

“2nd Edition”:

A Short Film Treatment

Ben Brown uses the writings of Jacques Derrida as inspiration for a film that addresses concepts concerning the ever changing nature of human beings and how everything changes with time.

WORKING TITLE: 2nd Edition

TAGLINE: Deconstructing a Romance

BRIEF SYNOPSIS (50 WORDS):

The Film is about an author who, upon publishing a non-fiction philosophical book on the subject of love, finds that a second edition of his book has been published and is in shops. The second edition also seems to have been written and updated by the author himself. The second edition has major theoretical and philosophical differences to the first edition and the author begins to investigate how the ‘him’ of the second edition has come to these conclusions.

BRIEF OUTLINE:

The film begins with the author at a book signing, he repeats his signature perfectly every time. This is his ‘trace’, a first clue and link to deconstructionism. He is trapped in one state, not making any progress. He has just published a philosophical work on love. The book is called ‘The Presence of Love’. One person approaches him to complain that his book is so pessimistic about love and that one day he will realise he was ‘*wrong* about love’. Later on he walks into a bookshop and finds a copy of his just published book, only that it is a second edition. He is surprised by this and buys the book. Later on at home he reads the book but dismisses it. He goes to see an old philosophy teacher to discuss the nature of the new book, the new book has fundamental differences to the 1st edition which the author does not agree with. He explains how he doesn’t understand how he could have written the second edition as he doesn’t believe the changes stating “it’s like somebody else wrote this, it’s wrong”, throughout the scene the teacher says nothing. The author leaves and walks down a busy street, he keeps looking backwards down the street as though someone he knows is back there, and due to looking backwards he walks straight into someone. Later on the author looks back into

the second edition and finds that it is 'dedicated to Margaret Aucouturier'. He investigates this name, looking it up in the phone book, he is told over the phone that this woman has died. This woman could be the key to why the drastic changes have been made however she is now not present to be able to investigate for answers. He goes home and investigates the 'author' of the second book, he can find no other author with this name who has published the book. The author visits the grave of Margaret, a mourner leaving flowers at the grave ask him how he is coping, the author plays along. The mourner also comments that the author had made a "real difference in Margaret's life" and that her "absence would surely be great hole in his life". The mourner leaves, the author looks at the grave and leaves too. Arriving back his old philosophy teachers house he tell him of his findings but how he still can't understand how he could of written the second edition, the teacher questions whether the author *did* write the book, the author states he clearly must of but fails to understand the teacher meant the him of the *now* and that one day he might become a version of himself that does think like that. This, however, seems unlikely as the trace of this thinking is now gone. At home the author begins to write a third edition.

The theme of the film is taken from Jacques Derrida's writing's, namely the ones concerned with temporality, the past, future and present and the idea of the presence. Edmond Husserl's writings are of particular note as Derrida deconstructs Husserl's concepts to reveal their flaws and build upon them a new 'philosophy'. These writings are of most importance to the film as I want the main character to take this journey of Husserlian thought to Derridian. Text's include *Speech and Phenomena* (1973) and *Writing and Difference* (1979), both by Derrida. I have, however, used books about and on Derrida to help with my understanding of his concepts, these include *The Time of Our Lives* (Hoy, 2009) and *Understanding Derrida* (Reynolds, Roffe, 2004). The visual aesthetic and style is inspired by the film's of Michelangelo Antonioni, notably 'L'eclisse' and 'L'Avventura', for their visual emphasis on creating meaning through images as well as the way they handle their characters and the existential themes in them.

Outline of theoretical focus

The idea behind my film is based on Jacques Derrida's writing on presence and temporality.

Jacques Derrida's 'deconstructionism' is a concept or method where-by critical texts and theories are broken down into their core elements so that they can be scrutinised. The reason for doing this is to reveal any flaws or contradictions within them or distinctions within them that they take for granted

without questioning them. The method itself is hard to grasp as there is no pure deconstructionist text itself, but rather the method is used on pre-existing texts in order to get closer to the/a 'truth'. What Derrida finds is that there is no truth, no meaning pre-existing within the world and that there is only meaning imposed on the world by human beings through thought, language and communication. I use this base knowledge of Derrida's thought to establish a foundation from which to build upon using Derrida's thoughts concerning time and temporality.

There are two main ideas/concepts/theories of Derrida's that I use to create my idea. The first was the concept of the trace. The trace was conceived by Derrida, by way of Emmanuel Levinas and Heidegger, as the gap between appearance of the present and the yet to appear, the appearing. In opposition to the established metaphysics of presence, which thought they were one and the same thing and that meaning was self-present within that moment, Derrida says that this difference is the foundation of all other imposed differences on the world, and where meaning and the trace is found in relation to these oppositions is where the moment of identity is found (Hoy, 2009, p76-77). Furthermore, Derrida goes on to suggest that "writing first makes the perception of temporality possible" (Hoy, 2009, p79). It is the absence, in the past, of something that goes towards the meaning of something that I found most intriguing. "Writing can never be thought of under the category of the subject." just as writing can make sense in the absence of either the author or the world as it was at the time of writing, so "the original absence of the subject of writing is also the absence of the thing or referent"" (Hoy 2009 p79-80).

The second strand of reading and thinking has much to do with Derrida's critique of Husserl's work and ties in with the first train of reading and thought in relation to the concept of the presence. Derrida viewed Husserl's work as the paradigm of modern philosophy and thus chose it specifically to deconstruct in order to show the major flaws in the 'system' as a whole (Reynolds, Roffe, 2004). Husserl saw meaning as self-present within a self and that it happened in an instant. Husserl saw this meaning as perfect and ideal as it wasn't having to be watered down by communication, something which Husserl saw as imperfect as it could not conform to the whole scope of the mind. Derrida by contrast saw that meaning was pre-existent and was re-presented to the mind through the language of itself. This self-language is built up over one's life time and it is this emphasis on absence of the origin of created meaning that I am interested in.

Derrida also see that the presence is always moving away from itself, a movement through time, evolving into something new at all times, moving in different directions to all others, building up a subjective language in the presence/self through which meaning is articulated. As such, the search for meaning is will always lead one from one signifier to another; there is no beginning point, only differences imposed.

Further points to make are in relation to Derrida and the future. Although, it seems to me, that Derrida places a lot of emphasis on the past and the present, he does 'go into the future'. Derrida refers to the future as "messianic", and although he does not want to impose a system onto his work, this terms works, he asks for "messianicity without messianism" (Hoy, 2009, p143). Derrida also explains the future as rushing "onto me, comes onto me, precisely where I don't even expect it, don't anticipate it, don't 'see it coming'" (Derrida, 2001, *A Taste of the Secret* p84).

Explanation of aims

Derrida's concepts of time dependent presents and absences struck me as something I could really latch onto and make something from. Added with the ideas surrounding subjectivity; ones life experience and circumstance going towards how you make meaning in the world and how you are a constantly evolving self, never once the same, I used a story concept I had been working on beforehand, that links in with subjective identity and how it is created. This story was that of an author who had published a book only to find that one had been published exactly the same, seemingly by himself beforehand. However I chose to emphasize the ever-evolving self by having the book be a second edition with major revisions. This way I could emphasise how with time meanings change and accrue. The idea was that the author would not understand how *he* could have come to these conclusions and that it was only with time that he would eventually pass through the mentality that would create this book. I had the basic idea down on paper then began to re-read my research and find the intricacies of the concepts and use them as the events within my film, so that the film would be a true filmic representation of my understanding of these ideas.

The signature repetition at the start of the film is to show how the author is stuck in one mind set and cannot become the next, hampering his evolution and growth as a human being. Early dialogue from the person in the book shop and the author himself, both using the term 'wrong' were inserted to draw emphasis towards the ideas about where meaning comes from and how there is no real right

and wrong other than within man-made systems (the books themselves). The line “it’s like somebody else wrote this” is sign posting towards the theme of the constantly changing self.

Once the author has left the teachers house is walking down the street and walks into someone because he wasn’t looking forwards is reference to Derrida’s ‘future rushing onto me’ idea, just as the author does not see the other person coming down the busy street he will not see his next ‘state of mind’ in the future.

Marguerite Aucouturier was the name of Derrida’s wife. The idea behind the ‘dead love’ character is that is a non-present presence that had clearly guided the author to revise his book. Perhaps Margaret had changed the authors view on love so much that he felt the need to write a second edition, thus changing into a different version of his self. He begins to investigate the Margaret character as if he is going to try and deconstruct why he might have made the revisions. The reason for Margaret’s death, for her non-existence and non-presence, is similar to the way in which Derrida says that there is no meaning but for what impose ourselves. The author’s search for the reason of his second edition would surely only have led him past Margaret and into a search he would never complete. By accepting Margaret’s death the author can accept that there is no right and wrong and that meaning and ‘truth’ is different for every single self. Instead of trying to investigate this futile search for meaning, he uses his new experience to go and write the third edition.

Ben Brown is currently studying Film and Media production in his third year. This treatment comes from his second year and was produced for the Time and Narrative module.

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