"I MADE YOU, BUT YOU MADE ME FIRST"[1]

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF EVIL, IN PART THROUGH THE ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN LANDSCAPE IN TIM BURTON'S *Batman* (1989) AND CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S *The Dark Knight* (2008)

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Master's thesis in Comparative religion

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[1] Batman, dir. Tim Burton, USA, WARNER BROS., 1989, [dvd] 01:50:08. Batman in a dialogue with the Joker

ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY – FACULTY OF ARTS, PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY Master's thesis abstract

Subject: Comparative Religion
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In *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2004), Christopher Partridge proposes that the study of religion and popular culture can discover the "new ways of believing in societies in which the old ways are inhibited and declining." In my thesis, I will research how evil is socially constructed in film, and to highlight the role architecture and the urban landscape plays in the construction of an understanding of evil. The films I have chosen to analyse in my thesis are Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008). My theoretical perspective is based in Peter L. Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's writings of the Social Construction of Reality and Knowledge. Berger and Luckmann argued that our construction of reality is a dialectic process, in which we simultaneously construct and create our reality as well as being constructed by our reality. The construction happens through the negotiation of meaning and values of language, symbols, and relationships. Our understanding of our own reality, the way we decode it and release new information back into circulation, is as a good representation of what happens when we watch films.

The main objective of this thesis is to examine how film as a popular culture product, functions as part of our meaning-making and world-building process. By examining the narrative, style and the films connection to a cultural and religious context, produces an opportunity to understand how we construct an understanding of evil and good with the help of an everyday mass produced artefact. The theoretical base together with a methodology that is an equal combination of the Comparative Religion and Film theory disciplines, also shows how what is presented on-screen reflects back onto the off-screen reality, and becomes part of what constructs us and our reality. As the urban city is not merely a physical construction of things, but is an essential part in framing the narratives of the citizens who live and navigate the space on a daily basis, the thesis also discusses the striking urban landscapes in both films. Films, as part of the popular cultural arsenal on offer at our fingertips 24/7, present narratives that can challenge our perceptions of our society and values. This thesis provides insight into how Batman's quest to conquer the villains of Gotham as well as his inner demons, can influence how we construct an understanding of evil and good.

Key words: Film and religion, social construction of reality and evil, the urban landscape

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I sin bok *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2004) föreslår Christopher Partridge att studier av religion och populärkultur kan upptäcka "nya sätt att tro i samhällen där de gamla traditionerna hämmas och är på nedgång". Avhandlingen undersöker specifikt hur en uppfattning av ondska är socialt konstruerad i Tim Burtons film *Batman* (1989) och Christopher Nolans film *The Dark Knight* (2008). Avhandlingen lyfter även fram rollen som arkitektur och urbana landskap spelar i konstruktionen av uppfattningen av ondska. Det teoretiska perspektivet utgår från Peter L. Berger och Thomas Luckmanns teorier om den sociala konstruktionen av verklighet och kunskap. Berger och Luckmann hävdade att vår konstruktion av verkligheten är en dialektisk process, där vi samtidigt konstruerar och skapar vår verklighet samt verkligheten skapar oss. Den socialkonstruktiva processen sker via språk, symboler, relationer med vilka vi förhandlar om bland annat mening, värden, moral och etik. Vår förståelse av vår egen verklighet, hur vi kodar av den och återproducerar information, fungerar som en bra återspegling av vad som händer när vi ser på filmer.

Huvudsyftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka hur film som en populärkulturell produkt är en del av vår meningsskapande och världsbyggande process. Genom att undersöka filmens narrativ, stil och hur filmerna placerar sig i ett kulturellt och religiöst sammanhang, skapas en möjlighet att förstå hur vi bygger en förståelse av ondska och godhet, med hjälp av en vardaglig massproducerad artefakt. Det teoretiska perspektivet, tillsammans med en metodologi som kombinerar de religions- och filmvetenskapliga disciplinerna, visar också hur det som presenteras på skärmen återspeglar sig i verkligheten utanför skärmen, och blir en del av det som bygger oss och vår verklighet. Avhandlingen diskuterar även den slående urbana stadsbilden i båda filmerna eftersom staden som plats, inte enbart är en fysisk konstruktion av saker, utan också är en viktig del i utformningen av de berättelser som invånarna skapar när de dagligen navigerar och rör sig i det fysiska urbana landskapet. Filmer, som en del av den populärkulturella arsenalen som är oss tillgängliga dygnet runt, presenterar berättelser som kan utmana våra uppfattningar om vårt samhälle och våra värderingar. Denna avhandling ger en insikt i hur Batmans kamp mot Gothams skurkar, såväl som hans inre demoner, kan påverka hur vi konstruerar en förståelse av ondska och godhet.

Datum: 18.06.2019

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1 SETTING THE SCENE - An introduction

Most of my life I have lived near the centre of a city. Everything has been in close proximity and easily reachable by foot or by bike. This has made navigating through the city very easy and effortless. However, for a few years, I lived a little further from the city centre and my commute to work in the centre became longer. Many evenings and nights I walked home along deserted streets and the quiet riverside listening to music. The urban landscape combined with the music created a very cinematic sensation. It felt like I was in a movie and the urban landscape through which I was navigating was just as much a part of my story or narrative as were my thoughts and the music.

I have never felt as connected to a city as during those late evenings and at night. The air, the lights, the colours, the different textures of nature and the physical space, all contributed in creating a backdrop of any chosen narrative I wanted to transpose onto it. Through the narratives I transpose onto the physical, urban landscape, I explore, and challenge, for instance, concepts of good and evil, and the moral values I encounter in the social settings I participate in. By absorbing and utilising a variety of pop culture sources like film, music and art as references points, I am in a constant dialogue with my (cultural) reality. I am simultaneously creating my narrative with the influences I take and receive from my surroundings, reshaping them to fit my personal narrative and then transposing the reshaped influences back onto my surroundings. Life in general, and the narratives we create to help us navigate life, is a continuous process with which we create structure, and define values that are meaningful and important for us.

Today's society is rich with sources to be influenced by, both for better or worse. Simultaneously, while we are moving in the physical landscapes we inhabit, we are immersed in images, stories and narratives laced with agendas and values of various kinds, from areas like politics, economy, consumerism, ethics and so forth. The abundance of agendas and values I find intriguing, specifically because the distinctions of the values have become more cluttered over time. For

instance, social media has, on a broad scale, thoroughly infiltrated our everyday existence. Mass media, the internet and the technical devices that govern our daily lives are rapidly evolving, blurring the line between private and public and the sacred and profane. In the preface to *Religion and Film: An introduction* (2007)*,* Melanie J. Wright writes that films "shapes and reflects a range of cultural, economic, religious and social practices and positions of modern society."[2] Films offer alternate realities and narratives for us to explore, and as John C. Lyden proposes in his book *Film as Religion. Myths, morals and ritual* (2003), we "desire alternate worlds because we find our own imperfect; but such desires to flee also entail a desire to return, renewed and refreshed, to the everyday."[3]

Indeed our own offscreen worlds and realities are under constant construction. A recent study of legal regulation of online hate speech in the Nordic countries, commissioned by the *Nordic Information on Gender* (NIKK, 2017) at the request of the Nordic Council of Ministers and published in the spring of 2017, reports that "the rampant online posting of aggressive and sexist remarks poses a serious democracy problem". The study highlights key issues with online hate crime, one regarding the uncertainty of how the "hate crimes legislation should be applied and where to draw the line between hate speech and freedom of expression". Another issue raised in the report is the challenge to hold the "perpetrators accountable, partly because the legislation in the field has not been updated."[4] Online hate speech, crime and bullying can be seen as a result of the blurred distinction of what is a morally acceptable code of conduct online.

Another example of how the different sources of social media are utilised as means of both construction and destruction is presented by the Secretary General for human rights organization Amnesty International, Salil Shetty, in an interview for Helsingin Sanomat[5]. According to Shetty, as smartphones and social media are becoming more widespread and common, they present both

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[2] M. J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An introduction*(London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd) 2007, p. 1

[3] J. C. Lyden, *Film as Religion. Myths, morals and ritual* (New York, London: New York University Press) 2003, p. 52-53

[4] M. Bladini, *Online hate speech* 19 June 2017, retrieved 18 April 2018, NIKK - Nordic Information on Gender

[5] L. Laine, 'Ihmisoikeuksissa on menty takapakkia, sanoo Suomessa vieraillut ihmisoikeusjärjestö Amnestyn pääsihteeri Salil Shetty' *Helsingin Sanomat* 25 March 2018, retrieved 18 April 2018

great potential and threat to human rights. The emerged potential of social media, allowing previously repressed voices to be heard to aid the human rights revolution, is not unproblematic. While social media channels like Facebook and Twitter, played a significant role in organising the peaceful demonstrations and the spreading of information during the Arab Spring, there is a flip side of the coin. Not only the ones fighting against oppression and for change have utilised the potential of various social media channels. According to Shetty, politicians among others use social media to create a demonizing atmosphere where, for instance, refugees and Muslims are singled out as scapegoats. Shetty says that "social media has created hatred, prejudice and breakdown. At the same time, it has also created more awareness and empowered people."[6]

Social media aside, tragic events happen all over the world every day; mass shootings at music concerts in Paris[7] and Las Vegas[8], terror attacks in Stockholm[9] and Turku[10] and extreme youth violence[11]. In his essay *Djävulen åter mitt i bland oss* (The Devil again in the midst of us, 2005), for the Swedish journal, *Kyrkans Tidning,* Ola Sigurdson talks to some extent about how the perceptions, of how evil is created in society, often are mediated via films, music, literature and thus popular culture is "overflowing with concepts of evil: from the simplest drawing of the battle between good and evil to the complex illustrations of the essence of/how evil came to be."[12] The question is, can popular culture sources like film, overflowing with concepts of evil, help us decipher or understand the severe, tragic events, and their causes, happening in our cities and streets? On a personal level, I am curious of how we construct our reality and understanding of values and morals, specifically when on offer is a vast open market of sources, secular and profane, all advertising their own seemingly unique set of values and morals. Films have, since the beginning of my academic studies, intrigued me as the representation of versatile compositions,

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[6] Laine, *loc. cit.*

[7] 'Paris attacks: What happened on the night' *BBC News* 25 March 2018, retrieved 18 April 2018 http://www.bbc.com

[8] 'Las Vegas shooting: gunman was on losing streak and 'germophobic', police say' *The Guardian* 21 January 2018, retrieved 18 April 2018 http://www.theguardian.com

[9] 'Uzbek man pleads guilty in Stockholm terror trial' *BBC News* 13 February 2018, retrieved 18 April 2018, http://www.bbc.com

[10] K. Jansson, 'Analyysi: Turun puukotuksista tuli Suomen ensimmäinen terrori-isku – kansalle ja uhreille tuomiolla on suuri henkinen merkitys' *Yle* 15 June 2018, retrieved 15 May 2019, http://www.yle.fi

[11] S. Pöntinen, 'Seinäjoen teinisurma oli murha – tekijälle 9 vuotta vankeutta' *Yle* 11 December 2015, retrieved 18 April 2018, http://www.yle.fi

[12] O. Sigurdson 'Djävulen åter mitt i bland oss' *Kyrkans Tidning*, no. 45 (2005) p. 24

communicating meaning, entertainment and stimuli for several senses. Cinema's place as a popular, visually appealing and engaging form of entertainment, regardless of ethnicity, age and gender, makes it a valuable source to research. Films offer a safe medium or canvas, onto which we can transpose, project, negotiate and accept or discard the values and moral viewpoints that we are propositioned in the off-screen world. When we *are* in the world, we are engaged in the continuous process of receiving and decoding information, of interpreting and releasing back our own understanding of the information received. In this sense, films can be seen as a confidant, with which one can exchange and explore ideas and understandings of e.g. good and evil, in setting momentarily and figuratively suspended in time.

1.1 Creating an ensemble - the what and how

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how an understanding of evil is (socially) constructed in the films, *Batman* (1989) by Tim Burton and *The Dark Knight* (2008)[13] by Christopher Nolan. I will also analyse how the urban landscape in the films affects how an understanding of evil is constructed. The urban city is not merely a physical construction of things, it is an essential part of framing the narratives of the citizens who live and navigate the space on a daily basis. I have chosen to include the urban landscape as a part focus in the analysis, because the city of Gotham plays an essential part in the Batman universe, as protecting it is a main motive for Batman's existence. According to Sofia Sjö "the city in film has been highlighted both as a place of progress and forward movement and as of loneliness, danger and fear."[14] Often it is also the infrastructure of the physical space, its streets, buildings and natural resources, that on a subconscious level draws us in, speaks to us and make us feel comfortable and at ease but also evoke feelings and sensations of fear, danger and despair, in the words of Juhani Pallasmaa: "the architecture of film is an architecture of terror, anguish, suspense, boredom, alienation, melancholy, happiness or

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[13] The Dark Knight, dir. Christopher Nolan, USA, WARNER BROS., 2008, [dvd]
[14] S. Sjö, 'Filmic Constructions of Religious Spaces: Churches as Settings for Trauma, Change and Redemption' *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 27 no. 2 (Summer 2015) p. 106

ecstasy, depending on the essence of the particular cinematic narrative and the director's intention."[15]

The foundation for this thesis is the research field of religion and popular culture and more specifically film. The theoretical perspective is placed within the sociology of religion and the focus will be on Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's writings on the social construction of knowledge and reality. My material and object for analysis for the thesis are the films. When combining two separate disciplines like comparative religion and film theory, the primary focus of the research will be in either discipline. When the primary focus for research is film, the methodology and tools used for the analysis, stem from film studies and theory, and usually include for example light, sound and editing as well as the narrative of the film. If the primary focus of the research is instead religion (or theology), other analysis methods and approaches, for example, discourse analysis or symbol theory, are more appropriate[16]. Since this thesis is in the subject of comparative religion, the focus is on theories regarding sociology of religion as well as film/popular culture and religion.

The method of analysis is a modified form of narrative analysis based on the four-part methodology presented by Melanie J. Wright in *Religion and Film: An Introduction* and adding to it a more in-depth use of analysis tools from film theory. A certain emphasis will be on how the cinematic image is created, focusing on how technique in connection with the story creates multidimensional narratives on screen. Wright's four-part methodology is rooted in the discipline of comparative religion and utilises only to some extent the technique based methodology of film theory. *Film Art: An Introduction* (2008) by David Bordwell, Professor Emeritus of Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Kristin Thompson, Honorary Fellow, and Doctor of Philosophy in film, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as well as Gregory Watkins' chapter on *Religion, Film and Film Theory*[17] in the *Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, aides in deepening the methodology. Both Bordwell and Thompson have written extensively within the

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[15] J. Pallasmaa, *The architecture of image: existential space in cinema* (Hämeenlinna: Kirjapaino Karisto Oy), 2001 p. 7
[16] Wright, *op. cit.* page 23
[17] G. Watkins, 'Religion, Film and Film Theory' in *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London, New York: Continuum) 2009

discipline of film studies, and have collaborated on other comprehensive works, similar to *Film Art*, including *Film History: An Introduction* (2003) and with Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985). Whereas Bordwell and Thompson strictly move in the area of film theory, Wright's intention is to bridge the gap between the two disciplines, and for that reason, I see her methodology as a useful tool in connecting separate disciplines of religion, film and architecture. The methodology for the analysis will be discussed further in chapter 5.

In the analysis, I will research the construction of an understanding of evil, as well as how the on-screen urban landscape affects the construction of an understanding of evil. The focus will be on looking at how the themes are (socially) constructed within the realm of the films, through the interplay between the characters, the city in itself and through the way the characters interact with the city. Several films would have been equally rewarding to analyse, especially considering the chosen main themes. Films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), Alex Proyas' *The Crow* (1994) David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995), Joel and Ethan Coen's *No Country for Old Men* (2007) and Dan Gilroy's *Nightcrawler* (2014) are all excellent options, however I chose Batman because of its universal appeal and familiarity, because of both films striking presentation of the cityscape and because of the stories penchant for rich dark shadows. Batman today is a popular brand that appeals to a large and varied audience, with a dedicated fan base and a solid popular culture status. Born as, and being first and foremost, a comic book character, Batman has been recreated into TV series, films, video games and so on. Batman appeals to a universal public mainly because he is a human superhero (or villain). The stories of Batman from the pages of comic books to the big screen, all carry with them themes and commentary that mirror the current social climate and politics while maintaining its fictive essence, which in turn resonates across borders, cultures and politics.

Another major influence on why I chose two Batman films, is because of the complex relationship between Batman and his archenemy, the Joker in both films. At first glance, the two characters seem to represent opposites to each other, as in hero versus villain, but a closer look reveals a more layered reality, where the clear distinction becomes muddled. Nolan's *The Dark Knight* is the second film in his Batman trilogy, and one option could have been to simply conduct an analysis

on his three films. Instead I opted to pair Nolan's film with Tim Burton's Batman, partly because of the fact that the films have almost 20 years between them, but also because I was intrigued to see if a shift in tone and nature of the chosen themes, the notion of evil and the urban on-screen landscape, could be discerned in the films. Would the analysis of the constructed notion of evil be different in the films, and if yes, in what ways. Also, would the films discern an evolvement of our understanding, and the complexity of, the urban landscape of Gotham city?

My field is thus on a macro level that of film and religion. My theory brings to the table the sociological perspective and aims at providing the reference points and works as a form of sounding board against which the analysis of the major themes in the films are projected. The films as popular cultural items represent forms of building blocks which we can utilise to shape and reshape our personal, communal and societal narratives. The themes reflect back onto the notion that films can be seen "not only as a site for religious insight and ethical debate, but also as a catalyst for critical moral reflection."[18]

In the following chapters, I discuss the relation between film, religion and architecture. In chapters 2.2, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. I present and discuss the theoretical framework for this thesis, which is situated in the theory of social construction of reality and knowledge as presented by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. In chapter 3 I will present and discuss a definition of evil and in chapter 4 the connection between architecture, the urban landscape and religion will be presented and discussed. Chapter 5 includes the presentation and discussion of the methodology, as well as a presentation of a short history of Batman, including an abbreviated synopsis. In chapters 6 to 6.3, the analysis is presented and is divided into three parts. The first and second part will focus on narrative and cultural context, while the third part will focus on locating an understanding of evil in the architecture and the urban landscape in the films.

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[18] J. Mitchell, 'Ethics' in J. Lyden (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Oxon,New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 483

2 RESEARCHING RELIGION, FILM AND SPATIALITY - A theoretical viewpoint

The past decades have seen an expansion in the study of religion and film and popular culture. Artists working with photography and moving pictures have since the respective births of both art forms, been intrigued by religion and the spiritual world and the works have depicted various themes, mythology, and stories from the religious realm[19]. Religion and theology as academic disciplines have warmed to the cinematic form much later, and it is only in the past decades that religion and film have become an established field of research[20]. Given the richness of cinema in its entirety, it attracts scholars from various disciplines to utilise the richness and to create cross-disciplinary research results. This is without a doubt a fruitful development in the academic world, but as John C. Lyden suggests, even though what unites scholars is a shared interest in the topic, the "diversity is both a challenge and a strength to the discipline of Religion and Film"[21]. According to Lyden (see also Wright 2007) the strength and challenge are in the versatility of the wide array of knowledge and methodologies the different disciplines have to offer. The different perspectives and viewpoints on offer, while interesting and insightful, create a somewhat incomplete map of clear and useful cross-disciplinary theories and methodologies, to aid when conducting an interdisciplinary analysis.

David Morgan discusses the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary research in his chapter *Studying Religion and Popular Culture - prospects, presuppositions, procedures* in *Between the Sacred and Profane* (2007 ed. G. Lynch)[22], where he calls for further crossover research between different disciplines interested in and studying popular culture. Morgan makes a valid point when arguing that a discipline's own research, including its distinguished theories, methodologies and prime focus subjects, themes and topics, should always come first in order for the discipline to stand on solid ground. Since the solidity of a discipline's standpoint paves the way for more fruitful

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[19] Wright *op. cit.* Page 3
[20] Lyden *op. cit.* 2003, 2009
[21] Lyden *op. cit.* Page 1
[22] D. Morgan 'Studying Religion and Popular Culture - prospects, presuppositions, procedures' in G. Lynch (eds), *Between Sacred and Profane* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Co Ltd) 2007 p. 21-34

interdisciplinary cooperation, study and research.[23] The main objective is not to solely do interdisciplinary research for the sake of the value of interdisciplinary research, but to broaden the possibilities and to make the research field more flexible so that it better can study and translate the ever-changing society. Just like society is in a constant negotiation between past-present-future on many different levels, so is research in continuous dialogue within different disciplines.

2.1 The secular and plural nature of religion and popular culture

> Film is a legitimate object of academic study. It is legitimate either as an art form or as a part of popular culture.[24]

It is no accident that films and cinema have become important for the discipline of religion. It is its versatile form as a mass-consumed, popular cultural product, entertainment and mediator of meaning and values, that has earned it a solid foothold in the discipline of religion and theology, as well as in other disciplines. With the rapid growth and constantly evolving nature of popular culture, scholars in the discipline of religion and theology have advocated for research with a more engaged focus on (popular) culture and media. As Elaine Graham proposes in her chapter *What we make of the world* in *Between Sacred and Profane - Researching Religion and Popular Culture* (ed. Lynch, G., 2007), "As institutional religion recedes, and its narratives and norms no longer furnish ordinary people with moral or existential bearings, so popular culture moves into the vacated space, offering alternative archetypes, myths, heroic figures or soteriologies to form the stories we live by."[25]

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[23] *Ibid.*, page 26-26
[24] W. L. Blizek, 'Introduction' in W. L. Blizek (eds), *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London, New York: Continuum) 2009, p. 1
[25] E. Graham, '"What We Make of the World": the Turn to 'Culture' in Theology and the Study of Religion' in G. Lynch (eds) *What we make of the world in Between Sacred and Profane - Researching Religion and Popular Culture* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd) 2007 p. 68

The reasons why scholars of different disciplines have a growing interest in studying and researching popular culture lies precisely in what popular culture has to offer and how it does it. According to David Morgan, in his chapter *Studying Religion and Popular Culture*, published in the same anthology as Eileen Graham's article mentioned above, most people spend the majority of their waking hours "constructing the selves and communities that define who they are"[26] through, and with the help of, mass-produced media and culture. Morgan continues by highlighting a good point when proposing that popular culture "fuel the imagination of millions" and thus "deliver a shared stock of symbols that embody people's hopes, desires, fears and hatreds."[27] Popular culture is not an isolated or separate entity in society, but something we consume, practice and create as well as construct, on a daily basis. Another important point Morgan highlights in his text is how mass-produced media and popular culture of all shapes and forms, is readily available for the masses and thus helps blur the distinction of high and low culture; "the cultural realm of entertainment is so pervasive, so common, that rich, middling and poor are not readily distinguished by their choice in music, food, film or sport."[28] The commonness of popular culture and its mass-appeal not only solidifies its value and relevance, in that it cannot be easily dismissed as "just" popular culture and that it ought to be taken seriously because of its prevalence in everyday life, and can just like religion be "a narrative producing mechanism".[29]

In correlation to Graham's notion of a receding religious institution vacating a space for something else, Christopher Partridge follows a similar thought in *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2004), when proposing that the study of religion and popular culture can discover the "new ways of believing in societies in which the old ways are inhibited and declining."[30] Important to note here is the choice of the words 'inhibited' and 'declining' because they connect to the thought Partridge continues in the introduction, that "just because new ways of believing are not allied to the state or located in large buildings next to the village green they are therefore socially insignificant"[31],

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[26] Morgan, *op. cit.,* page 21
[27] Morgan, *op. cit.,* page 21
[28] *Ibid.,* page 24
[29] Wright *op. cit.,* page 4
[30] C. Partridge *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (London, New York: T&T Clark International) 2004 p. 1
[31] *Ibid.,* page 2

in other words popular culture can be seen as presenting new avenues and sources for locating religion or spirituality that does not exclude the significance of or the old ways of believing.[32]

Central to the study of popular culture within a religion scholar frame is the discussion of secularisation and pluralism. Building on the theory of the disenchantment of the world by Max Weber (1864-1920) Partridge gives a concentrated overview of the key aspects of secularization. As discussed by Partridge, the Weberian disenchantment dates back to the Protestant Reformation and based in Enlightenment Rationalism, constitutes a network of social and intellectual forces that created a progressive, unilinear process towards increased technological rationalisation.[33] As rationalisation gained a foothold in a society governed by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, secularisation could be seen as a direct consequence since "the worshipper was concerned with obeying only one God, the ethical was rationalized and the scope of the sacred shrunk as the mysterious, the miraculous and the magical were expunged from the world".[34]

Peter L. Berger, who was one of the prominent scholars writing and researching secularisation, summarised secularisation in *The Desecularization of the world* (1999) as thus: "Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion both in society and in the minds of individuals"[35]. A neatly packaged summarisation which indeed would hold true, would the world function in a linear fashion. Starting off in the early 1960's Berger was very productive throughout his career, and his work has been very influential in the disciplines of sociology and sociology of religion. Even though Berger, together with many other social scientists and scholars, attributed to the great collection of works researching secularisation theory, he refutes his own view on secularisation when stating, that even though modernisation has had a secularising effect it has also "provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization."[36] Berger continues:

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[32] *Ibid.,* page 5

[33] Partridge, *op. cit.,* page 9

[34] Partridge, *loc. cit.*

[35] P. L. Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview' in P. L. Berger (eds) *The Desecularization of the world* (Washington, Grand Rapids: Ethics and Public Policy Center and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 1999, page 2

[36] *Ibid.,* page 3

Certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor.[37]

With all the technological, economic, cultural and other advancements in society during the past decades, the everyday of the West has, according to Partridge, become more based on process, order, structure and a streamlined way of living, "everything can and should be done better, faster, cheaper, and more efficiently."[38] By making the everyday more efficient and rationalised, the need for an all-encompassing religious institution to govern society diminishes. The everyday is divided into independent sections that all create their own structure and *modus operandi* and so the "religious authorities have lost their grip on the reigns of economic power as the world of employment has been increasingly motivated by its own values."[39] In short, the religious discourse that in the past permeated the western society and framed the everyday has moved from being the captain of a team, to become one of the players.

As the original religious unity is disarmed of its permeating effect and the secularisation of the West is in motion, with it comes pluralisation. Based on the premise that "communities in which people operated with a shared religious worldview, a shared morality, and a shared identity, and within which an individual's material intellectual and spiritual sustenance was provided, are rapidly disappearing"[40], what is created is an open market that is pluralism and that according to Peter L. Berger "multiplies the number of plausibility structures competing with each other"[41]. Continuing on my game analogy from the previous passage, pluralisation could be seen as the result where, instead of there being one specific team excelling above all other teams, and with the ruling team weakened by the loss of their captain (secularisation), the field is now open for new teams to equally compete for the admiration and allegiance of the audience, people and consumers (pluralisation). This, in turn, leads to more power to the consumers who now have the growing

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[37] Berger, *loc. cit.*
[38] Partridge *op. cit.,* page 13
[39] *Ibid.,* page 14
[40] *Ibid.,* page 15
[41] P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday) 1967 p. 151

freedom to choose their own preferred worldview. With choice, however, follows a shift from the collective community-based faith to the personal, private fate, and quoting Partridge:

> The decline of community, the increasing fragmentation of modern life, the impact of multicultural and religiously plural societies, the growth of bureaucracy, the creeping rationalization and the influence of scientific worldviews have together led to a situation in which religion is privatized, far less socially important and far less plausible than it was in pre-modern communities.[42]

Albeit the Western everyday, to some extent, can be seen just as Partridge portrays it, religion has not exited the narrative of the everyday, "the religious impulse, the quest for meaning that transcends the restricted space of empirical existence in this world has been a perennial feature of humanity."[43] One could say the league of religion is going through changes, where the player line-up and chosen captains are still finding their form, with some teams being more successful than others.

2.2 The theory of social construction

The theoretical base for this thesis will be situated in Peter L. Berger's theories on the construction of knowledge and reality, as the aim of this thesis is to analyse how an understanding of evil is constructed in the Batman films of Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan. The main focus is on how the theory of social construction can be used to portray a form of world-building and meaning-making. Peter L. Berger (1929-2017) was a prominent and highly productive sociologist and widely acknowledged scholar in the field of sociology of religion. Classic works include among many others *The Social Construction of Reality - A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966), co-written with fellow sociologist Thomas Luckmann, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967), *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (1973) written with Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner and *The Many Altars of Modernity. Towards a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (2014). Since the mid 1960s, Berger

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[42] Partridge *op. cit.,* page 16
[43] Berger, 1999 page 13

contributions within the academic discussion of secularisation and more recently the desecularization in and of society has been very notable.

In his article *Peter L. Berger and the sociology of religion*, published in the Journal of Classical Sociology in 2018, Titus Hjelm presents an inclusive, yet concise, assessment of Peter L. Berger's work, while also offering a proposition on why Berger's theories never quite managed to generate a functional or adaptable constructionist sociology of religion[44]. Hjelm's article focuses on Berger's theories and ideas presented mainly in the works *The Sacred Canopy* (1967) and *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966), wherein Hjelm manages to distil the key elements of Berger's sociology of religion. Hjelm proposes that a significant reason to why Berger's and Luckmann's theories have not been more prominently utilised in the various areas of research, is that readers and researchers have applied the theories differently than was intended and envisioned by Berger and Luckmann. According to Hjelm, it is only now, over 50 years later that there is an "emergence of approaches taking the idea of social construction, and specifically the role of language, seriously"[45] The article stands a good starting point to the ideas and theories of Peter Berger that I intend to use as the theoretical frame and base for the thesis at hand.

Just as Hjelm has shown in his article, when talking about Peter Berger's work, the most common ideas brought forward, are the theorisations of religion and secularisation and the key paradigm of *The Sacred Canopy*: "society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product."[46] The paradigm is a continuation of the ideas and theories Berger and Luckmann presented in *The Social Construction of Reality*, and the paradigm strives to capture the ongoing social process that constitutes our understanding of reality and knowledge.

The social construction of reality and knowledge is, in essence, a basic sociological angle or understanding of society. Concepts like money, legal systems and states, all have in common that

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[44] T. Hjelm, 'Peter L. Berger and the sociology of religion', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Vol. 18 (March 2018) pp. 231-248, Sage Journals database
[45] *Ibid.,* page 12
[46] Berger, *op. cit.,* page 4

they are established or defined by social relations, outside of which they cannot exist. A good example is currency. The base of currency is most often paper and metal, and its value comes from the social relation it depends on and the social relations it produces and by which it is produced. Currency becomes a socially constructed concept when it is assigned a descriptive definition and a value, by the society, or social context, in which it is used. Knowledge, like currency in its basic form of paper and metal, does not exist in, or of itself. It becomes something, a reality only through social agreement. The social construction of reality and knowledge researches e.g. how our ideas of reality are socially formed. In an interview conducted in 2016 by Jochen Dreher, focusing on the 50th anniversary of *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger admits to still agreeing with the theories he published in the late 1960s, but suggests that social construction could be seen as just one possible point of view rather than a strict theory of reality or knowledge. He proposes that society could be seen as a human artefact, with concepts developed by human beings and so society becomes constructed by human beings.[47]

In *The Sacred Canopy* Berger writes that society is a human product,

> ...that yet continuously acts back upon its producer. Society is a product of man. It has no other being except that which is bestowed upon it by human activity and consciousness. There can be no social reality apart from man. Yet it may also be stated that man is a product of society. Every individual biography is an episode within the history of society, which both precedes it and survives it. [48]

According to Berger the foundation of our meaning-making and world-building is the dialectic process of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation. The process Berger breaks down as so: 'society is a human product' presents the process of externalisation, i.e that which is external or outside of us and that which we start a dialogue with, in order to construct meaning or world-building. The next step in the paradigm is the objectivation that is 'society is an objective reality', and presents the process in where we decode or interpret the product that is society, before moving on to the third step of the paradigm in which we internalise the decoding. By locating ourselves in

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[47] J. Dreher, *Interview with Peter L. Berger on The Social Construction of Reality* Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv Konstanz 19 October 2016, retrieved 14 May 2019 www.youtube.com
[48] Berger *op. cit.,* page 3

reality and releasing the information back into society, the process results in 'man is a social product'.

As an objective reality, society could be seen as a stage, a physical entity, one which we humans enter via birth and which we start to interact with, and shape, all the while we are being shaped by it until we exit 'the stage' when we die. When we are born we have no understanding or comprehension of the reality around us. How we start to comprehend our reality originates from the reality formed by our parents, surroundings, society and its culture, in short, what came before us, one which produced us. We only come equipped with biology, everything else is at first given to us until we can start to more independently piece together our own individual understanding of reality. In contrast to animals, who live in environments specific to their particular species, the world of humans, is an open world, with which we do not have a predetermined relationship, and so "man must *make* a world for himself."[49] The making of the world is, as mentioned above, a dialectic process, an action-reaction based balancing act, where we produce a world in which we can locate ourselves, and realize our lives. The world we produce ourselves in gains a structure via culture. Culture, in turn, is a product of our own activity and is to be understood in a vast scope, consisting of everything we humans produce, both non-material and material.

2.2.1 Culture as a dialectic process

Culture, however, is not a fixed or constant whole, it is in itself in a constant motion of production and reproduction. It provides a structure to the reality we build but is simultaneously given to change, which in turn, can be a challenge to fully perceive. According to Berger, as a part of a culture, human beings also cultivate a language, upon which "its foundation, and by means of it, a towering edifice of symbols that permeate every aspect of his life."[50]. Culture and language, including symbols, combined offer a form of framework that becomes the structure, like a flexible

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[49] Berger *op. cit.,* page 5, Italics in the original text.
[50] *Ibid.,* page 6

glue that holds everything together. Because of its flexible nature, one way to make culture more comprehensible and tangible is to anchor it into physical and/or material elements, which Berger also proposes when writing "there is good reason for thinking that the production of non-material culture has always gone hand in hand with man's activity of physically modifying his environment."[51] Anchoring culture as a whole to the physical environment also eases the formation of (a) society. The ongoing dialogue of production and reproduction of culture that human beings engage in with each other thus becomes a society. According to Berger society can be understood as a coordinator of human's world-building activities, with activities being a key word here;

> Men *together* shape tools, invent languages, adhere to values, devise institutions, and so on. Not only is the individual's participation in a culture contingent upon a social process (namely, the process called socialization), but his continuing cultural existence depends upon the maintenance of specific social arrangements.[52]

When the dialectic relationship we hold to our surroundings is seen from a singular perspective, i.e. how I, as a singular person, interact in the world, it seems easy enough to comprehend. And even though the singular perspective is important, it cannot be treated as an isolated circumstance. As Berger states in the quote above, we shape our reality together. The dialectical relationships we cultivate together becomes a multifaceted network of silent and verbal communication, via which we continuously negotiate towards a functioning order. Communication also requires an understanding that the reality we perceive encompasses several layers[53]. The layers contain meanings that together help us understand objects, situations, concepts. For example, an understanding of a house can hold meanings like how to build a house, that there are different kinds of houses, what it means to have or not have a house, what *is* a house and so forth.

When writing about the foundations of knowledge in everyday life in *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann state that everyday life is the most important reality

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[51] Berger, *loc. cit.*
[52] *Ibid.,* page 6
[53] P.L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality.* (England:Penguin Books) 1991 [1966], p. 35

for us[54]. Everyday life is where we are most present and can be viewed as our home base from which we operate and communicate, or as Berger and Luckmann write, "Indeed I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others./.../I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between *my* meanings and *their* meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality."[55] It is via this ongoing correspondence that we become a social product. Even though our interaction and communication is a continuous action, conclusions and decisions need to be made so that a certain level of structure is maintained.

2.2.2 Language and symbols

> On the foundation of language, and by means of it, is built up the cognitive and normative edifice that passes for "knowledge" in a society. In what it "knows," every society imposes a common order of interpretation upon experience that becomes "objective knowledge" by means of the process of objectivation[56]

In order to continuously communicate and maintain the world-building process, a common language is paramount. It comes quite naturally to most living species to formulate *a* language, both verbal and non-verbal, in order to convey e.g. intentions, feelings and ideas. Language is, as Berger puts it, a "ready-made and collectively recognized universe of discourse within which individuals may understand each other and themselves"[57], and as a human product, firmly rooted with a long history, it becomes an essential currency of sorts. Everything, and who we are, is translated into the currency of language, with which we then use to trade with in the world. Our understanding of objects, relationships, concepts, values and so forth is formulated through words and symbols. We have collectively decided that a table is a 'table', and not a chair, and decided on appropriate words to explain how a table is constructed and what a table is used for. But even if we could not use words to describe a table, we could most likely be able to explain a table with gestures or as a drawing. It is also important to note that with language, which is seen as the most

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[54] Berger, Luckmann *loc. cit.*
[55] *Ibid.*, page 37 Italics in the original
[56] Berger 1990 [1967], *op. cit.,* page 20
[57] *Ibid.*, page 13

important sign system of society, we are able to communicate and receive information of subjects, concepts and objects that we might not have experienced personally.

Bearing in mind the current perspective of social construction, I am intentionally leaving out a more in-depth discussion of the specific linguistics of language. Naturally, the theory of language including a focus on rules, structures and patterns, is of importance, but just as Robert Wuthnow et. al. fittingly suggests, when discussing the phenomenology of Peter L. Berger in their book *Cultural Analysis* (1984), Berger's view on language was a fairly broad one. According to Wuthnow et. al. Berger was more interested in language as a channel for human meaning.[58] On a broader scale, signs and symbol systems help us navigate in, and decipher society. Via symbols and signs, we communicate nonverbally with our surroundings. Sign and symbol systems are also in themselves clusters of meanings, values and entities. So when we navigate the social reality we most likely entertain several different symbol systems as well as languages. By default, we become part of symbol and value systems that we do not choose ourselves. We are born into a certain social class, country, cultural tradition, gender and so forth, all of which come with their own sets of symbol systems and languages. To a large extent, the interaction between these different systems does not pose a problem, as we during the course of our lives become accustomed to maintaining different roles or identities (mother, student, lover, doctor, woman, etc).

However, just like adding balls to a juggling session, the dialectic communication process in connection to world-building and meaning-making is not without challenges:

> It is possible to sum up the dialectic formation of identity by saying that the individual becomes that which he is addressed as by others. One may add that the individual appropriates the world in conversation with others and, furthermore, that both identity and world remain real to himself only as long as he can continue the conversation.[59]

I will discuss the challenges further in the analysis when examining the interplay between the different characters in the films.

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[58] R. Wuthnow, J. D. Hunter, A. Bergesen, E. Kurzweil. *Cultural Analysis. The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas* (New York, London:Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd) 1984, page 37
[59] Berger, 1990 [1967], *op. cit.,* page 16

"It would require something close to a mutation of the species to extinguish this impulse for good"[60]

One of the themes of the analysis of this thesis is evil, and thus a need for a definition or precision of, and the context of evil which I will base my analysis on is needed. Just like religion can be researched from many perspectives so can the notion of evil be defined and researched in various ways depending on perspective and discipline. For my Bachelor's thesis, in which I also researched evil, I based my theory on philosopher Hannah Arendt's proposition of a *banal evil*, a phrase she coined during her reporting of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a high ranked officer in the German Nazi army, and which resulted in the book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). Arendt's theory was based on the premise of an ordinary, accountable, generally morally sound person committing evil deeds. The key concept of 'banal evil' was according to Arendt, the opposition and contrast of the banal man and the evil deeds he commits. What made the case compelling was Adolf Eichmann's apparent capacity of not seeing his actions as evil, but rather defining them as correct and honourable since he was "simply following orders"[61]. For Eichmann following orders and executing bureaucracy was an act of high virtue, and that he came across as a simple 'paper pusher', a cog (albeit an important one) in the bureaucratic war machine, stood in stark contrast with the orders he executed, namely the transportation of prisoners to the concentration camps in Germany and Austria.

The fascinating thing about Eichmann was that it was his moral conscious that guided his actions. It wasn't a neurological glitch in his brain that caused a malfunction that permitted evil deeds to happen, but rather it was Eichmann's moral conscious that rated the virtue of following orders as *more important* than sparing human life from certain death.[62] In Eichmann, the banal is found in

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[60] Berger, 1999 *op. cit.,* page 13
[61] H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books) 1994 [1963], p. 289
[62] *Ibid.,* page 135

the ordinary and everyday -nature of his character, and the evil is found in his actions. For the thesis at hand, the evil that will be explored is not banal evil but more a notion of moral evil. The example of *a form* of evil, provided by Arendt, is featured because it highlights the importance of consciousness will play in defining evil for my purposes. The general societal context for this thesis as stated in the introduction is the modern Western (American) society, in which Christianity was, and continues to be, one of the main institutional religions, and so the chosen approach the research of evil in this thesis is from a Judeo-Christian perspective. Therefore it will not be of interest to delve deeper into the philosophical writings on evil, or other religions and spiritualities definition of evil.

In his chapter *Evil on Film* Bryan Stone explores the "landscape of evil in film"[63] and utilizes an often adopted general division of evil used by both philosophers and theologians alike, namely the division of evil into the categories of moral evil and natural (non-moral) evil. Stone posits **moral evil** as "that which is caused by the action or inaction of moral agents (whether human beings or supernatural beings) who are presumably free to act otherwise" and **natural evil** as that "which we experience or perceive as negative, harmful and threatening, but with no moral agents as its source and instead arising from physical, inanimate or natural forces".[64] This division works well on a general level and will provide a functional base for me to build upon, but as Stone points out, evil on screen is not a static entity and is under continuous negotiation. Just as in the off-screen world, in the on-screen world evil is elusive and faceted, especially when associated with "a complex social or economic system, an interior psychological state, or the routine harm perpetuated by those who are 'just doing their job'"[65]

Stone's division echoes in part Saint Augustine's thoughts on evil in the twelfth book of *City of God* ([1952] 2010), in that Augustine sees evil as a part of a "good, though mutable nature" that "even before its will is evil, can produce something evil" continuing to suggest that evil is, in fact, a deficiency, "no one, therefore, need seek for an efficient cause of an evil will. Since the 'effect'

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[63] B. Stone, 'Evil on Film' in W. L. Blizek (eds) *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film*, (London, New York: Continuum Books) 2007, page 310
[64] *Ibid.,* page 311
[65] *Ibid.,* page 310 By *just doing their job* Stone is referring to Arendt's banal evil and Eichmann.

is, in fact, a deficiency, the cause should be called 'deficient'."[66] Augustine continues by defining evil as "trying to see darkness or to hear silence"[67] which is reminiscent of the notion of evil's elusiveness. Augustine's ideas of evil derive from The Fall and the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were tempted to eat from the tree of knowledge. Augustine holds that even though God is wholly good and incapable of evil, humans are not as wholly good and can thus be tempted or corrupted. The key here is that before the Fall, humans were without knowledge, but after the Fall the gain of knowledge provides Adam and Eve with the understanding of cause and effect. Humans have free will but actions have consequences and this understanding implies the existence of a conscience.

Several other factors also come into play when researching and discussing evil. In their own right films can be seen as very useful tools in constructing evil, via the multitude of on-screen narratives exploring the notion of evil. Bryan Stone's article gives a good overview of various cinematic narratives portraying evil, and when discussing moral evil in film, Stone touches upon two important aspects associated with the notion of evil, namely the degree of its intentionality and its complex existential corruptness[68]. As the on-screen world reflects the off-screen world, so has the 'cinematic' evil evolved into a more complex matter. According to Stone, no longer is evil "as likely to be painted with such broad strokes today (hero versus villain, 'us versus them') by an industry that seeks not to offend any group and tends to portray evil as an internal spiritual source with which both hero and villain must struggle"[69]. As in the films chosen for the analysis, as well as in other films like Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974 & 1990), David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005) and Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006), the characters struggle with striving to do good, to be accountable stable, morally sound members of the conventional society they are a part of and having to do evil. The characters are not portrayed as solely bad or evil, rather they are equipped with a general moral code and have to face the reality that they have to choose. The burden of choice simultaneously makes the characters more relatable to the audience. Stone's proposition of moral evil on screen echoes the writing of philosopher Peter

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[66] St. Augustine *City of God - Book Twelve* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press) 2010 [1952] p. 257 retrieved 15 May 2019 ProQuest Ebook Central
[67] Augustine, *loc. cit.*
[68] Stone, *op. cit.* page 315
[69] Stone, *loc. cit.*

Dews in his book *The Idea of Evil* (2008) in where Dews offers a more developed definition of evil:

> It [evil] is a notion, after all, that stands out in our modern moral lexicon by virtue of its potent, frequently dangerous, emotional charge. It hints at dark forces, at the obscure, unfathomable depths of human motivation. It seems to stand contrary to our widespread optimism that the behaviour of our fellow human beings can be accounted for in social and psychological terms, and so made amenable to improvement. If we understand the factors that condition people to do wrong – the twists and turns of personal history, the circumstances, oppressive or favourable, into which they are born – then presumably we will be able to alter them.[70]

In the introduction Dews continues and proposes that to do evil "is to be involved in some wilfully pain inflicting, destructive, and – often – self-destructive enterprise, to be driven by forces that lie deeper than the familiar repertoire of unappealing human motives, such as greed, lust, or naked ambition".[71] Dews continues by reminding the reader that indeed "evil is somehow chosen, not a matter of lapse or default".[72] In his book, Dews discusses not just the notion of evil, but also how we ought to tackle evil in today's modern, postmodern, secular/plural society. Dews bases much of his book in Kant's theories and writings concerning evil but utilises many other prominent scholars' propositions and responses to the question of evil, in his aim to create a more durable understanding of evil in a secular/pluralist society. According to Dews "we are torn between a commitment to freedom and autonomy and a due recognition of the intractability of moral evil, its refusal to fit into common conceptions of rational agency" to which he proposes a rather contemporary way of understanding evil: "to re-work formerly religious conceptions of evil/.../to articulate a basis for hope that is no longer dependent on any specific dogma or revelation, but is inherent in our moral orientation to the world."[73]

For this thesis I have opted to understand the notion of evil as a combination of Bryan Stone's and Peter Dews' ideas, where evil is the result of the action, or inaction of a human agent, who by

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[70] P. Dews, *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell), 2008 page 1
[71] *Ibid.,* page 4
[72] *Ibid.,* page10
[73] *Ibid.,* page 13

his/her motivation, and with an understanding of the governing social moral code, freely chooses to cause destruction or damage. This correlates to Peter L. Berger's social constructivist approach, where Berger proposes that "when the socially defined reality has come to be identified with the ultimate reality of the universe, then its denial takes on the quality of evil as well as madness."[74] Stone's, Dew's and Berger's understanding of evil stem from the assumption that there first has to be constructed a counterpart, opposite which a notion of evil can be placed.

As I will discuss more in depth in the analysis part of this thesis, the films chosen illustrate on several levels possible shifts that have happened with the notion of evil in today's Western society. No longer is it as easy to distance ourselves from defining what evil is, when evil acts enter, uninvited, our sports stadiums, concert halls, our cities and backyards. The distance decreases in part because we are not simply innocent bystanders to the evil forces, rather the struggle that lies ahead is our own culpability. The values we assign to situations and things, become the base for the order and structure we strive for in our understanding of reality. In the process of striving to build structure and order, our construction of an understanding of evil is included in the construction of reality and knowledge and meaning-making in the world.

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[74] Berger ([1967] 1990) *op. cit.,* page 41

4 ARCHITECTURE, THE URBAN LANDSCAPE AND RELIGION

The second central theme the analysis focuses on is the architecture and the urban landscape in both Batman films. Considering architecture and religion, the most obvious connection are the physical buildings designed for worship: churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and so forth. And indeed these spaces service the attendant in many ways. Spiritual elements are already written into the blueprint, structure and build of the physical spaces (the archways, the design, the interior) and are continuously reinforced by the people that use the buildings for various reasons. More often than not the physical sacred spaces offer their visitors a material connection, an anchor of sorts that can provide solace, comfort, safety, strength, fortitude and love, akin to a silent benign personal relationship that can last a lifetime. Yet other more secular places can become equally spiritually significant and meaningful since the physical spaces we inhabit are not static in their function in providing structure and backdrop to the narratives of our everyday lives.

I propose homes as good examples of secular places, that many ranks high because of the central part they play in the formation of our narratives. The high regard we hold for our homes as places of safety, family and as a manifestation of who we are, homes become close to a sacred place of worship. We fill our homes with things that mirror who we are and our history, and we decorate the interior with colours, candles, fabrics and other beautiful things, not quite unlike a shrine. Just as the inside of architecture enforces our narrative on a micro level, so does the exterior on a macro level. Similarly to how the scenography and stage design provide the physical backdrop for the on-screen world so is the architecture of lived and shared space an essential part of the creation of our narrative[75].

Here a distinction is needed of how I understand *space* for this thesis. Space can be seen as both subjective and ideological and/or physical. The physical space can be equal to a territory, location, place or building. Even in its objective form or formation, it can, however, contain meaning and

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[75] A-M. Åström, 'Stadens hjärta - en introduktion' in A-M. Åström, J. Lillqvist (eds) *Stadens hjärta. Täta ytor och symboliska element i nutida nordiska städer* (Helsinki: Oy Nord Print Ab), 2012, p. 28

values. The subjective or ideological space or room is non-material and transcends physical restrictions[76] (see also Knöd, 2015, Knott, Poole, Taira, 2013).

In his TED talk[77] *Why great architecture should tell a story,* architect Ole Scheeren says he believes "architecture exceeds the domain of physical matter, of the built environment, but is really about how we want to live our lives, how we script our own stories and those of others."[78] Scheeren proposes the idea that architecture could be more about a collaborative narrative than the separation and hierarchy of skyscrapers, instead of following the concept of *form follows function*, Scheeren offers the suggestion that *form follows fiction*, which is meant to disregard the fact that architecture *is* solely about function. Rather Scheeren is interested in the dialogue between structure and user: "How can we create structures that generate a series of relationships and narratives? And how can fictive stories of the inhabitants and users of our buildings script the architecture, while the architecture scripts those stories at the same time?"[79] It is these fictive stories that are in part also relayed on screen.

The architectural landscape present in the films I have chosen is not strictly sacred, rather it is predominantly profane or secular. However, if one would opt to view architecture and the urban landscape as a component within popular culture, and as such place it in contrast to religion, we arrive at a similar outset as with film and religion. As the scholarly interest for how both religion and spirituality in popular culture, as well as culture as the force that shapes our quality of life, have grown in the past decades, so have several other disciplines, in addition to the more traditional ones, become increasingly interested in the influence of culture and spirituality on life in the city. The editors of the anthology *Architecture, Culture and Spirituality* propose in the introduction of the book, that this broadened interest stems from the fact that "humanity is an increasingly urban

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[76] *Ibid.,* pages 11-12
[77] TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics — from science to business to global issues — in more than 100 languages. https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization retrieved 10 May 2018
[78] O. Scheeran, *Why Great Architecture Should Tell a Story* (London: TED talk), September 2015 00:16:07-00:16:20 retrieved 10 May 2018 www.ted.com
[79] Scheeren *op. cit.,* 00:01:47-00:02:01

phenomenon."[80] They continue that "there is accord that the built environment plays a central role in preserving, sustaining and advancing cultural identity, authenticity, and wellbeing."[81] proposing the notion that both spirituality and culture are "fundamental and interrelated components that address how we aesthetically, ethically, physically, and socially respond to reality - and both are most synthetically expressed in the built environment."[82] Though the interrelatedness of culture, spirituality and architecture might seem a sorted affair on the surface, as with other interdisciplinary subjects, the migration of the different disciplines will often prove to be easier said than done.

With each discipline being equipped with its own set of aesthetics and structures, to execute a complete interdisciplinary effort requires for the scholar to realize their own limitations.[83] When discussing architecture and spirituality/religion the positioning of *meaning* poses a particular challenge. Is the meaning to be found within the physical structure of a building, is it already designed into the buildings DNA on the drawing board or is the building given meaning by its surroundings, its users and its social context? Sofia Sjö proposes in her article *Filmic Constructions of Religious Spaces* that the "most thought provoking studies come from keeping our ideas of both space and place unlocked and seeing space and place as something we continually construct."[84] This, in turn, opens up to the possibility of a wider understanding of the word *construct* if both the physical and the immaterial/theoretical structures are seen as constructed. The editors of *Architecture, Culture and Spirituality* propose that "despite the ephemerality of contemporary media and consumerism and the placelessness attendant to globalization, the solidity and stability of architecture can provide a stable framework to facilitate transcendent experiences and meaning."[85]. Following this idea, one could opt to see architecture and the urban landscape in a continuous dialogue with its context.

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[80] T. Barrie, J. Bermudez, P. J. Tabb, 'Introduction' in T. Barrie, J. Bermudez, P. J. Tabb (eds) *Architecture, Culture and Spirituality* (Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company), 2015 p. 2
[81] Barrie, Bermudez, Tabb, *loc. cit.*
[82] Barrie, Bermudez, Tabb, *loc. cit.*
[83] *Ibid.* Page 3
[84] Sjö *op. cit.,* Page 107
[85] Barrie, Bermudez,Tabb, *op. cit.* Page 6

Connecting back to Scheeren's idea of whether form should follow function and/or fiction, buildings answer to a basic human need: shelter. Here I will draw a comparison to food, which also answers a basic human need: hunger. Both architecture and food can be provided in the most elementary form, e.g. high-rise apartment buildings erected in suburbs and meant to serve affordable housing to a growing population, and the food served in large institutions like schools and prisons meant to provide necessary nutrition for students and inmates. Yet simply answering a need is often not sufficient. The simple answers of housing and nutrition are only the surface of the 'substance' they contain, and often the substance is what communicates meaning to the inhabitant, student and inmate.

Transitioning to the architecture on screen, architect Juhani Pallasmaa has written an indulging and inspired book about the connection of architecture and cinema. Pallasmaa's viewpoint is that of an "architect who looks at films through the eyes of a designer interested in the mental ground of architecture".[86] His book offers many interesting angles for the exploration of architecture on screen. According to Pallasmaa "both architecture and cinema articulate lived space." and so in the "same way that buildings and cities create and preserve images of culture and a particular way of life, cinema illuminates the cultural archaeology of both the time of its making and the era it depicts."[87] The construction of the material and mental narratives that happen both on and off screen is locked in a continuously evolving motion or dialogue where "experiencing the lived space, memory and dream, fear and desire, value and meaning, fuse with the actual perception."[88] Pallasmaa offers the important viewpoint that both film and architecture is in large a full-body experience where both art forms "imply a kinesthetic way of experiencing space, and images stored in our memory are embodied and haptic images as much as retinal pictures." and so it becomes of minor detail that architectures longevity is fixed in physical matter and film a mere fleeting celluloid illusion since "both define frames of life, situations of human interaction and horizons of understanding the world."[89]

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[86] Pallasmaa, *op. cit.* Page 7
[87] *Ibid.,* Page 13
[88] *Ibid.,* Page 18
[89] Pallasmaa, *loc. cit.*

> Doing religion (or theology) and film well does not entail a rejection of previously held assumptions, competencies and passions. Nor does it mean that one should seek to do everything in an account of a film or films. What is instead called for is focusing in on one or more of the religion-film interfaces, coupled with an awareness of what is being undertaken elsewhere.[90]

When the aim is to study specifically the relationship between religion and film, there are several research methods and routes to take. Simply looking at the contents in both anthologies *The Routledge Companion to Religion and film* (2009) and *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (2009), shows the variety of viewpoints available. In *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film,* editor and scholar William Z. Blizek presents alternatives on how to use film to critique religion or how to use religion to interpret films. The same anthology includes chapters by established scholars presenting various ways to approach, as well as optional themes to highlight in, the study of religion/theology and film. In his chapter, *Theology and Film*, Clive Marsh proposes a theological perspective on the study of film, which researches "how films and the practice of film-watching are contributing to the doing of theology"[91] as well as how "films and viewers are engaging in God-talk".[92] In his chapter *Religion and World Cinema*, S. Brent Plate widens the perspective geographically, when discussing "the ways in which religious identity is presented and represented throughout world cinema"[93]. When discussing world cinema, Plate also highlights religious identity as a "'*georeligious* aesthetic'"[94] and how different viewpoints in filmmaking styles better can illustrate "religious themes through their representation of conflict."[95]

Considering methodology, both Melanie J. Wright and Gregory Watkins present options of providing the research of religion and film with more solid practical methods. Wright's chapter,

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[90] Wright, *op. it.,* pp. 30-31
[91] Marsh, C., 'Theology and Film' in W. L. Blizek (eds) *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London, New York: Continuum Books) 2009, p. 60
[92] Marsh, *loc. cit.,*
[93] B. S. Plate, 'Religion and World Cinema' in W. L. Blizek (eds) *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London, New York: Continuum Books) 2009, p.89
[94] Plate, *loc. cit.,* (Italics in the original)
[95] *Ibid.,* page 99

Religion, Film and Cultural Studies, presents the idea of applying the methodology and theory used in cultural studies onto the study of religion and film, seeing that "cultural studies is interested in practices and objects, and in the uses people make of them - the individual and collective meanings (including religious ones) that are circulated in the production and reception of artefacts (including film)."[96] Wright proposes cultural studies as a "discursive space within which investigation of the relationships between religion and film may be conducted" because even though the "scholars of religion and film, the fields of theology and film, and bible and film - *do* have their own ways of working, these are rarely the subjects of extended critical discourse.[97] The cultural studies approach can be an option well worth utilizing especially if the focus of research is on "a need to triangulate meanings between film texts, contexts and audiences."[98] For my Bachelor thesis, I found the cultural studies approach to be quite useful, however, I felt that for the thesis at hand I would need a more precise or practical methodology, especially since the aim is to engage film in its entirety in the analysis.

In the study of religion and film the option of engaging the tools of film theory in the methodology more prominently is often overlooked[99]. According to Gregory Watkins, the challenge becomes how to align methodologies and theories from separate, and often not even neighbouring disciplines, so that the core analysis does not become too elusive. There are however exceptions and in his chapter *Religion, Film and Film Theory* (2009)*,* Watkins offers an insightful analysis of the writings of filmmaker and critic Paul Schrader, professor in religion and theology Francisca Cho and professor of philosophy Irving Singer, who all have in their respective works aimed at exploring the religious and spiritual in film through the cinematic gaze, with Watkins striving to replace the question of "what do we need to know about film to understand religion and film" with an understanding of "what the distinctive nature of cinema can teach us about religious thought and customs."[100] The options and challenges of finding more tailored methodologies in the realm

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[96] M. J. Wright 'Religion, Film and Cultural Studies' in W. L. Blizek (eds) *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London, New York: Continuum Books) 2009, p. 107

[97] Wright, *op. cit.* 2009 page 101

[98] Wright, *op. cit.* 2009 page 112

[99] G. Watkins, 'Religion, Film and Film Theory' in W. L. Blizek (eds) *The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London, New York: Continuum books) 2009, p. 82

[100] *Ibid.*, page 88

of religion and film, that would cater to a more integrated combination of both disciplines, are, however, possibly becoming easier as time goes on. Academic disciplines are increasingly finding that the material and subjects/objects of study and research have blurred the edges, which in turn can result in a more integrated and overlapping interest for various disciplines.

In her book, *Religion and Film. An Introduction* (2007) Melanie J. Wright presents a methodological approach, which I have decided to utilise in my thesis, and with which I intend to include supplements from film theory and narrative analysis provided by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, in their comprehensive introductory book regarding film as an art form. Film is in itself a challenging art form to study since it comprises so many parts. The sum of all parts, including sound, lighting, camera angles, colouring, or in short *mise-en-scene*, create together the main story to be told. Yet, just the fact that film *is* the sum of many parts makes it possible to take it apart, to dismantle the pieces into separate and individual entities that independently are also telling a story, citing Bordwell and Thompson:

> In a novel, the author's use of language conveys the progression of the plot and the development of the characters. A composer draws on the resources of melody and rhythm to create a song. Similarly, the film medium provides the filmmaker with several ways to convey moment-by-moment formal developments.[101]

The different parts can be seen as supporting actors to the main actors, the story/plot, yet they can, and often do, offer a contrasting (sometimes even entirely oppositional) nuance in order to make the story and plot richer[102].

Melanie J. Wright also strives to find a more functional methodology to analyse and research religion and film. Like many other scholars writing about the same theme, she discusses the benefits and challenges when trying to combine the two separate disciplines. She expresses a concern that while there is an increasing amount of literature being produced and published about film and religion, maybe film *itself* is lost in the translation and is not really studied at all.[103] A

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[101] D. Bordwell, K. Thompson, *Film Art. An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill), 2008, pp. 4-5
[102] *Ibid.*, pages 112-115
[103] Wright, *op. cit.* 2007 page 22

fairly obvious reason for the concern being the absence of adequate film theory tools and terminology in the study and research discipline of religion and film. The main challenge when trying to merge two separate disciplines, whose mutual affection and regard are not always pronounced, is to find a common ground that would equally benefit and give credit to both disciplines[104]. As a solution, Wright offers the cultural studies approach as a neutral territory, where both disciplines can find common ground.

> For religion specialists, there is an opportunity to engage with film criticism in a way that does not imply a subordinate relationship, in which the exchange of insight is not a one-way process *from* film studies *to* religion (and theology).[105]

While Wright chooses to view culture in itself as quite extensive and including "all human production, concepts and social structures as much as objects and artefacts", and even as the cultural studies approach strives to "build on older agendas and methods"[106] rather than reject or try something completely new, the approach does not come without uncertainties. According to Wright, the discipline of film studies fears that the unique essence of film might become lost in the vast realm of culture. Another debate concerns what results can be achieved by equating high-art/culture with popular art/culture, thus provoking the value discussion. Switching the point of view to that of religious studies, similar discussions and concerns are being raised concerning religion and cultural studies. However here, the discussion is more favourable as religious studies may have more in common with cultural studies than film studies have. Cultural studies, according to Wright (see also Miles 1998), offers an opportune situation to "focus on the material dimensions and on occasionality - the details of the conditions in which religious meanings are re-created and expressed"[107]

Building on the cultural studies approach Wrights methodology for studying religion and film is divided into four categories: *narrative*, *style*, *cultural and religious context* and *reception*. In the category of narrative, Wright includes characters, story and plotting, style includes the aesthetic

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[104] *Ibid.,* page 24
[105] *Ibid.,* page 27
[106] *Ibid.,* page 25
[107] *Ibid.,* page 28

and audio-visual dimensions (mise-en-scèn, cinematography, editing and sound). In the category of cultural and religious context Wright includes locating the film's external and internal cultural and religious context. The reception category looks at the way a film has been interpreted based on reviews, fan activities, industry, government or other agency documents.[108] The four-part methodology offers a neutral and inclusive way to research religion and film, as it is applicable to a large variety of films and religions. It also offers a form of structure to the research or/and analysis and does not exclude the option to highlight one or more of the four categories. In her book, Wright has featured several analysis treatments of films, where she has applied her four-part methodology.

One good example is her analysis of Edward Norton's *Keeping the Faith* (2000)[109], a film about two friends, a Catholic priest and a rabbi, who falls in love with the same non-religious girl. Wright begins with locating the film in an external cultural context, by positioning the film to belong to the category of popular, New Hollywood cinema, and representing the genre, romantic comedy[110]. Wright then precedes with discussing the religious context, weaving into the discussion how the narrative of the film is in dialogue with the religious context. Throughout the analysis, Wright also ads illustrating examples of style, including camera shots and angles[111] and wardrobe[112]. In itself, Wright's analysis of *Keeping the Faith*, illustrates well how the different categories are interwoven, e.g. how style emphasises what the narrative is striving to convey, or how the narrative, in turn, can respond to an off screen religious context.

In order to flesh out the categories narrative and style, I will use David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's writings on film art and theory in their collaborative book *Film Art. An Introduction* (2008). I have also chosen to focus on certain scenes in both Batman films that will help illustrate the chosen themes and the relationships between the characters so that the analysis will become more in depth. Building on the four-part methodology, I will look at the narrative, style and cultural

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[108] *Ibid.,* page 29
[109] *Ibid.,* pages 129-141
[110] Wright, *op. cit.,* pages 129-130
[111] *Ibid.,* pages 130-131
[112] *Ibid.,* page 139

context, however, I have made a conscious decision to limit the focus on Wright's last part, reception, mainly in an effort to keep the analysis focused and contained. What stands to be gained by also including reception in the analysis is to see the continuous dialectic process in effect. How viewers understand and receive films is an important part of the meaning-making and world-building, and it is not my intention to dismiss its value or importance in the subject matter at hand.

Restricting the space given to reception in the analysis, provides, in turn, more room to the interplay between narrative, style and cultural context and considering the themes of evil and architecture, hopefully, generate interesting results and insights. I have chosen to focus on the interaction and the relationships of the central characters in both Batman films, which will help to demonstrate the construction of an understanding of evil, architecture and so forth. Where applicable I also highlight music and wardrobe along with mise-en-scene. The following chapter provides a short background to Batman as well as an abbreviated synopsis.

5.1 Batman - A short history

Batman is an American comic book character, often described as a superhero, and was created in 1939 by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger. The character was first introduced in the 27th issue of Detective Comics, published by DC Comics[113]. Batman is also known as the Caped Crusader, the Dark Knight and the World's Greatest Detective. The foundation of Batman, his history, his dual personality (Bruce Wayne/Batman), where and how he operates, was defined throughout the first year of his existence. Over the years Batman has lived through several changes and have appeared battling a diverse set of criminals, with the aid of a variety of characters. Not surprisingly, the storylines and style, as well as the atmosphere of the Batman stories, have shifted throughout history, and often the current societal climate is reflected. In the 1940s and 1950s Batman was presented as a crime fighter together with his sidekick Robin, but more in the style of a fanciful detective than a dark, brooding caped vigilante.[114]

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[113] R. Duncan, M. J. Smith, *The Power of Comics. History, Form and Culture* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc New York), 2009 p. 33
[114] *Ibid.*, page 239

The 1960s saw a change in the Batman brand and because of declining sales, Batman was conceptualised into a more camp-inspired TV-series. This change also opened up a broader market for by-products and merchandise, which in turn helped grow the Batman brand and increase its popularity[115]. Batman has been licensed and featured in various adaptations, from radio to television and film, and appears on merchandise sold around the world, such as apparel, toys, and video games[116].

Batman was at the beginning created by Kane and writer Bill Finger but over the years several writers and creators have reshaped Batman. As mentioned above the storylines, usually taking their cue from current trends and movements (political, ideological and cultural) of the current society, shifted and developed from the 1960s onward[117]. In the mid-1980s Frank Miller and Klaus Janson redefined Batman into an "older, tougher warrior coming out of retirement to reclaim Gotham City from criminals who had overtaken it".[118]

For example film director Tim Burton has taken several cues from Millers more dark take on Batman when creating and directing *Batman* (1989) and its sequel *Batman Returns* (1992). Director Joel Schumacher, in turn, created more colourful and camp-esque Batman films, *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997), that took their cue more from the blossoming scene of music videos than brooding darkness. With a concoction of characters from past Batman stories, Schumacher's films could be seen as pop culture collages, a sum total of current popular parts rather than representing a main single narrative**.**

Many fans of Batman were apprehensive when talk of a new Batman movie circulated in the media in the early 2000s. Suffice it to say, many have been more than pleased and thrilled by director

[115] B. Boichel, 'Batman: Commodity as Myth' in R. E. Pearson, W. Uricchio (eds) *The Many Lives of the Batman* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pages 14-15

[116] D. LoCicero, *Superheroes and Gods. A Comparative Study from Babylonia to Batman* (Jefferson, North Carolina, London: McFarland & Company, Inc.) 2008, pages 221-222

[117] E. Meehan, '"Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!": The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext' in R. E. Pearson, W. Uricchio (eds) *The Many Lives of the Batman* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pages 47-48

[118] 'Batman at 75 - Highlights in the life of the caped crusader' *DCE Editorial* 22 july 2014. Retrieved 18 April 2018 www.dccomics.com/https://www.dccomics.com/blog/2014/07/22/batman-at-75-highlights-in-the-life-of-the-caped-crusader

Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy, *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). With the Batman trilogy, Nolan created a clear story arch spanning over the three films, with a beginning, middle and end, a welcome addition to the cinematic Batman family collection. The characters in Nolan's trilogy are familiar characters from the Batman comics, and Nolan has chosen wisely, opting for quality over quantity when in each of his films presenting a main villain, which in *The Dark Knight* is the Joker. In addition to the main villain there are other characters who portray villainous characteristics, thus creating a more complex battlefield for Batman to navigate[119]

5.1.1 Batman behind the mask

Batman is the alter ego of wealthy socialite Bruce Wayne. When creating Batman in the late 1930s Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger were inspired by the current contemporary popular culture of the 1930s like pulp fiction, comic strips and newspaper headlines. Predecessors for Batman were the *Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Zorro* along with pulp magazine heroes *the Shadow* and the *Bat*[120]. Kane has stated that he drew inspiration for Batman from films like *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) and *The Bat Whisperer* (1930). Finger has stated that for the storyline he was inspired by pulp fiction heroes like The Shadow, Dick Tracy and Sherlock Holmes, to create a master detective narrative for Batman.[121]

In his 1989 autobiography, Bob Kane recalls Finger's contributions to Batman's creation:

> One day I called Bill and said, 'I have a new character called the Bat-Man and I've made some crude, elementary sketches I'd like you to look at.' He came over and I showed him the drawings. At the time, I only had a small domino mask, like the one Robin later wore, on Batman's face. Bill said, 'Why not make him look more like a bat and put a hood on him, and take the eyeballs out and just put slits for eyes to make him look more mysterious?' At this point, the Bat-Man wore a red union suit; the wings, trunks, and mask were black. I thought that red and black would be a good combination. Bill said that the costume was too bright: 'Color it dark grey to make it look more ominous.' The cape looked like two stiff bat wings attached to his arms. As Bill and I talked, we realized that these wings would get cumbersome when Bat-Man was in action

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119 Jesser, Pourroy, *op. cit.,* pages 22, 51
120 Duncan, Smith, *op. cit.,* page 225
121 L. Daniels, *Batman: the complete history. The life and times of the dark knight* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books cop) 1990, p. 31

and changed them into a cape, scalloped to look like bat wings when he was fighting or swinging down on a rope. Also, he didn't have any gloves on, and we added them so that he wouldn't leave fingerprints.[122]

The Batman is the secret identity of Bruce Wayne, whose character was born by Finger combining the names 'Wayne' inspired by Mad Anthony Wayne, a brigadier general active in the American army in the late 18th century, and 'Bruce' inspired by Scottish patriot Robert Bruce.[123] Alas, there can be no Batman without Bruce Wayne. Unlike e.g. Superman whose human disguise, Clark Kent, came second, Bruce Wayne is an ordinary human being, who becomes a superhero, Batman. Batman has no distinct superpower, rather his 'superpower' is the fact that he is *human* and hence is flawed, which in turn makes his character relatable and appealing both on and off screen.[124] His physique is well developed, and he has a lot of cool toys and equipment that help him fight evil, but in essence he is just as vulnerable as the rest of us, as the following scene at the beginning of Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, where Batman catches fake batmen trying to interrupt a drug deal between criminals, well illustrates:

> **Batman:** Don't let me find you out here again!
> **Fake Batman:** We're trying to help you!
> **Batman:** I don't need help!
> **Scarecrow:** That's not my diagnosis.
> **Fake Batman:** What gives you the right? What's the difference between you and me?
> **Batman:** I'm not wearing hockey pads.[125]

5.2 An abbreviated synopsis

Even though the adventures of Batman are not necessarily linear throughout history, or follow any direct logic, the base story of his character stays the same. In the two specific Batman films I am concentrating on, the storyline or synopsis for the films are in large part the same. While on the way home from the movies/theatre, young Bruce Wayne's parents are mugged and killed in a dark

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[122] B. Kane. T. Andrae, *Batman & Me* (California: Eclipse Books) 1989 p. 41
[123] Kane, Andrae, *loc. cit.*
[124] S. P. Born., 'Shadows of the Bat. Construction of Good and Evil in the Batman Movies of Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan' *Online Journal for Religion, Film and Media*, VOL 3, NO 1, 2017 p. 80, retrieved
[125] *The Dark Knight* 2008 00:09:55-00:10:07

alley by common criminals. Bruce then vows to avenge the death of his parents and rid the streets of Gotham city of crime and injustice.[126] When older, Wayne creates his alter ego Batman to be able to work anonymously in the shadows of Gotham city to defeat the criminals and to save the city he loves. For the majority of Tim Burton's film, it is Batman and the Joker that battle for the soul of Gotham. In Nolan's film, Attorney General Harvey Dent and Police Commissioner Jim Gordon are also part of the battle, alongside Batman and the Joker. In essence, both Burton and Nolan's films portray similar battles between good and evil and strive to have justice (and love) be the conquerer by the end of the day. The main difference between the two films is that Burton has chosen to focus much attention solely on Batman and the Joker, while Nolan involves several other characters in order to give a more multidimensional take on the battle of good and evil.[127]

For the sake of good drama, a female character is made a part of the narrative. In Tim Burton's film, it is the press photographer Vicki Vale who falls in love with Bruce Wayne and brings an element of complication to the double life of Bruce Wayne/Batman. In Burton's film, the romance angle is more classic, clear and conventional. Vale, played by Kim Basinger, represents the light, in long, blond hair and white or light colored wardrobe, to Batman/Wayne's brooding, black darkness, and becomes a more prominent motive for Batman, in his quest to avenge his parents death, to save Gotham city and to find redemption in Vale's love.

In Christopher Nolan's film, the love interest is portrayed by Bruce Wayne's childhood sweetheart Rachel Dawes, who is a lawyer and works for the Attorney General's office. In Nolan's film it is Wayne who still has feelings for Dawes, while Dawes is involved and in love with someone else. The romance angle is still featured as a motive for Batman in Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, but it is not as central a theme as in Burton's film. Here the romantic angle is most likely featured in order to offer a humanising point of view or human trait to the character of Bruce Wayne/Batman. But ultimately, in Nolan's film, there is not much room for romance in Batman's life, since he becomes more and more consumed by the entity that is Batman.

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[126] Duncan, Smith, *op. cit.,* page 225
[127] Jesser, Pourroy, *op. cit.,* pages 47-49

Both films feature several of the same characters, the central characters alongside Batman and Bruce Wayne, being the Wayne family's and manor's faithful butler Alfred Pennyworth, Gotham Police Commissioner Jim Gordon and Gotham Attorney General Harvey Dent as well as Batman's archenemy the Joker. While Bruce Wayne designs and creates his own bat-gadgets in Burton's *Batman,* Nolan's *The Dark Knight* features Lucius Fox, CEO of Wayne Enterprises' Applied Sciences Division, who aids Bruce Wayne's nocturnal life as Batman by ensuring the financial security of business strategy and management at Wayne Corporations. Together with Alfred, Fox functions as the main enablers of Batman's equipment and an arsenal of bat-gadgets.

All characters represent different counterparts to Wayne/Batman, and in my analysis, I will utilise the interplay between the characters to help illustrate how an understanding of evil is constructed in the films.

6 MAKING SENSE IN A SENSELESS WORLD - The analysis

As presented in my chapter on methodology, I will utilise Melanie J. Wright's four-part methodology for my analysis, with the exclusion of reception. I have chosen to divide the analysis into three parts and will begin by researching the narrative in chapter 6.1. In this chapter, the focus will be on the characters, story and plotting. From narrative, I will continue on to discussing the cultural and religious context in chapter 6.2. In chapter 6.3, I will shift the focus onto the architecture in both films and research Gotham as an urban territory for the construction of evil. I will highlight style i.e. the aesthetic and audio-visual dimensions (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound), throughout the analysis, since it ties strongly into all the sections.

6.1 A little anarchy to upset the established order

Much of the construction of an understanding of evil in both films are based on the opposites and contrasts of order and chaos. Both film's chaos and order relationships are presented as an external battle on a more general level, as well as an internal battle for Bruce Wayne/Batman and Harvey Dent. The Joker's character is the force that in both films questions, demolishes and challenges the order that Batman, Dent and Jim Gordon tries to uphold. However the character's motives in both films differ, and it is the differences that speak to the success of whether or not order is regained, maintained or lost.

Batman is in himself a character of contrast with the split personality of Bruce Wayne and Batman. In the following passages, I have deliberately used Wayne/Batman with the slash punctuation mark in between the names, when illustrating or referring to situations where the two characters become one and the same. In cases where there is a need to distinguish between the two characters, I will use either Wayne or Batman. The internal balance of chaos and order, along with Wayne/Batman's motives, are well illustrated in the following scenes in Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, in the dialogue between butler and personal confidant of Bruce Wayne, Alfred Pennyworth and Bruce Wayne. The first conversation is early on in the film when Alfred and Wayne talk in the Bat-bunker:

> **Alfred:** Know your limits, Master Wayne.
>
> **Wayne:** Batman has no limits.
>
> **Alfred:** Well you do sir.
>
> **Wayne:** Well, I can't afford to know them.
>
> **Alfred:** And what's going to happen on the day that you find out?[128]

The second part takes place early in the morning in Wayne's penthouse, midway into the film, and is in response to the Joker's threat to keep on killing civilians until Batman takes off his mask and turns himself in:

> **Batman:** People are dying, Alfred. What would you have me do?
>
> **Alfred:** Endure, Master Wayne. Take it. They'll hate you for it, but that's the point of Batman. He can be the outcast. He can make the choice no one else can make. The right choice.
>
> **Batman:** No. Today I found out what Batman can't do. He can't endure this.[129]

The conversations also visually display a shift in the power structure. In the first conversation Wayne is standing up, he is shot walking towards his Bat-suit, confident yet with a serious facial expression. He exudes a sense of power and collectedness, ready for action with an awareness of caution. In the second conversation, he is sitting down in a chair, dressed in the Bat-suit, holding the bat mask in his hands. Alfred enters from behind and remains standing for the conversation. In this scene, Wayne/Batman exudes defeat. In his mind, he has failed to live up to his standards, and so he has now taken refuge from the citizens, high above the streets. Alfred's choice to remain standing shows his regard both for the severity of the situation but also the urgency not to succumb to self-pity and temporary setbacks.

In Burton's film, the battle for order is in turn concentrated to the trio of Batman, the Joker and Vicki Vale. Burton has chosen to clearly define the characters to the point where they have their own theme colours: press photographer Vicki Vale's theme colour is white, Batman/Wayne's is

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[128] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 00:12:59-00:13:18
[129] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 01:07:07-01:07:27

black, the Joker's theme colour is violet and green. Commissioner Gordon and Attorney General Harvey Dent fall into a muted palette of browns and greys. The theme colours provide a distinction in values and also the positioning of the characters in the construction of an understanding of evil in Burton's film. The significance of colour as part of the mise-en-scene, specifically introducing brighter colours to a palette of cold steely colours (black, grey, brown), can according to Bordwell and Thompson: "support a narrative development that shows an inhumane city landscape that is transformed by vitality and spontaneity."[130]

Vale's white dress and blond hair in the final scene up in the bell tower of Gotham cathedral, speaks to her being the light, the bride/love, purity and freedom, the saviour of Bruce Wayne. The Joker, in turn, is the homicidal trickster and jester in green and violet, who tries to fool the citizens into self-destruction with capitalist tricks and illusions of vanity. The Joker sells greed and smokescreens, he brings colour, music, money and sponsors the city's 200 year celebration parade. Yet his only goal and motive are to cause chaos and destruction. Batman dressed in signature black, represents the shadow as well as a certain level of solidness. All the while a lone ranger, his choice of colour gives him the element of surprise, he awaits his prey in the dark and strikes when the time is right. His choice of colour also speaks to the fact that he does not seek adulation or fame, he wants to remain in the shadows rather than work in broad daylight. Batman's motives are to avenge his parent's murders but also to seek justice in extension for Gotham city. In his personal quest, his actions become the mirror Gotham needs, in order to take collective responsibility to salvage the city, a testament of this being Batman's evolution in Burton's film, is going from a masked vigilante, a wanted outlaw, to become the guardian/hero Gotham can call if "the forces of evil should rise again".[131] Both Vale and the Joker bring a certain kind of vitality and spontaneity to the bleak urban landscape of Gotham. Both Vale and the Joker attract the attention of Batman, and as representations of order and chaos, good and evil, the question becomes, which of the two characters colour themes burns bright enough to puncture Batman's darkness.

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[130] Bordwell, Thompson, *op. cit.*, page 117
[131] *Batman,* 1989, 01:54:20

The order and chaos relationship is in both films interlinked with the city and its citizens. In Burton's *Batman*, the "shadowy, dingy"[132] Gotham city's legal system is corrupt, with police officers accepting bribes and doing deals with criminals, while the city itself is on the verge of bankruptcy. The rhetoric of city officials is weak, which in turn causes the citizens to turn to alternate powers and leaders to restore order. Almost two decades later, the situation in Nolan's Gotham is not as dire, but still, the law enforcement has difficulty in restraining criminality. Because the foundation is weak, villains like the Joker can easily infiltrate, manipulate and take control of the city, as Vilja Johnson points out in her article *"It's What You Do that Defines You:" Christopher Nolan's Batman as Moral Philosopher* (2014), the Joker "hopes to tear down the presumed morality of the city, allowing people to free themselves from all structure, from all morality, and from all systems of belief."[133]

While the other criminals and law enforcement have plans, the Jokers only plan is to "relieve you, the little people, of the burden of your failed and useless lives"[134] to "introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order and everything becomes chaos."[135] In essence, the Joker is an "agent of chaos"[136], according to himself just "a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it. You know, I just do things."[137] As an agent of chaos, the Joker in both films spreads his violence with shock, explosives, fear and destruction. He creates moral dilemmas with the citizens of Gotham as pawns in a game of twisted chess he plays with Batman, a game he does not want to end. That the Joker does not seem to want to achieve more than destruction and chaos, is hard for the other characters in the film to come to terms with. As Peter L. Berger writes: "The future attains a meaningful shape by virtue of the same order being projected into it. In other words, to live in the social world is to live an ordered and meaningful life. Society is the guardian of order and meaning not only objectively, in its institutional structures, but subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness. "[138] Here both Alfred Pennyworth and Lucius Fox

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[132] R. E. Terrill, 'Put on a happy face: *Batman* as schizophrenic saviour' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* NO 79, 1993 p. 319

[133] V. Johnson., "It's What You Do that Defines You:" Christopher Nolan's Batman as Moral Philosopher. *The Journal of Popular Culture* VOL 47, NO 5 2014 p. 958

[134] *Batman,* 1989, 01:35:10-01:35:35

[135] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 01:46:48-01:47:00

[136] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 01:47:01

[137] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 01:44:30-01:44:39

[138] Berger 1990 [1967], *op. cit.,* page 21

represent figures of authorities that enforce the order and meaningful life both for Wayne/Batman as well as for the societal structure of Gotham.

The Joker can easily be seen as what Peter Berger calls an anomy, i.e. "a radical separation from the social world/.../a powerful threat to the individual"[139]. He is however not alone in being an anomy in the films of Burton and Nolan. Attorney General Harvey Dent, crowned to be Gotham's white knight, "the symbol of hope Batman could never be and the first legitimate ray of light in Gotham in decades"[140], balances the line of order and chaos already from the start of Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, with his philosophy of creating his own luck with a same-sided coin. He crosses over to the moral grey area when his love interest Rachel Dawes is killed in a scheme rigged by the Joker, and where he, himself burns half his face, thus becoming two-faced, like his lucky coin, which also gets its one side scorched. With Dent, the Joker succeeds where he fails with Batman, to extinguish Dent's hope in humanity, in the bearing nature of the social order.

In most societies, the rule of law is seen as the most objective organ to pass judgment on what is right and wrong. When a society's legal system falters, it can be seen in Bergian terms, as a "not just a moral offense against society, but an outrage against the ultimate order that embraces both gods and men and, indeed, all beings"[141]. Wayne/Batman is himself also on the verge of radically separating himself from the social world and order, specifically when considering his tactics in his quest for justice. As Batman, he does not adhere to a jurisdiction, he continues to work in the shadows, as a vigilante, in the grey areas of the law and utilises audio and video surveillance that covers all of Gotham in order to find the Joker. Most importantly, he does not seem to fully comprehend the ethical dilemmas his actions cause. A good example is illustrated by the scene in Nolan's *The Dark Knight,* where Batman asks Lucius Fox, CEO of Wayne Enterprises Applied Science Division, to help him find the Joker with the help of audio and video surveillance:

> **Batman:** Beautiful isn't it?
> **Lucius:** Beautiful? Unethical. Dangerous. You've turned every cell phone in Gotham city into a microphone.
> **Batman:** And a high-frequency generator-receiver.

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[139] Berger 1990 [1967], *loc. cit.*
[140] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 01:05:12-01:05:16 Batman talking to Dent after the funeral march
[141] Berger 1990 [1967], *op. cit.,* page 40

> **Lucius:** You took my sonar concept and applied it to every phone in the city. With half the city feeding you sonar, you can imagine all of Gotham. This is wrong.
>
> **Batman:** I've got to find this man, Lucius.
>
> **Lucius:** At what cost?
>
> **Batman:** The database is null-key encrypted. It can only be accessed by one person.
>
> **Lucius:** This is too much power for one person.
>
> **Batman:** That's why I gave it to you. Only you can use it.
>
> **Lucius:** Spying on 30 million people isn't part of my job description.[142]

Fox agrees to help Batman, on the condition that he destroys the concept and machine when it has fulfilled its purpose, conditions to which Batman agrees. The screens that are feeding the information, are set up in the Bat-bunker, and when Fox enters, Batman is standing behind the wall of screens when he says his first line. Batman delivers the line with a hint of a smile, a certain tone of excitement and even pride in his voice, communicating his philosophy that the ends might justify the means. The fact that he has entrusted the use of the concept to only one person as well as designed it to be destroyed when no longer needed, shows he still reasons with a moral code that is in line with the social reality he inhabits.

Question is, how much of Bruce Wayne is, and remains, in Batman, and how it affects the construction of the characters moral framework. In his article *Shadows of the Bat*, Simon Philipp Born proposes whether or not Batman, in fact is, ultimately himself responsible for the creation of the villains he is fighting in both films.[143] In their last battle in the bell tower of Gotham Cathedral, in Tim Burton's *Batman*, the Joker proposes to Batman quite clear-headedly, a similar idea:

> **Batman:** I'm going to kill you!
>
> **The Joker:** You idiot! You made me, remember?
>
> **Batman:** I made you, but you made me first.[144]

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[142] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 01:52:29-01:53:30

[143] S. P. Born, 'Shadows of the Bat. Construction of Good and Evil in the Batman Movies of Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan' *Online Journal for Religion, Film and Media*, VOL 3, NO 1, 2017, page 81

[144] *Batman,* 1989, 01:49:17-01:50:10

The same conversation, held two decades later in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight,* also high above the streets of Gotham, still supports the idea that Batman and the Joker need each other, with the Joker proclaiming to Batman: "you truly are incorruptible aren't you? Huh? You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won't kill you because you're just too much fun. I think we are destined to do this forever."[145] This particular scene, which over the years has grown from a few lines to a much longer monologue by the Joker, shows the shift towards a more nuanced narrative. As our experience of reality has become more layered, with a multitude of sources (among others: social media, popular culture, the experience industry, politics and religion) providing values and morals, so needs the on-screen narrative become more layered too. This in order to better be able to respond to functioning as a site for world building and meaning-making.

6. 2 Shaping evil - The cultural context as a moral framework

In this chapter, I will look more closely at the cultural and religious context of the films. The chapter will research how the cultural context offers a moral framework/structure to the characters.

Both Burton and Nolan's films have been hailed as great representations of the battle between good and evil. Both films are also representative of the social environment and era they were made in. In her chapter *'Wait till they get a hold of me!': The Joker from Modern to Postmodern Villainous S/laughter*, featured in *Villains and Villainy : Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media* (ed. A. Fahraeus, D. Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2011) Sorcha Ní Fhlainn discusses Burton's *Batman* as permeating much of the social and political reality it was created in. According to Ní Fhlainn, Burton's *Batman* is reconfigured "for a 1980s audience in the midst of social divide and insecurity born out of the immediate post-Reaganite era of supreme confidence"[146]. As Ní Fhlainn also relates, the bleak social reality of Burton's Gotham is ruled by capitalism, consumption, greed and the excess focus on appearance. This becomes evident most

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prominently in the Joker, who is fixated with appearance, beyond the obvious reason of his own face being deformed, and accessories. In a social reality fixated with appearance, it becomes easy for the Joker to exploit the citizens and city officials weakness for vanity, in order to spread his gospel of destruction and chaos, e.g. by poisoning everyday cosmetics[147].

Round the same time Burton's film premiered, the United States had elected a new president, George W. Bush, who did not live up to the expectations set by his predecessor. This is, according to Ní Fhlainn, mirrored in Burton's film by Gothams struggle to keep its own streets clean from criminality, and the city budget balanced, a city in desperate need for a saviour in the form of Batman[148]. Yet what is important to remember is that Batman's quest for justice was first and foremost personal. At the beginning of Burton's film, Batman is treated as an outlaw, a criminal to be captured, not a saviour. It is only when the city is faced with the chaos that the Joker orchestrates and broadcasts[149], that the citizens become aware of the price of vanity and greed. Even though Batman ultimately becomes the guardian of Gotham, he has to grow into the role of guardian. Most societies need a strong leader, however, in contrast, Burton's *Batman* is an example of what happens when the leaders are not as strong as society needs them to be.

While the cultural context and themes in Burton's film, are quite clear and can be well situated in the off-screen environment it was conceived in, Nolan's film, from 2008, presents a cultural context and characters, that are more fluid, multifaceted and disordered. Real life events during the two decades between the films, the terror attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent political rhetoric as well as the financial fluctuations in The United States, influenced a change in both film's tones. Both films play on the theme of film noir, but where Burton created a 1930's representation of an American noir landscape "overrun with crime and disillusionment at the end of the 1980s"[150], Nolan's noir is hyper-real and "acutely aware of the post 9/11 landscape in which we now live."[151] Yet as Will Brooker suggests in his book *Hunting the Dark Knight* (2012), while many have chosen to interpret Nolan's film as a reflection of the United States and the Bush administration's ongoing

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[147] *Ibid*., page 77
[148] Ni Fhlainn, *loc. cit.*
[149] *Ibid.,* page 80
[150] *Ibid.,* page 77
[151] *Ibid.,* page 86

War on Terror[152], the possible political ties in the *The Dark Knight* rather concerns "the blurring of boundaries, the instability of oppositions and the shades of grey between black and white, and the implications of [its] fluid, shifting, moral universe".[153] Real life events have shifted the perception of evil in the films from a possible *something* or *someone*, that can be easily gotten rid of, like a rancid piece of meat or faulty mechanics, to a fluid unstoppable force that just wants to watch the world burn.

The morals and values embedded in the social reality Wayne grows up in creates the base upon which Wayne builds his own and Batman's moral code. Key insights that both films contain regarding Wayne's history include the Wayne manor and the butler Alfred. Both indicate considerable wealth and social status that suggests a certain hierarchy, which in both films is best illustrated by Alfred still calling adult Bruce Wayne, *Master* Wayne. Even though the relationship Wayne has with Alfred is close to being of equal social status, which is e.g. illustrated in *The Dark Knight* by often placing both characters on the same height level when in key conversations, there still exists a certain level of subtle distance between the two, one being the master and the other a servant.

While Alfred's character in Burton's film, remains more of a caricature of a butler[154], in *The Dark Knight* Alfred acts as Wayne/Batman's moral compass throughout the film. Even though Alfred's stance is mostly supportive, with elements of guardianlike care, his comments carry at times an undertone of criticism of Wayne/Batman's reasoning. In a scene where Alfred arrives at the Bat-bunker, to find Wayne stitching himself up after yet another night as Batman, both reflect on the current problematic situation with Gotham's criminals forging an alliance with the Joker:

> **Alfred:** You crossed the line first. You squeezed them, you hammered them to the point of desperation. And in their desperation, they turned to a man they didn't fully understand.
> **Wayne:** Criminals aren't complicated, Alfred. We just need to figure out what he's after.

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[152] W. Brooker *Hunting the Dark Knight. Twenty-First Century Batman* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd) 2012, p. 202
[153] *Ibid.,* page 207
[154] J. D. Jesser, J. Pourroy, *The Art and Making of The Dark Knight Trilogy* (New York: Abrams Books), 2012, p. 90

> **Alfred:** With respect Master Wayne, perhaps this is a man you don't fully understand either. Some men aren't looking for anything logical, like money. They can't be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn.[155]

During the conversation, Alfred has walked towards Wayne, who is standing by his Bat-suit. When Alfred says his last sentence, the camera shows images of the Joker on a TV screen behind the two men, before cutting back to a close up of Alfred and Wayne, standing face to face, underlining the personal essence of the conversation. And just as Alfred says the last word, *burn*, the camera shows a close up of Alfred looking Wayne straight in the eye with a severe facial expression. With his comments Alfred is mainly referring to the Joker, as a man who cannot be fully comprehended, but by looking directly at Wayne when he says the last sentence, one could interpret that Alfred is insinuating that Wayne has the same destructive trait, that also he, on some level, wants to watch the world burn, and that maybe that trait is part of Wayne/Batman's ongoing struggle of maintaining his own moral code.

Apart from suggesting Wayne/Batman too would want to watch the world burn, the conversation also speaks to the fact that when faced with the forces of destruction that seem unfathomable, it is easier to externalize evil, to take to the rhetoric of "us" versus "them. Simon Philipp Born suggests that by presenting more complex characters, that are not solely good or evil, both Burton and Nolan try to deconstruct and reposition the notion of evil, as a reaction to the often chosen rhetoric by American politicians who "constantly evoke the Manichaean rhetoric of good versus evil, posing God's chosen people against foreign enemies of freedom and democracy"[156]

The character of the Joker is another good example of the evolution of the cultural and moral context between the two films. Burton's Joker is a flamboyant extrovert, a character that desires to be in the spotlight and is not afraid to make a scene. He takes pride in being evil. Nolan's Joker, on the other hand, is an introvert, often appearing somewhat hunched over, and looking at the world from under the brow, showing equal contempt for all who adhere to *a* form of order. He seems to appear out of thin air, and stays anonymous throughout the film, as Police Commissioner

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[155] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 00:52:02-00:53:20
[156] Born *op. cit.,* page 99

Gordon attests: "Nothing. No DNA, no fingerprints. Clothing is custom, no tags or brand labels. Nothing in his pockets but knives and lint. No name, no other alias."[157] What also separates the character of the Joker in Burton's and Nolan's films is his origin. In Burton's *Batman*, the Joker is originally Jack Napier, a criminal part of the local mob in Gotham. In Nolan's *The Dark Knight* the Joker has no history, a conscious choice by Nolan in order to make the character "*very scary*".[158] As Nolan continues on the motives of the Joker, in *The Art and Making of The Dark Knight Trilogy*, J. D. Jesser, J. Pourroy (eds), "The Joker is not a logical criminal, he's devoid of sense, devoid of logic. This makes him an extraordinary adversary for Batman because Batman relies on tapping into criminals' fears and playing those fears against them. But the Joker is not responsive to that."[159]

Nolan's *The Dark Knight* also highlights several aspects that blurs the lines of moral and ethical certitude, like Batman's use of Lucius Fox's sonar surveillance system and Harvey Dent's use of mental and physical torture and fear tactics in order to achieve answers and justice. These extreme tactics are also ways to forcefully hold on to the declining personal faith the characters are experiencing.

As Peter Berger wrote in *The Sacred Canopy*, "that the individual appropriates the world in conversation with others and, furthermore, that both identity and world remain real to himself only as long as he can continue the conversation."[160], much of the construction of evil in both films is located in the dialogue, interplay and language of the characters. Almost always, when specific values, moral viewpoints and ideologies are expressed in the films, the shots are framed to focus on the upper body and face, often having the camera circling around the actors, in order to create urgency and intensity in the shot[161]. Where it gets personal, and where conflicting ideologies are expressed, only a few people are shown in a shot, in order to capture the communication via facial expressions. As a contrast, when the intention is to express a more common ideology/values or viewpoint, shared by society as a whole, the shots are wide, featuring more people and

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[157] *The Dark Knight,* 2008, 00:1:20:42-01:20:55
[158] Jesser, Pourroy, *op. Cit.,* page 47
[159] Jesser, Pourroy, *loc. cit.,*
[160] Berger, 1990 [1967] *op. cit.,* page 16
[161] Bordwell, Thompson, *op. cit.,* page 141

surroundings, e.g. the funeral march in *The Dark Knight* and 200-year celebration parade in *Batman*.

6. 3 Gotham - Researching evil in the urban landscape

Moving on from the narrative and the cultural context of Burton's and Nolan's films, in this chapter the focus is on the city of Gotham as the urban landscape for researching an understanding of evil. The different textures of the physical space of the city, becomes the backdrop onto which the narrative is transposed, while also offering a spatial framework in which the characters in the film operate. The physical on-screen world, while not really real, functions as a form of playhouse, a testing ground for the viewer, since the urban landscape is reminiscent of real, off-screen urban landscapes. Just as the narrative, style and cultural context can help us research a notion of evil on screen, so does the physical and mental architecture and urban landscape play a significant role in the construction of an understanding of evil. According to Pallasmaa:

> We do not live separately in material and mental worlds; these experiential dimensions are fully intertwined. Neither do we live in an objective world. We live in mental worlds, in which the experienced, remembered and imagined, as well as past, present and future are inseparably intermixed.[162]

As Pallasmaa notes, the past, present and future is interlinked in the world we inhabit. Whenever we move along sidewalks, travel by train or visit buildings, we decode our surroundings through its values and ideological and physical structures. Simultaneously with the decoding, we are free to assign new values, attach memories and ideologies to our surroundings. Buildings, spaces and cities are in the physical capacity devoid of meaning and value. A cathedral is in essence only the sum of the materials it's made of. Following Peter L. Berger's paradigm of social construction[163], physical spaces and buildings can be seen as the objective reality that we give meaning, assign value too. Via the ideas and values built into them, via the chosen design and materials used, places them in a context, be it social, cultural and so forth.

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[162] Pallasmaa *op. cit.,* page 18
[163] Berger ([1967] 1990), *op. cit.,* page 4

Generally, the assumption is that cities are benign. Most cities are planned and constructed following certain ideals and agendas, in order to grow the citizen ratio or to generate positive economic, political, social growth in an area. When new buildings and areas are planned and constructed, it raises the question of how much power and influence the citizens have in the process. Are not architecture and urban landscapes ultimately designed to cater to the consumer, rather than to the vanity or architectural folly?[164] In *Cities and Urban Cultures* (2003), Deborah Stevenson discusses the urban landscape as being "aesthetic and strategic practices of architecture and urban design which, through a complex of formal and informal processes contribute to the creation of urban cultures as well as giving shape to distinctive city image."[165] According to Stevenson the aesthetic of modernism in architecture and urban planning was essentially an "anti-urban philosophy, used to justify massive slum clearances, the destruction of neighbourhood communities, and the building of alienating public spaces, such as high-rise housing developments for low-income earners."[166] As Stevenson notes, even when modernism has become postmodernism and new architectural planning and building ideologies have evolved, the "urban legacy of the modernist concern with the general, the minimal and the formal"[167], is still present in the urban landscape of both off-screen and on-screen cities.

Both the urban landscape and the architecture in Batman and The Dark Knight, are striking, but bleak. The bleakness and darkness of the urban landscape in both films can influence the viewer to transpose the atmosphere onto similar physical spatial palace he/she utilises in the off-screen world. The Gotham Burton built together with production designer Anton Furst is "a stygian Babylon of emaciated alleys and big, bruising towers, all murk, sleaze and psychopathic architecture"[168], a vision that was inspired by a cramped rundown Manhattan. Burton morphed his Gotham into a hyper-stylised gothic noir landscape, that hardly ever saw sunshine. Smoke and shadows embed the streets and citizens of Gotham into an illusion that conditions will never get better. This is reinforced by placing the character's most meaningful encounters high above the streets, in penthouse offices and apartments and church towers, separating the citizens from the

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[164] D. Stevenson, *Cities and Urban Cultures* (Berkshire, Philadelphia: Open University Press), 2003, p. 73
[165] Stevenson, *loc. cit.,*
[166] *Ibid.,* page 74
[167] Stevenson, *loc. cit.,*
[168] B. Nightingale, 'Batman Prowls a Gotham Drawn From the Absurd' *New York Times* 18 June 1989, retrieved 5 May 2019, www.nytimes.com

task of collectively saving the city. Even the final battle between Batman and the Joker is situated in the bell tower of Gotham Cathedral, a "period piece, closed and allowed to rot because God left the city long ago and no one goes to church anymore."[169]

Like the Wayne Manor in Burton's Batman, with its tall ceilings, large rooms dominated by heavy dark drapery, is comparable to a giant, hollow shell full of relics, past tense and ambiguous personality, so does much of the interior and exterior of Nolan's The Dark Knight communicate anonymity. Penthouse apartments, vast, minimalistically furnished boardrooms, reflecting glass exteriors and sleek, metal interiors, communicate on the surface great economic wealth, yet also convey a spiritual deficit and anonymity. In contrast to Burton, Nolan has sought a strong sense of realism to The Dark Knight. While Burton built the set for his Batman on set in England, Nolan chose to film on location, mostly in Chicago. Also here Batman comes down to street level from above. Throughout the film, Batman is seen on rooftops, surveilling the city while Bruce Wayne is pictured in big, empty boardrooms looking out onto a landscape of corporate, high rise buildings with shells of reflecting glass. Both speak to the urban landscape of being more excluding than including. In her chapter From the City Beautiful to the 'End' of Modernism, Deborah Stevenson writes about the urban design approach, City Beautiful[170], where major cities, and often postcolonial nations, were radically rebuilt with the bearing ideology that urban landscape and public architecture should exude "power in all its manifestations"[171]. According to Stevenson the City Beautiful movement "legitimized the design and construction of potent symbols of supremacy in the form of monuments, streetscapes, buildings and in the location of parks and gardens."[172] The Gotham that both Burton and Nolan have created and built, echo the ideals of the City Beautiful movement.

The last battle in Nolan's film, between Batman and the Joker, is similarly to Burton's Batman, portrayed high above the streets, in a secular place of worship, an abandoned, hollow high rise building whose values speak more to bankrupt, capitalistic ideals, than to spiritual growth. The

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[169] Nightingale, *loc. cit.,*
[170] Stevenson *op. cit.,* page 74
[171] *Ibid.,* page 75
[172] Stevenson *loc. cit.,*

more critical battle is instead fought on street level, in the ruins of where Rachel Dawes died, and where Harvey Dent loses his own battle of personal faith:

> **Dent:** It's not about what I want, it's about what is fair! You thought we could be decent men in an indecent time. But you were wrong. The world is cruel. And the only morality in a cruel world is chance. Unbiased. Unprejudiced. Fair. His son's got the same chance as she had, fifty-fifty.
> **Batman:** What happened to Rachel wasn't chance. We decided to act. We three.
> **Dent:** Then why was it me who was the only one who lost everything?
> **Batman:** It wasn't.
> **Dent:** The Joker chose me.
> **Batman:** Because you were the best of us. He wanted to prove that even someone as good as you, could fall.
> **Dent:** And he was right.
> **Batman:** You are the one pointing the gun Harvey. So point it at the people responsible.[173]

This final scene is of interest because it is at street level that Batman becomes the hunted outlaw again. He takes on the spiritual fall of Harvey Dent, in order to preserve him as Gotham's White Knight, and moreover to sustain the hope of the citizens of Gotham. In a very symbolic way, the bat spotlight is destroyed, at night while the rain pours down, as a form of cleansing ritual for the city. The gesture could also be seen as a way for Gotham to take the power back to its citizens and restoring social order. As mentioned earlier, in Burton's film the bleakness never lifted, but in Nolan's film scenes in daylight, which often feature a broader urban landscape and more citizens, support a sense of hope amidst the dark, night-time inhumane landscape[174].

The urban landscape and architecture in both films do not communicate a sense of security. The anonymity of the strict gothic architecture in Burton's Gotham and the reflecting glass exteriors in Nolan's Gotham constructs a mental environment that rejects and excludes, an on-screen urban surface that is devoid of texture. In comparison to the sleek, black Bat-suit, the Gotham created for both films is just a role, a form of suit and tie we wear to the office in order to fit into a social reality. Deborah Stevenson proposes that it is "within built space that cultures are negotiated and feelings of belonging expressed"[175], yet in order to define a built space as excluding, there needs

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[173] *The Dark Knight*, 2008, 02:13:47-02:14:35
[174] Bordwell, Thompson, *op. cit.,* page 117
[175] Stevenson, *op. cit.,* page 72

to be an opposite, an understanding of how a built space is including. In her TED Talk, *How public spaces make cities work* (2014) Amanda Burden, New York's chief city planner under the Bloomberg administration, talks about the importance of user-friendly, accessible public spaces for functioning, successful cities. Her theory is that people are attracted to "places with greenery and places to sit in the middle of the city where you didn't feel alone, or like a trespasser"[176] in contrast to modern, stylish, Spartan plazas that architects love to design, since " there's nothing to water, nothing to maintain, and no undesirable people to worry about"[177], and which look desolate and dangerous[178]. Akin to the low-maintenance plazas in Burden's New York, the urban landscape of Burton's gritty, industrial bleak Gotham and Nolan's sleek reflecting glass skyscraper Gotham, offer little or no welcoming place for people to meet, sit and to not feel alone. To be able to construct an understanding of good or evil, not just the mental space, but the physical space we move in needs to have a texture. In an urban landscape, textures produce surfaces that, in turn, offer possibilities to attach values and meaning to. Through, and with the help of, the different textures and colours found in urban landscapes, a good example being parks, it becomes easier to construct values because of the possibility of a response or reaction. As Burden proposes:

> How do you turn a park into a place that people want to be?/.../You don't tap into your design expertise. You tap into your humanity. I mean, would you want to go there? Would you want to stay there? Can you see into it and out of it? Are there other people there? Does it seem green and friendly? Can you find your very own seat?[179]

The urban landscape in both films does little to instil a sense of inclusion in the viewer, but that is partly the point of the films. In *The Architecture of Image*, Pallasmaa writes: "the mind is in the world, and the world exists through the mind. Experiencing a space is a dialogue, a kind of exchange - I place myself in the space and the space settles in me"[180] Gotham is not just *a* city, it is a state of mind. And so the on-screen urban landscape can function as a testing ground, or site for ethical debate and moral reflection. Is there enough texture in the on-screen urban landscape that we can respond too? When we sit down to watch films, we transpose onto the screen the values

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[176] A. Burden, *How public spaces make cities work* (New York: TED talk), March 2014 00:02:40-00:02:50 retrieved 10 May 2018 www.ted.com
[177] *Ibid.,* 00:03:00-00:03:20
[178] Burden, *loc. cit.,*
[179] *Ibid.,* 00:12:55-00:13:31
[180] Pallasmaa, *op. cit.,* page 22

and understanding of the off-screen world, in order to see how the values of the on-screen reality responds. It is here where we can place ourselves in the space of Gotham and let Gotham settle in us in order to explore the moral landscape and whether or not we can locate ourselves in it.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim for this thesis was to research how an understanding of evil is socially constructed in the Batman films of Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan, with the addition to highlight how the architecture and urban landscape in the films tie into the construction of an understanding of evil. The theoretical base is situated in Peter L. Berger's, and Thomas Luckmann's, theories on the social construction of reality and knowledge, and as the methodology I chose an adaptation of Melanie J. Wright's four-part methodology. Part of my ambition of this thesis was also to combine different disciplines, with the objective to see if an interdisciplinary approach would produce more in-depth and multifaceted results. What has become obvious during the work with the thesis is that utilising different disciplines is comparable to creating a piece of art with different materials, that normally would not be used together. The knowledge needed of the materials being used, in order to get the most of them, and achieving an interesting fit, requires quite extensive understanding of the materials themselves. Film as a source is rich in its content and functions on many levels. To research the many layers in a film, requires an understanding of how the different elements of sound, editing, narrative work together. Just the fact that films are a composite of the different elements, makes it a valuable source to research since it so strongly resembles the off-screen world of which it is, in essence, a product of, and for.

The strength and challenge of combining disciplines, is in the versatility and the wide array of knowledge and methodologies they have to offer. Increasingly the subjects and objects of study and research have grown less contained and more fluid, which in turn can result in a more integrated and overlapping interest for various disciplines. The appeal when locating similar points of view or themes in the different disciplines, e.g. the ones included in this thesis, affirms the possibilities of more integrated and relevant research. The process of construction our reality is an ongoing one, and so when we move in the physical, mental and emotional world, we are constantly projecting and reacting to our surroundings. Hence research of a specific theme in a distinct material, like a film, becomes more intricate when the different disciplines provide versatile viewpoints.

Films in themselves tend to offer great canvases for researching, analysing and discovering various themes, e. g. a notion of evil. The strength that films have are their possibility to contain more layers of the narratives unfolding on screen. The layers create nuances that communicate, both on a conscious and subconscious level, to the constructed ideas of things and subjects, as Bordwell and Thompson write: "Films communicate information and ideas, and they show us places and ways of life we might not otherwise know. Important as these benefits are, though, something more is at stake. Films offer us ways of seeing and feeling that we find deeply gratifying."[181]

Mirroring a possible off-screen reality, both films by Burton and Nolan, suggest that the notion of evil is not constructed via the battle fought between just two characters, but rather as a joint venture involving all the main characters. All the different characters Bruce Wayne fights as Batman could also be seen as an embodiment of Wayne/Batman's ongoing inner struggle of coming to terms with his own moral code and growth. Simon Philipp Born comments quite perceptively that both Burton and Nolan's films favour a certain level of inconclusiveness in the resolution of the narratives. According to Philip Born both directors "question the clear separation of good and evil as well as their ontological statuses./.../Consequently, their Batman movies exhibit that the struggle between good and evil is fought not externally, but internally."[182] The Joker, Alfred, Dent, Vale and Dawes, could all be seen as representing different internal angles to the construction of an understanding of evil (and good), within Wayne/Batman. Alfred, Vicki Vale and Rachel Dawes represent the sound morals, the normal life Wayne could have, where he would not need to be Batman. In District Attorney Harvey Dent, Batman sees Gotham's true hero. Dent is in part who Batman wishes he was, but knows he can never be because his tactics and motives do not align with the law-abiding Dent, as is illustrated in the following scene where Batman finds Dent trying to force answers out of the schizophrenic character Scarecrow:

> **Dent:** The Joker killed Gordon. He's gonna kill Rachel.
> **Batman:** You're the symbol of hope I could never be. Your stand against organized crime is the first legitimate ray of light in Gotham in decades. If anyone saw this, everything would be undone. All the criminals you pulled off the streets would be released. And Jim Gordon would have died for nothing.[183]

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[181] Bordwell., Thompson., *op. cit.* page 2
[182] Philipp Born *op. cit.* page 100
[183] *The Dark Knight* 01:05:09-01:05:30

The way that the central characters are presented in both films also communicates an evolution of different ways to portray evil on-screen. A challenge with showing villainy on screen, is that it is easier to materialise, or concentrate, something intangible like evil, into a character like the Joker. Thus the intangible becomes concrete and is represented by a physical being that is easier to handle, relate to and discard. Not wholly unlike the snake in the garden of Eden that tempted Eve to taste the forbidden fruit. Yet as Randolph Lewis in his review *The Dark Knight of American empire* in *Jump Cut - A Review of Contemporary Media,* comments on Nolan's *The Dark Knight,* about the considerable possibilities of moral and ethical explorations in popular culture:

> ...at some level *The Dark Knight* is speaking to a weary and agitated part of the U.S. psyche that is desperate for change./.../ Perhaps unconsciously, we no longer look to mythic heroes like Batman and their clumsy imitators in our political system, but to villains like the Joker for the hope that change is possible. We may not be aware of our desire for transformation—it may be stuck in what Bloch calls the "Not-Yet-Conscious" — but our inner longing for something better can find resonance even in a Hollywood blockbuster.[184]

As mentioned earlier in chapter 2.1, concerning the secular and plural nature of religion and popular culture, the present everyday of the West is governed by effectiveness, order and a streamlined way of living. In *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Christopher Partridge suggests the world we live in has become a disenchanted place, which is increasingly fragmented, communities are in decline and the "impact of multicultural and religiously plural societies, the growth of bureaucracy, the creeping rationalization, and the influence of scientific worldviews have together led to a situation in which religion is privatized, far less socially important, and far less plausible than it was in pre-modern communities."[185] All the different sources that advertise their own set of values, morals and tools for meaning making and world-building in today's society, however, run the risk of melting together and becoming white noise, devoid of texture. In this disenchanted world, popular culture offers a source of textures and themes that according to Partridge "both reflects and informs ideas, values and meanings within society as well as providing a site for the exploration of ideas values and meanings."[186]

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[184] Lewis 2009
[185] Partridge, *op. cit.* page 16
[186] *Ibid.,* page 121

In accordance with discussing the value of the material, the relevance of researching the different disciplines and themes separately and interlinked is of interest and importance. Considering film (and in extension popular culture) and religion as sites for religious and spiritual research and debate, there clearly is a relevance, to which the growing number of literature on the market is a testament to. Our society is becoming more multifaceted everyday, global migration, as well as continuous demand for online, social media presence, blurs the boundaries of cultures and conventions. Human beings in the ongoing dialogue of constructing their social realities, simultaneously produce the framework for cross-disciplinary research while also being the subject/object of study, simply by living in the world[187].

Social construction as the theoretical framework has also required some effort. The theories and ideas put forth by Peter L. Berger, together with Thomas Luckmann, in the late 1960s, raises the question of whether or not they are relevant in today's research field. Is it possible that the idea that human beings are in an ongoing dialectical relationship/symbiosis with the reality they occupy, has become commonplace to the point where it no longer stands to offer anything new to the study of religion and film and popular culture? Maybe. Many in the academic field have been influenced by Berger's sociology of reality and religion, yet few have tried to distil it into a more precise, applicable form of theory. More so than not, I am inclined to agree with Titus Hjelm when he proposes that maybe the sociology of religions "theoretical refinement has been waiting in the wings for a surprisingly long time. Perhaps now, the sociology of religion can be refocused to ask 'what passes for religion in society' - especially since it is a question that scholars and religious and secular people of the world increasingly confront in their lives."[188].

In order to understand our increasingly complex contemporary social, physical, subjective and objective reality, to be able to decode it, we need to expand our research reference points.[189] This so that we are better equipped to ask the right questions and to achieve more involved readings of the social reality and values we trade with on a daily basis. Films, as part of the popular cultural

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[187] Berger ([1967] 1990), *op. cit.,* pages 5-6
[188] Hjelm *op. cit.,* page 245
[189] Berger, Luckmann, *op. cit.,* pp. 38-39

arsenal on offer at our fingertips 24/7, present narratives that can challenge our perceptions of our society and values. As Vilja Johnson notes when discussing *The Dark Knight*:

> In the extreme dilemmas depicted onscreen Batman tests the utility of various values, prioritizing and even discarding moral codes to achieve what he views as the best possible outcome. In this capacity, Gotham City serves as an ethical testing ground for audience members, too - a site where they can watch the utility of their own morals play out on screen.[190]

Considering the choice of films, it is of merit to question whether or not it would have sufficed to choose only one film to analyse. Seeing as film, as a medium or format, is quite rich, it offers several angles or layers to study. The involvement of several disciplines, proposes the possibility for the analysis to dive deeper, to explore more intricately the interplay of mise-en-scene with narrative, had I opted for only one film as my material. Concerning the methodological approach, an option could have been to do quantitative research by hosting a film viewing with an attached survey in order to generate information and data on how a certain demographic group would receive the chosen films. Another methodology option could be to utilise netnography, by which the research would focus on the viewer comments on various established movie and film sites and social media forums, i.e. IMDB, Rotten Tomatoes and Facebook.

An additional question in regards to the material is the value of analysing films that are similar in themes but created at different times and social realities. The value is in the fact that what has come before, has helped shape the present day. Choosing similar materials from different time periods can also help illustrate any possible change. Here the cultural context becomes important so that the material does not get assigned qualities and values it does not actually contain, as the material is always a product of its time. Evolving and changing ideologies, political, economic and social fluctuations can affect how we read materials, which is why it is important to position the material in its cultural context. Stylistically and technologically, Burton's *Batman* in comparison to Nolan's *The Dark Knight* is more crude and simplistic, yet at the time of its release in 1989, Burton's *Batman* was in the forefront regarding style and visual effects.

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[190] Johnson *op. cit.,* page 957

The urban landscape we navigate in and through daily also evolves and changes over time. Areas are demolished, re-planned and constructed into something new. Just as much as popular culture becomes part of the language we use to decode and recode our reality, so does the urban landscape become part of our language, with which we trade in the world. In his chapter *A Home in the World: The Ontological Significance of Home* in *Architecture, Culture and Spirituality*, Thomas Barrie writes that

> The tasking of architecture to replicate or reveal the world and situate our place within it can be understood as a quest for making a home in an inherently unstable world. Acts of building have served to connect us with ourselves and our place in the cosmos, while simultaneously revealing the vast contexts of which we are a part.[191]

In the process of the construction of our reality, as well as locating understandings of good and evil, we project our own ideas and values with how we are, act, dress and so forth, via the cultural artefacts we use, and the urban landscape we move in.

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[191] T. Barrie, 'A Home in the World: The Ontological Significance of Home' in T. Barrie, J. Bermudez, p. J. Tabb, (eds) *Architecture, Culture and Spirituality* (Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company), 2015 p.99

8. SUMMARY IN SWEDISH - SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

"I MADE YOU, BUT YOU MADE ME FIRST"[192]

Hur ondska konstrueras socialt, delvis via arkitekturen och det urbana landskapet i Tim Burtons *Batman* (1989) och Christopher Nolans *The Dark Knight* (2008)

Under åren då jag bodde utanför stadens centrum, gick min hemväg ofta längs med tysta, tomma nattliga gator. Musiken i hörlurarna skapade tillsammans med atmosfären i omgivningen en filmisk upplevelse. Av upplevelsen av det urbana landskapet tillsammans med musiken konstruerade jag ett nytt sammanhang, samtidigt som upplevelsen i sin egen rätt hade en inverkan på mig och mina värderingar. Vårt meningsskapande kan ses som en pågående process i vilken vi skapar sammanhang i vardagen, meningsskapandet fungerar således som en pågående dialog mellan mig och min omgivning. Samtidigt som jag skapar mening i min vardag och definierar värderingar som är viktiga för mig i den, påverkas mitt meningsskapande av de värderingar och meningar som redan finns i min omgivning.

I det nutida samhället har media av varierande slag ett relativt stort inflytande på våra liv och de värderingar som förmedlas via dagstidningar, tv-program och filmer påverkar till en viss grad hur vi konstruerar uppfattningar om till exempel gott och ont. Sociala medier har infiltrerat vardagen, mediernas produktions- och konsumtionsformat utvecklas konstant och samtidigt har gränsen mellan fakta och fiktion, heligt och profant, i vardagen grumlats. Ola Sigurdson diskuterar i sin essä "Djävulen åter mitt i bland oss" i Kyrkans Tidning bl.a. hur föreställningar om det onda skapas i samhället "oftast genom film, musik, böcker, serier med mera", att det i populärkulturen "flödar över av föreställningar om det onda: från den allra enklaste teckning av striden mellan det goda och det onda till komplexa skildringar av hur någon blev ond och av ondskans ursprung."[193]

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[192] Batman, dir. Tim Burton, USA, WARNER BROS., 1989, [dvd] 01:50:08. Batman in a dialogue with the Joker

[193] O. Sigurdson, 'Djävulen åter mitt i bland oss' *Kyrkans tidning* 2005:45 s 24

I min kandidatavhandling inom ämnet religionsvetenskap undersökte jag hur Hannah Arendts definition av banal ondska tog sig uttryck i Sam Raimis film *A simple plan* (1998). Min avhandling pro gradu är en fortsättning på temat film och religion, och här undersöker jag specifikt hur en uppfattning av ondska konstrueras socialt i Tim Burtons film *Batman* (1989) och Christopher Nolans film *The Dark Knight* (2008). Avhandlingen lyfter även fram i vilken utsträckning, samt på vilket sätt, arkitektur och urbana landskap påverkar konstruktionen av uppfattningen om ondska. Valet att forska om Batman, samt att analysera specifikt de två valda filmerna, är i första hand baserat på att Batman är universellt känd som karaktär och varumärke samt att det urbana landskapet i filmerna är påfallande.

Det teoretiska perspektivet i avhandlingen utgår från Peter L. Bergers och Thomas Luckmanns teorier om den sociala konstruktionen av verklighet och kunskap. Berger och Luckmann hävdade att vår konstruktion av verkligheten är en dialektisk process, där vi konstruerar och skapar vår verklighet samtidigt som verkligheten skapar oss.[194] Den socialkonstruktivistiska processen sker via språk, symboler och relationer med vilka vi förhandlar om bland annat mening, värden, moral och etik.[195] När vi skapar narrativ i, och om, vår vardag gör vi det via redan konstruerade narrativ som innehåller värderingar och åsikter. I film kan vi gå in i filmens narrativ för att uppleva alternativa verkligheter och värderingar. John C. Lyden menar i sin bok *Film as Religion* (2003) att åskådaren medvetet går in i filmens fiktiva verklighet för att uttryckligen uppleva en alternativ värld som ofta kan te sig mera sammansatt eller fullkomlig gentemot vår riktiga ofullkomliga verklighet. Lyden menar vidare att vår önskan sällan är att stanna i filmens artificiella fullkomlighet, utan snarare att vi som åskådare gärna vill återkomma till vår verklighet med de nya insikter filmen erbjudit oss.[196] Avhandlingens utgångsläge är att undersöka hur film som populärkulturell produkt eller medium kan understöda individens konstruktion av mening och värderingar i vardagen, och inbegriper ett specifikt fokus på värderingar som är kopplade till hur vi skapar en förståelse av ondska och godhet. I sin bok *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (2004) föreslår Christopher Partridge bland annat att studier av religion och populärkultur kan visa på hur

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[194] P.L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (England:Penguin Books), 1991 [1966], p.
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[195] P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday), 1967, p. 6
[196] J. C. Lyden, *Film as religion. Myths, morals and ritual* (New York, London: I.B. Tauris), 2003, pp. 52-53

det växer fram nya sätt att tro på i samhällen där traditionella trosfrågor och sätt att utöva religion är på nedgång eller hämmade.[197]

Avhandlingen placerar sig i den religionsvetenskapliga disciplinen, medan materialet som analyseras är film. För forskningsmetoden är således en interdisciplinär infallsvinkel välkommen, och därför har jag valt att använda en anpassad version av Melanie J. Wrights fyrdelade kulturanalytiska metodologi, som hon presenterar i sin bok *Religion and Film. An Introduction* (2007). Enligt Wright erbjuder kulturanalys som metod en möjlighet för forskare inom religion och populärkultur att inkludera filmvetenskapliga metoder och teorier i forskningen på ett sätt som inte innebär en underordnad relation till religionsvetenskap, och där dialogen inte förblir en enkelriktad process från filmstudier till religion eller vice versa.[198] Wrights fyrdelade metod består av huvudområdena narrativ, stil, kulturell och religiös kontext och reception.[199] Narrativ inbegriper en films persongalleri, berättelse och intrig. Stil inbegriper filmens estetik, det audiovisuella, cinematografi, editering och ljud. Via den kulturella och religiösa kontexten placeras materialets innehåll och narrativ samt materialet som en produkt av sin tid, i ett socialt sammanhang. Reception inkluderar bland annat tolkningar av film, recensioner, entusiastgrupperingar och biprodukter. Enligt Wright erbjuder denna indelning en bredare bas för analys, som istället för att rangordna de fyra områdena på basis av relevans skapar en dialog mellan dem för att bättre kunna åskådliggöra hur värderingar och föreställningar om ondska och godhet förmedlas i film.

I både Tim Burtons och Christopher Nolans Batman filmer har den urbana miljön en stark framtoning, varför jag valt att lyfta fram den urbana miljöns roll i konstruktionen av en förståelse av ondska i filmerna. Forskning kring det urbana landskapet som bakgrund eller plats för meningsskapande har överlag blivit mer framträdande under de senaste decennierna (se Åström 2012, Stevenson 2005). Den urbana miljön är inte enbart en fysisk konstruktion av byggnadsmaterial och saker, utan en viktig del i utformningen av de berättelser som formar invånarna när de lever och navigera i det urbana landskapet (se Scheeran 2015, Sjö 2015).

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[197] C. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (London, New York: T&T Clark International), 2004, p. 1
[198] Wright 2007:27
[199] Wright 2007:29

För denna avhandling har jag valt att förstå begreppet ondska som en kombination av Bryan Stones (2007)[200] och Peter Dews (2008)[201] idéer, då båda ser ondska som ett resultat av att en människa aktivt eller snarare inaktivt, utgående från hens motivation, i samförstånd med en förståelse av rådande sociala och moraliska normer, med fri vilja väljer att orsaka förstörelse eller skada. Enligt Peter L. Bergers socialkonstruktivistiska teori, eftersträvar vi konstant en balanserad harmoni där den socialt definierade och konstruerade verkligheten identifieras som lika med den ultimata verkligheten av universum. En förnekelse av harmonin liknar Berger med en uppfattning av ondska och galenskap, som i sin tur korrelerar med Stones och Dews definitioner av en förståelse av ondska.[202] Stone, Dews och Bergers uppfattningar av ondska baserar sig på antagandet att det tillika bör finnas en motpol, mot vilken en uppfattning av ondska kan placeras.

Det har blivit allt svårare att förhålla sig objektivt till en förståelse av ondska när förödande attacker sker allt oftare i konserthus, sportstadion, städer och våra egna hemkvarter. Tragedier som berör starkt på ett personligt plan tenderar att grumla ett analytiskt förhållningssätt till en förståelse av ondska. Det kan te sig mer tillgängligt att konkretisera det onda i fysisk form, för att lättare kunna döma ut den, att lägga skulden på någonting konkret. I avhandlingens analys framhävs hur det valda filmerna illustrerar på olika plan, en tidsmässig utveckling av en uppfattning om ondska i dagens västerländska samhälle, där distansen till ondska sett som en separat entitet, minskat. De valda filmerna framhäver behovet för ordning och struktur i ett samhälle och en tid var destruktiva attacker blivit allt mer vanliga och orsakar kaos och osäkerhet i en större utsträckning. I konstruktionen av vår verklighet skapar de värderingar som vi tilldelar situationer och objekt grunden för ordningen och struktur. Denna process inbegriper även konstruktionen av en förståelse av ondska som ofta representerar kaos och som således står som motpol till ordning och struktur.

Både Burtons *Batman* och Nolans *The Dark Knight* presenterar förhållandet mellan ordning och kaos på ett generellt plan som en extern kamp mellan de olika karaktärerna samt som en intern kamp för Bruce Wayne/Batman och Gothams allmänna åklagare Harvey Dent. Den centrala karaktären Jokern fungerar i båda filmerna som den som ifrågasätter, utmanar och försöker rasera

[200] B. Stone, 'Evil on Film' in W. L. Blizek (eds) The Continuum Companion to Religion and Film, (London, New York: Continuum Books) 2007, pp. 310-322
[201] P. Dews, The Idea of Evil (Oxford: Blackwell), 2008
[202] Berger ([1967] 1990) op. cit., page 41

och förstöra den ordning och struktur som Batman, Harvey Dent och Jim Gordon strävar till att upprätthålla. Filmernas narrativ framhäver även de intrikata förhållandena mellan de olika karaktärerna som visar på att det under ytan finns en mer komplex, skiktad verklighet där klara distinktioner mellan exempelvis gott och ont luckras upp. I sin artikel *Shadows of the Bat*, föreslår Simon Philipp Born möjligheten att det de facto är Batman själv som står som upphovsman till förbrytarna han kämpar mot i båda filmerna.[203]

Mer generellt reflekterar filmer ofta det samhälle, de värderingar och den tid i vilka de är producerade. Exempelvis föreslår Will Brooker i sin bok *Hunting the Dark Knight* (2012), att även om många har valt att tolka Nolans film som en återspegling av USAs och Bush-administrationens krig mot terrorism,[204] reflekterar de möjliga politiska kopplingarna i *The Dark Knight* snarare hur konkreta gränser suddats ut och blivit mera vaga. De klara distinktionerna mellan exempelvis rättsmyndigheter och förövare i filmen har övergått från en svart-vit uppdelning till ett mera instabilt och mångfacetterat upplägg med en mångfald av gråa nyanser, ett resultat av en förskjutning av moraliska värderingar.[205]

För att kunna skapa en förståelse av ondska (och godhet), i både det mentala och fysiska rummet vi rör oss och är verksamma i, behöver det finnas textur. I det mentala och fysiska urbana landskapet producerar texturer kontaktytor på vilka det går att fästa mening och värderingar. Den urbana stadsbilden på filmskärmen kan således fungera som ett bollplank, eller testyta som erbjuder möjligheten för åskådaren att föra en etisk debatt eller bjuda in till moralisk reflektion. När vi ser på film, projicerar vi på den vita duken värderingar och vår uppfattning om den fysiska verkligheten, för att se hurdant gensvar värderingarna i filmens verklighet väcker.[206] När vi ser på film kan vi placera oss i Gotham och samtidigt låta Gotham bli en del av oss, och på så vis skapa en möjlighet att utforska det moraliska landskapet och se ifall vi kan lokalisera oss själva i det.

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[203] S. P. Born, 'Shadows of the Bat. Construction of Good and Evil in the Batman Movies of Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan' *Online Journal for Religion, Film and Media*, VOL 3, NO 1, 2017, page 81

[204] W. Brooker Hunting the Dark Knight. Twenty-First Century Batman (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd) 2012, p. 202

[205] *Ibid*., page 207

[206] D. Bordwell, K. Thompson, *Film Art. An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill), 2008, p. 2

Avhandlingens interdisciplinära infallsvinkel visar på möjligheten att via en populärvetenskaplig produkt forska i det alltjämt relevanta temat hur vi skapar mening i världen. Avhandlingens analys, vars teoretiska grund utgår från Peter L. Bergers och Thomas Luckmanns socialkonstruktivistiska perspektiv, indikerar att en uppfattning om ondska konstrueras i den kontinuerliga processen av definiering, dekonstruering och rekonstruering av värderingar. Processen av konstruktionen av vår verklighet, inklusive skapandet av en förståelse av ondska och godhet, är således en kontinuerlig dialog där vi projicerar våra egna tankar och värderingar via exempelvis vårt agerande och vår klädsel, med hjälp av de kulturella produkterna och formaten vi använder och de urbana landskapet vi rör oss i.

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