



**HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY AND NARRATIVE STYLE  
OF MICHAEL HANEKE'S FILMS**

BY  
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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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### Abstract

The research aims 1) to explore the philosophy of humanism appearing in Michael Haneke's films, and 2) to analyze the narrative style of Michael Haneke's films. This is a qualitative study applying text analysis to four award-winning representative films by Michael Haneke, released between 2000 and 2017. The selected films are as follows: 1) The Piano Teacher, 2) Caché, 3) The White Ribbon, and 4) Amour. The results found that:

According to part 1 that examines the philosophy of humanism in Michael Haneke's films, it was found that, six out of the eight key aspects of humanism philosophy are commonly displayed and discussed as follows: 1) a naturalistic world, 2) human value and dignity, 3) freedom of action and choice, 4) ethical conduct, 5) arts, culture and education, and 6) social justice.

In terms of part 2 focusing on the narrative style of Michael Haneke's films, the analysis of the narrative structure and basic narrative elements of each film revealed five conclusions as follows: 1) non-linear structures, slow pacing and open-endedness, 2) depth in character psychology and the philosophy of humanism, 3) a realism and distanced observational approach, 4) minimalism and simplicity in dialogues and settings, and 5) cinematic naturalism.

(Total 172 pages)

Keywords: Humanism Philosophy, Narrative Style, Michael Haneke

Student's Signature ..... Thesis Advisor's Signature .....

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Michael Haneke is a world-class artistic film director, screenwriter born in Austria, who is now over 80 years old but still keeping enthusiasm in filmmaking. He started his career as a director very late at the age of 47 but is well known for his unique dark, cold and minimalism film language and an in-depth portrayal of social issues and modern people's inner problems. He insists on writing and directing his own scripts from his observations on European society issues, thousands of modern families, people of different classes, countries and races, from kids to elders. He is like "the diagnostician of society" (Yuan, 2012) to analyze social and human problems layer by layer using his films, making the audiences rethink about the modern daily life and the inner spiritual conditions of human beings, facing these problems straightforward giving us a chance of finding a way out ourselves. His films are not only remarkable in art but also of great significance in human philosophy.

Haneke is a representative "auteur theory" director who has very sharp perspectives and distinctive film style. Starting from his first film "The Seventh Continent" (1989), he depicted the process of a self-planned family suicide, use the camera going deep into an Austrian middle-class family's repeated silence daily life, portrayed the depression and emptiness inside everyone in the family including the kid. This is not only the life of a single family but a common phenomenon among the society, people are alienated by the over-rational and repetitive social labor and a long-term suppression of their inner needs and communication between families. They no longer understand the meaning of life and fell into spiritual crisis, a family suicide was planned. This story was adapted from a real social event and the film caused great discussion in the European film circle. And later on, Haneke made another two films

in similar theme and style, “Benny’s Video” (1992) and “71 fragments of a Chronology of Chance” (1994), these early three films are so called “Glaciation Trilogy” by media. They all related to death in the society, an incident children murder and a bank robbery shooting incident. “Benny’s Video” (1992) is about an incident murder of a girl from the boy in a middle-class family. But he is no guilty or caring after taken away the girl’s life, he hidden the body and continued his routine to school, and his parents faked a travelling for him while his father was handling the girl’s body at home. The disrespect for life, avoidance of responsibility, and sinful ethical issues greatly violated the principles of western humanism philosophy. Violence, ethical responsibilities, human dignity, and social justice are to rediscussed through the film. And the issues of refugees, survival dilemma of the elderly, challenges of human value and communications in modern society are once again discussed in Haneke’s third film “71 fragments of a Chronology of Chance” (1994). He used a series of fragments narrative to depicted the social conditions and the very essentials caused a young man to rob a bank and shoot people died.

The choice of stories is related to the background of Haneke’s 17 years of working in a German television, a witness to what’s really happening in social news and he adapted them into film scripts himself, making the social news not only on televisions but also real artistic pieces that would be watched all over the world, it’s not only the truth of western world but also the common essentials of all human beings.

People are to redefine the essentials of humanism, examine human value and restart the caring for human dignity and inner needs through art and cultural education.

Haneke’s early “Glaciation Trilogy” set up the foundation of his perspectives on humanism and he explored more and deeper in different storytelling through the following 30 years of his film career. In the film “Funny Games” (1997) (2007), he challenged the moral bottom line of society. Utilize a cruel kidnapping and killing event happened in a middle-class family to evoke people’s critical thoughts about violence and social justice rules. As to the film “Code Unknown” (2000) is the first French film he made, he portrayed serval individual stories of different classes in Paris all full of

misunderstandings and difficulties, extending his viewpoints to political and racial conflicts. He also had a significant change in film language from still shots to motion long takes, which made the film more real-time and objective. "The Piano Teacher" (2001) is another breakthrough work won Grand Prix of Cannes Film Festival (2001), he portrayed a psychopathic talented piano teacher who forces her student to abuse her in love, which lead to a distortion in the man's mental personality and raped her in the finale. Haneke deeply depict the depressive control from her mother which caused her wanted to be abused and the very process of how she tortured the man into mental illness and hart her deeply. Again, Haneke stepped into human mind and dig out the origins of mental illness and showed how people are alienated in spiritual. Expressing his concerns for human freedom on thoughts and actions, spiritual and moral health, and also the art/music background was addressed. While in the story of "Cache" (2005), Haneke shift his focus to a French middle-class family, depicted the secrets and alienation between family members, tracing back to the sin from childhood that influence the future life adults, the sin is also related to the political and racial problems in France. Accusing the moral evasion of people's own sins and mistakes in childhood, we saw how people could be blind and unconcerned about other's life, especially it related to different races. Social justice and human ethical self-control issues were challenged seriously. This issue was upgraded in his next film "The White Ribbon" (2009). He utilizes black and white tone to depict society and family in a northern German village, where the roots of evil could be found in childhood. The conflicts between two generations, religions and the crime the children had claimed. As a son of a Germany, it's the first time Haneke discuss about the war in his film. The Germany's original sin rooted in this film and also in his childhood memories. This film won Palme d'Or in Cannes Film Festival (2009). The issue of human original sins and how human beings to save ourselves form inner evil was discussed all over the world through this film.

Then to the latest two films of Haneke, as his own age goes older, he shifts to think about the death problems in elder people. How human facing age and death when it conflicts with the love and human dignity, ethical problems of suicide or killing in order to free them from illness are to face. Is it a violation of humanistic principles

when the old husband in “Amour” (2012) killed his beloved wife with a pillow after long-term suffering from her illness and losing human dignity? Or it is to maintain her human dignity and keep their promise? Everyone is getting older and older every day, we all have to face the problem of age and illness, how do we choose between death and dignity and what shall our lovers do under this condition. It is said that Haneke wrote this story based on his own aunt’s life, his aunt is in serious sick and beg him to end her life after she tried suicide but failed. Haneke always bring up question but no answer, in “Happy End” (2017), the similar question was face again. The same actor in “Amour” (2012) now this time face the problem of how to kill himself or ask help from others to end his life. Besides this, the film also depicts a big rich family with alienated relationship and a suicidal granddaughter. No matter the elder or the young girl, they all struggled to find their way of death and life, no one could understand their inner voice because everyone has his own secrets and busy with their own problems. That is the truth of modern society, even rich in materials, but empty in spiritual, which echo back to the humanism philosophy of how human beings redefine the value of life and ethical problems.

An overall look at Haneke's over 30 years' film works, he has always been concerned about the living conditions of human beings in modern society, especially the inner needs and spiritually. He discussed in different films of different aspects of humanism principles and ethical conduct of ourselves. Although he always exposes the problems and dark side of human nature in an objective way, it forcing us to face the worst part of ourselves and rethink about where our better future is.

Due to his niche film style and the cultural barriers of Europe, Haneke's films are not very widely understood in Asia, and his aesthetics in film is also underestimated among audience. There is a significant meaning to analyze Michael Haneke's film comprehensively both in philosophy and film study. Carrying on his critical thinking on human life and adapting to our own social culture. Film art is not only a tool for entertainment but most importantly to convey human thoughts and perspectives, without international limits.

## 1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To comprehensively examine Michael Haneke's film from both humanism significance and filmmaking technical, two objectives are to be achieved.

1.2.1 To explore Humanism Philosophy appeared in Michael Haneke's films.

1.2.2 To analyze the narrative style of Michael Haneke's films.

## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1 What are the viewpoints of Humanism Philosophy that appeared in Michael Haneke's films?

1.3.2 How does Michael Haneke utilize different narrative skills to accomplish a good storytelling?

## 1.4 SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This research will analyze 4 representative and most award-winning films in Michael Haneke's later works from 2001 to present time. They are as follows:

Table1.1 Selected scope of Four films of Michael Haneke from 2001 to present

Release Year	Film Name	Award-Winning
2001	The Piano Teacher	Grand Prix in Cannes Film Festival (2001)
2005	Caché	Best Director, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, FIPRESCI Prize, in Cannes Film Festival (2005)
2009	The White Ribbon	Best Foreign Film in Golden Globe Awards (2009),

Table1.1 Selected scope of Four films of Michael Haneke from 2001 to present (Cont.)

Release Year	Film Name	Award-Winning
		Palme d'Or, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, FIPRESCI Prize, French National Education System Prize of Cannes Film Festival (2009), FIPRESCI Film of the Year in San Sebastian Film Festival (2009)
2012	Amour	Best Foreign Language Film in Oscars Academy Awards (2012), Palme d'Or in Cannes Film Festival (2012), Best Film Not in the English Language in BAFTA Awards (2012), Best Film, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay in César Awards (2013), Best Foreign Film in Golden Globe Awards (2012), Best International Film in Independent Spirit Awards (2012), FIPRESCI Film of the Year in San Sebastian Film Festival (2012)

## 1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Term 1 Humanism Philosophy** Humanism is a philosophy theory centered on human beings. It refers to a non-theistic belief, opposing the God-centered world view of Christianity. Usually contains aspects as below: 1) Naturalistic world, 2) Human dignity and value, 3) Freedom of choice and action, 4) Science, logic and critical thinking, 5) Ethical conduct, 6) Arts, culture, and education, 7) Social justice, 8) Environmental concerns.

**Term 2 Narrative Style** The Narrative Style refers to two main aspects in this research. One is the narrative structure, including narrative arc and type of narratives. Another is how the director utilize narrative elements in storytelling, including plots,

theme, characters, settings, viewpoint, dialogues and symbolism or motifs.

## **1.6 EXPECTED BENEFIT FROM THE RESEARCH**

Michael Haneke has very high reputation in western film circle especially Europe but is thought niche in Asian world, which one benefit of this research is to attract more attention and discussion on his films from Asian perspective. Because human beings all over the world share the same feelings and philosophy, what's happening in the western world would possibly happen in other countries too.

Haneke's films concentrate on discussions about human beings' inner world in context of the modern society, he brought up many issues related to society, politics, race, immigration, family, violence, age, death, ethical conduct, moral struggles, children crime etc. all of these topics exist in our daily life but modern human beings are used to ignore. The second great benefit of this research is to arouse rethinking and reflections on these issues from a humanistic point, which would redefine the principles we follow to find a way of solving spiritual crisis and have a better life.

Thirdly, Haneke's narrative style is distinct from others, which not usually follow the conventional narrative structures in Hollywood. Based on different stories, Haneke utilize different narrative strategies like space narrative, nonlinear narrative, fragmental narrative, open-ending etc. As a film master who's good at applying varieties of narrative techniques, it is an innovative contribution to contemporary film to analyze Haneke's work as a challenge to traditional narrative expectations.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This research aims to comprehensively analyze the Humanism Philosophy and also narrative style of Michael Haneke's film, here we firstly need to understand the essentials and principles of Humanism Philosophy, it's related to many aspects of human beings and social activities. Secondly, in terms of film art, we need to breakdown Haneke's films by narrative theories and skills one by one to have a holistic picture of his narrative strategies. So, the researcher uses the concepts, theories, related researches as follows:

- 2.1 The Humanism Philosophy
- 2.2 Narrative Theories
- 2.3 Biography of Michael Haneke
- 2.4 Related Researches

#### 2.1 THE HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY

Humanism is a philosophy theory centered on human beings. It refers to a non-theistic belief, opposing the God-centered world view of Christianity. It rejects to believe in supernatural or religious explanations, advocating human values, dignity and rights, believing that human beings have the power and potential abilities to create a better world and solve their own problems. Humanism helps people to achieve individual growth and proposes human has freedom of choice and action, emphasizing Human character, talent and wisdom play a decisive role of the nature world, and emphasize on rationality and science.

Ancient Humanism origins from ancient Greek and Rome that shared a common emphasis on the importance of human individuals, often focusing on their achievements, intellect, and ethical conduct. "Humanism" is a concept appeared in the

early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but Aaron Block mentioned in his book “The Western Humanist Tradition” that this term can be traced back to Renaissance Italy in the 15th century.

Renaissance Humanism is an important development period of humanism in literature, philosophy and art. During this period, Humanism became an intellectual movement with international influence started from Italy, which contributed to the solid foundations of human value, achievements, individual potential, and the pursuit of knowledge. Artists devoted themselves to the movement of humanism. They believed people is the first important in world, opposed religious theocracy and hierarchical, claimed to free individual liberation, encouraging people to pursue happiness. They explored a series of artistic creations from a rational and respectful perspective. The profound thought of humanism appeared in many master pieces of art form.

From 19<sup>th</sup> century to present, the concept and definition of Humanism was improved to Modern and Contemporary Humanism. The discussion on contemporary humanism focuses not only on the nature of human and science world but more on human ethical and moral principles, extended to various fields, including education, literature, and social justice movements, even global environment problems. Meanwhile, it goes deeper in the inner nature and emotions of human being, empathy and compassion, ethical responsibilities are widely studied both in philosophy and psychological humanism.



Figure 2.1 Background and Affiliations of the humanism philosophy

Source: Lamont, 1997

Contemporary Humanism's applications in film art are more relevant to the topic here discussed. Hereby, A list down of following defined key points in Contemporary Humanism is quite necessary:

### **2.1.1 Naturalistic World**

Humanism's worldview of understanding the nature of world based on human activity observations, life evidence and rational thinking. They reject supernatural explanations for natural phenomena, Including religious dogma, mystical beliefs, and paranormal explanations.

### **2.1.2 Human Value and Dignity**

Human value and dignity are foundational concepts of Humanism, advocating inherent worth of individuals. Humanism believes that all humankind should have the same value no matter of their race, gender, religion, or social status. Placing humans at the center of philosophical thinking. Every human should be born, live and die with dignity, people are to respect each other.

### **2.1.3 Freedom of Choice and Action**

Humanism asserts that individuals have the capacity for rational thought and self-determination, and it values the freedom to make choices and take actions in accordance with one's values and beliefs. Individuals should have free thoughts, free will on decision-making and personal responsibilities for the consequences of their choices and actions.

### **2.1.4 Science, Logic and Critical thinking**

The principles of science, logic, and critical thinking are vital approaches for humanism to observe the nature of world. It determined how human beings making decisions, and navigating ethical considerations. Science is the reliable method to

acquiring knowledges, Logic is considered a fundamental tool for discerning truth and Critical thinking to objectively analyze the information, arguments.

### **2.1.5 Ethical Conduct**

Humanism accepts the responsibility for human life and sets some common principles or values for moral questions including fairness, integrity, honesty, respect for others, empathy and compassion. The pursuit of ethical conduct is a continuous process of self-reflection, learning, and a commitment to acting in ways that promote the well-being of oneself and others.

### **2.1.6 Arts, Culture, and Education**

In Humanism, arts, culture, and education are very essential components of human life. These could enrich human experiences, promote critical thinking and cultural understanding, play crucial roles in individual growth, and empower them to be ethically engaged in the world through time.

### **2.1.7 Social Justice**

It's a commitment to the fair and equal treatment of individuals in society. All individuals have the opportunity to their basic necessities, education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal and professional development, free from discrimination. They also supports legal and criminal justice systems that are fair, transparent, no systemic biases.

### **2.1.8 Environmental Concern**

Environmental concern is a recognition between human well-being and the health of the natural world. Humans to act in ways that promote the welfare of all living beings and future generations. It is important to stick to sustainable practices and global cooperation to address environmental challenges.

## 2.2 NARRATIVE THEORIES

Film Narrative is to analyze how the film telling a story by using film language, what structure is designed and the strategies, what narrative elements includes. Film narrative involves the organization of various cinematic elements, such as plots, theme, settings, conflicts, characters, point of view, space, dialogue, cinematography, symbolism and motif etc. to tell a story, create the mood or atmosphere, convey the point of theme.

### 2.2.1 Narrative Structure

Narrative structure is the fundamental layer of how the film units is designed and organized to convey the story. Different narrative structures are applied to different genre and narrative objectives.

#### 2.2.1.1 Narrative Arc

Narrative arc is the overall structure of the film and development of story along the process of film. While different types of stories may use different narrative arcs to suit the narrative. It typically includes elements such as initial setting-up, inciting incident, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Initial setting-up is the beginning of the film that introduce about the background setting of story, the initial situation of characters. Inciting incident is the point that events unconventional happened, disrupting the initial status of character's life and set up for the challenges and conflicts. Rising action is when the story develops to a tension point and characters confront with obstacles, which leads to a climax. The climax is the turning moment of story with most tension and conflicts, usually the character facing a critical emotional changing. Resolution is the conclusion to the story or hinting the future of characters.

#### 2.2.1.2 Types of Narrative Structures

Linear and Non-linear narrative structures are mainly used in film narrative. Linear Narrative is a narrative structure that a series of events happening from beginning to the end, following a straightforward timeline. It is a classical and traditional storytelling convention adhere to a cause-and-effect relationship of the events occurring

in the order of story's timeline. Usually starting with the setting ups and characters' initial situations and then following the inciting accident, development of conflicts, rising action, climax, and the resolution.

Nonlinear narrative is to tell a story presenting the events out of time order, opposite to the traditional linear narrative structure. This kind of structure is used to engage audiences in some purpose, deepen the view of characters or theme, multiple viewpoints of critical thinking of the plots, or forcing audiences to an objective stand. There are several types of Nonlinear structures are commonly used in films:

Flashback and Flash-forward, flashback is a way of storytelling where the order of events is interrupted to present the earlier scenes. Audiences are taken back to earlier time to know the reasons, motives, process or background the story, which would greatly trigger the interests of audience. But flash-forward is an opposite way to flashback which takes audience to the future scenes that haven't happened in present plots, this allows a jump to create suspense atmosphere or guesses from audience to the plot development.

Parallel Narrative, refers to a narrative structure that two or more storylines are presented simultaneously in one narrative progress. It makes the narrative more complex and exciting while the storylines may be or not independent to each other, it always involves different characters and events from different viewpoints to give the audiences multiple explorations or surprises to the theme or conflicts at the same time.

Nested Narrative, is a structure that a storytelling within a story, the central narrative has another one or more narratives. This structure has multiple layers and each layer has its own storyline but may share the common elements, motifs or theme. It could enhance the depth of the film theme interpretation and engaging audiences in multiple ways.

Modular Narrative, this kind of narrative is divided into different modules or units that are interconnected or independent, each part contributes to the common theme or different function in the storytelling. These modules are often rearranged in nonlinear construction which provides the flexibility to the narrative and making the narrative more dynamic and open.

Fragmented Narrative, it breaks the whole narrative into fragments and pieces and presenting in a nonlinear structure. The fragments seem random challenging the audience watching expectations behavior but encouraging them to interpretate themselves with a profound and provoking thoughts. It's a very unique experience for audiences unlike the traditional linear way.

There are also other Nonlinear narratives structures applied in different storytelling purpose and some of the structures are multiple used in one film. The narrative structures are to breakdown based on specific theme and contents of films.

## 2.2.2 Narrative Elements

### 2.2.2.1 Plots

In film narrative, the plots are the sequences of how the events are organized and structured to carry on the story. In classic convention, the plots usually include setting up, inciting accident, conflicts, rising actions, climax and resolution, but in contemporary film narrative, films are not always following this rule. Some plots could be in disordered or loosen and vague in plots.

There are also some unconventional narratives such as Poetic or Symbolic Narrative, the narrative may not follow a clear plots development but focusing on poetic film language to convey the mood, atmosphere, or symbolism. Another example is Minimalist Narrative, it has no complex plots but use minimal details and events to tell a story by focusing on single aspect like one character or emotions without plots developments.

### 2.2.2.2 Theme

The theme of narrative is the core concept or idea that the whole film tries to convey to the audience. It explores the deep meaning of the story related to many aspects of human life and social issues. Common film theme including such as love, death, compassion, honesty, friendship, kindness, responsibility, courage, future, isolation and alienation, age etc. Themes vary from wide topics and can be interpretated for different meanings by different viewers. Understanding the theme of film providing a better way to understand the characters and plots.

#### 2.2.2.3 Characters

Characters are individuals who drive the story forward. Usually, a film would have a few characters of different functions. Protagonist, the central character of the story who carries the story mostly by his/her experiences and perspective. Antagonist, the opposite side of the protagonist, who is to set up obstacles and barriers for the protagonist and create conflicts in the story. Supporting characters, who are not the central focus but also contribute to the story narrative by different means of supporting or challenging the protagonist.

When talking about characters, narrative elements like character arc, character development, motivations and goals are crucial to depict the characters. Character arc is the process of how this character starting from initial situation to the end of the story with all along facing challenges, choices and overcome the obstacles. Character development refers to the changes in the character's life, belief, values and relationships with others. The motivations and goals are the thing inside the character that drive the character to actions, their motivations and goals could be completely changed in the development of the story.

#### 2.2.2.4 Settings

Settings in narrative refers to the time and place the story happened. It includes the specific physical environment of the location, exact period of time that could be in the past, present or future, and also the social culture or history background of it. The choose of settings would influence the way how character to performance suitable for the background and their costumes, also how is the production design and cinematography and lighting style, which has significant impact on the film's overall atmosphere and mood.

#### 2.2.2.5 Narrative Viewpoint

Narrative Viewpoint in film is the perspective from which the story presented. Usually below 5 narrative viewpoints are commonly applied: First-Person Perspective, Third-Person Limited Perspective, Third-Person Omniscient Perspective, Objective Perspective and Subjective Perspective.

First-Person Perspective is from the perspective of a character within the story, audiences see things through this character's eyes and experiences. Third-Person Limited Perspective is an external perspective that could tell the inner feelings and

thoughts of this characters but limited to what the character knows. Third-Person Omniscient Perspective is also an external perspective but extended to multiple characters which provides all-knowing perspective to the narrative. Objective Perspective is the external perspective that keeps distant from the events and characters' thoughts. Subjective Perspective, or so called Subjective POV (point of view) is that we see through the perspective of the character, it provides a more immersive feelings inside the character.

#### 2.2.2.6 Dialogues

Dialogues are another crucial element in film narrative. Good dialogues convey the theme memorably and have multiple functions like build characterization, drive the plots, set up and push in the conflicts and tension, and add depth to the film theme. Sometimes it influences the mood and style of film and lead the pace and rhythm of plots.

#### 2.2.2.7 Symbolism and motifs

Symbolism refers to the symbols, objects, or images that convey a deeper meaning in interpretation. It always related to the theme of the story and making the theme more subtly and specific in visual, which enhances the audience memory moments and understanding of the theme. Many things could be used as symbols such as props, colors, numbers, patterns, images, gestures or architectural buildings etc. But the audience's interpretation on different symbols can vary widely according to their different cultural background and life experiences.

Motifs are the repetitive element with significant symbolic meaning to the overall story or theme. It provides consistent and coherent through the film and emphasizes on the theme, emotions or important concepts. It also contributes to the visual aesthetics by using some symmetrical compositions or color pattern etc. Enriching the exploration and emotional resonance of the story.

## 2.3 BIOGRAPHY OF MICHAEL HANEKE

### 2.3.1 Life of Michael Haneke

Michael Haneke is an Austrian director and screenwriter born on 23 March 1942, who is known for his unique director style and also the deep exploration in social and individual issues in his film themes. He has won the Cannes Film Festival's Grand Prix once and its Palme d'Or twice and also many times of Academy Award nominations. He is considered as a film master all over the world and real a film author who instincts on his own style and self-expression.

Haneke's mother was an actress in the theater and his father was a German actor and director, so he made his film in French, German, and English. His mother remarried to a composer when he was 3, but he mostly lived in the city of Wiener Neustadt, Austria, with his aunt, who was also a classical music lover. He had a whole related family involved in art and music, which contributes to his early talents showed in literature and music. The music in Haneke's films is thought to be classic, especially the scenes related to violence or darkness about human nature.

In his college time, he studied philosophy, psychology at the University of Vienna, this laying the foundations of philosophy and psychology applied in his later dramas and films. Most theme of his films are exploring the original sins of human beings or childhood, suicide and violence among teenagers and elders, moral questions when facing age and death, and also the emptiness of existence of the middle class. He also tried to be an actor temporarily but failed on his audition. Then he switched his focus on writing and directing.

After college and a period of freelancer jobs as a writer/critic for different journals, he started his career at the southwestern German television station called Südwestfunk as a drama editor and consultant at 1967. He worked there for 18 years, firstly he was in charge of selecting scripts for television dramas, gradually he started to write his own scripts and directing numbers of television projects.

In 1989, Haneke directed his first film “The seventh Continent” at the age of 47, this film built up to his later director style and the exploration in human nature in his works. Since then, His films career as a director took off and quickly became one the world’s most famous directors with numerous global awards.

### **2.3.2 Different creation periods of Michael Haneke**

#### **2.3.2.1 1989-1994 Early works.**

This is the first stage of Haneke’s film and also the important stage. During this period, Haneke created his most famous works: the so called “Glaciation Trilogy” including “The Seventh Continent” (1989), “Benny's Video” (1992), “71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance” (1994).

These three early films set up the director style of Haneke's films, and are an important cornerstone for the study and definition of Haneke's films, they also impact European audience with strong viewpoint and distinctive artistic aesthetics. These three films made Michael Haneke the winner of the “Directors' Fortnight Award” at the Ghana Film Festival for three times. Among them, “Benny's Video” also won the Best Screenplay Award at the European Film Awards that year (Liguangyuan, 2012).

“The Seventh Continent” (1989) reveals the superficial harmony relationship but inner emptiness of a middle-class family, the young daughter who needs attention, parents who have lost the meaning of life in their repetitive daily life, separation from their elder parents, and a self-planned death plan. Haneke uses his unique cold film language and limited simple space narrative skills to calmly and objectively depicts the existing inner problems and ultimate death solution of this family. “Benny's Video” (1992) was similar to “The Seventh Continent” (1989) in film style. It also exposes the cruelty, darkness and lies shown by middle-class families when faced with their child’s crimes, parents' responsibilities and redemption, and no respect for life. While “71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance” (1994) is a much more complicated fragment narrative film. It reveals the multiple diseases of modern society, and comprehensively presents social/political issues related to multiple causes of this bank robberies with multiple narratives in different character stories and perspectives.

These three films are all written and adapted from real social news by Haneke himself, which lead to his later consistently exploration of hidden secrets under human nature. He observes social news in an objective critical way, focusing on modern family relationships (mainly focus on middle-class families), and social individual inner needs (both adults, kids and elders), using film language to calmly depict the deep thinking behind each character, focusing on daily life details, steady story rhythm, and cold film tonality, well balancing the relationship between real stories and artistic treatment. Social reality, cold distant film tonality, and depth in human nature have become the key impressions of Haneke's films.

#### 2.3.2.2 1995-2005, Consistent Exploration and Career Breakthrough.

This period of 10 years is Haneke's exploration process in different aspects of social and individual issues, the stories vary from different cultural background, language, and narrative style, which expanded and deepened his views on more issues like racial/immigration issues, mental illness, allegorical story philosophy, extreme absurd violence etc. He also extended his career to France, not only in Austria and German.

He made five different type of films including "Funny Games" (1997), "Code Unknown" (2000), "The Piano Teacher" (2001), "Time of the Wolf" (2003), "Cache" (2005). Among these, "The Piano Teacher" (2001) won Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix (2001) and "Cache" (2005) won him Best Director in Cannes Film Festival (2005). This was the first time Haneke's film was officially recognized and praised by international film festivals, which makes him a truly film master with world-class recognition and reputation.

"Funny Games" (1997) is a story about two young men break into a family's house and torture the whole family including the kid to death, it's just a "game" for the two perverted young men but a real killing for the family. This film reflects the unreasonable power system of real society, people have to follow the social game rules without choice. And Haneke used some narrative tricks to provoke the audience to rethink about this problem, such as when the woman killed one of the bad guys, Haneke twist the plots backwards to change it into another plot that the woman failed to catch the gun, and an unhappy ending of bad guys were not caught and go on to kill another family. These tricks greatly make the audience angry about the violence and injustice

showed in the film and provoke a lot of discussion on this. And Haneke has achieved his goal of forcing people to face and rethink their life. While “Code Unknown” (2000) is the first film Haneke made in France. He chose the story across different classes and races in Paris, depict a comparative life picture in French society. An actress in Paris who is suffering from relationship with her boyfriend and harassment of refugees, a black young man is arrested by police out of some racial bias for upholding justice for a beggar, the beggar went back to her hometown in Romania but in the end, she came back to Paris to beg for money again. Haneke made it clear in the begging that these are all incomplete story fragments happened in Paris, which not to interpretate in a complete storyline but to catch the independent meaning of these fragments. This is an unconventional narrative strategy used in his film like real life news report format, but he used a lot of motion long takes to make it real and artistic. We could see his change in camera language during this time. For “The Piano Teacher” (2001), it is another breakthrough for Haneke because it's the first time he adapted a story from a novel literature, and it won Grand Prix of Cannes Film Festival (2001). Haneke dig into the psychological problems of human beings and depict the process of how the mental illness is formed and influence other relationships around. It's so different from Haneke's works before with very clear plots development and character arc. And meanwhile, he demonstrated the psychological subline of characters to make audience objectively understand. “Time of the Wolf” (2003) is another new trial for Haneke as it's a French dystopian post-apocalyptic drama film. Haneke discussed about how the human nature would be challenged when facing extreme circumstances. He utilized minimalist aesthetics to capture the atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. And we could see how vulnerable human is if the original social foundations collapse and it's also crucial to face the dark side inside human beings. As always, Haneke didn't answer the question in the end and left the audience to seek for answer themselves. Then comes to “Cache” (2005), this is a film explore the childhood evil that influence lifelong, it also involved issues related to Algerian refugees. An upper-class family Gorge, Anne and their son were threatened by a series anonymous video tapes recording their daily life. Gorge traced these tapes to his Algerian friend when he was young, but his friend does not admit doing this and prove his innocent by suicide. It reveals the guilty that Gorge made both in his childhood and adulthood, but he avoided to accept the weakness

and guilty of his own. When a life is taken away because of you, are you brave to face it in morality? This question of human nature is brought up to discuss by this story.

Through these 5 different stories during this period, Haneke rise up different social and individual topics in life across varied aspects. He also changed the narrative strategies due to different themes but kept a recognized film style of his own.

### 2.3.2.3 2006-Now, Master Pieces Booming and Award-winning.

During this period, Haneke really showed his accumulative film master skills and created excellent award-winning works. He has made 4 films from 2007-2017: “Funny Games” (2007) “The White Ribbon” (2009), “Amour” (2012), “Happy End” (2017), two of them won international awards widely, also known as his most representative works in the world.

“The White Ribbon” (2009) won Palme d'Or of Cannes Film Awards (2009) and Best Foreign Film in Golden Globe Awards (2009), “Amour” (2012) won the Best Foreign Language Film of Oscar Academy Awards (2012), Best Foreign Film in Golden Globe Awards (2012), Palme d'Or of Cannes Film Festival (2012). These two films made Haneke a twice winner of Palme d'Or of Cannes Film Awards, a great honor in film history.

“Funny Games” (2007) is a shot-by-shot remake film of his original one in 1997. He remade it in the U.S adapted to a more common culture for audience all over the world to understand it. It's also his first trail in Hollywood. The film challenged the American audience's view behavior and expectations of conventional Hollywood stories. It was fiercely discussed by media saying that Haneke was raping the audience by some violent twist of the plots design. However, it may be Haneke's purpose doing this to force people to objectively watch the film without fantasy but thinking about the reality reflected in the story, the social power system, social justice rules and also how human to conduct their own ethical problems. “The White Ribbon” (2009) is a story rooted into the background of a Germany village before the first world war shoot in black and white. The white ribbon is a symbol of pure and kindness in human especially in children but the film on the contrary explored the evil roots among kids. This is also a film related to religious and politics that is a new trail of storytelling for Haneke, which definitely distinct from his former films in narrative and cinematography style. It is presented from a first-person viewpoint in the village describing the series of evil events

happened there, revealing the crimes the kids had commit and also the ugly secrets behind the so-called decent men like the priest, the doctor, and the duke, who also represented the social power class in this village. “Amour” (2012) is the most touching film of Michael Haneke’s. It’s a story about the old couple Gorge and Anne who are both in their 80s, a sudden stroke hit Anne and she lost her ability of life and dignity as a decent elder. During the process of Anne suffering from the illness, it is more suffer for Gorge to taking care of Anne and watching her live in a tragic daily life without any dignity. Haneke brought up a question that all human beings would face in the end of their life, love or death? Dignity or death? It is not only the test for ourselves but also for our lovers. How should we choose between love, death and moral issues of human beings? Gorge did choose to let Anne go with a pillow but is it the choice for common people like us? And after that, Gorge may face the inner moral conflicts from society and himself. Haneke used many long takes and still shots in the room to make audience observe their life objectively. We see Anne goes into death step by step like we are to experience this when we are old. Since this film is about the ultimate question in human life and resonating around the world. It became the most famous film of Haneke’s. Then in 2017, Haneke released another film starred the same actor in “Amour”, also talking about the death in an elder life and the suicide among teenagers. Not only old people, but also young people, they are vulnerable in mental and sensitive in life. After knowing about the truth about her father and mother’s secrets, the girl Eve tried to poison her mother and also herself. Her grandfather George is also suffering from illness and empty in life and tried to suicide as well. They two in some extent understand each other but still could not save each other from their own problems. In the end, Eve watched George running into the sea trying to kill himself without doing anything about it but recording with her phone. Deep down in her mind, she does not know if it’s right to prevent Gorge from suicide like her father saved her life. Live or death, does every individual have the free choice of will and action according to principles of Humanism Philosophy? And how we treat our own ethical problems when facing others’ choice of death? Once again, Haneke brought up this philosophy question and made human beings to think about it deeply in advance.

Through the films, Haneke probed into different philosophy questions related to human life: death, age, crime, evil in childhood, human beings' responsibilities, dignity, value, moral conduct, communication problems in families and also modern society, he is the "auteur" who care deeply for human life and objectively explore the question and issues we are facing or will confront in the future. Human are born used to avoid thinking serious problems but Haneke force audience to face through films.

## 2.4 RELATED RESEARCH

At the present time, there are relatively few comprehensive studies on Michael Haneke. After collecting and sorting out research on him through data platforms and channels, it can be mainly classified into two categories: Thesis research on overall Haneke's films, study or analyze on single one of his films. But each category has its own emphasis point and shortcomings.

### 2.4.1 Researches on overall Haneke's films

Based on contents of current researches, it can be observed that the academic exploration of Haneke's films is not comprehensive. The majority of studies primarily focus on technical aspects such as film themes, lighting and color, visual style, camera techniques, space narrative, and special musical treatment, interpreting Haneke's works in terms of societal issues, individual survival dilemma, and the dissection of human relationships.

Shu-wen (2017) in the research named "The Research on The Art of Michael Haneke", Primarily analyzes from the perspective on how Haneke using the family as a unit to depicts modern human's unpleasant existential conditions and deeply rooted spiritual issues. It believed that Haneke's film themes embody the tragic nature of life's unpredictability with intentions of suicide and death. The existence of individuals in society is portrayed in endless loneliness and full of repetitive mechanical daily life routines, leading to moral distortions in family relationships that leads to violence.

Meanwhile, a thorough examination of Michael Haneke's cinematic style and narrative features was conducted. It is analyzed that Haneke's films prefer dark and cold images, simple and distant cinema shots, and flexible in music and sound effects. Further expounded on Haneke's excellence in space narrative, extending narrative by using television screen in the frame, and employing suspense and open-ended resolutions in narrative structure.

Not many researches go deep into the philosophical thinking of Haneke's films, a few starting from the main viewpoints of Western existentialism philosophy or post-modern socialism.

Guang-Yuan (2012) in the research named "Study on Michael Haneke's Films" addresses the modernism and existentialism philosophy in Haneke's film, using the existentialism in western world to interpretate Haneke's film philosophy on internal spiritual world of human being conflicts with the external social environment in modern society, this conflicts of internal and external leads to the depression in daily life and dilemma of human existence. He also analyzed how Haneke chose very limited interior space to enhance feeling of loneliness and despair in narrative, and avoiding straightforward crucial bloody scenes instead of sound effect or objective medium long shots to depict violence. He explored Haneke's life experience to see how it impact on the film art from his childhood in a devoiced family with little caring and love from his father, giving a possible explanation on Haneke's reflection on crime in childhood and consistent attention on middle-class family relationship.

Ye (2020) in the research named "Dilemma, struggle, landscape Post-modernity of Haneke's Film Imagery" discussed the dilemmas of human communication in postmodern society and cultural context. He explained the death imagery in post-modern people's disordered spiritual mind, which caused suicide and murder in Haneke's film. A discussion on how difficult for people to really communicate with each other under the effects of modern media like televisions, cameras and cellphones. Referring to Lacan's "Mirror Stage" theory, interpreted how mirrors as props participating in the narrative in Haneke's films. He came to the conclusion on how death,

media, and mirror imagery in Haneke's films reflect the characteristics of struggles and communication dilemma in postmodernity.

Some studies only focus on a single keyword in Haneke's film themes, such as alienation in social individuals, communication problems, crime and evil, death, etc., which over-amplifies the role of this element in Haneke's entire ideological system of works.

Yuan (2017) in the research named "The Sin that be Shadowed and Highlighted Michael Haneke's film studies" focus on reveal the sin of characters through Haneke's films. It expounded German racial guilty in terms of Haneke was born as a German-speaking director. Summarized into three groups of characters in sin: the perpetrators and the abused, materialist and life self-destroyer, grown-up kids and regressed adults. He also discussed the alienation of people by rational modernism and the ethics in Haneke's films, the determination of responsibility and construction of moral self.

Nan (2018) in the research named "A Life of Alienation Michael Haneke's film aesthetics research" focus on exploring the origin of life alienation from three aspects: no love family relationship, inner needs in mental world and spiritual crisis in modern world. Showing Haneke's persist attention to social reality, let us re-examine ourselves and the present more deeply, and find solutions for individuals to free from self-struggles.

#### **2.4.2 Study or analyze on one single of Haneke's film**

Single film analyzations on Haneke are found mainly for his later famous works since 2001, when his film "The Piano Teacher" (2001) won Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix (2001). Four popular films are studied widely including "The Piano Teacher" (2001), "Funny Games" (2007), "The White Ribbon" (2009), and "Amour" (2012).

Jing (2020) in the research named “Healing Through Vulnerability: Transformative Openness in Michael Haneke’s The Piano Teacher” taking psychopathy as the theme, explore how psychopathy embodies the rejection of vulnerability and its “anti-fragility”, explored people emotional needs for love, belonging and companionship from the character in the film.

Ying (2019) in the Journal article “Convent Another Truth Michael Haneke’s art reconstruction of literature in ‘The Piano Teacher’ “explained how Haneke shift the focus on relationship between mother and daughter in original literature into the abuser and abused relationship between woman and man. As Haneke’s first and only adaption film, he successfully re-constructed the novel story through accurate film language.

Baomin (2022) in the study named “Funny Games of Film Remake: On Michael Haneke’s Shot-by-Shot Remake of his Funny Games” discussed the significance of a shot-by-shot remake of his old film to reduce language barriers to introduce his film to more American and worldwide audience. Four unconventional aspects comparing to Hollywood films are addressed in the study: deliberately hiding violent scenes, setting up multiple times of provocative conversations with the audience, violently change the direction of the story by editing, and an unhappy anti-Hollywood ending.

Herling (2021) in the study named “Haneke avec Foucault: The White Ribbon, Religion, and Violence” examined the nature of the Protestant community depicted in the film, its systems of discipline, repression and control, also the bond between the systems and the violence it caused, utilizing Michel Foucault's characterization of the Christian pastorate.

Rong (2017) in the study named “The Dark Violence under The White Ribbon” analyzed the violence depicted in this film from the depressive symmetrical composition, mise-en-scene of father and son, father and daughter, visual contrast of black and white tone. Yun (2014) in the study “Interpretation of Artistic Style in “Amour” by Michael Haneke” analyzed the minimalism applied in this film through

music, space, light and color. Discussed the violence hidden in love and human dignity, and the metaphorical symbols.

Juan (2023) in the study “An analysis of Haneke's film style - taking “Amour” as an example” discussed the characteristics of chamber drama in Amour. Showing the dilemma between generations and interpretation of the mixture of dreams and memories in the elders.

To conclusion, the existing research mainly focuses on analyzing the early representative trilogy films and a small number of well-known works in Haneke's later period. It does not deeply analyze each work one by one, but prefers to find examples supporting the summarized characteristics, with limited details and discriminations. In fact, there is a big difference in narrative and theme between his early and later works. As to a single analysis of one of Haneke's films, lacks insight into the context of its creation and it is difficult to spot changes in narrative strategies the director's viewpoints through different stories.

However, there is also a notable absence of in-depth and systematic exploration in philosophy and spiritual interpretation on Haneke's viewpoint. Film is the art of expressing opinions through storytelling, a film “auteur” like Haneke, his films always make audience to rethink about the society and their own life, it is more meaningful to study focus on what life philosophy he is trying to express.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to the objectives and questions of this research, analyzing exactly what humanism philosophy appeared in Michael Haneke's in a detailed and specific way, and to breakdown the narrative strategy and structure of the films, qualitative research is chosen for deeper textual analysis. This would provide a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the two study aspects above.

#### 3.1 POPULATION AND SAMPLES

Michael Haneke has directed 12 films through 30 years. There is a very significant difference between his early works and later stage works, and his films after 2001 are more skillful in narrative with variety themes and social topics. Hereby, the later 4 films are chosen as samples for this research, as these 4 films are the most representative and latest films that could understand Michael Haneke's recent style. They are listed as table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Four films of Michael Haneke from 2001 to present

Release Year	Film Name	Film Poster
2001	The Piano Teacher	

Table 3.1 Four films of Michael Haneke from 2001 to present (Cont.)

Release Year	Film Name	Film Poster
2005	Caché	
2009	The White Ribbon	
2012	Amour	

Source: Haneke, 2024

### **3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

The research is divided into two parts, one is to analyze the Humanism Philosophy in Haneke's films, and the second part to is study the narrative style of Michael Haneke.

For the first part, the researcher uses the theories and concepts of Humanism Philosophy to have a contextual analyzation of every single film.

For the second part, the researcher uses related narrative theories and skills to breakdown and analyze and interpretate narrative elements, structure and strategies in every single film by a textual analysis.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

The data of films for analyzation are collected from online website: [www.bttt.com](http://www.bttt.com), searched by each film's name viewed online and downloaded.

The literature review documents and references are collected from online database like "ProQuest" "CNKI", searched by keywords related to Michael Haneke.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

The researcher selected 4 representative films of in the later life of Michael Haneke's and to analyze the films one by one based on its single contextual and background, both from Humanism philosophy concepts and narrative theories.

To deep study the appeared Humanism Philosophy in Haneke's films, the research list down all related principles and principles and to examine the film theme, plots, characters one by one, interpretate and conclude the viewpoints of Humanism Philosophy reflected in the films.

To better understand the narrative style of Michael Haneke, the researcher would break down the narrative elements, strategies, narrative structure, narrative space, narrative perspective, time and pacing, and other unconventional narrative tricks used in Haneke's film. Each film could be different in narrative style.

Here is the Data Analysis Sheet of checklist related to aspects in humanism philosophy and Narrative style that be analyzed.

Table3.2 Check-list of Humanism Philosophy Analysis.

Humanism Philosophy	Film Name			
	The Piano Teacher	Caché	The White Ribbon	Amour
1) Naturalistic World				
2) Human Value and Dignity				
3) Freedom of action and choice				
4) Science, Logic, and Critical thinking				
5) Ethical Conduct				
6) Arts, Culture and Education				
7) Social Justice				
8) Environmental Concern				

Table3.3 Check-list of Narrative Style Analysis.

Narrative	Film Name			
	The Piano Teacher	Caché	The White Ribbon	Amour
Narrative Structure				
1)Narrative Arc				
2) Narrative type				
Narrative Elements				
1) Plot				
2) Theme				

Table3.3 Check-list of Narrative Style Analysis. (Cont.)

Narrative	Film Name			
	The Piano Teacher	Caché	The White Ribbon	Amour
3) Characters				
4) Settings				
5) Viewpoint				
6) Dialogue				
7) Symbolism and Motifs				



## CHAPTER 4

### **HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY ANALYSIS IN MICHAEL HANEKE'S FILMS**

According to the objectives and questions of this research, analyzing exactly what humanism philosophy appeared in Michael Haneke's in a detailed and specific way, and to breakdown the narrative strategy and structure of the films, qualitative research is chosen for deeper textual analyzation. This would provide a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the two study aspects above.

#### **4.1 HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY ANALYSIS IN THE PIANO TEACHER**

“The Piano Teacher” explores some key aspects of humanism philosophy but it doesn't demonstrate it in a straightforward and positive way. On the contrary, the film unveils the consequences of lacking of proper humanism, which would lead to potential psychological issues in human beings' mental status and also distorted relationships with others or society. We would understand the importance of humanism philosophy by experiencing the psychological struggles of the protagonist. Below are some key points that related to humanism philosophy in the film.

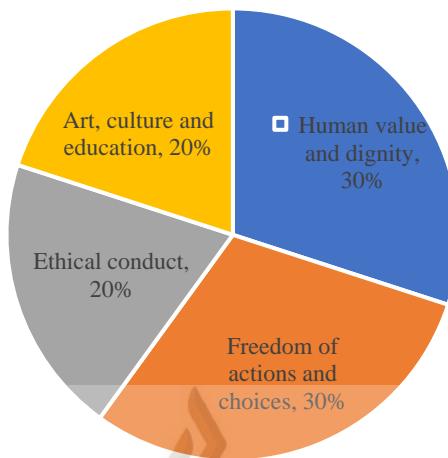


Figure 4.1 Humanism Philosophy Analysis in The Piano Teacher.

#### 4.1.1 Human Value and Dignity in Family and Society

The protagonist of the film Erika Kohut is a talented and skilled piano teacher of her late 30s near 40. As a grown-up adult, she is to have independent life of her own and valued social relations. But she is still under control of her dominated elderly mother even though she has proper profession and income in society, her value and dignity as an individual is not respected by her mother in family life. She is much more considered as a piano instrument to her mother because of her talent in it. Her mother treats her strictly since she was a child, ignoring her desires and needs as a normal human being. She gains no respect from her mother and feels no sense of value except playing piano. She lacks of common sense of value and dignity as normal human beings, and her only origin of value and dignity is piano, which misleads her psychology development to a abnormal manner. She even sleeps with her mother in the same bedroom putting two single beds together, no private personal space, which is a sign of no personal dignity in life, her every move is under her mother's watch and her mother could comment on her and even check her personal closet and bag as she wants to, left no respect and dignity for her in the family. She has been treated that way for life long and got used to it, even she wanted to confront with her mother, she's still got used to live with her mother and been controlled by her. This formats the distorted relationship of them two. Erika often screams and fights with her mother but after all, she still hugs her crying and told her

she loves her. This kind of twisted relationship is becoming Erika's life in all. She is suffering from it but she could not live without it, which leads her into a masochism.



Figure 4.2 Humanism philosophy analysis of the piano teacher, Erika's mother  
checking her personal stuff

Source: Haneke, 2024

On the other hand, Erika could find her value and dignity in career and society. She is a valued and respected teacher by the students, her students appreciate her talents in piano and all want to learn from her even though she is so cold and strict to her students. As a piano teacher in society, she found her value and dignity as an individual. Because of she being treated by her mother without respect, she did the same to her students. When she got jealous about the girl Walter talking to, she put glass pieces into her pocket and hurt her hand badly, it's a horrible and unforgiven crime in some extent, which reflects her no respect and value for other person's life.

Erika also treats herself with no value and dignity because she has never been treated in a proper way, thus she doesn't know how to respect and value others in life. We could see her often hurting herself when she had upset feelings or to experience sex in a perverted way. As a long-term repressed masochism, she could not understand and feel the dignity as normal individuals, the only way in her world is to be treated under controlled or beat, abuse. Erika is a negative example to human value and dignity, who has no experience in valued and respectful life since a child, which forms her distorted

psychology and pains, struggles in normal relationships. Without proper experiences and concept of humanism value and dignity, one could totally lose control on herself and also do harm to others.

#### **4.1.2 Freedom of Actions and Choices with Psychological Issues**

One core aspect that the film explores into is the repression VS. free individual actions and choices. Long-term repression from family is the origin of Erika's psychological issues and self-destructive tendency. When confronting with repression from family and expectational pressures society, how should we defend the freedom of actions and choices for ourselves. And what the consequences would be when one losing free actions and choices in life?



Figure 4.3 Humanism philosophy analysis of the piano teacher, Erika watching sexual videos in a shop

Source: Haneke, 2024

In the film, Erika was confronted with repression from her mother which left no more choice and freedom of pursing what she really needed or rethink about her life. She is totally under controlled by her mother of what she should do and where she goes, her mother would call to her office to check on when is she off and if she got home late, she would be questioned where she had been and what she had done. Even her mother could inspect her handbag checking her personal stuff and what she bought, and open

her closet to inspect her dresses to see which is suitable for her and which one is not, even throw away her dresses if she is not happy with it. Under such circumstances, Erika lost all her freedom to choose what to do, where to go and even her preferences on dresses. And she doesn't have free actions because she has to report to everything she did to her mother. If she did something wrong, her mother would be mad at her and they would have a fight about it. She has been treated like this since she was a kid so that she got live on with it. She quarrels and fight with her mother over it many times which reflects her inner desire of freedom and the struggles of being under control. Losing freedom of action and choice making her a psychopath of depressed desires and distorted exit for expressions.

Societal expectations also add on her repressions. As she is talented and counted on so much expectations on success in music career, she has to sacrifice her other desires and needs to focus on piano practice so that she could fulfil the expectations from society and maintain her reputations in career. This kind of societal expectations also defined what a piano teacher should or not do, thus she always pretends elegant and cool impressions in front of people which is not the real her. The societal expectation is another way of depriving her freedom in actions and choices, which worsen her psychological issues.

After Erika's psychology has been distorted, she chooses abnormal ways of as exit for her repressed desires and needs, she takes actions to go to erotic stores to watch sexual videos and smelling others' used tissues to feel sexual experiences, and she also peeps on others having sex in the car but pee while they reach orgasm. She even chooses to cut her vagina to blood to have an orgasm. As a result of long-term repression, she has no choice but to fulfil her inner desires through abnormal and masochistic manners. We could see the terrible consequences from losing freedom of actions and choices out of one's real inner needs. You could not kill the desires inside one's mind but to push them to an extreme and distorted way to find an exit out.

#### 4.1.3 Ethical Conduct in an Unconventional Relationship

The film challenges and test audiences' moral compass by pushing to extreme and unconventional situations. It forces us to rethink the ethical conduct of individuals confronting with psychological issues and sexual taboos. Another core topic in this film is how do we judge the criterions of ethical conduction when in unconventional relationship and impacted by long-term repressions. It adds more complexity to morality in the context of personal psychological issues.



Figure 4.4 Humanism philosophy analysis of the piano teacher, Erika putting glass pieces into girl's pocket

Source: Haneke, 2024

There are three key events related to ethical conduct issues in the film that worthy to discuss in details. The first event is when Erika saw Walter talking and helping another young innocent girl in the concert rehearsal, she got so jealous and envy to put glass fragments into the girl's pocket, which results in her hands were badly hurt. It challenges the audiences' ethical standards of such terrible behavior. Only because of such small things, Erika could over react to lose ethical control to hurt the girl badly. Does psychology issue an excuse for her bad behavior or she should be legal responsible for her crazy revenge? The director didn't give any clear answer to this question but left it ambiguity to the audiences to think. Could you forgive this considering she's psychological insane and under depress and repression?

The second event is that when Walter found out Erika did such terrible thing to the girl just because of jealous, he didn't blame Erika but wants to have sex with her in the bathroom. Walter is so young and passionate, he got blind by his love and passion for Erika, which makes him losing ethical conduct, he even considered such terrible behavior a reaction from Erika's love for him. But later when he wanted have normal sex with Erika, she did another personal unethical thing to Walter, that is she won't let Walter have normal sexual intercourse with her but left him suffering after she had a blow job for him. Walter realized her abnormal sexual desire and distorted psychology, still considering it as a sexual game from her that hopefully he could change Erika by his passionate love for her. This is the moment that Erika did personal unethical things to Walter, playing with his sexual desires and making him suffering from it. As she is a masochism, she planned induce Walter into her sexual abuse game as she wanted. This also raises up the ethical challenge that if one could do this to other ones when she's suffering the inner psychological pains, transferring the struggles and sickness into normal person around her.



Figure 4.5 Humanism philosophy analysis of the piano teacher, Erika and Walter kissing in bathroom

Source: Haneke, 2024

But dramatically, in the end of film, after long-term suffering and impacts from Erika, Walter lost control of himself finally and turned into a sadism as Erika wanted before. Erika's psychology illness infected Walter deeply. He broke into Erika's

apartment and raped her with her mother locked inside the bedroom by their side. While Walter was doing all the terrible things, Erika realized that now it is not what she wanted and she didn't really enjoy this beat and sex abuse, but it's too late, Walter has totally lost his mind and turned into a monster that driven by primal animal nature. Erika aroused the animal nature of Walter but she could not stop it anymore. She became the victim herself. She begged Walter to stop but it didn't work anymore. She could only suffer from what she provoked. Most importantly here in ethical conduct, Walter's behavior also challenges societal standards in an extreme extent, how do we judge the action of rape under this situation? It is the private unconventional sadism and masochism behavior between them two or it should be put in the context of societal legal principles? All Walter's changes and behaviors are caused by Erika's back-and forth torturing emotionally and physically, does she have to suffer the results herself? Still, the director didn't answer it straightly but left it opened to the audience. Everyone could have one's own criterion of ethical conduct considering all contextual situations.



Figure 4.6 Humanism philosophy analysis of the piano teacher, Walter raping Erika

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 4.1.4 Art, Music and Educational Impact on Human Spirit and Personality

As a well-known classic music lover, Michael Haneke applied music elements in many of his films. This one is a typical film discussing about the influence of music on human spirit and impacts on one's psychology and personality. Usually, we thought

music has positive effect on human spirit and culture, but this film also discussed the negative effect if music takes all one's time and pursuit excessively the success in art may do harm to one's normal life desires and needs fulfilments, which would lead to psychological issues if not handled in a proper way.

Erika is a successful and talented piano teacher in Vienna, a rich musical culture city. Her value of human beings built on her success and talents in piano, but this was over controlled by her mother pushing her practice piano in an extreme strict way which repressed her other desires and needs as normal people. She immersed herself with piano so long that she doesn't have normal social life and connections with others. Piano and music became the only thing she knows about life and lost the ability of a social individual. When she talks about understandings of music, she could talk in deep and continuously, but when comes to other emotional or daily stuff, she became fragmental talking and full of orders and confrontations in the tone. As a result of long-term practice piano alone, her personality was complete formed into isolation and alienation from society. She treats her student in a cold, distant and strict way, like the way she was treated in piano training.

But on the other hand, music is her only way of escaping from the repression from family and society. She plays the best of Schubert's music and she understands it in a unique and profound extent, which makes her proud and respected by others. And through music, she digs out her psychological issues and explain it in her own way. In some extent, she is both the victim and beneficiary from music. Music makes who she is and it also destroys other aspects of her life. This raises up the issues in musical and cultural education here, how should we enjoy art and culture education in a proper way without harm other aspects of individual life.



Figure 4.7 Humanism philosophy analysis of the piano teacher, Erika teaching a student in cold way

Source: Haneke, 2024

## 4.2 HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY ANALYSIS IN CACHÉ

The film Caché also named Hidden in English, which reflects the core theme of hidden secret and truth of personal and the society. The film explored the guilty past of the protagonist Gorge's sin in his childhood though an anonymous surveillance videotape and also unveiled the covered collective guilty of French government in 1961 Paris Massacre which numbers of Algerian were killed. The film delves into many aspects of humanism philosophy in a depth, most significantly in the perspective of social justice when confronting with historical event, ethical conduct for both children and adults, human dignity under poor conditions, the free actions and choices to defend one's dignity and honor, and also the impact of education.

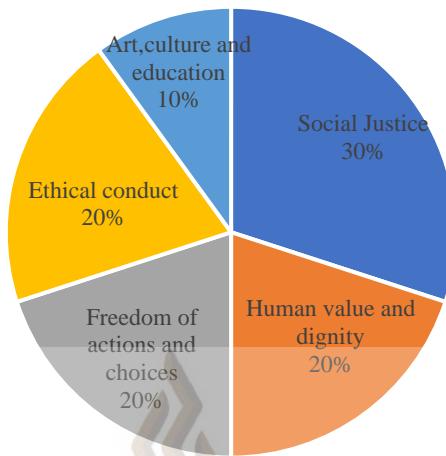


Figure 4.8 Humanism Philosophy Analysis in Caché

#### 4.2.1 Social Justice for Significant Historical Event

One of the key reasons why Michael Haneke created this film is that he knows about the real truth about Paris massacre of 1961, during which 200 Algerians may have been shot or murdered by France police secretly, but the French government covered the facts of this event and public investigations were not allowed for years. There are almost no records on the historic massacre until 1997. Michael Haneke learned about this event and was shocked by the hidden truth and also the cheating from government, so he decided to make this history into his film, which taken as an allegory about collective guilt and memory of France's Algerian War and colonialism to Algeria.

This fact of history could be learned from the protagonist Gorge's narrative at the end part of film after he witnessed Majid's suicide in front of him. He confessed to his wife that in October 1961, Algerians were called to a demonstration in Paris, but the police drowned about 200 Arabs in the Seine which may including Majid's parents, who were farm labors of his family, Gorge's dad went to look for them but been told he should be glad to be rid of two blacks. When Gorge's parents wanted to adopt Majid as he was an orphan, but Gorge not only lied about Majid coughing blood with some disease but also lied about Majid trying to kill and threaten him with a bloody axe, which resulted in Majid been sent away from the family to an orphanage. Losing the care of

family and also chance of good education, Majid's life ended up in miserable and poor conditions years later when he reappeared in Gorge's life. Some visual materials are also shown in the TV media in Gorge's home in some shots, which reflects the historical facts and societal issues. As Michael Haneke has been working in a German TV station for years, he is used to unveil the truth via television medias.



Figure 4.9 Humanism philosophy analysis of Caché, military news on TV

Source: Haneke, 2024

Majid's parents were innocent people but killed crucially by the government and no one took the responsibility of it and even the government has covered the truth for years. It is collective guilty that France committed to Algerians that should be claimed and take the responsibilities for it. There were numbers of orphans who lost their parents like Majid, he is just one of the victims. What are the social justice principles when confronting with such historical and political events? How should French government responsible for the results and make up for the lost? When government turned out to be the criminal, who is to judge this in justice? There is no answer of these questions from the film and it's also hard to have answers in real life. But as a society of justice, every human being is granted with equal rights no matter their nations and races. Majid's parents were murdered because of their race which is unacceptable in a fair and justice society with legal protections. And the government's actions of covering the truth is another serious crime again.

Not only Majid's parents' death in the massacre, but also Majid's suicide in the end, no one takes any responsibility for it. Majid's death is considered as individual suicide but he was forced to death by Gorge. Gorge forced him to leave in the childhood and again he called police to arrest Majid and his son just because of he mistakenly assumed Majid had kidnaped his son Pierrot. With no actual evidence of kidnapping, the police just convinced by Gorge's words and the prejudice for Majid's race, innocent person was taken away by police. That's the factor that also leads to Majid's suicide decision, he could not see any change and hope living in the world with dignity. And as an Algerian living in France country, he is always under suspicion, discriminated, and disrespected, could be taken away by the police for any reason like his parents. The social justice has not been upheld yet.

#### 4.2.2 Ethical Conduct for Both Children and Adults

In Humanism Philosophy we usually discuss about the ethical conduct referring adults, but through this film, the topic extends to the ethical and guilty issues of children. Both adults and kids are supposed to be aware of moral principles, especially kids who are lack of logical and rational thinking and much harder to control their behaviors. How we should face the guilty that we committed in childhood, how the sin would affect our psychology when one grown up and how to take responsibilities for the crime committed in childhood. Should one escape from what he did in childhood or he should make up for the related consequences? Michael Haneke has raised all these questions up in the film and left it for audiences to think themselves.

In the film, Gorge in his childhood lied to his parents about Majid had infective disease coughing blood to stop his parents adopting Majid after Majid's parents were murdered in the Paris Massacre in 1961. Kids are supposed to be honesty and kind but Gorge was a liar at the age of 6, just out of his selfishness and paranoid of Majid would take away what he had in the family. His personality of selfish, paranoid as a liar was shown out in his childhood. To force Majid away from his family, he set up a second trap for Majid, saying his father asked him to cut the chicken but actually it was Gorge who planned this, Gorge taking it as evidence that Majid threatening him with the

bloody axe and lied to his parents about it. Then Majid was sent away to an orphanage ever since. Majid lost his parents and lost the only person who were nice to him and grow up alone in the orphanage without any good educational chance, and living a poor life in Paris ever after. Gorge is the one who has no sympathy to an Algerian orphan and took away the life and chance Majid could have. Lie, guilty, sin, are what Gorge had committed in his childhood, and all these memories recurring in his nightmares when he became an adult. The unpaid guilty past is always hunting him.

When Gorge is grown up, his inside personality has never changed, he turned into a typical bourgeois middle-class person who is selfish, paranoid and hypocrisy, he cares only about his career, social reputation and maintaining what he owned at present. He is too weak to face the past guilty and run away from responsibility, since he is afraid the exposure of hidden past secrets may influence his present life and family. He keeps lying to his wife Anne about the videotape just like he was lying to his parents when he was a child. This reflects a fact that if one committed crime at a young age and he is possible to repeat the crime when he grows up if the moral behavior has been punished and corrected. And senior Gorge did the terrible thing to senior Majid the second time by threatening him without solid evidence. Even Majid already said he had nothing to do with the surveillance videotape, he didn't believe his words as he taken everyone is dishonest and a liar like himself. Once again when Gorge's son disappeared, he immediately thought it was Majid who kidnapped his son and he asked police to arrest Majid and Majid's son with no evidence. Majid was deeply hurt again by what Gorge did to him and he could not bear it any more, to defend his human dignity and honor, he chose suicide in front of Gorge to prove his innocence. Although the police considered it as suicide, the real factor that caused Majid's death is Gorge's behavior and altitude towards him. In a sense, Senior Gorge had committed a crime at the second time. He is to be responsible for consequences of what he did to Majid morally. But he escaped from moral judgement again and denying of it when confronted by Majid's son. He refused to face the guilty truth he caused and run away from the relevant ethical responsibility of it.



Figure 4.10 Humanism philosophy analysis of Caché, junior Majid got bloody

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 4.2.3 Human Dignity Under Poor Condition

Human value and dignity are most important aspects for human beings to live a satisfied and happy life spiritually. No matter one's living condition is poor or rich, one's social class and wealth, he could always find his unique value in the world and live with dignity. This topic is brought up in the film through Majid's life experiences and his choice to death. As a poor man like Majid with less education and live a miserable life, how does he recover from his childhood trauma and find his value in life? When facing racial and class discriminations, how should he defend his honor and dignity? Is it worthy to suicide because of Gorge's distrust and insult?

When Majid was a kid, his parents were murdered in the 1961 Paris Massacre, and he became an orphan since then, which left him deeply in pain. While Gorge's parents wanted to adopt him, it was like saving his life. But his life was ruined again by Gorge's selfishness and paranoia, as a little kid, he had no ability to heal himself from being abandoned again and again, and also been framed by Gorge with no ability to defend or explain himself clearly. He became the victim of French governmental crime and also Gorge's personal sin. His dignity as independent human being was ruined by them and he suffered a lot from it. When Gorge found Majid in a poor apartment, we could know that how miserable was Majid's life for all these years. He has been living

in low quality and dignity life. His cheap, messy room made huge contrasted to Gorge's gorgeous and cultural house. They had a big gap in social class, education and wealth. But this gap should not define one's living dignity as equal human beings. Gorge came to question Majid without solid evidence and he continues to threaten Majid after Majid said he didn't do it. During the conversation, Majid has been polite and kind to Gorge, asking him to get in and sit down, but Gorge is too arrogant to sit down talking calmly to Majid. After so many years of miserable life, Majid met the man who hurt him in the childhood, and again been questioned and suspected after all these years, Majid's self-dignity was hurt deeply. That's why he cried for almost one hour after Gorge left. Gorge is same as when he was a kid, treating him with no respect and kindness.

What's worse more, Gorge called the police to arrested Majid and his son when Gorge's son disappeared. As poor Algerian living in France, they are to be easily arrested and suspected once got involved in some shameful things. They became the criminal suspect just because their race and nation, and they are not rich with decent social class. This is the final factor trigger to Maijd's suicide. He realized his dignity was seriously downtrodden and he could not bear the insult any more. Although he is not rich with good education, but he still has human dignity of honesty, respect and kindness. He is not to be framed up and arrested by police without any excuses. He chose to die to defend his final dignity. That's why he asked Gorge to witness his suicide. Majid used his own way to protect his final dignity as human beings, to prove to Gorge that he is an innocent and honest man, no one can insult freely. He proved to the society that he worth dignity more than his life.



Figure 4.11 Humanism philosophy analysis of Caché, Senior Majid got arrested

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 4.2.4 Free Actions and Choices to Defend Dignity

Human beings have free choices and actions at his will and also one is to be responsible for the consequences caused, even facing death itself. One could not experience and feel like anyone else, so we could not judge other's actions and choices by our own value or social standards. Free actions and choices are core aspects in humanism philosophy that makes us individuals with independence, we should value and respect each other's choice and actions equally.

This freedom of choice and action reflected by Majid's choice of suicide, which is the climax of the film. Majid was second time been insulted by Gorge's distrust and questioned about his honest personality, as a decent innocent poor man, he could not stand a second time psychological injury by the same person after so many years again, and this time Majid's son was also been arrested by the police because of Gorge's suspects, Majid had no other ways of proving his innocence and protecting his son and himself from infringe on human dignity, he made the choice decisively and bravely of a suicide in front of Gorge. After the second Gorge came into his room, he took out the knife without any hesitation and cut his own throat rapidly after said he asked Gorge here to be a witness to this. No fear, no hesitation and no more words to explain, Majid

chose to defend his human dignity with suicide. This is the darkest moment of Majid's life but also his highlight moment.

Majid had his whole life living in poor and lower dignity in France society, not as Gorge's upper-middle-class status, he is the bottom of society. He and Gorge had huge gap in social class but they had no difference in human dignity and free rights. Personally, he is a man with honest and dignity, unlike Gorge's selfishness, paranoid and being a liar. Majid's fate has been under other's control since he was a kid, he was set up by Gorge to be sent away to orphanage and living a marginalized poor life in France society with parents killed by the government, he never had the power to change his life or destiny until so many years.

Majid is the victim of both France's colonialism and also Gorge's guilty past, his destiny was never in his own hands and he also had no power or freedom to live a life as he wanted. The choice of suicide is finally his own action on proving his dignity and controlling his own destiny even it was death. Finally, his choice of death set him free from the heavy burden of Algerian history and trauma from his childhood that hunting him for a whole life. He is really free at last, away from the unbearable past.



Figure 4.12 Humanism philosophy analysis of Caché, Majid suicide in front of Gorge  
Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 4.2.5 Importance and Impact of Education

Education is seen as a key approach for individual development in intellectual, moral and social life in humanism philosophy, which believes in human potential, value and dignity in every individual. With good education, one is to master more skills on critical thinking and ways of self-expression through the tools of science, technology logical, and arts. They are to have better involvement in social activities and obtain better material and spiritual life. Education is also considered as a mean to better understand human values like compassion, empathy and responsibility, for a better moral conduct and civilization. In the film *Caché*, Michael Haneke has implied the importance and impact of education to individuals in many aspects. Most significantly is the educational background of Majid resulted in his later actions and choices of death, the second is presence of Gorge's and Majid's sons, the educational progress of the young generation in France.

Firstly, Majid's suicide is considered as a complex and multi-factored outcome of hidden history, personal guilty and also Majid's lacking of good educational chance. Majid chose suicide as an extreme way of defending himself, because he could not find another way to prove his innocence, like verbal explain or logical proof with evidences. As a man raised up in an orphanage, he was never taught to how to defend his right in a logical and rational manner, he could only made choices and actions out of human nature, which is emotional and impulsive. He is powerless without enough educational knowledge on how to heal himself from a childhood psychological trauma and fight for his own rights facing suspicion and unreasonable blame from an upper-class enemy that caused his past trauma. We could see from the conversation scene of him and Gorge confronting, he is so speechless and has no skill in defending himself verbally, he could only express his hurt feelings by crying for an hour and told Gorge his sick reactions of seen Gorge on the Tv show after years, he could not verbally explain the truth or defend himself in a logical or legal way. His poor education is also a factor that killed him.

By contrast, the manner of Majid's son and Gorge's son have a big difference with their fathers. In the scene when Majid's son came to Gorge's office after Majid's

suicide, although he hates Gorge a lot in his heart of caused his father's death, he behaves himself like a rational and controlled man without any crazy emotional actions of yelling or fighting. He said to Gorge that his father has educated him very well even though his father's educational chance was taken away by Gorge, and he is here only to see how Gorge's feelings and reactions on causing Majid's suicide. Majid's son is not controlled by anger or hate, he remained rational controlled of himself, which reflects his better education and rational thinking than his father. He is considered as a progress of past generation like as his father on dealing with trauma and fighting with injustice.

Most importantly, the final scene of Majid's son and Gorge's son talking in front of the school gate, is taken as an implication of the new well-educated generation could remember the history and made right choices on social justice on their own critical thinking, which differs from last generation. Gorge's son Pierrot is unlike his father either, which we could see from his alienation from his hypocritical father and action of disappearance when suspecting his mother had dishonest affairs with her friend. Pierrot is depicted as a pure, honesty young teenager with good educational chance, he would grow up an adult unlike his selfish and guilty father.



Figure 4.13 Humanism philosophy analysis of Caché, the sons are talking in school

Source: Haneke, 2024

The final scene of school implies the hope of education to bring a progress in hidden history, social justice, and also personal honest and dignity. Although the

director hasn't unveiled the answer of who sent the surveillance videotapes and Majid's son denied of it, Gorge's son Pierrot talking to Majid's son makes Pierrot one of the implicated suspects who may confront his father's guilty past and also the collective guilty of the society. The new generation is to remember the injustice hidden history and take responsibility for a better and justice future.

### 4.3 HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY ANALYSIS IN THE WHITE RIBBON

The White Ribbon is a black and white film about a series mysterious violence happened in a German protestant village before the World War I that explores the roots of evil related to religion repression and child crimes. It is a micro version of the whole Germany society to imply where and how the German Nazi and Fascism evil guilty origin from. The film mainly explored the following aspects of humanism philosophy: naturalistic world in a protestant village, human value and dignity under hierarchy society, free actions and choices under control, ethical conduct for both adults and children and also impact of education.

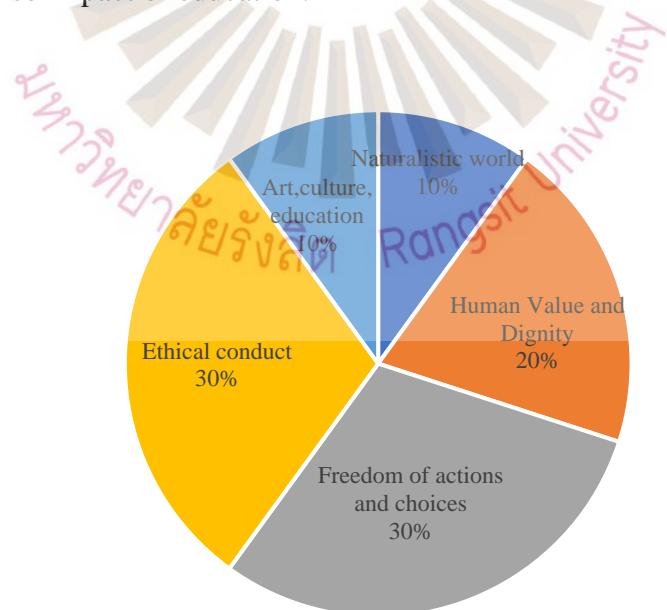


Figure 4.14 Humanism Philosophy Analysis in The White Ribbon

### 4.3.1 Naturalistic World in a Protestant Village

In the perspective of Humanism philosophy, it rejects believe in supernatural phenomena like God, religious dogma, mystical beliefs. Humanism philosophy understands the world based on human activities and observations, life experiences and logical thinking. In the film *The White Ribbon*, Michael Haneke discussed the viewpoint of Naturalistic world in an opposite way by setting up the story as a German protestant village which people are under controlled by religion and societal hierarchy.

The white ribbon itself is a religious symbol which means purity and innocence in human spirit while in the film it is an ironic symbol because the evil and violence in the children was caused by strict and cold religious repression from family and society. The pastor's older kids Klara and Martin are the core leaders of the children criminals that did horrible violence harm to those poor little kids. They hurt the midwife's mentally ill son to blind in the name of God's punishment quoting note quoting Bible Exodus 20:5. They made the trap causing the doctor's fallen off the horse maybe because they knew the doctor's evil inner mind, his shame secret with the midwife and long-term sexual harassment to his own daughter. They beat up the baron's little son out of revenge to the baron's cold govern over the village. Michael Haneke depicts how cold and repressive the religious rules could be to the extreme, especially for the children, they are the weak ones in the world so that they have no ability of resistance. As a result of years of repression by religious rules, they gradually got twisted in deep mind, violence and evil start to grow in their mind, which makes them take revenge actions on other innocent kids. To some extent, this is the extremely negative impact of religious beliefs, which states the opposite viewpoint of beliefs in Naturalistic world. The director challenged the existence of religion, does it really lead people to good or it on the contrary ruined the purity and innocence of children? The value and impact of religion should be questioned and also how the world works, how human beings' roles and value among the naturalistic world.



Figure 4.15 Humanism philosophy analysis of the white ribbon, Martin forced to wear on the white ribbon

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 4.3.2 Human Value and Dignity under Hierarchical Society

The story is set up in a German village with strict hierarchy, women, children and poor farmers are under controlled by the baron, and the pastor mostly. In material life, the baron owns most of the village's resources and he could decide the food and labor work over the village, everyone is afraid of his power and has to follow his rules. While mentally, the pastor controls the religious spirit of the villagers and repress human nature by strict religious rules as it's a Protestant village. If someone didn't follow the religious requirements, the pastor is to punish them physically and mentally, he is even harder to his own children. Under double repressions from society and religion, individuals are hard to have their own human value and dignity. The poor farmer's wife got accidentally died while working in the lumberyard, but he is so afraid to blame it on the baron, since he depends on the baron allowing his work to feed his whole family, if he accuses the baron of his wife's death, he could no longer working on the farm to feed his other kids. The poor farmer has to live on without human dignity for himself and his wife. After his oldest son ruined the baron's cabbage field, the baron forbidden them to work on his farm, the poor farmer family had no other way for food and it pushes the farmer to the extreme situation that he hung himself to death finally. The farmer's death is the result of unfair societal hierarchy which left individuals no independent resources

and abilities for life, they are so powerless to live an independent life, to defend their human value and dignity. Their lives are determined by the ruling classes. So, in a hierarchy social structure, human value and dignity are also under repression and much harder to realize.

On the other hand, the extremely strict religious control over the villagers and children constrains the mental freedom and thinking of human value and dignity. In the name of religion and God, children and villagers are forced to follow the dehumanized religious rules which goes against humanity. The pastor's children are the mostly victimized ones. The children are grown up in a depressed and violent family environment seeing what their parents and other adults' horrible actions and got twisted psychology in mind, they are usually punished because of some minor mistakes and required to stay extreme pure and innocent, due to long-term repression of human nature and lacking of thinking on individual value and dignity, they became evil and violent from their bottom heart. The pastor even goes against teenager nature by tying up his son Martin's hands to the bed to stopping him from masturbation, this is also insulting the child's dignity as normal human beings. He also punishes his own daughter only because she speaking loudly in the classroom, which leads to his daughter's revenge of killing the pastor's bird in the cage with a scissor. With repression of individual human value and dignity, the rules of religion would only lead to opposite effects on human beings.



Figure 4.16 Humanism philosophy analysis of the white ribbon, the midwife

insulted by the doctor

Source: Haneke, 2024

No human value and dignity also reflecting in the relationship of the doctor, the midwife and the doctor's daughter. The midwife helped the doctor taking care of his family since his wife died and kept sexual relationship with him to satisfy him, but after the doctor got recovered from the hospital, he got tired of the midwife and insulted her time after time without any respect. He also treats his own daughter as a sexual tool for him and did sexual harassment to his young girl in a long term. As a decent and respectful profession, the doctor indeed is such a dirty horrible guy who had no any respect to women, regarding them like sexual target no matter who she is. The women in the doctor's family had no any human value and dignity as individual women.

#### **4.3.3 Free Actions and Choices under Control**

Humanism philosophy believe that individual human beings should have their own free choices and actions, and they would also take responsibilities for their actions with proper moral conduct. Free choice and actions are critical for building human independence and individual values. Without free choices and actions, human beings are unable to live an independent and valuable life as their own wishes. While in this film, the free actions and choices are extremely constrained and repressed by societal classes and also religious rules. The village community is made up of strict social hierarchy of the baron, the pastor, and the doctor, they controlled the resources, food, health, moral and spiritual rules over the women and children, forcing them to live and act as what they required, left them no choices of their own. Once the children or women go against their wishes, they would be punished physically and mentally.

The white ribbon is the key symbol for religious constrains. The pastor ties the white ribbon on his own children to remind them stay in pure and innocent, but it's almost a suffocative bound for such young kids to act like what their pastor father wanted them to be. The white ribbon deprived the children's free choices but only to follow the pastor's strict and unfair rules. They are under cold and strict family disciplines which would kill the innocence of the children on the contrary. Such strict and cold religious rules didn't bring any good for the children's healthy growth but push them into a twisted evil psychology situation, turning them into young criminals to

revenge the repression they had suffered from family and society. They did horrible violence to other innocent kids to punish their parents in the name of religion, just like what their pastor father did to them with religious rules.



Figure 4.17 Humanism philosophy analysis of the white ribbon, the pastor punishing his children before dinner

Source: Haneke, 2024

Not only the children had no free actions and choices, but also the baroness herself has no freedom either. She is the richest and most respectful woman in this village, but her innocent little son was still badly hurt by mysterious violence. As the wife of the baron, she hates the violence and hatred among this village but she had no choice of changing anything. She could only take her little son to get away from the village for a while, but when she turned back, her son was again beat up by children violence, this time, she could no longer stand the violence and also the baron's coldness. She asked for a divorce to the baron, but the baron is so angry with this and it's not easy for her to get away from this. In the end, the World War I broke out and there is no definite solution to the baroness's divorce. We could see how vulnerable and hopeless the children and women can be when facing strong hierarchy and religious constrains. They both are deprived of free actions and choices as basic human rights.

#### 4.3.4 Ethical Conduct of Both Adults and Children

Ethical conduct is a very key aspect in Humanism philosophy since it believes that individuals have free choices and actions on their own, thus they should be completely responsible for their behaviors and results. How individuals make decisions and principles they have to follow is related to their ethical conduct. Individuals must act and choose without hurting others' benefit or life, that's the basic ethical conduct principle they should follow and use it to regulate their behaviors. We usually discuss ethical conduct among adults, while in this film Michael Haneke focus it on the ethical conduct of the children. The film explores the roots of evil, the roots were planted into the younger generation since they were kids by their parents and society through religious repression and societal oppression, this is how the evil roots came from in the context of German society before World War I, the village is a microcosm of the whole Germany society and the children in the village imply the next generation that's growing up during World War I, who are possibly turned into Nazi under the impact of violence and evil since they were young.



Figure 4.18 Humanism philosophy analysis of the white ribbon, the midwife's son got seriously injured to blind

Source: Haneke, 2024

The children in the film although under very strict religious, family and societal control but the extreme constraints lead to a opposite results that makes the children rebel

from their bottom heart and they are to revenge the repressions and sufferings to the hypocritical adults and other innocent kids. They perhaps knew about the doctor's dirty secrets with the midwife so they set up the trap to make him fall off his horse to badly injured, and they tied up the midwife's son to the tree and hurt him to blind to punish them in the name of God. They kidnaped the baron's little son and beat him hardly to revenge the baron for his abuse of his authority over the villagers. The pastor's daughter even killed her father's innocent bird in the cage to revenge his punishment for her in the classroom. All these violence and crimes are committed by the children and they have no moral constrains for themselves since they are young and the adults never believe that such innocent kids of that age could done such horrible violent crimes which are much terrible than adults. With no moral constrains in their childhood, we could not imagine what they would become when they grow up. This is the reason why there are so many Nazis in German around World War I that caused a terrible war all over the world. Thus, we should pay more attention to children ethical conduct since a young age before it's too late. Ethical conduct is not only set up for adults but also for children.

#### **4.3.5 Impact of Education**

In Humanism Philosophy, education is a key mean of human development including cultivating critical thinking and individual autonomy and cultural knowledges, most importantly, it allows human beings to have a way to learn how to be kind with compassion to others. In the film, the director depicts the how the education situation and principles under strict societal hierarchy and religious repressions before World War I, we could both see how crucial the family education is and how cold and goes against humanity the social education there and the terrible results it leads to the children. Education is a significant role in shaping the children's beliefs, personalities and attitudes towards others. If the children are educated in a repressive environment like the pastor's family, and they are always physically and mentally punished for minor mistakes, it would possibly lead to a twisted psychology, violence and evil would be planted into their childish heart.



Figure 4.19 Humanism philosophy analysis of the white ribbon, the pastor threatens his children out of masturbating

Source: Haneke, 2024

We know from the film that the pastor's oldest daughter Klara and son Martin could be the core criminals who planned all the violence and crimes, thus we could dig into the pastor's education manner to his children to see the impact of unproper education could do to innocent children. The first scene in the pastor's family is the day Klara and Martin came back home late and missed the dinner, their pastor father got angry and educated all of their children before dinner and punish all of them no dinner tonight and he insists that Klara and Martin should be tied up a white ribbon to remind them of purity and innocence. We could see the family education atmosphere here is very depressive and cold, the pastor is not like a father but a training officer in the army, the children are treated like soldiers with no mercy and compassion. Long term influence of their cold and distant father, they would gradually become the same one. And when Martin turned to the age of a young man who would have natural physical needs like masturbation, his father firstly threatens him that it would get him badly sick and die which is absolutely unscientific, and then he tied Martin's hands to the bed to stop him doing that. It is completely goes against human nature and repress man's natural needs at proper age. Punishment, threaten, and repression are the principles of the pastor's educational manners which is seriously wrong for the children. It could not stop the kids from mistakes but push them to the opposite side of rebelling and revenge. Nice, patient, and scientific education manners could influence the children to the good

side but harsh, cold educational could only effect oppositely and causes violence, evil and revenge from the children's heart. So, we should pay much attention to how we educate the children in a proper and gentle way to cultivate them into kind and good adults in the future.

#### 4.4 HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY ANALYSIS IN AMOUR

The film Amour mainly focusing on exploration of the cruel problems in elderly life, which mostly related to the choice between human dignity and death, ethical and free actions and conduct, and the importance of spiritual functions of arts, music and education. Haneke provokes the critical thinking in depth related to these aspects of humanism philosophy in modern society.

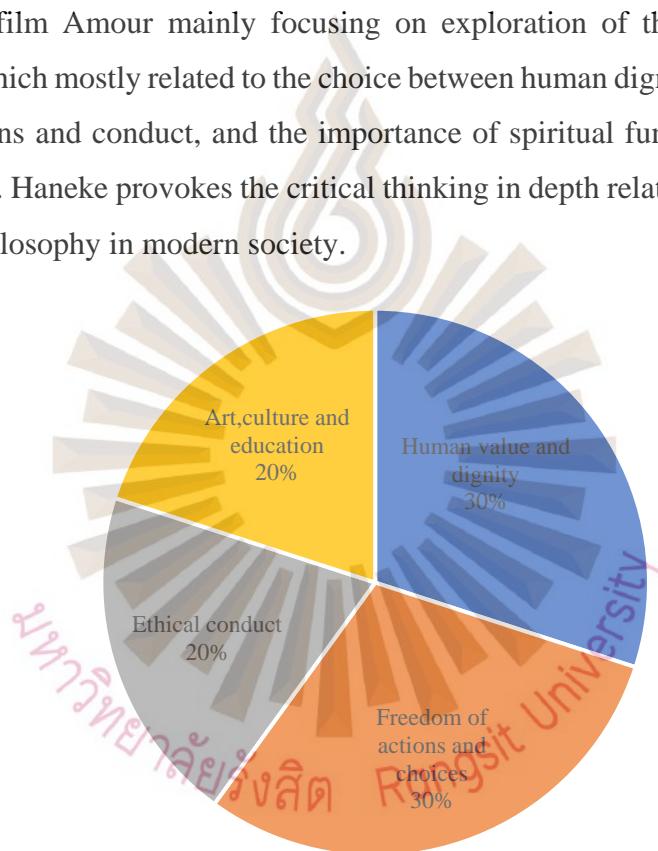


Figure 4.20 Humanism Philosophy Analysis in Amour

##### 4.4.1 Human Value and Dignity in Aging

Human value and dignity are the core aspects in humanism philosophy which affirmed the existence and value of human beings rather than super natures or God. Human being should believe in themselves to create and build a wonderful world they dreamed with intelligence and labor. And most importantly, human beings should live

a life with dignity in all individual aspects as certain material life, independent social actions, spiritual enjoyment, companionship of lovers and friends etc.



Figure 4.21 Humanism philosophy analysis of Amour, Gorge helping Anna recovering

Source: Haneke, 2024

As to the elderly, human value and dignity became a serious problem that is much harder to maintain because of declined physical situation and social activities. The ability to create social value and capacity to active life are also fade away. This is the ultimate question all human beings would face in later life, how to maintain the value and dignity of human when in old age.

The primary problem that Anne facing in the film is exactly the question of dignity and value of elderly. We could see from the beginning of film that Anne, as a retired music teacher with good educational background and elegant manners, she had a very decent, rich and peaceful life of happiness, art, respectfulness from her husband and students. She and her husband live in a cozy and warm apartment in France and keep a distance and independence from their daughter, a satisfied elderly life with dignity by their own. They went to music concert invited by their talented student, hugged by the musician warmly after concert, talking about life and music all the way back home, and had nice breakfast in the warm sunshine from the window. The settings in the apartment full of books, art paintings, and a piano in the middle of the living room,

Anne dressed elegant and beautiful, so does Gorge by her side. This is the perfect life of elderly that we could all dream about.

But after Anne got stroke, everything changed suddenly. Her ability to movements was taken away, this is the start point of her losing independence and physical dignity, she had to rely on Gorge or healthcare woman to eat, drink and even go to toilet or shower. Her physical body was completely lost privacy which means part of her human dignity is lost too. Then came the losing of verbal ability, she could not speak gradually, without verbal ability to communicate with Gorge or even express the feelings of herself. This means another part her dignity of human spirit was taken away too. Physically or spiritually, Anne lost her inner and external dignity as human beings.

The inner struggles begin from the time Anne got home from hospital that she knows her situation would get worse and worse. She made her choice of death rather than live a life without dignity, but refused by Gorge, and she also failed in suicide later. The compassion and love from Gorge, the helplessness of suicide lead to her later life of suffering and miserable.

In the case of Anne in the film, she values more dignity than death. For a well-educated woman with all life living in dignity and respectfulness, she could not lose human dignity even in the last stage of life. But the choice differs from different persons, some elderly value more life than dignity. Individuals has the free choice to their own life and living way, all choices should be equally valued, according to contemporary humanism philosophy. This raises up the core critical thinking that how would the audience choose if facing the same problem in elderly life. As William Shakespeare put it, “To be or not to be, that is the question”.

#### **4.4.2 Facing Death in Modern Life**

In Amour, the director portrays both the physical and emotional challenges of facing death in the last stage of life, also the influences and choices on closely related families and lovers. Allow audience to experience the death process itself in an objective

but immersive way to watch and think. How to face death of your own or the people you love is an ultimate philosophy question that we should learn from birth to lifelong.



Figure 4.22 Humanism philosophy analysis of Amour, Anne was found dead

Source: Haneke, 2024

The problem is more complicated in the film as it's set in the context of illness, aging, suicide and morality. It is a decision not only by oneself but the suffering of two or three in the family. The influence of death or suicide would affect every family member in a deep way in the future life. Anne chose to die immediately knowing her situation but Gorge could not accept her death in such an early time. Later on, Anne again chose to suicide but rescued by Gorge, still, he could not face Anne's death even though he knew that day would come soon or later. But dramatically, it is Gorge who ends Anne's life in the end when both of them suffered a lot to the limitation and Anne lost everything as a human being. The discussion here is if it would be better for both Gorge and Anne if Gorge could face and accept Anne's death in earlier time, which would avoid the long time suffering for them both and remain Anne's dignity in life. Or it is still worth to keep Anne in life for more time even though it's the hardest period of their life. Suffering and pains are inevitable for human beings.

In the context of Amour, Haneke didn't make it a social realistic drama involving medical, hospital, social justice but left the problem purely to the couple themselves. It also came to an existential question of the meaning and purpose of life

when facing death, considering it a fundamental aspect of human existence. We all have freedom in face of death and individual responsibility for it.

#### 4.4.3 Freedom of Choice VS Ethical Conduct

Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in his work "Existentialism Is a Humanism" asserted that "existence precedes essence", which means human beings define their own essence by actions, choices and experiences. Human beings have the freedom choice and decisions based on their own values. But this would raise another problem of ethical conduct by oneself. To be aware of one's morality, conduct own actions and behaviors to be morally acceptable. This principle of free choice and confrontation with ethical conduct is also the critical part of this film.



Figure 4.23 Humanism philosophy analysis of Amour, Gorge killed Anne with a pillow

Source: Haneke, 2024

In the film, the choice between Anne and Gorge is different at the beginning of Anne's illness. Anne chose death rather than live along with declined physical situation, but Gorge chose to accompany and take care of Anne even though he knew what to come in the later time. This is the first time they had opposite choices on death or live. Gorge is not the one who's ill, so he chose to have Anne there for longer time in the world, but Anne definitely value dignity more than life and she didn't want to suffer

more from this. The second time they had confrontation about this is when Anne tried to suicide when Gorge was out for a funeral of their friend. Anne tried to jump out of the window by herself but Gorge came home in time to save her life. Anne lost her choice again while Gorge is the relatively stronger one in their situation. And when it came to the later of the film, Anne though lost all ability to move or speak, her choice on death never changed. She refused to drink after got insult from the rude healthcare woman. This third time, Gorge finally made the horrible choice of ending Anne's life. We could realize that though Gorge and Anne are in deep love and bonding relationship, they understand and respect each other a lot, they still had different choices on death and illness. In this way, they are both free to make vital choices over death by their own feelings and values.

Then came to the opposite part to freedom of choice, that is the ethical problems occurred. Haneke didn't depict the consequences of Gorge's action of ending Anne's life with a pillow, even we could not know about what happened to Gorge after Anne's death. The film ended with Gorge's perfect dream about Anne being alive and he followed her going out as they used to. This is an unsolved question and an open-end to the audience to think themselves. Is it legal and moral that Gorge killed Anne as a fact and what are the responsibilities to take for this action? Gorge has already suffered a lot along with Anne's illness and death, he is the one who's punished most in this tragedy.

We could experience Gorge's suffering from inner morality in many moments. His last letter left in the world described the details and emotions all the way along, and he admitted his so-called crime in it. In the begging, morality and love wins over the suffering, which keeps Gorge insisting on taking care of Anne, ignoring her own decision on death. When they both suffered enough and is came to the end of Anne's situation, Gorge realized it is time to let Anne go and maybe she was right for the decision to end all this earlier. After dark struggles and desperations, Gorge took the horrible action without hesitation. Although we won't discuss the exact legal results of this, but it makes us to rethink about the morality conduct when facing vital decisions.

#### 4.4.4 Love, Companion and Empathy

The humanism philosophy emphasis strongly on love, companionship, and empathy, they are meaningful connections and understanding among individuals. As independent human beings, we all should have the ability to love and be loved by other individuals, built relationships of companion with the ones sharing the same life values, and have empathy to understand and share in the feelings and perspectives of others.



Figure 4.24 Humanism philosophy analysis of Amour, Gorge helping Anne standing

Source: Haneke, 2024

The love in humanism philosophy is regarded as the fundamental emotions or feeling for others, it's not merely romantic relationships but a wider sense of familial relations, compassion and caring. Humanism love is also the acceptance of each individual's distinct inner worth and values with mutual respect. Reflected in the film Amour, the love between Gorge and Anne is typically humanism love unconditionally. They had been married for years in love and companion, understand each other and share the same passion for music and art. Especially for Gorge, his love for Anne was under severe test of illness, aging, daily sufferings and separation from death. He unconditionally took the responsibility of taking care of Anne to the end and also the guilty of killing Anne with a pillow to free them both from suffering. This kind of love is beyond romantic and family, it's a more deeper bonding mixed with morality, suffering and responsibility and understanding. Gorge accepted Anne's condition no

matter good or bad, his love for Anne never changed, even the action of ending her life is out of his love for her, he could not stand watching her suffering from life with no dignity or value anymore.

The companionship in humanism philosophy is to share experiences, understanding and support for each other without conditions. Good companionship would contribute to personal growth for helping each other to fulfill their own life goals and provoke their potentials. It's relationship of encouragement and meaningful connections among individuals. Presented in the film, Gorge and Anne are also the perfect couple with companionship in depth. They are both retired music teacher sharing the same background and culture. In the beginning, they keep talking about music all the way to the concert and back home in a pleasant atmosphere full of enjoyment and understanding. Gorge has accompanied with Anne all the time she got stroke and Anne is used to have him by her side and she didn't want to be sent in hospital ever again after the first time. With the companion of Gorge at home, she felt safe and comfortable more than anything. And Gorge fulfilled his obligation of accompanying Anne to the last moment of her life. It is touching when Anne could not speak or move any more but Gorge keeps talking and telling stories to her by her bed.

On the other side, the companionship from their daughter is seldomly appear. Their daughter Eva showed up 3 times during Anne's illness. First time to talk to her dad about Anne's situation and followed solutions, second time to visit her mother in serious condition which Anne could not almost talk already, and third time to visit but refused by Gorge out of respect for Anne, she didn't want to be seen lied in bed horribly. This depicting the relatively independent companionship between the couple and their daughter, which also reflects the common relationship between parents and children in modern society. As individuals of independent life, parents and children are to have separate life the time children grown up. Children now are not responsible for the aging life of parents. Younger or elder, we have to plan and responsible for our own destiny independently. Not like traditional conventions that children to take the whole responsibilities for parents' life as a burden.

Empathy could be a precious aspect of humanism philosophy. The ability to understand other individuals and share the feelings of happiness and suffering with respect. With empathy, individuals can be different from each other but work or live as a whole. It makes human beings to be diversity and more creative in different ways as a unit in modern society. The feelings showing in the film of Gorge and Anne also make a good example for this emotion. Gorge and Anne knew each other well both in life habits and inner emotion needs. At a minimal extent in dialogues, they could understand and communicate with each other without extra words but gestures and eyesight. As to the death choice problem, they had different opinions, it didn't mean they misunderstand each other but Gorge knew how Anne's feelings and thinking, he just could not accept Anne leaving him so early without much more trying to recover. He knew Anne's dignity as human beings so he locked the door when their daughter came to visit Anne at the last stage while Anne in unconscious and could not move or speak. And he also knew it's time to let Anne go at the end of the film when both of them were suffered enough and he took the responsibility and guilty of doing so. He also left Anne the last dignity after dying with fully elegant dressed and flowers around. The empathy between the old couple throughout their lifelong to the end of life, which is appreciated by the audience and we could all learn from it and rethink the relations of our own.

#### **4.4.5 Arts, Music in Human Spirit**

The art in humanism is the expressions of the human experiences and emotions diversified from individuals, exploring cultural renaissance, and an approach for better education. Human beings could have very different background and education but sharing the same feelings from paintings, music, films and other format of art. With all kinds of arts, human beings could express and understand each other better. And it also plays an important role in human spirit, encouraging individuals with power, energy and beauty in the world.



Figure 4.25 Humanism philosophy analysis of Amour, Anne playing piano

Source: Haneke, 2024

The role of art and music also play an important part in this film, the music and art are not only the symbols of life, hope, freedom and happiness but also the big change in the couple's inner emotions and decisions. In the beginning, the music is the symbol for the couple's nice life and deep love for each other, they went to the music concert together and exchange opinions with delight. Their apartment is full of books, art paintings, music CDs and player and a beautiful piano in the living room. Their life is full of arts and music around. But gradually with the worse condition of Anne, art and music became as painful as Anne. Anne stopped the music playing as she wanted to end her miserable life. When Gorge made the horrible decision, it is from the still shots of art paintings in darkness and depression we could assume that something terrible is to happen. Music and art are the inner spirit of Gorge and Anne to reflect in the outside world. When music stopped, Anne's life and hope stopped, all her life entered into darkness and sufferings.

As the director Haneke himself is also a music lover and piano player, he is known for passionate about classic music. He applied a lot classic music in the film too, especially Schubert and Mozart. The plot of Anne's student coming to visit her in sick, she asked him to play a Schubert music to comfort her, that's like a signal of her farewell to her previous beautiful life. Ans the plot of Gorge imaging Anne playing piano again

when Anne's situation got worse, it is also a symbol for hope and life. The director has deeply implanted music into the characters and story.



## CHAPTER 5

### NARRATIVE STYLE ANALYSIS OF MICHAEL HANEKE'S FILMS

Michael Haneke's narrative style is known as unique and often challenges conventional narrative structures. He adapts different narrative strategies in different stories and it has been such different in his early films and later films. The detailed breakdown analysis of his narrative style, including narrative structures, narrative elements like plots, characterization, theme, dialogues, sound design, space and symbolism etc. would lead to a comprehensive understanding of his narrative style.

#### 5.1 NARRATIVE STYLE ANALYSIS OF THE PIANO TEACHER

The Piano Teacher is the only fiction novel adapted film by Michael Haneke, the original novel in 1983 is written by Elfriede Jelinek, an Austrian novelist and playwright. The film depicts the story of a talented piano teacher's psychological distortions and extreme relationships with her mother and student. It's a very profound psychological film exploring complex aspects of human nature of love, control and manipulation, repression, sexual desire and distortion, sadism and masochism, violence and envy, emotional isolation and alienation, talent in art etc.

##### 5.1.1 Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of The Piano Teacher mostly follows a Linear Narrative Structure mixed with unconventional Fragmental Narrative. The linear structure is used to depict the intense relationship between the two main characters and the fragmental narrative is used to add the layers and psychological complexity of characters or events to push audience to put fragments and pieces together to have a whole picture and deeper viewpoint of the characters and themes. The fragmental narrative here unfolding the

events by the arcs of main character Erika's psychological manner and relationships with her mother and students.

And the film also applied an open-ended resolution which intentionally leaves ambiguities for the audience to rethink the story objectively by themselves. The open-ended resolution technique is often used by Michael Haneke in his films to engage audience in a deeper level and stimulate different interpretations in society.

Although the story follows a linear order, it's considered more as a Character-Driven Narrative which primarily driven by Erika's psychological journey. Here we could breakdown and analyze the narrative arc of the film by clues of the protagonist's psychological journey and her relationships with her mother and others:

5.1.1.1 Initial setting-up: the film starts with the scenes depicting Erika's twisted relationship with her mother. Erika is still single and lives with her mother in a small apartment in Vienna at the age of 40s. Although she is a skilled and talented pianist and teacher in society but got all in controlled by her old mother who is almost in 70s or 80s. One day when she got home late, her mother yelled at her and opened her handbag and closet to check on what she had done outside, and they had a serious fight with each other. They even sleep in the same room with two single beds put together. These a few scenes depict the controlled mother, repressive and distorted family relationship of Erika's life.



Figure 5.1 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika and her mother crying

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.1.1.2 Inciting incident: when Erika and her mother are invited to a private musical concert, there she first time met Walter Klemmer, a handsome and active young man at the age of 20s, who appreciates her talent in piano and shows great interest in her. Walter expressed his feelings for her by taking piano classes from Erika. This is the beginning of the relationship of the two main characters and Erika is firstly in control of the relationship as she is Walter's teacher and keeps refusing Walter's love many times, which makes Walter is more eager to get her.

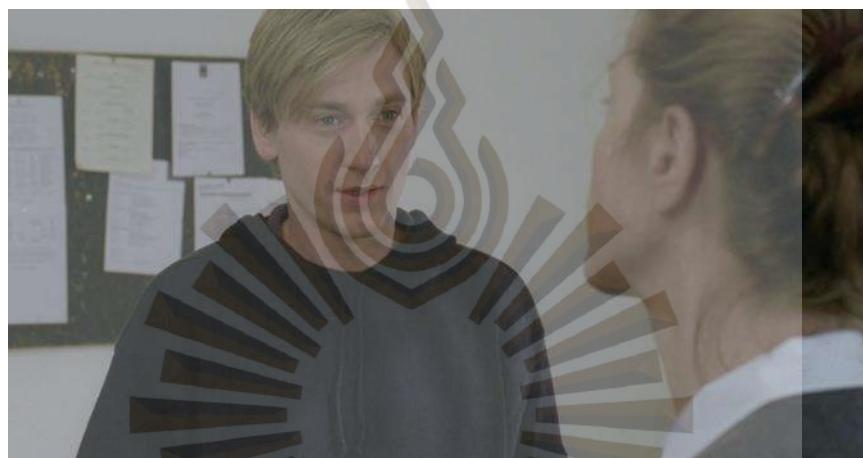


Figure 5.2 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Walter attracted by Erika

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.1.1.3 Rising Actions: Although Erika keeps rejecting Walter every time but she is somehow attracted by this passionate and handsome young man. When she saw Walter helping another cute young lady of her class during a concert rehearsal, she got mad and envy, put glass pieces into the girl's coat pocket and get her hand injured badly. Walter found out her feelings for him and want to have sex with her in the washroom. Erika makes Walter to penile erection but refuse to have normal sex with him to torture him. This is the time when Walter found out Erika's real personality and perverted sexual preferences. Then comes the dynamic relationship of them. Erika writes to Walter telling him she is sexual masochism and how she wants to be beat and abused in sex, which pissed off Walter and he left madly, Walter could not accept this kind of sadism and masochism sick relationship. When Erika lost Walter's love, she regretted and went to Walter for pardon, but they had a unpleasant sexual experience

and Walter asked Erika to leave. The relationship between them changed totally. Now Walter is in control and he got gradually sick of her and Erika is the vulnerable side, she realized how she cared about Walter's love for her.



Figure 5.3 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Walter and Erika

kissing in bathroom

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.1.1.4 Climax: After back-and-forth suffering from Erika, Walter's psychological status has been influenced seriously. And he was turned from a normal positive young man into a sadist as Erika wished in the letter. He could control himself anymore and break into Erika's house one night and raped her. This is the consequence of Erika's emotional torture for him and he felt no guilty for beating and raping her. The time when Erika was raped and beat by Walter, she knew this is not what she really wanted but it is too late. She lost the love and respect from Walter but only the distorted sexual demands left. She cried and asked Walter to stop but he could not stop himself anymore. She had turned him into a psychological monster.



Figure 5.4 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Walter raping Erika

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.1.1.5 Resolution: Erika lost everything totally. She didn't enjoy masochism sexual relationship when it became true and also lost Walter's love and respect for her. She brought a knife to the concert, after she saw Walter saying hello to her like nothing happened and seems she means nothing to Walter. She feels so painful to stab herself in the shoulder and left alone. All she thought she would have didn't come true but been hurt deeply one more time. It is her repressive emotion and perverted sexual preference that hurt her.



Figure 5.5 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika stabbed herself

Source: Haneke, 2024

Although the film follows a mostly Linear Narrative structure for the core story, it inserts some Fragmental Narrative parts to unveil the complex psychological states of Erika. Three key events to be mentioned when understanding her psychological journey. The first event is Erika going to an erotic video shop after piano class to watch sex videos and smell the used tissues to experience sex. Another event is that she peeps others having sex in the car while sneak into another erotic store. And she even pee by the car while watching others having orgasm. The last event is that when Erika going back home, she uses a blade to cut her own vagina to have orgasm. These fragmental narrative parts depict in details how abnormal Erika's sexual status is and setting up for her later request to Walter for sexual abuse. She has been in both sexual repression and family life repression for a long time, which makes her distorted psychology.



Figure 5.6 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika cut her vagina

Source: Haneke, 2024

### 5.1.2 Narrative Elements

#### 5.1.2.1 Plot

Erika Kohut is a talented piano teacher at the age of 40s at Vienna with respect from her students, on the other hand, she lives with her dominated elderly mother in an apartment sharing one bedroom. Her mother has been controlling her life all the time, checking on what she doing at work and after work every day. They usually fight with each other about this but they have been used to rely on each other and could not

separate. The distorted and repressive relationship has deeply influenced Erika's psychology and makes her an alienated, indifferent, cold person to others, and also developed perverted sexual preferences. She usually goes to erotic stores to watch sexual videos and smells used tissues to experience sex. She also sneaks into erotic stores to peep others having sex, and she could not stop peeing when others are having orgasm. When getting back home, Erika uses a blade to cut her vagina to have orgasm.

One day when Erika and her mother were invited to play piano at a private musical concert, there she met the owner's nephew, Walter Klemmer, a passionate handsome young man, also a music lover and piano player. Walter was attracted by Erika's talent in piano, her elegance and understanding of Franz Schubert at the first time. He showed great interest and enthusiasm for her, and start to pursue her passionately by taking her classes. But Erika keeps rejecting and keep distance from Walter even though she is also interested in him. Her alienated personality and distorted psychology make her unable to accept normal love from Walter. When Walter shows kindness to another girl and help her with the concert rehearsal, Erika saw this and got madly envy. She put glass pieces into the girl's coat pocket and making her hand seriously hurt. Walter knew it was Erika who did this and she is also interested in him, he tried to have sex with her in the bathroom. But Erika refused to have normal sex with Walter even though they kissed each other passionately. She made Walter penile erection and torture him by not having sexual intercourse after this. She gave him a handjob but abruptly stops when he does not follow her orders of touching or looking at her. Walter realized Erika's distorted sexual preference but he still loves her, and wanted to change her with his love for her.

Erika then gave Walter a letter in which specifically writes what she wants Walter to do to satisfy her masochistic fantasies. After Walter followed her home one night, Walter read the letter in front of Erika by her request but he could not accept this kind of perverted sexual relationship, he left Erika's apartment madly. Erika got very frustrated after Walter refused her and abreact her upset emotions on her mother when they sleep together at night. She kissed her mother and fight with her on bed like crazy.

Erika went to find Walter at an ice rink to apologize. She asked Walter to have sex with her as he wanted in the cleaning room. But Erika could not have normal sex and vomited while having fellatio for Walter, which makes Walter feel bad and disgusted for her, asking her to leave.

Later in that night, Walter breaks into Erika's apartment madly, and beat, raped Erika as what she wrote in the letter. While all these happening, Erika begged Walter to stop, but Walter could no longer control himself and turned into a crazy monster.

The next day, Erika is to perform on a concert, substituting for her injured student. She brought a knife with her. When she saw Walter came to the concert with his family like nothing happened, he still laughing and cheerfully saying hello to her. Erika stabs herself in the shoulder and left the building to the street.



Figure 5.7 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika left the building alone

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 5.1.2.2 Theme

The film is a psychological drama which explores the complex, repressive emotional and sexual struggles of Erika Kohut, a talented piano teacher in her 40s. It shows us the distorted personality because of long term control and repression from family and parents. We see the repression of human nature for love and sex would lead to a distorted psychology which would also find unconventional ways of outlets, such as sadism and masochism. The dynamic changes in Erika and Walter's relationship

also unveil that this distorted psychology have great impact on normal people, after been tortured mentally and physically by Erika, Walter finally became psychological sick and could not control himself anymore that raped Erika terribly.

The origin of why Erika has such twisted personality is also a key theme of this film, which is about family control and dominated parents. As Erika's mother controlled her all her life long until middle age, she has no ability to build her own life and normal personality. She is under watch whatever she does. And violence and quarrels are common in their daily life. We could rethink about the relationship between parents and kids. If a child grown up under parental control, what consequences could do to her or his future life and personality.

The film also depicts the loneliness and alienation of modern human beings. As the protagonist Erika, she is successful in piano, but living with her elderly mother sharing one bed, no close friend or lovers. This also leads to her cold and strict attitude towards her students.

The last viewpoint of the film theme is related to the art education. As Erika is somehow talented in piano, she spent a lot of time practicing and playing piano, plus she is under tremendous pressure from family and also society, which is also a factor leading to her personality. The pursuit of artistic excellence may sacrifice some emotional needs and normal social connections.

#### 5.1.2.3 Characters

There are two main characters in the film. One is the female piano teacher Erika Kohut, who's in late 30s or near 40s but still elegant and looks attractive at the first sight. Actually, she is still single for years and lives with her elderly mother in an apartment sharing one bedroom. She has been under her mother's control for her whole life and almost had no friends or lovers. Her relationship with her mother is full of control and resistance, violence and quarrels, depression and repression, they love each other but also hate each other the most.



Figure 5.8 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika listening to Walter playing piano during the test

Source: Haneke, 2024

The long-term repression from family makes Erika's personality distorted and isolated from people. She formed perverted preferences in sexual experience as the result of long-term sexual repression too. She has fantasied for sex abuse and turned into a masochism. When she met the passionate young man Walter Klemmer, Erika could not accept his love and have sex with him normally but torturing him both emotionally and physically. She wrote a letter to him asking for sex abuse and beating her, after rejected by Walter, she felt disgraced and beg for pardon, losing her dignity to have a fellatio for Walter but ending up vomiting. The relationship between them has changed that Walter now is in control and he raped Erika at night later, until then Erika knew that beat and sex abuse is not what she really enjoyed. But it's too late, even though she cried and asked him to stop, Walter could not control his pulse as an animal.

After all these humiliations and losing of love and dignity, Erika brought a knife with her to the concert, it is either to hurt Walter or herself. When she saw Walter saying hello to her like nothing happened, she finally knew she had lost everything and stabs herself in the shoulder, walking out of the concert.

Erika is a complex person with extreme personality, she is also a victim from long-term repression from parents. She has been in repression both emotionally and sexually, which leads to her distorted psychology. She is incapable to love or

beloved, immersing herself in perverted sex experience and also has the self-harm tendency. She has spent all her time with her mother or practicing piano, so that she turned out a isolated person who could not have normal relationships and sex.

Walter Klemmer, another main character in the film, who is an engineer in 20s and also a piano player with good-looking appearance and passionate personality. On the contrary to Erika, Walter is a standard positive young man from middle class family living a satisfied life. He fell in love with Erika at the musical concert and deeply attracted by her talent in piano, and he passionately pursuing Erika even though she rejected him for times. The more times Erika refusing him, the more he wanted her.



Figure 5.9 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Walter enjoying Erika's music

Source: Haneke, 2024

At the beginning, Walter was initially portrayed as charming and passionate, seeking profound understanding of music and also Erika. As he unveiled the dark side inside Erika's psychology, what she did to the innocent girl, he didn't blame her but considered it as the love reaction for him from her. When the first time they had sex experience in the bathroom, Erika showed out her unconventional sexual preference and perverted sex abuse bias and desire of controlling the relationship, Walter was shocked but also seduced to this kind of sex game out of curiosity and love for Erika. At this point, Walter is under the control of Erika, he is the weak side in this relationship being played because Erika threatened to leave him if he doesn't abide her orders.

Gradually, Walter takes actions to take over the initiatives. As he knows Erika is also interested in him, he starts to pursue her more boldly hoping that he could build a normal relationship with her and save her from unnormal sexual desire. When he read the letter Erika wrote to him describing the beat and sex abuse that she wanted exactly, his dream crashed as he never knew anything about sadism and masochism. He thought it was unacceptable and left Erika madly. This is the turning point of Walter's character arc that he becomes the one who starts to take controls in this relationship.

When Erika came to beg pardon from Walter at the skating rink and request him to have normal sex with her, the power tends to Walter. It turned out Erika could not have normal sex experience that she vomited when having a blow job for Walter, Walter's inner feelings for Erika totally changed, he starts to disgust her from the heart of bottom, which set up for his later terrible behavior to her.

When Walter came to Erika's apartment at night with anger and sex impulse, he completely lost his mind and was forced into a sadism under the back-and-forth torture of Erika and her sick psychology impact. For this moment, Walter is changed into a different person from the beginning, a psychopathy and a rapist, the passionate young man no longer exist. When Walter happily saying hello to Erika the next day, it is proven again that Walter felt no guilty about what he did and he felt nothing about Erika anymore.

#### 5.1.2.4 Settings

The film is set in contemporary Vienna, Austria, a city known for its rich culture and arts. This background setting built the atmosphere of artistic fantasy but also depression and isolation. Long term piano practice and less social activities with outside world is also the factor leads to Erika's depressed psychology. Art could cure one's spirit but also can destroy one's ability to connect with real world if she immersing herself for so long in the artistic and fantasy world. Erika is the one who has been under pressure for lifelong and isolate herself in the piano world, which distorted her personality and she has to find an unconventional way of expressions.



Figure 5.10 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, street shot at the end

Source: Haneke, 2024

Most part of the film shoot in interior with a dark tone, including Erika's apartment, her piano classroom at work, concert in a private house and public building, bathroom and cleaning room etc. Seldom outdoor locations and street views. This intentional setting up build a closed and isolated world for Erika, also an implication for her dark secret that unacceptable by normal society. The first time Erika and Walter had sexual experience in a bathroom and the second is in a cleaning room, these locations are all unconventional places for normal relationship, which also echoes back to Erika's perverted sexual behavior in sex video stores smelling others' used tissues and watching others having orgasm.

The most important location is Erika's apartment with her mother, here is the scene that she had fight with her mother and the place her distorted psychology grew. The apartment is isolated into different small parts by walls, like Erika's inner world isolated from outside world, forming a depressive and secret inner world full of darkness and repression. Erika and her mother's bedroom placed two single beds together in the central, like the distorted relationship of them two, relying on each other but stuck in a crowded room in darkness. When Erika got raped by Walter, it was at the corridor of the living room, which is just in front of the bedroom door, Erika's mother is locked in the bedroom hearing everything happening.

The film also set a very contrast between interiors of Erika's private space and the musical space, making it also an implication for the bright side and dark side of artistic influences, and also implies two aspects of Erika's life, one is elegant and respectful piano teacher and another side she is a distorted psychology person.



Figure 5.11 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Walter abuse Erika sexually

Source: Haneke, 2024

### 5.1.2.5 Viewpoint

The film mainly employs a subjective and limited third-person narrative viewpoint to deeply explore Erika's personal experiences, emotional distortions and psychological struggles. Providing audience an in-depth journey into Erika's past, present and feelings, to dig out the origin that leads to her unconventional personality and observe the dynamic power changes in her relationship with Walter.

The subjective viewpoint and close-up shots are usually used to capture Erika's emotional expressions, amplify what she sees and the reactions from her inner mind. We could observe the subtle changes in her face every time she looks at Walter, in the beginning, she pretends to be uninterested in him and keeps reject him, but her expressions unveiled her deep thoughts on him, which is more complex. The scene that Erika saw Walter interacting with another girl triggered her inner envy and evil, which lead to the terrible action she took on that girl. And from her subjective viewpoint at the ice sink, we could see how she feels about Walter actually, she saw an active energetic young man playing hockey with all focus on him, indeed, this is the feeling she never

had in life, alive and bright. She lived in loneliness and darkness for too long to really knew what she wants exactly.



Figure 5.12 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika watching Walter through the bars smiling

Source: Haneke, 2024

For most of the rest part, the camera exploring Erika's hidden private experiences and inner struggles in an objective third-person viewpoint. We watch Erika's private sexual behaviors in the bathroom in a distance, and following her into one and another sex video shops to dig out her perverted inner desires. And we also observe everything happened between her and her mother, their fighting and struggles. The director often uses a long shot recording all these events and facts with limited editing. We watch the film like we living in the same room with Erika.



Figure 5.13 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika fighting her mother

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 5.1.2.6 Dialogues

To unveil Erika's inner struggles and distorted ways of self-expression, the dialogues through the film is restrained and precise. Not much emotional or normal communications between characters. This reflects the long-term repression and control Erika bear from her dominated mother. She could not express her inner feelings or desires in a normal way, which contributes to her repressive and distorted psychology.

The dialogues between Erika and Walter are mostly about music and sex, which reflects Erika's whole contents of life. She knows only about music and has strong twisted sexual desires. She is incapable to have common social life or build love relationship with others. We could only tell the subtle emotional changes inside Erika by close-up shots on her face, most time she hides her emotions showing a cold face with subtle changes in her eyesight. This unveils the long-term repression takes away her ability to express by oral language but she could only rely on music as an exit. Even she tells Walter how to act the sex abuse as she wanted, she wrote it in a letter instead talking to him in verbal. And her overall tone of voice is calm and cold which reflecting her isolation and alienation to others.

Besides, Erika's dialogues with her mother are fragmental, full of conflicts and confrontations. She has built a repressive and controlled relationship with her mother since her childhood, they are speechless at most time. Her mother only talks to her when related to piano or life routines of her, no normal emotional communications. And Erika vents her feelings in an extreme way to her mother through physical confrontations and verbal attacks. They are both incapable of emotional expressions and communications. The conversations between them are left to conflicts, violence, controlling and orders. The dialogues are designed to build the atmosphere of inner repression and distortion.

#### 5.1.2.7 Symbolism and Motifs

The film is rich with symbolism and recurring motifs to imply its complex psychological depth. Some key symbols and motifs are: piano and music, windows and iron fences, blood and self-harm.

**Piano and Music:** The most important central symbol in this film is the piano and music. It's Erika's origin of repression and strict control. As she is a talent piano player from childhood under very strict control and repression from her mother

and also social expectations for almost life long time until late 30s, piano and music became the only thing she connect with every day. Her mother put such stress and pressure on her because of her talent in piano. Piano became the origin that make her who she is but also destroy her normal life as social human beings, taking away her time and connections to others.

On the other hand, piano and music are also the saver for her isolated and depressed life, a symbol for freedom and love. Every time she plays piano and talking about music, it makes her proud of her expertise and talent. Music is also the emotional exit of self-expression, especially when she talks about her understanding of Schubert. She is the one who plays Schubert's music the best and irreplaceable. And the young man Walter is attracted by her when she plays Schubert's music and impressed by her in-depth understanding of music.



Figure 5.14 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika teaching a student

Source: Haneke, 2024

Windows and Iron fences: The windows and iron fences keep appearing in the film in many significant scenes, the window implies Erika's deep desire for freedom and outside world. Erika always looks outside from her piano room window thinking alone. And we see no windows in her apartment with her mother which implies that there is no exit for her to escape from her dominated mother.

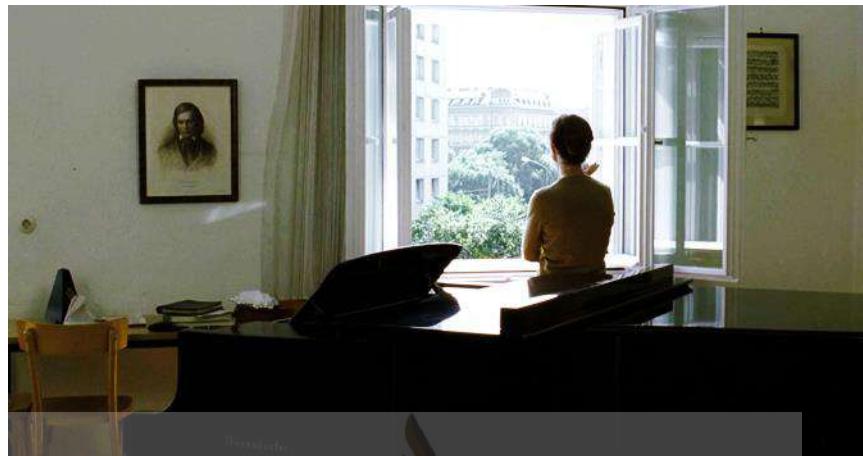


Figure 5.15 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika looking out of window

Source: Haneke, 2024

But the iron fences are the symbol for her isolated and distorted life under control. The first time when Erika and her mother met Walter in the elevator, Walter wanted to get in the elevator but they closed the fence door, Walter was seen through the fences from Erika's viewpoint, it's a hint that they are isolated from each other and implying Erika's later reject for Walter's pursuing. Walter came into her life as a positive saver for her but she refused.



Figure 5.16 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Walter first meet Erika

Source: Haneke, 2024

The scene that Erika followed Walter to the ice sink, she watching Walter playing hocket happily through the iron fences outside, the camera shot from the iron

fences that Erika is blocked from Walter's world but she keeps subtle smiling on her face which is rarely seen in her, that moment she desired for Walter and may image she could have the freedom and normal life as him too. It's also an implication that she could not own what she wanted like the iron fences isolated her from that happy world, making her an outsider.



Figure 5.17 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika watching

Walter behind the bars

Source: Haneke, 2024

Blood and Self-harm: Self-harm and bleeding keep recurring in the film as motifs for Erika's inner pains and exit for extreme emotions, also the behavior of psychological distortion. When Erika ~~came back~~ home from erotic stores and she has no way expressing sexual desires, she cut her vagina with a razor blade to blood, which makes her feel sexual orgasm. The pains is related to her unconventional sexual experiences as she is a machoism and self-destructing.



Figure 5.18 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika cutting her vagina

Source: Haneke, 2024

At the end of the film, Erika stabs herself in the shoulder calmly and the blood bleeding out from her decent shirt. We saw Erika was so painful after she found Walter felt no guilty or love for her after raped her, she got no exit for expressing the painful feelings but choose to harm herself again. This reflects her disability of dealing with inner struggles and distorted way to hurt herself.



Figure 5.19 Narrative style analysis of the piano teacher, Erika stabbing herself

Source: Haneke, 2024

Table 5.1 Narrative style analysis of The piano teacher

Film name	The Piano Teacher
Narrative Structure	
1)Narrative Arc	√
2) Narrative type	Linear
Narrative elements	
1) Plot	√
2) Theme	Psychological Distortions, Repression and Desire Sadism and Masochism
3)Characters	Erika, Walter
4) Settings	Modern Vienna, Austria
5)Viewpoint	First-person and Third-person
6) Dialogue	√
7) Symbolism and Motifs	Piano/Music, Windows and Iron fences, Blood and Self-harm

## 5.2 NARRATIVE STYLE ANALYSIS OF CACHÉ

Caché is a psychological thriller film written and directed by Michael Haneke in 2005, in which explored guilty in childhood and collective memory about France's Algerian War and colonialism. It is characterized by its unique narrative style with an intentional slow pacing revealing the information and mixed flashbacks and dreams with reality, which adds complexity to the story for viewers to interpretate. As a frequently-used trick by Michael Haneke, he also applied an open-ended to this film, left unanswered questions to the audiences.

### 5.2.1 Narrative structure

To support the two themes of both personal and societal guilty, the film applies a complex Non-Linear Narrative structure combined dual narrative lines, one is the personal story of the protagonist Gorge's family being threatened by some anonymous

video tapes, and another is the hidden narrative clue that unfolds France's historical relationship with Algeria through Gorge's childhood friend Majid's life experiences and encounters as well as Gorge's memories and dreams. Here we could breakdown its Non-Linear narrative structure by two narrative clues, the first main line is the event that Gorge's present life being threatened by anonymous video tapes:

5.2.1.1 Suspense Opening: the film starts with the frame of Gorge and Anne watching and talking they received a mysterious video tape recording the front door of their house, which implying they are under surveillance. This suspense opening triggered audience's curiosity for why and who send this and to find the answer step by step with the Gorge and Anne.



Figure 5.20 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge family watch the videotape

Source: Haneke, 2005

5.2.1.2 Conflict Tension: the tension of the story gradually increased as they received 3 times of the video tapes followed, one is sent to Gorge's company along with a children's drawing of a kid face spitting out blood, the second is send to the front door while the Gorge and Anne are having dinner with their friends at home, and the third is sent to their 12-year-old son, Pierrot's school. The unexpected following video tapes with scary drawing terrified them a lot and make them into anxiety.

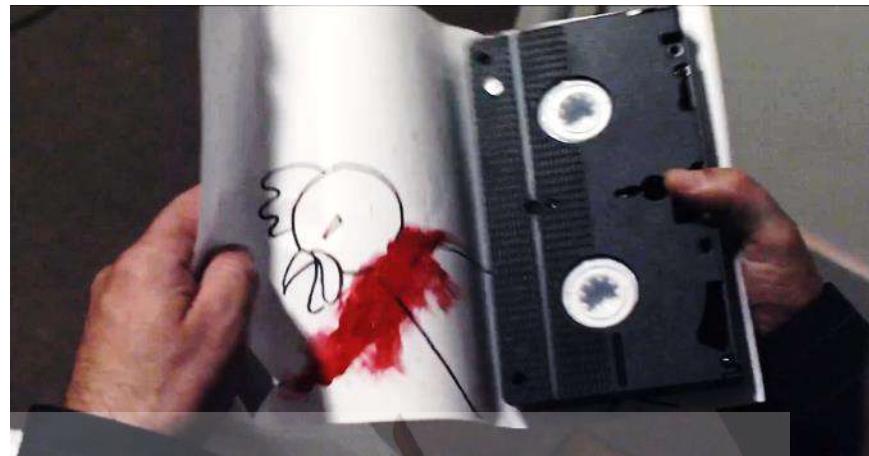


Figure 5.21 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge found drawing with videotape

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.2.1.3 Rising Actions: The contents of the anonymous tape implying Gorge's old farm house in his childhood with his family, Gorge went to visit his mother in sick and which brought up the person who may related to all this, an Algerian orphan named Majid. A series of Gorge's nightmares and flashbacks imply they had secret past. Gorge went for Majid but he denied about it and then Gorge's son was missing that Gorge thought Majid kidnaped his son and called police to captured Majid and his son.



Figure 5.22 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Senior Majid got arrested

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.2.1.4 Climax: Later, Gorge's son was sent home by his friend's mother and it turned out a misunderstanding. But Gorge got a phone call from Majid to his apartment and Majid cut his throat with a knife in front of Gorge to prove his innocence.



Figure 5.23 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Majid suicide in front of Gorge

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.2.1.5 Resolution: Gorge went to home for sleep after Majid died, and Majid's son came for Gorge after Majid died but he found Gorge felt no guilty of himself causing Majid's suicide. Majid's son left upset.



Figure 5.24 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Majid's son confronts Gorge

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.2.1.6 Open-ended Closure: the film ended without clear answer to who sent the video tapes or what happened to Gorge or Majid's son after Majid's death. Instead, it ends with a wide shot in front of Gorge's son's school door where we could see Gorge's son is talking to Majid's son in the corner.

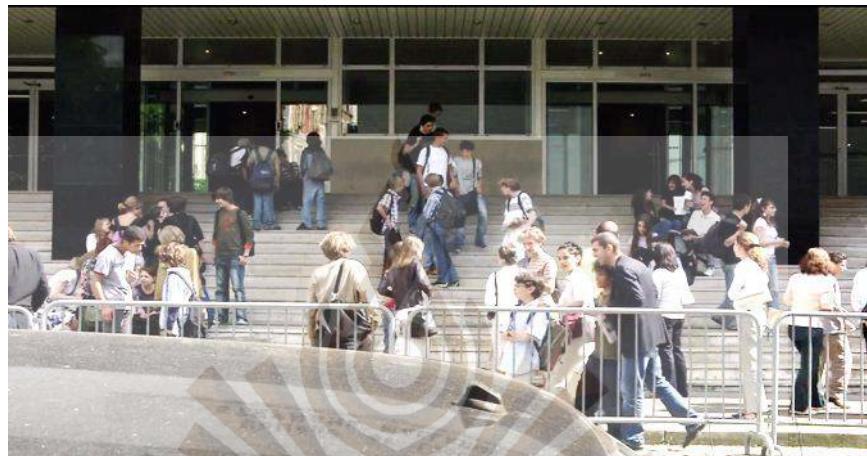


Figure 5.25 Narrative style analysis of Caché, the sons talking in school

Source: Haneke, 2024

The film also has an underlying second narrative line of Gorge's childhood guilty related to societal guilty of France's war and colonialism to Algeria, which mixed with Gorge's personal storyline appearing as flashbacks and dreams of Gorge.



Figure 5.26 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge dreaming about Majid

Source: Haneke, 2024

Gorge thought about it may related what he did to Majid in his childhood when he saw the hand-drawing picture of a kid's face spitting out blood. Memory of Majid as a child staring at him with blood on his face appears. When Gorge went back to his old house talking to his mother about this, he had nightmare about Majid cutting a chicken's throat with blood everywhere and threatening him with the axe. And after Majid's suicide in front of Gorge, he confessed to Anne what he did to Majid by setting up him to leave his family. The film then cut in a flash back memory of junior Majid being dragging into the car and sent away from the farm to an orphanage.

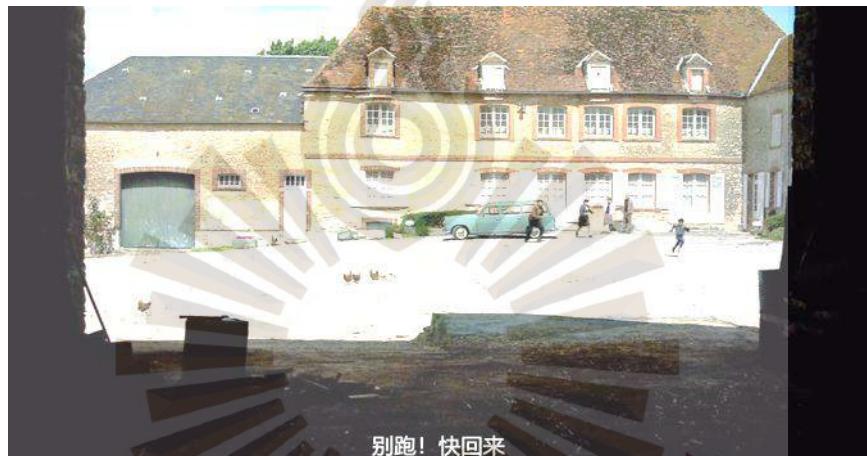


Figure 5.27 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Majid being taken away

Source: Haneke, 2024

### 5.2.2 Narrative Elements

#### 5.2.2.1 Plot

The film begins with showing the video tape frame that Gorge and Anne's house are filmed by hours, implying they are under surveillance. Gorge and Anne are discussing about the origin of this video tape and what the man wanted by doing this threatening them. Gorge is a successful tv host, when he goes to his office the next day, a second tape was sent to Gorge's office along with a hand drawing of a kid's face with blood streaming out of his mouth. The same card of drawing was sent to Gorge's 12-year-old son Pierrot's school too. Gorge and Anne returned from the police office been told the tape was seems no harm to be considered a criminal. While Gorge

and Anne gathering with friends at home in a night, the doorbell ring and a video tape with the picture was sent to their door again. They watched the video tape and it showed the place where he grew up as a child.

Gorge went back to his old place to visit his mother to talk about the person Majid he thought was related to all this happened. Majid was the son of their farmhands who were from Algeria and got killed in the Paris massacre of 1961. Gorge's parents wanted to adopt and take care of Majid but it didn't work at last. Gorge had bad nightmares about Majid cutting a chicken's throat with an axe with blood ever where and he holding the bloody axe towards Gorge threatening.

After Gorge came back from his childhood place, he received another tape showing the way to a poor apartment. He drives to that apartment and found Majid in the room, he angrily threatened Majid to stop sending the tapes to disturb his family but Majid knows nothing about it and said it was never him doing this. After Gorge left, Majid sitting there crying for hours. A hidden camera recorded all this and was sent to Gorge's family as well as Gorge's office leader. When Anne watched this and questioned Gorge, he still didn't want to admit what he did to Majid in childhood.

Their son Pierrot disappeared and Gorge thought Majid kidnapped him and called the police to search Majid's apartment and arrested Majid and his son. Pierrot was sent back home by his friend's mother and it turned out a misunderstanding. Gorge got a call from Majid asking him to his apartment, when Gorge arrived, Majid said he had nothing to do with the tapes and committed suicide in front of Gorge by cutting his throat with a knife to prove his innocence.

Gorge was terrified and back home to sleep, he finally confessed to Anne what he did to Majid when they were kids. He claimed Majid had some disease that he often coughing blood and he asked Majid to cut a chicken but told his parents that Majid threaten him with a bloody axe. Majid was sent away from the family to an orphanage because of Gorge finally.

Majid's son came to Gorge's office to confront him and Gorge threatened him to stop the video tapes, Majid's son said it was not him who sending these tapes and wanted to know how Gorge feels about cause the suicide of Majid. Gorge refused to feel guilty and responsible for Majid's death. Later in front of Pierrot's school gate, Majid's son was talking to Pierrot at the corner.

### 5.2.2.2 Theme

The film delves into complex themes related to both societal and psychological explorations. As a psychological thriller film, it unveils the hidden guilty, responsibility of individuals, digging into one's childhood criminals, how should we be responsible for our behaviors since a child. Does the lies and criminals in one's childhood should be forgiven and taking as jokes. The protagonist Gorge never admits his guilty for he forced Majid to leave the family and lost chances in education with a miserable orphan life. He also denied to be responsible and guilty for Majid's suicide in front of him. How should we judge the justice for vulnerable person like Majid and who should be responsible for their unfair destiny.

The second theme in this film unveiled the history of the Paris massacre of 1961, France's war and colonialism to Algeria. Majid's parents were killed in the massacre which made Majid an orphan. There are also some shots implying the present unfair confrontations of Algerians in Paris. Gorge had conflict with a Algerian young man when he came out from the police office and he was so rude to yell at him because of his bad mood. And Majid and his son were under arrested by police even they did nothing to do with Pierrot's disappearance. They are usually confronted with social prejudice and injustice.

In addition, the film also unveils the present truth that our life is somehow under surveillance by government or someone unknown, cameras are everywhere, which leads to social justice and human personal rights discussions. In a digital society with all private data accessible by government or companies. As Gorge's family, they are under anonymous surveillance 24 hours. They don't know who's doing this and what for. Even in the end, the director didn't answer to this question that who is monitoring their life and sending those threatening tapes to them. This also raises the problem of personal privacy VS. social safety.

### 5.2.2.3 Characters

The protagonist of the film named Gorge Laurent, who is a well-known TV show host from an upper-middle-class in his 40s. He lives in a decent house in Paris with his wife Anne and his 12-year-old son Pierrot. He seems has all successful man should have with beautiful wife, lovely son, and prospect career. Indeed, he is a selfish paranoid person with secrets unknown and also a liar. His relationship with wife Anne

is also cold and distant, they are both too busy with work to take care of their son, the family is not as intimate and close as it looks like. He had guilty secrets since his childhood until an anonymous video tape was sent to them recording the front gate of their house and them going in and out which implied they are under surveillance.



Figure 5.28 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge refused guilty for Majid

Source: Haneke, 2024

When firstly Gorge saw the hand drawing picture of a kid spitting out a stream of blood, Gorge actually had flashbacks of his childhood memories, but he hid the facts when discussing the origin of the tape with his wife. This showing his weakness to face the truth and paranoia to everyone even his wife. Then when he went to Majid's apartment to question and threaten him, he shows no mercy and respect to Majid, he is a typical distant and cold person from middle class who only cares about himself and his fame and wealth. And when Gorge assumes Majid kidnaped his son, he called police to arrest Majid and his son, which leads to Majid's suicide later. He denies to admit his crime to Majid in his childhood and argues it was only a trick between kids, which reflects his blindness and weakness to face the fault and crucial crime he made, also protection to his present social reputation and status.

Even more, when Majid suicided in front of him to prove his innocence in an extreme way, Gorge shows no sympathy or guilty on him but escaping to home without calling the police or ambulance. He is so afraid of what he did in his childhood to Majid would affect his career and life. And he is also afraid of being accused by his

fans, society and family. Every time his wife tried to ask him about the truth of his past, he either lies or avoiding talking about it, which reflects his hypocrisy and cowardice as a typical western upper-middle-class.

Gorge is also taken as the reflection of France collective guilty and responsibility towards Algeria, especially the Paris massacre of 1961. After Majid's parents were killed in the massacre, Gorge's parents were to adopt Majid but stopped by Gorge's dirty tricks. This kind of crime and guilty is what Gorge has committed as a child and it's also the collective guilty of France's Algerian war and colonialism.

Anne, the wife of Gorge, she is a book editor with intellectual grace in her 40s. Through the film, Anne is the one who support Gorge to find the truth but been fooled by Gorge's lies many times. Her marital relation with Gorge is depicted distant and full of distrust. Even they seem a well-matched couple in societal status and career, Gorge's paranoia and unkind personality makes their relation distant and alienated. Her son even suspects that she had affairs with one of her friends, which reflects the inner family relations has fallen apart actually.

The role of Anne is set as an ethical compass in the film as she keeps find the hidden truth of the tapes and question the past of Gorge's guilty. She is like an observer for Gorge's reactions and behaviors, and always push Gorge to tell the truth and keeps honesty to the friends of what happening. Anne is also a collateral damage of Gorge's past influence. Her existence is like the audience themselves at the scene to question and pursuit the final truth and justice.



Figure 5.29 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge lying to Anna

Source: Haneke, 2024

Majid, here to mention him because though he is a bit part but a key figure in this film. He is the victim of Gorge's childhood crime and the represent for numbers of Algerian victims in the Paris massacre of 1961. His parents were killed by France government and he lost the chance of being adopted by a good family and sent to the orphanage. After losing parents and adoption in childhood, he has been trying to cope with the trauma all his life. Poor education makes him unable to defend and express himself well verbally while confronting with Gorge, so that he could only choose an extreme tragic way of suicide to prove his innocence and dignity. He had a class and educational gap with Gorge, but he is a kind, innocent man with dignity. Majid's character plays as the important symbol of historical events that to be memorized and learned from. He is also set as the opposite side of Gorge, Gorge is hypocrisy, selfish, and paranoid, but Majid is honest, sincere and of dignity even in poor condition.

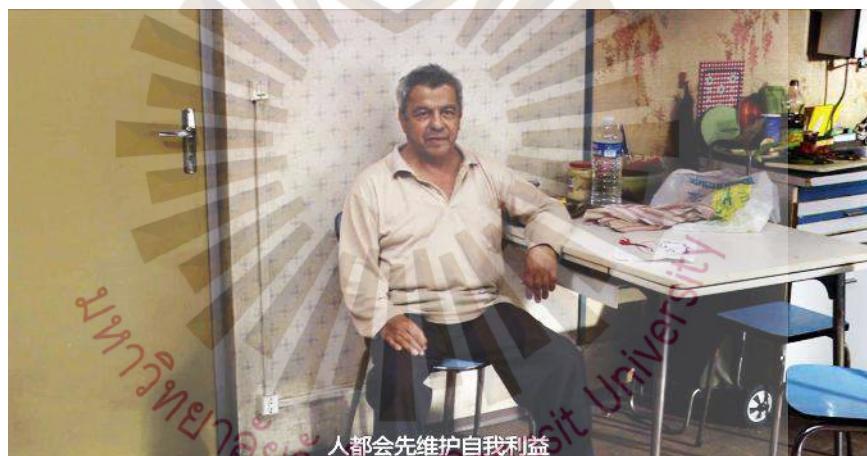


Figure 5.30 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Majid in poor condition

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 5.2.2.4 Settings

The film is set in Paris, France in 2000s, which the era is significantly marked by technological development and societal evolutions. It is also 40 years after the Paris Massacre, which France government has been denied for years. As new digital technology and social media arose then, modern people's privacy and data are all under surveillance and exposed by different social medias. We felt unsafe of our privacies and a lot policies are under discussion about this serious societal problem. The choice of

time and location for this story is designed deliberately to adds credibility and authenticity to its depth of thoughts, it is considered as an allegory of France guilty to Algeria, an expose to the surveillance societal situation and also ironic for the hypocritical middle class.

Most of the events shoot in the locations of Paris, Gorge's middle-class house, TV show offices, Paris city streets and schools, which lead us to a full societal picture of contemporary Paris city in 2000s. We experience a real daily life of the Gorge's family. The house of Gorge's is set full of books and videos placed on a whole wall shelf in the living room, which reflects good educational and cultural background of the family and an ironic to Gorge's inside guilty and selfishness. The style of simple home furniture design shows out a distant relation between the families and a depressed atmosphere of isolation, not cozy and close. This style of settings is to suit the broken relations in the family, both the married couple and the son with them. They don't trust and understand each other. Some Paris streets are chosen as locations to unveil the reality that modern people are under surveillance everywhere as the technology develops. Anyone could place a minor camera around your house or on the street to monitor your personal life, and it's very hard to track the origin just as we don't have final answer to who send the videotapes in the film. Public life is exposed to cameras and we don't have real privacy rights anymore.



Figure 5.31 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge's house under surveillance

Source: Haneke, 2024



Figure 5.32 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge's family having dinner

Source: Haneke, 2024

Some other part of the scenes related to Gorge's childhood with Majid are chosen shoot in an aged country house on a farm, which to recall the hidden history of France colonialism to Algeria. These scenes are mostly from Gorge's childhood memories or dreams of what he did to Majid. It recurs in fragmental pieces that implying the government denial on the Paris Massacre in 1961.



Figure 5.33 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Gorge hometown

Source: Haneke, 2024

### 5.2.2.5 Viewpoint

The film mostly employs a third-person omniscient perspective with some parts break the gap between objective reality and subjective views. A third-person viewpoint narrative is used when depict the suspense event that Gorge and Anne tracking down the origin of the videotape step by step, how they received it in different time and location and what they discussed about it and the actions they took, it revealing the clues and truth in a slow pace, the third-person viewpoint allowing audiences to put all external and internal pieces together to figure out the problem along with the characters together. The use of third-person viewpoint also provides an illusion of objectivity for the viewers to analyze the mystery themselves in different angles with clues provided by the director.

And Subjective viewpoint as first-person narrative is also used in the film as the underlying narrative line of Gorge's past and memories. When it comes to Gorge's past childhood with Majid, the film presented in a subjective viewpoint of flashbacks, dreams and memories of Gorge's perspective. This viewpoint blurs the distinctions between present reality and past memories. As the director's purpose is to recall collective memories on the history of France and Algeria, he deliberately to use this way to mix reality with memories from past.

### 5.2.2.6 Dialogues

The dialogues in the film are designed in a naturalistic and subtle way conveying unspoken emotions and hidden secrets, to build a suspense atmosphere and imply the political history behind the story. When Gorge and Anne have conversations at home, their communications are always full of confrontations in an unease manner, which reflect their struggles in marital relation and distrust to each other, especially Gorge is always hiding secrets from Anne and won't tell her the whole truth as he is such a paranoid person. And the talking between them are straightforward to the purpose without emotional comfort which depicts the isolation and alienation in this family. Gorge lied to Anne many times in the process of tracking the origin of the videotapes and it was unveiled latterly. The overall Gorge's lines are expressed in an uneasy and anxious tone since he is the guilty one with dark secrets in life.

Another characterization of the dialogues in this film is the conversations are full of subtext and unspoken tension. As Gorge is keep hiding secrets and looking

for excuses covering his guilty past, he always talks in subtext that could be interpreted in different meanings. His words are vague and discontinuous as he tried rethinking while talking. But Anne's lines are designed in a straightforward way to question Gorge and shows less emotions of love or intimacy for Gorge.

While the words of Majid are designed simple with sincere, as Majid is the victim without good education and ability to express himself in verbal. He could only speak out basic truth of his life principles when confronted by Gorge, he could not use evidence or logically explain his due to his education. But as an innocent man with dignity, he proved himself in taking extreme action of suicide.

#### 5.2.2.7 Symbol and Motifs

Michael Haneke's films are always rich in symbols and motifs, as a significant work unveiling the hidden history of France and Algeria and also collective and personal guilty, this film has symbols serving different aspects. Some key symbols are the surveillance videotapes, bloody drawing along with the tapes, the presence of aged Majid, the repeated occurrence of Gorge's childhood memories, and the next generation of Gorge and Majid.

(1) Surveillance videotapes: the tapes serve as a central symbol throughout the film as it appeared repeatedly and recording different contents of footages carrying the story forward in a suspense way. But at the end of film, we don't even know who send these tapes and what for. It remained an unsolved question to the audiences to rethink about it and interpretate in different meanings. The direct symbol of the videotape is an implication of societal surveillance. As the era of 2000s is developing fast in digital and social networks, modern people are under exposed to camera and internet data everywhere at any time, our rights of privacy and independent individuals are invaded. No matter the surveillance is from government or personal actions, the fact of surveillance never changed, which should be taken seriously as societal issues.

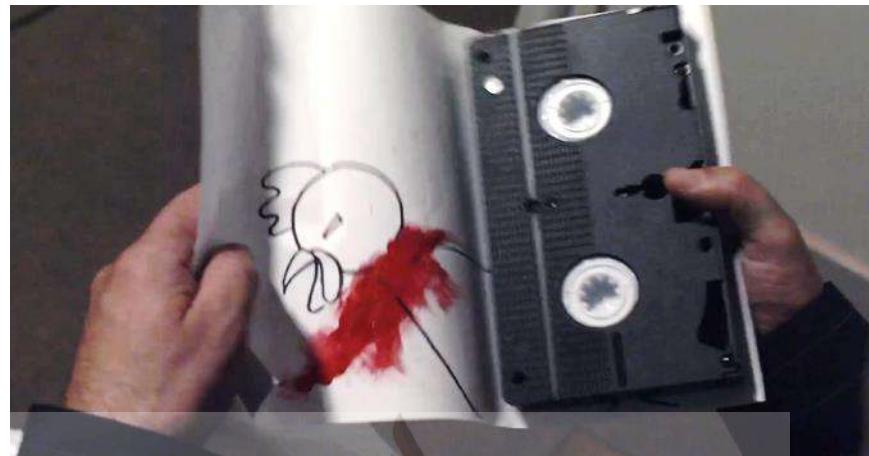


Figure 5.34 Narrative style analysis of Caché, surveillance videotape

Source: Haneke, 2024

(2) Bloody drawings: Along with the videotapes, comes the hand drawing pictures of a kid spitting out blood, which also is a significant symbol to the film theme of childhood guilty. The drawing is intentionally draw as a kid did to recall the past memories of Gorge as a child. This is the reminder of what Gorge did to hurt Majid and force him to leave. Even though Gorge is only a kid back then, he still committed a crime to the orphan which affects his whole life with trauma. It's also a factor leads to Senior Majid's death years later.



Figure 5.35 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Bloody drawing with the tape

Source: Haneke, 2024

(3) Majid's Presence: the aged Majid's presence after so many years is an important symbol of Gorge's past and the history of France's colonialism to Algeria. As a living existing evidence of the victims, his return arose the facts and memories of guilty that belongs to Gorge personally and also France country. Who should be responsible for Majid's lifelong trauma of losing parents been murdered by the government and who is to responsible to ruin Majid's adoption by a good family thus changed his destiny into a tragedy. In the end, Majid's death is considered suicide but who is responsible for pushing him into suicide. The victim should not be forgotten so as the history of massacre.



Figure 5.36 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Majid cut his throat to death

Source: Haneke, 2024

(4) Childhood Memories: Gorge's childhood memories is the motif recurring in different pieces for times, which indicating the underlying trauma of Gorge and Majid since childhood to adults lives. The sin Gorge has committed still hunting him even though he keeps denying of the guilty and escaping from ethical criticism for years. The guilty could never been eliminated from the bottom of his heart. So as to the collective guilty of France to Algerian, the guilty of Algerian War and 1961 Paris Massacre could never been erased from the history no matter how the government denies it. The fact and the consequences are objectively existing.



Figure 5.37 Narrative style analysis of Caché, Junior Majid cutting a chicken

Source: Haneke, 2024

(5) The sons of Majid's and Gorge's: Gorge's son Pierrot and Majid's son are also the symbol of new generation in society who are aware of the guilty past of last generation but stand for justice. The last shot is the two sons are having a conversation in front of the school gate as an ambiguous closure, which could be taken as the implication that new generation know all about the secret truth in history and it would be passed on.



Figure 5.38 Narrative style analysis of Caché, the sons talking outside school

Source: Haneke, 2024

Table 5.2 Narrative style analysis of Caché

Film name	Caché
Narrative Structure	
1) Narrative Arc	√
2) Narrative type	Non-Linear
Narrative elements	
1) Plot	√
2) Theme	Guilty, Colonialism, Surveillance
3) Characters	Gorge, Anne
4) Settings	Modern Paris, France
5) Viewpoint	First-person and Third-person Limited
6) Dialogue	√
7) Symbolism and Motifs	Videotapes, Drawings, Majid's presence, Childhood Memories, The sons

### 5.3 NARRATIVE STYLE ANALYSIS OF THE WHITE RIBBON

#### 5.3.1 Narrative Structure

The White Ribbon is one of Michael Haneke's greatest works which explores an ambitious and profound theme regarding the roots of violence, repressions from religion, societal authority and hierarchy in the context of human historical transformations with high aesthetic value shot in black and white. The film is designed by a retrospective narration of an aged schoolteacher in the German village after decades of years. The narrative structure of the film is complex and deliberate Non-Linear Narrative with a series of mysterious and suspicious interconnected events over years until The World War I according to the narrator's memories. It doesn't follow a conventional narrative arc with a clear progression of exposition, rising action, climax and resolution, but presented in a fragmental narrative structure divided into different parts by the voiceover of the narrator. Each part depicts on some specific incidents or characters in the village, providing a suspense progression to the whole film. The Non-

Linear episodic structure allows audience to put all fragments together gradually to solve the final question in the end. Haneke still applied an unsolved open-ending to this film of who are the criminals for the series of crucial incidents, left viewers to interpretate the events and characters' motives themselves, provoking in-depth critical thinking behind the events in a historical context.

Although the film could not be adapted to a conventional narrative arc, we still can break down its narrative structure by each part divided by the voiceover of the narrator, unfolding a whole picture of how the mysterious events happened one by one in this German village before World War I.

5.3.1.1 Introduction: The film begins with voiceover of the old aged schoolteacher's retrospective narration, introducing the background of the German village and why he telling these stories is because he felt responsible to rethink about the societal transformations in German through the series of mysterious incidents happened in his village, setting up the mysterious and suspense atmosphere.



Figure 5.39 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, view of the village

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.2 Event 1: The doctor fell off his horse. The narrator starts with the accident of the doctor falling off his horse strangely by a steel wire in front of his house. Therefore, related characters are introduced, including the doctor's 3 years-old son and

young daughter, the midwife who's in sexual relationship with the doctor, the midwife's mentally retarded son, the pastor's oldest daughter Klara and her friends' abnormal behaviors after class, and the schoolteacher himself showing up.



Figure 5.40 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the doctor fell off horse

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.3 Event2: The farmer's wife's death. The Farmer's family is the bottom of society in this village, and the farmer's wife was found died because falling down from a broken hole of upper floor in a lumber-mill she was rearranged to, because she was unable to do farm work. The farmer's oldest son blames his mother's death to the baron's family and had a conflict with his father about this.

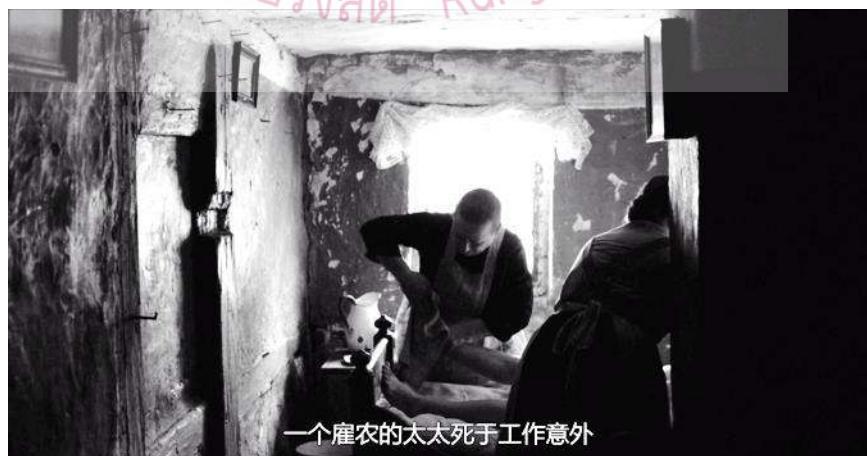


Figure 5.41 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the farmer's wife died

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.4 Event3: The pastor claimed to his family that he would have his oldest daughter and son, Klara and Martin, to wear the white ribbon as reminder and punishment for their guilty and sins of lying. And the schoolteacher found Martin alone walking on a single-plank bridge claiming he was testing on if the God wants to punish him to death or not.



Figure 5.42 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the pastor punishes children

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.5 Event4: The baron's cabbages are ruined by farmer's son on the celebration day of harvest and the baron's oldest son Sigmund was disappeared the same day and found physically abused being carried back at midnight. The baron got so mad about it and gave a threatening speech at the church of tracking down the criminal, which caused mutual suspicions among the villagers.



Figure 5.43 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the baron's son got injured

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.6 Event5: The pastor tied a white ribbon on his old son Martin's arm and also tied his hands on the bed to stop his masturbation.



Figure 5.44 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the pastor punishing his son

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.7 Event6: The farmer's house got fired at night and the farmer was found suicided in his room, because he could not stand the pressure of getting the whole family suffering from starvation as he could no longer got a job from the baron's.



Figure 5.45 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the farmer hung himself

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.8 Event7: The doctor's sexual relation with the midwife and sexually abusing his own daughter. The doctor recovered from hospital back home, he

broke up with the midwife after had sex with her and humiliated her by saying she's ugly and smelling bad. He did sexual assault to his own daughter at night and run across by his little son Rudy, but Rudy was too young to understand what's going on.



Figure 5.46 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the doctor sexually harass his own daughter

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.9 Event 8: The baron's wife came back to divorce with the baron after her son was second time hurt by violence. The baron's wife was in love with someone else when she was in Italy, and she was tired of the violence and hate in this village, she wanted to take away her son from growing up in a dark and guilty place like this. Her son Sigmund was pushed into the pond while the housekeeper's old son trying to grab his piccolo.



Figure 5.47 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the baron's son

was push into river

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.10 Event9: The midwife's son was seriously physically abused and the doctor's family and the midwife disappeared from the village. The midwife's mentally retarded son Karli was found tied to a tree and seriously hurt to blind, with a note quoting Exodus 20:5 of the Bible. Not long after this, the doctor's family moved away from the village secretly and the midwife run away claiming she was to the police to unveil the criminal hurt her son but never returned.



Figure 5.48 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the midwife's son  
been abused to blind

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.11 Event10: The housekeeper's new baby got seriously ill and later in the film this was suspected caused by the housekeeper's older sons' deliberate actions of opening the window to get the baby got cold.



Figure 5.49 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the housekeeper's new baby

got seriously ill

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.3.1.12 Unsolved Resolution: The housekeeper's daughter claimed on she had dreams about all these crimes happened before, which caused the schoolteacher's suspicion and asked the police to investigate. The schoolteacher suspects the kids could be criminals behind all these but threatened by the pastor not to tell. The World War I started and everything came to a sudden stop without any answers.



Figure 5.50 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, villagers gathered in church

Source: Haneke, 2024

Besides the series of mysterious incidents, the narrator schoolteacher's own love affairs with the nanny of the baron's twin babies were also a second line mixed into the narrative process along with the events going on, from their first meet until how they got engaged and finally got married before the world war I. The whole narrative structure is so complex and interconnected with multiple layers, which makes it in-depth and rich in the storytelling.



Figure 5.51 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the schoolteacher and his wife Eva going for an outing

Source: Haneke, 2024

### 5.3.2 Narrative Elements

#### 5.3.2.1 Plot

The White Ribbon is about a series mysterious violence incidents happened in a German village before World War I to reflect the origins of societal transformation, which narrated by the aged schoolteacher in this village after years according to his memories. The film applies an unconventional fragmental narrative depicting a series of events with interconnections.

The village was ruled by the baron with small structured community of the pastor, doctor, midwife, farmer, schoolteacher and their families and kids. A series of violence incidents happened to each family including the baron. The criminals haven't been found until the outbreak of World War I.

The first violence incident is the doctor fall off his horse by a steel wire tied between the trees in front of his house. He was badly injured and sent to hospital far away. The local midwife who's also his assistant helped to look after his 3 years-old son Rudy and his older daughter Anna, while the midwife herself has a mental retarded son to take care as well. The police came to investigate but no answers but the schoolteacher found the pastor's oldest daughter Klara and her friends didn't go home after school but went to the doctor's house to check on Anna.

After the doctor's accident, the farmer's wife was found dead falling down from the broken hole of the upper floor in the lumber-mill. The farmer's wife was rearranged to the lumber-mill by the baron's housekeeper because she could no longer work on the farm. The farmer's oldest son blamed his mother's death to the baron and hold the grudge. He also had a fight with his father as he thought his father didn't confront the baron for justice for his mother as his father was so afraid of losing the jobs in the baron's farm which would make the whole family suffer from starvation. On the same day, the schoolteacher found the pastor's older son Martin walking on a single-plank bridge alone claiming that he was giving a chance to the God to take away his life but he didn't, which implies that the God still likes him. And the schoolteacher first time met Eva, who he fell in love with later and became his wife when he was on the back.

The pastor got angry because Klara and Martin came home very late and they lied about it. He threatened to punish them and tie the white ribbon to them reminding them to stay pure and innocent. The housekeeper's wife just had a new born baby boy but the oldest son of the family doesn't like it, the midwife slapped him in the face for him saying that.

On the harvest celebration day, the baron's cabbage filed was ruined by the farmer's son as a revenge for his mother. On the same day, the baron's oldest son Sigmund was disappeared, and he was found in the forest after been beat on the ass hurt badly. The baron got so angry and gave a threatening speech at the church claiming that he would track down the criminal and ask villagers to report each other.

And Eva, as the nanny of the baron's twin babies, was also fired because of the violence incident of Sigmund. She came to the schoolteacher for comfort and he sent her home after playing a Schubert's music to comfort her. They happened to meet the doctor getting back to village on the way, the doctor had sex with the midwife but after that, he broke up with the midwife saying she was ugly and smelly that he could not stand it anymore. In the night, the doctor's youngest son found his father and sister in the room saying that his father was doing ear piercing to his sister, the son was too young to understand anything.

The pastor tied his son Martin's hands to the bed to stop him from masturbation. At night, the farmer's house was on a big fire and next day, the farmer was found hung himself to death. The housekeeper's new born baby was seriously ill

and the doctor went to check on him. The schoolteacher went to Eva's house to make a proposal but Eva's father let him to wait another year after Eva working as a barber assistant in the town.

The baron's wife came back from Italy with her son Sigmund, but Sigmund was again pushed into the river while been grabbed away his piccolo by the housekeeper's older son. The baron's wife wants to get divorced with the baron because she fell in love with someone else in Italy and more importantly, she wants to take away her son from this violent and hateful village.

The pastor saw his daughter playing and speaking loudly in the classroom when he went to teach a theology class in the school, he punished Klara standing behind the classroom and Klara fainted suddenly. After waking up, Klara went into the pastor's room and killed the pastor's bird with a scissor. Later day, the pastor held the confirmation ceremony for every kid in the village including his own daughter.

The housekeeper's younger daughter talked to the schoolteacher about she could dream about the series violence incidents happened which caused the teacher's suspicion. He called the police to look into it and also told the pastor that he suspecting the kids in the village were the criminals behind the violence, but the pastor refused to believe what he said and threaten him not to tell others. Before everything has an answer, the World War I broke out, and the film came to a sudden open-ending.

### 5.3.2.2 Theme

Michael Haneke himself said this film "is about the root of evil, Whether it's religious or political terrorism, it's the same thing." The root of evil or guilty is the primary theme of this film in a religious and historical context in German. The film depicts a series of terrible violence happened in a protestant German village that may committed by a group of children of the pastor and baron's housekeeper in the village, exploring why and how the kids became violent and evil, who are supposed to be pure and innocent.

The white ribbon as a symbol of purity and innocence but also a constrain and restrain from societal authority and religion imposed on them. Tracing back to the kids' strict family life rules and religious repression, how they are treated in family life with violence and how their human nature is repressed due to religious rules. Especially the oldest daughter and son of the pastor, they are tied with the white ribbon by their

pastor father to remind them of staying pure and innocent, they would be physically punished for minor mistakes or lying. And the pastor repressed his son's teenager sexual nature of masturbation by threatening him it would cause serious illness and tied his hands to the bed to stop him. And the doctor sexually abuses his own teenage daughter and humiliating the midwife who he had sexual relationship with. Family violence and repression are seen in all families over the village including the pastor, the doctor, the famer and the baron's, the kids are grown up in such violent and repressive atmosphere which would lead to their evil thoughts and guilty behaviors to others. The repressive societal structures impact a lot on the psychological well-being of individuals.



Figure 5.52 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Martin been tied with a white ribbon

Source: Haneke, 2024

The film also explored the societal repressions from authority and hierarchy, and abuse of power. The village is ruled by the local baron, the pastor, the doctor over the women, children and farmers, which formed a strict social hierarchy reflecting authority and controlling. The authorities are abusing their power over innocent kids, women and poor farmers. The baron had the famer no work to do because he was angry about the farmer's son's revenge of ruining his cabbage field, which lead to the starvation of the farmer's whole family and he hanged himself to death.

The film reflects the collective Guilty of the German society of how Nazi Germany and German Fascism came from, exploring its origin of how Fascism is born. The story is a foreshadow of historical transformations before the World War I, the Village reflects on a larger historical social context in the perspective of religion, societal repression, and violence inheritance.

#### 5.3.2.3 Characters

The film has a diverse cast of characters over 20 depicting a group story crossing two generations. One group is the ruling class of the village including the baron, the pastor, and the doctor, another group is the farmer, women, children who are under their control and the narrator schoolteacher himself.

The schoolteacher, who is also the narrator and central character of the whole story, recalled the series of mysterious violence after many years in an old age. He also functions as the observer for the guilty and evil of the children. He was in his 30s when the story happened and he fell in love with his wife Eva the first time they met, who's the nanny of the baron's older son Sigmund. He witnessed the violence happened one by one and he found the kids' suspicious behaviors related to the violence. When he told his thoughts to the pastor in the end, the pastor didn't believe him and threaten him not to tell anyone to plant these innocent kids. The schoolteacher is like the audience himself as an observer who watched all these guilty and struggling in mind.



Figure 5.53 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the schoolteacher

Source: Haneke, 2024

The pastor, who is the representant of the religion and also one from the ruling class in the village, treat his children in a repressive and strict way, which triggered the rebellion in them under the table. He is inflexible and cold, requiring his kids to stay in pure and innocent which sometimes against humanity. He punished his kids for their coming home late and lying, making them wear the white ribbon, which is the symbol for purity and innocence in the religion, the white ribbon is also regarded as the constraints and restrains from religious repression. He tied his son's hands to the bed to stop him from masturbation in teenage which is violating normal humanity. Under such depression and repression from a pastor father, the oldest daughter and son of the pastor are the central criminals who are suspected for planning all the violence. The repressions from family and religion twisted the kids' psychology and turned them into the persons going against to the religious rules.



Figure 5.54 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the pastor

Source: Haneke, 2024

The doctor, is also a negative character from the ruling class in the story, representing authority and oppression for the disadvantaged women and children. A doctor is supposed to be kind with compassion, but the doctor in this film is cold, distant with secret darkness. He could not control his sexual desires after his wife died and kept a secret sexual relationship with the local midwife, who's also his assistant. But he had no any respect for her, only treating her as a sexual tool with humiliations and disgusts.

And what's worst is, he even sexually assaulted his own teenager daughter, which is of the most terrible guilty and unforgivable.



Figure 5.55 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the doctor

Source: Haneke, 2024

The baron, as the top hierarchy of the village, he controls all the villagers' survival resources of working and living. He is also depicted as a cold and selfish man with abuse of his authority. He is so angry of his son's incident that he threatened the whole village with a speech which caused suspicions and mistrust among people. He no longer hired the farmer working in his field after the farmer's son ruined his cabbage field revenging for his mother, this made the farmer's family got starvation and the farmer could not bear the pressure that chose to suicide. The baron's oppressive ruling over the villagers especially women and children is on main factor to the violence happened as rebellion.



Figure 5.56 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the baron

Source: Haneke, 2024

The children, who are suspected as criminals of the violence incidents, especially the oldest daughter and son of the pastor, Klara and Martin, they are at their 10s and acted as the central leaders of the rest kids for planning and committed the crimes. They are also victims of the repression from religion and society. They are tied with the white ribbon, a symbol of purity and innocence in religion, also a symbol of constraints and restraints for human nature. The long-term repression had huge impact on their psychology and behaviors, as grown up in such depressed and violent village under strictly control, they lost freedom of critical thinking and actions, they are twisted in psychology and filled with violence and hate in their mind.



Figure 5.57 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the pastor's daughter Klara

Source: Haneke, 2024



Figure 5.58 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the pastor's son Martin

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 5.3.2.4 Setting

The setting of this film is a crucial element for exploring the story theme, characters and cinematic aesthetics. It is set back to the time from July 1913 to August 1914 before the World War I broke out and applies a memory narrative of one of the main characters from years later, this kind of time setting built a distant atmosphere from history as personal and collective introspection on what happened. The theme of the film is to explore the roots of evil, which primarily refers to German Nazi and Fascism, the story was just set happened before the World War I is a direct reflection on the violence root of the war may come from the same origin of religious and societal repressions. The film could be considered as a metaphor for exploring how the guilty and violence of the Nazi and Fascism came from. As Michael Haneke put it himself, the root if evil is the same for religion and polity.

The setting of location is a rural Protestant village of Eichwald, Northern Germany, which is in the rule of the local baron, pastor and doctor, the women, children and poor farmers are under crucial and strict hierarchy control. The societal setting of the village is a microcosm version of the whole German society at that time, a typical and extreme small version with distance. The rural setting built an isolated and interconnected community, which would simplify the clues for exploring the mysterious events and seeking for the origin behind the violence and guilty. To present the remote, cold and dark atmosphere in German village, the director chose a black and white

cinematic aesthetic, which makes the setting of the village more austere and desperate, a place where the root of evil starting to grow into a big society. A remote rural village could be the purest place but also the extremely dark place for guilty.



Figure 5.59 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the view of village

Source: Haneke, 2024

### 5.3.2.5 Viewpoint

The White Ribbon is primarily presented in a first-person viewpoint of the schoolteacher who's also a character and observer in the series of incidents. It is narrated in a retrospective perspective from the schoolteacher's memories after many years later, which provides a subjective perspective interpretation on the characters and theme of the film. The retrospective narrative makes the story unreliable and subjective with strong personal reflections, which serves the director's narrative purpose of reflecting a bigger problem of the society through a symbol of single village.

The film starts with the aged schoolteacher's voiceover from years later telling why he would recall the series of mysterious events happened in this village that he thought this might provide some clues for origins of the societal transformations in the whole country. Then he begins telling the story from the doctor's accident, then followed the farmer's, the pastor's, and the baron's, while he inserts his love story with his wife Eva through the film. While he is narrating the events he experienced, he would add some subjective perspectives and guesses on these events, leading the audience to connect the series of violence together to figure out the final answer themselves. This

kind of first-person narrative and comments adds complex layers to the narrative and let the audience explore the characters' insights and motives in a deeper way, also providing the interpretation of the director himself to the film theme through the narrator's comments.

While the overall film is connected through the first-person narrator, the film sometimes shifts into the characters viewpoints to have a glimpse of their experiences and feelings when unfolding their own secrets. This multi-character viewpoints enriches the narrative layers and provides a more comprehensive understanding of characters' insights and film theme. The double narrative lines blur the boundaries between subjective and objective allows more individual interpretations from different aspects.

#### 5.3.2.6 Dialogues

The screenplay of this film is originally written by Michael Haneke himself applying double narrative lines. Therefore, the dialogues design also contains two layers, the first layer is the voiceover of the narrator and the second is the conversations of the characters. The two parts are crafted for different narrative purposes, the narrator's lines are designed in a subjective and ambiguous manner because it's the remote memories of the schoolteacher with strong personal interpretations. The narrator telling this story with personal perspective such as the line "They could perhaps clarify some things that happened in this country.". Through the progression of the events, the narrator also mixed in his own suspicions and commentary to what happened, as he added in the memories that he saw the kids left school without straightly going home and Martin's walking alone on the single-plank bridge for testing if the God wants to kill him or not, as personal guesses at the kids were criminals behind all this. As a connection of the series of events, the narrator cut into his voiceover when significant incidents occur such as the baron's son disappeared at the night of harvest celebration, the midwife's son was seriously hurt to blind etc. and he would also add his subjective inference and suspicions to the violence through narration. The narrator is somehow the representative of the director himself to express his thoughts and perspectives through the telling.

The second part of dialogues is the conversations between the villagers in daily life, which is overall designed in a depressed, formal, minimal style. This contributes to the film theme of repression, violence, and religion, to build a formal, repressive and cold atmosphere. As the village is set as a Protestant place, the religion over controls the spirit of individuals, the conversations between them always reflect in formal and emotional restrained. The adults talk to the kids also in a tonality of authority and oppression which is deliberately designed to reflect the repression and violent bias from family and parents. And silence is applied in most scenes which build the atmosphere of depress, dull and death, working along with the cinematic dark light in the village, depicting the story from both visual and auditory impact. And a lot quotes from the bible are used in the dialogues to shape the image of religion.

#### 5.3.2.7 Symbol and Motifs

The White Ribbon itself is the most significant symbol in this film as it's the name of it. The white ribbon is a symbol in religion that represents purity and innocence inside people, but in the film, it's also taken as the restrains and constrains from religious rules that violating human natures. The pastor tied their children with the white ribbon to remind them stay in innocent and kind, strictly following religious requirements in a crucial and repressive way. On the contrary, this kind of over repression caused negative distortions for the children psychology and rebellion behavior. The kids turned into criminals who physically abuse other kids and adults in this village in the name of religion and God.



Figure 5.60 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the white ribbon on Martin

Source: Haneke, 2024

The children are the underlying symbols for the young generation been oppressed and mis-educated by religion, who turned into German Nazi and Fascist. The film is to explore the root of evil and guilty, which reflect the root origin from the mistreatment and repression for children, they are both victims and perpetrators of religion, family and societal repressions. As the baroness in the film finally said when she wanted to leave this village with her son, this village is filled with violence, jealousy, hate and oppression, she didn't want her son grown up in such dark environment. Under such repression and cold circumstances, even the innocent children wound become criminals and crucial persons in the future, that's why German Nazi come from.



Figure 5.61 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the children visiting Anna

Source: Haneke, 2024

The bird is another important symbol in this film which represents innocent and vulnerable, and also the metaphor for the children in oppression. The first time the bird appears is when the pastor's youngest son found an injured bird and asking his father if he could keep it and take care of it. The bird is like the kid himself, so innocent and vulnerable. The pastor himself also has a bird locked in the cage, it's the same like the kids under religious and societal repressions. Later when the pastor's oldest daughter Klara killed the pastor's bird with a scissor, it's like she's killing herself stuck in this village. But the pastor's youngest son sent his own bird to his father to replace the dead one in the cage, which means the youngest son replaced his older

sister's place, continue to be raised up in such repressive family. One after one child, would continue be mistreated and became the victims and perpetrators.



Figure 5.62 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, bird killed the Klara

Source: Haneke, 2024



Figure 5.63 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, the pastor's little son gave his bird to his father

Source: Haneke, 2024

The church is an obvious symbol for religion and authority. The villagers are summoned into the church for pray or speeches from the baron or pastor. The pastor control over the people's spirit through religious methods but he abuses his power over kids and women in a crucial way. The baron controls over the food and resources of the village, he gave threatening speech which caused scare and panic among villagers after

his son was attacked. The children are required singing religious songs in the church and drinking holy blood at their confirmation ceremony, which is also a symbol of religious restraints for the kids.



Figure 5.64 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, villagers in the church

Source: Haneke, 2024

Table 5.3 Narrative style analysis of The white ribbon

Film name	The White Ribbon
Narrative Structure	
1)Narrative Arc	✗
2) Narrative type	Non-Linear
Narrative elements	
1) Plot	✓
2) Theme	Violence, Religion, Repression, Guilty
3)Characters	Schoolteacher, baron, pastor, doctor, children
4) Settings	1913 to 1914, German Village
5)Viewpoint	First-person
6) Dialogue	✓
7) Symbolism and Motifs	White Ribbon, Children, Bird, Church

## 5.4 NARRATIVE STYLE ANALYSIS OF AMOUR

### 5.4.1 Narrative structure

Unlike other films of Michael Haneke's, *Amour* follows a typical Linear narrative structure which presents the story in a straightforward way. The events in the film presented by the time process of Anne's deterioration. It makes the film simple in narrative structure and closer to realism allowing audience to watch and understand the story development and also changes in characters' minds. Here we could break down its Narrative Arc by follow parts:

5.4.1.1 Introduction: The film opens with the scene of officers breaking into the apartment and found Anne's dead body in the closed room, which implies what happened to the old couple in the end. It's a framing device that adding an attractive layer to the audience wondering how this happened. Then the film officially started with black screen on film title *Amour*.



Figure 5.65 Narrative style analysis of *The White Ribbon*, Anne was found died

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.4.1.2 Initial Set-Up: Followed the introduction, Haneke depicts the original life situation of the two main characters, George and Anne, an elderly retired music professor couple living a decent and peaceful life in an apartment in Paris. The

setting up follows their daily routine life, attending a music concert of their student, taking bus home after the event and talking about musical and life stuff.



Figure 5.66 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Gorge and Anne in the music concert

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.4.1.3 Inciting Incident: It is quite short the film showing the couple's happy life but suddenly takes a dramatic turn that Anne had a stroke when having breakfast with Gorge in a beautiful normal morning. This incident changed the couple's life completely.



Figure 5.67 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Anne got a stroke

Source: Haneke, 2024

Development of Conflicts: The film then unfolds the conflicts by presenting the worse and worse situation of Anne's illness, along with Gorge's suffering and inner changes from this. Anne was sent into hospital after second stroke with half body paralyzed back home and she talked to Gorge that she wants to end all this but refused by Gorge. Gorge takes the role of her primary caretaker.

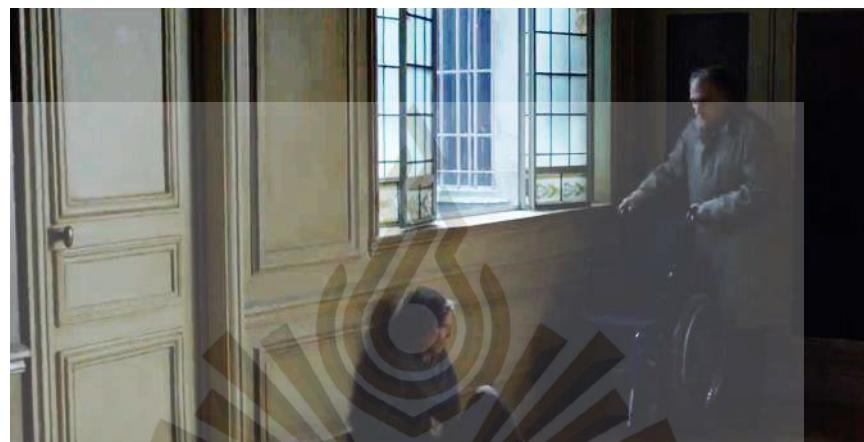


Figure 5.68 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Anne failed suicide

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.4.1.4 Rising Action: As her condition getting worse and gradually losing physical independence, Gorge and Anne both dropped into depth of misery. And she gradually starts to lose ability to move and speak, ending up laying on the bed all day depending on diapers and feeding by others. Anne loses all her dignity as decent human beings and only a breath left on bed.



Figure 5.69 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Anne's condition got worse

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.4.1.5 Climax: As Anne almost can't speak or move at all and she also lost consciousness, and also because of some unrespectful actions from the healthcare woman, Anne refuses to drink water to die, which makes Gorge losing control and slapped her face. This is the moment both of their suffering coming to the limit, pushing Gorge to make the terrible decision in the end.



Figure 5.70 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Gorge slapped Anne

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.4.1.6 Resolution: Gorge finally couldn't bear watching Anne suffering any longer, living on without dignity and value. He uses a pillow to press Anne to death one morning while Anne is constantly moaning because of pain after he calms down Anne by telling her his childhood story. This scene answers to the first scene that Anne was found dead in the apartment, providing closure to the story in a full circle.



Figure 5.71 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Gorge ended

Anne's life with a pillow

Source: Haneke, 2024

5.4.1.7 Closure: The film ends with Anne and Gorge's daughter Eva coming into the empty apartment without any of her parents there anymore. Without telling us what happened with Gorge after he killed Anne. The house is all empty just like both of them were gone, like nothing happened.

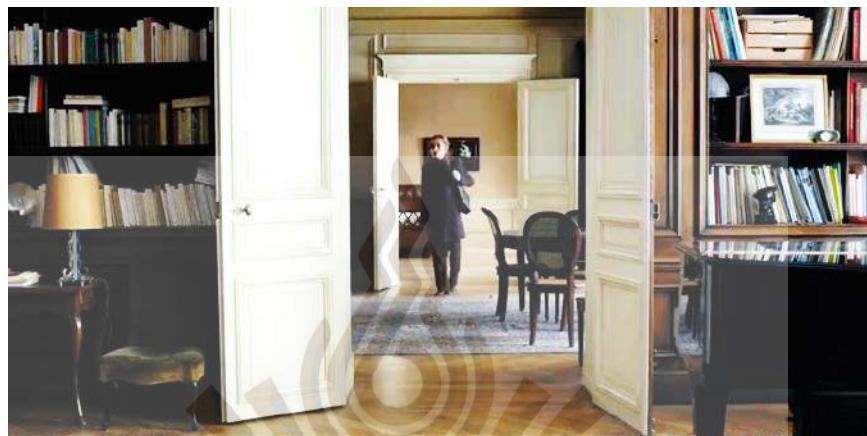


Figure 5.72 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Eva back to apartment

Source: Haneke, 2024

## 5.4.2 Narrative Elements

### 5.4.2.1 Plot

The story begins with the police officer break into the apartment in Paris found out that an elderly woman Anne (Emmanuelle Riva) was dead on bed for days with the smell of the corpse. Then the film title *Amour* showing up, taking the audience back to trace why and how this happened in the past.

The beginning of story is a nice night of the old couple Anne and her husband Gorge (Jean-Louis Trintignant) going to a music concert of their excellent student. They enjoyed the music and talked to the musician at the backstage. As they returning home by a bus, they shared opinions about music and talked about daily stuff all the way home. Soon, next morning when they are having a breakfast at the table, Anne suddenly got a stroke, but she refused to accept the situation after she came to her mind in a few minutes. Gorge was so worried and insist sending her to the doctor.

Then we saw Anne got back from hospital after a surgery with half of her body paralyzed. She could only sit on a wheelchair to move around the house which

makes her very upset, and she talked to Gorge asking him to promise not to send her to a hospital ever again. Gorge became her caretaker from then on. One day, Anne tried to kill herself by jumping out of the window while Gorge went out for a funeral, but she failed. Gorge was upset and angry about it. They had a talk about Anne's suicide.

Anne's former student came to visit them and Anne asked him to play Schubert for her. But she got a second stroke soon and this time her condition was worse. She gradually lost ability to move and also speaking. Gorge had to hire a professional caretaker to look after her together. Their daughter came to visit Anne but found she lied on bed unconsciously and could not speak a complete sentence. Another professional caretaker treats Anne rudely making her look at herself miserable in the mirror which leads to Anne's hunger strike to die. Gorge fired the nurse but Anne's situation getting worse and worse, she could only moan painfully in bed with dippers all day on.

As the suffering goes on, one day when Gorge was telling a story to Anne about his childhood to comfort her in pain, he suddenly grabs a pillow and smothers her to dead. He wrote a long letter after Anne died and help her dress decently and bought flowers put on her bed. Gorge then had a dream about Anne was still alive and washing dishes in the kitchen like before, he followed Anne going out of the door. The film ends with an opened scene that Eva coming back to visit the empty house without a definite resolution of Gorge.

#### 5.4.2.2 Theme

The theme of Amour is discussing about profound meaning of life in age when facing death, specifically how you deal with the illness and suffering of your beloved ones. It's not only about responsibility and compassion for lovers, but also involved with long time suffering without human dignity and value beings. As Michael Haneke once said in an interview about this film, "I didn't want to make a social drama, but an existential drama that deals with the question: how do I cope with the suffering of a loved one?"

Anne in the film is challenged with illness of losing physical and mental ability little by little, which also means she is losing the dignity and value as individual human beings, she got nothing left when paralyzed in bed and relying on others to feed

for life. She had chosen death rather than live without dignity but failed in suicide. And she chose taking a hunger strike even when she is unable to move or talk anymore.

For Gorge, the most challenge part is not the hard work of taking care of Anne but the suffering of watching her condition declined day by day, plus Anne herself wants to end this but Gorge didn't want to let her go. The more time he struggled with this choice, the more time they both suffering from this. How does Gorge choose between love, suffering, dignity and morality? It is not a social question anymore in this film but the crucial problem dealing with suffering from death between them two.

#### 5.4.2.3 Characters

The film features a small cast of two main characters, Gorge and Anne, and other secondary characters with limited appearance, their daughter Eva and two professional healthcare women.



Figure 5.73 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Gorge and Anne reading

Source: Haneke, 2024

Gorge, an elderly man, is the husband and soul mate of Anne, he has been married with Anne for over decades and they are in deep love and intimate relationship all these years. He is a retired music teacher same as Anne, well-educated, dedicated husband, being gentle, patient and respectful to his wife. He seems a perfect husband and partner in life at the beginning of the story.

After Anne got stroke, Gorge takes the responsibility of caretaker, struggling to remain Anne's life in dignity, showing out his deep love for Anne and

strong determination on taking care of her for the rest time. But when Anne's condition declined worse and worse, long time physical and spiritual suffering, his mind is changing little by little as difficult time goes by. Watching the beloved and proud wife losing physical independence and also communication ability, he suffers more than his wife. As the one who understand most of Anne, he knows exactly that both he and Anne want this suffer to end. He was in deep struggle with love, dignity, illness, responsibility, death and moral questions.

When Anne's illness came to the worst condition, she totally lost all abilities of living and communication only breathing and moaning in pain, Anne forced Gorge to take actions by going on a hunger strike. Gorge's mind was completely changed from the beginning. He thought they would overcome all this suffers but after long time trying and Anne could not get any better any more, only death and much more pain waiting for them, he finally makes the horrible decision to end the suffering of them both.

Gorge's characterization has been through a big change as Anne's condition changes. From a dedicated husband who loves and respect his wife the most, into someone who is also in deep pain and lost hope of life, killing his beloved wife by his own hands. His determination was so strong and also his love for his wife, but the suffering from aging and illness is too real to bear. It is hard to comment on Gorge's actions to Anne's death in legal or social justice, therefore, the director left this moral question to the audience to think.



Figure 5.74 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Anne asked for death

Source: Haneke, 2024

Another main character Anne, who is also an elderly, the wife of Gorge, also a retired music teacher with respect from people around. In the beginning, she was so elegant as an elderly woman living a decent life with Gorge, independent from her daughter. Love, music, independence, pride, elegance, well-respected, Anne seems has all beautiful stuff in life in this cozy apartment in France.

But this ideal life didn't last long in the film, soon minutes later, Anne got first stroke in a sudden when having breakfast with Gorge. She refuses to believe it's true as she is such a proud old lady, but after her second stroke came, everything changed in her life after she came back from hospital with half body paralyzed. She has to rely on Gorge's help to eat, move, even go to bathroom. This situation is more than what Anne could bear. She has already predicted that her condition would be worse and worse, and she didn't want that to happen, so she first time ask Gorge help her to end this earlier before it's too late for them to suffering from this. She even tried to end her life by jumping from the window but failed. This showing out Anne's pride as decent human being and strong mind to keep her dignity.

As she getting worse and worse, she gradually could not move or speak any more, or even recognize her own daughter, lying on bed with diapers all day unconsciously. She lost everything she cherished in life, no privacy or dignity when the healthcare woman changing diaper and taking shower for her. It became the worst part when one bad healthcare woman combing her mass hair and force her to look at herself in the mirror. She could not bear this anymore and refuse to eat or drink to die. This is also the moment of Gorge's limitation, he slapped Anne in her face.

The characterization of Anne has very strong contrast at the beginning to the later part of illness. She turned into a breathing living only in pain, without pleasure, dignity, value of life, and all these are her most precious stuff in life before. And we could see how she turned out like this situation step by step, ending up dead. She tried to avoiding this happening the first time the stroke but it was Gorge who wants to keep and take care of her, and they both suffered a lot from the declined process to death.

#### 5.4.2.4 Setting

The film is set in modern society in Paris, France. At the beginning of film, we could feel and experience the artistic and free contemporary Paris when Anne and Gorge went out for music concert. The classical music theater and decent dressed

audiences implies the couple's well-educated culture background and middle-class society status. Unconventionally, most part of the film takes place inside the old couple's apartment, with extreme limited outside interactions. Since it focuses on inner struggle of the old couple, the whole apartment plays as the symbol of their life status.

At the beginning, the apartment is a cozy and comfortable place for the happy old couple living a decent life. The director focus much on their daily routine in this apartment, having breakfast in kitchen, helping each other put on clothes at the corridor, reading in the living room etc. The apartment is divided into rooms by walls and doors, which build a wall for them to isolate from outside world, a place seems perfect dream house for old couple to live.

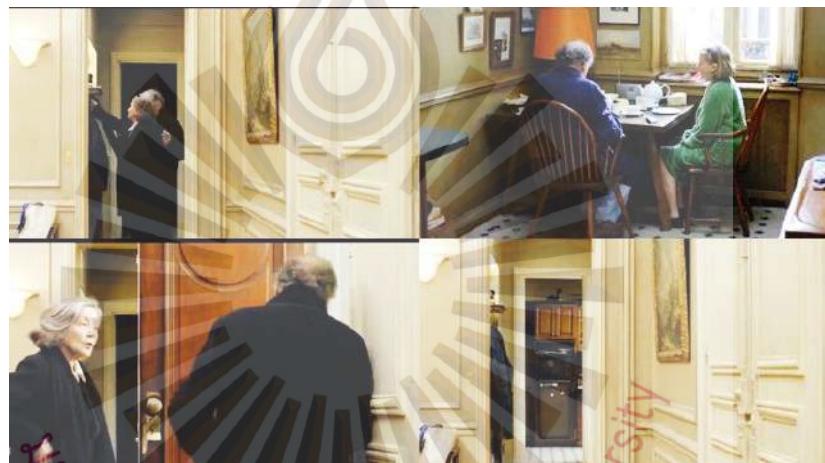


Figure 5.75 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, confined apartment

Source: Haneke, 2024

Then as Anne got stroke and back from hospital, the atmosphere of the isolated rooms gradually changed. We saw Gorge and Anne stuck in the apartment, Anne lying on bed or couch with Gorge beside her, Gorge help Anne doing exercises in the desperate bedroom, Gorge helping Anne with the toilet in the narrow space, Anne sitting on wheelchair moving in circles in the space closed on all sides. Every room become a prison for them, locking them down in the longtime suffering, isolated from hope, light, and help from others. This deliberate design of narrative space allow audience to observe and immerse themselves with the characters' life and inner emotions.



Figure 5.76 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, isolated rooms

Source: Haneke, 2024

#### 5.4.2.5 Viewpoint

The film employs a third-person limited viewpoint mostly to enhance an observational approach to the old couple's real struggles in life, which is Michael Haneke's trademark director style of distance and alienation. And some subjective viewpoint is also used when it comes to critical emotional moments of the characters.

The objective viewpoint is most applied in the scenes of the couple's daily life, both before and after Anne's stroke, to offer an approach for audience to experience the process of the daily struggles that never ends. The camera follows them in a distance like we are watching real life daily show on ourselves. We saw Anne and Gorge went out for concert and how they talk and interact with each other in a pleasant atmosphere before the stroke. It becomes a strong contrast with the daily routines after Anne's stroke, Gorge help Anne to move from wheelchair to bed, or from wheelchair to bathroom. How Gorge feed food to Anne and help her wash hair. These daily sufferings are all presented in an objective way that immerse the audience with authenticity.

Some first-person viewpoint is employed especially when Gorge's inner emotion changes. The first time Anne got a stroke, it is from Gorge's perspective watching Anne unmoved for a long time without any conscious. We experience the same shock feelings as Gorge. It is the critical moment that their life is changed ever after. At the end of the film, a pigeon came into their house again which is a symbol for

hope and freedom of Anne, Gorge watches the pigeon as he is facing Anne in person. Here the first-person viewpoint of Gorge allows audience to feel like Gorge too.

#### 5.4.2.6 Dialogue and Silence

The dialogue design in *Amour* follows a minimalism and simplicity principle, focusing on depicting the authentic daily dialogues between the old couple and discussions on critical transitions between Gorge and Anne, or Gorge and their daughter Eva. Mostly, the film is in silence with some ambience and movement noises from Gorge or Anne. When coming to the later part of the film, we could only hear the constant moaning from Anne and the horrible silence of the apartment.

The dialogues between Gorge and Anne present in a peaceful and daily way. At the beginning, they naturally keep talking their daily affairs and share opinions on music, which format a strong contrast to the later conversations between them. After Anne got stroke, they had a brief conversation about the idea Anne wants the suffering to end but Gorge insists on taking care of her and won't let her go. Then Anne's condition became worse and worse, the conversation between them is less and less. Mostly they use body gestures and eye contacts to communicate with each other, the suffering had taken all their energy and words away. At the end of Anne's life, she completely lost the ability to speak and moaning on bed unconsciously, Gorge tried to teach Anne some simple pronunciations to keep her alive. Until the end of film, Gorge could only tell stories to Anne to keep her accompany.

Silent moments are critical part and common in this film. There have been 2 times of critical transitions of silent still shots through the story. The first is when Anne got first time stroke and sent to hospital, a series of still shots in different angles of the empty apartment showing great silence, sadness and emptiness, it is the big transition point of Gorge and Anne's life. The second series of silent still shots appear when Gorge made the decision of ending Anne's suffering. A series of silent shots on dark painting arts on the wall imply Gorge's change in mind. The terrible decision has been made and the darkest end is to coming.

#### 5.4.2.7 Symbolism

The pigeon is a key symbol which appears twice in the film. It is a metaphor for life, freedom, and also implies the pass of time. The first time the pigeon flied into the room through the window after Anne got stroke back from hospital, Gorge

and Anne were in deep dilemma. They just got isolated from their used normal nice life, entering the stage of suffering. The pigeon then is a messenger of life visiting them, also refers to their inner desire for freedom and health. Gorge tried to catch the pigeon but failed, just like he tried hard to seize the life hope for Anne but it also failed in endless pains and suffering for both of them.



Figure 5.77 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, pigeon from the window

Source: Haneke, 2024

The second time the pigeon appeared is after Gorge did the terrible action to take away Anne's life in the end, he saw the pigeon again in the room. The pigeon came back like a life circle to end. This time, it is the symbol for the end of Anne's life and finally Anne is freed from all the suffer and pains. Gorge tried to catch the pigeon again and this time he succeeds, he gently holding the pigeon in his arms like he was holding Anne. The pigeon is the metaphor freedom, hope and end of life, like all nature circles.



Figure 5.78 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Gorge hold the pigeon

Source: Haneke, 2024

The confined apartment with corridors and doors is another key symbol in the film. Firstly, the isolated apartment is a perfect nice living place for the old couple unaffected by outside world, refers to their own dream world. After Anne's situation got bad, the doors, corridors in the apartment became walls and cages imprisoned them inside the endless pains, like the always closed windows and curtains, no way out.



Figure 5.79 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, confined rooms

Source: Haneke, 2024

Another important symbol in this film is music and art. As the old couple are both retired music teachers, music means their used nice life with elegance, dignity, and happiness. They went to their student's concert together at the beginning, and their student to visit them after Anne got sick and was asked to play Franz Schubert. With music, their life is hopeful and beautiful. But the music was stopped by Anne when her condition getting worse and she interrupted the CD playing music when she thought all the nice life were gone far away from her. Only Gorge dreaming about Anne playing piano in the living room when he falls asleep. All beautiful things are gone for them as music, they were left in deep darkness.



Figure 5.80 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, Anne playing piano

Source: Haneke, 2024

The art paintings on the wall are key symbols of Gorge's inner mind changes in the end when he made the terrible decision of ending Anne's life. The director uses a series of still shots on the dark and depressed paintings to imply that there is a big change in Gorge's mind and the terrible things to come. The art paintings represent a sense of death and depression of their inner world.



Figure 5.81 Narrative style analysis of The White Ribbon, art paintings shots

Source: Haneke, 2024

Table 5.4 Narrative style analysis of Amour

Film name	Amour
Narrative Structure	
1) Narrative Arc	✓
2) Narrative type	Linear
Narrative elements	
1) Plot	✓
2) Theme	Love, Death, Aging
3) Characters	Anne, Gorge
4) Settings	Modern Paris, France
5) Viewpoint	Third-person
6) Dialogue	✓
7) Symbolism and Motifs	Pigeon, Confined Apartment, Piano, Art Paintings

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

The objectives of the Humanism Philosophy and Narrative Style of Michael Haneke's films is to 1) To explore humanism philosophy appeared in Michael Haneke's films. 2) To analyze the narrative style of Michael Haneke's films. The text analysis is applied to a qualitative study of four most representative films of his released during 2001 to 2017. The selected four films are as follows:

- 1) The Piano Teacher (2001)
- 2) Caché (2005)
- 3) The White Ribbon (2009)
- 4) Amour (2012)

#### 6.1 CONCLUSION

##### 6.1.1 Humanism Philosophy in Michael Haneke's films

The profound humanism philosophy exploration is one of the typical and valuable aspect of Michael Haneke's films. He is a societal observer and an excellent realism storyteller who keeps taking materials from real life struggles of human beings across different ages, countries and races. He explores deeply into human nature and spiritual thoughts of modern humanism philosophy in different aspects. Humanism philosophy is a theory that study and summarize the inner activities and thoughts of human beings in modern society and families, Michael Haneke as a graduate student of the University of Vienna to studying philosophy, psychology and drama, he applied what he learned in philosophy into his films to provide a profound portrait of complex human minds of both the darkness and brightness, and also how human beings to face the struggles of themselves and problems from society. He explored the themes of love,

death, age, violence, religion, psychology distortions, guilty, emotional repression, colonialism, surveillance etc. which involves all aspects of human inner world.

The common viewpoints of modern humanism philosophy are usually considered contains 8 important aspects while Michael Haneke focused on 6 of them which are usually repeatedly appeared and discussed in his films, they are as follows:

- 1) Naturalistic World
- 2) Human Value and Dignity
- 3) Freedom of action and choice
- 4) Ethical Conduct
- 5) Arts, Culture and Education
- 6) Social Justice

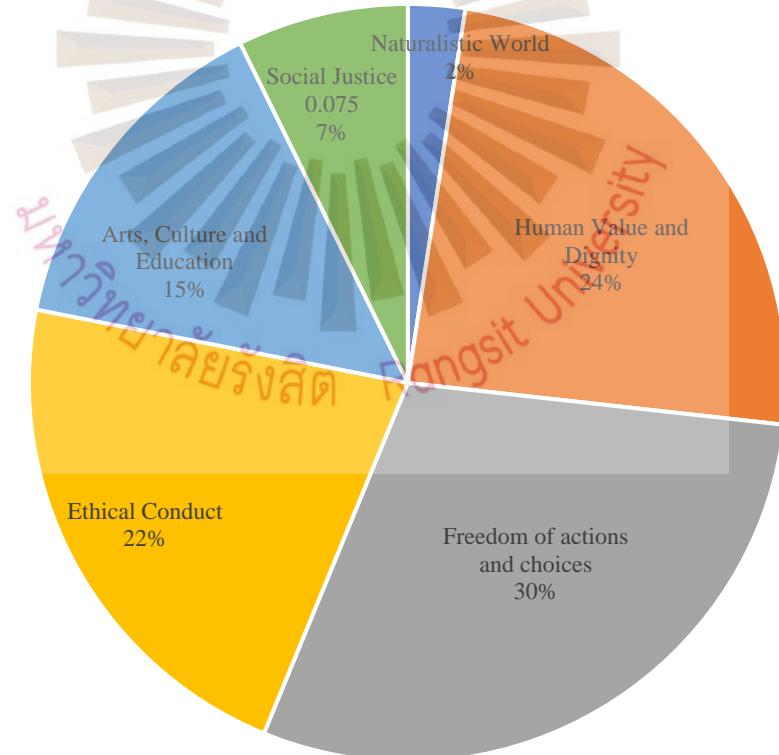


Figure 6.1 Humanism Philosophy Analysis in Michael Haneke's films

6.1.1.1 Naturalistic World is humanism's worldview of understanding the nature of world based on human activity observations, life evidence and rational thinking. They reject supernatural explanations for natural phenomena, Including religious dogma, mystical beliefs, and paranormal explanations. In the film The White Ribbon (2009), Michael Haneke discussed the viewpoint of Naturalistic world in an opposite way by setting up the story as a German protestant village which people are under controlled by religion and societal hierarchy. The director challenged the existence of religion, does it really lead people to good or it on the contrary ruined the purity and innocence of children? The value and impact of religion should be questioned and also how the world works, how human beings' roles and value among the naturalistic world.

6.1.1.2 Human Value and Dignity are foundational concepts of Humanism, advocating inherent worth of individuals. Humanism believes that all humankind should have the same value no matter of their race, gender, religion, or social status. Placing humans at the center of philosophical thinking. Every human should be born, live and die with dignity, people are to respect each other. In Michael Haneke's films, almost every film (4/4) has discussed about this viewpoint. In the film The Piano Teacher (2001), Michael Haneke discussed about the human value and dignity in family and society. The protagonist of the film Erika Kohut is a talented piano teacher but still under control of her dominated elderly mother even though she has proper profession and income in society, her value and dignity as an individual is not respected by her mother in family life which leads to her twisted personality. On the other hand, Erika could find her value and dignity in career and society. She is a valued and respected teacher by the students, her students appreciate her talents in piano and all want to learn from her even though she is so cold and strict to her students. As a piano teacher in society, she found her value and dignity as an individual. In the film Caché (2005), Michael Haneke discussed about the human dignity under poor conditions. No matter one's living condition is poor or rich, one's social class and wealth, he could always find his unique value in the world and live with dignity. This topic is brought up in the film through Majid's life experiences and his choice to death. As a poor man like Majid with less education and live a miserable life, how does he recover from his childhood trauma and find his value in life? When facing racial and class discriminations, how

should he defend his honor and dignity? Is it worthy to suicide because of Gorge's distrust and insult? In the film The White Ribbon (2009), Michael Haneke discussed about the human value and dignity under hierarchical society. The story is set up in a German village with strict hierarchy, women, children and poor farmers are under controlled by the baron, and the pastor mostly. In material life, the baron owns most of the village's resources and he could decide the food and labor work over the village, everyone is afraid of his power and has to follow his rules. While mentally, the pastor controls the religious spirit of the villagers and repress human nature by strict religious rules as it's a Protestant village. If someone didn't follow the religious requirements, the pastor is to punish them physically and mentally, he is even harder to his own children. Under double repressions from society and religion, individuals are hard to have their own human value and dignity. The extremely strict religious control over the villagers and children constrains the mental freedom and thinking of human value and dignity, the rules of religion would only lead to opposite effects on human beings, turning them into violent kids with evil thoughts. And in the film Amour (2012), Michael Haneke discussed about human value and dignity in aging. As to the elderly, human value and dignity became a serious problem that is much harder to maintain because of declined physical situation and social activities. The ability to create social value and capacity to active life are also fade away. This is the ultimate question all human beings would face in later life, how to maintain the value and dignity of human when in old age. The primary problem that Anne facing in the film is exactly the question of dignity and value of elderly. We could see from the beginning of film that Anne, as a retired music teacher with good educational background and elegant manners, she had a very decent, rich and peaceful life of happiness, art, respectfulness from her husband and students. But after Anne got stroke, everything changed suddenly. Her ability to movements was taken away, this is the start point of her losing independence and physical dignity. And finally, his beloved husband chose to end her poor life.

6.1.1.3 Freedom of action and choice is that humanism asserts that individuals have the capacity for rational thought and self-determination, and it values the freedom to make choices and take actions in accordance with one's values and beliefs. Individuals should have free thoughts, free will on decision-making and personal responsibilities for the consequences of their choices and actions. In Michael

Haneke's films, this is another viewpoint that been discussed in all (4/4) of his films. In the film The Piano teacher (2001), he discussed about the freedom of actions and choices with psychological issues. One core aspect that the film explores into is the repression VS. free individual actions and choices. Long-term repression from family is the origin of Erika's psychological issues and self-destructive tendency. When confronting with repression from family and expectational pressures society, how should we defend the freedom of actions and choices for ourselves. And what the consequences would be when one losing free actions and choices in life? In the film Caché (2005), Michael Haneke discussed about free actions and choices to defend dignity. Human beings have free choices and actions at his will and also one is to be responsible for the consequences caused, even facing death itself. This freedom of choice and action reflected by Majid's choice of suicide, which is the climax of the film. Majid was second time been insulted by Gorge's distrust and questioned about his honest personality, as a decent innocent poor man, he could not stand a second time psychological injury by the same person after so many years again, and this time Majid's son was also been arrested by the police because of Gorge's suspects, Majid had no other ways of proving his innocence and protecting his son and himself from infringe on human dignity, he made the choice decisively and bravely of a suicide in front of Gorge. In the film The White Ribbon (2009), Michael Haneke discussed about the free actions and choices under control. While in this film, the white ribbon is the key symbol for religious constrains. The free actions and choices are extremely constrained and repressed by societal classes and also religious rules. The village community is made up of strict social hierarchy of the baron, the pastor, and the doctor, they controlled the resources, food, health, moral and spiritual rules over the women and children, forcing them to live and act as what they required, left them no choices of their own. Once the children or women go against their wishes, they would be punished physically and mentally. In the film Amour (2012), Michael Haneke discussed about freedom of choice and actions while facing ethical problems. Human beings have the freedom choice and decisions based on their own values. But this would raise another problem of ethical conduct by oneself. To be aware of one's morality, conduct own actions and behaviors to be morally acceptable. This principle of free choice and confrontation with ethical conduct is also the critical part of this film. Then came to the opposite part to freedom of choice, that is the ethical problems

occurred. Haneke didn't depict the consequences of Gorge's action of ending Anne's life with a pillow, even we could not know about what happened to Gorge after Anne's death. The film ended with Gorge's perfect dream about Anne being alive and he followed her going out as they used to. This is an unsolved question and an open-end to the audience to think themselves. Is it legal and moral that Gorge killed Anne as a fact and what are the responsibilities to take for this action? Gorge has already suffered a lot along with Anne's illness and death, he is the one who's punished most in this tragedy.

6.1.1.4 Ethical Conduct in humanism accepts the responsibility for human life and sets some common principles or values for moral questions including fairness, integrity, honesty, respect for others, empathy and compassion. The pursuit of ethical conduct is a continuous process of self-reflection, learning, and a commitment to acting in ways that promote the well-being of oneself and others. In Michael Haneke's films, this is also a viewpoint that been discussed in all (4/4) of his films. In the film The Piano teacher (2001), he discussed about ethical conduct in an unconventional relationship. It forces us to rethink the ethical conduct of individuals confronting with psychological issues and sexual taboos. Another core topic in this film is how do we judge the criterions of ethical conduction when in unconventional relationship and impacted by long-term repressions. It adds more complexity to morality in the context of personal psychological issues. At the end of film, Walter lost control of himself and raped Erika, Walter's behavior challenged societal standards in an extreme extent, how do we judge the action of rape under this situation? It is the private unconventional sadism and masochism behavior between them two or it should be put in the context of societal legal principles? In the film Caché (2005), Michael Haneke discussed about ethical Conduct for both children and adults. In the film, Gorge in his childhood lied to his parents about Majid had infective disease coughing blood to stop his parents adopting Majid after Majid's parents were murdered in the Paris Massacre in 1961. Kids are supposed to be honesty and kind but Gorge was a liar at the age of 6, just out of his selfishness and paranoid of Majid would take away what he had in the family. In Humanism Philosophy we usually discuss about the ethical conduct referring adults, but through this film, the topic extends to the ethical and guilty issues of children. Both adults and kids are supposed to be aware of moral principles, especially kids who are lack of logical and rational thinking and much harder to control their behaviors. How

we should face the guilty that we committed in childhood, how the sin would affect our psychology when one grown up and how to take responsibilities for the crime committed in childhood. In the film The White Ribbon (2009), Michael Haneke again discussed about the ethical conduct of children. The film explores the roots of evil, the roots were planted into the younger generation since they were kids by their parents and society through religious repression and societal oppression, this is how the evil roots came from in the context of German society before World War I, the village is a microcosm of the whole Germany society and the children in the village imply the next generation that's growing up during World War I, who are possibly turned into Nazi under the impact of violence and evil since they were young. In the film Amour (2012), Michael Haneke discussed about ethical conduct VS freedom of choices and actions. It was raised up the question of ethical conduct when Gorge killed Anne in pain. We could experience Gorge's suffering from inner morality in many moments. His last letter left in the world described the details and emotions all the way along, and he admitted his so-called crime in it. After dark struggles and desperations, Gorge took the horrible action without hesitation. Although we won't discuss the exact legal results of this, but it makes us to rethink about the morality conduct when facing vital decisions.

6.1.1.5 Arts, Culture and Education: In Humanism, arts, culture, and education are very essential components of human life. These could enrich human experiences, promote critical thinking and cultural understanding, play crucial roles in individual growth, and empower them to be ethically engaged in the world through time. In Michael Haneke's films, this is also been discussed in all (4/4) of his films but not as the core theme point. In the film The Piano teacher (2001), he discussed about art, music and educational impact on human spirit and personality. As a well-known classic music lover, Michael Haneke applied music elements in many of his films. This one is a typical film discussing about the influence of music on human spirit and impacts on one's psychology and personality. Usually, we thought music has positive effect on human spirit and culture, but this film also discussed the negative effect if music takes all one's time and pursuit excessively the success in art may do harm to one's normal life desires and needs fulfilments, which would lead to psychological issues if not handled in a proper way. In the film Caché (2005), Michael Haneke discussed about importance and impact of education. Michael Haneke has implied the importance and impact of

education to individuals in many aspects. Most significantly is the educational background of Majid resulted in his later actions and choices of death, the second is presence of Gorge's and Majid's sons, the educational progress of the young generation in France. Education is seen as a key approach for individual development in intellectual, moral and social life in humanism philosophy, which believes in human potential, value and dignity in every individual. With good education, one is to master more skills on critical thinking and ways of self-expression through the tools of science, technology logical, and arts. In the film The White Ribbon (2009), Michael Haneke discussed about the impact of education. In the film, the director depicts the how the education situation and principles under strict societal hierarchy and religious repressions before World War I, we could both see how crucial the family education is and how cold and goes against humanity the social education there and the terrible results it leads to the children. Education is a significant role in shaping the children's beliefs, personalities and attitudes towards others. If the children are educated in a repressive environment like the pastor's family, and they are always physically and mentally punished for minor mistakes, it would possibly lead to a twisted psychology, violence and evil would be planted into their childish heart. In the film Amour (2012), Michael Haneke discussed about Arts, Music in Human Spirit. The role of art and music also play an important part in this film, the music and art are not only the symbols of life, hope, freedom and happiness but also the big change in the couple's inner emotions and decisions. As the director Haneke himself is also a music lover and piano player, he is known for passionate about classic music. He applied a lot classic music in the film too, especially Schubert and Mozart. The plot of Anne's student coming to visit her in sick, she asked him to play a Schubert music to comfort her, that's like a signal of her farewell to her previous beautiful life. Ans the plot of Gorge imaging Anne playing piano again when Anne's situation got worse, it is also a symbol for hope and life. The director has deeply implanted music into the characters and story.

6.1.1.6 Social Justice is a commitment to the fair and equal treatment of individuals in society. All individuals have the opportunity to their basic necessities, education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal and professional development, free from discrimination They also supports legal and criminal justice systems that are fair, transparent, no systemic biases. This viewpoint is only been discussed in one of Michael

Haneke's films of Caché (2005). He discussed about Social Justice for significant historical event. There are almost no records on the historic massacre until 1997, during which 200 Algerians may have been shot or murdered by France police secretly, but the French government covered the facts of this event and public investigations were not allowed for years. Michael Haneke learned about this event and was shocked by the hidden truth and also the cheating from government, so he decided to make this history into his film, which taken as an allegory about collective guilt and memory of France's Algerian War and colonialism to Algeria. This fact of history could be learned from the protagonist Gorge's narrative at the end part of film after he witnessed Majid's suicide in front of him. He confessed to his wife that in October 1961, Algerians were called to a demonstration in Paris, but the police drowned about 200 Arabs in the Seine which may including Majid's parents.

Table 6.1 Check-list of Humanism Philosophy Analyzed

Humanism Philosophy	Film Name			
	The Piano Teacher	Caché	The White Ribbon	Amour
1) Naturalistic World			√	
2) Human Value and Dignity	√	√	√	√
3) Freedom of action and choice	√	√	√	√
4) Science, Logic, and Critical thinking				
5) Ethical Conduct	√	√	√	√
6) Arts, Culture and Education	√	√	√	√
7) Social Justice		√		
8) Environmental Concern				

### 6.1.2 Narrative Style of Michael Haneke's films

The narrative style of Michael Haneke is characterized as distinctive in realism, philosophy and psychological depth of human nature, and a deliberate sense of alienation and isolation of modern society. By breaking down his representative films in recent years, we also saw significant changes in his narrative style which differs from his early works, that is much more improvement in characters' psychological depth and arcs, insisting on a distanced observational approach to keep real and authentic to the audiences, his non-linear structure, slow pacing and open-endedness tricks always left space for rethinking afterwards, and minimalism and simplicity are presented through all his films, as well as the excellent top naturalism cinematic style in both black and white or color. Narrative style of Michael Haneke's films could be concluded into 5 aspects based on the narrative style analysis of the 4 selected films as below:

#### 6.1.2.1 Non-linear Structures, Slow Pacing and Open-endedness

Michael Haneke's films often employ non-linear structures, slow pacing, and open-endedness that challenges conventional storytelling conventions and engages the audiences in deeper thoughts of complex societal or humanism philosophy themes. He usually utilizes non-linear narrative structures to create a sense of flexibility and complexity in narrative by presenting the events out of chronological order or in multiple timelines, two of the four selected films are non-linear structures, *Caché* and *The White Ribbon*. With non-linear structures, Haneke invites the audience to piece the fragmental events together to understand the story themselves in a deeper way with independent second thoughts.

Haneke's films are often applied with a deliberately slow pacing as well, to create a sense of tension and unease. He designs periods of silence, contemplation, and minimal action through the films for a slow rhythm, so the audiences are forced to confront the real details of the characters' life and experience the anxieties and tense that the characters are going through in the meantime. This is commonly presented in the films *Amour*, *The White Ribbon* and *The Piano Teacher*. We watch the daily life of the old couple dying in struggles, waiting for the series of violence to happen in silence and observe the piano teacher abusing herself in the bathroom like we were there

ourselves. This slow-pacing is on the contrary to the mainstream cinema in fast-paced, attention-grabbing techniques, which is a great challenge to the cinema market. The success of Haneke's films proved it works.

As a director who raises the question but never answered, he almost applied an open-endedness to every film, always leaving key questions unanswered and allowing multiple interpretations from the audiences. This open-ended approach also reflects Haneke's belief in the uncertainty and changes of human nature, as well as his resistance to offering easy and superficial answers, or personal judgments over the ultimate problems of human beings.

#### 6.1.2.2 Depth in Character Psychology and Humanism Philosophy

Michael Haneke's films always delve into the depth of humanism philosophy related to all life and societal aspects by exploring the complex inner world of characters' psychological arcs. He often builds the characters who are going through psychological transformations during the narrative, portraying characters with flaws, complexities and inner conflicts but in dynamic development through the stories. The characters in his films are usually set up in moral dilemmas, psychological traumas, existential crises, facing choices on death or dignity, and more children and elderly recent years as he himself is getting old while he used to focus on the middle-aged middle-class families in modern society. With exploration on characters' complex inner world, Haneke reflecting his profound thoughts on universal struggles of human condition related to humanism philosophy, such as human guilty, value and dignity in different situations, human psyche in extreme family or societal environment, the natural desire and needs of human beings, and alienation, isolation in modern society or families.

The protagonist Erika and antagonist Walter in the film *The Piano Teacher* is a typical example of Haneke's characterization preferences. Erika is in a distorted personality and psychopath of masochism with self-abuse tendency. She tortured Walter both physically and mentally, who is originally a positive young man in love with her, and turned him into a sadism who lost control of himself and finally raped her like a monster. The film *Caché* depicts an upper middle-class protagonist who's hypocritical with lies to his family and friends hiding secrets and crimes he had made in his childhood, and the Algerian antagonist is an innocent poor man with limited

education and spending all his life recovering from childhood trauma of losing his parents and been abandoned to an orphanage, and finally cut his own throat to prove his innocence in an extreme way. Through the unveiling of the two main characters' inner world and past traumas, Haneke also unveiled an unknown historical past of 1961 Paris massacre which has been hidden by the government for years. And The White Ribbon is obviously another historical film that reflecting where and why German Nazi and Fascism came from, where the roots of evil growing up. By portraying a group of characters in a German protestant village as the baron, the pastor, the doctor and their children, Haneke delves into the motivation and origins of a series of mysterious violence crimes that may be committed by the children. The film reflects that the repressions from religion and hierarchy society could be the roots of evil that caused a big transformation in the whole German country before World War I. Amour could be the most realism romantic drama that Haneke made about an elderly French couple facing the last stage of life and death. The husband Gorge in the film companied and taking care of his paralyzed wife through the last period of life but finally ended her life with a pillow after a longtime suffering, he is still facing a moral dilemma even it's out of love and dignity for him doing this terrible thing. By portraying all these complex characters with inner conflict and moral struggles, Haneke explored in depth of all key aspects relating modern humanism philosophy.

#### 6.1.2.3 Realism and Distanced Observational Approach

Haneke is a director who insists on realism stories in modern society and depicting ordinary people in everyday life, focusing a lot on daily details, naturalistic performance and authentic locations, to create a sense of authenticity and reality of life for the audience to connect with their life and thinking. He also prefers explorations of social realities including issues of social or family alienation, social inequality or injustice, or the lack of empathy and compassion among the society. By presenting these social reality issues, he encourages audiences to reflect on their own complicity in the social system injustices and different perspectives on social and human spiritual issues.

Another obvious feature of Haneke's narrative style is his distanced observational approach to all the characters and scenes through all his films. He often uses long takes, static shots, and minimal editing to keep a sense of detachment from the story. This kind of distanced approach allows the audience to observe the actions

and motivations of the characters in a critical way rather than emotionally immersed themselves in the drama. This could be seen as a challenge to the audience perspective at the present time of fast-paced editing, eye-catching and immersed plots films. Haneke insists on presenting events from multiple perspectives without giving the only answer from the director himself. By maintaining a sense of objectivity and distance from different perspectives, Haneke invites the audiences to confront uncomfortable truth about human beings and society, fostering their own intellectual reflections, assumptions and prejudices to the questions of their own. Haneke is the director or artist who discover the problems and present them on the screen while the audiences are the ones who should rethink and find their own answers in reality.

#### 6.1.2.4 Minimalism and Simplicity in Dialogues and Settings

Minimalism and Simplicity are typical characters of Michael Haneke's film narrative style. He always keeps a deliberate simple in both dialogues and settings to allow the audience focusing on the characters inner world and actions without other distractions, which contribute to his distinct film aesthetics. Haneke often employs minimalistic dialogues with sparse and restrained conversations between characters depressive and repressive atmosphere are always built in his film to dig into the characters' inner changes. Characters in Haneke's films always communicating through subtle gestures, pauses, and non-verbal cues, this minimalistic approach also creating tension and unease in narrative. By cutting off excess dialogues, Haneke focuses audiences' attention on the emotional subtext in the scenes, allowing them to engage more deeply with the characters inner struggles and motivations.

Similarly, Haneke often sets his films in simple, authentical locations that reflecting the detailed realities in daily life. Whether it's a suburban house, a remote village, or an urban apartment, Haneke's settings are always following the rules of simplicity. This minimalist and simplicity approach of settings creates a sense of reality and authenticity, and the audiences can easily project their own experiences onto the family or characters. By extreme simply designs on settings and locations, Haneke focuses attention on the characters themselves and their interactions, allowing purely the psychological and emotional dynamics to be the center of narrative.

#### 6.1.2.5 Cinematic Naturalism

The last point to mention is the cinematic naturalism of Michael Haneke's films, which is also the important aspect of his unique style, which contribute to the immersive and authentic portrayal of reality. He prefers long takes and static shots as the traditional cinematic naturalism conventions, often feature extended sequences shot in a single take, with the camera positioned at a distance from the action. As the prominent French film critic and theorist André Bazin addressed in the publication "What is Cinema?", long takes with minimal cutting, more continuous and unbroken shots, it is closer to capture the essence of the events and a better sense of reality of story. Haneke is unconventional in film narrative but he always loved classical natural cinema and also insists on natural lighting with less artificial lightning and everyday settings to reflect all aspects of the real life. utilizing available light sources to create a sense of realism. The scenes are often lit in a way that mimics natural daylight or interior lighting, avoiding the use of overly stylized or dramatic lighting setups. And Haneke always places a strong emphasis on naturalistic performances from his actors, encouraging them to underplay their emotions and reactions. Performances in Haneke's films often feel genuine and understated, with actors conveying complex emotions through subtle gestures and expressions.

Table 6.2 Check-list of Narrative Style Analyzed

Narrative	Film Name			
	The Piano Teacher	Cacheé	The White Ribbon	Amour
	Narrative Structure			
1) Narrative Arc	√	√	✗	√
2) Narrative type	Linear	Non-Linear	Non-Linear	Linear
Narrative Elements				
1) Plot	√	√	√	√

Table 6.2 Check-list of Narrative Style Analyzed (Cont.)

Narrative	Film Name			
	The Piano Teacher	Caché	The White Ribbon	Amour
2) Theme	Psychological Distortions Repression and Desire Sadism and Masochism	Guilty Colonialism Surveillance	Violence, Religion, Repression, Guilty	Love, Death, Aging
Narrative Structure				
3) Characters	Erika, Walter	Gorge, Anne	Schoolteacher, baron, pastor doctor, children	Anne, Gorge
4) Settings	Modern Vienna, Austria	Modern Paris, France	1913 to 1914, German Village	Modern Paris, France
5) Viewpoint	First-person and Third-person	First-person and Third-person Limited	First-person	Third-person
6) Dialogue	✓	✓	✓	✓
7) Symbolism and Motifs	Piano/Music, Windows and Iron fences, Blood and Self-harm	Videotapes, Drawings, Majid's presence, Childhood Memories, The sons	White Ribbon, Children, Bird, Church	Pigeon, Confined Apartment, Piano, Art Paintings

## 6.2 DISCUSSIONS

As the author analyzed recent four films of Michael Haneke's to summarize on the Humanism Philosophy and Narrative Style of his films, the conclusions from this

study would limit to represent Michael Haneke's recent style and thoughts as he has been filmmaking for over 40 years and had made 12 films. There could be changes and differences in narrative style contrasting his early films with selected recent films. The author chose 4 most representative films of his latest films that could understand Michael Haneke's recent thoughts.

In humanism philosophy, the top 1 humanism philosophy viewpoint appeared in his films is the freedom of actions and choices which has a percentage of 30%, and the second important viewpoint is human value and dignity which has a percentage of 24%. The conclusions of humanism philosophy in his films differs from earlier studies and conclusions of Michael Haneke's films. While in early films of Michael Haneke, referring to Yuan (2017) in the research named "The Sin that be Shadowed and Highlighted — Michael Haneke' s film studies", he thought although he discusses lots of issues, all of them is about the motif of sin, which unite sexual, violence, death, crime without motivations, collapse of dignity and order of authority. While referring to Nan (2018) in the research named "A Life of Alienation Michael Haneke's film aesthetics research" focus on exploring the origin of life alienation from three aspects: no love family relationship, inner needs in mental world and spiritual crisis in modern world, Michael Haneke is full of restraints and pessimism who creating stems from his unique life experiences in his early years, cracked family relationship and long-term television work experiences that lead to a lack of love in his early films. The author of present study might differ from above two conclusions on Michael Haneke, although his film characters and stories seem negative in common sense, while he is an objective observer of modern life who point out the inner issues of humanity and society, this would contribute to a much better world in the future with more humanism concerns.

As to the narrative style of Michael Haneke's films, the author concluded into 5 aspects as: non-linear structures, slow pacing and open-endedness, depth in Character psychology and humanism philosophy, realism and distanced observational approach minimalism and simplicity in dialogues and settings, and cinematic naturalism. And the top 1 important narrative style of Michael Haneke is his Non-linear structures, slow pacing and open-endedness. While the changes could be that Michael Haneke used more

linear structure (2 of 4) in his films than his early narrative structure of non-linear, multi-lines and fragmental narrative. We could see that in his late films, Michael Haneke is trying to apply more linear structures than his earlier works which are almost Non-linear structures for every film. He is being more flexible in narrative structures according to different stories but Michael Haneke still keeps his style of slow pacing and open-endedness through all years. Referring to Shuwen (2017) in the research named “The Research on The Art of Michael Haneke”, the director prefers a detective suspense setting narrative structure, most of Michael Haneke's films have a cool, mysterious “detective” style with Non-linear structure. Although there is no detective role in his film, the camera is like an objective and calm detective, entering the life of the film characters to observe their stories and solve the heavy suspense. Referring to Yuan (2012) in the research named “Study on Michael Haneke's Films” addressed his works still adhere to the aesthetic tradition of modernism in narrative. In the construction of space, the setting of plot, the handling of details and other aspects, the director rationally and clearly points to the incomplete life of an individual without love, and completes the exploration and questioning of life with a calm and restrained approach. This form of treatment, as simple and controlled as possible, may have greater performance.

### 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

When study and analyze the humanism philosophy and narrative style of Michael Haneke's films, the author learned several useful suggestions that could help researchers delve into future films study on Michael Haneke, who is a worthy and precious director in modern world. The following are some suggestions on how to start the research:

6.3.1 Review all of the director's films and focus on what interest you: the director would have many films works across decades which it would be difficult to cover every single film of his and you have to choose the representative ones that interest you or the ones from his recent works or you could focus on his early works in you prefer. There could be obvious differences between a director's early works and his recent works.

6.3.2 Deeper study on Humanism philosophy and analyze how it appeared in the films: To deeply understand the director's thoughts in philosophy, you have pre-study the humanism philosophy and read all related literatures to fully understand the key aspects of philosophy. While reviewing the films at a second or third time, to analyzed the plots and characters frame by frame to see how the key aspects of philosophy appeared in the films. Philosophy is a subjective text analysis which differs from personal life experiences and personalities, while analyzing the philosophy in the films, it's better to understand the director's past life experiences and social viewpoints to have a comprehensive study of the films.

6.3.3 Analyze the narrative structure and narrative elements through the films one by one: To have a better understanding of the director's narrative style, the first thing is to break down his narrative elements by each film, including narrative structure, narrative arc, basic narrative elements like plots, theme, characters, settings, viewpoints, dialogues, symbolism and motifs. It would be better if the researcher could take elements of cinematography into consideration such as composition, lighting and color.

#### **6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES**

Reviewing the present research of Humanism philosophy and narrative style of Michael Haneke's films, the author is constrained by her own limited knowledge and understanding on philosophy and film narrative as well as ability of writing and expression. There are certain limitations in the process of research and analysis:

6.4.1 As a result of a textual analysis method, there could be some subjective conclusions based on the author's personal experiences and interpretations which could not adapt to common people.

6.4.2 The author selected only 4 representative films of the director's recent works while the director got 12 films through his film career which more and deeper studies could be built on. It would be more comprehensive if the early works are analyzed in contrast to his later works.

6.4.3 The narrative style analysis only consists of literature narrative elements while lacking of cinematography analysis of narrative style. The author would continue conduct a more comprehensive and deeper study on Michael Haneke's future and early films in the future for complement.



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