

Chapter 3

Methodology

As I have mentioned before, the methodology of this research is based on Hermeneutics of Ricoeur. Here is an overall review of what is Hermeneutics exactly and why it is appropriate to use it as a methodology in the research.

Hermeneutic originates from interpreting symbols. Then it is extended to involve the text and the symbols of the text. Finally, the text expands to reality, for it represents something from our world. In the film, the image is meaningful for carrying so many symbols within it. Every film is an imitation of our real world, where many distinctive symbols are prevalent. In Ricoeur's opinion, "within the textual world, human existence is explained by its own culture and the interpretation made by human" (Simms 31). As a result, through the symbols, the text reveals various cultural value and significance of our own world. In von Trier's film, he discusses different sides of humanity within the text. Through his films we come to understand the idea of being a human and witness various life experiences that we might have gone through in the past or will happen to experience in the future. The film text is created by humans and the idea comes from human beings. Therefore, in this research, interpreting the humanity which is covered in the text tells us the information of the story characters and the reality of human existence. In sum, the interpretation of humanity starts from human perspective and is relevant to our reality. The theme in the film always conveys many meanings for us to ponder upon our existence as a human being.

The followings are how I use Hermeneutics as a methodology to proceed with the research for the purpose of this study.

3.1 Narrative and Hermeneutic

1. Intentional meaning of Lars von Trier's films

According to Ricoeur (Simms 34), the true meaning of the text is “intentional meaning”, which can be regarded as the theme of a text. What von Trier tried to tell us constantly in his films is the subject of “suppression of humanity”. Therefore we suppose that the intentional meanings in von Trier's films are centralized in the topic of “suppression of humanity”.

2. Symbolic meanings in visual expression

In Ricoeur's opinion, “the symbol gives rise to the thought” (Simms 33). Since the symbolic meaning is created by humans and it is closely connected to our life experiences that reveals human existence. The symbol is not only about the literal meanings within individual sentences, but also the meanings for the whole text (31-32). Therefore, this research tries to interpret the symbols in films. Through these symbols we can get one step closer to the “intentional meanings” of the entire film text for understanding the meaning of human existence. The symbolic meaning is presented in images since visual component is the chief language for presenting a film. Thus I suggest that the intentional meaning can be interpreted through visual language in films. Therefore, in this research, the interpretation of film text originates from the perspective of visual analysis.

3. Metaphor

Based on Ricoeur (Simms 61-62), the metaphor is a result of the multiple meanings of symbols. In addition, there are three main processes of interpreting metaphor. The first is through the literal word. The second is from the sentence. Thirdly, metaphors lie in the whole discourse, which is also the region of hermeneutics. Step by step, the metaphor is fully interpreted.

In dealing with the literal words, the messages of metaphors are conveyed primarily by

“the literal rhetoric”. In the film, the “word” in metaphor should chiefly be the essential components of visual language. Therefore, the deciphering of visual elements in the film is the first step for film study.

Secondly, metaphor in sentence is understood by the semantic meanings of the whole sentence. In this way, visual components have constituted semantic meanings in sentences. For example, the image of the horrible creature in *The Kingdom* gives the reader a semantic feeling. If we consider the monster image in the form of sentence, it would be read like this: ‘such hideous appearance doesn’t belong to the human world at all’.

At last, we perceive the metaphors in discourse. Contemplating the metaphor in the discourse can help us discover the roles of the metaphors that reveal the theme of the text. Within the discourse, there lies a hermeneutic circle. In this circle, metaphors invite interpretations, and thus we are invited to do hermeneutics.

When we devote ourselves to this hermeneutic circle, we do not only link ourselves with the context of the word and sentence, but also involve ourselves with the cultural context of the discourse related to our world. In Ricoeur’s view, metaphors are the most vivid and active part of a language. And this is why a language can be perceived as a living being for us to interpret and perceive multi-dimensionally (Simms 73-77). Therefore, we can treat metaphors as an essential part for interpreting the content of films.

4. The subject matters of visual narrative for the research

In hermeneutic idea of narrative, we interpret the meanings of sign, symbol, or text to comprehend the narrative. In order to understand a subject, we must think thoroughly about these signs, symbols and texts. In the film narrative, the sign and symbol are presented in image forms. Further more, there are three mimetics and they will be discussed in the following chart.

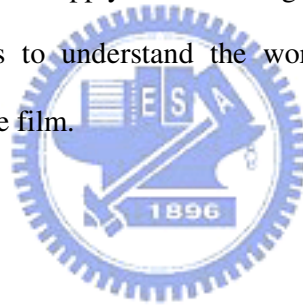
Three “mimetics” of human acting for understanding narratives							
mimetic 1 Prefiguration	“Practical thinking” from our daily experience for pre-understanding the text.						
	Method: Comprehend the plot and build a basic structure of film narrative for further reading of the film content.						
	Three procedures of pre-understanding narrative						
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Semantic understanding</td> <td>The attitudes and position of different characters with the plot. → To define the identity of main characters in the plot.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Symbolic understanding</td> <td>Ideas of sign and symbol from society for interpreting the identity in the narrative. → Symbols and metaphors will be discussed from the angle of cultural experiences in our society.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Temporal understanding</td> <td>The ability for organizing the sequence of the happening of events in story → Explain the cause and effect between characters and society.</td> </tr> </table>	Semantic understanding	The attitudes and position of different characters with the plot. → To define the identity of main characters in the plot.	Symbolic understanding	Ideas of sign and symbol from society for interpreting the identity in the narrative. → Symbols and metaphors will be discussed from the angle of cultural experiences in our society.	Temporal understanding	The ability for organizing the sequence of the happening of events in story → Explain the cause and effect between characters and society.
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Temporal understanding	The ability for organizing the sequence of the happening of events in story → Explain the cause and effect between characters and society.						
mimet2 Configuration	To set up the sequences of events, causal relationships or other configurations among a text.						
	Method: To illustrate the setting, the relation between characters and society. These are complements of each other for the plot, also the configurations for film text.						
mimetic3 Refiguration	The interaction between the textual world and the viewer or the reader’s world.						
	Method: The hermeneutic circle for the theme of film narratives, which is also the intentional meaning in the content of von Trier’s films.						

Table 3.1 The three mimetics

Mimetic 1 and 2 within the plots are all presented visually in the film. They reveal the intentional meaning of the film text and invite the viewers to interpret and interact through their reflections on von Trier’s films and also on the content of this research.

In addition, Ricoeur mentions that narrative concerns not referential truths, but diverse human factors (Simms 94). He takes fiction and history as examples. They share common “narrative competence” which is the human factors that makes people comprehend the story in a familiar and acceptable fashion. Fiction and history both record the behaviors of human. People who are written in history are just like characters in fiction. Here fictional can be compared with film, since they are both narrative made by human. In fact, the life experience in narrative is integrated with history and fiction. The fictional context is so related to our real life that we can learn lessons from it and apply it to our real life (Simms 79-99).

In the film, it describes human factors rather than referential truths. It provides us nutrition for narrative competence, and helps us to understand our world in a new way. We get a new perspective from the film, and we apply the knowledge and experience gained from the film to reality. The film helps us to understand the world in a better way. This it is how hermeneutic circle works in the film.



3.2 Hermeneutics Circle and Intersubjectivity

1. Hermeneutics circle

Since Ricoeur has recommended that hermeneutic circle takes place in any text. Whenever we interpret a text, we enter a hermeneutic circle and have conversation with other viewers within the text. The ideas of the author and the viewers interact and enrich each other through the interpretation.

The topic of this research is centered on humanity which also strongly corresponds to the idea of hermeneutics. That is to say, interpreting a text and understanding ourselves as human beings are correlative in this research. The subject of humanity here is unfolded and examined in this research. Thus, the research has provided a world that invite people to join in this topic – suppression of humanity, which specifically concerns about human mind and our existence in society.

According to Ricoeur, we understand the text in order to believe in our existence as a human, and this belief and faith in return helps us to understand the text in a better sense. The understanding enhances our belief, and vice versa (Simms 37-42). Therefore, I propose that the function of the research is for a further understanding of being human, which helps us to get a better sense of who we are and the world we live in.

2. Intersubjectivity

Base on the speech of Schutz (164), hermeneutic circle has created an intersubjective world where similar reflections or meanings are revealed within it. These meanings are significant to our world, for they can reflect universal human conditions. With the never-ending growing of the continuous new thoughts in different era, this intersubjective world exists in the present and past. It will also continue to exist hereafter and expanded by others' interpretations in the future.

In this research, the reflections on the context of the film have created a philosophical

world. It invites people from different cultural backgrounds or with various life experiences to gather together in this hermeneutic circle. People who get into this circle interact and enrich each other through their various interpretations of the film context. These interpretations have formed an intersubjective world.

Here the intersubjectivity of hermeneutics not only lies in the film contexts, but also in this research. Since von Trier's films have common visual languages and intentional meanings. In this research, I, as a researcher, intend to describe and interpret those visual languages and intentional meanings. Following that, reflections on humanity in the films are collected in the research and new meanings are brought forward. These reflections and new meanings can make a difference to our reality.

Consequently, the reflections stemmed from this research are the extensions of our life experiences. They have shared meanings within the films, as well as within the world. That is why I am drawn to the universal subject—"suppression of humanity", which becomes a central focus for the study. It is my hope that this research can contribute to build an effective conversation in which people will have mutual understandings for the existence as human beings.

3.3 Hermeneutic Psychoanalysis and Morality

1. Psychoanalysis as a hermenetuics

In hermeneutics perspective of psychoanalysis (Simms 60), Ricoeur claims that Freud has made his thesis on Psychoanalysis convincible by interpreting historical texts. Thus Ricoeur regards psychoanalysis as a historical theory, rather than a natural science.

According to Simmis (59), the lessons derived from the religious myths are not eternal suppressions of humans since the myths are always changing. They are changeable because they have been reinterpreted constantly. For this reason, the reality is not merely a necessity to submit ourselves to. The essence of reality is changeable. The changeability makes the reality becomes a creation for people to cherish. Besides, since the classics have always been renewed and innovated in human cultures, they can thus last long and become a part of culture.

In the film, the various human lives are performed and diverse portrait of humanities are revealed. It provides people with a general observation on adaptability of our belief and faith. Therefore, the film world is attractive and significant, for it inspires people to see life and the world in an innovative and fascinating way.

2. The subject of ethics

The subject of ethics for Riecoeur is not the question about good or evil, but is what constitutes a good life (Simms 108). In von Trier's films, he reveals diverse aspects of human thinking that cause various behaviors. Here von Trier's purpose of describing humanity is not to reveal good or evil, but to give people a new perspective to consider humanity. In this way, we can gain a profound mind and constitute a better sense of life. This is the similarity between von Trier and Ricoeur's idea about ethics.

The following table includes a few subjects that we have discussed in Ricoeur's perspective of Hermeneutics and the correspondent method in this research.

Narrative identity	
Definition	Ricoeur recommends the concept of “narrative identity” in contemplation of ethics. The narrative of identity is a perpetual characteristic for being a person. It is learned from life experiences and through which a person keeps to behave consistently. In this research, the “narrative identity” can be “suppression of humanity” in von Trier’s films.
Method	Through interpreting “narratives”, we understand life in a better sense. Both literary narrative and real life require others to interpret and create meanings for it. In von Trier’s films, he demonstrates mutual significations of humanity which are shared in his films and also reality. The contents of his films can reflect Ricoeur’s implication of narratives, for interpreting his narratives has made us acquire a narrative identity in life and understand life in a better sense.
Ethical interaction	
Definition	In fact, each of the individuals is related to one another as if we were all parts of diverse narrative branches within an extensive plot. We are related to one another. Thus one must interact with others in order to recognize his own narrative identity. Through the ethical interaction between them, the narrative identity arises and becomes the characteristic that affects each other (Simms 108-109).
Method	Considering the ethical interaction for narrative identity, I interpret the ethical interaction in von Trier’s films as suppression of humanity in this research. Through ethical interpretations of von Trier’s films, I disclose the relative and regular characteristic of humanity. Finally, I hope that such ethical discussion for humanity can influence others and provide meaningful significance for the world.

Table 3.2 Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics idea of ethics