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MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY OF A POSTHUMAN NOMAD: A DELEUZIAN READING OF THE JOKER

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ABSTRACT
Becoming 'minoritarian', for Deleuze and Guattari is an action that happens outside of the dominant discourse. It is a process of deterritorialization to reinvent a minority stance. Through becoming, one can create myriads of identities and use it to resist the State Apparatus, Social Objectification, and Categorization. Becoming is not evolution by descent or affiliation, but it is an infinite process of metamorphosis. Todd Phillip's latest film Joker (2019) portrays such a becoming of its titular character. Joker is the recurring archenemy of Batman and one of the most enduring fictional characters of all time. In the various movies, books, and games featuring Joker, he is called the Clown Prince of Crime. The Joker gives a profound look into the various psychological particularities of the character's criminal mind and substantially reveals his philosophical position towards life in a Posthuman Society. Through an examination of Joker's life and plight in Gotham City, the study tries to explore the trajectories of Becoming a Nomad in a society where class war still exists. More importantly, the study is an attempt to figure out the domino effect of anarchy in a totalitarian regime.

INTRODUCTION
Violence has an ineluctable connection with human culture and civilization. It is one of the significant aspects that distort the boundary between man and other non-human species. Violence is considered as natural instinct, which needs to be controlled and tamed to make human civilization possible. However, Nihilists believe that violence can be used as an effective apparatus of dissent (Zizek, 2007: 42). Violence, Nihilism, Anarchy, and War are some

of the key concepts studied and developed by the Post-structuralist thinkers like Slavoj Zizek, Gilles Deleuze, Hannah Arendt, and Frantz Fanon in the late 20th Century.

The film undertaken for the study, unlike any of the previous films that feature Batman-Joker, does not have protagonists with Super Power or larger than life narration. Todd Phillip's Joker (2019) cleverly portrays an ordinary man's descend into madness, but at the same time, the film makes its viewers empathize with the anarchist as a victim of circumstances and elevates him to the position of an iconic vigilante. Joker is the most popular and insane villain in the whole of DC Comics. He has myriad hues in his character, which makes him an unpredictable and unfathomable Criminal Mastermind. The fact that Joker has no particular reason behind his extreme acts of anarchy makes him an unparalleled villain.

The Joker embarks on his tumultuous journey of chaos and violence since his first appearance in the DC Comic book Batman on 25th April 1940. Ever since his debut, this iconic character has been a cult figure featuring in a copious number of Books, T. V. Series, Films, and Games. The character's first on-screen adaptation happened in the 1966 film Batman. Christopher Nolan's highly acclaimed Batman Trilogy; Batman Begins (2005), The Dark Knight (2008), and The Dark Knight Rises (2012) changed the history of this archetypal character. The unfortunate death of the actor Heath Ledger, who gave an unparalleled performance as the Psychopathic Joker character in The Dark Knight brought much attention and a bunch of urban myths from the viewers' all around. Though the reason for his death is uncertain, there are speculations that he was so obsessed with the character's negative and dark persona that it led him to consume a lot of drugs. Joker is indeed a Super-villain with more fan base than the hero counterpart, Batman.

Todd Phillip's Joker continued a trajectory in comic books to film adaptation away from the banality that is visible in other Superhero films like Spiderman, Superman, or Avengers. Notwithstanding the fact that Todd preferred a certain amount of realism and drama to give the character a back story, Joker like any of Batman's Super-villains creates a chaotic and disastrous Gotham.

LITERATURE REVIEW
DC Comics have been widely researched incorporating various Theories from Literature, Political Science, and Visual Communication. In that, the Batman-Joker relationship has been a dynamic area of discussion for its philosophical value. Using the theoretical framework of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, Spanjers (2010: 2) conducts an in-depth study of the character, Joker. He identifies that Joker's hysterical laughter works as a Defense Mechanism to resist others from knowing his motive behind the violent acts. The study says that Joker's laughter instills fear and dilemma among characters and that makes him an enigmatic villain.

From a Psychological point of view, Terrill (1993: 325) conducts a reading of select DC Comics featuring Batman and Joker and connects Gotham City to Human Psyche. He finds Joker as the agent who arouses the repressed thoughts and desires of the unconscious and Batman as the ultimate savior or the Super-Ego that resists Joker's actions. Ewald (2017: 11) in his paper investigates the reason behind Joker's popularity and claims that it is because the viewers and readers can relate to Joker's character. The researcher calls Joker a 'Super-villain' for his unpredictable actions and more-than-human abilities. Joker as the face of Alienation, Marginalization, and Failure in a corporate world stands as a symbol of resistance against the devouring tyrannical power that often considers the browbeaten and downtrodden as hopeless.

In a later study, Lukic (2018: 205) concentrates on the aspect of space/place in the select films that include Nolan's The Dark Knight Trilogy and Tim Burton's Batman. The researcher maps out Gotham City in the light of Foucauldian Discourse analysis and Jeremy Bentham's concept of Panopticon Gaze. This architectural study on Gotham City illustrates Batman's Bat Cave as the watchtower or "the laboratory of power" (2018: 204) and the Crime Alley as a Heterotopian Space. Further, the researcher finds that Gotham City acts as a vital character throughout the films. However, the study gives less attention to Joker in the discussion.

Jurgens (2014: 448) argues that Batman's Joker is a neo-modern clown that has its roots in the '(circus-) pantomimes'. The study traces the history of the Clown Archetype of the 19th Century to the evil- Joker Clown of the 2oth Century. Joker is a circus clown whose actions and appearance have deconstructed and reconstructed overtimes. The researcher opines that Joker's evilness is embedded in him from the early days itself and it remains the same even today.
Based on this brie
f review, the current study is an attempt to pursue a thorough understanding of the metamorphosis of Arthur Fleck aka Joker from a vulnerable working-class man to the Mephistopheles of Mirth. The researcher endeavors to interpret the latest Joker (2019) film of Todd Phillips using different critical perspectives from Post-structuralism.

Arthur's predicament in gotham city: a territorialized body

The Joker (2019) chronicles the rise of a deranged- anemic, sickly thin, wild-eyed, and green-haired Psychopath with an insatiable appetite for destruction. Set in decrepit Gotham City, the film focuses on the life of Arthur Fleck, the unholy child of a harsh, mirthless world. Instead of following the tradition of presenting an origin-less, enigmatic Clown Prince of Crime, the film gives a disenfranchised working-class man whose violent acts are the product of a mixture of mental and social problems.

Arthur Fleck as a marginalized individual is torn between his mediocre life in Gotham and his desire to fit in the elite society that denies him constantly. The film shows Gotham as a failed state that is hostile to its marginalized community of which Arthur is a part. The film starts with the City facing massive problems due to the excessive number of rats from its pile of garbage (2019, 00:08:46). Gotham is no longer livable with its crowded dilapidated buildings, vintage cars, and mendicant citizens. Arthur requires counseling, but the Gotham government fails to provide him any support. The Social Worker says to Arthur:

Social Worker: …We won't be. The city's cut funding across the board. Social service is part of that.

Joker: Okay. (Joker nods, not hating the idea).
Social Worker: They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. You don't have a voice and they don't really care what happens to you or to us for that matter. (He sits there for a moment) (2019, 00:17:45).

The given context portrays Gotham as an economically deprived state with poor administration. At the same time, the film shows the place being amicable with its upper-crust members. Arthur faces assaults and physical attacks on a daily basis from almost everyone he meets. His fragile physique, a medical condition, and moreover his socio-economic status and occupation stops him from resisting assaults which he faces daily.

At the beginning of the film, Arthur is introduced as a clown who is willing to be vulnerable and lie to himself in hopes to make others feel happier than he does. Arthur shows many signs of major Psychological disorders including Delusion, Schizophrenia, and Depression. He has low self-esteem, a lack of eye contact, a nervous smile, and an indistinct voice. He is mentally and physically unstable; and has a disorder called Pseudobulbar Affect, a medical condition that causes uncontrollable random laughter. Moreover, Arthur swings between different replacements for his absent father figure. This includes Murray Franklin; the comedian, Randall; his colleague, and Thomas Wayne. Arthur is constantly deceived by his own identity as he doesn't have one concrete. Later, the film reveals that Arthur had been abused by Penny Fleck when he was a child and that she is not his biological mother. "Adults are often left struggling with fears and fantasies they were supposed to have left behind in childhood" (Freud, 2010: 140). Thus, the series of setbacks and humiliations Arthur faces gradually catalyzes his fall into a violent and rage-fueled madman, aimed at the system that failed to treat people like him, as human.

Arthur and His Rhizomatic Identities: A Detteritorializing Body

Schizoanalysis is a counter approach to Psychoanalysis introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their work Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Vol:

1&2). According to Deleuze and Guattari, "the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities" (1981: 275). The film shows Arthur as a man who is trapped in multiple identities or 'selves' that are attributed by the people around him. He has no honest emotional authorship in his own identity; instead, he is defined by the behavioral norms and guidelines that are conditioned into him by his mother and society.

Arthur's relationship with his bedridden mother is perceived by others in the film as strange and unacceptable:

As the music continues, Joker puts his face up against his mom's nose, to see if she's breathing or if she's dead. He feels her breath against his cheek. Now he picks his mother up in his arms and carries her into her bedroom to the music, almost as if he's dancing with her as he leaves the room.(2019, 00:43:01).

The absence of a father figure to compromise his relationship with his mother is a key factor in the film. As Freud says; "dreams are concealed realization of repressed desires" (2010: 62). In one of his hallucinations, Arthur tells Murray Franklin that, he still lives with his mother is perhaps indicates his understanding that it is against the accepted societal rules. A repressive father figure is represented by the accepted laws and societal norms that constantly remind him of his unhealthy relationship with his mother. Arthur is inculcated by a moral framework around him. He notes down the rules of standup comedy but struggles to comprehend the unwritten rules around him. Arthur needs guidance but he has no reliable mentor. Now, his desire to have a father figure has displaced Murray Franklin, who is his idol and a source of a moral framework. Later, Arthur diverts his fatherly affection towards his colleague Randall who gives him bits of advice to fit in the society. Arthur is confused and exhausted by the identities and territories each one gives him. Most of the time, he doesn't know what emotion to show.

The Rhizome is an important concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizome is a bunch of non-hierarchical multiplicities without any structure and it is opposite to the 'arborescent' formations. Here, Arthurs's understanding of the self can be approached with the concept of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981: 344). He has no stable sense of identity, as he is uncertain about the identity of his parents and his origin. Every now and then, he locates new reliable figures for moral guidance. His murder of Murray Franklin, Randall, and Penny Fleck, who attributed him different identities, can be interpreted as his crossing of each self or threshold in the course of becoming.

Becoming a nomad or becoming a body of intensities

"Wherever there is a multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with that individual that an alliance must be made in order to become-animal" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981: 243). .

According to Deleuze and Guattari, every assemblage has a tendency either towards stasis or towards becoming. Becoming always involves a pack, a band, or a multiplicity. In the context of the film, Arthur's self constantly evolves and amalgamates with new identities that attribute by others. This amalgamation transforms into lines of flight that connect them outside of themselves and transforms them. Lines of flight are the energy that escapes a controlling system (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981: 207). These lines explore new areas or directions where one can enter in the process of becoming. Arthur's transformation starts when he killed three Wall Street employees on a subway in self-defense. Here, Arthur comes out of the image of a "good boy" that his mother has created, ignoring everything that festered in the darkness. He now knows what he is capable of becoming.

After committing the crime, Arthur gets into an abandoned public toilet and dances in a trance state. According to Deleuze and Guattari, dance leads to a state of the Body without Organs (BwO). All assemblages with bodies have an impulse to deterritorialize their organs. The organization of the organs is what restricts a body from going beyond its territory. "A Body without Organs is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981: 288). Pure creative activities once flow of intensity, driven by desire in the abstract are allowed roaming across a very abstract body or a Body without Organs [3]. Arthur was heavily reminded of his vulnerability by everyone he knows. He forgets that identity, once he understood his power. In other words, he enters a milieu where he considers himself the utmost free and powerful without any constraints. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of Nomadism reinforces Arthur's becoming of a nomad. To become other than ourselves or to Becoming a nomad or a minor are the modes of escape from the capturing. This has both revolutionary and fascist potential. Arthur was exhausted swinging between different replacements of his absent father figure. Thus, it was easy for him to deterritorializes into Joker.

Deleuze and Guattari consider a nomad as someone who stays outside of the state apparatus. A nomad is different from a migrant. For the reason that a nomad functions within a smooth space whereas a migrant needs a striated space for its movement. Smooth space and striated space; the space in which the war machine develops and the space instituted by the state apparatus is not of the same nature. Smooth space rarely appears in pure form and is usually mixed with striated space which results in dynamic power. According to Deleuze and Guattari, smooth space is rhizomatic and its points are subordinate to the trajectory. Nomad follows the trajectory that lies between two points. And the trajectory alters according to the circumstance. "Nomad follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981: 380). Arthur's smooth space is himself which is in constant flux. This space gives him a favorable platform to become imperceptible. He gradually becomes an innovator, interrogative, and non-conformist as a nomad/minor.

The collective movement that occurs in Gotham Street paves the way for the birth of a nomadic war machine. A war machine is a tool used by a nomad to preserve the smooth space and its rhizomatic movements. It lies outside of the state apparatus like the marginalized community of Gotham. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "an 'ideological,' scientific, or artistic movement can be a potential war machine" (1981: 347). It resists the interference of the system which is driven by capitalism. Here, a whole city turns into a war machine inspired by Arthur's actions. Arthur has unintentionally become an agitator to the mass protest of the oppressed population of Gotham. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the War machine has an indispensable role in the smooth functioning of a State, as it pesters the State persistently to internalize or appropriate something that stays outside of its territory. Here, Joker develops an aggravated form of a social group, which is not centralized, not so oriented around the state. And this less systematically stratified group becomes a nomadic war machine.

The Posthuman Aspects of Joker

The Philosophical Posthumanism is an existential approach developed from the tradition of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought. Posthumanism considers 'human' as an open term that has been subjected to deconstructions over time. 'Human' is not a single notion, but a plural entity. Therefore, not every human is considered as human as the other. The concept of becoming has a vital role here. Posthumanism says that we need to open up our sense of identity to new relations or multiplicities of other bodies. It is in opposition to the idea of identity as something completely closed, fully formed, and static forever. Rosi Braidotti, on the light of Deleuzian philosophy says, Posthumanism allows us to think who and what we are in the process of becoming. We are always subjects in the process, always becoming something (2012: 94).

Joker is a true embodiment of becoming a Posthuman -nomad. Rather than staying on a single identity, Arthur aka Joker chooses a path of becoming. A Posthuman uses his/her multiple selves as a navigational tool. Arthur too uses his complex and ambiguous history for navigating and liberating his fixed roles to a becoming Thousand Plateaus. Joker marks the Posthuman in him by the dynamic forces and processes that he uses in the act of becoming. Joker practices the Posthuman goal that, one can incessantly carve his/her identity and expands the body outside of one's territory.

A Failed State is a Dangerous State

"What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a system that treats him like trash? You get what you deserve" (2019, 1:52:35).

Arthur Fleck's transformation into Joker is his revolt against Gotham City's ruling class that treats people like him as abominable. It results in the oppressed and underprivileged Gothamists taking the killer clown's persona themselves and ultimately calling for a mass takedown of the rich with the slogan, "kill the rich" (2019, 01:07:38).The rich and bureaucrats flee the local alley in fear for their life, only to be caught by random rioters and shot. Joker, who was arrested for killing Franklin, was rescued from the police van by his new followers wearing clown masks.

The Political Philosopher, Slavoj Zizek in his book Violence: Six Sideways Reflections categorizes different types of human violence in society. He distinguishes Objective Violence from Subjective Violence. According to Zizek, Subjective Violence is the kind of violence that has an obvious perpetrator. Objective Violence, on the other hand, has a less clear and distanced systemic cause. It has two forms; systemic (institutional) and symbolic (language-related). Due to its uncertain executor, Objective Violence often gets less attention than Subjective Violence. Zizek describes Objective Violence as, "the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjective violence" (2010: 34).

Here, the chaos that breaks out by the oppressed class of Gotham indicates a Subjective Violence. According to Zizek, Subjective Violence can be symptomatic of Objective violent conditions that caused by the state and its system. Hence, the Subjective Violence present in this context has its roots back in the failed sovereign body of Gotham and its systemic injustice towards the underprivileged. There are different kinds of power that works through overlapping and intersecting (Zizek, 2010: 49). Violence here works as a way of resisting such a power. Political thinker Michael Taylor says, "Power is the ability to change the range of someone's available action" (1989:3). In other words, power expands or to limits somebody's options in life. Gotham's repressive sovereign body indeed has a reciprocal relation to the violent frenzy that happened on the street. The flawed system is the sole reason behind all the atrocities that followed after Arthur introduced Joker.

CONCLUSION

The film seems to swing between implying that people with extreme behavior and mental illness diagnosis are an inherent threat to society and fetishizing mental health conditions as providing an escape from the grueling psychological impact of late capitalism. The current political scenario is loaded with chaotic events that pose questions to our being as responsible citizens and rightful individuals. In a sense, such confusions can be regarded as the effect of a totalitarian body's attempts to control the individual lives. This is exactly where Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical concept of Becoming a Nomad is pertinent as an experiment to resist the state power.

At the beginning of the film, Arthur is presented as someone who tries to represent a given world and to match the established models of being. But

later in his life of absurdity and unfairness, he finds his sense of fulfillment and meaning when he let go of the self that was constructed by society. So, the sense of being is the underlying condition of all 'becomings'. The fall of Arthur and the rise of Joker indicate that there is a crisis amongst the Nihilistic and the alienated young men that Joker purposefully parallels and that we need a dialogue about the marginalized 'Others'.

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