

Anatomy of a Scene

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The Joker: Stair Scene

Aracely, 0:00:

Hello! This is an in-depth analysis of the stairs scene in Todd Phillips's 2019 movie, The Joker.

Jordan, 0:07:

Out of focus hallway, parading Joaquin outside, with him under the impression that he has evaded the police, allowing a cocky front to him.

Jordan, 0:15:

We then move with him into the elevator giving a menacing look into the viewer that screams, I've done it, I've won.

Jordan, 0:23:

After that, we get to the Joker coming down the stairs. Then he starts to break it down (Michael Jackson adlib), and we get a wide shot of the Joker celebrating down the steps. We can come under the impression that since it's an open frame and the Joker is the only one in it, he has successfully escaped. There is no other way to interpret it.

Aracely, 0:41:

As the Joker descends the stairs, there is a clear stair symbolism that is used in other movies like Parasite. The stairs symbolize the hierarchy in society and how descending the stairs is much easier than climbing them. He has trouble going up the stairs and keeping himself sane, once he

reached his breaking point he came down dancing. The camera work is methodically slow as he goes up the stairs but unrestricted as he goes down.

Jordan, 1:04:

The Joker seems to be honestly enjoying himself, adding to his inflated mood, he lights a cigarette to smoke off the adrenaline of evading the police.

Jordan, 1:13:

We see a smile begin to form that could light up an entire room because of this large feat the Joker has accomplished.

Jordan, 1:20:

What's this? Two mysterious figures appear in the background and out of focus to signal that their presence has not been detected by the Joker.

Jordan, 1:27:

He is completely oblivious to them.

Jordan, 1:30:

The two subjects in the background reveal to be cops.

Jordan, 1:34

The Joker now begins to flee to avoid being detained.

Jordan, 1:38:

A mad dog chase begins to unfold within the streets.

Jordan, 1:41:

The adrenaline is pumping so high within the Joker that he is not paying attention to imminent danger.

Jordan, 1:48:

He then proceeds to be hit by a car.

Aracely, 1:51:

After just being hit by a car, the Joker is being chased by detectives. His facial expressions and movements signal that he is still not wholly the Joker persona. The shaky camera movements represent panic and disarray and his spiral into madness with the stairs scene. The Joker is in limbo as he is finally starting to embrace being the Joker.

Aracely, 2:08:

He boards a train of protesters in clown masks, as he is looking for the detectives he is also looking at the movement he started unintentionally. From the start, he didn't fully accept being the cause of the riots. Watching all these protesters let loose and embrace themselves made Arthur finally adopt the persona that let him be noticed and feel empowered. His movements reflect this change as he isn't stiff or cautious in his movement, he is loose, unrestrained, and free to be who he wants.

Aracely, 2:34:

The set design is also something to note. Gotham has been noted to be crime-ridden. This is seen in the graffiti on the train walls and station. Paired with the dark, fluorescent lighting, and the flickering lights, it is reminiscent of New York in the '80s. This was a time of crime and unruliness. The director, Todd Phillips, said that his Gotham was based on the city.

Aracely, 2:53:

As the Joker is crossing train carts he is also gaining courage and confidence to be the person that the people want him to be. The detectives are right behind them while getting insults hurled against them. To the detectives, this is a dire situation but to the Joker, this is his playground. He rips the clown mask from that man and puts it on while watching the man and another person

brawl, he admires the beauty behind madness. [The Film Theorist](#) on Youtube made a great point that Arthur feels this sense of empowerment that he gained through the fears of others, he would rather be feared than pitied.

Aracely, 3:24:

This scene uses a lot of shot-reverse-shots between the detectives and the Joker. This prevents the audience from losing track of the Joker among the sea of clowns and demonstrates what makes Arthur stand out. Aside from the fact that they are chasing him because of the murder of his colleagues, they haven't lost track of him because he wants to be seen. This is a game of tag to Arthur which is shown in his eerie grins. The [New York Times](#) review says about the Joker's transformation, "Joker's embrace of radical evil becomes a kind of integrity."

Aracely, 3:52:

In a similar fashion to when the Joker murdered the three businessmen, the detective murdered a protestor. The shaky camera emphasizes how the detective was feeling about being ambushed and forced to shoot. This similarity brings attention to the fact that the Joker shot the businessmen to defend himself, as did the detective. The difference is that the Joker was vilified by the media but the detective had a "moral compass" to ground himself on.

Aracely, 4:14:

The Joker's laugh at the end isn't because of his condition, it is now a genuine laugh. Todd Phillips has a way to let us know when the Joker lets himself go. From the stairs scenes where he goes up in a struggle and comes down loose, to the jig he does as he walks away from the detective.

Aracely, 4:28:

His walk at the end without his mask on is powerful and unrestrained, he is now physically and mentally, the Joker. As [Owen Gleiberman from Variety](#) says, “He’s too far out there, like Norman Bates; he’s a self-conscious, postmodern head case — a person who spends every moment trying to twist himself into a normal shape, but he knows the effort is doomed, so he turns it all into a “joke” that only he gets.”