A Study on Death and Sex in Rick and Morty in Existentialism Perspective

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Abstract: Animation has become one of the emerging forms of cultural communication due to the advantage of exceptional creativity and expressiveness. Rick and Morty, as a phenomenon-level animation conveys the profundity philosophical thinking of social problems by absurd painting imagination. Especially in the discussion of the two sensitive topics of death and sex which correspond to the French philosopher Sartre's Existentialism. This paper aims to analyze the two topics of death and sex in Rick and Morty by Sartre's Existentialism. The topic of death will be based on Sartre's discussions of two body cognitions and deprivation, and analyze the definition of death limit from combining with the background of science development. In the topic of sex, the paper will have the discussions of Physiological level and Psychological level to divide into sexual organs, sexual desire and sexual relations to analyzed the symbol of sex from a philosophical perspective. This article hopes to use Existentialism perspective to open a new angle for the study of Rick and Morty. It will take deep thinking on the two major themes of death and sex by philosophical analysis and interpretation, and also through the sexual symbol to discuss sexual culture and female standing to promote cultural exchange.

Keywords: Sartre, Existentialism, Death, Sex, Animation

1. Introduction

Rick and Morty is an American adult animation created by Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon. It is a satirical sitcom that combines science fiction, black humour, philosophy. Since it released in 2013, it has launched a wave of absurdism culture in millennium generation.

The animation tells a story of a crazy scientist grandpa Rick Sanchez who takes his adolescent grandson Morty Smith in a universe adventure. While, the prototype of the story is taken from the movie Back to the Future(1985), but this version is an adult-oriented animation work, which explores many of the complicated adult problems and social contradictions.

There are lots of significations of death and sex in Rick and Morty. Youths in nowadays are less introspection in sensitive issues as death and sex. The information age offers an opening environment to help people receive the knowledge; however, this cram process lack of reflection, which is the indispensable ability of youths. Death and Sex, as sensitive issues, signify the end and the start of human’s life. At the same time, death and sex also could be the approaches to figure out the relationship between self and others by for-itself in Existentialism. The two issues have been profoundly analyzed by existentialists, especially Sartre.
Sartre's Existentialism exerts a profound influence on our time. Many disciplines based on Existentialism paradigm included psychology, theology, art and literature. They all express humanism with the existential attitude to convey the freedom. Animation, which is a new form of cultural communication, is also given this mission.

In the academic value, my thesis aims to study animation in Existentialism perspective, which gives us a deeper understanding of Existentialism. Meanwhile, Existentialism theory could provide a new angle for discussion of the anime work.

2. Theoretical Framework

This thesis takes the theories of Sartre's Existentialism as its framework.

The theory of "Exist" could be traced back to ancient Greece when Parmenides tried to prove what "Being" is. However, the philosophical concept of existent, which profoundly influenced contemporary human civilization, was developed in France. French philosopher Gabriel Marseille first proposed theistic Existentialism, and then, Jean-Paul Sartre used atheistic Existentialism to set off a wave of existence.

Sartre's Existentialism centers on freedom is different from any period of Existentialism. Basis on the discussion of "essence" and "existence" (Different from Heidegger), he put "freedom" in an absolute and indivisible form of first position. Sartre wrote in Being and Nothingness, "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of Existentialism. For we mean to say that man primarily exists—that man is"[ All quotations from Being and Nothingness are from the edition published by China Social Sciences Publishing House 1993 unless otherwise stated.] (Sartre 16). So the reason why is freedom so paramount is that human beings make themselves as an essence by freedom choice. The existence of essence itself is a process of self-perception. Moreover, this kind of consciousness is achieved through "Absolutely free choice" which is under unlimited conditions is based on human subjectivity. Freedom is a structure of conscious existence. In other words, as a subjective premise of human beings, a conscious judgment of others is a kind of free choice. Then, based on the structure of subjectivity and conscious existence, turning the object of consciousness beyond the self to inner self becomes self-consciousness. The reason why we talk about self-awareness is that the epistemological basis of Sartre's Existentialism is to distinguish consciousness from self-consciousness. From the "first principle" mentioned above, the intentionality of the person as an existence is the relationship between "I" as the subjective subject and the objective things. Therefore, discussions about death and sex still revolve the "I".

3. Sartre and Death

3.1. The Body

Sartre believes that the relationship between the body and consciousness often allocates the body as an external thing cause of the psychological understanding makes the problem difficult. Actually, the body can be integrated by consciousness. Nevertheless, the problem is that people always try to unite the body of others. On the premise of integration, the body should be "My". So before people figure out the meaning of "My body", it is necessary to summarize the two Ontological dimensions of the body in Sartre's Existentialism.

The first dimension of the body as "Being-For-Itself" is "‘thereness’ for it-self"" (Morris 5),combined with contingency and inevitability. "For human reality, to be is to-be-there; that is, "there in that chair," "there at that table," "there at the top of that mountain, with these dimensions, this orientation, etc." " (Ch. 2). Somehow, "My" body seems to use by feeling the world, but it also decides the existence. "My" appearance is a contingency, and as my carrier, my body is also a contingency. But the thing is, we are totally exist. We feel the world just right now and passion for something
between us. At this level, body is a subject to feel the object in the world. Therefore, we are exist, we are live and inevitability.

The second dimension of the body is "Being-For-Others" which also could understand by "body of others". The most direct argument is that we could not directly see our brains and endocrine glands, which makes it impossible for us to directly understand our organs. The way to recognize these organs is by means of medical instruments, such as x-rays. And, not only for organs, but for organs that we can actively and directly recognize. This method of recognition is no different from the way that doctors check our bodies. Doctors usually check the patient's health based on sensory systems such as touch or smell, and so do our perceptions. Sartre thinks: "There is no fundamental difference" (Ch. 2). Therefore, when the body is viewed as an object, the body is "Being-For-Others".

Of course, the question of "sense" will be mentioned here. While, as the subject, we will feel when we are touched, but the question is, the perception of this feeling has not come from ourselves. Because when we touch the body in the same way that other dose, the feeling is the same. The concept of an attribute which Sartre mentioned is given to the body means that the function of the body itself is a possibility. The mouth can talk, the feet can walk are all the possibilities of the body, and the emergence of this possibility means the disappearance of the possibility, which is also the death. Sartre said: "The possibility of living is to shows the possibility of my death. " (Ch. 3). The purpose of showing this attribute is to reveal that the body is placed in the "object" position. When we want to recognize and reflect on the attribute of the body, we must establish such an order which was built to find my body. According to Sartre, this order is called contingency. Sartre used his disabled leg to example. He was thrown into the world and had a disability in leg. This accidental nature allowed him to experience this disability and therefore bear it. Only by bearing this kind of disability can make him choose whether he wants to become disabled or normal.

### 3.2. Deprivation

For physical attributes, the disappearance of possibility is a kind of extinction. But if Sartre used only this method to explain, then many situations would not make sense. For example, an intact painter would no longer paint because he lost his enthusiasm. However, the hand was not lost the possibility. Because this possibility is a property of the body, and the object body can pick up the brush. As long as it is possible to pick up the pen to paint, there is no possibility of losing. Therefore, Sartre's explanation for this situation is deprivation: "Death still looks like a series of deprivation processes" (Ch. 1). And it is a "Being-For-Others" perspective.

Sartre used the interest in drinking to demonstrate this deprivation process. Drinking is a hobby that the body cannot afford alcohol. And the inability to drink to protect the body is a process of deprivation. In the same way, if the painter is unable to paint, there is no possibility of disappearing in physical attributes. But for the painter's existence, the matter of painting is deprived. This deprivation of the body attributes is the process of dying. However, this process of deprivation that makes Sartre's definition of death not limited to a physiological level. Sartre compares his work to life, and the work continues to provide readers with the meaning of the work itself, which is a kind of "for the glorious body carved with words". It is a way to be eternal. The reason is there are no factors that hinder the continuity of the text, or Sartre handed himself over to the reader, and the reader has touched Sartre's text. Once this process of deprivation does not take place, life will continue.

### 4. Sartre and Sex

When you look at your sexual organs as objects, you put yourself and others at the same observation point. But the difference is that when we observe other people's bodies, we liberate
ourselves in the form of possession, and obtain our freedom from this way of possession. While, at the same time, the sex organs are also accidental. Especially the special structure caused by gender, this structure is extremely accidental identity information, and the "sexual instinct" we set is also the psychological information planned for this accident. It can be said that the "man" and "woman" summarized because of the sexual organs are accidental results. But this contingency is not pure. Human's accidental provision of physiology, which makes the classification of "gender". Therefore, the gender difference is actually an artificial result, and it is the information forced to accept.

4.1. Sexual Organs

The sexual organ is part of the body. However, Sartre emphasized the importance of sexual organs for the body existence. There are two arguments.

First of all. For Sartre, the sexual organs, like all organs of the body, are the existence of "objects". Others will watch this existence for a kind of possession. When you look at your sexual organs as objects, you put yourself and others at the same observation point. But the difference is that when we observe other people's bodies, we liberate ourselves in the form of possession, and obtain our freedom from this way of possession. While, at the same time, the sex organs are also accidental. Especially the special structure caused by gender, this structure is extremely accidental identity information, and the "sexual instinct" we set is also the psychological information planned for this accident. It can be said that the "man" and "woman" summarized because of the sexual organs are accidental results. But this contingency is not pure. Human's accidental provision of physiology, which makes the classification of "gender". Therefore, the gender difference is actually an artificial result, and it is the information forced to accept.

4.2. Love and Desire

Sartre's approach to "love" is to find the reason for "possession."

First of all, our relationship with others begins by constantly affirming the existence of others. Only when we are constantly affirming others' existence that we could be sure that "we" are not "others". This way is not to alienate the object of "others", but to affirm one's own existence by the attention of others. In the process of affirming others, we demand absolute freedom. Sartre explained this process as: "Love must conquer 'consciousness'." (Ch. 4). The object of possession is actually the freedom of others, and this freedom is caused "consciousness" to reflect. However, often after they have possessed the freedom of others, they hope that the other party is willing to be conquered in the form of freedom: He prays for a special type of belonging. He wants to have a choice of freedom. Love is the possession of consciousness, but desire is not the possession of the body. Appearance of sexual organs is contingent, and this contingency is a physiological division. But the emergence of desire has a subject, and this subject has nothing to do with gender or even the object, but the existence itself.

5. Death in Rick and Morty

There are many different forms of death in Rick and Morty. No matter the main roles or extras, they more or less experienced "perish" in absurd situations. And it is precisely because of the sci-fi background that the death limit are blurred. In this context, death has an impact on the character itself, and even reflects on the worldview in this story. And this shock and contradiction can be discussed with Sartre's definition of death, which combines the definition of the body and the process of deprivation.
5.1. Technologies

Science fiction is the most prominent setting of Rick and Morty. The development of science and technology is like some a kind of original sin, putting a shackle on all characters. This shackle is the physical limit. The crazy development of technology is often unexpected, but the human body is still limited to the setting of the world, like any object in the world.

The first ontological dimension of the body is the “thereness” showed by the universe's setting of Rick and Morty. There are infinite dimensions of the universe that the possibilities of the world are unsettled. And this setting confirms the contingency of the bodily existence. For Rick, his presence may or may not exist in countless dimensions. More, the Rick city where could insure that Rick is existence also live lots of alien Ricks with extraterrestrial organs. Even the similar Ricks with similar appearances, actually with a different life. This contingency happens to all the characters. The story of S2E4 is different from the "main dimension" that Smiths have a long-time family friend called Mr Poopybutthole. This is the contingency of the Mr Poopybutthole. However, the confusing of the story S2E4 is that audiences thought Mr Poopybutthole does not exist until the blood flowed out of his body. Audiences assure the existence by the real body, which mean the inevitability of the body is the guarantee of the existence- "Being-For-Itself".

The second dimension of the body is showed in Anatomy park. The Park built by Rick and Dr Xenon Bloom. Like all the amusement parks, there have Bladder Falls, Haunted Liver and Colon Log Ride for actual play. Anatomy park is a typical way to use the organ as an objective application. The function of the organs is no longer limited in serving the subject. The organs also could transcend the subject as an altruistic tools, or the body of others- "Being-For-Others".

Rick and Morty also combine these two dimensions of the body.

In S1E06: Rick poyion#9, Rick and Morty fled to another similar dimension to buried the original Rick and Morty in preparation to start a new life in this new similar dimension. Moreover, their dimension was irreparably destroyed cause of Morty. After burying himself in another dimension, Morty breakdown. The reason for this emotional shock was that Morty could not understand who the body was buried at this time. The first goal to solve this problem is to define the body. Sartre's perception of the body is to combine "Being-For-Itself" and "Being-For-Others". Nevertheless, Morty is not facing a "Self" body, but an unconscious "Others" corpse. The corpse loses its sense, so the corpse cannot reflect its contingency through the body. As a "past tense", the body represents the past of life. In this case, Morty has no way to determine who the subject represented by this past tense. Because it is me who has lost the body, that for others is the same for any observer. Therefore, there is a contradiction in Morty's cognition at this time. Since Morty in this original dimension is not different from Morty in a new dimension.

5.2. Exclusiveness

The body is also "Being-For-Itself", this kind of exclusivity "Being-For-Itself" in Rick and Morty is a alienation of objects other than "I".

In the story of Rick and Morty, there is a Rick City. In Rick City, Rick and Morty at different universes and dimensions are gathered, and each Rick and Morty have their own personality characteristics. This personality trait is often given according to the environment by accidental. It is because of this accident that Sartre thought is externally forced each Rick and Morty have personalities and characteristics. They also have the "physical attributes" of Ricks and Mortys, but their different personalities and memories are the result of their free choice. In fact, the reflection of this part lies in the existence of Rick and Morty as categories-such as "human", and the separation of Rick and Morty is an accident by selves. For example, men and women. Under such accidental conditions, the type of objects that have been collected has transcended objectivity and has become
"Being-For-Itself"-real existence. Existence itself transcends categories, and existence that transcends categories is an agreement on the theme of "I" through exclusivity. In Sartre's view, he is affirming himself by negating others.

The process of affirming self-identity is the progress of self-existence.

The identity of self-existence alienate others is exclusiveness. The expression of this exclusiveness is determined by objective decorations which represent social identities in Rick and Morty. Safety helmets symbolize engineering-related work, and stethoscopes means medical care. In this sense, various ornaments on a person gather all the social identities of the person. That is why it call exclusiveness. We can not deny that it is "Being-For-Others". However, it is the case that an individual could be identified from homogeneous group.

5.2.1. Definition of Deprivation

In essence, the deprivation is the disappearing of possibilities which are very close to the body identity. Although the body is inevitably affected by objective factors, the choices are in the hands of individuals.

In Rick and Morty, this selection is amplified by High-tech.

When Rick became a pickle, he completely stripped the possibility of "body" with methods, but under his choice, using animal stumps to create the same possibility, even surpassing the functions. This is the result of free choice.

Therefore, the identity of death is vaguely due to the high-tech operations. People lose physical function which technology can revest possibilities, or beyond the original functions, that is mean to large the limits of possibilities.

Of course, physical function is not the only part of deprivation. Social identity also could be deprived.

In S3E03, Rick resists the treatment of family problems and turns himself into a pickle to escape the concept of "family". The reason is that Rick lost his wife (the story is not specifically explained, but from S3 E09: The ABC's of Beth, it can be concluded that Rick did lose the role of husband after leaving the wife) The process of deprivation is to deprive Rick of his identity. This identity is a social role, just like painters and writers. Moreover, the social nature of family identity is more important than professional identity, and it has a fundamental determining role for human social functions. If it does not have this social function at the beginning, it means that it is not a process of deprivation at the beginning. As Sartre thought, the leg was disabled at birth, so this contingency cannot be avoided, but people are free to choose whether to be disabled, even the process is painful. However, Rick's deprivation of family identity was not born. And this deprivation was the result of free choice. Finally, the result caused Rick's life to be consumed.

The definition of death include two deprivations. The deprivation of social identity is not affected by high technology, notwithstanding that physical deprivation is indeed difficult due to high-tech.

In general, the borderline of death is blurred by technology.

6. Sex in Rick and Morty

In Rick and Morty, the topic of sex covers all episodes. Whether it is a joke or a character motive, the topic of sex is arranged into all the storylines.

6.1.1. Sexual Organs

The performance of sex in Rick and Morty is straightforward, especially the symbol of female breasts. Most of these performances are based on Morty's perspective by showing adolescent boys'
desire and shyness to sex. In S1E01, Morty can not look away from Jessica's chest, even in his dream. He loves Jessica and want to touch the breast from the calling. This exaggerated form of expression is to portray the only goal of adolescent boys is about "sex". But in fact, this approach is the alienation of the sexual organs of others as "masculine" for an adolescent kid.

It is affirmed that this object has the same form as itself so that "self" is different from this object. While craving female sex organs is to show that such sex organs are different from mine, and this difference allows Morty to affirm his existence as a "man". All the descriptions of the breasts in the animation are intended to emphasize Morty as a "puberty boy".

As adults, Rick and Jerry did not pay too much attention to female sexual organs. And as the main male roles, they all have "male lovers".

Jerry's lover Sleepy Garry who actually is an alien parasite implanted false memories in Smiths to invade the earth. Whereas the relationship is fake, but Jerry has a true affection to this empathetic gentleman.

For Rick, his lover Unity is a hive-mind, unify all the single-mind creature like a human, to achieve the unified ambition. Hive-mind has no gender or sexual discrepancy between differing the identity. It could say, Unity is a minded creature that surpass the body. Rick's love could also surpass the single "sexual organs".

From the relationships of both Jerry and Rick, adult males did not identify the sexual-identity by female sexual organs. Furthermore, it is not correct that Jerry and Rick have homosexual tendencies. Especially the setting of Unity. It weakens the boundary to emphasize the less influence. This is to show that the identification of men and their gender had completed the process of negating the "female" object.

From a female perspective, Beth in S2 E08: Interdimensional Cable 2: Tempting Fate, regards her husband Jerry's sexual organs as a simple tool. When she found that her husband would lose his natural penis but replace a useful machine, Beth agreed with the surgery. That is mean, Beth does not regard the "natural sexual organ" as a male sign. What Beth cares is the function of it. While, in Jerry's view, he always believed that only his own natural represented his male characteristics. We can see that Beth does not take Jerry's gender characteristics as the "natural sexual organ" as a standard, but rather lies in the properties or functions of this organ. But for Jerry, the nature of "natural organs" cannot be changed.

6.1.2. Sexual Desire

The performance of sexual desire in Rick and Morty is clarity. Two different roles represent two different position of sexual desire.

The first role is sexual fantasy—Jessica.

Jessica is very passive as a sexual fantasy object. Morty's possession of Jessica is a free choice. In S4E01. Morty follows different choices and hopes to lead Jessica to "freely" choose to spend the rest of her life with her. Although this approach does not seem to be the result of free choice, this is what sexual desire really wants. However, desire does not just refer to physical pleasure. It is undeniable that Morty wants physical contact with Jessica, but more hopes that Jessica can choose to be his "slave" as a free person.

The paradox of possessiveness is that Morty is even preparing to destroy the world in order to get Jessica's "free choice". This hypocritical manifestation is the essence of desire. Sartre used the contradiction of desire to explain the problems in love. The freedom to possess freedom must lead to the hypocrisy of love.

The second role is Unity.

Unity is completely existing, which mean the subjectivity that Unity has is unquestionable. Unity does not have a fixed appearance which makes the objects of this individual purely. That is mean, all
contingencies will be possible. The love from Rick for Unity is just the existence itself, which proves Sartre's theory that the object of our desire is not the sex and organs, but the existence itself. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of Unity's existential objectivity that all the contingencies that appear in the body will constitute this object. These possible sets allow Rick to have complete control over Unity. Imagine that all external needs (gender or appearance, etc.) will be gathered on one object, and this choice is absolutely free. The absolute freedom of possessing must be the choice that can almost feel the freedom of the subject. Meanwhile, Unity knows that only by leaving Rick can he be freed from this possession and return to a free state.

6.1.3. Sexual Relationships

Sexual relationship is a kind of coexistence, which is a combination of sexual organs and sexual desire. The physical and consciousness of the two existing individuals' responses to each other's existence. Jerry and Beth is a typical couple.

The conflict between Jerry and Beth has always been the main portrayal in the animation. The relationship between the two is an exaggerated expression of many sexual relations. S1E08: In Rixty Minutes, they saw different dimension's Beth and Jerry under different choices. In particular, choosing not to marry and fulfilling their dreams, both of them have been very successful in their careers which make the happiness that marriage cannot offer. The source of the pain is that both of them realized that the iron chains are based on freely chosen. It can be seen that the relationship between the sexes is now like a prison that has blocked their pursuit of their own learning.

According to Sartre, love is not to cancel the other party's freedom, but to use the other party as a slave to freedom. This approach is the sum of all the discordant factors in the sexual relationship. Even in the relationship between Jerry and Beth, we can clearly see the role of Sartre's "Masochism" and "Sadism". As a "Masochist", Jerry relies heavily on Beth's control. Beth also became happy because of his control over Jerry. In S1E08, Jerry and Beth initially thought that the two who chose the career could get their own happiness, but the ending was that they finally chose to abandon the career and back to the "love prison".

7. Conclusions

In accordance with Sartre's Existentialism, the research offers a creative interpretation of Rick and Morty. The death limit is blurred in Rick’s world by technology, especially on the unity of consciousness and body. Scientific methods can separate humanity from the attribute of "body", and the existence of the object can be through different forms, even multiple forms. And the living individual often judges death by the combination of "Being-For-Itself" and "Being-For-Others" of the body. This technological trend also reflects the forward-thinking of existential understanding of death.

Meanwhile, sex is a cognitive tool. In youth, sexual desire is a functional cognition of one's own sex identity-birth sex, and the curiousness of desire once again builds their own social sex identity-gender through the feedback from others. Until the development of a sexual relationship fuse two identities, one will perceive integral sex identity to establish the Self-awareness. Self-awareness can be stabilized by the emergence of stable relationship, and a stabilized family can continue this sex guidance of physiological ways. Existentialism's discussion of sex gave Rick and Morty's seemingly entangled emotions and academic consideration.
References


