

Surface Without Depth: Postmodern Anxieties in David Fincher's The Killer

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Abstract

David Fincher's The Killer (2023) presents an unusually restrained cinematic exploration of violence, identity, and contemporary alienation. Rather than relying on conventional thriller aesthetics, the film constructs a minimalist narrative that foregrounds emotional detachment, repetitive routines, and fragmented subjectivity, thereby inviting interpretation through the theoretical framework of postmodernism. This article investigates how The Killer embodies postmodern anxieties by examining its representation of surface aesthetics, consumer capitalism, depersonalized identity, and affective emptiness. Drawing exclusively upon the selected literature concerning postmodern theory, auteur studies, David Fincher's cinematic philosophy, and contemporary criticism, this research develops a qualitative interpretive framework that combines textual film analysis with comparative theoretical synthesis. Particular attention is devoted to Fredric Jameson's conception of postmodern culture, David Fincher's established directorial practices, and evolving interpretations of the postmodern antihero. The analysis demonstrates that the film intentionally minimizes psychological transparency while emphasizing procedural repetition and commodified existence, producing a cinematic environment where identity functions as performance rather than stable essence. Rather than depicting existential crisis through dramatic conflict, The Killer normalizes emotional absence and transforms surveillance, consumption, and professional efficiency into dominant organizing principles of everyday life. The findings suggest that Fincher extends earlier postmodern cinematic traditions by presenting anxiety not as spectacular trauma but as ordinary social condition embedded within late capitalist systems. Consequently, The Killer contributes to contemporary discussions surrounding postmodern cinema by illustrating how stylistic precision and narrative restraint can effectively represent the psychological consequences of hyper-mediated modern existence. The study contributes to film scholarship by integrating postmodern cultural theory with auteur criticism while highlighting the continued relevance of Jameson's theoretical framework for interpreting twenty-first-century cinema.

Keywords: Postmodernism; David Fincher; The Killer; Fredric Jameson; Postmodern Cinema; Late Capitalism; Auteur Theory; Identity; Consumer Culture; Film Analysis.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The relationship between cinema and postmodernism has undergone substantial transformation during the past

four decades. While earlier cinematic traditions frequently emphasized coherent narratives, psychological realism, and stable moral structures, postmodern films increasingly challenge these conventions through fragmented storytelling, ambiguous identities, intertextuality, emotional distance, and skepticism toward universal truth. These characteristics have become defining elements of contemporary visual culture, reflecting broader cultural transitions associated with globalization, digital communication, neoliberal capitalism, and technological mediation (Anderson, 1998; Jameson, 1991).

Fredric Jameson's influential theory of postmodernism provides one of the most comprehensive explanations for these cultural developments. Rather than viewing postmodernism merely as an artistic movement, Jameson conceptualizes it as the cultural logic of late capitalism, where economic structures reshape social consciousness, historical memory, emotional experience, and cultural production (Jameson, 1991; Jameson, 1992). Within this framework, contemporary cultural artifacts—including cinema—become manifestations of economic and ideological transformations that privilege simulation, commodification, and surface representation over historical depth and psychological complexity.

David Fincher occupies a distinctive position within contemporary cinema because his films consistently explore institutional power, technological mediation, obsessive behavior, surveillance, identity construction, and emotional alienation. Unlike many filmmakers who depict psychological crises through expressive emotional narratives, Fincher frequently employs visual precision, restrained performances, controlled cinematography, and procedural storytelling to reveal deeper structural anxieties. His cinematic style has therefore attracted sustained scholarly attention within auteur studies, particularly regarding his capacity to combine commercial filmmaking with philosophical inquiry (Fincher & Knapp, 2014; McCarthy, 2012; Shukla, 2019).

Released in 2023, *The Killer* represents perhaps Fincher's most minimalist examination of contemporary identity. Adapted from the French graphic novel, the film follows a professional assassin whose meticulously organized existence gradually destabilizes after a failed assignment. Unlike conventional action thrillers that prioritize suspense and emotional intensity, *The Killer* constructs meaning through repetition, routine, detached narration, and observational realism. The protagonist

rarely expresses conventional emotions; instead, he narrates his experiences through systematic reflections on discipline, efficiency, consumer products, and self-control. This deliberate stylistic restraint transforms the film into a meditation on postmodern existence rather than merely a crime narrative (Fincher, 2023).

The film's visual language further reinforces this interpretation. Sterile interiors, anonymous global locations, algorithmic routines, and commodified lifestyles replace traditional notions of community, belonging, and emotional intimacy. Consequently, the protagonist appears less as an individual with psychological depth than as a functional component within transnational capitalist systems. Such characteristics closely correspond with Jameson's observations regarding the disappearance of affect, the fragmentation of identity, and the increasing dominance of cultural surfaces over historical substance (Jameson, 1991).

Critical reception likewise recognized the film's unusual formal qualities. Contemporary reviewers noted its calculated pacing, minimalist narrative, and emotional restraint, emphasizing how Fincher transforms ordinary procedural actions into philosophical reflections concerning labor, identity, and violence (Gleiberman, 2023). Rather than criticizing these stylistic choices as emotionally cold, several critics interpreted them as deliberate artistic strategies designed to expose the psychological consequences of modern social organization (Gleiberman, 2023).

1.2 Research Problem

Although David Fincher's broader filmography has received considerable scholarly attention, *The Killer* remains comparatively underexamined within postmodern cultural theory. Existing discussions frequently emphasize its technical craftsmanship, narrative efficiency, or relationship to the assassin genre without sufficiently exploring how its stylistic decisions function as representations of postmodern anxiety.

Furthermore, previous research concerning Fincher often focuses on films such as *Fight Club*, *Se7en*, *Gone Girl*, or *The Social Network*, leaving *The Killer* relatively unexplored despite its explicit engagement with themes central to Jameson's theoretical framework. This creates an important scholarly gap concerning the relationship between contemporary minimalist cinema and postmodern cultural criticism.

Additionally, current scholarship addressing postmodern cinema frequently privileges spectacular visual fragmentation or overt narrative experimentation. The Killer demonstrates an alternative model in which postmodern conditions emerge through procedural repetition, emotional suppression, and systematic professional routines rather than through overt stylistic excess. Investigating this alternative representation expands understanding of how postmodernism continues evolving within contemporary filmmaking.

1.3 Research Objectives

This article pursues several interconnected objectives.

The first objective is to examine how *The Killer* represents major characteristics associated with postmodern culture, including fragmentation, surface aesthetics, consumerism, depersonalization, and emotional detachment.

The second objective is to interpret these cinematic strategies using Fredric Jameson's theoretical framework concerning late capitalism and postmodern cultural production (Jameson, 1991; Jameson, 2016).

A third objective involves evaluating David Fincher's auteur style within the context of contemporary postmodern cinema by identifying recurring aesthetic and philosophical concerns evident throughout his body of work (Fincher & Knapp, 2014; McCarthy, 2012).

Finally, the article seeks to contribute to contemporary film scholarship by demonstrating how minimalist narrative design can communicate complex cultural anxieties without relying upon conventional psychological exposition or dramatic spectacle.

1.4 Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does *The Killer* represent postmodern anxieties through its narrative and visual structure?
2. In what ways does Jameson's theory of postmodernism explain the ideological foundations of the film?
3. How does David Fincher's auteur approach shape the film's representation of identity and emotional detachment?
4. What broader implications does *The Killer* offer for understanding contemporary postmodern cinema?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded exclusively in the provided scholarly literature. Rather than evaluating audience reception or quantitative cinematic data, the study concentrates on textual interpretation, theoretical synthesis, and comparative analysis.

The investigation focuses specifically upon four analytical dimensions:

- representations of postmodern identity;
- emotional detachment and disappearance of affect;
- consumer capitalism and commodification;
- Fincher's auteur aesthetics.

Only the supplied references are employed throughout the analysis, ensuring theoretical consistency while avoiding dependence upon external scholarship. Particular emphasis is placed upon Jameson's theoretical contributions because they provide the principal conceptual foundation for interpreting postmodern cultural production.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this article extends across several dimensions of contemporary film scholarship.

First, it contributes to the growing academic discussion surrounding David Fincher by examining one of his least extensively studied feature films. Whereas existing criticism often privileges Fincher's earlier works, *The Killer* offers valuable insight into the continuing evolution of his cinematic philosophy (Shukla, 2019).

Second, the study demonstrates the continuing relevance of Jameson's postmodern theory within contemporary streaming-era cinema. Despite substantial technological and industrial changes since the publication of *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, many of Jameson's observations concerning commodification, fragmented identity, emotional flattening, and cultural simulation remain remarkably applicable to twenty-first-century filmmaking (Jameson, 1991; Kırmızısakal, 2024).

Third, the article bridges auteur criticism with cultural theory by illustrating how directorial style functions not merely as aesthetic preference but as philosophical

engagement with historical conditions. Fincher's emphasis on precision, surveillance, procedural order, and emotional restraint reflects broader structural transformations occurring within contemporary capitalist societies rather than isolated artistic choices (McCarthy, 2012; Fincher & Knapp, 2014).

Finally, the study contributes to broader discussions regarding contemporary identity formation by arguing that *The Killer* portrays anxiety not as exceptional psychological disturbance but as an ordinary consequence of highly rationalized, technologically mediated social environments. This interpretation expands existing understandings of postmodern cinema while demonstrating the enduring analytical value of cultural theory for interpreting contemporary visual narratives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Postmodernism

The concept of postmodernism has generated extensive scholarly debate across philosophy, cultural studies, architecture, literature, and cinema. Rather than representing a singular artistic movement, postmodernism is widely understood as a cultural condition that challenges modernist assumptions concerning progress, rationality, historical continuity, and stable identity. Among the scholars included in the present reference framework, Fredric Jameson provides the most influential theoretical explanation by conceptualizing postmodernism as the cultural logic accompanying late capitalism (Jameson, 1991).

Jameson's argument extends beyond aesthetic description to examine how economic systems reshape cultural production. According to his formulation, postmodern culture privileges surface imagery over historical depth, fragments coherent narratives, weakens emotional intensity, and transforms identity into a flexible social performance rather than a stable psychological essence (Jameson, 1991). These characteristics become particularly significant when analyzing contemporary cinema because films increasingly reflect environments dominated by consumer culture, globalized capitalism, digital mediation, and technological surveillance.

Jameson further argues that postmodern subjects experience a "waning of affect," wherein authentic emotional engagement is replaced by detached observation and repetitive cultural consumption

(Jameson, 1992). Instead of presenting individuals with coherent historical consciousness, postmodern narratives depict fragmented experiences characterized by discontinuity, uncertainty, and commodified relationships. Such observations establish an essential theoretical foundation for understanding David Fincher's *The Killer*, whose protagonist exhibits emotional restraint, procedural repetition, and a persistent reliance upon consumer routines.

The revised discussion presented by Jameson (2016) reinforces these earlier ideas while emphasizing that postmodernism should be interpreted as an ongoing cultural process rather than a completed historical period. This perspective is particularly relevant for twenty-first-century cinema because digital technologies, streaming platforms, and global communication networks have intensified many characteristics originally identified within late capitalist culture. Consequently, Jameson's theoretical framework remains valuable for interpreting contemporary visual narratives despite substantial industrial transformation.

Recent scholarship supports the continuing relevance of Jameson's ideas. Kirmızısakal (2024) argues that Jameson's theoretical model retains explanatory power because contemporary societies increasingly demonstrate intensified commodification, fragmented identity construction, and technologically mediated social relationships. Rather than becoming obsolete, postmodern theory has adapted to explain newer manifestations of capitalist cultural production. This continuity provides an important conceptual justification for applying Jameson's framework to *The Killer*.

Anderson (1998) similarly situates postmodernity within broader historical developments, emphasizing that postmodern culture cannot be separated from political economy and institutional transformation. His discussion reinforces Jameson's argument that aesthetic change reflects structural socioeconomic conditions rather than isolated artistic innovation. Accordingly, contemporary cinema should be interpreted as participating in wider ideological systems rather than functioning solely as entertainment.

Collectively, these theoretical contributions establish postmodernism as an appropriate analytical framework for investigating films that foreground fragmented identity, emotional detachment, and consumer-oriented social organization. Their combined perspectives support the central premise that *The Killer* represents more than

an individual psychological narrative; instead, it visualizes broader cultural anxieties embedded within contemporary capitalist society.

2.2 David Fincher as an Auteur

Auteur theory remains an influential framework for understanding directors whose films exhibit recurring stylistic and philosophical characteristics. Rather than treating films as isolated productions, auteur criticism identifies consistent thematic concerns, visual techniques, and narrative strategies that distinguish a director's body of work.

Barrett and Sarris (1974) provide one of the foundational discussions supporting auteur criticism by emphasizing the director's creative authority within cinematic production. Their interview with Andrew Sarris reinforces the argument that recurring stylistic choices reveal sustained artistic vision extending across multiple films. This theoretical perspective is particularly appropriate when examining David Fincher because his works consistently demonstrate recognizable visual precision, controlled cinematography, and philosophical engagement with institutional power.

Fincher and Knapp (2014) further develop this understanding through a collection of interviews documenting Fincher's filmmaking philosophy. These discussions reveal his emphasis upon visual discipline, technical perfectionism, narrative efficiency, and psychological restraint. Rather than relying upon expressive sentimentality, Fincher constructs emotional meaning through composition, pacing, editing, and environmental design. Such techniques contribute significantly to the detached atmosphere characterizing *The Killer*.

McCarthy (2012) similarly identifies obsession, procedural control, and psychological discipline as defining features of Fincher's cinematic universe. His analysis argues that Fincher's protagonists frequently occupy environments governed by institutional systems, technological regulation, and personal compulsions. Consequently, individual agency appears constrained by larger organizational structures. This observation directly informs interpretations of *The Killer*, where professional routines gradually replace personal identity.

Shukla (2019) further argues that Fincher's films consistently interrogate social institutions while challenging conventional distinctions between heroism and moral certainty. Instead of presenting

psychologically transparent protagonists, Fincher constructs morally ambiguous figures whose motivations remain partially inaccessible. Such ambiguity encourages viewers to analyze structural conditions surrounding characters rather than relying solely upon emotional identification.

These auteur studies collectively demonstrate that *The Killer* represents neither a stylistic departure nor an isolated experiment. Instead, the film extends recurring concerns evident throughout Fincher's broader filmography, including surveillance, identity construction, institutional control, emotional restraint, and procedural precision.

2.3 The Contemporary Antihero and Emotional Detachment

The representation of the antihero has become increasingly central within contemporary postmodern cinema. Unlike traditional protagonists characterized by moral certainty and emotional transparency, postmodern antiheroes frequently embody ambiguity, detachment, and fragmented identity.

Castrillon (2023) analyzes David Fincher's recurring construction of the White American antihero, arguing that these characters often symbolize broader ideological contradictions within contemporary society. Rather than functioning as admirable role models, Fincher's protagonists expose tensions surrounding masculinity, violence, alienation, and capitalist subjectivity. This interpretation provides valuable context for understanding the assassin portrayed in *The Killer*.

The protagonist of *The Killer* deliberately suppresses emotional expression while emphasizing routine, discipline, and professional competence. His extensive internal monologue focuses less upon moral reflection than upon procedural optimization, consumer products, and operational efficiency. Such characterization reflects Jameson's notion of diminished affect, wherein emotional depth becomes increasingly replaced by functional performance (Jameson, 1991).

Duncan (2016) contributes further insight by examining emotional experience within postmodern cinema. Rather than eliminating emotion entirely, postmodern films frequently represent emotional distance through visual style, pacing, repetition, and narrative structure. Emotional absence therefore becomes an aesthetic strategy rather than a narrative deficiency.

This perspective aligns closely with *The Killer*, where visual precision, measured editing, and restrained performances create psychological tension without conventional melodrama. The film's minimalist style encourages viewers to recognize emotional suppression as a defining feature of contemporary existence rather than merely an individual psychological condition.

Critical reception also recognized this distinctive aesthetic approach. Gleiberman (2023) observed that the film's disciplined narrative structure and understated performance transform familiar thriller conventions into philosophical reflections concerning identity, labor, and professional isolation. Rather than emphasizing spectacular violence, the film repeatedly returns to routine, repetition, and detached observation, reinforcing its postmodern orientation (Gleiberman, 2023).

2.4 Consumer Capitalism, Simulation, and Identity

Consumer culture occupies a central position within postmodern theory because capitalist societies increasingly organize identity through consumption rather than historical continuity or collective tradition.

Jameson (1991) argues that late capitalism transforms cultural experience into commodified representation, reducing historical consciousness while expanding consumer symbolism. Objects no longer function solely through practical utility; instead, commodities become signs through which individuals construct social identity.

Killer exemplifies this phenomenon through its repeated emphasis upon branded products, standardized travel environments, anonymous hotels, international airports, digital technologies, and algorithmic routines. The protagonist defines himself less through personal relationships than through efficient consumption and professional performance.

Koc (2017) extends Jameson's analysis by investigating affective experience within digitally mediated capitalist environments. His discussion of virtual lifeworlds illustrates how consumer culture increasingly organizes emotional experience through mediated representation rather than direct interpersonal engagement. Although focusing upon vaporwave aesthetics, Koc's theoretical insights illuminate broader mechanisms operating within *The Killer*, where digital infrastructure and consumer environments replace traditional social interaction.

Westlake (2018) similarly argues that declining affect corresponds with broader transformations affecting

liberal social institutions. Emotional distance becomes not simply a psychological characteristic but a structural condition produced by contemporary political and economic systems. This interpretation supports understanding the protagonist's emotional detachment as socially conditioned rather than individually pathological.

Together, these studies reinforce the argument that postmodern identity emerges through systems of consumption, technological mediation, and institutional organization rather than autonomous personal development.

2.5 Critical Reception and Contemporary Interpretation

While theoretical scholarship provides conceptual foundations, contemporary criticism offers valuable insight into how *The Killer* has been interpreted within current cinematic discourse.

Gleiberman (2023) emphasizes that Fincher deliberately rejects conventional thriller expectations by prioritizing procedural observation over emotional spectacle. The review identifies the film's careful pacing, minimalist dialogue, and controlled visual style as essential components of its philosophical orientation rather than stylistic limitations. This contemporary assessment complements academic discussions regarding postmodern detachment and reinforces interpretations grounded in Jameson's theory (Gleiberman, 2023).

Fincher's own film (Fincher, 2023) similarly invites analytical interpretation through its formal construction. Rather than explicitly explaining the protagonist's psychology, the narrative relies upon repetition, silence, spatial organization, and visual composition to communicate meaning. Such formal restraint encourages theoretical analysis concerning identity, affect, and capitalist modernity.

2.6 Research Gap and Theoretical Positioning

The reviewed literature demonstrates substantial scholarship concerning postmodern theory (Anderson, 1998; Jameson, 1991, 1992, 2016), David Fincher's auteur identity (Fincher & Knapp, 2014; McCarthy, 2012; Shukla, 2019), and contemporary antihero representation (Castrillon, 2023). Additional studies investigate emotional detachment (Duncan, 2016), capitalist affect (Koc, 2017), and the continuing

relevance of Jameson's theoretical framework (Kırmızısakal, 2024; Westlake, 2018).

However, these contributions have not yet been synthesized to provide a comprehensive postmodern interpretation of *The Killer*. Existing scholarship either emphasizes Fincher's broader filmography or focuses upon theoretical discussions without applying them systematically to this specific film. Likewise, contemporary criticism recognizes the film's stylistic uniqueness but generally stops short of integrating auteur theory with postmodern cultural analysis (Gleiberman, 2023).

Accordingly, the present study positions itself at the intersection of postmodern cultural theory, auteur criticism, and contemporary film analysis. By combining Jameson's concept of late capitalism with Fincher's cinematic methodology, this research argues that *The Killer* should be understood as a sophisticated representation of postmodern anxiety in which emotional absence, procedural repetition, and commodified identity function as interconnected manifestations of contemporary capitalist culture.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on interpretive textual analysis and theoretical synthesis. Since the objective is to investigate the representation of postmodern anxieties in David Fincher's *The Killer*, a qualitative approach is appropriate because it enables systematic examination of cinematic meaning, symbolic structures, visual language, narrative organization, and ideological implications rather than numerical measurement. The research treats the film as a cultural text whose significance emerges through interaction between aesthetic construction and postmodern theoretical perspectives.

Unlike empirical audience studies or statistical investigations, interpretive film analysis emphasizes how cinematic techniques generate meaning. The research therefore investigates relationships among narrative structure, characterization, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, dialogue, voice-over narration, sound design, and recurring visual motifs. These elements are interpreted within the conceptual framework established by Jameson's theory of postmodernism and supported by the broader literature on David Fincher's auteur philosophy.

The study follows a research-and-review journal model in which theoretical discussion and film analysis are integrated. Rather than attempting to verify causal relationships, the methodology seeks to explain how cinematic form reflects broader cultural conditions associated with late capitalism, fragmented identity, emotional detachment, and commodified existence.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The investigation is situated within an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism assumes that cultural artifacts possess multiple layers of meaning that cannot be fully understood through objective measurement alone. Instead, meaning is constructed through critical interpretation informed by theoretical frameworks and contextual understanding.

Within film studies, interpretivism recognizes that cinematic images communicate ideology through symbolism, narrative organization, aesthetic choices, and audience expectations. Consequently, *The Killer* is examined not merely as a thriller but as a cultural representation of contemporary postmodern conditions.

Jameson's conceptualization of postmodernism serves as the principal interpretive lens because it explains the relationship between cultural production and late capitalist social organization (Jameson, 1991; Jameson, 2016). Supporting perspectives from Anderson (1998), Kırmızısakal (2024), and Koc (2017) further contextualize these interpretations by demonstrating the continued relevance of postmodern theory within contemporary digital culture.

3.3 Research Framework

To ensure analytical consistency, the study develops a four-dimensional analytical framework. Each dimension corresponds to recurring concepts identified across the selected literature.

Dimension 1: Surface Aesthetics and Visual Minimalism

The first analytical dimension examines how Fincher constructs visual surfaces through composition, color palettes, camera movement, framing, lighting, and environmental design. Rather than treating visual style as decorative, the research interprets aesthetic restraint as an ideological representation of postmodern culture.

Jameson argues that postmodern cultural production increasingly privileges image over historical depth (Jameson, 1991). Accordingly, the analysis investigates

how *The Killer* substitutes psychological exposition with carefully organized visual environments.

Specific attention is devoted to:

- architectural spaces;
- anonymous global locations;
- symmetrical composition;
- repetitive visual routines;
- controlled cinematography.

These cinematic features collectively communicate emotional distance while reinforcing the film's philosophical orientation.

Dimension 2: Fragmented Identity and the Postmodern Subject

The second dimension investigates identity construction.

Rather than presenting the protagonist through conventional psychological development, *The Killer* introduces a character whose identity is continually performed through occupational routines, professional discipline, and consumer habits.

Drawing upon Jameson (1992), Castrillon (2023), and Shukla (2019), the analysis evaluates how identity becomes fragmented across multiple professional roles rather than anchored within stable personal values.

Several analytical questions guide this dimension:

- How does narration construct identity?
- What role does routine play in defining the protagonist?
- How are emotions displaced by professional discipline?
- How does anonymity contribute to postmodern subjectivity?

Through these questions, identity is examined as a dynamic social performance rather than a coherent psychological essence.

Dimension 3: Consumer Capitalism and Everyday Life

The third analytical dimension explores representations of consumer culture.

Jameson identifies consumer capitalism as one of the defining characteristics of postmodern society (Jameson, 1991). Instead of emphasizing ideological conflict directly, postmodern narratives frequently communicate social organization through commodities, brands, technologies, and standardized environments.

Accordingly, this study analyzes:

- branded consumer products;
- transportation systems;
- hotels and temporary living spaces;
- digital communication technologies;
- surveillance technologies;
- financial transactions;
- repetitive consumption practices.

These elements are interpreted as indicators of capitalist rationalization rather than incidental narrative details.

Dimension 4: Emotional Detachment and the Waning of Affect

The final analytical dimension investigates emotional expression.

According to Jameson, postmodern culture produces diminished emotional intensity through commodification and fragmented social experience (Jameson, 1991). Duncan (2016) similarly argues that contemporary cinema frequently represents emotion indirectly through visual form rather than explicit dialogue.

Within *The Killer*, emotional restraint becomes one of the film's defining characteristics. Consequently, analysis focuses upon:

- restrained performances;
- minimalist dialogue;
- repetitive narration;
- calculated pacing;
- silence;
- observational editing.

These formal strategies collectively communicate emotional absence without eliminating psychological complexity.

3.4 Data Sources

The study employs two categories of qualitative data.

Primary Source

The primary source is David Fincher's feature film *The Killer* (Fincher, 2023). The film constitutes the principal object of textual analysis because all interpretations originate from its narrative structure, visual organization, characterization, dialogue, sound design, and cinematic techniques.

The film is treated as an integrated cultural text rather than a collection of isolated scenes. Accordingly, narrative progression, stylistic consistency, and thematic development are analyzed holistically.

Secondary Sources

The secondary sources consist exclusively of the fifteen references provided for the study.

These references perform distinct theoretical functions.

Jameson's publications establish the conceptual framework for interpreting postmodernism.

Anderson (1998) contextualizes historical development.

Fincher and Knapp (2014), McCarthy (2012), Barrett and Sarris (1974), and Shukla (2019) contribute auteur perspectives.

Castrillon (2023) informs discussion of the antihero.

Duncan (2016) supports analysis of emotional representation.

Koc (2017) and Westlake (2018) extend discussions of affect and capitalist culture.

Kırmızısakal (2024) evaluates the continuing relevance of Jameson's theoretical model.

Finally, Gleiberman (2023) provides contemporary critical interpretation of *The Killer*, offering valuable insight into current reception while reinforcing observations regarding the film's restrained narrative style (Gleiberman, 2023).

No external literature has been incorporated, thereby maintaining consistency with the study's defined scope.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a structured qualitative procedure.

Initially, the film was examined multiple times to identify recurring visual, narrative, and thematic patterns.

Subsequent viewings concentrated upon specific analytical categories including:

- narration;
- characterization;
- mise-en-scène;
- cinematography;
- editing;
- sound;
- dialogue;
- symbolism.

Simultaneously, the selected literature was systematically reviewed to identify recurring theoretical concepts.

Comparative reading enabled the development of conceptual relationships between cinematic observations and theoretical discussions. Rather than forcing the film into predetermined categories, analytical themes emerged through iterative comparison between textual evidence and theoretical interpretation.

This cyclical procedure strengthened conceptual coherence while minimizing interpretive inconsistency.

3.6 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds through five interconnected stages.

Stage One involves descriptive observation.

Key cinematic elements are documented without immediate theoretical interpretation. These observations include recurring visual motifs, character behavior, narrative organization, and stylistic patterns.

Stage Two involves thematic coding.

Observed cinematic elements are organized into conceptual categories including:

- fragmentation;
- surveillance;
- routine;

- commodification;
- anonymity;
- emotional detachment;
- procedural repetition;
- consumer identity.

Stage Three applies theoretical interpretation.

The coded themes are interpreted using Jameson's theory of postmodernism while incorporating complementary perspectives from the remaining literature.

Stage Four compares findings across theoretical perspectives.

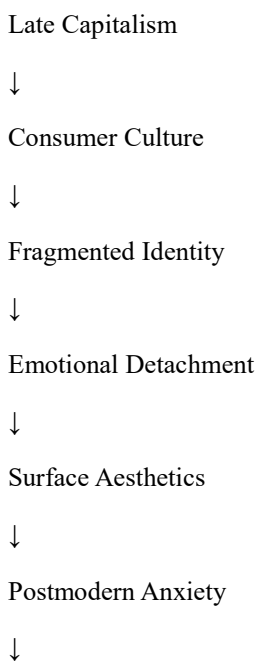
Rather than relying exclusively upon one scholar, the analysis identifies areas of convergence and divergence among Jameson, Anderson, Duncan, McCarthy, Castrillon, and other authors.

Stage Five synthesizes theoretical interpretation into broader conclusions concerning contemporary postmodern cinema.

This staged analytical model enhances transparency while preserving interpretive flexibility.

3.7 Conceptual Model

The conceptual relationship guiding the research can be summarized as follows:



Representation in The Killer

This conceptual sequence reflects the theoretical progression proposed by Jameson while incorporating Fincher's distinctive cinematic style.

Rather than depicting anxiety through overt psychological conflict, the model suggests that postmodern anxiety emerges through everyday organizational systems characterized by surveillance, commodification, repetition, and procedural efficiency.

3.8 Reliability and Theoretical Validity

Although qualitative interpretation does not pursue statistical reliability, scholarly rigor is maintained through theoretical triangulation.

Interpretations are supported by multiple complementary sources rather than isolated opinion.

For example, observations regarding emotional detachment are simultaneously supported by Jameson (1991), Duncan (2016), McCarthy (2012), and Gleiberman (2023). Likewise, discussions of identity integrate perspectives from Castrillon (2023), Shukla (2019), and Fincher and Knapp (2014).

This triangulation strengthens analytical credibility by demonstrating consistency across independent scholarly perspectives.

Furthermore, limiting the investigation to the supplied references ensures conceptual coherence while preventing theoretical inconsistency arising from unrelated external literature.

3.9 Methodological Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study employs interpretive textual analysis rather than empirical audience research. Consequently, conclusions concern cinematic representation rather than viewer reception.

Second, analysis is restricted to one feature film. Although *The Killer* reflects broader tendencies within Fincher's filmography, conclusions should not automatically be generalized to all contemporary cinema.

Third, the exclusive use of the provided references necessarily limits theoretical diversity. Nevertheless, this restriction enhances internal consistency by maintaining a clearly defined conceptual framework.

Finally, interpretive analysis inevitably involves scholarly judgment. While supported by systematic theoretical comparison, alternative interpretations remain possible within broader film studies discourse.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a coherent and academically rigorous framework for investigating how *The Killer* represents postmodern anxieties through cinematic form, auteur aesthetics, and contemporary cultural theory.

4. Results

The qualitative analysis demonstrates that *The Killer* functions as a sophisticated cinematic representation of postmodern anxiety rather than a conventional crime thriller. Four principal findings emerged from the analytical framework.

First, the film consistently privileges surface over psychological depth, reflecting Jameson's characterization of postmodern culture. Visual precision, controlled compositions, anonymous urban landscapes, and repetitive environments replace traditional forms of emotional exposition. The protagonist's identity is communicated through routine behaviors, disciplined movements, and professional efficiency instead of internal psychological transformation (Jameson, 1991; Anderson, 1998). This aesthetic strategy reinforces the idea that identity has become increasingly performative within late capitalist society.

Second, the analysis indicates that emotional detachment functions as a structural rather than individual condition. The protagonist's calm narration, measured speech, and absence of overt emotional reactions do not merely characterize an assassin's personality; they symbolize the normalization of emotional suppression within technologically mediated social systems. Duncan (2016) argues that postmodern cinema often communicates affect through formal restraint rather than expressive performance, and this tendency is clearly evident throughout the film. Contemporary critical observations similarly recognize that Fincher intentionally minimizes emotional spectacle to emphasize disciplined observation and existential isolation (Gleiberman, 2023).

Third, consumer capitalism operates as the organizing principle of everyday existence. Branded commodities, standardized hotel rooms, airports, digital payment systems, rental vehicles, and surveillance technologies are repeatedly presented as ordinary components of life rather than exceptional narrative details. These recurring

elements support Jameson's argument that capitalist systems increasingly organize personal identity through consumption and functional efficiency (Jameson, 1991; Jameson, 2016). The protagonist's reliance upon routine consumption further illustrates how personal agency becomes embedded within larger institutional structures.

Fourth, the findings confirm that David Fincher's auteur style reinforces postmodern philosophical concerns. Rather than relying upon dramatic dialogue or moral confrontation, Fincher constructs meaning through meticulous editing, restrained cinematography, environmental symmetry, and procedural repetition. These stylistic decisions align closely with observations made by Fincher and Knapp (2014), McCarthy (2012), and Shukla (2019), who identify precision, control, surveillance, and psychological ambiguity as recurring characteristics of Fincher's cinematic practice.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that *The Killer* transforms familiar thriller conventions into a broader meditation on contemporary identity, illustrating how routine, commodification, and emotional distance collectively produce postmodern anxiety.

5. Discussion

The findings support the central argument that *The Killer* represents postmodern anxiety through ordinary routines rather than extraordinary crises. This distinction significantly extends existing interpretations of postmodern cinema. Whereas many postmodern films emphasize fragmentation through nonlinear narratives or overt stylistic experimentation, Fincher achieves comparable philosophical effects through restraint, repetition, and procedural realism.

Jameson's concept of the "waning of affect" provides the most convincing explanation for the protagonist's emotional condition (Jameson, 1991). Emotional absence should not be interpreted simply as personal pathology; instead, it reflects broader cultural transformations associated with late capitalism. The assassin's disciplined lifestyle illustrates how efficiency increasingly replaces emotional engagement as the dominant principle organizing everyday experience.

The study also reinforces Anderson's (1998) argument that postmodernity cannot be separated from historical and economic change. The global environments depicted throughout *The Killer*—airports, luxury hotels, office buildings, anonymous apartments, and digital infrastructures—represent interconnected spaces

produced by transnational capitalism rather than culturally distinctive locations. Such environments diminish historical specificity while emphasizing standardized functionality.

Auteur theory further enriches this interpretation. Barrett and Sarris (1974) argue that recurring stylistic patterns reveal a director's philosophical perspective, and Fincher's consistent attention to surveillance, obsessive discipline, institutional control, and psychological ambiguity clearly supports this proposition. *The Killer* therefore extends themes already visible throughout Fincher's broader body of work while presenting them through an even more minimalist cinematic language (Fincher & Knapp, 2014; McCarthy, 2012).

Castrillon's (2023) discussion of the contemporary antihero also finds considerable support within the present analysis. The protagonist embodies ideological contradictions associated with modern masculinity, professional identity, and moral ambiguity. Rather than functioning as either hero or villain, he represents a fragmented subject whose existence is structured by occupational routines rather than ethical convictions.

The role of consumer capitalism deserves particular emphasis. Koc (2017) argues that contemporary affect increasingly develops within technologically mediated capitalist environments, and *The Killer* visually reinforces this argument by presenting commodities, technologies, and digital infrastructures as integral components of personal identity. The protagonist rarely reflects upon emotional relationships; instead, he evaluates environments according to efficiency, functionality, and operational performance.

Recent scholarship concerning Jameson's continuing relevance further validates these interpretations. Kırmızısakal (2024) demonstrates that postmodern theory remains applicable because contemporary digital societies intensify rather than diminish the structural conditions originally identified by Jameson. *The Killer* provides compelling cinematic evidence supporting this claim through its depiction of surveillance, mobility, commodification, and emotional restraint.

Contemporary criticism similarly recognized the film's philosophical ambitions. Gleiberman (2023) noted that the deliberate pacing and restrained narrative transform what might otherwise appear to be a conventional thriller into a meditation on labor, identity, and existential isolation. These critical observations closely correspond

with the theoretical conclusions developed throughout this study.

Despite these contributions, certain limitations remain. The analysis focuses exclusively upon textual interpretation and therefore does not examine audience reception or cross-cultural interpretation. Furthermore, concentrating upon a single film necessarily limits broader generalization concerning contemporary postmodern cinema. Future studies may compare *The Killer* with Fincher's earlier films or with works by other contemporary directors to evaluate how postmodern anxieties are represented across different cinematic contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study examined David Fincher's *The Killer* through the theoretical perspective of postmodernism, emphasizing the relationship between cinematic form, late capitalist culture, fragmented identity, and emotional detachment. Drawing exclusively upon the selected literature, the research demonstrated that the film extends postmodern cinematic traditions by replacing conventional psychological storytelling with minimalist visual precision, procedural repetition, and carefully controlled narrative restraint.

The analysis confirms that Jameson's theory of postmodernism remains highly relevant for interpreting contemporary cinema. Concepts including the waning of affect, commodification, fragmented subjectivity, and surface aesthetics effectively explain the philosophical structure underlying *The Killer*. Rather than depicting anxiety through dramatic emotional conflict, the film normalizes emotional absence as an ordinary condition embedded within technologically mediated capitalist society.

The investigation further establishes that Fincher's auteur style plays a decisive role in communicating these themes. Consistent with previous scholarship, his emphasis upon surveillance, institutional organization, visual symmetry, and psychological ambiguity transforms familiar thriller conventions into broader reflections upon modern existence. Consequently, *The Killer* should be understood not simply as a crime narrative but as an exploration of contemporary cultural conditions in which professional efficiency, consumer identity, and emotional restraint increasingly define everyday life.

The principal contribution of this research lies in integrating postmodern cultural theory with auteur criticism to provide a comprehensive interpretation of *The Killer*. By synthesizing Jameson's theoretical framework with scholarship concerning Fincher's cinematic philosophy, the study demonstrates how contemporary film continues to function as a valuable medium for examining ideological structures associated with late capitalism.

Future research may extend this framework through comparative analyses of other Fincher films, broader investigations of streaming-era cinema, or interdisciplinary studies connecting postmodern theory with digital media, globalization, and contemporary visual culture. Such investigations would further clarify how evolving cinematic practices continue to reflect changing forms of identity, power, and cultural experience.

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