in addition to the representation of his mental illness which led to people casting him out of their social circles. Hence, these cinematic techniques create the representation of the character's alienation in Phillips' feature film *Joker*, in addition to how Phillips converses with the

audience about Arthur's alienation, engaging them in his violent behaviour. Accordingly, the two research questions of how the anti-hero's eccentric mind style was represented through the model of grammar of visual design, and which cinematic techniques that Phillips used to contribute to the representation of Arthur's alienation are answered supporting the hypothesis made by the researchers.

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