



Contagious Clown

CC0 1.0 Universal

Note: Image generated using StableDiffusion Image Generator by Stable Diffusion AI from the prompt 'Compose a close-up image of a person's lower face, accentuating multiple rows of teeth and highlighting their laughing mouth. Infuse the visual with a colour scheme reminiscent of The Joker, evoking the character's distinctive and vibrant palette for added context and impact'.

Abstract

Chapter 7

The Cheshire Clown: Joker's Infectious Laughter

The Joker is one of our most notoriously laughing pop cultural nightmares. He creates worshippers and victims by spreading his infectious laugh and is both in personal union: one of the most polarising 'gods' and one of the most unholy and vile 'monsters' in popular culture. In DC comic books and (animated) films, Joker's laugh can detach itself from that of the violent clown. It can spread. In visual fiction, Joker's laugh is contagious in two ways: on the one hand, as a form of physical and mental illness, and on the other, as a symbolic vehicle for civil disobedience, escalating social protest and outbursts of public violence. In both cases, Joker affects the physiology of others by 'jokerising' them – those 'infected' by the Clown Prince of Crime not only behave but also look like the Joker. While other authors of this edited collection argue that humour and laughter turn gods into humans and bring to light the human in the monstrous, this chapter explores the opposite: monstrous laughter as a wicked facial disease, as the embodiment of sick jokes and a threat to society and the human. Focusing on the iconography and 'epidemic' impact of laughter in recent Joker stories, this chapter clarifies the post/moral 'cultural work', 'aesthetic achievements' and cultural ideas of science and art personified in one of the most iconic supervillains of our time.

7

The Cheshire Clown

Joker's Infectious Laughter

Anna-Sophie Jürgens, Anastasiya Fiadotava & David C Tscharke

*What would a clown be without an audience?
On the DC Comic Book Joker*

The Maestro of Malevolent Mirth¹

Although created by Bill Finger, Bob Kane, and Jerry Robinson as Batman's colourful comic book antagonist for the DC Universe in April 1940, the roots of the Joker character can be traced back to late nineteenth-century traditions of violent clown plays and pantomimes as well as the cultural discourse unfolding around them. For instance, the iconography of the Joker, i.e. his whitened, skull-like face with its exorbitantly overemphasised (painted or flesh-cut) mouth, is based on Paul Leni's 1928 film *The Man Who Laughs*, featuring Conrad Veidt as a travelling comic performer bearing a monstrous, permanent grin.² The film itself is an adaptation of Victor Hugo's 1869 novel *L'Homme qui rit*, which draws on a cultural mould based on extreme body aesthetics and the amalgamation of humour and violence. The former were embodied, for instance, in the macabre pantomimes of French performer Jean-Gaspard Debureau

¹ This is what the Joker is called in "Public Luna-Tic Number One!", Detective Comics #388. Ellsworth et al, 41.

² Spear, *Batman*, 40; Andrae, *Creators of the Superheroes*, 70.

and, later, in the world-renowned acrobatic clown plays of the Hanlon Lees Brothers. At the end of the nineteenth century, the performances and style of the latter – who enlarged their painted clown mouths up to their ears – inspired famous writers, poets, and playwrights to explore the macabre, sadistic side of Pierrots, clowns, and other characters wearing cannibalistic clown smiles and engaging in violent activities.³ Their legacy lives on in twentieth-century and contemporary clown stories and aesthetics.⁴

However, the creators of the Joker also directly refer to the clown as a source of inspiration. Jerry Robinson, who stated “I loved the circus”⁵, was captivated by the idea of a sinister and contradictory clown. “I knew that I wanted someone who was bizarre and exotic”, he wrote, someone “visually striking” who can serve as “a marvellous counterpoint to the sinister, shadowy figure of Batman”.⁶ Bob Kane, who created the first Batman-Joker story, explains retrospectively: “I drew the joker straighter and more illustratively than my ghost artists. They made him grotesquely clown-like, longer and thinner, and so exaggerated he looked like a buffoon”.⁷

It is thus hardly surprising that in early comic book stories, “[l]ike a circus, the Joker’s schemes are loud, grand, goofy affairs, suffused with danger and, a wild card, one who puts play into play”.⁸ Still physiognomically intact, hilarious, and mad in a gentle way, the early Joker is a stuntman who performs tricks for Batman and other antagonists, because “what would be a clown without an audience?”. He is more “a master showman at work” than a “Master Psychologist” as he would like to be called⁹ (The Joker #2 and #7)¹⁰; a villain, who is “trickier than a whole circus!” (The Joker #1). This early Joker travels in a circus-like fashion in a camper, his so-called “Ho-Home-on-Wheels” (The Joker #5), and self-referentially plays with his own origins. In *The Joker* #5, for example, he steals a painting entitled “The Laughing Man”. More recent stories – including *Batman: The Man Who Laughs* (2008) and *The Batman Who Laughs* (2019) – follow this tradition, but also reinterpret the Joker’s connection with circus and other forms of popular entertainment such as amusement parks (e.g. *Nightwing Volume 3: Death of the Family* (2013)). In line with Joker’s motto “us clowns gotta stick together!”¹¹ clowns and clown-like creatures and contraptions surround or accompany

³ Jürgens, “The Pathology of Joker’s Dance”.

⁴ Jürgens, “Being the Alien”.

⁵ Robinson in Andrea, *Creators of the Superheroes*, 104.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kane in Andrea, *Creators of the Superheroes*, 70.

⁸ Smith, “And doesn’t All the World Love a Clown?”, 188.

⁹ O’Neil, *The Joker*, 41, 130.

¹⁰ All emphases in the quotes cited in this chapter are in the original texts, which only rarely have page numbers. Authors are fully aware that it is insufficient to reference the authorship of comics with only one or two names as it is common in academic writing, as each comic is the result of the talent and hard work of many people. It is a limited amount of space that does not allow us to include all writers and artists – colourists, letterers, cover-artists, co-authors and many more, but readers will find more information in the sources listed at the end of the chapter.

¹¹ Higgins et al, “The Laughter of the 1962 Tanganyika ‘Laughter Epidemic’”.

the “Ringmaster of Riotous Robbery – that Tycoon of Teasing Terror” in many of his mischievous, murderous adventures (compare e.g. *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988)).

Most of Joker’s “adventures” are directed against Batman’s efforts to restore order and peace to the city of Gotham. Since Batman categorically refuses to kill the criminals he fights (so as not to become one of them), and since Joker just as categorically breaks out of prisons and mental institutions and uses increasingly devious methods to get Batman to kill him, they find themselves in an Ouroboros-like circle of perpetual confrontation and mutual re-creation. Joker gets to the heart of this by saying to Batman: “We ain’t just loopy...” – “We’re **in** a loop”.¹² In complex and sophisticated reflections, contemporary Batman comics devote great attention to this difficult relationship and the role of the Joker. The 2020 story *Scars* is an example thereof: in it, the power of the Joker is dissected as the power of a man who convinces people that he is “more than a man, more than the worst psychopath, even. – He’s convinced them that he **is**, at core, the bearer of whatever their greatest fear is”. The Joker is revealed as a master in psychological manipulation, whose victims are “afraid to heal for fear he’ll come after them again, come howling back out of the dark, laughing at them”.¹³ In short, the once silly funster is now a homicidal nightmare.

Contemporary DC comics – e.g. by Scott Snyder and teams – focus on the character’s inclination towards savagery and mass murder, thus exploring the Joker as a brutish psycho killer *jokerising* his world. As described for the historical Hanlon Lees clowns, whose hyperbolic painted grins provoked laughter spasms in their audience¹⁴, the Joker’s laughter is ‘contagious’, normally fatal, and generally – and in various and abominable ways – detached from the positive emotional states commonly associated with laughter (such as joy, mirth, and happiness). For instance, in *The Joker: Death of the Family*¹⁵, the Joker undergoes surgery to remove his laughing face (which is stripped off his head) so that he can wear it upside down on his raw muscles; turning his physiognomy into a rotting (death) mask attached to his head with clips and rubber bands. In this story, the particularly perverse Joker not only tries to transform others into (his) grimacing doubles, as he usually does (see below), but, in the form of a sick joke, threatens to cut off their laughing faces, too. More commonly, however, the Joker deploys art and science to *jokerise* his surroundings by forcibly making others smile and laugh.

“Who am I to say? Maybe I am an artist”.

“Beauty”. – “That is all I have ever wanted”. – explains Joker, before poisoning all the people in a pedestrian zone with a gas emanating from colourful balloons.

¹² Azzarello et al, “Two Fell Into the Hornet’s Nest”.

¹³ Snyder et al, “Scars”.

¹⁴ Jürgens, “The Joker”.

¹⁵ Snyder et al, “The Joker”

In this 2019 story, *Joker: Killer Smile 1*, Joker is introduced as someone seeking “the sublime”, someone, who has always wanted “to create things that are beautiful”; and this includes: “Happiness. – Laughter. – Yes, laughter most of all. – That is true beauty”. Corpses bearing his own, ghastly distorted grin are for Joker an expression of such true beauty. Obviously committed to aesthetics, when asked whether he was an artist, he replies: “Now that would just be pretentious. No, I have always considered myself more of an entertainer, really. But then again, who am I to say? Maybe I am an artist”.¹⁶

Indeed, in many Joker stories, the violent clown criminal is linked to or engages with performing arts. In *Scars*, for instance, he is called “a mime. And what is a mime? Pantomime is the art of one actor playing all parts so well that the unreal becomes real before your eyes”¹⁷. Similarly playing with realities, he also appears as a magician (e.g. in “Trust” [Detective Comics #833 and #834]). In Todd Phillips’ 2019 Oscar-winning *Joker* film featuring Joaquin Phoenix in the title role, he is a clown and dancer¹⁸ as well as an aspiring comedian. Originally a clown character, it comes as no surprise that Joker often appears on the stages of comedy clubs. He shows up, for instance, in a “Comedy Manor” – “a theatre, once a renowned London Music Hall where the greats convulsed audiences... entertainers like Chaplin, Fields, the Marx Brothers...”. (“This one’ll kill you, Batman!” [Batman #260]: 70) – and in “the Killing Joke Club”. Joker uses the Killing Joke Club, in which audiences are welcomed as “Creeps and Creepettes”, “Ladeez and Germs”, before subjecting them to a mass gassing and an interesting, self-contradictory tirade in which he complains about people copying his style and “culture” *voluntarily*:

The problem with you kids today is that you have no culture of your own so you’re always ripping off other eras! The fifties?! The seventies?! Puh-lease! They were hideous enough once! – You’re not adding me to your list! I am unique and I will suffer no false Jokers before me!... Just to make sure your smiles are as big and permanent as mine... take a whiff of Joker Gas! (‘A Savage Innocence’ [The Spectre #51])

Killing his audience is a means to “challenge them”, Joker explains in *Joker: Killer Smile 1*: “You see, I am to give my audience what they need, not what they want”.¹⁹ Whether as a hellish mime, magician, or criminal comedian with profile neurosis and a problem with losing control over his imitators – or, in other words, the urge to be in the vanguard – the Joker’s “performance art” is an art of destruction. This becomes particularly clear in the Joker interpretation by Jack Nicholson in Tim Burton’s 1989 *Batman* movie, in which the clown villain does not only explicitly manifest “I am an artist” (01:24), but, while admiring the disfigured mask-like face of one of his victims,

¹⁶ Lemire et al, *Joker*.

¹⁷ Snyder et al, “Scars”.

¹⁸ Jürgens, “The Pathology of Joker’s Dance”.

¹⁹ Lemire et al, *Joker*.

also explains: “I now do what other people only dream. I make art until someone dies. See? I am the world’s first fully-functioning homicidal artist” (01:02).

Indeed, the “art” of this Joker does not only involve the creative recreation of faces (in order to create what he calls a “living work of art”), the creation of a toxic drug (dubbed Smylex), and paper collages (51:08), but also the attack and destruction of objects of cultural devotion. Assisted by his gang, Burton’s Joker frolics around in a museum, where they expressively paint and spray colourful slogans over pieces of classic art, graffiti-style, while cheerfully dancing and singing to Prince’s song “Partyman”. They add to Rembrandt’s self-portrait their own hand-prints in pink colour, crowned with a splash of neon green paint. With fanciful, artistic gestures they also paint pink lines over a Degas, and smash various sculptures while moving through the exhibition space in a dance-like fashion.²⁰ Cheerfully, Joker explains to someone who observes his ravaging: “You will join me in the avant-garde of the new aesthetic” (*Batman*, 01:02). Against this background – and the fact that Joker has also been called “the PICASSO of crime! The Great Modernist in a postmodern tradition!”²¹ and refers to himself as “an artist trying to create something exceptional”²² – it seems appropriate to call this Joker an “avant-garde iconoclastic artist”, as suggested by art critic, media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys.²³

According to Groys, the art-smashing gesture in Burton’s *Batman* represents a form of artistic expression.²⁴ It echoes the definition of the artist as a skilled performer in the sense of *artiste*: someone ‘who is adept at something’ (see Merriam-Webster) – in this case a skilled performer of art destruction. The artistic process in which Joker’s gang indulges in Burton’s film leads to the destruction of old icons embodying outdated messages, and (thus) to the production of new images. This artistic expression draws from Joker’s abovementioned links to the popular stage and slapstick comedy, as well as from an iconoclastic – icon-destroying – dimension intrinsic to the film medium itself. From Groys’ perspective, film is a medium that, from its beginnings, has fought a more or less open battle against other media, including painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, and opera. Their destruction is regularly celebrated, above all, in early film. Since its earliest beginnings, in the form of slapstick comedy, film has staged true orgies of destruction, damage, and annihilation, including traditionally revered cultural assets, which evoke the laughter of the audience. Groys ties this to the

²⁰ These activities are revived in the 2011 *Batman Imposters* story, in which “[t]he first mad mob event [including many Joker imitators] caused millions of dollars in damage at the Gotham Museum of Art”, Hine et al, 2011.

²¹ Morrison in Williams, “Making sense squared”, n.p.

²² Garcia et al, “Joker/Harley”.

²³ Groys, “Topologie der Kunst”, 58.

²⁴ An earlier version of this paragraph appeared in the 2019 online article ‘Violent Clown Artists between Science & Art’ (Jürgens, 2019, *w/k: Between Science and Art*, 8 December 2019: <https://between-science-and-art.com/violent-clown-artists-between-science-art/>). We have previously discussed Groys’s “avant-garde iconoclastic artist” in another Joker context in relation to the destructive potential of dance (see Jürgens, “The Pathology of Joker’s Dance”, 333).

theory of carnival by influential philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin defined carnival as an iconoclastic, cheerful festive season, and as a celebration of utopian excesses (which may include acts of destruction). According to his definition, carnival does not replace the profaned icons of an old order with newer ones but invites us to just enjoy the downfall of the existing. Carnival, circus, and other forms of popular entertainment have much in common. The latter even preserved aspects of the Bakhtinian carnival. Bakhtin himself observed that “jugglers, acrobats, vendors of panaceas, magicians, clowns, [and] trainers of monkeys, had a sharply expressed grotesque bodily character. Even today this character has been most fully preserved in marketplace shows and the circus”.²⁵ And it is time to add that this is also visible in the iconoclastic, grotesquely made-up Joker with his green hair, terrific smile, and purple suit – a clown oscillating between humour and violence.²⁶ However, the Joker is not only a homicidal, iconoclastic avant-garde artist. According to his profile in Burton’s film his “aptitudes” include not only art, but also science and chemistry (55:08). And as a matter of fact, the Joker is much of a scientist.

Spreading Laughter: Joker’s Merry Scientific Mischief

An array of Batman stories suggests that before becoming the infamous clown, the Joker character was a chemist or lab worker (see e.g. “The Man Behind the Red Hood!” [Detective Comics #168]: 48). According to what is probably the best known and most frequently interpreted origin story, the Joker itself is a creature born from chemical waste (which we discuss in detail elsewhere²⁷) However miraculously he was brought into being, from the very beginning the Joker has been associated with science, particularly chemistry, biochemistry and microbiology and their use for the creation of vicious weapons. The countless “joker gases”, “joker toxins”, “joker poisons”, “joker serums” and other drugs and chemicals he uses to poison his adversaries all have similar effects: Not only do they increase the propensity to violence and the desire to destroy or otherwise lose control over oneself, but they also paralyse or kill – but not without first turning Joker victims into Joker copies. Those poisoned by the Joker have the evil clown’s look and can be read as projections of their and the Joker’s inner emptiness: once infected by the societal pollutant, they show a grotesque smile on

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 353.

²⁶ This has been linked to the *Aesthetic Theory* by German philosopher Theodor Adorno, for whom “the violence of the new”, the inclination towards spectacular effects and ‘scars of damage and disruption’ are characteristic for modern artists and their love for experiments. According to Adorno, a genuine modern (and new) art manifests itself explicitly in the alien, the dissonant and violent deformation. Examples (or rather paradigms) of violent deformation – and thereby of the artistic creation process per se – are detected by Adorno in circus, variety- and music hall shows (see Adorno in Jürgens, “The Joker”).

²⁷ Jürgens et al, “From Caligari to Joker”. Interestingly, Joker’s partner in crime, Harley Quinn, is also a scientist, see Santos and Jürgens “From Harleen Quinzel to Harley Quinn”.

their distorted white faces, the “gaping grimace – the everlasting smile courtesy of the Joker”.²⁸

These poisons also come custom-made. Knowing that Batman has immunised himself to many Joker gases, in *Batman Volume 7: Endgame*, for example, Joker does not only design a special paralytic for the Bat – “some kind of twilight anaesthetic” – but also intoxicates, and thus “neutralises”, the Justice League (a strike force comprised of the mightiest superheroes of the DC universe, including Wonder Woman and Superman) “with pathogens individuated to each member”.²⁹

Contemporary Batman narratives point to the chemical composition of these biochemical weapons and offer (some) scientific explanations for their devastating effects. *Batman Imposters* (2011), for example, offers a complex “[c]hemical breakdown of Joker juice”, which is produced by an imposter Joker, not the “real” Joker. This is why “[t]he most lethal element of authentic Joker venom, hydrogen cyanide, is absent”. However, “Strychnodide is present”. This chemical causes “muscle convulsions that produce the hallmark grin. The rictus sardonius”. The comic book further explains: “Combined with methamphetamine, MDMA and nitrous oxide, the effects are euphoria, mild hallucinations, increased energy levels, uncontrolled hilarity, and muscular spasms. – It’s likely to be psychologically addictive after a single dose”. Within the course of the story, the science team of the imposter Joker (which includes a chemist with the telling name Dr. Kaligari) modifies this chemical by adding ‘several steroids in a combination that seems to be calculated to increase aggression, along with a powerful pain suppressant. – It’s pure “roid rage”.³⁰ It also causes an urge to destroy and a sense of absurdity, according to Batman, who takes the drug in a self-experiment and then concludes that the imposter Joker uses “the juice to share his state of mind”.³¹ *Jokerification* through science is thus not only about exerting formlessness upon others by annihilating the individual bodies of the poisoned – their face, age, and gender – but also about turning bodies into weapons through science.

Thinking science through violent clowning, Joker’s manifold chemicals tap into speculative, creative aspects of scientific thought. Through science, Joker takes control of the image that he projects onto the world and asserts control over his public identity. Science iconography, epitomised for instance in depictions of scientific equipment including beakers filled with boiling, bubbling, coloured liquids, chemical formulas etc³², offers visual evidence for knowledge-producing activities and, thus, a sense of (scientific) realism. However, it is interesting to note that from the perspective of a *non-fictional* scientist, a binary compound is one with only two types of atoms (water is an example, consisting of just hydrogen and oxygen), not a combination of two entirely different substances. And there is no such thing as an “epidermal solution”

²⁸ Hine et al, *Batman Imposters*.

²⁹ Synder et al, *Batman Volume 7*.

³⁰ Hine et al, *Batman Imposters*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Snyder et al, *Batman Volume 7*.

as in *Death of the Family*. As the abovementioned troponin is a protein that acts as a switch, responding to calcium levels by inducing changes in the cell cyto(cell)skeleton (which is a network of interlinking protein filaments), it is something that would need to be produced *inside* muscle cells. In other words, it would not work as a toxin. Neither the abovementioned nitrous oxide (laughing gas) nor MDMA (ecstasy) are considered to be particularly addictive (whether MDMA is even addictive is controversial).

So there is no reason to expect that mixing the two drugs would suddenly create a new highly addictive drug (as there are very few drugs that become a habit after one use). In short, although science adds drama, intriguing vocabulary, and visual splendour to fictional stories – and according to David Kirby even plausibility³³ – in these graphic narratives Joker science is a caricature of science; quasi- and pseudo-science. Instead of using simple, but highly “effective” chemicals to kill or maim his victims (such as cyanide, sarin, or mustard gas), Joker creates rather gothic substances and mannerist compounds, apparently following the motto: why kill with something simple when you can spend time mulling over a complicated mixture as you premeditate your next shocking crime? Joker science is a wild mixture of physiology textbook facts and science fantasy – and another intriguing way of rendering the picture of an outrageous villain.

This becomes particularly clear in the science and art of Joker’s *virus-making*. Indeed, Joker does not merely develop poisons and drugs that turn others into Joker-like figures, but also viruses. In *Batman Volume 7: Endgame* (Part 2)³⁴, Joker initiates the outbreak of an airborne virus in a hospital where *jokerised* patients infect and tear apart doctors, who then roam the streets, infecting more and more people who in ever larger numbers enjoy themselves in violent delights, and also overrun the police and military. The virus is described by Batman’s assistant as: “Micro drops of pathogen coated in resistant mucus disseminated into the air every time an infected person coughs or spits or...” – “...laughs. Of course”. Batman adds: “A laugh is just a series of diaphragmatic spasms – coughs in rapid fire. – A virus that spreads like laughter. Damn”. – “And they just... keep laughing”. The laugh and look of the Joker, and what has been called above his “state of mind”, spread *like* and *as* a virus. Virus and laughter are thus methods *and* results of *jokerification*. The effects are similar to those of Joker venoms and toxins (see above): “The virus works by changing a victim’s neurology. Making them go after anything they have affection for”.

Batman immediately sets off in search of the source of the infection, to get a sample from patient zero, the carrier, to “figure out an antibody”. In so doing, the Caped Crusader turns out to be a biochemist himself, who has already “created nearly a hundred cures for joker toxins over the years. – antitoxins, antibiotics, steroids...”. While running tests and “simulations with antitoxin”, he realises that the Joker “virus

³³ Kirby, *Lab Coats in Hollywood*, 9.

³⁴ All the following quotes, unless otherwise specified, are from Synder et al, *Batman Volume 7* (np). For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that viruses also appear in the Batman universe *without* the Joker, see e.g. *All-Star Batman Volume 2: Ends of the Earth* (2018) or *Batman Contagion* (2016).

resisted”: “Whatever chemical is making the strain resistant... it also causes a kind of ‘cellular rot’”. Looking at the “decay factor of the virus against the regenerative factor in the blood”, Batman’s science team discovers that they are “inverses” – that “the virus contains an inverse strain”. Interestingly, Batman immediately interprets the virus’ resilience and combination of regenerative and deadly abilities *in terms of culture*: “They’re opposites. It’s a game. He’s playing. Life and death. Comedy and tragedy. Love and hate”. Alfred, Batman’s ally, adds: “it seems almost... – ...unnatural – It’s virulent, fast acting, and seemingly unkillable. I’m afraid it’s his masterpiece”.

If a masterpiece is considered a supreme intellectual or artistic achievement as per Merriam-Webster’s definition, then is this Joker virus a work of art? It is interesting to note that Joker’s assistant in virus making, or “bio art”, Dr Paul Dekker, is introduced as the scion of “a family of artists” as well. Even more, he is an expert in regenerative science. This “regenerative science” draws on nature and mythological, “immortal creatures” outside the natural life cycle. Objects of study include the hydra, certain lobsters (growing “bigger in their shells, but their cells don’t age past their prime”) and *Turritopsis Dohrnii*: “One of the only animals that can actually age backwards when it so desires, revert from medusa to polyp”. Stories from the past about substances that heal miraculously and help withstand death (such as the “waters of Gilgamesh’s time”, the river Styx) feed into this science; they are “[c]lues to something real!” According to the mythopoetic biochemist, all these stories point to a chemical compound that has “existed in nature long ago”. As it turns out, that mysterious chemical, which Dekker dubbed “Dionesium” (after the Greek god Dionysus, associated with rebirth – “A little scientist humour, see?”), was hidden and carried through centuries by a sort of antediluvian supernatural creature described as “the pale man. The one who laughs at us”. His most recent incarnation is the Joker. In other words: “The material at the core of that virus isn’t anything [a scientist] could make in a lab”. The special “substance in the virus, it’s from him” – the Joker. Dekker extracted it from “the Joker’s body... from his spine”, where it only expresses in cases of catastrophic damage, which is why Batman, who “sampled and tested his blood dozens of times”, has not found it before.

The Joker in *Endgame* is thus not only “Gotham’s own Dionysian man – Dionysus, the god of madness and tragedy” – with “the biology of an undead”, but also a kind of Über-Joker: He *is* the virus – he *is* the infectious laughter. While aspects of this Joker virology are feasible, but unlikely (e.g. a chemical that activates just particular genes),³⁵ the scientific-sounding idea of an inverse virus strain (and many other aspects such as the power of drugs [drugs just block the action of particular cellular proteins rather than activate something new]) is a purely fictional idea about how viruses *might* work. It is like applying the physics principle of matter and anti-matter, or perhaps the Eastern philosophy of yin and yang to viruses. In all cases, there is no possible analogy. Thus, Joker science is a science that is not constrained by science,

³⁵ There are efforts being made to regulate or activate genes, but these do not rely on chemicals – they are biological compounds (proteins engineered to have a particular function and then delivered via gene therapy).

ethics, morals, or societal norms. It taps into the infamous “mad scientist” trope³⁶: Joker creates and uses *psychopathic science* for his *own* sick gratification and perverse entertainment.

“We are the Joker!”³⁷

Sick Humour, Mass-Clownification and the Culture- Constituting Power of Infectious Clown Laugh(ter)

Joker’s artistic style and scientific patho-creations are not only viral in various imminent, homicidal ways, but they also have an epidemic *societal* impact.³⁸ Joker has an influence that “affects people, on an almost subconscious, primal level. For most people – regular people – he inspires fear. For the less stable people – he simply inspires”.³⁹ Joker inspiration, or obsession, has a clear course: “It would always start the same way. – Focusing on the Joker. Finding some way to obsess over the Joker. – Collecting newspaper clippings about his crime. – Or filling notebooks of Joker-inspired art. – Before it would escalate into something else”.⁴⁰ This is why in many Batman stories people “jokerise” themselves *voluntarily*, for example by taking Joker’s designer drugs or copying his look by choice. Even without directly violently transforming others into clowns using biological or chemical weapons, Joker is still a source of mass-clownification – instigating riots (see *Batman Imposters*) and protests for “Equal rights for the disturbed!”.⁴¹

Todd Phillips’ 2019 Oscar-winning *Joker* film is one of the most recent examples highlighting the power of Joker’s laugh to fuel (tabooed) social behaviour, radicalise public beliefs and reactions, and create a cult – if not culture (?) – of protest. All this happens in a time of crisis in the film, when large parts of the population are dissatisfied with the local politics of their city, embodied by their arrogant leading politician, who shows total lack of understanding towards the protesters and their reasons and goals. For him, they are “nothing but clowns” (00:39). As dissatisfaction and propensity to violence rise, a desperate man in clown make-up – Arthur Fleck, the future Joker – murders three young rich people. Meeting the ravages of time, the clown becomes a symbol of protest when demonstrators appropriate his look and hyperbolic grin. How

³⁶ Haynes, *From Madman to Crime Fighter*.

³⁷ Daniel et al, *Batman Detective Comics*.

³⁸ In the very recent story *The Joker – Volume Two*, this happens without the Joker’s doing: a scientist (ab)uses his DNA to ‘recreate’ Jokers, but “[t]he chemicals that stained the Joker’s skin damaged his genetic material. It means that creating any kind of double of him is a fool’s errand”, which is why the results resemble zombies more than humans: “They’re alive?!” – “Alive might be an overstatement”. (Tynion et al 2022, *The Joker*)

³⁹ Snyder et al, *The Joker*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Daniel et al, *Batman Detective Comics*.

can the societal impact, if not “cultural work”, of the clown’s laugh and the connection between social crisis and the “spread” of its iconography be grasped?

The ability and willingness to use laughter and humour in tragic circumstances has long been a subject of academic discussion. It seems that there has been no disaster in contemporary human history that has not been accompanied by humour.⁴² According to one of the most popular theories deployed to understand this phenomenon, humour is an effective mechanism that helps people cope with diseases, catastrophic events and other disasters.⁴³ This interpretation fits into the framework of the relief theory, one of the three key theories of humour.⁴⁴ The theory’s proponents argue that humour is a means to release tension by expressing ideas that are inappropriate in serious (*bona fide*) discourse.⁴⁵ These ideas often revolve around taboo topics, such as sex, race, or any form of aggression. Freud, for instance, argued that the impulse to discuss these topics without inhibitions is suppressed by our subconsciousness, and jokes (alongside dreams) might be the only way to vent out the pressure that results from this suppression.⁴⁶ Todd Phillips’ 2019 *Joker* film seems to perfectly illustrate this understanding of humour in a scene in which Arthur-as-Joker (in full clown make-up and costume) appears on Murray Franklin’s talk show. Walking in, the first thing he does is kiss another guest of the show, Dr Sally, on the mouth.

Such an unexpected and unconventional form of greeting provokes laughter from the audience – laughter which, as Freud would have put it, stems from repressed sexual impulses. However, Joker continues with a “knock-knock joke”, at which he laughs heartily – “Knock Knock. Who’s there? It’s the police ma’am. Your son has been hit by a drunk driver. He’s dead” (01:41) – the audience is not amused. The reason why this is not funny lies in the structure of the joke itself: its final line does not qualify as a joke punchline as it does not “produce an important twist in the narrative, resulting in humor”.⁴⁷ According to Freud’s (1927 [1950])⁴⁸ conceptualisation of humour, it should bring grandeur and elevation – in contrast to jokes and the comic, which he regards as separate phenomena. In the case of Joker’s knock-knock joke, the protagonist does not display the elevation of reality but merely describes it. The scene manifests how the reference to one of the taboo topics was welcomed by the audience because it was presented with a humorous flavour whereas the other – which was a serious statement despite its initial framing as a joke – was met with a negative reaction, as a sick joke.

⁴² Oring, “Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster”.

⁴³ Saroglou and Anciaux, “Licking Sick Humor”.

⁴⁴ Two other popular humour theories include the superiority theory and incongruity theory. The first interprets humour as an expression of superiority of the performer of humour over its target. The second comprises a plethora of theories that explain the humorous effect with the unexpected conclusion of a humorous text which is nonetheless compatible with its build-up. For a detailed discussion on the three theories, see Morreall, “Philosophy of Humor”.

⁴⁵ Spencer, *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects*; Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.

⁴⁶ Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.

⁴⁷ Taylor, “Punch Line”, 611.

⁴⁸ Freud, “Humour”.

Outside the context of relief theory, sick humour has not only been discussed on a personal level, but also on a much larger scale: as a public reaction to vivid representations of catastrophes in media, particularly by audio-visual means.⁴⁹ The mediatisation of tragedies results in the fact that people perceive not the tragedy itself but rather its (audio)visual image presented in the news. Todd Phillips' 2019 *Joker* plays with this notion by including numerous scenes in which social protest and riots are visualised through television news reports. Such "films within films" simultaneously reassert the important role the media plays in our perception of social protest and highlight the lack of reality of the events. The theatrical (and even carnivalesque) nature of the riots is further strengthened by the clown masks and costumes worn by the protesters and the contrast between their outfits and the gloomy surroundings of the city. Much in the same way as sick "jokes may be viewed as a rebellion against a world defined by the media"⁵⁰, the sick and mirthless laughter of Joker is a rebellion against the mediatised image of the society he lives in and creates a sharp contrast between the portrayal of the lower classes of society on television and his personal, embodied experiences.

Both the *clownified* demonstrators in the film, who take their protest deadly seriously, and the Joker's unfunny jokes, which he finds hilarious, make it clear that humour and laughter do not necessarily go hand in hand. As "[n]ot everyone who appreciates a joke expresses that by laughing, and there are many forms of laughter that are not responses to humor"⁵¹, it is necessary to distinguish between these two phenomena. Like in the many other examples discussed above, the laugh and laughter of Todd Phillips' *Joker* are not a sign of happiness or solidarity and togetherness as they would be under normal circumstances after a successful joke performance.⁵² Quite the opposite, his laughter both signals and provokes alienation, sets him apart from his fellow citizens and is considered to be "a condition". Still, there are hints in the film that Joker's laughter is a reaction to some hidden jokes, but the humour of these jokes is not accessible to his surroundings, including his audiences (us). In other words, his laughter is not *social*, and this is precisely what makes it so monstrous.

Thus, if comic book characters can be read as social comments on sociocultural circumstances⁵³, the monstrous laughter of this Joker points to the conflict between the individual and the group, conformity, and rebellion, and the mediatised nature of society and laughter. Exploring the intricacies between humour, its corporeal manifestations (and iconography) and the societal frame, Todd Phillips's *Joker*, like many other Joker narratives, revolves around the question: "If you tell a joke but there's no one there to laugh... is it still funny?"⁵⁴ – and the answer does not seem to

⁴⁹ Oring, "Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster"; Kuipers, "Media Culture and Internet Disaster Jokes".

⁵⁰ Oring, "Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster", 284.

⁵¹ Kuipers, *Good Humor, Bad Taste*, 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Gray and Kaklamanidou, *The 21st Century Superhero*, 3.

⁵⁴ Whitta et al, "Kill the Batman".

matter at all. In Joker stories, clown laughter successfully propagates (and escalates) irrespective of any framing signalling that humour is involved.⁵⁵

Joker's monstrous laugh(ter)-without-laughing, sick jokes, and the funny-looking but deadly serious social protesters have a similar appearance and share a common *iconography* in the film: the laughing clown face that "spreads" from one person (Arthur) to many. How can its "contagiousness" be deciphered? On the one hand, and more generally, in accordance with Rod Martin, the appeal and even "contagiousness" of the image of clown laughter can be explained by its inherent positive vibe, its ability to bring about positive emotions in a group of people (assuming that they are not afraid of clowns) and to "coordinat[e] their activities".⁵⁶ Clown performances have an impact on group creation in two ways: the members of the audience become closer as they simultaneously laugh together ("laughing with") and identify a clown as an outsider ("laughing at"). Laughter thus stimulates the feeling of belonging and even introduces some aspects of shared identity; listening to other people's laughter, one is prompted to join in.

From this perspective, the virality of laughter is closely linked to experiences and feelings shared between the members of the group. Even if the emotions associated with the cultural *pars-pro-toto* of laughter, the clown, are not precisely positively connoted, the (promise of) shared experiences that it stimulates may serve as an explanation for the virality of clown iconography in *Joker*. On the other hand, and without any connection to humour, the viral nature of laughter has been linked to psychogenic illness.⁵⁷ In the case of the 1962 Tanganyika laughter epidemic, for example, it was the contagiousness of hysteria, rather than the contagiousness of laughter *per se* that made the epidemic so widespread.⁵⁸ The laughter could thus be a symptom which merely marks a broader contagious condition.

Regardless of whether the tendency of laughter "to spread through a group in a chain reaction"⁵⁹, its virality, is a function of its socialness or a psychogenic illness, the susceptibility of people to the same humorous items tends to decrease over time. Similarly to the immune system of a body that protects it from repeated infection caused by the same virus, the human brain is not as receptive to the second and consequent exposure to the same humorous item.⁶⁰ The adaptability of humour thus becomes not only a handy tool for its spread but also a necessary prerequisite for its survival. Although these parallels between humour and viruses by no means suggest that the comparison could be extended to consider the virus as a biological model of humour, or vice versa, that humour is a direct social and communicative analogue

⁵⁵ Peacock, *Slapstick and Comic Performance*.

⁵⁶ Martin, *The Psychology of Humor*, 10.

⁵⁷ Hempelmann, "The Laughter of the 1962 Tanganyika 'Laughter Epidemic'".

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

⁵⁹ Provine and Yong, "Laughter", 121.

⁶⁰ Or so says Khoury, "Norm formation", 161.

of the virus, their potentialities and fictional interplay are explored in Joker stories in which, for example, the Joker's *jokerising* virus goes viral through the internet.

The 2011 *Batman Imposters* story is an example thereof, in which “viral messaging” serves Joker fans (called “Jokerz”) to distribute and obtain mind-altering (also known as *jokerising*) substances, while in *Batman fights the Joker Virus* (2012), Joker creates a digital version of “Joker venom”, threatening “millions of video-game players to become his obedient zombies”.⁶¹ Besides chemicals, make-up and masks, cutting-edge technologies can thus also be included among the methods by which the clown messiah spreads its toxic blessing.

“How many times has someone been “jokerised” and driven mad?”⁶² Joker’s Violent Laughter

Virtuoso, corporeal-eccentric and violent clown plays from the popular stage have been promoted to the paradigm of an advanced aesthetic by both late-nineteenth-century and contemporary critics. Embodying paradigms of artistic creation processes, they are believed to contain the secret of modern art par excellence.⁶³ One of their descendants is the Joker, who – in line with his clown pedigree – is “an outsider who perceives, understands, and acts in a manner very different from the “normal order of things”.⁶⁴ What Ashley Tobias describes as the clown’s “anarchistic spirit” resurfaces in the Clown Prince of Crime: “The clown’s unrestrained vitality and his inability, or unwillingness, to behave in accordance with the normal order of things, results in him transgressing all manner of clearly defined boundaries”.⁶⁵ By irreverently crossing boundaries, the Joker destabilises those boundaries and “reduces to chaos the order they establish and maintain”.⁶⁶ The Joker is a singular entity *and* a multiplicity within the singular at the same time, for which art and sciences are the predominant modes for negotiating good and evil (with the scales pointing to evil).

Luxuriating in pathological body aesthetics, engaging in monstrous body engineering and self-multiplication (by giving “birth” to artificial creatures), and attacking the integrity of bodies (including his own), for example in *Batman Volume 7: Endgame*, the Joker celebrates violent bodily disintegration and resurrection, and

⁶¹ Peterson et al, *The Dark Knight*, book spine.

⁶² *Batman Three Jokers* #1 (2020).

⁶³ According to Jörg von Brincken, *Tour de Force*, 112–13, sciences – medicine and anatomical science in particular – have accompanied the aesthetically appreciative gaze of the crowd and the artistic fascination with the violated and wounded body for centuries, expressed, for instance, in the once burgeoning fashion for visiting morgues, public executions and the growing number of anatomical collections. All this, alleges von Brincken, has contributed to a modernity greedy for the spectacular.

⁶⁴ Tobias, “The Postmodern Theatre Clown”, 38.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 53.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 53.

new, experimental knowledge – or *psychopathic science* – the way mad scientists⁶⁷ and *Frankensteinian clown scientists* do. Clowns and the result of *Frankensteinian* science, the monstrous wretch, are associated with a “lack of social graces; impulsive, crude, or violent assaults against others” (cf. Schechter; 1985: 99), and with a comic tradition in which the human body becomes an object of ridicule.⁶⁸ As a clown (whether funny or not), whose “classical predecessors” are Dionysus and “the satanic clown Mephisto”⁶⁹, Joker does not explore “the nihilistic conception of the body as the limit of existence”, but instead explores “the innovative possibilities to be found in its explosion”⁷⁰ – embodied, among others, in “explosive”, spreading and epidemic laughter. In Joker stories, like in other *Frankensteinian* clown contexts, the clown scientist’s body becomes its own narrative. Furthermore, it narrates pathology.

No wonder, in *Batman Imposters*, Batman distinguishes between “real laughter” and Joker’s version of it. Real laughter is “infectious” and “makes you want to join in, share the joke”.⁷¹ The latter manifests itself physiologically in pathological body aesthetics (bleached skin, damaged nerves of facial muscles and broken jaws), and “socially” in the shared experience of and belonging to violent outbursts of clown protest. In all its incarnations, the meaning of Joker’s laughter (e.g. as an inner mode, or emotion) is suspended and rewritten into the purely temporary suddenness and instantiation of an intense external grimace. Such violent and empty laughter, in most cases induced and potentiated by science, serves primarily as the expression of violence itself, which shows itself as form without shape. In the words of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, violence is a display(ing) (*monstration*) and show(ing), an ostentation of what remains faceless.⁷²

The gesture of violence functions as a functionless overdetermination of expressive events, in which the unbridgeable gap between inner cause and outer consequence becomes obvious and external expression becomes independent of the content. Joker’s laughter embodies a genuinely performative quality of violence: his “empty” humour does not act as a corrective but as the actual guarantor of this quality. Joker’s laugh is, and produces, violence as image and imagery, which is its real fascination.⁷³ “Jokerised” laughter is violence staged as an aesthetic effect; or, put differently, the laughing catastrophe of the natural body is a gain for its aesthetic staging. Staged without any metaphysical, psychological, or moral justification, in Joker narratives, deformation is art – and is affirmed as such in laughter.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Haynes, *From Madman to Crime Fighter*.

⁶⁸ Jürgens, “Side-Splitting Amusement”.

⁶⁹ Riggan, *Pícaros, Madmen, Naifs, and Clowns*, 98.

⁷⁰ Reyes, *Body Gothic*, 56.

⁷¹ Hine et al, *Batman Imposters*.

⁷² Nancy, *Bild und Gewalt*, 86.

⁷³ Von Brincken, *Tours de Force*, 145.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 203.

For Joker, the homicidal, iconoclastic avant-garde artist, the human body is the canvas on which he uses science to paint a perverse smile. Joker's epidemic, contagious, violent, psychopathic, disembodied laugh is a Cheshire-cat-style clown laugh that in many Batman stories can be heard even after the Joker has died – and it is the last visible thing that remains. *Batman: Death of the Family* most appropriately illustrates this, when after the (presumed?) death of the Joker, Batman's computer finally identifies the previously unknown "isotope in Joker toxin" as "Element 105: Dubnium", also known as "Hahnium". And it is the symbol of this element we are left with: Ha.

References

- Andrae, Thomas. *Creators of the Superheroes*. Neshannock, Pennsylvania, USA: Hermes Press, 2011.
- Bachtin Michail Michajlovic̆, and Iswolsky Hélène. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Barrows, Eddy. *Nightwing*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2013.
- Batman*. USA: Guber-Peters Company, 1989.
- Bermejo, Lee, and Brian Azzarello. “Two Fell into the Hornet’s Nest”. Essay. In *Joker: Speciale 80. Anniversario*. Burbank, California, USA: The Joker 80th Anniversary, 2020.
- Brincken, Jörg von. *Tours De Force: Die Ästhetik Des Grotesken in Der Französischen Pantomime des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer, 2006.
- Brubaker, Ed, Doug Mahnke, Sean Phillips, Patrick Zircher, Aaron Sowd, Steve Bird. *Batman, the Man Who Laughs*. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2020.
- Chovanec, Jan. “Early Titanic Jokes: A Disaster for the Theory of Disaster Jokes?” *HUMOR* 32, no. 2 (2019): 201–25. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2018-0090>.
- Daniel, Tony S. *Batman, Detective Comics*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2012.
- Daniels, Les, Chip Kidd, and Geoff Spear. *Batman: The Complete History*. San Francisco, California, USA: Chronicle Books, 2004.
- DC Comics. “A Savage Innocence, The Spectre #51, March 1997”. Essay. In *The Joker: His Greatest Jokes*, 117–39. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- DC Comics. “Public Luna-Tic Number One! (from Detective Comics #388)”. Essay. In *The Joker: His Greatest Jokes*, 40–54. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- DC Comics. “The Cross-Country Crimes! (from Batman #8)”. Essay. In *The Joker: His Greatest Jokes*, 4–16. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- DC Comics. “This One’ll Kill You, Batman (From Batman#260)”. Essay. In *The Joker: His Greatest Jokes*, 55–75. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- DC Comics. “Trust. Part One (From Detective Comics#833)”. Essay. In *The Joker: His Greatest Jokes*, 140–62. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- DC Comics. “Trust. Part Two (From Detective Comics#834)”. Essay. In *The Joker: His Greatest Jokes*, 163–85. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- Fabok, Jason, Geoff Johns, Brad Anderson, Olav Beemer, Seppe Cools, and Bob Kane. *Batman Three Jokers*. Breda, Netherlands: Dark Dragon Books, 2021.
- Fox, Gardner F., John Broome, Mike Friedrich, Carmine Infantino, Sheldon Moldoff, Chic Stone, Joe Giella, and Bob Kane. *Batman: Volume 3*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2008.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious: Newly Translated from the German and Edited*. New York, New York, USA: Norton, 1960.
- Freud, Sigmund. Humour, In *Collected papers*, 215–221. London: Hogarth Press, 1950 [1927].
- Garcia, Kami et al. *Joker/Harley – Criminal Sanity*. Burbank: DC Black Label, 2022.

- Grant, Alan, Doug Moench, Kelley Jones, Vince Giarrano, John Beatty, Ray McCarthy, Gregory Wright, Pamela Rambo, Todd Klein, and Bill Oakley. *Batman: Contagion*. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2016.
- Gray, Richard J., and Betty Kaklamanidou. *The 21st Century Superhero: Essays on Gender, Genre and Globalization in Film*. Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland, 2011.
- Groys, Boris. Essay. In *Räume, Körper Und Ikonen (Post-)Konfessionelle Filmikonographien*, 47–62. Marburg, Germany: Schüren, 2013.
- Haynes, Roslynn D. *From Madman to Crime Fighter: The Scientist in Western Culture*. Baltimore, Maryland, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.
- Hempelmann, Christian F. "The Laughter of the 1962 Tanganyika 'Laughter Epidemic.'" *Humor – International Journal of Humor Research* 20, no. 1 (2007): 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humor.2007.003>.
- Hine, David, Scott McDaniel, Andy Owens, David Baron, and Todd Klein. *Batman. Imposters*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2011.
- Joker*. USA: Warner Brothers, 2019.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "Costumes of Belonging: 'Fitting in' Circus Fabrics in the Novels *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* by Peter Carey and *The Pilo Family Circus* by Will Elliott, and the Costume-Cum-Body Art of Leigh Bowery." Essay. In *Social Beings, Future Belongings: Reimagining the Social*, 98–104. London, UK: Routledge, 2020.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "Fun-De-Siècle': Dance, Popular Spectacles and the Circus". Essay. In *Zwischenzonen: Bewegungskünste Im 19. Jahrhundert: Tanz, Oper, Zirkus, Varieté*, 172–88. München, Germany: Epodium Verlag, 2020.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "A Funny Taste: Clowns and Cannibals". *Comedy Studies* 9, no. 2 (2018): 171–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2040610x.2018.1494358>.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "Batman and the World of Tomorrow: Yesterday's Technological Future in the Animated Film *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*". *Animation* 15, no. 3 (2020): 246–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746847720965459>.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "Being the Alien: The Space Pierrots and Circus Spaces of David Bowie, Klaus Nomi and Michael Jackson". *Outer Space and Popular Culture*, 2022, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91786-9_1.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "Side-Splitting Amusement". *Comedy Studies* 11, no. 1 (2019): 121–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2040610x.2019.1692538>.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "The Joker, a Neo-Modern Clown of Violence". *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5, no. 4 (2014): 441–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2014.926956>.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie. "The Pathology of Joker's Dance: The Origins of Arthur Fleck's Body Aesthetics in Todd Phillips's 2019 *Joker* Film". *Dance Chronicle* 43, no. 3 (2020): 321–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2020.1816740>.
- Khoury, Robert M. "Norm Formation, Social Conformity, and the Confederating Function of Humor". *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal* 13, no. 2 (1985): 159–65. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.1985.13.2.159>.
- Kirby, David A. *Lab Coats in Hollywood - Science, Scientists, and Cinema*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press, 2013.

The Cheshire Clown

- Kuipers, Giseline, and Kate Simms. *Good Humor, Bad Taste a Sociology of the Joke*. Boston, Massachusetts, USA: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015.
- Kuipers, Giseline. "Media Culture and Internet Disaster Jokes". *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4 (2002): 450–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1364942002005004296>.
- Lee, Jim, Scott Williams, and Alex Sinclair. "Batman vs. the Joker (from Batman #1)". Essay. In *The Joker: 80 Years of the Clown Prince of Crime*, 9–21. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2020.
- Lee, Jim, Scott Williams, and Alex Sinclair. "The Joker Returns (from Batman #1)". Essay. In *The Joker: 80 Years of the Clown Prince of Crime*, 22–34. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2020.
- Lee, Jim, Scott Williams, and Alex Sinclair. "The Man behind the Red Hood! (From Detective Comics)". Essay. In *The Joker: 80 Years of the Clown Prince of Crime*, 35–48. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2020.
- Lemire, Jeff, and Andrea Sorrentino. *Joker: Killer Smile*. Paris, France: Urban comics, 2020.
- Martin, Rod A. *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. San Diego, California, USA: Academic Press, 2018.
- Merriam Webster. "Artist Definition & Meaning". Merriam-Webster. Accessed November 25, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/artist>.
- Morreall, John. "Philosophy of Humor". Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford University, August 20, 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/>.
- Morrison, John Gordon, and Igor Kordey. *Batman and Son*. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2015.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Bild Und Gewalt: Von Absoluter Offenbarung Und Dem Unendlich Bevorstehenden". *Lettre Internationale*, 20n.d., 86–90.
- Nilsson, Nils John. "Rictus Grins and Glasgow Smiles: the Joker as Satirical Discourse". Essay. In *Joker: A Serious Study of the Clown Prince of Crime*, 165–78. Oxford, Mississippi, USA: University Press of Mississippi, 2016.
- O'Neil, Dennis, Elliot S. Maggin, Martin Pasko, Irv Novick, Dick Giordano, García-López José Luis, Ernie Chan, Vince Colletta, Tex Blaisdell, and Frank McLaughlin. *The Joker: The Clown Prince of Crime*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2013.
- Oring, Elliott. "Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster". *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 397 (1987): 276–86. <https://doi.org/10.2307/540324>.
- Peacock, Louise. *Slapstick and Comic Performance: Comedy and Pain*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Peterson, Scott, and Mike Cavallaro. *The Dark Knight: Batman Fights the Joker Virus*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: DC Comics, 2012.
- Provine, Robert R., and Yvonne L. Yong. "Laughter: A Stereotyped Human Vocalization". *Ethology* 89, no. 2 (2010): 115–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1439-0310.1991.tb00298.x>.
- Reyes, Aldana Xavier. *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film*. Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Press, 2014.

- Riesch, Hauke. "Why Did the Proton Cross the Road? Humour and Science Communication". *Public Understanding of Science* 24, no. 7 (2014): 768–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662514546299>.
- Riggan, William. *Picaros: Madmen, naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator*. Norman, Oklahoma, USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981.
- Santos, Dan, and Anna-Sophie Jürgens. "From Harleen Quinzel to Harley Quinn: science, symmetry and transformation". *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2023.2249978>.
- Saroglou, Vassilis, and Lydwine Anciaux. "Liking Sick Humor: Coping Styles and Religion as Predictors". *Humor – International Journal of Humor Research* 17, no. 3 (2004): 257–77. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.2004.012>.
- Schechter, Joel. *Durov's Pig: Clowns, Politics, and Theatre*. New York, New York, USA: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.
- Sharrett, Michael C. "Batman and the Twilight of the Idols: An Interview with Frank Miller". In *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, 33–46. New York, New York, USA: Routledge, 1991.
- Smith, Jonathan M. "And Doesn't All the World Love a Clown?: Finding the Joker and the Representation of His Evil". In *Riddle Me This, Batman!: Essays on the Universe of the Dark Knight*, 187–200. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011.
- Snyder, Scott, and Greg Capullo. *The Joker: Death of the Family*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2013.
- Snyder, Scott, and Tom Taylor. "Scars". Essay. In *The Joker 80th Anniversary 100-Page Super Spectacular #1*, edited by Paul Dini. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2020.
- Snyder, Scott, Greg Capullo, Danny Miki, and Fco Plascencia. *Batman, Volume 7*. New York, New York, USA: DC Comics, 2015.
- Snyder, Scott, James Tynion, and Eduardo Risso. *The Batman Who Laughs*. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2019.
- Snyder, Scott, John Romita, Danny Miki, Tom Palmer, Sandra Hope, Richard Friend, and Steve Wands. *All-Star Batman. Ends of the Earth*. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2017.
- Spencer, Herbert. *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects*. London, UK: Duke Classics, 2020.
- Taylor, Julia M. "Punch Line". Essay. In *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, 611–12. Thousand Oaks, California, USA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014.
- Tobias, Ashleigh. "The Postmodern Theatre Clown". In *Clowns, Fools and Picaros: Popular Forms in Theatre, Fiction and Film*, 37–56. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2007.
- Tynion IV, James, Guillem March, and Arif Prianto. *The Joker: Volume Two*. Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2022.
- Whitta, Gary. "Kill the Batman". Burbank, California, USA: DC Comics, 2020.
- Williams, Mark P. "Making Sense Squared: Iterations and Synthesis in Grant Morrison's Joker". In *The Joker: A Serious Study of The Clown Prince of Crime* edited by Robert Moses Peaslee and Robert G. Weiner, 209–228. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015.