

## The Tumultuous Game of Legitimacy: Capital Contestation between Riggan, Mike, and Tabitha in *Birdman* (2014)

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### ABSTRACT

The contemporary Hollywood cinematic landscape is commonly filled with popular films that seek mass legitimacy. It is different from theatrical works or Broadway that are specifically aimed at *connoisseurs*. The ample evidence of popular films infers that the American cultural field constructs its logicity in the effect of this system. It affects how one distinctively perceives theatre or Broadway as “art” and films as “entertainment”, leading the actors within them to seek to be legitimized as an “actor/artist” in a distinctive way. This article specifically aims to diagnose this condition through Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu’s film entitled *Birdman* (2014) that tells a story of a washed-up American film actor who wishes to revive his career on Broadway. The research utilizes Pierre Bourdieu’s theory on the mechanism of symbolic power, capital, and trajectories to reveal the dynamics of the field as represented in the film in legitimizing one’s status as an actor and the paths one takes to be legitimized as an artist. The analyses focus on characterizations and characters’ interactions to gain an understanding of the dynamic of the field as presented by the film. The findings suggest the asymmetrical position between Broadway and cinema leads to exertions of symbolic violence as portrayed by *Birdman*. The skillset to act is not a measurement for one to be called as an “actor”, rather it is the complex nexus between the field and the agent’s background that determines the legitimacy.

**Keywords:** capital, legitimacy, symbolic power, trajectory

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Hearing or seeing the phrase “Hollywood film” tends to project an image of bombastic spectacle or dazzles, whether the term “Hollywood” here signifies the old era of authoritarian nature of the studios or the New Wave which lets the filmmakers express their vision more freely (Carrigan & White, 2012, p. 44). Contemporarily, there has been a significant increase in the level of freedom that filmmakers attain in the American cinematic field. The production schema and even distribution process are no longer wholly being controlled by major studios. Although, it cannot be denied how hegemonic practices done by Disney on a massive scale can be found explicitly in all of the films they produce or the films which studios are owned by Disney (Dawson, 2020). The freedom which filmmakers attain is thus commonly utilized as a medium to produce cultural texts that challenge and even negate the hegemonic practice of major studios with their popular and blockbuster narratives. The word “hegemony” here is a Gramscian concept, in which it refers to a “stimulus” in an indirect

way to fundamentally embed a particular consciousness to the point it is viewed as commonsensical and natural (Gramsci, 2000, p. 192). The challenges that are posed by the independent filmmakers are not only lingering on the area of production and distribution schematic as mentioned earlier, but the internality of their produced cultural texts also have significant distinction compared to dominant- and mass-produced films. This tendency to reproduce and re-articulate popular narratives only in different technicality results in a formulaic essence of films, or in other words, continuously strengthening the hegemonic practices and values embedded in Hollywood's cinematic field.

For every prevailing power, there is always a resistance that questions the suitability of the current applied power structure and offers a new set of values and practices to be applied. This predestined system also occurs within American cinematic field. As has been mentioned earlier, the challenging values towards Hollywood are commonly attributed in a term entitled "independent films/filmmakers". The essential goals of filmmakers in defining themselves as independent are twofold. First, they resist the idea of having to conform to studio's strict ideological and economic regulation. As also has been alluded to earlier, before Hollywood's New Wave emerging in 1960s-1970s with some notable filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Robert Altman, the production of films in Hollywood was heavily dependent on studios' visions. This "coercion" ranges from economic aspects to the point where the narrativity was also being largely controlled to be able to reach a huge scale of audiences (Gomery, 2019). This system was then critically challenged by Hollywood's New Wave filmmakers because they felt that the authoritarian dynamic imposed by the studios alienated them without any opportunity for autonomy and made them felt like a workforce rather than as a group of art creators (Fisk, 2020). Second, the resistance also aims to revolutionize the prevailing narratives and techniques employed in popular films. The spirit which was first brought up by the New Wave, and is contemporarily continued by modern American independent films, is the spirit of unearthing political and social taboos. For example, the narrative of Vietnam War in which United States participated and failed miserably became a prominent issue to be discussed during 1960s to 1970s. Issues of corruption, forced drafting, and discrimination based on race dominated the discourses at that time. Films such as *Taxi Driver* and *Apocalypse Now* raise part of these issues, and seek to broaden the boundaries of what is appropriate and what is not to be represented through the medium of films (Ortner, 2012).

There is also a distinction in terms of independent films' technical elements. It is significantly visible in the object that this article analyzes, *Birdman: The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* (2014), wherein the used techniques are crafted as if the film directly simulates a theatrical atmosphere. Independent films no longer establish an exclusive identity to which they rigidly demarcate from other art forms. Through such techniques as applied by *Birdman*, there is a genre-mixing element within the field of contemporary American cinema. These two resisting points of independent films become significant variables for legitimacy to be earned by films that are concurrent with these points.

Aside from distinct technicalities, *Birdman: The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* also represents a story that also possesses different substances compared to the ones found in the majority of Hollywood films. *Birdman* tells a story of a washed-up actor named Riggan Thomson, who was known for his role as a superhero called as Birdman (not italicized to signify the character), who tries to revive his acting career on Broadway. During this process, Riggan is depicted to encounter psychological crises in coping up with many obstacles he has to face. These crises are formed due to his conflicting relationships with his daughter, ex-wife, acting partner, and girlfriend, as well as his alcoholic problems to name a few. One of these listed problems comes out as the distinct nature of

*Birdman's* substance, that is, Riggan's quest to revive his career or in other words to achieve legitimacy as an actor. This problem on legitimacy becomes the focal point of this article.

As this article deals with issues of legitimacy represented within the object and contained in the social facets or the externality of the object, Pierre Bourdieu's theorization on the dynamic of the field will be used. His concept of field or *le champ* defines that cultural and social fields are constructed by and filled with hierarchical structures in which each position construes its significance and logic in autonomous ways (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 6). Legitimacy does not work in a direct or top-down system, rather, as to how Foucauldian discourse works, legitimacy permeates symbolically in several institutionalized and structured fields, such as cultural, social, artistic, and literary fields (Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 15). Within the corresponding field, three elements build up the entirety of the field. These three elements, two of which work in an oppositional manner, constitute a subject's positioning in a field where they choose to participate. These elements constitute Bourdieu's distinct interpretation regarding issues on social and class struggles as well as symbolic violence which have been continuously raised in social, literary, and cultural dimensions (Arifin, 2021; Murti & Susanti, 2021; Setijowati, 2018).

The first element included in this system is *doxa*. *Doxa* can roughly be inferred as an unquestioned set of rules that are highly naturalized and defined as commonsensical (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). It is the dominant value that is applied in a particular field, and one who extremely defends this system for it is thought as the "truest" system compared to all can be defined as *orthodoxy* (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169, 1984). The dynamic between *doxa* and *orthodoxy* is then inevitably challenged by new or "heretic" ideas called as *heterodoxy* (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169). The illustration that encapsulates these three elements is the above description regarding independent films. Viewing this matter in the context of this Bourdieuan system, independent films and filmmakers can be categorized as *heterodoxy* for their nature to challenge the dominant paradigm of *doxa* of Hollywood's cinematic field. As for the specific study in this article, the *doxa* which will be the main focus is the theatrical or Broadway *doxa* as represented by the film. In analyzing the logic of the field, such as *doxa* and *heterodoxy*, the analyses focus on the interaction of the characters within the field, which in this case is Broadway in *Birdman*.

There have been several studies taken regarding the chosen object, and, they influence the paradigm of this article. This paragraph provides a synthesized version of these studies for efficiency. There is a specific study that utilizes Bourdieuan theorization on *le champ* done by Chung (2016) towards *Birdman*. This study emphasizes that the film's representation toward Broadway and films work in a hierarchical way, in which Broadway is represented as a cultured text whilst film is considered as a mass-market text, thus resulting in the main character of the film which is an actor in cinema to undergo a crisis of legitimacy. This notion also becomes the focal point of Sarahtika's thesis (2016). However, these studies do not fully elaborate on the actors' *habitus*, trajectories, and their capitals in their field, three aspects that are as important as other Bourdieuan tools in fully capturing class struggles in artistic field. Other studies have emphasized the "postmodern" element of this film, such as floating identity seeking to re-establish itself (Hardyno, 2017; Izquierdo, 2019; Kramer, 2016), technique-mixings regarding the use of scores and shots (Carlson, 2019; De Souza Lima, 2017), and critiques toward societal spectacle (Zitzelsberger & Beyvers, 2018).

This study seeks to analyze the genesis and manifestation of *Birdman's* characters' *habitus*, diagnosis of the field represented within the film, occurrence of symbolic violence, actors' or characters' trajectories, and capital contestation which correlate to a legitimizing system towards

actors in the cinematic and theatrical field. Each Bourdieuan concept that has not been explored in this section will be shortly elaborated in the discussion section.

## 2. METHOD

This article used a qualitative approach in answering the aim of the research. The data were divided into two types, primary and secondary. Primary data were consisted of the characterizations as employed in the film. Characterizations here are pivotal elements for which they answer the research questions on capital and trajectory issues. Alongside characterizations, film sequences and scenes which discuss the issue of legitimacy and manifestation of symbolic power are also utilized as accompanying focus on characterizations. These sequences and scenes were shown through several selected shots that fit the discussion section. On the other hand, the secondary data consisted of journal articles and popular articles discussing both *Birdman* and issues of Broadway/film dichotomy in the United States. Primary and secondary data were synthesized in order to achieve a clearer interpretation of the film using Bourdieuan lens.

Further note, this article employs the word "Broadway" to be equivalent with "theatre" and "play", so that the utilizations of these three words are actually referring to the same conception. Whilst "film", on the other hand, is equivalent to "cinema" and "movie". Although there are lengthy debates on the terminological aspects, this article stands its grounds as conceiving those words as representatives of a wholly singular field and does not deeply discuss neither tension nor contradiction within this singular field. It is also should be noted that the dissonance of Broadway/cinema that is discussed in this article is the dissonance that occurs within and represented by the film.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion will be a combination on internal aspects of the film and externality of it. The internal aspects of the film evident in forms of several scenes that are depicted, and it should be noted that the scenes taken are not chronologically presented. They are incorporated to fit with each section's elaboration.

### 3.1 The Genesis and Manifestation of the Characters' *Habitus*

Before the diagnosis of *habitus* is done, it is important to firstly define what *habitus* is according to Bourdieuan paradigm. In the effort to resolve endless debate between subjectivism and structuralism, *habitus* provides a synthesis between the two philosophical thoughts. *Habitus* is a sociological stimulus that is contained within any subject as a social being and generates logicity and rationality within them (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 72–73). By generating the sense of logicity and rationality, it means that *habitus* gives a subject senses of what is right and what is wrong according to which position this particular subject occupies. It gives them a way to see the world with their calculations, thus, it treats them as autonomous social beings. This particular side of definition is the notion of "subjective" nature of *habitus*. On the other hand, the *habitus* structures the subject and is structured by social or political, or historical conditioning to which the subject is exposed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). It helps subjects to determine their actions in a structured way, as mentioned earlier, accordingly to the environment they inhabit. At the same time *habitus* is stimulated by external factors that shape this particular subject as a social being. It can be grasped as an upbringing to which the subject continues to live on or maybe in their trajectories they may

negate the upbringing and choose to adapt into another sets of dispositions. Hence, *habitus* is as adaptive as it is highly structured.

In the movie *Birdman*, there are three characters selected to be further analyzed in terms of their *habitus*. This effort is done to dissect what is/are the element(s) that shape(s) the logicalities of these characters and how these characters express these logicalities. These characters are Riggan Thomson, Mike Shiner, and Tabitha Dickinson. These selected three characters are important in determining the sociological facets of the film without having to be too entangled with psychological aspects of the film, which must be said are greatly resonant.

### 3.1.1 The Habitus of Riggan Thomson

Riggan Thomson, portrayed by Michael Keaton, is a washed-up American actor who previously starred as a superhero figure named “Birdman” in the ‘90s. This scenario is rather similar to Keaton’s own background who is famously known to portray a superhero character, Batman, and chooses to partake in other genres of films in his current career (Bianculli, 2015). In the story, Riggan writes, directs, and stars in a play as a means to revive his relevancy and to get involved in Broadway life consistently. In this section, there are two main discussions to be made. First, the notion of adaptive *habitus* that Riggan has. It is shown in the opening sequence of the film. Second, and this point contradicts the first one, Riggan’s *habitus* is shown to be trapped in liminality. He is neither withstanding his old logicality nor adapting to his new environment. There are many occurrences to which he is extremely turbulent about his existence.

His departure from superhero spectacle and his shift toward a more “serious” art, as the dichotomy between these two works (Sarahtika, 2016), force him to be able to adapt to a new field which he has to inhabit. This field indeed bears similarities to his previous field of cinema, wherein one of the most prominent capital to master is the capability to act conformably to what the script and the vision of the director, or playwright in this case, intend to convey. As he has the experience in acting world of cinema, he projects this particular capital in assessing his peer actor based on what his vision of the play is like. The opening sequence with 2 minutes length of this film provides this exposition.



Figure 1: Opening Sequence (timestamp 00:04:00-00:06:00)

This sequence results in his distaste of his peer’s (Ralph) acting capability, to which he fires him due to his inconformity to Riggan’s standard. Though there are differences of skillset between the field of theatre and film, in which the former often requires raw acting without any opportunity to be involved in tight editing schematic (Shaiman, 2000), Riggan exerts his power and shows that he knows how to “act” in a theatrical sense. This very opening sequence infers that his *habitus* in terms of acting, which is highly structured in a cinematic sense, has adapted to the theatrical logicality. He manifests this shifting *habitus* through the verbal articulation of his assessment.

However, it is also shown that he encounters crises to which he cannot separate his current reality from his previous career. It is shown that he still embodies “Birdman” in which there are always voices that persuade him to re-portray Birdman to revive his career and to participate in what the mass market is attracted to. This case is indeed to be psychologically driven. However, interpreting it through a sociological lens, it can be said that Riggan’s conditioned *habitus* resists to adapt to the new environment. It is envisaged through series of sequences where Riggan imagines himself to possess superpowers as Birdman does. Here below are two selected pictures whose sequences are showing Riggan’s fantasy.



Figure 2: Riggan imagines himself destroying the vase through telekinesis (timestamp 00:08:50)



Figure 3: Riggan destroys the Birdman poster through telekinesis (timestamp 01:01:00)

The manifestations of his resistance towards his current environment emerge extremely. His inability to properly settle into the new environment and his inadequacy in directing his *habitus* into a satisfactory current logicality lead him to encounter *hysteresis*, a term specifically used by Bourdieu in describing a “penalty” given to a subject who fails to conform into a new set of objectivity in a new field he or she participates (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 62). This sanction appears in the form of Riggan’s massive hysteria manifested through concrete visions of hyper-reality as evidently showed by Birdman’s voices that work as Riggan’s stream of consciousness.

### 3.1.2 The Habitus of Mike Shiner

Mike is Riggan’s new peer in the play. He replaces Ralph who has been fired by Riggan. There is no clear background of Mike. The sequence where for the very first time he is mentioned acts as if the characters already know him, thus, it can be inferred that he is a well-known actor.



Figure 2: Mike's first rehearsal with Riggan (timestamp 00:13:10-00:17:00)

In the sequence of the figure above, Mike shows his far better range compared to Ralph. In this rehearsal, Mike easily adapts to Riggan's vision and embodies the character which Riggan wishes to express, much to Riggan's amazement towards Mike. Through this sequence, that shows Mike's great acting capability as can be inferred through Riggan's praises, it can be deduced that Mike has greater capital in terms of acting ability compared to Ralph and better capitalization of his *habitus* as presumably expected by Riggan. This specific skillset justifies the very previous scene where Brandon and Leslie's conversation signify the popularity of Mike. The reason to which his *habitus* is manifested in such a way indeed lacks clarity, however as his reputation is articulated by other characters, it then can be concluded that his finesse on theatrical field is effectively shaped. His finesse and "cultured" presumption from other characters can also be semiotically pointed out through how he dresses the first time he appears on screen. In this particular scene, it can be seen how he dresses rather differently compared to Riggan who is "messier". This modality serves as a person's explicit capitalization of his cultural manner and even of his *habitus* that drives him to rationalize his appearance (Bourdieu, 1984).



Figure 3: First scene of Mike/before rehearsal (timestamp 00:13:10)

Another prominent manifestation of his *habitus* is his logic where everything in the theater--both when acting on the stage and inhabiting the backstage--has to be real. It is firstly alluded to when Mike subtly criticizes Sam (Riggan's daughter) for her act. He states that life in theater should not be done self-consciously (*It's theater, don't be so self-conscious*; timestamp 00:17:44). Through this line, it can be known how his logicity dictates that an artist in theater should not bound him/herself with expected societal norms. It projects Bourdieuan's notion of each field possesses its own logicity. The "real" way of behaving on backstage of the theater works this way. Further, he also emphasizes how he wants every property and every sequence in a theater to work as authentic as possible. There are conflicts wherein he is frustrated due to a lack of authenticity of the properties and events, for example when he insists to be allowed to be authentically drunk in order to act as if he were drunk (*yes, I'm drunk. I'm supposed to be drunk*; timestamp 00:24:30). His logic to act in this way shows his conforming *habitus* to the "game" set by theatrical field or other art fields that possess higher legitimacy than film or cinema, that is, accentuating authenticity to be the most important capital to be considered as an "artist" (Schwarz, 2016).



Figure 4: Mike and Riggan debating on stage (timestamp 00:24:50)

### 3.1.3 The Habitus of Tabitha Dickinson

Tabitha is a theater critic whose voices are considered pivotal in determining the quality level of a certain play. The analysis will further discuss her impacts on theatrical world as construed by *Birdman* in the section regarding legitimacy. This section will be dedicated to allude to her rationale regarding her judgment towards the dichotomy of theatre and film.

As a theatre critic, she explicitly states her distaste towards cinematic actors' life to which she brackets as "Hollywood". She also expresses that Riggan is a "Hollywood clown", thus strengthening her distaste towards actors such as Riggan. The dichotomy between theatre and film highly emanates from her point of view. Her opinion validates herself as a pivotal legitimizer (or can also be referred to as *connoisseur*) in, once again, determining the quality of certain plays and performances.



Figure 5: Tabitha expresses her disgust on Riggan towards Mike (timestamp 00:36:05)

## 3.2 Mechanism of Symbolic Power

As has been elaborated in the introduction section, Bourdieu constructs the dynamic of each specific sector into a concept of "field". It is not merely a domain where subjects within it exist without competition, rather it is an arena where contestation and struggle become inherent characteristics of it. The arena is constructed by a dominant belief or *doxa*—strengthened by its *orthodoxy*—and a "heretic" value of *heterodoxy*. The binary opposition of these two keeps the field in balance without having to be fully hegemonized and chaotic.

As Sarahtika (2016) has elaborated, the dichotomy between theater/film works asymmetrically within the field of art and even culture, in which in Bourdieusian thought is considered to fill the oppositional formula of *doxa/heterodoxy* since they are viewed through the same field. It is also in line with Bourdieu's (1993b, p. 16) elaboration that considers film as reductively oriented on mass consumption. Based on this theoretical formulation, further elaboration on *Birdman* starts from seeking how this asymmetrical system is visibly exerted through "symbolic violence", an exertion of power that threatens the addressee through the use of symbolic means such as verbal as well as non-verbal language (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 51).

The first example of visible symbolic violence within a sequence, and the most pivotal as related to the issue, occurs within the third act (specific timestamp 01:22:00-01:24:00). This particular sequence shows a confrontation between Riggan and Tabitha, in which in the first place Tabitha expresses her distaste by saying Riggan only portrays “*selfish, untitled, spoiled*” characters. Riggan then vehemently for 2 minutes reviles Tabitha by saying that Tabitha— also referring to theatre critics in general—does not have originality and is only capable to label things rather than immersing herself into “true” state of the object she critiques. It is implied that she cannot immerse herself within theatre, rather she chooses to rigidly distance it through “labels” as Riggan implies. She then replies by saying that Riggan is not an actor, but only a celebrity. The duality of actor/celebrity here is an important point. Semantically deciphered, the word “celebrity” produces a somewhat unspecific description of a “famous person” (Oxford, n.d.-b), whilst “actor” produces a more thorough signification by referring to “person who acts on stage/television/films” (Oxford, n.d.-a). Although Riggan had acted in films and is currently undergoing an act in a play, Tabitha resists including Riggan within the term “actor”. She simply implies that Riggan is merely famous without having the skillset of an “actor” and she does not explain this skillset concretely. By implicating that Riggan does not suit a definition of “actor” and though he highly pursues it, Tabitha helps broadening the gap of the duality and restraining Riggan within liminal space of identity.



Figure 6: Riggan and Tabitha (01:21:10 – 01:24:47)

The second example that is related to issues around legitimacy occurs in the second act, specifically a sequence where Riggan and Mike are having a discussion (timestamp 00:32:10-00:33:25). In this sequence, the symbolic power is dominantly articulated by Mike, in which there are two examples that will be discussed. First, Mike explicitly states that Riggan is only famous for his portrayal of Birdman. He is a celebrity (as Tabitha later in the film states) without any clear point of who he is (“*They don't know you, they know you as the guy from Birdman*”). This statement serves to point out the alienation of Riggan from his “real” identity. His image as Birdman has become an object to be publicly consumed, leaving his own (in an immanent sense) to be cast away. Second, Mike utters his anger toward an industry that Riggan had worked for (Hollywood in a mass-market sense). He explicitly rejects Hollywood as a part of culture since he marks it as “a place of cultural genocide” (“*If this does not work out you'll go back to the studio, a place of cultural genocide...*”). As he constructs his image as a theatrical agent, he exclusively puts himself within a part of “cultured” activity in a high sense. He articulates this notion to Riggan who is still working on the liminal space he inhabits.

### 3.3 Actors’ Trajectories and Capital Contestation in *Birdman*

This section will present another Bourdieuan theoretical tool namely “trajectories”. This specific term refers to how agents within a particular field can occupy certain positions and shift consecutively to achieve legitimacy that they seek. The ways which they take to be able to advance

their status require strategies, and these strategies are not consciously stimulated, rather they emerge through unconscious consideration driven by the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1993b, pp. 17–18).

As has been articulated above, Riggan starts his career on Broadway with his background as a movie actor. His background, as his most important capital in terms of continuing to act and to be relevant, is negotiated within theatrical world which inevitably results in discrepancies as shown by various accounts of symbolic violence levered to him. In a chronological sense, the film culminates in satisfying ends for Riggan. The finale shows him earning massive critical acclaims and standing ovations due to the very real scene he executes in the end of his play, in which in this sequence he literally shot himself unbeknownst to the audience who think that the shot was fake. Aside from capitalizations of his “Birdman” image as a way to re-produce himself as an actor in theatre, another strategy that he puts on is that he chooses to borrow Mike’s logic of the authenticity of theatre. The act is not carried out in a performative situation of acting, rather in a deconstructed way the act in a theatre stage becomes real, an action in which the agent does something concrete without any illusion. However, this realist act is perceived by the critics as a new form of art. Tabitha cites him as a “pioneer of super-realism”. In a simplification, Riggan converts his Hollywood sense of cultural capital to a more theatrical one accordingly to Mike Shiner’s rationale, and due to this fact, Riggan successfully attains legitimacy in the world of theatre.

### 3.4 Broadway as Legitimizing Device in *Birdman*

Through the internal discussion above, it can be concluded how a “Hollywood” paradigm is considered to be a heretic within American theatrical or Broadway field. This perception is not solely derived from issues of mass-oriented nature of Hollywood, but it is more to how the Hollywood industry is deemed to butcher the artistic field. It kills the authenticity of art. Riggan’s arrival—or can be substituted to any Hollywood actor in general—is instantly considered as a heterodox to the realm of *haute monde* and *haute culture* (see Bourdieu, 1993a). Riggan is considered to have only popular legitimacy, thanks to his worldwide recognition as Birdman. However, this specific legitimacy cannot be effectively used in Broadway where the only valid legitimacies are specific and elite ones. There is a visible wide gap in this dynamic, and it is strengthened by the occurrences of symbolic violence. However, through genre-mixings and even an interdiscursive approach of cinema, *Birdman* as a film validates the sense of cinematic lowbrow whilst at the same time evokes this notion cinematically to achieve specific legitimacy in the field it inhabits. In other words, *Birdman* satirizes the class tension between low culture (superhero films; blockbuster) and high culture (Broadway) in order to achieve legitimacy within the internal contradiction of cinematic system.

Iñárritu, as an auteurist director, challenges the hegemonic narration of Hollywood texts which rarely discuss this asymmetrical relationship with theatre. *Birdman* meta-fictionally embraces notion of films to be inferior compared to theatre. It uses this naturalized system to boost its position into a *haute* position within American cinematic field. Through all of its technicality and narrativity, *Birdman* was able to earn the highest accolade in 2015 Academy Award. It won Best Picture in 2015. This legitimacy not only benefits the film to be rightfully considered as an elite text, it also helps to boast two things: Mexican directors’ and Michael Keaton’s trajectories. Although Iñárritu had been known before this film, he had not had as much recognition as to the one earned for *Birdman*. The legitimization towards him not only progressively stimulates his striking trajectory but also to other Mexican directors (Cuarón and Del Toro) who earn the same legitimacy in Academy’s next sequential years (Tierney, 2021). It is also the case for Keaton who is famously known for his portrayal of Batman. *Birdman*’s storyline that highly intersects with Keaton’s personal trajectory helps him to revive his image as an actor. It is highly strengthened by the fact that he earned a Best Actor nomination in 2015 Academy Award (Bianculli, 2015).

The strategy used in *Birdman* can be simply deduced to be a meta-strategy in seeking to earn legitimacy. It also conforms to the ideal notion of an independent film since it critiques and challenges dominant narration. This dominant narration means how films project issues that are “outside” their own field, whilst *Birdman* embraces issues of “cinematic consciousness” in a satirical way. It utilizes its essential inferiority compared to Broadway as a means to earn a high legitimacy in its own field. It is a postmodern way to earn existential importance in a postmodern world.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It can be inferred that the operation of *doxa/heterodoxy* does not only occur in a macro level of theatre/acting, as explicitly articulated by Mike (“*Hollywood’s heading here, Tabitha*”) which infers a challenge to the doxic state. The arrival of Riggan in theatrical field does not reductively mean a Hollywoodization of Broadway. It is more thoroughly a matter of negotiation and capital contestation of agents, especially Riggan, where the culmination of the story shows that the skillset to act as defined by Hollywood’s cinematic field is absolutely incongruent to the one in theatrical field. This distinction does not solely build upon individual’s acting characteristic, it is rather an issue of being as authentic as possible in which the word “act” refers to something concretely done rather than performatively enacted on stage. Further, the skillset to act and the qualifications for one to be discerned as “actor” are highly determined over the contestation of capital and *habitus* rather than simplistically determined from corporeal performances. And, it should be noted that these significations arise from an internal diagnosis for *Birdman*. Regarding the external aspect of the film, it can be said that the contents of the film hits close to the contextual aspects of the film’s production and involved agents. The characteristics of the two main characters reflect the two main actors of the film that portray them, Michael Keaton and Edward Norton. Keaton’s infamous image as Batman and Norton’s methodical acting inspire the creation of Riggan and Mike. The represented *habitus* of the two main characters mirrors the actors who embody them. As much as Mike’s statement on “Hollywood’s heading here”, the film ironically capitalizes a satirical view towards Broadway and uses it as a means to achieve legitimacy in both independent and Hollywood arenas. Hollywood is indeed heading toward Broadway.

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