

**One Bad Day and the Line of Flight,
the Joker's Escape from Order:
A Deleuzeoguattarian Reading of
Madness and Desire in Batman:
The Killing Joke**

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Abstract:

Madness, desire, and the dissolution of order are central to *Batman: The Killing Joke*, a graphic novel that reimagines the Joker's origin as both tragic and transformative. The present paper examines the representation of madness in Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's text through the philosophical framework of French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, particularly their concepts of deterritorialization, desiring-production, the body without organs, and the line of flight. To explore how the Joker's psychological and physical transformation resists moral and social structures, this study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in Deleuzeoguattarian schizoanalysis. The study argues that the Joker's "one bad day" marks not a descent into insanity but an act of becoming, an escape from the rigid territorialities of identity, reason, and justice that govern Gotham. Batman and the Joker thus emerge as interconnected assemblages in a continuous process of reterritorialization, mirroring the dynamics of order and chaos within late capitalist culture. The results indicate that the comic stages madness not as pathology but as creative resistance, revealing the ethics of desire that underpins Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions on subjectivity, power, and the politics of desire in contemporary graphic narratives.

Keywords: Deleuze and Guattari, schizoanalysis, deterritorialization, desiring-production, Body without Organs, assemblage.

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1. Introduction

The concept of becoming has occupied a central yet evolving position in Western philosophy, tracing a lineage from the pre-Socratics to poststructuralist thought. In contrast to being, which denotes stability and identity, becoming gestures toward flux, transformation, and the perpetual motion of existence. Heraclitus first articulated this intuition through the claim that one never steps into the same river twice, emphasizing change as the essence of reality (Heraclitus). Later, Plato and Aristotle sought to domesticate becoming by subordinating it to the permanence of forms or substance, thus, privileging ontology over process (Cooper). In the modern era, philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche reinstated becoming as the vital pulse of existence. As Kisner mentions Spinoza's monism imagined reality as a single substance expressing itself through infinite modes of transformation, while Nietzsche radicalized the idea in his doctrine of eternal recurrence, where life endlessly creates and destroys itself. Yet it is with Deleuze, and later in collaboration with Guattari, that becoming was reconfigured as a non-linear, anti-essentialist process of continual differentiation. In their joint works, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari proposed that all life is composed of dynamic assemblages animated by desire and movement, resisting fixed identity. Their philosophy redefined subjectivity not as a stable entity but as an ever-shifting field of becomings, animal, molecular, machinic, and otherwise, that transgress the boundaries of reason, morality, and representation.

This theoretical framework provides a fertile ground for re-examining *Batman: The Killing Joke*, a seminal graphic novel written by Alan Moore and illustrated by Brian Bolland. The text presents one of the more psychologically complex portrayals of the Joker, Batman's most notorious adversary. It offers a possible origin story in which a failed comedian, after a series of tragic events culminating in his disfigurement, becomes the Joker, a figure of unrestrained chaos and anarchic laughter. The narrative's nonlinear structure, coupled with its recurring motif of one bad day, collapses the distinction between sanity and madness, suggesting that anyone, even Batman, could descend into disorder given the right circumstances (Moore & Bolland). Visually and thematically, *The Killing Joke* oscillates between the grotesque and the absurd, the human and the inhuman, mirroring the Deleuzeoguattarian conception of a subject perpetually in flux. The comic's refusal to moralize or to provide closure reinforces its alignment with Deleuze and Guattari's notions of desire as production rather than lack, and of madness as a form of creative deterritorialization.

Building upon the aforementioned resonance, the present article examines *The Killing Joke* through the philosophical lens of Deleuze and Guattari, focusing on the interrelation between madness, desire, and becoming. It argues that the Joker's transformation exemplifies what Deleuze and Guattari term a "line of flight," an escape from the rigid codes of identity, order,

and reason that define Gotham City. By analyzing key visual and narrative moments, the paper seeks to reveal how the Joker's madness operates not as mere pathology but as an affirmative act of resistance against normalization. In doing so, it aims to contribute to contemporary discussions on subjectivity, ethics, and the politics of desire within graphic literature, positioning *Batman: The Killing Joke* as a text that visualizes philosophy through the aesthetics of madness and metamorphosis.

2. Review of Literature

The following chapter reviews both the sources concerning the theoretical framework of the present study, namely Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy, and the discourse surrounding Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *Batman: The Killing Joke*, with a focus on its political symbolism, cultural impact, and theoretical interpretations. While extensive scholarship has explored the graphic novel's themes, such as the instability of identity, deconstruction of narrative coherence, and multimodal complexity, there remains a gap. Almost no studies have applied Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts to the text. This chapter seeks to position their ideas as tools for a deeper reading of the novel's power dynamics, constructions of identity, and critique of authoritarianism. In addition, this chapter delves into the scholarly works revolving around *Batman: The Killing Joke*.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon the philosophical framework of Deleuze and Guattari, whose collaborative works propose a radical rethinking of subjectivity, desire, and madness. Their critique of psychoanalysis and representation transforms traditional notions of the self, revealing subjectivity as an ongoing process of *becoming* rather than a fixed identity. Within this theoretical landscape, several interrelated concepts, including but not limited to desiring-production, Body without Organs, becoming, and deterritorialization, offer tools for understanding the Joker's transformation in *Batman: The Killing Joke* as a line of flight, an escape from the molar structures of reason, morality, and order that define Gotham City.

3.1. Desiring-Production

At the core of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is their reconceptualization of desire as productive rather than representational. They argue that desire is not a lack to be fulfilled, as psychoanalysis posits, but a generative force that continually constructs realities and subjectivities. As Eugene W. Holland explains, desiring-production is the process through which the unconscious functions as a machine, producing connections, flows, and assemblages that constitute life itself. Desire is not oriented toward objects but toward intensities and relations, as the engine of becoming.

Brian Massumi emphasizes that desire, in Deleuze and Guattari's view, engineers reality, functioning as a creative force that deterritorializes established forms of life.

3.2. The Body without Organs

The Body without Organs (BwO), articulated by Deleuze and Guattari and elaborated in Deleuze's earlier work, represents the state of potentiality that underlies all organization. It is not a literal body but a conceptual field where desire circulates freely, prior to its capture by social codes or psychic hierarchies. Another source mentions Guattari defining the BwO as "unformed plane of consistency," a space of resistance to stratification (Bogue 132).

Guattari extends this idea, where he identifies the BwO as an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, a creative threshold from which new forms of subjectivity can emerge. The Joker's madness thus represents not a collapse into nothingness but an experiment in becoming other, an attempt to live beyond the stratified norms of Gotham's moral and psychological order.

3.3. Becoming

Deleuze's notion of becoming rejects identity as static or essential. Becoming is a process of transformation without predetermined telos, a movement between states rather than a transition from one fixed form to another.

3.4. Deterritorialization and the Line of Flight

Another idea central to Deleuze and Guattari's theory is the concept of deterritorialization, the movement through which structures of meaning, identity, and power are destabilized. Deterritorialization is paired with reterritorialization, the process of reimposing order (Deleuze & Guattari). Between them lies the line of flight, a vector of escape through which desire seeks new configurations.

3.5. Madness and Desire

Madness occupies a pivotal role in the Deleuzeoguattarian project. Unlike in Foucault, where madness is historically produced as an exclusion by reason, Deleuze and Guattari revalue it as a mode of creative intensity. Madness, in this sense, is not the negation of reason but its excess, a surge of desire that shatters the apparatuses of control. Deleuze and Guattari describe the schizophrenic as a figure of resistance who deterritorializes the socius by exposing the artificiality of its codes.

3.6. Studies on Batman: The Killing Joke

Since its publication in 1988, Moore and Bolland's *Batman: The Killing Joke* has emerged as one of the most analyzed and controversial texts in the Batman canon. As both a psychological study and a cultural artifact, the graphic novel has attracted scholarly attention across disciplines including literary theory, media studies, philosophy, and psychology. The majority

of these studies interrogate its complex engagement with identity, morality, and madness, often situating the text within the broader evolution of superhero narratives toward postmodern and poststructuralist forms of storytelling.

Early critical responses to *The Killing Joke* tend to focus on its narrative and psychological dimensions. On one hand, Will Brooker's seminal work *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon* was among the first to approach the Batman mythos through a cultural studies lens. Brooker reads *The Killing Joke* as an exploration of "a story about control, structure, rules and order — represented by Batman and Gordon — being put to the test by insanity" (272). On the other hand, Geoff Klock, in *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*, situates *The Killing Joke* within Moore's broader postmodern project of deconstructing narrative coherence and mythic authority. Klock interprets the Joker's one bad day philosophy as a device that questions the sanity of Batman's and Joker's own reactions to a random tragic event in their respective lives, asking which one has the saner response. Both Brooker and Klock thus contribute to an understanding of the graphic novel as a text of fragmentation and reflexivity, a theme that resonates strongly with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of subjectivity as a process of continual becoming.

More recent scholarship, however, has shifted from narrative analysis to philosophical and aesthetic readings, engaging with *The Killing Joke* as a site where madness, laughter, and desire intersect. Duncan and Smith's *The Power of Comics: Culture, Form, and Context* emphasizes the complexity of Moore's storytelling, identifying how he shifts from traditional superhero stories to narratives "that took apart the very concept of superhero" (276).

Additionally, Eric Garneau expands on *The Killing Joke* as a seminal exploration of the Joker's fragmented self. Garneau identifies the story as a landmark text that codifies the Joker's super-sanity, his acute awareness of life's absurdity and the artificiality of identity. Drawing upon Judith Butler's theories of performativity, Garneau argues that the Joker's self-reinvention as a failed comedian turned anarchist represents an exaggerated form of postmodern identity construction, where performance replaces essence. In this view, *The Killing Joke* dramatizes the Joker's realization that both sanity and identity are performances maintained by societal consensus. This interpretation aligns with the text's central claim that all it takes is one bad day to dissolve moral and psychological order.

Furthermore, vyShali Manivannan situates *The Killing Joke* within the lineage of mythic trickster narratives. Manivannan interprets the story's carnival setting and its theatrical violence as allegories for digital-age nihilism and "Dadaist absurdity" (Peasley & Weiner XXV). Through the Joker's insistence that madness is a rational response to a senseless world, Manivannan argues that *The Killing Joke* articulates a philosophy of transgression, a symbolic rejection of modern rationalism. The Joker's one-bad-day argument becomes a metaphor for cultural disillusionment, positioning him as a mirror to late-capitalist instability and digital subcultural rebellion.

Taken together, these studies illustrate the richness and versatility of *The Killing Joke* as an object of critical inquiry. They reveal how the text operates simultaneously as a psychological narrative, a philosophical allegory, and a cultural critique. Yet, despite growing attention to its philosophical dimensions, relatively few analyses have systematically employed a Deleuzeoguattarian framework to interpret the Joker's madness as a line of flight. The present study aims to fill this gap by synthesizing insights from existing scholarship while advancing a reading that foregrounds becoming, desire, and deterritorialization as central to the text's depiction of madness and order. In doing so, it positions *The Killing Joke* not merely as a story of psychological collapse but as a visual-philosophical meditation on the creative and destructive potentials of desire itself.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-critical research design to examine the representation of madness, desire, and becoming in *Batman: The Killing Joke* through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts. Anchored in poststructuralist theory, this approach facilitates an interpretive engagement with the text's visual and narrative structures, enabling an exploration of how the comic embodies the dynamics of becoming, deterritorialization, and the line of flight. By combining close textual and visual analysis with theoretical constructs from *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the study aims to illuminate how the Joker's transformation functions as a philosophical enactment of desire's creative and destructive potentials.

The research adopts a library-based methodology, relying primarily on theoretical and critical literature related to Deleuzeoguattarian philosophy, comic studies, and cultural theory. This design ensures a rigorous conceptual grounding while allowing for flexibility in textual interpretation. The study's descriptive orientation prioritizes detailed analysis and interpretive synthesis over empirical generalization, focusing on how the text generates meaning through visual form, narrative rhythm, and affective intensity. The qualitative nature of the research allows for a deep engagement with both the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of *The Killing Joke*, positioning the text as a site of conceptual experimentation.

The primary data for this research is Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *Batman: The Killing Joke* examined as an autonomous narrative artifact within the broader field of graphic literature and cultural philosophy. The text is treated not merely as a representation of madness but as a diagrammatic assemblage, a dynamic network of signs, images, and affects that produce meaning through their interaction. Secondary sources include key works by Deleuze and Guattari, particularly *Anti-Oedipus*, and *A Thousand Plateaus*, alongside critical interpretations by scholars such as Eugene Holland, Brian Massumi, and Claire Colebrook. These sources provide the conceptual scaffolding through which the Joker's madness is read as a manifestation of *desiring-production* and the *Body without Organs*.

The methodological procedure involves detailed textual and visual reading, emphasizing both the linguistic and graphic dimensions of the comic. Panels, color schemes, spatial organization, and dialogue are annotated and coded for recurring motifs related to becoming, madness, order, and desire. These annotations form the basis for a thematic analysis, linking aesthetic patterns with theoretical concepts. Analytical categories are derived both a priori, from Deleuzeoguattarian philosophy, and emergently, from recurring textual phenomena identified during iterative readings. Units of analysis range from individual panels and speech balloons to entire narrative sequences, with attention given to how visual composition and narrative rhythm enact processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Through this descriptive-critical method, the study seeks to reveal how *The Killing Joke* dramatizes the Deleuzeoguattarian notion of the line of flight, a movement of escape from the fixed strata of identity and morality. The coding process involves mapping textual and visual instances of rupture, repetition, and intensity that correspond to philosophical categories such as the Body without Organs or becoming-mad. These coded elements are analyzed for their structural and affective functions, allowing the study to articulate how Moore and Bolland's narrative expresses the immanent tension between creativity and destruction that defines the schizoanalytic field of desire.

Methodological integrity is ensured through reflexivity and triangulation. Reflexivity is maintained by documenting interpretive decisions, acknowledging the researcher's theoretical positioning within Deleuzeoguattarian discourse. Triangulation is achieved through cross-referencing interpretations with existing critical literature in both philosophy and comics studies, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. The integration of philosophical texts with visual analysis ensures that interpretations remain grounded in textual evidence while engaging with theoretical abstraction.

Although the study does not involve empirical participants, methodological rigor is achieved through systematic engagement with primary and secondary sources, detailed annotation, and iterative theoretical reflection. The library-based nature of the research ensures a comprehensive foundation in both philosophical and cultural scholarship, while its descriptive orientation emphasizes interpretive precision and depth. This approach allows for the articulation of the Joker's madness not as pathology but as a philosophical experiment, a becoming that transgresses the limits of identity and reason.

By integrating Deleuzeoguattarian theory with close reading, this study contributes to both comics scholarship and philosophical aesthetics. It demonstrates how *The Killing Joke* functions as a site of conceptual performance, where madness becomes an act of creation and the line of flight a mode of resistance against order. The methodology thus situates the graphic novel within a broader philosophical discourse on desire, deterritorialization, and becoming, offering a framework that bridges visual narrative analysis and critical theory.

5. Findings

This chapter applies the Deleuzeoguattarian framework to the narrative and visual structure of *Batman: The Killing Joke*, examining how desire, becoming, and madness function as forces of deterritorialization within the text. Moore and Bolland's graphic novel can be read as a site of the transformation of philosophical concepts into visual and affective intensities. Through repetition, symmetry, and rupture, the story dramatizes desire's productive power and its potential for annihilation. The Joker's madness becomes a line of flight, his laughter an act of deterritorialization that dissolves the boundaries between sanity and insanity, law and chaos, human and monstrous.

The chapter is divided into five interrelated subsections, desiring-production, the Body without Organs, becoming, deterritorialization, and madness, which together chart the novel's schizoanalytic landscape. The analysis focuses on panel composition, color, lighting, and repetition, emphasizing how the novel's visual and verbal language mirrors Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of desire and subjectivity.

5.1. Desiring-Production

The opening of *Batman: The Killing Joke* immediately establishes a machinic rhythm of desire through its visual and tonal composition. The sequence begins with no dialogue, only the soundless imagery of Batman driving through the rain toward Arkham Asylum.



(Moore & Bolland 6).

The absence of speech here is not emptiness but potential, a gathering of affective intensity before expression. In Deleuzeoguattarian terms, desire is already at work, constructing connections, between Batman, the city, the rain, and the asylum, before any words are spoken. Each panel, divided by sterile white gutters, functions as a discrete cell in a desiring-machine,

rain to road, tire to puddle, figure to gate. The repetition of rectangular frames enacts a mechanical rhythm, mirroring the very logic of desiring-production, the endless circuiting of energy through conduits and interruptions.

When Batman finally speaks to the man he assumes is the Joker, the dialogue itself operates like a machine that attempts to stabilize meaning, to impose order. "Hello, I came to talk," Batman begins (Moore & Bolland 9). "I've been thinking lately. About you and me. About what's going to happen to us. In the end. We're going to kill each other, aren't we?" His speech, fragmented by pauses and repetitions, "Perhaps you'll kill me. Perhaps I'll kill you. Perhaps sooner. Perhaps later," resembles the mechanical rhythm of the panels themselves. Desire here manifests as oscillation, between violence and conciliation, between order and chaos. Batman's attempt to rationalize their relationship is already infected by the very intensity he seeks to repress. His dialogue becomes a series of circuits that short out in their own repetition, revealing language as a desiring process rather than a stable expression of intent.

In contrast, the Joker's later monologues unleash desire as productive excess rather than repression. His speech overflows with linguistic energy, collapsing meaning into rhythm and sound. "If you hurt inside, get certified," he chants during Gordon's torture sequence, his words becoming singsong absurdities detached from propositional sense (30). "Don't get ee-ee-even, get mad!" The stutter here, "ee-ee-even," acts as a glitch in the machine of language, an eruption of pure affect that momentarily deterritorializes speech itself. Laughter, rhyme, and repetition transform dialogue into a sonic assemblage, aligning with the Deleuzeoguattarian idea that desire is a flow of intensities rather than signification.

The flashbacks contrast this linguistic exuberance with the timid, broken speech of the pre-Joker figure, a failed comedian desperate for recognition. "Jeez, I have to go, I have to go and **stand** up there, and nobody **laughs**, and you think, you think I ... Oh God. Oh God, I'm sorry ..." (12). The hesitations and repetitions here enact the blockage of desire. His stutter and self-correction dramatize the moment when productive energy encounters repression, the symbolic order of failure, shame, and domestic responsibility. The later Joker's compulsive laughter can thus be read as the release of this blocked energy, an eruption of desiring-production freed from representational limits. His entire persona becomes the living embodiment of desire unmoored from social regulation, a machinic assemblage that produces jokes, chaos, and violence as a single continuous flow.

The visual parallels intensify this reading. In the flashbacks, the only color is red, on the lobster and the Red Hood's helmet, marking the latent energy of desire awaiting explosion.



(Moore & Bolland 20)



(Moore & Bolland 21)

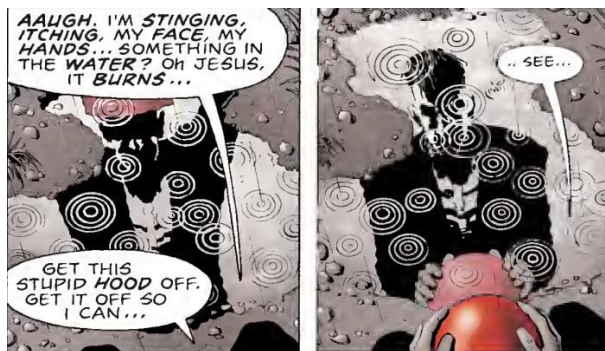
In the present, this red reemerges as the background to Barbara's torture photographs, the culmination of desire's circuit from potential to production. The transition from monochrome

flashbacks to the saturated reds of violence visually encodes the process of desiring-production turning kinetic.

The interplay between Batman's controlled dialogue and the Joker's overflowing speech defines the book's central tension. Batman's words seek closure, order, and containment; the Joker's proliferate meaning until it collapses. Desire, in the Deleuzeoguattarian sense, flows between these two poles, between repression and liberation, silence and laughter, molar law and molecular madness. *The Killing Joke* thus enacts a desiring-machine where speech and image operate together, producing madness not as lack or failure but as the inevitable consequence of language pushed beyond the threshold of sense.

5.2. The Body without Organs

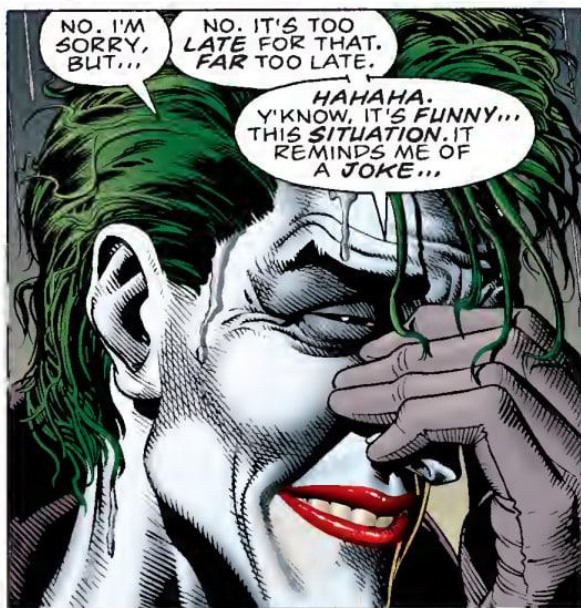
The Joker's transformation after his fall into the vat of chemicals represents one of the most literal visualizations of the Body without Organs (BwO) in graphic literature. The BwO, as Deleuze and Guattari theorize, is not a body without parts but a body without hierarchy, a surface of pure potential. In the flashbacks, the Joker's body is continually positioned within spaces of confinement, the small apartment, the factory he reluctantly agrees to infiltrate, and the claustrophobic Red Hood helmet. When he emerges from the chemical vat, his face burning and his body drenched in fluorescent liquid, the boundaries of the human form dissolve.



(Moore & Bolland 37)

The moment of his rebirth is visualized through reflection. He gazes into a puddle formed by the rain and sees the distorted, white face that will define him. His agony becomes laughter, a sound that annihilates meaning and creates affect. This is the creation of the BwO, the old, organized body of the struggling comedian is dissolved into a surface of intensities, white skin, green hair, red lips, on which new affects circulate. The chemicals which he falls into act as the medium of this transformation. They are the fluids that dissolve the stratified body and return it to a state of becoming.

The Joker's fluctuating physiognomy throughout the novel visualizes the unstable nature of the BwO. Sometimes his face is drawn with realistic proportions—rounded features, human expressions:



(Moore & Bolland 49)

At other times, his mouth stretches unnaturally, his chin elongates, his cheekbones bulge grotesquely:



(Moore & Bolland 30)

These oscillations between the plausible and the monstrous signify the BwO's constant reconfiguration. His body refuses to settle into a fixed identity.

This unmaking of the body extends beyond the Joker himself. Barbara Gordon's shooting scene visualizes the forced creation of another BwO. Her body, fragmented through photographic images and displayed as spectacle, becomes a field of affective intensities, pain, humiliation, and exposure. The red filter dominating these panels reinforces the affective charge of violence and desire. Similarly, Gordon's terrified expressions as he is forced through the funhouse ride mark his own destabilization, the disintegration of his moral and psychological coherence.

In each case, the BwO operates as both liberation and horror. The Joker's laughter, Barbara's wound, Gordon's breakdown, each event strips away organization and reveals the raw field of desire that lies beneath the social and moral order of Gotham.

5.3. Becoming

If the Body without Organs represents the Joker's disintegration into pure affect, then Becoming reveals how both he and Batman exist in perpetual transformation, not fixed entities but processes in motion. Becoming, in Deleuzeoguattarian thought, rejects identity as a stable essence. It is a movement between states, an ongoing metamorphosis without origin or end. In *The Killing Joke*, the "one bad day" motif crystallizes this concept, situating madness not as a condition that defines the Joker alone, but as an ever-present possibility latent within all subjects, even Batman himself.

The novel opens and closes on a rainy night a cyclical structure that visually encodes becoming as repetition.



(Moore & Bolland 6)



(Moore & Bolland 51)

The first scene, Batman driving toward Arkham Asylum in silence, mirrors the final scene, where he confronts the Joker under the same rainfall. This circular narrative design undermines any sense of linear progression; instead, the story folds back on itself, enacting Deleuze's "time-image," where events no longer follow a causal sequence but coexist as multiple durations. The rain, constant and rhythmic, is the material metaphor for becoming. It dissolves boundaries, flows across forms, and blurs distinctions between the human, the moral, and the mad.

The "one bad day" speech, arguably the novel's philosophical center, transforms the abstract, Deleuzeoguattarian, becoming into a psychological and existential event. The Joker's assertion, "All it takes is one bad day to reduce the sanest man alive to lunacy," collapses the difference between sanity and madness into a continuum (Moore & Bolland 43). His rhetoric embodies what is called "becoming-mad," a movement that exposes the instability of identity (Deleuze & Guattari 344). Madness, for the Joker, is not a pathology but a potential. It is the line along which one deterritorializes from the molar identity of the "sane man." His dialogue, "When I saw what a black, awful joke the world was, I went crazy as a coot! I admit it! Why can't you?" functions as an invitation, an interpellation of Batman, and by extension, the reader into this process of becoming (Moore & Bolland 44).

Visually, the previously mentioned discourse of transformation is echoed through repetition and mirroring. The transitions between flashback and present often hinge on identical gestures or compositions, most notably, the parallel between the Joker reaching toward his wife's hand in the past and the "Laughing Clown" machine in the present.



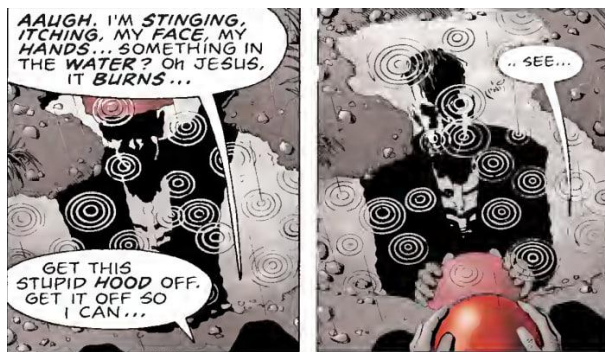
(Moore & Bolland 13)

These mirror-images enact what is described as “becoming-other,” a transformation triggered by repetition, where identity slips through its own reflection (Deleuze & Guattari 238). The Joker’s past self, timid and hesitant, bleeds into his manic present self, not as two distinct figures but as overlapping intensities in motion. The mirroring thus collapses temporal separation. The man and the monster coexist in a perpetual circuit of becoming.

The dialogue reinforces this continuity. In the flashbacks, the failed comedian stutters, apologizes, and pleads for understanding, “Jeez, I have to go, I have to go and **stand** up there, and nobody **laughs**, and you think, you think I... Oh God” (Moore & Bolland 12). His fragmented syntax and self-correction anticipate the erratic rhythm of his later speech. The stutter, a linguistic hesitation, becomes a minor refrain, a molecular sign of becoming-mad. By contrast, in the present, the Joker’s speech has deterritorialized entirely. His linguistic order dissolves into nonsense rhymes and compulsive laughter, a transformation from semantic communication to affective vibration. Deleuze and Guattari describe this as the stammering of language, where speech itself becomes a body of intensity rather than meaning. The Joker’s words perform his madness rather than describing it.

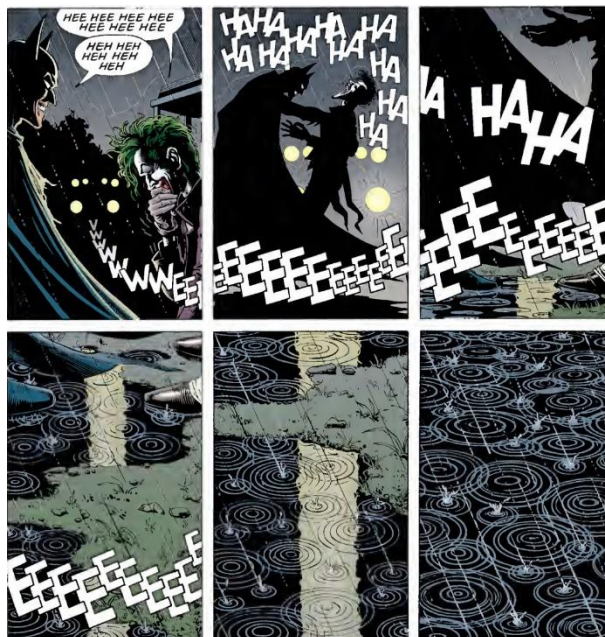
Batman’s own dialogue positions him as a figure of becoming-law, the inverse of the Joker’s becoming-mad. In his opening monologue, “About you and me. About what’s going to happen to us. In the **end**. We’re going to kill each other, aren’t we?” Batman articulates an awareness of his own unstable boundary (Moore & Bolland 9). He recognizes that his identity is defined by his relation to the Joker. Each is the other’s double, their becomings intertwined. The repetition of this sentiment at the novel’s conclusion, now internalized as Batman’s thoughts rather than spoken words, marks a shift from assertion to realization. The distinction between law and chaos collapses into reflexivity. Batman becomes the Joker’s mirror, just as the Joker once mirrored his own reflection. The “you and me” refrain thus functions as the axis of their shared becoming.

The rain, again, mediates the aforementioned process. It connects the two timelines, the past of the comedian’s failure and the present of the Joker’s rampage, suggesting that becoming is not transformation after trauma, but an endless repetition of the same event across different planes. The puddle in which the Joker first sees his new face



(Moore & Bolland 37)

and the rain-soaked final confrontation



(Moore & Bolland 51)

both depict the dissolution of form into surface. In both cases, reflection becomes the site of transformation. The Joker's laughter at his reflection in the puddle is echoed in the final laughter he shares with Batman. In Deleuzeoguattarian terms, this is not a resolution but as recurrence, a loop where meaning dissipates, and only affect circulates.

Language, at the novel's end, collapses into laughter, "HAHAHAHA" that fills the panels. Batman joins in, his grim face softening, his silhouette blending into the Joker's under the rain. The laughter is neither reconciliation nor triumph. It is the dissolution of both into the molecular flow of becoming. Speech deterritorializes into sound, identity into rhythm, morality into affect. What remains is pure immanence, the rain, the laughter, the blurred outlines, where becoming overtakes both law and madness.

In *The Killing Joke*, then, becoming is the very structure of the narrative. Its cyclical temporality, mirrored imagery, and oscillating dialogue enact a continuous dissolution of

boundaries, between past and present, sanity and insanity, self and other. The Joker's "one bad day" is not a singular origin but a diagram of becoming itself, the perpetual collapse and reformation of identity under the pressure of chaos.

5.4. Deterritorialization and the Line of Flight

If becoming describes the Joker's metamorphosis, then deterritorialization marks the forces that enable and sustain it. For Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization is the process by which established structures, social, moral, linguistic, or bodily, are displaced, dismantled, and reconfigured. In *The Killing Joke*, the Joker's descent into madness and his ongoing conflict with Batman illustrate this process as both liberation and danger, a line of flight that simultaneously escapes and threatens to implode.

The opening pages already hint at this dual movement. The rectangular panels, tightly organized with clean white gutters, give the illusion of order and containment.



(Moore & Bolland 6)

Yet this rigid structure fractures when Batman confronts the fake Joker; the composition shifts to three narrow frames above a large, expansive one.



(Moore & Bolland 8)

This visual rupture mirrors the very concept of deterritorialization, the moment when the symbolic system of Gotham, and by extension, of reason itself, begins to falter. The reader's gaze, once guided by predictable rhythm, is now released into disarray. The transition from structure to fluidity visually performs the Joker's philosophy that "one bad day" can shatter any illusion of control.

The funhouse sequence is the novel's purest depiction of deterritorialization. As Gordon is stripped, humiliated, and forced to witness the projected images of his wounded daughter, the carnival setting, ostensibly a space of amusement, becomes a grotesque parody of reality. The Joker's line, "If you hurt inside, get certified, and if life should treat you bad... Don't get ee-ee-even, get mad!" functions as both mockery and manifesto (Moore & Bolland 30). His stutter, that broken rhythm of language, operates as a linguistic deterritorialization, destabilizing sense itself. Here, meaning collapses into rhythm, echoing Deleuze and Guattari's insistence that deterritorialization is not the absence of structure, but its transformation into vibration and intensity. The surrounding panels heighten this sense. Barbara's photographs, tinted in red and scattered like debris across the background, invade Gordon's visual field, dislocating spatial

coherence. The page no longer represents a single scene but a multiplicity of overlapping affects, fear, shame, rage, all coexisting without hierarchy.

Color plays a central role in this aesthetic of deterritorialization. Throughout the flashbacks, red is the only chromatic element that punctures the monochrome palette.



(Moore & Bolland 21)



(Moore & Bolland 36)**(Moore & Bolland 18)**

Initially associated with the Joker's Red Hood disguise, red becomes a sign of excess, the point where representation overflows into affect. It reappears in the lobster meal, in the chemical vat, and in Barbara's blood, tracing a visual line of flight that connects past, present, and trauma. Red is both the mark of the Joker's origin and the signature of his ongoing rupture with order. Each recurrence of the color deterritorializes time itself, binding disparate events into a single circuit of madness.

Gordon's psychological ordeal represents another kind of deterritorialization, one that, paradoxically, leads to reterritorialization. Stripped and caged, he embodies the pure exposure of the subject once its social coordinates are dissolved. His journey through the funhouse is a descent through madness, yet his survival of it, and Batman's later affirmation that Gordon remains "as sane as he ever was," marks the point of resistance (Moore & Bolland 46). Unlike the Joker, Gordon reterritorializes. He returns to the structure of law and reason. This dialectic exemplifies Deleuze and Guattari's warning. Not all lines of flight lead to liberation. Some implode, while others stabilize new territories. The Joker's flight is suicidal, turning inward, while Gordon's is recuperative, finding a new ground within the ruins.

Visually, the novel represents this oscillation between deterritorialization and reterritorialization through repeated framings of reflection and distortion. The puddle in which the Joker sees his new face after emerging from the chemicals literalizes the concept, the self dissolved, liquefied, and reconstituted as something else. The surface of the puddle functions as a threshold, the site where identity deterritorializes.



(Moore & Bolland 15)

Similarly, the Dutch-angled panel of Batman in the Batcave, surrounded by multiple screens projecting the Joker's image, depicts the collapse of surveillance and knowledge. The technological apparatus that defines Batman's rational order becomes a mirror chamber of uncertainty. His monitors, once instruments of control, now reproduce the very chaos he seeks to contain.

The Joker's laughter throughout these scenes operates as an aural form of deterritorialization. It punctuates and disrupts dialogue, shattering narrative continuity. When he recounts his multiple-choice past, "Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another. If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!", he deterritorializes narrative itself (Moore & Bolland 44). Memory ceases to function as history and becomes a plane of variations, a schizophrenic flow of possible selves. His refusal of a singular origin mirrors the Deleuzeoguattarian critique of psychoanalysis, that the self is not grounded in a primal event but is always an assemblage in flux.

Batman's dialogue toward the end, "Maybe ordinary people don't always crack. Maybe it was just you, all the time." is a counter-movement, an attempt to reterritorialize meaning (Moore & Bolland 46). Yet the Joker's final "NO!" on the same page, and the ensuing shared laughter at the end dissolve even this gesture. The laughter floods the panels, erasing verbal

distinctions. In Deleuzeoguattarian terms, a line of flight may end in silence or explosion. Here, it ends in resonance. The laughter deterritorializes speech, rendering meaning obsolete. What



remains is the rhythm of madness, the echo of pure affect.

The *Killing Joke* thus situates deterritorialization not only as theme but as form. Its fractured narrative, recursive imagery, and oscillation between realism and caricature enact the very processes they describe. Gotham itself becomes a deterritorialized landscape, rain-slick, reflective, mutable, where every subject, from Batman to the Joker to Gordon, is caught in an endless negotiation between control and chaos. The line of flight that the Joker embodies, his laughter, his red, continues beyond the final panel, reverberating as a possibility, the perpetual escape from the structures that bind, and the perpetual risk of falling into the void.

5.5. Madness and Desire

Supposing that deterritorialization marks the Joker's outward escape from order, madness and desire define the interior logic of that escape, the energy that drives it, the rhythm that animates it. Within Deleuzeoguattarian framework, madness is not pathology but intensity, a form of becoming that shatters the boundaries of representation. Desire, in turn, is not lack but production, an immanent force that creates connections, assemblages, and possibilities. In *The Killing Joke* madness and desire converge as the central motor of the Joker's subjectivity. His insanity is not merely an effect of trauma but an affirmative act of creation, a reconfiguration of selfhood that rejects the coordinates of the sane, the moral, and the human.

The Joker's laughter, his defining sonic signature, functions as the purest expression of desiring-production. It punctuates every rupture in the narrative, from his first appearance in the theme park to the closing scene in the rain.

(Moore & Bolland 11)**(Moore & Bolland 51)**

His laughter is not a response but an event. It does not follow meaning but annihilates it. Each “HA” operates as a schizoanalytic gesture, an emission of intensity that refuses containment. When he declares, “When I saw what a black, awful joke the world was, I went crazy as a coot! I admit it! Why can’t you?” the question is not rhetorical (Moore & Bolland 44). It is an invitation to deterritorialize, to abandon the molar structures of reason and join him in the delirious flow of desire. His laughter, like the Deleuzeoguattarian schizophrenic flow, resists closure. It moves through the panels, through the gutters, contaminating the visual field until even Batman begins to echo it.

The interplay of laughter and silence further reveals the dynamics of madness as a process rather than a state. In the flashbacks, the pre-transformation Joker is timid, anxious, and fragile, constantly apologizing to his wife and lamenting his failed career. His speech is halting, repetitive, stuttering, “You think I ... Oh God. Oh God, I’m sorry” (Moore & Bolland 12). This broken language is a prefiguration of his future laughter. Both are ruptures in syntax, affective tremors where meaning disintegrates. What changes is not the form but the function, where once the stutter marked shame, it now marks freedom. After the transformation, his laughter becomes the same rhythm of speech liberated from sense, a line of flight from linguistic subjection. It is the schizoid liberation of language, words becoming music, sense becoming-sound.

Visually, the Joker’s laughter is inseparable from the representation of his face. Each iteration of his grin corresponds to a different intensity of desire.



(Moore & Bolland 11)



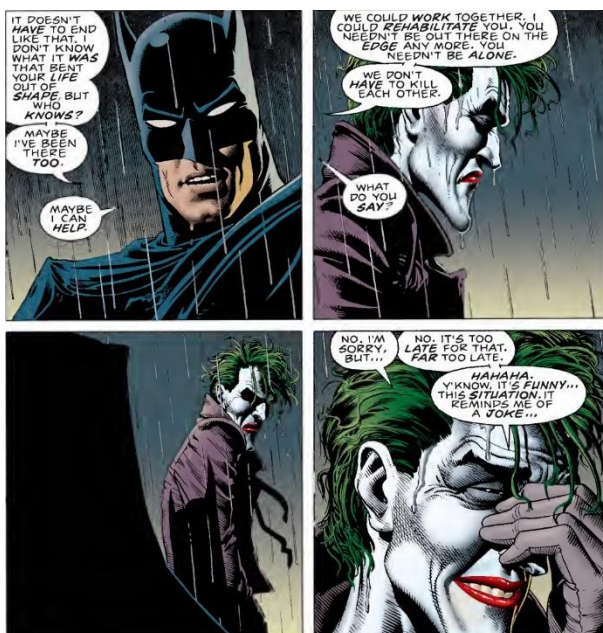
(Moore & Bolland 37)

Early depictions, with proportionate teeth and a realistic smile, suggest a subject still tethered to the human form. As the story progresses, his features distort, teeth lengthen, cheekbones bulge, eyes widen, as if the body itself is dissolving under the pressure of desire. His face becomes the Body without Organs in miniature, a surface upon which madness

inscribes itself. The most extreme image occurs at the end of his origin story, where he sees his reflection in the puddle and then begins to laugh. The transformation from man to monster is not simply chemical but ontological. The self liquefies, deterritorializes, and reforms as pure affect. His cry of laughter is the birth scream of a new body.

The parallel between the puddle and the mirror scene earlier in the flashback, where he reaches for his wife's hand with his own reflection in the background, completes this cycle. In both instances, reflection mediates desire. The first depicts the failed connection, the insufficiency of representation, the second, the overcoming of that insufficiency through madness. When he sees himself as the Joker, he no longer desires the Other, wife, recognition, success, but only the intensity of becoming itself. The puddle, therefore, is not an image of horror but of affirmation, the acceptance of desiring-production as self-sufficient.

The rain motif that frames both the opening and closing scenes of the novel reinforces this reading. Rain functions as the externalization of desiring flows, the element that dissolves boundaries between interior and exterior, self and world. The final scene, where Batman confronts the Joker once more under the rain, stages the collision of two forms of desire: the desiring-machine of law and order versus the desiring-machine of madness. Batman's words, "Perhaps you'll kill me. Perhaps I'll kill you. Perhaps sooner. Perhaps later." recall his opening monologue, completing a circuit of repetition that mirrors the cyclical nature of desire itself (Moore & Bolland 41). Both men are locked in an endless oscillation between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, each defining the other's limits.



(Moore & Bolland 49)

When Batman extends a helping hand, offering rehabilitation, "I can help you," the Joker's refusal marks the final affirmation of madness as becoming: "No, I'm sorry, but... No, it's too late for that. **Far** too late." His eyes, shaded and grim, portray neither triumph nor defeat.

What remains is the serenity of a subject who has traversed the limits of reason and returned as its Other. The ensuing laughter, shared by both men, collapses all distinctions, hero/villain, sanity/madness, speech/silence. It is the pure sound of desiring-production, stripped of signification, reverberating across the rain-drenched panels.

In this moment, *The Killing Joke* realizes the Deleuzeoguattarian vision of madness not as absence but as plenitude, the overflowing of desire beyond the limits of the subject. The laughter becomes the book's final act of creation, language deterritorialized, affect materialized, and the self dissolved into multiplicity. Rain falls and meaning evaporates. Only the rhythm remains, the pulse of madness as life, as laughter, as becoming.

Through the interweaving of visual, linguistic, and thematic analysis, the findings of this study reveal *Batman: The Killing Joke* as a profound dramatization of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming. Each formal element, from the recursive rain imagery and shifting facial proportions to the repetition of dialogue and the structural rhythm of laughter, participates in a desiring-machine that dismantles stable identity and moral coherence. The Joker's madness, when read through the lens of desiring-production, emerges not as pathology but as performance, a conscious embrace of the unbounded creative potential that lies beyond order. His laughter, simultaneously grotesque and liberating, expresses the productive power of desire freed from representation, a force that exposes the contingency of reason itself.

Across both the text and the visual aspects of the graphic novel, moments of rupture articulate this process of deterritorialization. The shattering of panel symmetry, the intrusion of flashbacks into the present, and the rain that erases distinctions between past and present all function as visual correlates to the philosophical unbinding of the self. Batman and the Joker become twin poles in a single circuit of becoming, the Joker as the deterritorialized body without organs, and Batman as the reterritorializing force of law. Yet neither escapes the other. Their final laughter, echoing into the rain, collapses this binary. It is the sound of the line of flight, not away from the world, but through it, where meaning dissolves into pure affect.

The Joker's fractured subjectivity, revealed through both his dialogue and his appearance, affirms the Deleuzeoguattarian notion that madness can serve as a generative principle of existence. His "one bad day" is not simply a descent into chaos, but an event of becoming, a leap from representation into immanence. By refusing Batman's offer of rehabilitation, he resists reterritorialization and instead affirms the ethical and aesthetic logic of the Body without Organs, the creation of a self, perpetually undone. In this light, *The Killing Joke* ceases to be a psychological narrative and becomes a metaphysical allegory, an exploration of how desire, when unleashed, deterritorializes not only the subject but the structures of meaning that sustain civilization.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that Moore and Bolland's text visualizes the Deleuzeoguattarian vision of art as a machine of intensities, a site where madness, laughter,

and desire converge to produce new realities. The Joker's metamorphosis, the visual oscillation between realism and grotesquerie, and the persistent interplay of speech and silence all function as cartographies of becoming. *The Killing Joke* thus stages the tension between order and chaos not as moral opposition but as ontological co-dependence, where every structure of sanity depends upon the madness it excludes.

In the final rain-soaked laughter shared by both figures, the text reaches its philosophical culmination. Meaning disintegrates, form dissolves, and only affect remains. The laughter that closes the novel is not a resolution but a release, the pure sound of desiring-production completing its circuit, collapsing distinction, and reaffirming life in its most chaotic, ungovernable form. Through this laughter, *The Killing Joke* articulates the Deleuzeoguattarian truth that to become mad is not to perish but to create, not to end but to begin again, endlessly, in difference.

6. Discussion

This study's findings contribute to expanding the understanding of madness, desire, and subjectivity in popular culture through a Deleuzeoguattarian reading of *Batman: The Killing Joke* (2008), with a focus on the Joker's madness. By situating Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's graphic novel within the philosophical framework of Deleuze and Guattari, the research illuminates how visual and linguistic elements converge to dramatize processes of becoming, deterritorialization, and the line of flight. The analysis demonstrates that the Joker's transformation is not simply an instance of psychological breakdown but an aesthetic and ontological event, the production of a new subjectivity that resists the stratified moral order represented by Gotham City and Batman. Through the novel's recurrent motifs of rain, reflection, and laughter, *The Killing Joke* stages madness as a generative process that dismantles identity and inaugurates new possibilities of existence.

One of the central contributions of this study is its elaboration on the concept of desiring-production within the context of the Joker's character, revealing how his transformation is an expression of desire as an immanent, productive force rather than a symptom of trauma or lack. Earlier interpretations of the Joker often rely on psychoanalytic or moral frameworks that seek to explain his actions through pathology or ideology. However, by approaching his madness as a productive act, a creation of new intensities rather than a collapse into disorder, this study repositions the Joker as an emblem of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytic subject. His laughter, his repeated references to "one bad day," and the disjunctions between his past and present selves all serve as expressions of this productive energy that dismantles the Oedipal structures of cause and consequence. In doing so, *The Killing Joke* (2008) offers an alternative understanding of madness not as negation but as affirmation, a means of constructing new realities through the breakdown of meaning.

The application of the Body without Organs (BwO) further enriches this understanding. As the findings reveal, the Joker's physical and psychological metamorphosis, marked by his bleached skin, distorted grin, and fluctuating facial proportions, visualizes the dissolution of the organized body. Through these visual ruptures, Bolland's art translates the Deleuzeoguattarian concept of the BwO into a graphic register, portraying the Joker as a plane of intensities rather than a stable subject. This study extends the theoretical discussion by showing how comic form, through its capacity to deform, fragment, and repeat, becomes an ideal medium for representing the BwO. The Joker's grotesque body, continuously redefined by mood, lighting, and expression, resists legibility and thus enacts the aesthetic of deterritorialization at the level of form.

Similarly, the analysis of becoming in the relationship between Batman and the Joker contributes to broader philosophical and cultural discussions of duality and identity. While earlier readings tend to oppose the two figures as order versus chaos, this study demonstrates that they function as complementary poles within the same process of becoming. Batman's obsessive pursuit of control mirrors the Joker's surrender to chaos, making both subjects interdependent expressions of deterritorialized desire. The repetition of Batman's monologue "We're going to kill each other, aren't we?" underscores this co-constitutive dynamic, transforming the narrative from a moral conflict into a metaphysical reflection on the impossibility of fixed identity (Moore & Bolland 9). This insight not only further expands Deleuzeoguattarian theory into the realm of graphic storytelling but also provides a framework for analyzing other pop-cultural narratives of duality and madness as sites of becoming rather than opposition.

The study also contributes to contemporary discussions of deterritorialization and the line of flight by demonstrating how *The Killing Joke's* visual and narrative disruptions enact the very processes Deleuze and Guattari describe. Through the breakdown of temporal continuity between past and present, the merging of flashbacks with the narrative present, and the recurring rain motif that erases distinctions between times and selves, the comic performs deterritorialization at both the diegetic and formal levels. The Joker's "one bad day" is revealed as a moment of radical deterritorialization, the collapse of symbolic structures, followed by an attempt to reterritorialize meaning through madness and performance. However, as Deleuze and Guattari warn, lines of flight may lead to destruction if they fold back upon themselves, and this ambivalence is realized in the Joker's final rejection of Batman's offer of redemption. The laughter that concludes the novel encapsulates this paradox, a deterritorialization that refuses resolution, an escape that ends in circular return.

The findings also underscore the philosophical revaluation of madness and desire as creative rather than pathological forces for the Joker. By juxtaposing the Joker's despairing flashback monologues, in which no one laughs at his jokes, with his present-day explosions of laughter, the graphic novel stages the transformation of repression into expression, of lack into

production. The final exchange between Batman and the Joker crystallizes this philosophical tension. Batman represents the law of reterritorialization, offering help, sanity, and structure. The Joker embodies the refusal of such stabilization. Their final shared laughter signifies the dissolution of both categories, the point where reason and madness converge into pure affect. This moment exemplifies Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that schizoanalysis does not cure madness but maps it as a field of potential, a living cartography of desire.

Despite these insights, the study is not without its limitations. Its analysis centers on *The Killing Joke* as a singular case study, focusing primarily on its visual, verbal, and philosophical dimensions. While this focus allows for deep engagement with Deleuzeoguattarian concepts, it limits the broader generalizability of findings to other representations of madness in comics or graphic novels. Future research might extend this approach to other works in the Batman canon or to graphic novels that explore similar themes of subjectivity and transformation, such as *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (Morrison & McKean) or *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons). Comparative studies could further illuminate how different aesthetic and narrative strategies enact the concepts of becoming, deterritorialization, and desiring-production across media.

Moreover, while this study prioritizes philosophical analysis over psychological or biographical readings, incorporating insights from trauma theory or affect studies could deepen understanding of how readers emotionally and cognitively engage with depictions of madness. Similarly, a more intertextual approach, situating *The Killing Joke* within broader cultural discourses of comedy, violence, and the carnivalesque, could reveal how Moore's narrative dialogues with traditions ranging from Shakespearean foolery to modern absurdism.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary and philosophical scholarship. In its portrayal of madness as a creative process, *The Killing Joke* challenges societal notions of sanity, control, and the boundaries of selfhood. This reconfiguration of madness as productive, rather than purely destructive, offers valuable perspectives for cultural theorists, psychologists, and educators interested in the intersections of creativity, mental health, and art. The Joker's transformation demonstrates how marginality and instability can become sources of artistic and philosophical invention, inviting renewed consideration of how culture defines and confines the "mad."

Ethical considerations were minimal in this study, as the analysis relied entirely on textual and visual interpretation of a published work. Nevertheless, the study's emphasis on madness as productive elucidates the importance of distinguishing philosophical metaphor from lived experience. Future research that bridges theoretical analysis with psychological or sociocultural inquiry could help contextualize the aesthetic valorization of madness within real-world frameworks of mental health and creative resistance.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates how *Batman: The Killing Joke* embodies the Deleuzeoguattarian vision of desire, madness, and becoming. Through its complex interplay of

visuals, dialogue, and affect, the text transforms the superhero genre into a site of philosophical experimentation. The Joker's laughter, Batman's silence, and the ceaseless rain all become figures of a deeper truth, that identity, morality, and reason are not fixed foundations but provisional constructions constantly undone by the forces of desire. By situating the novel within Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical matrix, this research not only deepens the understanding of *The Killing Joke* but also contributes to broader discourses on subjectivity, madness, and the aesthetics of becoming in contemporary visual culture.

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