

Signs of Insanity

How do psychoanalytic and semiotic frameworks enhance the emotional impact of madness on screen?

Introduction

Throughout all ages of films the theme of “madness” is there offering a glimpse into the fragility and complexities of the human mind. It’s captivating not only because of the psychological interest but because of how it reflects border cultural anxieties and curiosity into the human psyche. But what is madness? Madness is commonly described as a loss of reason, behaviour or thinking that is dangerous. According to Gomory et al., (2013) madness refers to “behaviours and ideas deemed profoundly abnormal or disturbing, shaped by cultural and social frameworks rather than scientific consensus” It often is seen as a broad label for actions that challenge societal norms and elicit strong emotional reactions. In the context of ‘film’ Bell, Emma (2007) states that “madness challenges aesthetics and explores political ideas.” Movements like Expressionism and Surrealism often romanticize it, while Lars von Trier's Dogma '95 films use madness to raise ethical and philosophical questions.

This dissertation aims to argue that films employing psychoanalysis, semiotics, and aesthetics create a stronger emotional impact than those using straight forward narratives. Hamid Reza Shairi et al.(2024) argues that straightforward narrative is a linear storytelling technique that explicitly presents plot and character development, often prioritising clarity and coherence over subtlety or abstraction. These Narratives rely on direct exposition and dialogue to convey ideas and emotions, which can limit audience engagement with deeper, symbolic layers of meaning.

In order to find out how psychoanalytic and semiotic frameworks enhance the emotional impact of madness on screen this dissertation will look into 3 case studies; ‘Joker’, ‘Revenge of the Sith’ and ‘Birdman’. Todd Phillips’ Joker portrays Arthur fleck’s psychological decline through trauma, alienation and societal neglect. Its psychological depth, symbolic use of clown imagery, and gritty aesthetics make it an ideal case for examining how layered techniques evoke emotional responses to madness. George Lucas’ Revenge of the Sith depicts Anakin Skywalker's descent into madness as a result of fear, loss and internal conflict. Through semiotic cues like shadow imagery and dramatic musical motifs, the film demonstrates how symbolism and aesthetics amplify the emotional resonance of a character's transformation. Alejandro G. Inarritu’s Birdman delves into Riggan Thomson’s identity crisis and hallucinations. With its psychoanalysis exploration of ego, recurring symbolic motifs, and immersive single-shot aesthetic, the film shows how visual and narrative complexities deepen audience engagement.

Exploring Psychoanalysis in Depicting Madness

Psychoanalysis is multiple factors ranging from cognitive process, social theories and foundational psychological insight, reflecting both individual and collective areas of the human experience. Lifebulb,(2024) states that the core belief of Psychoanalysis is that we are influenced by our unconscious thoughts, behaviours, emotions, and memories.

According to Freud, S. (1915), the unconscious mind is a part of the psyche that functions outside of conscious awareness, housing repressed thoughts, desires, and memories. It influences behaviour and decision-making indirectly, often revealing itself through dreams, slip of the tongue, or involuntary reactions. Unlike the conscious mind, it does not operate with logic or a sense of time, and its contents are driven by instinctual needs and unresolved conflicts. The unconscious acts as a hidden force shaping emotions and actions, often without the individual realizing its impact.

This concept is exemplified in *Joker* through the main character, Arthur Fleck. As Arthur's real life experiences constantly undermine his fantasy, triggering resentment and violent urges. Arthur's violent outbursts, such as the subway killing, represent the 'return of the repressed' as years of humiliation and suppression manifest in explosive violence. As well as this his uncontrollable laughter serves as a physical symptom repression, blurring the line between a coping mechanism and a sign of psychological fracture. These behaviors appear to be involuntary, as the character's unconscious thoughts are expressed through physical acts such as uncontrollable laughter and rage on the subway.

This character's behavior can alternatively be interpreted as a defense mechanism. Salman, A., (2020) describes Freud's theory of repression as a 'defence mechanism' where unacceptable or distressing thoughts, desires, or memories are pushed out of conscious awareness to avoid conflict with one's self. This process is continuous, demanding sustained mental efforts to maintain the suppression of these contents. Repression Often occurs when an impulse or idea clashes with the ego, superego and other competing instincts, rendering it unacceptable to the conscious mind. Even though repressed material is excluded from conscious awareness, it still indirectly affects behaviour, reappearing in dreams, slips of the tongue, or 'symbolic expressions in neurotic symptoms.

This dynamic of repression and its impact on behavior provides a foundation for understanding Arthur Fleck's psychological breakdown in *Joker* (Phillips, 2020), which can also be analyzed through Freud's model of the id, ego, and superego. Arthur's 'id' is driven by violent impulses and a desire for recognition, his 'id' often overwhelms his fragile 'ego', which struggles to mediate between these impulses and societal rejection. His 'Superego', shaped by societal judgement and his mother's influence, impose guilt and shame, contributing to his psychosis. This dynamic is evident in scenes where Arthur fantasizes about being adored by talk show host Murray Franklin, reflecting his deep yearning for acceptance and love.

This analysis of Arthur's breakdown exemplifies Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego, aligning with Lapsley & Stey's (2011) broader explanation of how these components interact to shape behavior and mental health. As Lapsley & Stey, (2011) States that Freud's theory of personality outlines the id, ego, and superego as interacting components of the psyche. The id is the source of instinctual drives and operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate fulfilment. The ego, shaped by experience, balances the id's desires with the constraints of reality, acting as the rational part of the mind. The superego, emerging from parental and social influence, enforces moral standards and strives for perfection. The ongoing interaction between the Id, ego and superego shapes behaviour and influences mental health.

A further example of Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego is the moment Arthur kills his mother, this reflects as his final break with the 'superego', dismantling the last constraint on his 'id'. Although Arthur's complete transformation into the 'Joker' happens at the end of the film, with his appearance on Murray Franklin's show signifying the collapse of his 'ego', with the 'id' fully taking over. The symbolic application of makeup, a mask of his true self, visually represents this psychological shift.

While Freud's theory examines the interplay between the id, ego, and superego in shaping behavior, Lacan's mirror stage theory shifts the focus to how identity develops through the process of misrecognition and the creation of an idealized self-image. Lacan's mirror stage theory suggests that when a child sees their reflection, they begin to form a sense of self. The child identifies with the image, but this creates a gap between how they see themselves and how they actually feel. This misrecognition leads to a sense of alienation and shapes how identity develops. The mirror stage highlights how our understanding of who we are is based on an idealized but unattainable image, influencing our sense of self throughout life. Billig, M. (2006).

This concept is exemplified in *Birdman* (Iñárritu, 2015), which explores the psychological unraveling of Riggan Thomson through Lacan's mirror stage and the concept of identity misrecognition. Riggan's obsession with reclaiming his former fame reflects the gap between his idealized self-image (Imaginary Order) and the Real—the truth of his declining career and personal dissatisfaction. This misrecognition is vividly portrayed in scenes where Riggan imagines himself flying or engaging in conversations with his Birdman alter ego, symbolizing his fractured identity and detachment from reality.

In addition to these symbolic scenes, the mirror stage is metaphorically represented by Riggan's ongoing reflection on his past glory, which highlights his struggle to align his self-perception with the present. This gap between his idealized self and his reality drives his alienation and fractured identity, illustrating Lacan's theory of how misrecognition shapes one's understanding of self.

This exploration of Lacan's mirror stage theory provides a foundation for understanding how identity is shaped, which is further expanded through his framework of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real, offering deeper insight into the complexities of human experience and the psyche. Kasparas Pocius. (2021) States that Lacan's theory of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real outlines three key dimensions of human experience. The Imaginary is shaped by images and identification, beginning with the mirror stage, where the self is formed through misrecognition. The Symbolic introduces language and social rules, shaping identity and desire through external structures. The Real reflects what lies beyond representation, exposing gaps in meaning and surfacing as moments of rupture or trauma. These three orders interact to reveal the complexities and contradictions at the core of subjectivity.

Lacan's framework of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real offers a critical lens for examining Anakin's internal conflict, particularly his failure to reconcile personal desires with the expectations imposed by the Symbolic Order.(represented by the Jedi Code and societal expectations). The opera house scene, where Palpatine tells Anakin the legend of Darth Plagueis, symbolizes this tension, as Palpatine exploits Anakin's fear of loss 'his lack' to lure him toward the Dark Side. Anakin's submission to Palpatine and betrayal of the Jedi mirrors the breakdown of his connection to the Symbolic Order, as he discards external rules and moral boundaries in pursuit of power.

A further example of Lacan's framework is demonstrated through Riggan's struggles, showcasing the tension between his idealized self and the reality he faces. Riggan's obsession with reclaiming his former fame reflects the gap between his idealized self-image (Imaginary Order) and 'the Real'—the truth of his declining career and personal dissatisfaction. His desire for validation mirrors Lacan's *objet petit a*, as Riggan seeks an external object to complete his fragmented self. However, each attempt only deepens his alienation, reinforcing the unattainable nature of desire. His confrontation with Tabitha, the critic, reflects the Real, exposing the futility of his quest for symbolic completeness.

This foundation leads naturally to Lacan's theory of lack and desire, which explores the underlying forces shaping human behavior and internal conflicts. Kirshner, L. (2005) Finds that Lacan's theory of lack and desire suggests that desire stems from a sense of incompleteness. Stating that 'neither self nor others can ever be whole', this lack fuels an individual to seek fulfilment in others or objects. The object of desire, known as '*objet petit a*', represents what the subject believes will complete them but ultimately remains unattainable. Kirshner also writes that Lacan emphasised that desires are shaped by social structures and symbolic relationships rather than biological drives, highlighting how the search for satisfaction is endless and central to human experience.

Riggan's desire for validation from critics and audiences mirrors Lacan's *objet petit a*, as Riggan seeks an external object to complete his fragmented self. However, each attempt to reclaim this lost status only deepens his feelings of alienation and failure, reinforcing Lacan's notion that the object of desire is unattainable.

Anakin Skywalker's fall in *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005) is another clear exploration of Lacan's theory of lack and desire. Anakin's desire for power and his fear of losing Padmé stem from deep-seated trauma and an incomplete sense of self. His desperate quest to prevent Padmé's death reflects Lacan's concept of *objet petit a*, the unattainable object that promises fulfillment but ultimately leads to further loss and fragmentation. Despite having achieved power, Anakin's inability to save Padmé reveals the futility of attempting to fill this lack, reinforcing the idea that desire is driven by the pursuit of what can never fully be attained.

Across *Joker*, *Revenge of the Sith*, and *Birdman*, psychoanalysis reveals how unresolved desires, identity conflicts, and repression drive the characters' psychological unraveling. Arthur's violence, Anakin's fall, and Riggan's fractured identity reflect the struggle with unconscious forces. Visual and symbolic cues, like Arthur's laughter, Anakin's visions, and Riggan's hallucinations, expose their inner conflicts. By using psychoanalytic theory, filmmakers craft complex, relatable characters, exploring loss, alienation, and unattainable desires. This lens deepens storytelling and offers insight into both the characters' psyches and the audience's own unconscious drives.

Analyzing Semiotics and Symbolism in Portraying Madness

Film semiotics is the study of how meaning is created and communicated through the use of signs and symbols in film. (Kotliar, Svitlana et al. 2018) Drawing from foundational theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics examines the relationship between the sign (the image, sound, or symbol), the signifier (its physical form), and the signified (the concept it represents). (Berger, 2005)

Building on the foundational principles of semiotics, Saussure's theory of structuralism provides a crucial framework for analyzing how signs and symbols in film interact within a structured system to create meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of structuralism is key to understanding how film operates as a system of signs. (Saniya, 2023) explained Saussure's as an idea that the sign, made up of the "signifier" (the physical form, like an image or sound) and the "signified" (the meaning or concept it represents), can be applied to film. For example, a red rose might act as a signifier for love. The meaning in film comes from the relationships between these signs within the overall structure of the film. Saussure's focus on how these signs work through contrasts and associations helps explain how films build meaning through their visual and auditory elements.

Saussure's concept of signs and their relationships within a structured system offers insight into how *Joker* employs visual and narrative elements to convey deeper meanings about identity and conflict. In *Joker* (Phillips, 2020), Arthur's clown makeup serves as a powerful signifier, symbolizing his transformation and fractured identity. This makeup, in contrast to his earlier subdued appearance, creates a visual language that highlights his descent into madness. Additionally, the film's recurring imagery of societal rejection—such as graffiti, hostile crowds, and aggressive encounters—functions as a system of signs. Together, these elements construct meaning about Arthur's alienation and internal conflict, aligning with Saussure's idea that meaning arises from the relationships between signs within a structured system.

A further example of Saussure's concept is *Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005) as Anakin's black robes and red lightsaber both serve as key signifiers of his shift to the dark side. Representing his internal moral collapse. As well as this The film's visual contrasts, such as the bright, orderly Jedi Temple against the dark, chaotic environment of Mustafar, further reflect Saussure's theory that meaning is derived from differences within a system. These structured oppositions emphasize Anakin's transformation, both visually and narratively, as he abandons the values of the Jedi to pursue personal power.

Saussure's concept is also found within *Birdman* (Iñárritu, 2015), as Riggan's Birdman alter ego acts as a central signifier, representing both his past fame and his fractured sense of self. This alter ego visually and thematically contrasts with his real-life struggles, such as his declining career and strained personal relationships. The film's structured interplay between Riggan's imagined ability to fly and his grounded, chaotic reality reflects Saussure's idea that meaning is constructed through relational differences. These elements work together to depict the tension between Riggan's perceived reality and his idealized self-image.

While Saussure's structuralism emphasizes the relationships between signs within a system, Charles Sanders Peirce expands this understanding by categorizing signs based on their specific connection to their referents, offering a complementary perspective on how meaning is constructed in film. Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs categorizes them into three types: icon, index, and symbol, each defined by the relationship between the sign and its object. An icon directly resembles its referent, such as a photograph representing a person or a map depicting geographical features (Peirce, 1931–1958). An index has a direct, causal, or physical connection to its referent, like smoke indicating fire or footprints signaling someone's presence. In contrast, a symbol relies on learned or cultural associations rather than a direct connection; for example, a red rose symbolizes love, but this meaning is culturally constructed. Peirce's triadic model emphasizes how meaning is constructed through these varying relationships, offering a versatile framework for analyzing visual and narrative elements in media, particularly in film, where icons, indices, and symbols interact to create layered meanings (Chandler, 2007).

Peirce's theory of signs can be directly applied to *Joker*, where the use of icons, indices, and symbols effectively conveys Arthur's transformation and psychological decline. In *Joker*, Arthur's clown makeup serves as a symbol, representing his fractured identity and descent into madness. Its meaning draws on cultural associations with clowns as figures of both humor and tragedy, subverted to signify chaos and instability. His uncontrollable laughter functions as an index, directly linked to his neurological condition and repressed emotions, connecting his internal struggles to his external behavior. Similarly, the visual of Arthur dancing on the stairs acts as an icon, directly resembling his transformation into the Joker persona.

Peirce's framework also applies to *Revenge of the Sith*, illustrating Anakin's descent into darkness. Because Anakin's red lightsaber is a symbol, signifying his allegiance to the Dark Side, with red culturally associated with danger and aggression. His physical injuries during the duel on Mustafar are indexical, illustrating the consequences of his moral and psychological collapse. Additionally, Darth Vader's mask and suit operate as icons, visually representing his complete detachment from humanity.

Similarly, in *Birdman*, Peirce's framework reveals how icons, indices, and symbols work together to highlight Riggan's psychological struggles and fragmented sense of self. We see Riggan's Birdman alter ego is an icon, resembling the superhero that once defined his fame and identity. His physical and emotional exhaustion serves as an index, pointing to his internal breakdown, while the film's ambiguous ending—where Riggan appears to fly or fall—acts as a symbol, leaving his transcendence or failure open to interpretation. Across all three films, the interplay of icons, indices, and symbols creates layered meanings that emphasize the characters' psychological journeys and conflicts.

While Peirce's theory focuses on the meaning of individual signs and their relationships to their referents, Metz's Grand Syntagmatic shifts the focus to how sequences of signs are organized within a film to create meaning through narrative structure and visual patterns. Metz's Grand Syntagmatic is a method for analyzing how films convey meaning through the structure of their sequences. It focuses on how different segments, such as montages or linear progressions, function within the larger narrative. By examining the arrangement of visual, auditory, and narrative elements, Metz's theory

reveals how films create patterns and emotions, emphasizing how interconnected sequences contribute to storytelling and thematic depth. (Media Studies, 2024)

In *Joker*, Metz's Grand Syntagmatic can be seen in how the film uses structured sequences to show Arthur's transformation. Key moments, like Arthur putting on his clown makeup or dancing, work together to build meaning about his descent into madness. The buildup to his appearance on the Murray Franklin show is a clear example, with visual and narrative cues—like his preparation, the tension in the music, and his erratic behavior—leading to his full transformation into the Joker persona. These sequences work together to highlight his growing detachment from reality.

Revenge of the Sith reflects Metz's syntagmatic approach in its depiction of Anakin's gradual detachment from the Jedi Order. For instance, the scene where Anakin stands alone in the Jedi Council chamber, framed against a sunset, uses visuals and silence to symbolize his growing isolation and internal conflict. Another example is the sequence of Order 66, where the montage of Jedi being executed combines dramatic music and action to show the immediate consequences of Anakin's choice to side with Palpatine. These sequences work together to emphasize the weight of his decisions and his ultimate transformation into Darth Vader.

In *Birdman*, Metz's theory is reflected in the way the film's long-take style creates a continuous sequence that mirrors Riggan's chaotic mental state. For instance, the buildup to Riggan's staged suicide combines dialogue, performance, and hallucinations, creating a structured sequence that blurs the line between his reality and delusion. The film's ending, where Riggan appears to either fly or fall, uses visual and narrative cues to reflect his fragmented sense of self and leave his psychological state open to interpretation.

Semiotics and symbolism are essential in portraying madness on screen, allowing directors to use visual and narrative elements to reflect their characters' inner conflicts. Through theories like Saussure's structuralism, Peirce's triadic model, and Metz's grand syntagmatic, films such as *Joker*, *Revenge of the Sith*, and *Birdman* show how meaning is created to highlight psychological struggles and transformation. These semiotic frameworks enhance the emotional impact of madness on screen by creating layered meanings that resonate with audiences, allowing them to connect with the characters' experiences on a deeper level.

Exploring how aesthetic choices amplify audience emotions

Inyang, E. N. (2017) states that the way visual, sound, and editing come together in a film plays a huge role in setting the mood and drawing out emotional reactions from the audience. In Nollywood, for example, filmmakers use a mix of aesthetic elements like imagery, lighting, and sound to create beauty and make stories feel believable, all while aiming to spark specific emotions. They rely on signs, codes, and conventions, blending them with techniques in camera work, lighting, sound, and editing to shape meaning and guide how viewers experience the story. Studios, (2024) highlights that visual elements in film, like colour, lighting, and camera movement can shape a viewer's emotional reaction by activating certain neurological responses.

The use of colour in film is a powerful tool for setting mood and shaping emotional experiences, as supported by various studies exploring the connection between color perception, emotional response, and narrative structure.

Weber, D., & Kostek, B. (2019) highlight that color perception plays a crucial role in shaping emotional experiences within visual media. Their analysis of color grading in relation to film music reveals that specific color palettes can amplify the emotional impact of a scene, as viewers often associate certain colors with particular emotions when paired with music in video clips. This concept is evident in *Joker* (2019), where the contrasting use of muted tones and vibrant colors mirrors the

protagonist's descent into madness, heightening the audience's emotional connection to his psychological unraveling.

Similarly, Su, Z. (2024) investigates human color perception and its correlation with fine-grained emotion prediction in videos. This study shows that incorporating perceptual color features enhances the accuracy of emotion prediction models, illustrating how color not only provides aesthetic value but also profoundly influences emotional interpretation. This is exemplified in *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), where the shift to fiery red and dark palettes during Anakin Skywalker's transformation into Darth Vader intensifies the emotional weight of his tragic fall and the climactic duel on Mustafar.

Color symbolism also plays a significant role in character development and narrative structure. Kovsh, O., & Dziuba, M. (2022) emphasize that thoughtfully organized color schemes can deepen the portrayal of characters and heighten dramatic tension, enhancing the viewer's emotional engagement. In *Birdman* (2014), for instance, the film's use of dim, shadowy lighting combined with stark contrasts reflects the protagonist's internal struggles and blurred lines between reality and delusion, engaging viewers on an emotional and symbolic level. Kovsh, O., & Dziuba (2022) further note that strategic color combinations create associations and convey deeper meanings, which are crucial for guiding the audience through the emotional journey of a film.

The emotional depth created through the use of color in film is further enriched by sound, as both elements work together to shape the audience's experience, with each complementing and amplifying the other to evoke mood and emotional resonance. Sound in film serves as a versatile tool for evoking mood, utilizing realistic post production techniques, innovative sound design, and deliberate linguistic choices in audio descriptions to shape the audience's emotional experience.

Yu, E. (2003) emphasizes the pivotal role sound plays in influencing mood and emotional engagement. Postproduction sound, often more refined than production sound, employs theories of original sound and acoustic space to heighten emotional impact. Techniques such as sound effects and surround sound help immerse audiences beyond the screen's two-dimensional boundaries, enhancing their emotional connection to the narrative. This can be seen in *Joker* (2019), where the haunting, melancholic score by Hildur Guðnadóttir is layered with realistic diegetic sound to reflect Arthur Fleck's psychological turmoil. The combination of distorted violin tones and everyday city noises creates a stark contrast that mirrors his descent into madness, intensifying the audience's emotional response.

Additionally, Srinives, T. (2011) highlights the significance of sound in creating atmospheres, particularly in exhibition design. The use of sound effects and instrumental music becomes essential in conveying narratives and shaping audience behavior, ultimately influencing the mood of the environment and enhancing the overall experience. This concept is exemplified in *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), where John Williams' dramatic orchestral score punctuates Anakin Skywalker's transformation into Darth Vader. The swelling strings and booming percussion during critical scenes, such as the climactic duel on Mustafar, create a heightened emotional intensity that draws viewers into the narrative's tragic arc.

Furthermore, in *Birdman* (2014), Antonio Sánchez's innovative use of a jazz percussion score blends seamlessly with the film's ambient sound design, reflecting the protagonist's chaotic internal struggles. The rhythmic, improvisational drumming amplifies the film's tension and instability, while the naturalistic background noise grounds the story in reality. This interplay of sound mirrors the film's themes of delusion and artistic desperation, reinforcing the audience's engagement with the character's emotional journey.

Building on the emotional resonance created by sound, the art of editing further shapes the viewer's experience by controlling the rhythm, flow, and visual composition of a film, seamlessly guiding their emotional engagement with the narrative.

Cutting, J. E. (2021) highlights that editing significantly impacts mood and emotional responses in film. Through the manipulation of cinematic techniques such as the rhythm of cuts and transitions, filmmakers can deeply influence the audience's perception and engagement. In *Birdman* (2014), the illusion of continuous, unbroken takes showcases how editing—or its deliberate absence—can heighten emotional intensity and immerse the audience in the protagonist's unraveling psyche. Cutting's discussion in *Movies on Our Minds* also explores how the structure of scenes and transitions between shots maintain attention and enhance emotional commitment, emphasizing the historical evolution of these techniques and their effect on viewer engagement.

Cao, Z. (2024) further examines the interaction between film color and editing styles in shaping emotional perception, as discussed in *Exploring the Combined Impact of Color and Editing on Emotional Perception in Authentic Films*. The study demonstrates that specific editing choices, paired with deliberate color palettes, can significantly affect viewers' emotional responses, supported by both subjective ratings and neuroimaging data. This dynamic is evident in *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), where rapid cuts during lightsaber duels are paired with fiery red and orange tones, amplifying the tension and emotional stakes of the narrative.

Brine, K. G. (2020) underscores the role of shot design and editing in shaping the audience's understanding of time and space, which directly influences mood. Techniques such as continuity editing and strategic cuts are essential in guiding the viewer's emotional journey, creating tension or relief. In *Joker* (2019), the use of slow cuts during Arthur's introspective moments juxtaposed with rapid cuts during his violent outbursts allows the audience to feel both his inner turmoil and the chaos of his actions, drawing them deeper into his fractured mental state.

The deliberate use of aesthetic elements, color, sound, and editing, amplifies audience emotions by creating a cohesive sensory experience that mirrors the characters' instability. These choices not only enhance the narrative's emotional depth but also immerse viewers in the psychological turmoil of the characters, fostering a deeper connection to their struggles and the overarching themes of the film.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has demonstrated that psychoanalytic and semiotic frameworks are pivotal in enhancing the emotional impact of madness on screen by deepening audience engagement with the characters' psychological struggles and the narrative's thematic complexity. Through the analysis of *Joker*, *Revenge of the Sith*, and *Birdman*, it is evident that these frameworks offer nuanced tools for exploring madness beyond surface-level storytelling.

Psychoanalytic theory provides a lens to unravel the unconscious forces driving characters toward instability. Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, alongside Lacan's theories of misrecognition and desire, reveal how repressed emotions, fractured identities, and unattainable aspirations fuel the descent into madness. In *Joker*, Arthur Fleck's uncontrollable laughter and violent outbursts embody Freudian repression, while his id-dominated transformation into the Joker mirrors the collapse of his ego. Similarly, Lacan's ideas of the Imaginary and the Real illustrates Riggan Thomson's fractured identity in *Birdman*, as he struggles with his fading fame and unattainable self-image. In *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker's tragic arc reflects Lacan's objet petit a, with his relentless pursuit of power and control driven by a fear of loss. These psychoanalytic layers not only provide depth to the characters' journeys but also resonate with the audience's own subconscious fears and desires, forging a profound emotional connection.

Semiotic frameworks further amplify this impact by crafting visual and narrative cues that signify psychological and thematic depth. Saussure's structuralism and Peirce's triadic model demonstrate how signs, such as Arthur's clown makeup, Anakin's red lightsaber, and Riggan's Birdman alter ego, serve as powerful symbols of transformation and instability. These signs, integrated within structured

narrative systems, guide viewers through the characters' unraveling psyches, creating a multi-layered cinematic experience. Metz's Grand Syntagmatic further underscores how sequences of visual and auditory elements, such as the climactic scenes in all three case studies, construct emotional arcs that enhance viewer engagement.

When combined with aesthetic choices in color, sound, and editing, these frameworks create a cohesive sensory experience that mirrors the instability of the characters. By intertwining psychoanalysis and semiotics, filmmakers evoke an emotional resonance that transcends straightforward narratives, immersing audiences in the psychological depths of madness and offering a richer, more impactful exploration of the human condition.

Ultimately, these frameworks not only deepen the portrayal of madness but also challenge viewers to reflect on the fragile complexities of the human psyche, making the cinematic experience both thought provoking and emotionally compelling.

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