

Film Review

ANALYSIS OF MOVIE THEMES IN THE LIGHT OF DECONSTRUCTIVISM

Pervin TÜZER*

Abstract

The Stanford Prison Experiment Movie is of great importance for power issues and research-based analysis. Since Stanford Prison Experiment is a prolific film in terms of critical themes, it will go hand in hand with deconstructivism. Deconstructivism takes its roots from Derrida's philosophy and deals with the deconstruction of a work to reveal its different meanings. The aim of this article is to study the reflections and similarities/differences between the film and the experimental research design with reflections from a critical perspective, with a deconstructive approach. The film will be examined in two parts, taking into account the implications suggested regarding critical themes and research approaches. For this reason, it would be more meaningful and comprehensive to analyze the film in the light of deconstruction by considering aforementioned two sections. In this way, Stanford Experiment Movie will pave the way to the researchers wishing to work on it in terms of critical themes and different methodologies.

Keywords: Critical analysis, deconstructivism, movie analysis, Stanford prison experiment movie

*Doktora Öğrencisi, Çukurova Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, pervn.tuzer@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-4812-5403

Received: 07.04.2024

Accepted: 03.05.2024

Film İncelemesi

YAPISÖKÜMCÜLÜK IŞIĞINDA STANFORD HAPİSHANE DENEYİ FİLMİ ÜZERİNE ELEŞTİREL BİR İNCELEME

Pervin TÜZER*

Özet

The Stanford Prison Experiment Movie is of great importance for power issues and research-based analysis. Since Stanford Prison Experiment is a prolific film in terms of critical themes, it will go hand in hand with deconstructivism. Deconstructivism takes its roots from Derrida's philosophy and deals with the deconstruction of a work to reveal its different meanings. The aim of this article is to study the reflections and similarities/differences between the film and the experimental research design with reflections from a critical perspective, with a deconstructive approach. The film will be examined in two parts, taking into account the implications suggested regarding critical themes and research approaches. For this reason, it would be more meaningful and comprehensive to analyze the film in the light of deconstruction by considering aforementioned two sections. In this way, Stanford Experiment Movie will pave the way to the researchers wishing to work on it in terms of critical themes and different methodologies.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eleştirel inceleme, film analizi, Stanford hapishane deneyi filmi, yapısökümcülük

*PhD Student, Çukurova University, Institute of Social Sciences, pervn.tuzer@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-4812-5403

Gönderim Tarihi: 07.04.2024

Kabul Tarihi: 03.05.2024

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT MOVIE IN THE LIGHT OF DECONSTRUCTIVISM

Analysis of Movie Themes in the Light of Deconstructivism

The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n"
(PL, 1:252-255) (Milton, 1674/1993, p. 16)".

Stanford movie is a psychological movie in which many thought-provoking incidents occur sequentially. This is an experiment carried out by a psychologist to test the effects of being prisoned under the simulated Stanford Prison circumstances. These circumstances ranging from violence to humiliating behaviours show that human-beings can transform into evil creatures when exposed to different scenarios and incidents. It is embodied the idea that people have inner instincts to behave wildly when given opportunity to dominate the others by using violence. That is to say, the themes are related to the idea that the human is to err, which means everyone has some lacking points and errors in the course of life. However, as human-beings, people should not violate the ethical issues whatever they do regardless of real life or an experiment. In the first part of the movie, being a prisoner seemed easier to the students rather than being a guard due to the responsibilities of being a guard. However, when the movie went on, one could understand that the prisoners were the ones who underwent harsh, violated behaviours without regarding the contract signed. This situation points out that actions and words should be intertwined. Prisoners' idea of identity and personality changed when they were forced to do something. Therefore, mutiny occurs when there is a power issue dominating the others (Foucault, 1978). This movie embodies the idea of power and its' variations in different contexts as in prisons. This idea is also in line with Said (1983) that power is inescapable part of the life because it is observed everywhere. It is comprehended that if there is an intentional act of power dominance over a group of people, people instinctively are ready to resist it. Human react to actions that they do not feel comfortable

with due to their comfort zone. That's why, the underlying themes that highlighted were authority, power, pressure, revolt against the system, violence against prisoners and so called legitimization of the guard's actions.

To analyse the critical themes resided in movie, one can exploit deconstructivism because the meanings attached to the themes differ from one person to the other. As for deconstructivism, deconstructive reading or watching must always seek some relationship between the reader and the writer (Derrida, 1997:349). Then, a meaningful and analytic reading can be achieved in terms of critical reading skills (Tüzer, 2023). For that reason, a deconstructive analysis is adapted in this paper so as to show the underlying meanings resided in the movie. While discussing the critical themes, the author is of a deconstructivist approach towards the themes. As everybody's view on movie could differ, the author's perspectives are given by deconstructing the meanings resided in the text. Similarly, deconstructivism is related to analyse a piece of work and find some similarities with other works. To exemplify, the movie themes go hand in hand with the themes resided in the book Lord of the Flies. No one is an island on its own. So, each text has a reminiscent of other ones as well as movies in terms of deconstructivism. Lord of the Flies sheds light on how a group of boy who had to sustain their life on an island turn the island into a calamity. Rather than finding a way to rescue from the island, the boys started to oppose one another's ideas. Deconstructive characteristic of boys- as humanbeings- points out that each human is of behaviours that might be deconstructive and torturous when given the authority and power. For that reason, these themes can enlighten the reader regarding critical themes embodied on one's mind in a deconstructivist manner.

Analysis of Research Methodology

Stanford Prison movie falls under the category of an experimental study. Experimental study is related to try something and systematically observe what happens (Fraenkel & Wallen & Hyun, 2011). The study is about power dynamics between guards and prisoners in a simulated prison. The researcher,

Doctor Zimbardo, wants to see the relationship between power dynamics and human behaviours. The sampling is random sampling because every member has the chance of being selected as prisoner or guard in the university. There is no purposive sampling. For the researchers wishing to work on the movie, the movie- related research questions might be as in the following:

-"What are the behavioral effects of a simulated prison on university male students as being guards and prisoners?"

"What is the relationship between the effect of being a prisoner on students and related reaction-change over the course of time?"

Experimental studies seek to answer the relationship between two variables and then try to establish cause&effect relationship. In this case, simulated prison has a negative and irreversible effect on students' behaviours due to the fact that participants are seen as a "subject" of the study, which indicates that they are exposed to some controlled and manipulated behaviours as subjects. The numbers allocated for each participants give the sense of building so-called "neutral" atmosphere in which no one resist to the commands made by guards. Clothing of guards are related to building so-called "rapport" with participants in a repulsive manner. Researchers, in any study, should build the rapport with the participants because participants will be honestly and openly to share their story when they feel comfortable (Cresswell, 2007 p. 133). However, rapport meant to have an oppressive authority over prisoners in the movie. Similarly, in the beginning of the study, participants signed a contract dictated some commands. However, as the movie went by, the guards behaved indecent ways without concerning the contract signed. This is in line with Brass& Burkhardt (1993) in a way that some precautions are taken by people in authority as in this movie example. Guards try to carry out a scary mission by wearing glasses and using some equipments such as stick and handcuff. From research perspectives, it is not ethical at all because a research should not give any harms to the humanbeings.

Secondarily, the researcher should take into account the informed consent, which gives participants the right to withdraw from the study whenever they want, which is the reverse case in the movie. This reversed-ethical side has an irreversible impact on students' mental capability and identity, which stated by prisoners at the end of the movie. Therefore, even if a study might have a potential to develop a fenomenan, the researcher ought to ensure the ethical dimensions of the study. If not, the study is nothing but to harm the participants.

In terms of data collection tools, the researcher has an observation system through which the crew can watch and evaluate about the things going on the prison. The crew, to ensure inter-rater reliability, resisted to the actions diverted from the research aim. However, the researcher did not want to conclude the experiment by explaining the data had not been developed well enough. Even when the researcher's wife warned him about the ethical concerns of this experiment, the researcher insisted on continuing the study until the last obnoxious scene- when data was "saturated" enough-. The experiment came to an end prior to determined process due to the last tangling situations in the prison. Rather than carrying out such an arduous experiment, the researcher could have found out some real prisoners and interview with them about the effects of prisons or the researcher might find some documents analysis such as prisoners' diaries by analysing them in terms of this critical issue.

Another key issue is the piloting process of any study. If participants had been given a chance to attend a piloting of the experiment, they would not have had the same willingness to participate in. That's why, if there is no piloting process in experimental studies, the aim and rationale of the study should be clearly explained to the public. In the movie, when students' families came for the visit, students behaved as if they were in a peaceful place. On the other hand, it is the deception of the study to the public because the guards forced the students to behave in a deceitful manner, which violated the ethical side of the research. Therefore, the study did not have any ethical considerations nor trustworthiness and confidentiality. Subjects are humans and each human is of value in the research as in real life. This movie sheds lights on critical

themes and understanding of a research and methodological dimensions from a deconstructive view. Furthermore, this paper handles a gap in the literature regarding the analysis of this vital movie and tries to give some insights to the researcher wishing to conduct experiments as in the film. Lastly, as Bacon (1625) points out that: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." The Stanford Movie falls into the category of digested movie in view of research methods and critical themes because it gives a number of important insights to the researchers by incorporating critical themes and methodological dimensions of the experiment.

References

Bacon, F. (1625). *Of Studies*.

Brass, D. J. & Burkhardt M. E. (1993). "Potential Power and Power Use: An Investigation of Structure and Behavior". *The Academy of Management Journal*. Cilt: 36, Sayı: 3, ss. 441-470

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, p. 133, CA: SAGE Publications.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Grammatology*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Fraenkel, J.R. & Wallen, N.E., & Hyun, H.H. (2011). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. Mc Graw Hill

M. Foucault, (1978), *The History of Sexuality*, translated by Robert Hurley, Vol. I, New York: Pantheon

Milton, J. (1674/1993). *Paradise lost*. In S. Elledge (Ed.), *Paradise lost: An authoritative text, backgrounds and sources*/John Milton (pp. 7-301). USA: W. W. Norton & Company.

Said, Edward W. (1983) *Foucault History of Sexuality*, p. 93. On conceptions and concentrations of power in Foucault's work, *The World, the Text and the Critic*.

Tüzer, P. (2023). A deconstructivist view on enhancing language classroom students' critical reading skills by using theme-based poetry in high school context, The Institute of Social Sciences, Çukurova University, Adana, Published Master Thesis.