

# Humanism Philosophy and Narrative Style in the Films of Michael Haneke

<sup>1\*</sup>Xi Liao, and <sup>2</sup>Chalongrat Chermanchonlamark

*\*Corresponding Author*

Communication Arts College, Rangsit University, Thailand

E-mail: xi.l65@rsu.ac.th

**Received** April 27, 2024; **Revised** June 25, 2024; **Accepted** July 16, 2024

## Abstract

Michael Haneke, an Austrian director and screenwriter, is celebrated for his intricate examination of social issues and the human psyche through film. With a career that took off at the age of 47, Haneke has become known for his dark, minimalist approach to storytelling, focusing on themes ranging from societal alienation to personal despair. His work, deeply embedded in European societal observations, seeks to confront audiences with the realities of modern life, inviting introspection on the part of the viewer. This paper aims to delve into the philosophical underpinnings and narrative techniques that characterize Haneke's films, contributing to a greater understanding of his contributions to cinema and philosophy. Employing qualitative research methods, this study focuses on exploring humanism philosophy in Haneke's films and analyzing his distinctive narrative style. By examining four of Haneke's later works: "The Piano Teacher"; "Caché"; "The White Ribbon" and "Amour". The research aims to uncover the philosophical inquiries and narrative strategies that underlie these films. The findings reveal a profound engagement with humanism philosophy, highlighting themes of dignity, freedom, and ethical conduct, alongside a narrative style marked by non-linear structures, meticulous pacing, and open-ended conclusions. Haneke's work challenges conventional storytelling and compels the audience to engage deeply with complex societal and personal issues, establishing him as a cinematic auteur with a unique voice in contemporary filmmaking.

**Keywords:** Michael Haneke; Humanism Philosophy; Narrative Style; Analysis

## Introduction

Michael Haneke, an eminent Austrian film director and screenwriter, commands global recognition despite initiating his filmmaking career at the relatively late age of 47. His work is characterized by a stark, minimalist cinematic language and a profound examination of societal dilemmas and the inner turmoil of contemporary individuals. Renowned for scripting and directing films that stem from his meticulous observations of European societal issues, Haneke explores the lives of diverse social classes, ethnicities, and age groups—from children to the elderly. Described by Li (2012) as a “diagnostician of society,” Haneke dissects social and human issues through his films, prompting audiences to reflect deeply on everyday life and our spiritual state. His films are celebrated not only for their artistic excellence but also for their significant philosophical implications.

In his role as a quintessential auteur, Haneke exhibits sharp insights and a distinctive style. His directorial debut, “The Seventh Continent” (1989), delves into the narrative of a family choosing collective suicide, portraying the monotonous and desolate existence of a middle-class Austrian family. This film, alongside “Benny’s Video” (1992) and “71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance” (1994), constitutes what the media have termed the “Glaciation Trilogy”—a series unified by themes of societal violence and personal despair. These films examine death and catastrophic incidents within the fabric of society, from a child’s murder to a bank robbery shootout.

As Haneke aged, his focus shifted towards the contemplation of death and aging, particularly the ethical dilemmas surrounding euthanasia and the quest to maintain human dignity amidst terminal illness. This thematic pivot is evident in his later films like “Amour” (2012), where an elderly husband faces the heart-wrenching decision to end his wife’s suffering, and “Happy End” (2017), which revisits similar moral quandaries. Haneke consistently poses questions yet leaves the answers elusive, challenging the audience to engage with the issues presented.

Haneke’s narrative choices are deeply influenced by his 17 years of experience in German television, where he was exposed to the gritty realities of social news, which he then transformed into compelling cinematic narratives. His films extend beyond mere representations of Western realities, touching on universal human experiences and ethical challenges. The “Glaciation Trilogy” laid the groundwork for Haneke’s exploration of humanism, which he has continued to develop throughout his 30-year career. His films encourage viewers to confront the darker aspects of human nature and ponder the potential for a better future.

Despite the niche appeal of Haneke's film style and cultural nuances that may not resonate universally—particularly in Asia—his work offers rich insights into European cinematic art and facilitates cross-cultural understanding. By delving into Haneke's oeuvre, we can enhance our appreciation of film as a form of art, foster cultural education, and contribute to societal progress. Thus, studying Haneke's films holds both academic value and practical significance, meriting thorough analysis and broad dissemination.

## Research Objectives

1. To explore Humanism Philosophy appeared in Michael Haneke's films.
2. To analyze the narrative style of Michael Haneke's films.

## Literature review

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.

### 1. Comprehensive Studies on Haneke's Films

The scholarly exploration into Michael Haneke's films largely centers on the technical dimensions like film themes, use of lighting and color, visual style, cinematography, spatial narrative, and unique musical treatments, interpreting his works from perspectives of societal issues, individual existential dilemma and human dissection.

Xie (2017) in "The Research on The Art of Michael Haneke" focuses on how Haneke uses the family unit to depict the unpleasant conditions of modern human existence and deep-rooted psychological issues, offering a thorough examination of Haneke's film style and narrative characteristics. Haneke's preference for dark, austere visuals, simple yet distant shots, and flexible use of music and sound effects are noted. The study also highlights Haneke's prowess in spatial narrative, leveraging television screens within frames for extended storytelling, and his use of suspense and open-ended resolutions.

Li (2012) in "Study on Michael Haneke's Films" explores the modernism and existentialist philosophies within Haneke's films, using Western existentialism to decode the philosophical tensions between individuals' inner worlds and external societal conflicts. The study discusses Haneke's personal life experiences, including growing up in a family lacking paternal care, to shed light on his thematic focus on crime, familial relationships, and societal alienation.

Lyu (2020) in “Dilemma, struggle, landscape — Post-modernity of Haneke’s Film Imagery” discusses the communication challenges in postmodern society and culture, analyzing themes of death, media influence, and the struggle for genuine human interaction as reflected in Haneke’s films. The study touches upon postmodern imagery, including suicide and murder, and the role of modern media in shaping perceptions and relationships.

Xie (2017) in “The Sin that be Shadowed and Highlighted — Michael Haneke’s film studies” delves into the depiction of sin and guilt, particularly focusing on German racial guilt from Haneke’s perspective as a German-speaking director. The research categorizes characters into perpetrators and victims, materialists and those who self-destruct, drawing connections between Haneke’s narrative choices and broader themes of alienation, responsibility, and ethical self-construction.

Li (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. Study or analyze on one single of Haneke’s film

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.

Yang (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.

Liu (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.

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.

Yu (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.

## 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.

### 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. They are listed as “The Piano Teacher” (2001); “Caché” (2005); “The White Ribbon” (2009) and “Amour” (2012).

### 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.

### 3. Data Collection

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

### 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.

## Research Results

### Objective 1. Humanism Philosophy Analysis in Michael Haneke's films

According to the objectives 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.

#### 1. Humanism Philosophy Analysis in "The Piano Teacher"

"The Piano Teacher" explores some key points 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 distorted relationships with others or society. We would understand the importance of humanism philosophy by experiencing the psychological struggles of the protagonist.

The film "The Piano Teacher" offers a profound exploration of human value and dignity, especially within the dynamics of family and society. Erika Kohut, a talented piano teacher in her late 30s, remains under the oppressive control of her domineering mother, despite having a respectable profession and income. This control extends to Erika's personal life, where her mother invades her privacy, leaving Erika with no sense of individual dignity or value outside her musical talent. The relationship between Erika and her mother is a twisted one, where love and abuse are entangled, leading Erika towards a path of masochism.

The film delves into the themes of repression versus freedom of action and choice, illustrating how long-term familial repression is the root of Erika's psychological issues and self-destructive tendencies. Her mother's overbearing control over Erika's life choices, including her personal belongings and social interactions, highlights the loss of individual freedom and the psychological toll it takes on Erika, driving her to extreme and abnormal behaviors to fulfill her repressed desires.

Ethical conduct in unconventional relationships is another core theme explored in the film, challenging the audience's moral compass by presenting situations that push ethical boundaries. The film questions the justification of unethical actions driven by psychological issues and sexual taboos, leaving it ambiguous whether Erika's actions, influenced by her troubled psyche, can be ethically excused or if they demand legal accountability.

Furthermore, the film addresses the impact of art, music, and education on the human spirit and personality. Erika's life, dominated by her pursuit of musical excellence under her

mother's strict guidance, leads to her alienation from normal social interactions and emotional connections. Music becomes both her refuge and her prison, suggesting that an excessive focus on artistic success can harm one's psychological well-being and social relationships.

In summary, "The Piano Teacher" presents a complex narrative that explores the intersections of human dignity, freedom, ethical conduct, and the influence of art on the individual psyche. It challenges viewers to consider the consequences of repression, the complexities of human relationships, and the dual nature of artistic pursuit as both a means of expression and a potential source of isolation and psychological turmoil. Through data analysis, the following are the results of the key points related to humanistic philosophy in the film are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Humanism Philosophy Analysis in "The Piano Teacher".

Key points	Proportion
Art, Culture and Education	20%
Human Value and Dignity	30%
Freedom of action and choice	30%
Ethical conduct	20%

## 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 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 the impact of education.

Haneke touches on a dark chapter of history — the Paris Massacre of 1961 — to explore themes of collective guilt and the consequences of governmental deceit. The film reveals the story of the massacre through the protagonist, Georges, shedding light on a covered-up tragedy that saw many Algerians killed by French police. This historical backdrop serves as an allegory for France's colonial past and its lingering effects on collective memory and guilt. The film questions

the principles of social justice and accountability when governments conceal their misdeeds, highlighting the importance of acknowledging and taking responsibility for historical injustices.

The film extends the discussion of ethics to include children's actions, questioning how past wrongdoings influence one's moral compass into adulthood. Georges, in his childhood, commits acts that lead to significant suffering for Majid, showcasing how early unethical behavior can cast a long shadow over multiple lives. Haneke prompts the audience to consider the implications of childhood actions and the possibility of redemption or responsibility in later years.

Majid's life story brings to the forefront the concept of human dignity despite economic and social hardship. His decision to end his life is a stark commentary on the struggles faced by those living on the margins of society, discriminated against due to their race and socio-economic status. The film poignantly addresses how dignity and the desire for respect can drive individuals to desperate measures, challenging viewers to reflect on the societal values that contribute to such tragedies.

The narrative explores the idea of autonomy in one's decisions and actions as a fundamental human right. Majid's tragic end underscores the complex interplay between personal dignity and the choices available to individuals in distressing circumstances. It highlights the ultimate autonomy in decision-making, even in the face of death, as a poignant assertion of one's dignity and agency.

Education emerges as a pivotal theme, underscoring its role in shaping individuals' intellectual and moral landscapes. The contrasting educational backgrounds and opportunities between generations in the film illustrate the potential of education to alter life trajectories and influence societal change. The discussions between the sons of Georges and Majid symbolize hope for future generations to address past injustices and create a more equitable society through informed, critical thinking, and empathy.

Through these themes, Haneke's film becomes a multi-layered critique of society, examining the impact of history, ethics, dignity, autonomy, and education on human relationships and societal progression. It challenges viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about collective guilt, personal responsibility, and the potential for redemption and understanding across divides. Through analysis, the proportions of these key elements are shown in Table 2.



**Table 2** Humanism Philosophy Analysis in “Caché”.

Key points	Proportion
Art, Culture and Education	10%
Social Justice	30%
Human Value and Dignity	20%
Freedom of action and choice	20%
Ethical conduct	20%

### 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; children and impact of education.

Michael Haneke’s film “The White Ribbon” explores the dark side of religious repression in a German Protestant village, using the symbol of purity, the white ribbon, to ironically highlight children’s violence resulting from strict societal and religious constraints. It questions the true impact of religion on human innocence and morality, suggesting a deep, negative influence that fosters violence and corruption among the most vulnerable.

The story takes place in a hierarchical German village where women, children, and poor peasants are all under the control of a baron. The Baron owns most of the village’s resources, and everyone fears his power and need abide by his rules. The priest controls the religious spirit of the villagers and suppresses human nature with strict religious rules. Under the dual oppression of society and religion, it is difficult for individuals to have their own human value and dignity.

The film explores the clash between Humanism’s ideals of individual freedom and responsibility, and the oppressive reality of a village bound by strict social and religious hierarchies. Symbols like the white ribbon demonstrate the suffocating effect of these constraints on children and adults alike, leading to a cycle of violence and repression. It highlights the severe

limitations on personal choice and action imposed by authority figures, revealing the profound impact on the human spirit and individual dignity.

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.

“The White Ribbon” by Michael Haneke scrutinizes the dark consequences of religious repression and societal hierarchy in a German village pre-World War I, suggesting the origins of Nazi ideologies. The key points of the above film are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** Humanism Philosophy Analysis in “The White Ribbon”.

Key points	Proportion
Art, Culture and Education	10%
Naturalistic world	10%
Human Value and Dignity	20%
Freedom of action and choice	30%
Ethical conduct	30%

#### 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.

Human value and dignity, central to humanism, emphasize self-belief and dignity in life's aspects. Aging challenges these values due to physical and social declines, raising questions about maintaining dignity in old age. "Amour" illustrates this through Anne's decline after a stroke, highlighting the loss of independence and dignity, leading to her struggle with the choice between life without dignity and death.

"Amour" explores the emotional and physical challenges of facing death, and its impact on family and lovers, in a deeply personal context involving illness, aging, and suicide. It questions the balance between prolonging life and maintaining dignity, showing Anne's and Gorge's differing views on death and dignity, and ultimately Gorge's controversial decision to end Anne's suffering.

The film reflects Sartre's idea that humans define their essence through choices, confronting ethical dilemmas. Anne and Gorge face contrasting choices regarding Anne's illness, highlighting their freedom to choose but also the ethical implications of those choices, especially Gorge's final act, which raises questions about legality and morality.

"Amour" emphasizes love, companionship, and empathy as foundations of human connections, showing Gorge and Anne's deep bond through illness and aging. Their relationship demonstrates unconditional love, deep companionship, and empathy, even as they navigate the difficult decisions around Anne's death, reflecting broader human experiences.

Art and music play a significant role in "Amour", symbolizing life, hope, and emotional expression. The couple's life is enriched by art and music, which become sources of pain as Anne's condition worsens. The film uses classic music and art to reflect the characters' inner spirits and their journey through suffering, hope, and ultimately, the end of life.

"Amour" distills complex themes of dignity, choice, and love in aging and death into a poignant narrative. Haneke scrutinizes the ethics of end-of-life decisions, the resilience of human bonds, and the solace found in art. This film prompts reflection on dignity's value against mortality's inevitability and the moral weight of our choices. Through analysis, the intricate balance between these themes is delineated, with data illustrated in the Table 4.

**Table 4** Humanism Philosophy Analysis in “Amour”

Key points	Proportion
Art, Culture and Education	20%
Human Value and Dignity	30%
Freedom of action and choice	30%
Ethical conduct	20%

## Objective 2. 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 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.

### 1. Narrative Style Analysis of “The Piano Teacher”

#### 1.1 Narrative Structure:

Michael Haneke’s adaptation of Elfriede Jelinek’s “The Piano Teacher” is a deep psychological exploration, presented through a complex narrative that combines linear and fragmental elements. This approach mirrors the protagonist, Erika’s, fractured psyche, drawing the audience into her tumultuous relationships and her struggle with repressed desires and societal expectations. An open-ended resolution leaves the audience contemplating the narrative, a hallmark of Haneke’s filmmaking that prompts individual interpretation.

#### 1.2 Narrative Elements

(1) Through the plot, focuses on Erika’s complex relationship with her controlling mother and Walter, a student. It explores her journey through themes of desire, control, and self-destruction. (2) Examines the effects of repression and societal expectations on individual psychology, questioning the nature of love and artistic pursuit. (3) At the heart of this exploration are the characters: Erika, a repressed piano teacher, and Walter, her infatuated student, navigating a relationship marked by power imbalances and vulnerability. (4) The setting in Vienna contrasts Erika’s cultural richness with her personal isolation, as the interior spaces mirror her psychological confinement. (5) A subjective narrative viewpoint delves into Erika’s experiences, offering an intimate examination of her internal struggles. (6) With dialogues, minimal, reflecting

Erika's emotional repression. Key conversations with her mother and Walter reveal the dynamics of control and desire. (7) Symbols like the piano and motifs of self-harm enrich the narrative, signifying Erika's conflict between her passion for music and her painful pursuit of autonomy and fulfillment.

"The Piano Teacher" presents a rich tapestry of narrative complexity, exploring the dark corners of human psyche and societal constraints through Erika's harrowing journey. Michael Haneke's adaptation skillfully blends narrative elements and structure to challenge and engage audiences, inviting deep contemplation of desire, repression, and autonomy. Based on the above content, the Narrative style analysis of "The Piano Teacher" is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5** Narrative style analysis of "The Piano Teacher".

The Piano Teacher		
Narrative Structure	Narrative Arc	√
	Narrative type	Linear
Narrative Elements	Plot	√
	Theme	Psychological Distortions; Repression and Desire; Sadism and Masochism
	Characters	Erika, Walter
	Settings	Modern Vienna, Austria
	Viewpoint	First-person and Third-person
	Dialogue	√
	Symbolism and Motifs	Piano/Music, Windows and Iron fences, Blood and Self-harm

## 2. Narrative Style Analysis of "Caché"

### 2.1 Narrative Structure

"Caché" by Michael Haneke intricately explores personal guilt and societal memories of France's colonial past through a narrative that blends reality with flashbacks and dreams. Utilizing a non-linear narrative, "Caché" weaves together Georges' family's ordeal with anonymous videotapes and the historical context of France's relationship with Algeria. This dual narrative approach, integrating Georges' personal conflicts with broader societal issues, prompts audiences to piece together the story from different timelines and perspectives, maintaining suspense and ambiguity throughout.

## 2.2 Narrative Elements

(1) The plot centers around Georges, faced with unsettling videotapes and drawings that hint at his childhood guilt and France’s colonial actions. (2) Themes of surveillance, guilt, and historical accountability are explored. (3) Characters like Georges, Anne, and Majid navigating a web of suspicion, denial, and discovery. (4) The setting in contemporary Paris juxtaposes personal space with public history. (5) The subjective viewpoint immerses viewers in Georges’ conflicted psyche. (6) Dialogues are sparse, loaded with tension, revealing complex dynamics between characters. (7) Symbolism, such as videotapes and bloody drawings, deepens the narrative, reflecting on the past’s impact on the present.

“Caché” stands as a thought-provoking film, inviting deep contemplation of individual responsibility and collective memory. This narrative style analysis, shown in Table 6.

**Table 6** Narrative style analysis of “Caché”.

Caché		
Narrative Structure	Narrative Arc	✓
	Narrative type	Non-Linear
Narrative Elements	Plot	✓
	Theme	Guilty, Colonialism, Surveillance
	Characters	George, Anne
	Settings	Modern Paris, France
	Viewpoint	First-person and Third-person Limited
	Dialogue	✓
	Symbolism and Motifs	Videotapes, Drawings, Majid’s presence, Childhood Memories, The sons

## 3. Narrative Style Analysis of “The White Ribbon”

### 3.1 Narrative Structure

In “The White Ribbon”, Michael Haneke navigates through the dark preludes of violence and repression within a German village on the eve of World War I, utilizing a complex non-linear narrative structured by the memories of an aged schoolteacher. This retrospective approach not only fragments the storyline into interconnected events but also infuses the narrative with a sense of mystery and suspense, compelling viewers to piece together the narrative puzzle. The film’s episodic nature, marked by Haneke’s signature open-ended resolution, leaves audiences lingering

on the questions of culpability and motive, thus fostering a deeper engagement with the themes of societal and religious repression.

### 3.2 Narrative Elements

(1) Through its deliberate pacing and intricate plot, the film explores a series of violent incidents within a rigid societal hierarchy. (2) Themes of innocence corrupted by authoritarian repressions, the roots of evil, and the cyclical nature of violence are explored against the backdrop of a pre-war German village. (3) Characters, from the ruling class to the oppressed villagers, embody the complex interplay of power, vulnerability, and resistance, set against the stark. (4) The setting of this film is a crucial element for exploring the story theme, characters and cinematic aesthetics. (5) Primarily a first-person retrospective by the village schoolteacher, blending subjective memories with objective narrative to invite deeper audience engagement with the complex layers of story and character motivation. (6) Dialogues, minimal yet loaded with significance, and symbols like the eponymous white ribbon, serve to deepen the narrative, hinting at the undercurrents of tension and unrest brewing beneath the village's surface. (7) The white ribbon symbolizes both innocence and the restrictive mores of society and religion, while recurring motifs like the bird and the church underscore themes of vulnerability, authority, and the pernicious cycle of repression.

As Figure 7, "The White Ribbon" stands as a testament to Haneke's masterful storytelling, where narrative structure and elements converge to form a haunting exploration of the origins of violence and authoritarianism. This narrative style analysis, offers insights into how Haneke weaves together personal and collective histories, prompting reflections on the nature of evil and the societal conditions that foster it.

**Table 7** Narrative style analysis of “The White Ribbon”

The White Ribbon		
Narrative Structure	Narrative Arc	×
	Narrative type	Non-Linear
Narrative Elements	Plot	✓
	Theme	Violence, Religion, Repression, Guilty
	Characters	Schoolteacher, baron, pastor, doctor, children
	Settings	1913 to 1914, German Village
	Viewpoint	First-person
	Dialogue	✓
	Symbolism and Motifs	White Ribbon, Children, Bird, Church

#### 4 Narrative Style Analysis of “Amour”

##### 4.1 Narrative Structure

“Amour”, distinct within Michael Haneke’s oeuvre, embraces a linear narrative to poignantly traverse the solemn journey of Anne’s deteriorating health and its profound impact on her relationship with Georges. This straightforward narrative arc draws viewers into an intimate exploration of love, loss, and the inevitability of decline, rendering the story with a realism that deeply resonates with audience emotions and reflections.

##### 4.2 Narrative Elements

(1) The plot methodically charts Anne’s decline and Georges’ caregiving, enveloped in the stark realities of aging and disease. (2) Central themes delve into the essence of love amidst adversity, the struggle for dignity in the face of debilitating illness, and the moral quandaries surrounding end-of-life decisions. (3) Character portrayals of Georges and Anne offer a profound look into enduring companionship, shifting from mutual independence to a heartbreaking dependency. (4) Set predominantly within their Parisian apartment, the film’s setting becomes a character in its own right, symbolizing both the couple’s world and the confinements imposed by Anne’s condition. (5) The use of a third-person viewpoint interlaced with moments of subjective insight provides a nuanced perspective on the couple’s internal world. (6) Through minimal dialogue, the narrative emphasizes the power of silent suffering and the unspoken bond between the couple. (7) Symbolism, such as the recurrent motif of a pigeon, imbues the narrative with layers of meaning related to freedom, life’s fragility, and the cycle of existence.



This narrative style analysis, outlined in Table 8, illuminates how Haneke's departure from his typical storytelling methods in "Amour" serves to amplify the film's profound commentary on the human condition, inviting viewers into a reflective engagement with the story's intimate portrayal of an unyielding bond faced with the ultimate test.

**Table 8** Narrative style analysis of "Amour"

Amour		
Narrative Structure	Narrative Arc	√
	Narrative type	Linear
Narrative Elements	Plot	√
	Theme	Love, Death, Aging
	Characters	Anne, Gorge
	Settings	Modern Paris, France
	Viewpoint	Third-person
	Dialogue	√
	Symbolism and Motifs	Pigeon, Confined Apartment, Piano, Art Paintings

## Discussion

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 humanism philosophy appeared in Michael Haneke's recent films are concluded to 6 viewpoints such as naturalistic world, human value and dignity, freedom of actions and choices, ethical conduct, arts, culture and education, and social justice. While in early films of Michael Haneke, referring to Xie (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 Li (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 restrains 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. These conclusions mostly keep consistency with the studies of Michael Haneke. 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. Referring to Xie (2017) in the research named "The Research on The Art of Michael Haneke", the director prefers cold gloomy pictures, simple sharp lens and flexible music, attaches great importance to the choice of narrative space. He took the expression of space and outside space. He also used TV as a media to expand the narrative space. And various narrative perspectives, detective suspense and the open ending to enrich the meaning of Michael Haneke's films. Referring to Li (2012) in the research named "Study on Michael Haneke's Films" addressed Michael Haneke's narrative style of rational restrains from three aspects: space construction, the presentation of violent elements and unique narrative carrier. His solemn style of the image from the camera angles, lens use and natural lighting and color.

## Conclusion

1. Through research, the following conclusions are drawn:

### 1.1 Humanism Philosophy in Michael Haneke's Films

The investigation into the humanism philosophy across Michael Haneke's selected filmography reveals his profound engagement with complex themes that resonate with the human condition. Through films like "The Piano Teacher"; "Caché"; "The White Ribbon" and "Amour" Haneke meticulously explores facets of human existence such as dignity, freedom, and ethical conduct against the backdrop of societal and familial dynamics. His philosophical inquiry, rooted in his academic background, not only challenges the audience's perceptions but also offers a deep dive into the nature of human values and the societal constructs that shape them. This thematic

exploration showcases Haneke's mastery in weaving philosophical questions into the fabric of his narratives, prompting reflection on our understanding of humanism in the contemporary world.

### 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: 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.

## Suggestions

When study and analyze the humanism philosophy and narrative style of Michael Haneke's films, the author learned several useful recommendations 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:

### 1. General recommendation

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.

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.

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.

## 2. Recommendations for further research

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: Firstly, 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. Secondly, 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. Thirdly, 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.

## References

- Herling, B. L. (2021). Haneke avec Foucault: The White Ribbon, religion, and violence. *Journal of Religion & Film*, 25(2), Article 5.
- Li, G. (2012). *Study on Michael Haneke's films addresses the modernism and existentialism philosophy in Haneke's film*(Master's thesis). Nanjing Normal University.
- Li, N. (2018). *A life of alienation — Michael Haneke's film aesthetics research*(Master's thesis). Hainan University.
- Liu, Y. (2019). Convey another kind of reality — Director Haneke's film artistic reconstruction of the novel "The Piano Teacher". *Movie Literature*, 725, 50–52.

- Lyu, Y. (2020). *Dilemma, struggle, landscape — Post-modernity of Haneke's film imagery* (Master's thesis). Fujian Normal University.
- Xie, S.-w. (2017). *The research on the art of Michael Haneke*(Master's thesis). Shanxi University.
- Xie, Y. (2017). *The sin that be shadowed and highlighted — Michael Haneke's film studies* (Master's thesis). Wuhan University.
- Yang, J. (2020). *Healing through vulnerability: Transformative openness in Michael Haneke's the Piano Teacher*(Master's thesis). National Taiwan Normal University.
- Yu, G.-y. (2014). Interpretation of artistic style in “Love” by Michael Haneke. *Journal of Jingdezhen College*, 29(4), 71–73.