

**RESPONSIBLE FILMMAKING:**  
**ETHICS AND SPECTATORSHIP THROUGH THE LENS**  
**OF MICHAEL HANEKE**

by

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*Ne pense pas à ton film en dehors des moyens que tu t'es fait*

- Robert Bresson<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Don't think of your film beyond the means you have chosen for yourself.

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. Each contribution, quotation and idea used, contextualised and employed in this dissertation from the research or work of other people has been attributed, cited and referenced. I have used the Harvard referencing method, as set out in the 2015 University of Cape Town's reference guide. The dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Film Studies at the University of Cape Town.

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation uses, as starting point, an interview with Michael Haneke in which the Austrian filmmaker criticises *Downfall* and *Schindler's List* for manipulating audiences and for generating entertainment from real-life and unspeakable horrors. He argues that filmmakers have a responsibility to enable audiences to form their own opinion regarding a film and its subject matter. I set forth to engage, theorise and develop Haneke's call for responsibility by asking the following questions as I move chronologically through his films: why is responsible filmmaking important, how does Haneke approach his own filmmaking and how does a responsible approach to filmmaking influence the position of spectators. Firstly, I draw from Stanley Cavell's film theory to read our current experience in a media saturated society by describing the ways in which the media positions and influences the characters' understanding of the world and their relationships with each other in *The Seventh Continent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*. Thereafter, I discuss Haneke's use of genre in *Funny Games*, the long take and continuity editing in *Code Unknown*, music in *The Piano Teacher* and sound in *Time of the Wolf* to analyse Haneke's approach to filmmaking. My readings are underpinned by Cavell's understanding of automatism and the manner in which Haneke uses and reflects upon film's automatisms. Finally, I illustrate Levinas' concept of responsibility for the Other through a reading of Georges and Majid's relationship in *Caché*, Kelly Oliver's work on witnessing in *The White Ribbon* and Judith Butler's work on responsibility in *Amour* in order to demonstrate how Haneke's responsibility ensures the audience's response-ability.

## GLOSSARY

**automatism:** From the Greek word *automatos*, meaning ‘acting of itself’. The Oxford Dictionary defines automatism as the “performance of actions without conscious thought or intention” (“Automatism, n.”, 2016). In art, it is usually referred to a method in painting “that avoids conscious thought and allows a free flow of ideas” (Wehmeier, 2005:85). Stanley Cavell applies the term to photography, drawing from Bazin’s claim of the camera’s automaticity (1946:6) not only as a “mechanical production of an image of reality”, but also as our “mechanical defeat of our presence to that reality” (1979:25). I unpack Cavell’s understanding and application of automatism in Chapter Two and Three.

**Hollywood-style:** Even though I explain the term *classical Hollywood cinema* in Chapter Three, it is still difficult to explain what exactly ‘Hollywood style’ refers to. In short, classical Hollywood cinema originated during the dominant Hollywood productions of the 1930s to 1960s and has since influenced other mainstream and dominant cinemas around the world (Hayward, 2013:80). Mainstream or dominant cinemas depend upon the economic and ideological relations of a specific country, meaning that the film industry will favour certain productions over others (Hayward, 2013:118). Haneke explains that his films “attempt to provide an alternative to the totalising productions that are typical of the entertainment cinema of American provenance” (Haneke, 2000:172). In this sense, my usage of the term must be seen in light of Haneke’s filmmaking approach which responds to the dominant style of mainstream cinemas that, even though originally from Hollywood, has been adapted by other mainstream cinematic practices worldwide.

**irrecoverability:** The word ‘irrecoverable’ refers to something “that you cannot get back; lost” (Wehmeier, 2005:790). Even though the word rarely appears in the form of a noun, Butler uses the word in her book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005:37).

**knownness:** The word ‘unknownness’ (noun) is derived from the word ‘unknown’. Cavell uses the word ‘unknownness’ in *The World Viewed* (1979:40,79,136,176,181,206). Rodowick, in his explication of Cavell’s theory, uses the word ‘knownness’ to refer to that which can be known (2007(a):70), to restore that which was once unknown.

**modernity/modernism:** Cavell calls Charles Baudelaire the prophet of the modern (1979:41), who defined modernity in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1859) as that which is “ephemeral, fugitive, contingent upon the occasion” (qtd in Cavell, 1979:41). Baudelaire’s definition, according to Gerard Delanty, was to describe the “particular cultural current in modern society that captured the sense of renewal and cosmopolitanism of modern life” (2007:3068). The term, however, had a broader resonance with the revolutions that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its presence already featured in Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which they described the conditions of society and capitalism as “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (2009:45). Moreover, social life in modern cities, for Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, was best expressed in various “‘momentary images’ or ‘snapshots’” (Delanty, 2007:3068). It is perhaps for these reasons that Cavell argues that Baudelaire’s text anticipates the arrival of film (1979:43). According to Delanty, both the fragmentation of modern society and the new technologies that arose (such as the camera and the cinema), increased the feeling that “there is nothing durable and solid” (2007:3069). Modernity is thus, in the way that I use it in this dissertation, the “loss of certainty and the realisation that certainty can never be established once and for all” (Delanty, 2007:3069).

**other:** The ‘other’, when spelt in lower-case, refers to the human other, someone different from the subject (me).

**Other:** Levinas and Butler use the capitalised ‘Other’ as a “placeholder for an infinite ethical relation” (Butler, 2005:x).

**skepticism:** Since Cavell argues that the trajectory of Western philosophy and the development of film are related, I have decided to keep his American spelling of ‘skepticism’ (instead of scepticism). Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey, British scholars, also stick with Cavell’s American spelling in *Cine-ethics: Ethical Dimensions of Film Theory, Practice, and Spectatorship* (2014). I explain and contextualise the term in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY: AN OUTLINE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FILM AND RESPONSIBILITY**

#### **1.1 Michael Haneke and the Filmmaker's Responsibility**

During an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke was asked about the representation of Adolf Hitler in the German film *Downfall* (2004), upon which Haneke replied that he found the film repulsive and dumb. He questioned writer and producer Bernd Eichinger's attempt to humanise Hitler by arguing that, by attempting to humanise Hitler, the film creates melodrama in order to generate an emotional response from the audience (Haneke, 2013). A representation of Hitler that depends upon melodrama as interpretative device dilutes the broad and historical context from which Hitler emerged. Haneke's critique joins a chorus of voices, as some have argued that *Downfall* leavens the account of Hitler with a melodramatic narrative and that the realistic style, combined with entertaining Hollywood conventions, encourages the audience "to engage emotionally yet remain passive" (Lotti, 2011). Others have gone even further, arguing that *Downfall* bathes the "the atrocities of historical perpetrators in the revisionist light of compassion" (von Moltke, 2007:42) and that the film uses "generic cinematic idioms to tell a suspenseful story that happens to have a historical referent" (von Moltke, 2007:43). Haneke continues by pointing out, in the same interview, that *Schindler's List* (1993) falls in a similar trap. While *Downfall* uses melodrama as a device to interpret Hitler, Steven Spielberg creates suspense in the scene in which the Jews are driven into a gas chamber by filming a close-up of a showerhead, teasing the audience by asking whether water or gas will come out of its nozzle. In both films, the complexities of the Holocaust are reduced to a device aimed at creating melodrama or suspense for the audience's entertainment. For Haneke, the mere idea

of creating entertainment from something as horrific as the Holocaust is “unspeakable” (Haneke, 2013). How is a filmmaker supposed to treat such sensitive subject matter that has had a profound, harrowing and traumatic effect on its real-life survivors? Are certain subjects off-limits, their horrors unrepresentable? For Haneke, the question for the filmmaker is not “what am I allowed to show”, but rather, “what chance do I give the viewer to recognise what it is I am showing?” (2010(b):579). In this sense, the only film that treats the Holocaust responsibly, according to Haneke, is Alain Resnais’ *Night & Fog* (1995). Although *Night & Fog* is a documentary, Haneke highlights Resnais’ approach to the Holocaust and how it differs from Eichinger and Spielberg, as Resnais does not represent the Holocaust as something knowable, explainable or entertaining, but rather asks the audience “what do you think about this, what is your position, what does this mean to you?” (Haneke, 2013). Haneke’s response to the pitfall of providing answers or creating entertainment from something unspeakable is what he calls the responsibility of the filmmaker:

Responsibility entails enabling your audience to remain free and independent from manipulation. The question is how seriously I take my viewer. . . . Am I trying to force my opinion on the spectator, or on the contrary, am I taking the spectator seriously and providing him or her with the means of creating and forming their own opinion? (Haneke, 2013).

It seems that a responsible filmmaker, according to Haneke, ensures that a film does not manipulate its audience, enables them to recognise that what is being shown and allows them to take part in the meaning-making process. Does the melodrama of *Downfall* and the technical gimmicks of *Schindler’s List* compromise the audience’s ability to recognise the historical context of Hitler and the gas chambers? Do these tropes keep the audience from forming their own opinion? How does a film allow for audience participation? In order to investigate these broad questions I will use, as starting point, the work of Stanley Cavell.

## 1.2 The Ethical Dimensions of Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*

D.N. Rodowick claims Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Cinema* (1979) to be the last great work of classical film theory, a theory that dealt primarily with the specificity of the medium (2007(a):79). Even though classical film theories have given way to the structuralist and psychoanalytic film theories of the 1970s, Cavell's work has "earned a new currency of late" due to film studies' recent turn to ethics and focus on the affective nature of film spectatorship (Choi and Frey, 2014:2). It is through his reading of Cavell's work that Rodowick reveals the ethical dimensions embedded in *The World Viewed* (Choi and Frey, 2014:3), demonstrating how Cavell's classical film theory, dealing with aesthetic questions of medium specificity, has "continually turned into ethical questions" (Rodowick, 2007(a):73).

In *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell argues that cinema is a response to the complex trajectory of the history of modern philosophy (Rodowick, 2007(a):66), as the essence of modern philosophy contains "an epistemological skepticism regarding the existence of external reality" (Choi and Frey, 2014:3). Cavell uses skepticism as a term that signifies "some new, or new realisation of, human distance from the world, or some withdrawal of the world, which philosophy interprets as a limitation in our capacity for knowing the world" (1985:116). Empiricist philosophers such as John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume argued that human understanding and knowledge was limited to human experience.<sup>2</sup> Personal experience, attained through our senses and perceptions, informs our understanding of the world and, if one were to move beyond the limits of experience, one will only fall victim to

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<sup>2</sup> Locke places epistemology before metaphysics, an approach followed by both Berkeley and Hume. Their approach countered the rationalist movement in Europe, which claimed that knowledge could be attained simply through rational reflection. For empiricists, however, the world only exists through what can be perceived. We experience the world only through our senses; to be is to be perceived. Knowledge is thus "primarily a knowledge of our *ideas*, the contents of our minds", which is "*mediated* by our mental equipment" (Frame, 2015:192). Hume, however, developed empiricist epistemology much more rigorously than Locke and Berkeley, which led empiricist philosophy into skepticism. Hume's presupposition is based on the solitary dialogue with one's own perceptions, a position that makes subjectivism and skepticism unavoidable. According to Hume, we are trapped within the subjectivity of our own impressions and ideas (Frame, 2015:205).

skepticism or entangle oneself with nonsense (Scruton, 2002:83). Being limited to our subjective selves has also compromised the manner in which we relate to those around us. William Frankena claims that our modern conception of living morally is “largely a matter of our relations with our fellow human beings” (1980:11), a statement which Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey uses to argue that, if true, our lack of ontological conviction of external reality outside our subjectivity denies us the possibility of engaging with others (2014:4). Skepticism, consequently, not only doubts the existence of external reality, but also compromises the possibility of engagement with each other. This has become an ethical dilemma for the modern subject who, according to Rodowick, has tried throughout the course of modern philosophy to regain contact with the world, to overcome his or her distance from it and restore its knownness (2007(a):70). Regaining contact with the world is a precondition necessary for the modern subject, not only to recover itself, but also to assume moral responsibility and commitment (Choi and Frey, 2014:4). We can only relate to and become responsible for another if we have established that a world exists outside of ourselves.

Film addresses and responds to the modern subject’s skepticism, or epistemological and existential concerns, by presenting a world in which the modern subject was absent. Due to our absence in the world that was filmed, that is, not being present during the shooting of a film, the mechanical nature of photography suggests that a world does indeed exist outside our subjectivity. Film thus responds to our skepticism of an external reality, as film’s “mechanical process prevent it from being an invented creation of the mind” (Choi and Frey, 2014:3). Cavell’s argument that cinema has responded to our skepticism and desire to “escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation” thus becomes clear (Cavell, 1979:21). Rodowick’s reading, however, illuminates the manner in which Cavell’s theory can be regarded as a cine-ethics, which provides the spectator with “an ethical solution to the dilemma of modern subjectivity” (Choi and Frey, 2014:3). How does film offer

(re)connectivity with the world and place the spectator within a collectivity that exceeds subjectivity? Cinema presents spectators with a situation, in contrast to the skeptical belief, in which humanity is visibly returned to nature, sharing the same ontological substance and “held in common duration” (Rodowick, 2007(a):72). In other words, the pro-filmic world evidences that humanity is indeed, not only present to external reality, but also share a common existence with nature. The “common duration” that Rodowick refers to, then, is the temporal experience of the spectator while watching a film, as the viewer “(re)experiences the past or the world passing in the present tense – a virtual time in which the skeptical subject and the world viewed share the same mode of existence” (Choi and Frey, 2014:4). Cinema thus provides us with the means to establish the existence of external reality and also offers us with the possibility to regain contact, respond to and engage with one another by placing us at one with nature.

Even though the word ‘ontology’ appears in the title, Cavell’s film theory does not simply deal with the fundamental components of film, but rather, as Rodowick argues, values film’s ability to *express* the modern dilemma as well as the possibility to *overcome* it (Choi and Frey, 2014:4). Since film expresses our fall into skepticism as well as our possible return from it, Rodowick understands Cavell’s film ontology to be concerned with how film presents modern philosophy’s problem, of skepticism and the modern subject’s perceptual disjunction from the world, “as past, while orientating the modern subject towards a possible future” (Rodowick, 2007(b):107). He thus reveals the ethical dimension of Cavell’s film theory by linking the modern subject’s possible overcoming with Cavell’s theory of moral perfectionism, which guides us from skepticism to the possibility of human change, allowing us to evaluate the deeper moral problem of “our contemporary mode of existence and transcending it in anticipation of a better, future existence” (2007(b):108). Even though most of Cavell’s writing is dedicated to clarify exactly what moral perfectionism might be, Choi

and Frey summarises the aim of moral perfection broadly as the protecting and promoting of human goodness, as film “helps the subject perfect oneself by transcending the ontological, epistemic impasse through the virtual experience of the world (the past)” (2014:4).

### **1.3 Free from Bearing the Burdens of the World**

While cinema enables us to view a world from which we were absent, thus proving the existence of external reality, one must ask to what extent the suggested connection between spectator and external reality can be substantiated (Choi and Frey, 2014:4) or, even, how this return from skepticism guarantees a *response* from the spectator *because of* the ethical connection gained between the self, reality and others. To what degree will an ethical connection compel the spectator to *act*? The fictional nature of the diegetic world keeps the spectator at a distance, while the mechanical reproduction of the pro-filmic world displaces the spectator both temporally and spatially from the world viewed, both of which inhibits the spectator’s participation in the meaning-making process (Choi and Frey, 2014:4). These two aspects underline the problem of film’s depiction of a world that is only present *to us*. We are not present *to the world we are viewing*. Since a film cannot watch us watching it, Cavell says that film has the “capacity to lift the burden of responsibility, relieving the spectator from the burden of acting on the situation” (Choi and Frey, 2014:4). Even though film meets the preconditions necessary for moral responsibility by enabling the modern subject to establish the existence of external reality, providing the opportunity to overcome distance and regain the world’s knownness, I argue that it remains questionable whether the modern subject will respond to the ethical connection made with reality and others, as an ethical connection between the self, reality and others does not automatically necessitate a response from the viewer.

Since it permits us to view the world unseen, Cavell claims that film satisfies a profound, modern desire “not a wish for power over creation... but a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens” (1979:40). In her book *Michael Haneke’s Cinema: The Ethic of the Image* (2009), Catherine Wheatley draws from Cavell’s film theory to argue that mainstream cinema provides refuge for the spectator from the world of responsibility (2009:42). Due to its ability to provide spectators with the power of invisibility, film appeals to the modern desire for privacy and anonymity by granting spectators respite from their “complicity in the structuring of the world” (Wheatley, 2009:40). She goes on to criticise the modern subject’s desire to establish a connection with external reality, expounded by Cavell, by arguing that the return to nature that the modern subject so desperately craves is a state “in which everyone pursues his or her own desires without constraint” (2009:41-42). Since film provides us with the ability to return to nature and regain its knownness, spectators are under the spell of the narrative and unaware of any moral imperatives, a position she argues enables spectators to accept and even enjoy scenes of atrocity, violence, revenge and rape, even though they would never have the same reaction towards such horrors outside the cinema. Spectators, settled in a safe and voyeuristic position, cannot “perceive that [they] are participating in an act of spectatorship, and thus cannot take responsibility for that action” (Wheatley, 2009:42).

#### **1.4 Emmanuel Levinas and Responsibility**

If film offers us respite from bearing the burdens of the world and relief from responsibility, then I argue that, on the contrary, we cannot wish not to need power, not to bear the burdens of another, because we are responsible for each other. In keeping with Cavell’s revisionist approach, I problematise film’s ability to absolve spectators from bearing any kind of burden by turning to Emmanuel Levinas’ radical writings on responsibility.

Throughout his writings, Levinas continually refers to a passage from Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which a character says "Each of us is guilty<sup>3</sup> before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others" (qtd in Levinas, 1969:146). Levinas uses the quotation to demonstrate that, similarly to Father Zosima, we are "obligated to respond to the suffering and needs of others, [since] we are responsible for everyone, for everything" (Shepherd, 2012:492). This is an obligation that regards oneself as infinitely and endlessly responsible for another's well being, regardless of one's position. My responsibility towards another is important, because my existence is predicated upon another and depends on those to whom I am responsible (Shepherd, 2012:492). Another's needs, together with our responses, determine who we are. We have an obligation to answer the other's claim upon us, because "actions taken in generous response to other people [are] what constitutes the human being" (Shepherd, 2012:476). Our responsibility towards others, however, runs the risk of being suspended during the viewing of a film. Spectators watch scenes of atrocity and violence that draw from real-life horrors as source material. Does this not aggravate our already warped desire of not wanting to bear the burdens of the world? How can we watch scenes of carnage, safe and anonymous, without taking responsibility for that what we have seen or for being entertained at the cost of those who have truly suffered? Similar to the close-up of the showerhead in *Schindler's List*, suspense is created for the audience's pleasure rather than making them aware of, not only their complicity in being entertained by something which has

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<sup>3</sup> Dostoevsky uses the word, виноват or *vinovat*, which means to be guilty or blameworthy. The Russian word for responsibility is ответственность or *otvetstvennost*, while a derivative of the word, ответчик or *otvetchik*, means one who defends or one who is answerable. The relationship between the two, in English, is like saying "the one responsible is the one obliged to make a response to a charge" (Doval, 2014:3). Even though it is closer to the meaning of 'guilty' or 'answerability', some translators translated виноват or *vinovat* as 'responsibility'. Séan Hand translates the dictum as "We are responsible for everyone else – but I am more responsible for all the others" in *The Levinas Reader* (Hand, 1989:1), while Pevear and Volokhonsky's translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* reads: "And I shall also tell you, dear mother, that each of us is guilty in everything before everyone, and I most of all" (Dostoevsky, 2004:289).

cost those subjected to the horrors in real-life, but also their responsibility towards real-life victims and the persecuted.

### **1.5 Judith Butler on Responsibility and Opacity**

So how *can* a filmmaker get the audience to realise that they are participating in an act of spectatorship and thus take responsibility for the viewing situation? How can a filmmaker destabilise, challenge, disrupt the spectator's wish not to need power and desire not to bear the other's burden? How can a filmmaker hold the audience accountable and responsible for that what they are watching? In her book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) Judith Butler argues how a theory of subject formation that "acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can serve a conception of ethics and, indeed, responsibility" (2005:19). I draw from Butler's understanding of subject formation to illustrate how a filmmaker can help the audience secure an ethical position for themselves in a film. Since spectators come from the school of mainstream, entertainment cinema and television, they have become accustomed to the presentation of a world that is explainable and in which all contradictions are solved. They are not, in contrast, confronted with the limits of self-knowledge, since traditional narratives usually aim to explain the ways in which we are related to one another and other social realities. These narratives serve to extract meaning and purpose from a reality that is complex and confusing. If a film's narrative is depicted as a knowable totality, a world that is easy to understand and explanatory in the ways that we are related to one another, the audience will be led to believe that they are wholly perspicacious beings. We do not, however, have the ability to understand everything quickly, accurately and in its totality. Butler argues the belief of our sagacity to be a lie, as such a belief would lead us to renounce our "infancy, dependency, relationality [and] primary impressionability" at the expense of the "active and structuring traces of our psychological formations" (2005:102). We do not know

the lived experience of others. To think we do proves our inherent pride, self-importance and arrogance.

Butler's understanding of ethics is informed by Levinas, whose ethical philosophy resides in the primordial face-to-face encounter with the other. When we encounter the other, an unavoidable demand is placed upon us to respond, because we are "trapped, captured, 'held hostage' by the face of another person whose presence commands a response. The command to respond to the face of another person comes before anything else" (Shepherd, 2012:476). When we encounter someone or something different from us, an Other, we are confronted with our inability to know. Similarly, Butler states that moments of unknowingness, in which people become unknowable to themselves, only emerge in the context of relation to the other (2005:20). In other words, it is only when we are put in relation to and confronted by another's alterity, that we become aware of our own opacity and failure to be sagacious. Thus, if a person is opaque to themselves, that is, not completely knowable or transparent to him- or herself, the subject "is not thereby licensed to do what it wants or to ignore its obligation to others" (Butler, 2005:19-20). Since mainstream films aim to solve social conflicts and explain the ways we are related to one another, we are presented with a worldview that is explainable, transparent and all-knowing. Spectators thus, I argue, can only respond when they are confronted with their own opacity. For it is only when we are confronted with the other's alterity, that which *keeps the Other from me*, that responsibility can be demanded from us. If a film presents everything as knowable, easy to understand and without contradictions, we are not confronted with any form of otherness and thus remain safe from having to respond responsibly. That is why subject formation can only take place in the context of relations that "become partially irrecoverable to us", because opacity is "built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency" (Butler, 2005:20). It is only when audiences are confronted with a film with

gaps and contradictions, opaque and unknowable, in other words, when a film is constructed as an Other, that a demand is placed upon the audience to respond.

## **1.6 Responsible Filmmaking**

My dissertation, thus, argues that filmmakers have an imperative to construct films that are opaque, ensure that it becomes an ‘Other’ to its audience and enforce a face-to-face encounter, thereby enabling the audience to respond and become responsible. My research question approaches responsibility from both the filmmaker and spectator’s position. I argue that by creating a film that is opaque, in other words acknowledging its limits of self-knowledge and constructed as Other, filmmakers will not only renounce their sagacity and admit their own inability to know, but also declare the irrecoverability attached in depicting scenes of carnage and violence. The audience will, in turn, be confronted with their own opacity, because the film is not explanatory or attempting to be sagacious. If the opacity of a film questions the spectator, the spectator might become aware of his or her own opacity and be confronted with the limits of their own self-understanding. No longer is a horrific and unknowable experience presented in a clear and coherent way, as the audience is left to fill the void and answer the questions with their own life experience. For it is only when spectators are posed with questions, without any instructions or guidance from the filmmaker, that spectators will be disturbed, gather their defences and respond. If film expresses, as Cavell argues, the modern subject’s dilemma of skepticism, presents the viewer with the possibility to transcend his or her skepticism, reinstate the spectator’s relations with others and the world towards a ‘perfect future’, then I argue that filmmakers have a responsibility to present the pro-filmic world’s opacity and closedness to the viewer. For it will only be when a film’s opacity confronts the viewer that the audience will become response-able, that is, be *able to respond* to the film, its subject matter and be held accountable for the viewing

situation and the other it depicts. The audience's confrontation with the opacity of a film is, for Haneke, a productive conflict, for "the more radically answers are withheld, the sooner [audiences] will have to find their own" (Haneke, 2000:172).

Responsible filmmaking, I thus argue, entails the filmmaker's responsibility to ensure the audience's response-ability. Instead of constructing a narrative that serves to explain and guide the audience, an approach that constructs a film with gaps and contradictions will *enable* audiences to *respond* to the film on their own terms. Since film responds to the modern subject's skepticism, audiences now have a responsibility for having the possibility of gaining a connection to self, reality and others. A responsible filmmaker's challenge, as Haneke argues, is thus how to make "images and information fresh and perceptible again, how to restore to them the power that derives from their potential for critical engagement" (2000:172). Cavell argues that, through modernist techniques filmmakers can acknowledge the world's closedness and separateness from the audience, thereby allowing the world to exhibit itself through a consideration of "the conditions of nature not as they effect me but in their indifference to me; that is as autonomous, self-sufficient laws unto themselves" (Trahair, 2013:6). Thus, if the modernist filmmaker demonstrates the world's closedness and denies the world's coherence to and around me (imagined by traditional cinema), and I acknowledge the closedness of the world, then I "stand a chance of securing an ethical place for myself in the picture" (Trahair, 2013:6).

## 1.7 Motivation for the Dissertation

The motivation for this dissertation and its investigation was inspired by Haneke's critique of *Downfall* and *Schindler's List* and his call for the filmmaker's responsibility towards the audience. I had three major questions: Firstly, why is responsible filmmaking important in the world that we live in today? Does the influence of the media necessitate a

responsible mode of filmmaking? Secondly, how does Haneke's own approach to filmmaking shed light on responsibility and audience accountability? And finally, does Haneke assume his role as responsible filmmaker and, if so, how does he perform his responsibility and, in turn, ensure the audience's response-ability? These three questions frame each of the following chapters, in which I guide my investigation with the film theory of Stanley Cavell and the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Judith Butler, in order to formulate a robust understanding of responsible filmmaking through the lens of Michael Haneke. Thus, I do not intend to examine each of Haneke's films through an exhaustive filmic analysis, since there are various articles, books and monographs dedicated to his work. Instead, as I progress chronologically through his oeuvre, I am going to contextualise, argue and illustrate what responsible filmmaking entails, adjusting and focusing the lens of Haneke's films on the specific question in mind. Due to the lack of space (and unavailability of the films), I will not draw from Haneke's eleven films made for television.<sup>4</sup>

Firstly, in Chapter Two, I outline the importance of responsibility by discussing the influence and ubiquity of the media on modern society through Haneke's first three films. I read and test Cavell's arguments of film displacing the spectator and relieving the audience of bearing the burdens of the world in *The Seventh Continent* (1989), while I further problematise the influence of the media and the content on television in *Benny's Video* (1992). Next, I focus on three selected scenes from *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994) in order to contextualise post-war/modern Europe and how the media contributes to identity formation and feelings of alienation. In Chapter Three, I draw from Cavell's work on film's automatism in order to illustrate how Haneke responds to the influence of the media by using and reflecting on film's form and its automatism. I focus on the use of classical

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<sup>4</sup> The films made for television are: ...*Und was kommt danach?* (*After Liverpool*) (1974), *Drei Wege zum See* (*Three Paths to the Lake*) (1976), *Spermüll* (*Household Rubbish*) (1976), *Lemminge, Teil 1: Arkadien* (1979), *Lemminge, Teil 2: Verletzungen* (1979), *Variation* (1983), *Wer war Edgar Allan* (1984), *Fräulein* (1985), *Nachruf für einen Mörder* (*Obituary for a Murderer*) (1991), *Die Rebellion* (1992) and *Das Schloß* (*The Castle*) (1997).

Hollywood cinema and counter cinema in *Funny Games* (1997), the juxtaposition between classical Hollywood editing and the effect of the long take in *Code Unknown* (2000), the use of music in *The Piano Teacher* (2001) and the utilisation of sound in *Time of the Wolf* (2003). In Chapter Four, I theorise the filmmaker's responsibility and the audience's response-ability. Firstly, I read Emmanuel Levinas' formulation of responsibility towards the Other in the context of Georges and Majid's relationship in *Caché* (2005). Thereafter, I approach *The White Ribbon* (2009) through a contextualisation of Kelly Oliver's work on witnessing, mapping the ways in which the audience is enabled to bear witness to the events of the film, a position which enables their response, in other words, their response-ability. My reading of response-ability flows over into my analysis of *Amour* (2012), in which I draw from Judith Butler's formulation of responsibility and recognition in order to illustrate how Haneke succeeds in keeping the audience's recognition of suffering on-going and open. The chapter will conclude by theorising how a harmonisation of content and form is imperative to responsible filmmaking. Additionally, each of the chapters draw from one of the articles written by Haneke himself, regulating my investigation and keeping my application of Cavell, Levinas and Butler's theories in check: Chapter Two draws from his article "Violence and the Media", which he presented at a screening of *Benny's Video*, Chapter Three from "71 Fragments: Notes to the Film" published in Wiley Riemer's *After Postmodernism: Austrian Literature and Film in Transition* (2000) and Chapter Four from "Terror and Utopia: *Au hasard Balthazar*". Finally, Chapter Five concludes the dissertation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ***THE GLACIATION TRILOGY: THE ONTOLOGY OF THE IMAGE AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA***

#### **2.1 Introduction: *The Glaciation Trilogy***

An established theme in the films of Michael Haneke is the role, influence and ubiquity of the media in modern society. Advertisements entice consumers, printed media govern its readers, radio transmissions penetrate kitchens, televisions spew images into living rooms, surveillance cameras follow subjects and multiplexes are deemed places of refuge. These aspects feature in Haneke's first three theatrical films, *The Seventh Continent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, which depict alienated and isolated characters in a state of glaciation, surrounded by technology and consumer ideals in a global capitalist economy. Haneke makes clear, however, that his characters are not unique, distinct or extraordinary. In the first eight minutes of *The Seventh Continent*, for example, the identity of the three main characters remains a mystery, even though the audience gets an intimate look at their morning routine. Anonymous bodies, detached from any face or personality, wake up and perform, almost mechanically, a series of tedious and banal tasks: getting out of bed, putting on slippers, opening curtains, brushing teeth, waking a child, tying shoes laces, feeding fish, making coffee, packing a briefcase and eating breakfast. This could be anyone, and perhaps, simultaneously, everyone.

All three films of Haneke's *Glaciation Trilogy*, serving as a critique of western civilisation and exposing the existential coldness of modern society, contain or culminate in violence. The Schröbers, a typical nuclear family, meticulously plan and effect their suicide after they destroy their entire home in *The Seventh Continent*, Benny videotapes himself killing a teenage girl in *Benny's Video* and Max barges into a bank and executes several

customers before shooting himself in *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*. Before a screening of *Benny's Video* at the Marshall-Theatre in Munich in 1995, Haneke asked what bears responsibility for the increasing violence in our daily interactions with others. Were the media itself culpable, with its authoritative voice and apparent role of objective mirror of society the reason? Or was it, rather, the fact that violence enjoyed a privileged and permanent position in the media? (Haneke, 2010(b):575).

In this chapter I problematise the media's influence on modern society through the lens of Stanley Cavell's film ontology, by mapping the ways in which the media, and especially violence in the media, takes responsibility from us and allows for our invisibility, thereby compromising our position as moral agents who consume media. Firstly, before I discuss the influence of the media, I will contextualise the ontology of the image as described by Stanley Cavell with *The Seventh Continent*, in order to examine the act of viewing and the manner in which images are received and interpreted by viewers. Thereafter, I will problematise the form and continual presence of television through a close reading of the media's influence in *Benny's Video*. Thirdly and finally, I will draw from specific scenes in *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* to illustrate how the media, in the context of modern Austria, contributes to the alienation of modern western society. I will reference, throughout my readings of the films, Michael Haneke's own article "Media and Violence" and illustrate the complex interchange between the two to emphasise the problematic effect of the media on modern society. I agree with Haneke's argument that neither the media nor the presence of violence in the media to be culpable, but rather the *manner* in which violence is depicted and employed. In other words, I will redirect the question away from violence towards the *form* in which violence is depicted, thereby illustrating the importance of responsible filmmaking.

## 2.2 *The Seventh Continent* and Stanley Cavell's Film Ontology

### 2.2.1 The Ontology of the Image: The Advertisement of Australia in *The Seventh Continent*

At the end of the first chapter in *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell asks the question “What is film?” (1979:15), even though he does not intend to answer it. Rather, the question allows him to explore the ontology of film. He sets out to explore the question by recalling Erwin Panofsky's claim that “[t]he medium of the movies is physical reality as such” and André Bazin's statement that cinema is “committed to communicate only by way of what is real” (qtd in Cavell, 1979:16) by cautioning that a too literal reading would claim reality to be the foundation of cinema. Cavell argues that, instead of reality being the essence of cinema, Panofsky and Bazin intends rather that *photography* is the foundation of the cinematic medium and that a “photograph is *of* reality” not reality itself. The question, for Cavell, thus turns from what is cinema to “[w]hat happens to reality when it is projected and screened?” (1979:16).

In order to contextualise his question, Cavell makes two important claims to understand the ontology of a photograph in order to guide him to his answer. Firstly, Cavell differentiates between a painting and a photograph by arguing that a painting<sup>5</sup> is a rendering or likeness of an object, while a photograph<sup>6</sup> presents the viewer with the object itself. The idea that a photograph presents the viewer with the object itself creates, in Cavell, a feeling of ontological restlessness, because a photograph of an object cannot be, and never will be, the physical object itself. The problem, for Cavell, is that spectators struggle to think about the connection between a photograph and the object photographed, thus failing to place a photograph ontologically (1979:17-18). The failure to determine or place a photograph's

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<sup>5</sup> Painting, according to Bazin, will never escape from the subjective hand that painted it, as the intervening human hand “cast[s] a shadow of doubt over the image” (1967:12).

<sup>6</sup> Photography, on the other hand, is a “mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part” (Bazin, 1967:12).

ontology is reflected in the Schröbers' engagement and reading of the advertisement for Australia in *The Seventh Continent*. The film introduces Georg, Anna and Evi as the nuclear family going about their routine in modern Austria. The advertisement for Australia first appears after the family passes through a car wash during the opening scene of the film, after which the alluring tourist billboard welcomes them. The advertisement, depicting a beach and ocean with mountains in the background, fills the whole frame after the Schröbers drive past. The image of Australia haunts the family throughout the film over a three-year period and becomes an emblem of hope. While a photograph, such as the image of Australia, is not a "likeness...a replica, or a relic, or a shadow, or an apparition", the image still contains traces of these characteristics (Cavell, 1979:18). What exactly, then, is reproduced by the image of Australia?



**Figure 1: The Australian advertisement greeting the Schröbers**

The second idea put forth by Cavell in order to contextualise the viewer's reception of a photograph, is the distinction he draws between auditory and visual transcriptions. In terms of auditory transcriptions, people can listen to a sound made by an object without being in the presence of the original object from which the sound emits. Cavell uses the example of a recording of an English horn. The presence of an English horn is not required to hear the

sound of an English horn via a recording, as the sound is ontologically (although not empirically) the same. Sounds can thus be copied perfectly, its copy faithfully reproduced by a record. A photograph, on the other hand, is not an exact copy of the object, because it does not bear a relation to the object in the same way that a sound does of a recording. The photograph of Australia does not copy the ontology of an Australian beach in the same way as a recording of an English horn does. While a recording certainly reproduces a sound, a photograph does not reproduce a sight (Cavell, 1979:19), because a sight *is* an object, in and of itself. One can only *sight* an Australian beach when one is in the presence of the Australian beach, or, in other words, *on* the Australian beach. A sight is only possible when one is in the presence of the object being viewed, or, as Cavell says, the sight of something is always an object itself, not the sight of an object (1979:20). The Schröbers are not, ontologically, on an Australian beach when they see the advertisement. The Schröbers are looking at a sight of *an image* of an Australian beach, not a sight of an Australian beach itself. Could the image of Australia, rather, be a surface of an Australian beach? Cavell denies the idea of images producing a surface, as surface puts emphasis on texture. The problem is that the real Australian beach cannot *make* a sight or *have* a sight, because the Australian beach is “too close to [its] sight to give [the sight] up for reproducing” (Cavell, 1979:20). The only way to reproduce a sight of an object is to make a mould or create an impression, in other words, a hand-made copy of the object. Did photography enable the advertisement to be a physical mould or impression of an Australian beach? No, because according to Cavell, a physical mould, impression or imprint would get *rid* of the original Australian beach, put distance between the object and its impression, while in the photograph the original Australian beach is still as present<sup>7</sup> as ever (Cavell, 1979:20).

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<sup>7</sup> Rodowick expands Cavell’s understanding of the presentness of an object in a photograph, by describing how we are not used to seeing objects that are not physically present *to* us or *with* us, even though ontologically, when viewing a photograph, we are presented with the presentness of an object (2015:18).

After much deliberation, Cavell concludes and argues for, instead, that photographs are manufactured, in other words, a manufactured image of the world (1979:20). The mechanism or automatism involved in manufacturing a photograph has *so far*<sup>8</sup> satisfied, according to Cavell, the human desire “in the West since the Reformation, to escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation – a wish for the power to reach this world, having for so long tried, at last hopelessly, to manifest fidelity to another” (1979:21). As I have outlined the modern subject’s skepticism in the introductory chapter, D.N Rodowick explains the effect that skepticism has had on the modern subject. He unpacks Cavell’s dense conclusion by explaining cinema’s response to the extensive and complex trajectory of western philosophy. The reawakening of Pyrrhonism and skepticism during the Renaissance and the rejection of theological dogmatism that the Reformation brought about had three effects on the modern subject. Firstly, the fact that God is *in* each of us (instead of the outside world) separated us from the modern subject of scientific empiricism. Due to our confinement to ourselves, we carry a responsibility for our epistemological isolation, and moral effects thereof, from the outside world. Thus, secondly, God’s absence in the world (because He is *in* us) led to a loss of meaning in nature, meaning that we can only derive and construct meaning by and through our isolated perceptions. Furthermore, and finally, we are separated from nature through our isolated perceptions, because humanity and nature “no longer shared the same metaphysical context” (Rodowick, 2015:20). Thus, Cavell argues that, since we believed that our hold on the world is confined to our perceptions of it, we “began to invent machines for perceiving the whole of the world” (Rodowick, 2015:20). As I outlined in the first chapter, the dilemma of modern subjects have been to regain contact, overcome their

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<sup>8</sup> Many theorists misquote Cavell by omitting ‘*so far...*’. Douglas Lackey, for instance, in his review of *The World Viewed*, understands Cavell to mean that photography has *succeeded* in satisfying the human wish to escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation. Rothman and Keane point out that Lackey makes the mistake of thinking that painting and photography were in competition. Instead, Cavell is saying “so far as photography and modernist painting succeeded in satisfying this wish, they satisfied it in fundamentally different ways”. The ‘*so far...*’, thus, leaves open “the possibility that photography’s satisfaction of this wish was less than complete” (Rothman and Keane, 2000:65).

distance and restore the world's knownness to them. Such a desire is reflected in the Schröbers' situation, since it is clear that they are isolated and feel disengaged from the world around them. Their disposition is symptomatic of living in the West, as Cavell explains, since Austria is one of the wealthiest countries in the world.<sup>9</sup> They are thus prone to the skeptical attitude regarding the outside world. They understand that regaining contact with the world is a necessary precondition for recovering themselves and taking moral responsibility and commitment for themselves and one another (Choi and Frey, 2014:4). The chasm between the modern subject and nature, and the individual's desire to regain contact, is experienced by the Schröbers and, so far, satisfied by the image of Australia. They want to escape their metaphysical isolation. As I outlined in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, film, or photography, expresses the modern subject's epistemological and existential concerns. Since the Schröbers were not present during the taking of the picture of Australia, they can be sure that a world does indeed exist outside their subjectivity. Contained and trapped within their car, going through the mechanics of the carwash, the manufactured image of Australia waits outside and presents a utopic escape. The image becomes a marker of hope for them, representing a world they long for, providing them with the possibility of regaining contact with the world they feel isolated from.

### **2.2.2 Displacement as the Schröbers' Natural Condition**

After the opening scene, the first section of the film is introduced, chronicling a day in 1987 that depict husband Georg, wife Anna and daughter Evi, going about their daily and

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<sup>9</sup> In a lecture he presented at the Graz (Austria) Photography Symposium, Cavell argues that photography could not "have impressed itself so immediately on the European [...] mind unless that mind had at once recognised in photography a manifestation of something that had already happened to itself. What happened to this mind, as the events registered in philosophy, is its fall into skepticism, together with its efforts to recover itself" (1985:116). While many people argue that photography has changed the way we see, Cavell criticises the idea, because the remark does not explain photography's power, but rather assumes it. For him, it is the modern, European mind that attributes photography its power and value, *because* of their fall into skepticism [see Cavell's essay 'What Photography Calls Thinking' (1985)].

banal routine. Georg and Anna go to work, Evi goes to school, they buy groceries, the family enjoys dinner with Alexander, Anna's brother, and they watch television. The day is, however, punctuated by a few disturbing incidents: Evi feigns blindness at school, Anna slaps Evi through the face and Alexander breaks down during dinner. The second section, a day in 1988, portrays the same routine with minor adjustments: Georg gets promoted and the family witness the effects of a car crash, after which Anna cries during another carwash. The third section, taking place in 1989, shows the family cutting all their ties with the outside world, destroying their entire home and committing suicide. Throughout the three segments, the alluring advertisement reappears and becomes kinetic, representing an ultimate ideal for Georg and Anna. When Anna and Georg go to the bank to withdraw all their money in the third section of the film, the teller queries their decision, upon which Anna answers that they are immigrating to Australia. Even though they have already decided to commit suicide, Anna's decision to use Australia as a cover-up proves her equating death to an escape.<sup>10</sup> Lisa Coulthard argues Australia, referenced by the Schröbers as a sort of paradise, to be a false destination. The poster's both static and kinetic appearance, with the unnatural landscape, dreamlike quality and odd tidal movements, indicates its "own non-existence", as well as the "isolation, false idealisation and dehumanised existence of the family" (Coulthard, 2009:16). The Schröbers place their hope in the world represented by the image of Australia, but does that world even exist? Is their confidence in the image justified, supported and protected by the represented world's actual existence?

The world in a photograph, for Cavell, comes to an end as the "camera crops [the world] by predetermining the amount of view it will accept" (1979:24). Even though the Australian image becomes animated later in the film, it never recedes or reveals the utopic

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<sup>10</sup> The fact that the Schröbers kill themselves in front of their television, the only appliance they do not destroy, alludes to the way they are "lost in a televisual void of consumer objects where no plane of existence or meaning can be found to take precedence over another...[They are] now free to ease back off into a group coma that elides consciousness with death – a coma exacted by either television or its role as ceaseless witness to our gravest ways of being, which is to say our nonbeing" (Sutherland, 2010:173).

world hidden beyond the edges of the frame. The promise of paradise is caught between the edges of the frame and does not allow movement beyond, reflecting the entrapment and isolation experienced by the family. Similar to the confined space of the frame of the Australian beach, the Schröbers are confined to and trapped in their world: the car frame, the walls of the house and the capitalist structures they find themselves in. The image of Australia provides hope for another world, to reach another world, but there is still a frame that contains and traps the paradise represented by the image of Australia. Cavell says that when a photograph is cropped, the “rest of the world is cut *out*”, yet its implied presence and explicit rejection are still essential to the experience of the photograph (1979:24). The Schröbers are thus not longing for the specific Australian beach visible in the advertisement contained *in* the frame, but rather the Australia implied *beyond* the frame. Nevertheless, it is exactly the world beyond the frame that they cannot reach. The dreamlike quality of the image, the fact that the sterile advertisement has transformed into a moving image, presents a world that does not exist: a manufactured photograph that has transformed into a memory, a manufactured lie. Cavell says that “drawing the camera back, and panning it, are two ways of extending the frame” which enables the film medium to “let the world happen, to let its parts draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight” (1979:25). The utopic dream of Australia, however, does not ‘happen’ for the Schröbers. Instead, paradise stays confined in the frame witnessed from their restricted space of the car. Together with the fragmented sections that depict the family going about their daily routine, the repetitive shots of the advertisement “suggest a kind of oppressive sameness, an unchanging existence marked by false imaginings...that are ultimately as repetitive and static as the daily routine itself” (Coulthard, 2009:16-17). Thus, for the Schröbers, suicide is the only way of escape, escaping

the confines of the frame, the frame of paradise, the frame of modernity and the frame imposed by the capitalist global economy.<sup>11</sup>

The mechanical reproduction of the Australian beach results in the spatial and temporal displacement of the Schröbers and thus prevents them from participating in it (Choi and Frey, 2012:4). Even though they watch the image of Australia, the image does not watch them watching it; they remain unseen. The magic, thus, of manufactured images such as photography or cinema, is that it presents spectators with the ability to view the world unseen. The viewing of the image of Australia thus *expresses* and *epitomises* the invisibility and displacement that the Schröbers are experiencing in modern-day Austria. Since they are present to an image of Australia from which they are spatially and temporally displaced, the photograph of Australia contributes to their feelings of being screened from the world and of being “held before it in a state of anonymous and invisible viewing” (Rodowick, 2007(a):65). Cavell points out that, since we are displaced from the world being show, the screen overcomes our fixed distance and “makes displacement appear as our natural condition” (1979:22). In viewing the exotic and foreign world of Australia as an image, the Schröbers are made aware of their displacement, since “this view is screened for [them], and from [them], in time” (Rodowick, 2007(a):65). The Schröbers are invisible to the image of Australia, as neither the static nor kinetic image of Australia reacts to the Schröbers watching it. By permitting us to view the world unseen, or, in this case, permitting the Schröbers to view the image of Australia unnoticed, the image has the capacity to satisfy, as Cavell claims, the profound, modern wish, not for power over creation, but “a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens” (1979:40). The image of Australia thus simultaneously displaces the Schröbers and provides them with the means of looking and viewing the world without having to take responsibility for it. The advent of television has, furthermore, exacerbated our

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<sup>11</sup> The advertisement remains, according to Brigitte Peucker, a dystopian space, a “landscape of death to which the family will ultimately gain access” (2000:182).

desire to view the world anonymously and not need power over that which we are viewing. The next section of this chapter will problematise television and its influential role in permitting us to view the world unseen and thereby absolving us from bearing the burdens of the world.

### 2.3 Viewing the World Unseen: Television in *Benny's Video*

According to Mattias Frey, Haneke's *Glaciation Trilogy* serves as a critique of civilisation that portrays "lives deformed by the media, technology and generational discontent" (2010:154). All three films take place in the industrialised world of the West, in which existential coldness envelops the characters. They are surrounded by rampant technology and consumer culture, while being alienated from each other and victim to dysfunctional relationships, all "under television's baneful eye" (Vogel, 1996:74). How is television, a product of technology and consumer culture, implicated in the modern subject's feeling of isolation and alienation? What is the context of those that Haneke's films aim to critique? As I have shown in the previous section, that the advertisement of Australia makes the Schröbers' displacement seem as their natural condition, Benny's situation reflects a similar situation. I will argue that, by providing us the possibility of viewing the world unseen, television takes responsibility out of our hands and frees us from bearing another's burden, a position that impacts our relation with others and the world. *Benny's Video* serves as an excellent example of television's influence; it's ability to allow us to view the world unseen and distort our relation to self, reality and others.

*Benny's Video* tells the story of a young teenager from an upper class Austrian family who spends most of his time watching television and recording videos. One of the videos that he is fascinated with depicts a squealing pig being killed with an airgun, a clip that he constantly replays. During one of his outings to the local video store, Benny meets a girl who

he invites over to his house. His interactions with her are awkward and uncomfortable, but he decides to show her the video of the pig. He shows her the airgun with which the pig was killed and, after a playful dare, shoots her multiple times, the entire exchange being recorded by the watchful eye of his camcorder. He struggles to get rid of the body and eventually decides to inform his parents by showing them the video that recorded the murder. His mother and father, also named Georg and Anna, distraught and upset by the video, decide to secretly get rid of the body. Benny, on the other hand, records their conversation from his bedroom. They decide to get to work, as Anna takes Benny to Egypt on a holiday while his father dismembers and disposes the corpse. Upon their return Benny decides to show the video of their conversation to the police, implicating his mother and fathers and their act of disposing the body. Benny offers a curt apology to his parents right before the film ends, his parents fate unknown.

### **2.3.1 The Ubiquity of the Media in the Domestic Space**

One of the characteristics of Benny's environment is the ubiquity of the media and how his day-to-day activities revolve around these mediated technologies. He spends his days after school at the video store, plays video games and videotapes the people around him. The walls of his room are adorned with posters and rows and rows of videotapes, while a television glares at its centre. He also has a video recorder aimed at the street outside, delivering a live feed into the confines of his bedroom. Benny's bedroom depicts the manner in which domestic spaces are overwhelmed by media technologies.



Figure 2: Benny in his techno-sanctuary

The film, which premiered in 1992, illustrates how the boundary separating media and the domestic space were, and still are, gradually disappearing. Even though the influence of the media is more profound today, it is interesting to trace media's slow colonisation of the domestic space. Barbara Klinger traces the development of the media infiltrating the domestic space back to the 1980s in the United States, when the advancement of technology made it possible for films to be watched on VHS in the comfort of one's own home. Since then, the advance of technology has enabled the expansion of theatrical space into the domestic area. Television produced cable TV, VHS developed into DVD and Blu-Ray, while the Internet provided an immediate platform for those seeking films not commercially available. Today, the advent of YouTube and Netflix further exacerbates the expansion of the theatrical space. The hardware displaying these media also expanded from small television sets into giant home theatre systems, flat screens and projectors. All these developments have made the commodities produced by Hollywood an intimate part of the domestic space, becoming our favourite pastime and entrenching itself firmly into our routine (Klinger, 2006:4,7). Furthermore, the capitalist drive to accumulate as much profit as possible has led studios to generate additional commodities and products by using film as a marketing tool.

The commodification of film expands into as many forms as possible, from “fast-food franchise promotions and T-shirts to cartoon series spin-offs based on a film’s original characters” (Klinger, 2006:8), all of which will enter the domestic space eventually. These media-related and capitalist goods have, for example, entered Benny’s bedroom. Videotapes, CDs and figurines decorate the shelves, small placards adorn the walls and Pepsi bottles and Coca-Cola cans lie on his desk, while a Mickey Mouse masks grins on a display board. The rest of the family’s ultramodern home is similar to Benny’s bedroom. The wall of the family’s dining room is overwhelmed by consumerist artworks, from a portrait of a vintage Pepsi Cola cap to a sequence of Andy Warhol’s famed Marilyn Diptych print. Together with Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘Mona Lisa’ and Claude Monet’s ‘Houses of Parliament’, the diverse prints not only point to Georg and Anna’s “middlebrow bourgeois status”, but also reveal and implicate their “so-called higher forms of art [to be] on the same level as Benny’s comic books, slasher flicks and video games” (Frey, 2011:157). These various media and artworks, from a variety of public sources, enter the private home of the family and receive a special place in their domestic space, while being collectively treated as consumer products.



Figure 3: The domestic space of the Schröbers

Klinger thus argues that the home has become a “site of negotiation and tension between the public and the private” (2006:7). She draws from Umberto Eco’s reading of Superman’s hideout called the ‘Fortress of Solitude’ to describe the paradoxical situation of the domestic sphere. While the idea of a fortress conjures up the image of a strong and protected environment, Superman’s fortress is secluded and situated on the outskirts of civilisation, providing him with a safe space to turn to when the world becomes too much. The Fortress of Solitude is built in a steep cliff and situated in the mountains, only accessible through a gigantic steel door. The solace that Superman finds in his fortress provides him with a place to think, to write his memoirs and do important research, as the fortress is furnished with a screening room, communications and exercise equipment and other household items (Klinger, 2006:8-9). Comparable to Superman’s fortress, the hi-tech apartment of Benny and his parents also provide seclusion and safety from the outside world. As the elevator’s metal doors close behind them, the family enter their ultramodern apartment with state of the art kitchen and appliances, comfortable furniture and various media technologies. Benny’s modern bedroom is similarly adorned with audio-visual and cine-televisual equipment, enabling him to immerse himself with cinematic and other mediated images. After Benny plays video games at the video store and rents a movie, he returns to his fortress of technology. He does his homework while an ice hockey game plays on television, rock music blasts in the background and a live feed of the street below projects into his room. The paradox of the domestic space thus becomes clear: the private space has become an arena in which media from the outside world is consumed, intimately linking one’s privacy to “larger cultural developments such as industrialisation and modernisation” (Klinger, 2006:9). Klinger claims that even the manner in which houses are built or constructed are influenced by consumer consciousness. The style in which rooms are wired allow for the variety of multimedia to function, which contributes to the interrelationship between the domestic space

and its hardware (2006:10). The cupboards upon which Benny stores his videotapes are neatly built to allow for the television to feature in the middle. His bed, also, is strategically placed so that he can watch television before falling asleep, while a remote conveniently enables him to control the television without having to move. The home, or in this case, Benny's bedroom, is thus a conundrum: while appearing as a retreat from the public sphere, the domestic space is dependent on its cine-televisual technologies in order to function as a sanctuary (Klinger, 2006:10).

### 2.3.2 The Death of the Pig

In the article he presented before a screening of *Benny's Video*, Haneke explains that one of the reasons genre films preoccupied with violence became popular, is because of the oscillation between "the disconcerting feeling of being present at *a real event* and the emotional security of seeing only the *image* of an artificially created or a found reality" (2010(b):578). Before the title sequence, the first scene of *Benny's Video* display grainy, hand-held footage of a squealing pig led outside. The pig is steadied, a rope raises his snout and an airgun is placed on its forehead. A shot rings out, the pig plummets to the ground and convulses on the floor. The dead pig is flung with its hind legs to the left and a streak of blood smears the floor. The image suddenly freezes. Tell-tale white lines appear and rewinding skids are heard as the video is rewound until the pig has been summoned back to life. The scene freezes again and replays, this time at a slower speed. Slowly, the airgun is put on its forehead again, a deep bellowing sound rings out and the pig drifts to the ground, dying again. Benny is fascinated with the video. He replays the video various times throughout the film and, later, it becomes clear that Benny filmed the killing of the pig himself. He was part of the real event of the pig's death, but hid behind his camera. During their conversation, Benny tells the girl about the death of his grandfather and the open casket

at his funeral. Since the open casket was too high for him, his father had to pick him up to see his grandfather one last time. He admits that he closed his eyes, using his young age as an excuse and the fact that he was too short to look himself. It is clear, however, through his fascination with the video of the pig's death and his recollection of his grandfather's funeral, that Benny is unable to confront death on its own terms. He can only deal with a mediated version thereof, as the video presents him with the possibility of witnessing the real event of the pig's death, yet remain emotionally safe and secure in the knowledge that it is only an image. While he could not handle the abject body of his grandfather, he could deal with the death of the pig, not because "it was just a pig" (*Benny's Video*), but rather because he was hidden behind the video camera and mediating the death through his lens. Even though Benny was not viewing a video, but rather *making* a video, his actions recall Cavell's claim that photography (or, in this case, videography) takes responsibility out of Benny's hands and relieves him of acting on the situation (Cavell, 1979:40).

In an interview for the film, Haneke suggests that Benny has the impression or illusion that he can control things by capturing them on video. Haneke reveals that, personally, he has never filmed or taken photos when going on vacation, because he finds the act perverse. I would argue that he expands Cavell's claim that photography provides relief from responsibility, as Haneke points out that photography gives one the impression of ownership, in other words, that you are able to take ownership of the object that you have photographed. He believes that the strong desire to control and own something through an image is created by the media. Since people see and learn of the world through different media such as film, television and photographs, they are in the danger of "believing that it's only through the medium that reality exists...[while] in truth it's exactly the opposite" (Haneke, 2005(b)). Haneke's claim becomes loaded with significance when read in conjunction with Cavell's idea of the mechanical reproduction of photography. Due to

photography's ability to reproduce the world mechanically, it points, as I have written earlier, to the existence of a world outside our subjectivity. Even though Cavell and Haneke differ in the role of the spectator, their different starting points draw the same conclusion. While Cavell's argument rests on the spectator's *absence* when the mechanical creation of a photograph takes place, Haneke's rests on the subject's *presence* during the taking of a photograph or video, in other words, actually being the one to *record*. Either way, both argue that the act of viewing, whether in the absence (like the Schröbers in *The Seventh Continent*) or presence (like Benny) of its mechanical creation, serves as material evidence of reality outside one's subjectivity. In other words, regardless whether one was present during the act of filming or whether you are the one *doing* the filming, both acts are intended to validate reality.

### **2.3.3 Mediated Reality: Benny's Control Over the Image**

Benny records various events on his video camera. Apart from having a live feed of the street below his room, Benny records his sister's party, his parents' conversations, Egyptian landscapes and ruins, as well as banalities such as his mother on the toilet. The most disturbing thing that Benny videotapes, however, is his murdering of the girl. After he invites her to his house, Benny decides to show the girl the video of the dead pig as well as the weapon that was used to kill it. He gives her the weapon and playfully challenges her to shoot him. After she declines, he calls her a coward, but she returns the weapon and he reiterates his request. She also calls him a coward, but Benny casually aims and fires the gun off-screen. The girl drops out of the frame and the viewers are left to witness her final execution via the television screen that projects a live feed of his bedroom, his camera recording since the start of the scene. Even though it was not Benny's deliberate decision to do so, her death is captured on video. After the girl is killed and Benny eats some yoghurt, he covers her body

and goes through her things.<sup>12</sup> He then puts some rock music on and continues with his homework while the television shimmers in the background. The violence that has taken place in his bedroom has not, however, disappeared like all the other mediated scenes of violence have before. He simply cannot return to his fortress safe, secure and in control, for there is a lifeless body lying in his bedroom. After a while he decides to do something about the corpse by cleaning the blood that oozed from her head. He starts to drag her, but the blood continues to flow. He cleans it up again, and pulls her a few inches further, only to see more blood oozing. It does not stop. After he takes a break, Benny spots some of her blood on the side of his stomach and decides to videotape it. He then goes to his bedroom and records the lifeless body on the floor. He turns her around, revealing her bloodied and lifeless face. He then watches the recording on his console.

While the video of the pig provided Benny with the ability to watch a real event yet remain emotionally secure and safe, his television enabled him to rewind and replay the video at will. Since the pig's death can be replayed countless times and at various speeds, the remote provides Benny with the ability to control reality and reverse its progression (Frey, 2011:159). Similar to the video of the pig, Benny decides to watch the video of the girl's murder from his television and, afterwards, rewinds the sequence. Not only does Benny want to control the video by rewinding and slowing the sequence as he pleases, but he also wants to watch himself kill her on television. The virtual experience after the actual murder is, to him, even more dramatic, important and real, as he "spends much more time viewing and re-viewing the video than cleaning the body" (Frey, 2011:156). Haneke's argument that, for Benny's generation, reality only exists through the medium of film or video is conveyed in his decision to videotape her dead body and re-watch it on television. Her death only

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<sup>12</sup> One of the things that Benny finds is a wooden egg, which he opens only to reveal another egg and then another, with nothing inside. A "reduplication of images or concepts referring to the textual whole", is called *mise-en-abyme* (Hayward, 2013:239). The wooden eggs thus encapsulates Haneke's attitude towards the media, a *mise-en-abyme* which "inverts the relation between part and whole...itself the aesthetic trope through which spectacle produces society as such, withdrawing it from our grasp only to dump it back" (Sutherland, 2010:185).

becomes real, becomes part of 'reality', by being captured on video and replayed on television. The difference, however, is even though Benny could control the video of the pig and make its presence instantly disappear by switching the video off, the recording of the girl's death does not forget her lifeless body lying a few feet away.

Benny's idea of violence is thus informed by the way in which television depicts violence and its instant disappearance. Mary-Ann Doane addresses the forgettability and instantaneousness of television, by dividing the content of television between information, crisis and catastrophe. She argues that each programme, episode, talk show, documentary or news broadcast is self-destructing in order to make way for the next (1990:223-224). Television organises itself around the most current event and is characterised by the presentness of the situation as it "does not deal with the weight of the dead past but with the potential trauma and explosiveness of the present" (Doane, 1990:222). At the beginning of the film, video footage of a party held by Benny's sister, also named Evi, is shown in which she initiates a game with her guests that involves some sort of pyramid scheme. After almost a minute, Haneke reveals Benny watching the video footage on the television in his room. His mother's off-screen voice asks him to switch the channel to the news. He obliges and, instantly, bulletins flash across the screen, from glaring scenes of xenophobia in which football fans chase asylum seekers, to Imelda Marcos returning to the Philippines after living in exile. As the news anchors relay the details of the day's greatest hits, Benny and his mother discuss his sister's party. His father leans from the door and asks if there is any news worthy of attention, upon which his mother says no and complains that she cannot hear what the news anchor is saying, even though news footage display the destruction inflicted by the Croatian War of Independence on civilians in Zagreb. Georg resumes the conversation and questions Benny about Evi's pyramid scheme party and where she got the money. The television, however, continues to show the devastation wrecked by Serbian troops, while the

family, unmoved by the scenes of atrocity, chatter off-screen. While they continue to blabber, the news anchor's voice relay and explain the atrocities, carefully trained to "exclude all emotion" and render a "sanitised version of the real" (Peucker, 2000:179). Later, Benny watches a B-grade American slasher film in which a zombie assaults a man while he drives speeding car, crashing into a variety of obstacles. Even though the sources of the pig's video, the news footage and the American movie differ, the position of Benny remains the same: in front of his television. He is able to flick through different channels, from news bulletins that display atrocities to violent movies, without having to do more than press a button. Violence has thus, due to its interchangeability, become domesticated in its image and, through administering and broadcasting violence in fair amounts, Haneke argues that the "controlled invocation of evil permitted the hope for its controllability in reality" (2010(b):578). The girl's lifeless body, however, is not as controllable and 'disappearable' as those bodies on television.

#### **2.3.4 This is Violence: Pedagogy of Television**

Haneke argues that, before television, viewers only received "homeopathic dosages" of violence (2010(b):577). Since the appearance of television, however, a shift in viewing habits took place due to the *speed* in which media was broadcasted and the manner in which information was *circulated* (Haneke, 2010(b):577). He argues that the impression that the arresting and attention-grabbing images of the cinema commanded was matched and then eclipsed by television's "sheer *mass* of impressions and their permanent presence in the living room" (2010(b):578). The added complexity of actual, violent footage that televisions spew into living rooms through news broadcasts and documentaries challenged filmic representations of violence. It was much easier to spot fake violence in fictional films, since television gave audiences a thorough schooling on what real violence looked like.

Filmmakers thus had to compete against the real violence of news and documentary footage, by upping the visual appeal of their own fictional films in order to carry the same sensation of authentic terror (Haneke, 2010(b):577). The fabricated violence in fictional films aims at authenticity, even though audiences know that, somehow, it is faked. The constructed authenticity of violence does, however, allow the audience to forget momentarily that they are watching a fabrication. During their encounter in his bedroom, Benny explains to the girl that he has seen on television an explanation regarding the construction of fictional violence. The grotesque scenes of violence are actually only “ketchup and plastic.” He adds, however, “it looks real though” (*Benny’s Video*, 1992).<sup>13</sup> While Benny has only seen violence on television, death was usually a part of the domestic space in a radical different way. Before the nineteenth century, death was a public process in which the dead were left in their room for a few days to allow the members of society to grieve. There was thus “no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not died” (Benjamin in Doane, 1990:233). The arrival of modernity, however, has sequestered death from the domestic space and everyday life to “hospitals, old people’s homes and hospices” (Turnock, 2005:48). Neither the girl nor Benny has thus ever seen a dead body in real-life, with Benny losing his only chance at the funeral of his grandfather by closing his eyes.

Benny’s generation is thus part of a contemporary society in which death is concealed “to such an extent that its experience is generally a vicarious one through representation” (Doane, 1990:233). With the coming of media, death has slowly been replaced in the domestic space by a mere representation of it. While violence such as murder, brutalities of war and bloody massacres have always been present in film, the advent of television has contributed greatly to the manner in which our perception of violence has been distorted.

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<sup>13</sup> Benny cannot, however, distinguish between what is simulated violence and what is real violence, because, for him, “there is no difference between a death marked by ‘ketchup and plastic’ [...] and one that produces real blood” (Peucker, 2000:179).

What has changed over the years, according to Haneke, is the “increase in quantity and the distribution potential of electronic media” (2010(b):577). Scenes of carnage have bombarded audiences increasingly since the advent of television up until the release of *Benny’s Video*, an assault, I argue, that has not lost any momentum into the new millennium. Haneke asks whether the similarity between real and fictional forms of violence and its representation, be it news footage or a action flick, have influenced audience’s perception and sensitivity in such a way that they are unable to distinguish between the different contents of each. The question, for him, is whether the influence of television have dulled our perceptions to such an extent that “authenticity of the corpses of Grozny and Sarajevo approximate that of *The Terminator*” and that the only thing that distinguishes *Star Wars* from the “media event of the blitz invasion of Kuwait [is the] the timeslot in which it goes on the air” (Haneke, 2010(b):577). While Haneke’s claim may seem like a stretch, as context will always orientate its audience, one must keep in mind that the spectatorial position of the audience still remains the same: the comfort of their couch. If the viewing situation remains the same for the audience and the different contexts of violence depicted bears resemblance to each other, will the boundary separating ‘real and distressing’ violence from ‘for entertainment’s sake only’ not get blurred, at least to some extent?

To problematise our inability to distinguish between different depictions of violence even further, Haneke addresses the interchange between cinema and television. He traces cinema’s attempt to counter the tremendous omnipresence of electronic media by intensifying its own means of representation, techniques employed which television simply “integrated into its system again” (2010(b):578). The desire of cinema and television to outdo one another led to the constant attempt to intensify scenes of violence more than the other, resulting “indirectly to the further blurring of the boundary between reality and image” (Haneke, 2010(b):578). The battle between various film companies and television networks is

driven by the desire to gain market shares and viewer ratings. In order to meet the audience's growing atavistic thirst for destruction, these companies compete in finding new ways in which violence can be represented more intense, horrific and disturbing than the other. Thus, any artistic or technical innovation is solely focused on the intensification of representation in order to stimulate the capitalist drive (Haneke, 2010(b):578). Haneke believes, however, that the "form of representation determines the effect of its content" (2010(b):578). Therefore, since corporations compete in the intensification of form, be it faster editing, louder music or eye-popping *mise-en-scène*, "content has become an interchangeable variable" (Haneke, 2010(b):578). Thus, be it real or fictional violence, the war victim or the movie star, the car or toothpaste, Haneke argues that:

The absolute *equivalency of all the contents* stripped of their reality ensures the *universal fictionality* of anything shown and, with it, the coveted *feeling of security* of the consumer (2010(b):578).

A rape scene, horrors of war, genocide or even bullying are all interchangeable content, as the form in which these violent acts are packaged are, usually, spectacular. Due to the fact that fictional violence approximates real violence, the violent acts of both contexts are stripped of the reality from which they emerged from, resulting in them simply becoming part of the stream of mere representations that emit from various media. The merging of various media into a common stream recalls Guy Debord's work on *The Society of the Spectacle* as images "detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever" (1994:2). In the same way that violent footage of something approximates that of another, what is the actual video referred to in the title of *Benny's Video*? Is it the recording of the pig's death, the footage of the girl's murder and the subsequent cleaning thereof or the video he delivers to the police to implicate his parents? Perhaps, as Frey suggests, the title implies that these different videos are, in fact, all the same,

since, for Benny, the videos create a “flat line of reality or unreality, a total conflation of the actual and the virtual” (2010:161).

### **2.3.5 Television Today**

How has the position of the generation after Benny deteriorated since 1992? Has the flat line of reality and unreality become worse? The past twenty-four years since the film’s release have seen, as Klinger explains, media entrenching itself increasingly into our daily routine. Most notably, the attacks of September 11 have resulted in a decline in traveling and attendance of public events in American society. Klinger argues that people decided that the safest place would be their home, which led to an increase in expenditure in home entertainment that Klinger describes as “bunkering the house” or “post-9/11 cocooning” (2006:25). The modern tendency was to retreat to our home entertainment systems by cocooning ourselves in the comfort of our own living room. Even though this was a temporary and localised phenomenon, the proliferation of media has not abated. Since then, television has attempted to bring the “even more real” into our living rooms in high definition, with UHD and 3D televisions allowing us to lose ourselves in a reality that bears little resemblance to our normal definition of the world. The dominating images of the domestic space provides “an on-going blanket of white noise” dulling perception and rendering “everything safe, logical, anodyne” (Wheatley, 2011:19). The popularity of YouTube and the immediacy provided by Netflix has given consumers of media even more power, much more than Benny’s ability to rewind and replay. Not only can we watch anything at any time and any place (provided there is a Wi-Fi connection), we also digest media at a staggering speed. We watch and process the world with several Chrome tabs open or a “social media feed where news about beheadings and refugees are sandwiched between duckface selfies and BuzzFeed quizzes” (McCraken, 2016). Even though we consume these

media safely and anonymously, Klinger argues that all viewers, including couch potatoes, are both active and implicated in the world, as our “daily encounters with the cinema and other media in [our] homes entail decoding and evaluation as well as, at times, a passionate attachment to domesticated media objects” which turns the domestic space into an “aesthetically and ideologically charged environment of reception” (2006:11). Cultural theorist Douglas Kellner has pointed out that the Internet is absorbing previous forms of culture, as the computer has become “a major household appliance and source of entertainment, information, play, communication, and connection with the outside world” (2003:13). He describes two distressing fears of critics of media that the influence and expansion of media generate. Firstly, the spreading of media into the ever-expanding realms of cyberspace may obliterate and substitute the real with an “ersatz, contrived, and manufactured pseudo-reality for the ordinary experiences of everyday life”, or, secondly, the surplus of information and entertainment available to consumers might distract individuals from the “trials and travails of ordinary life” in exchange for the escape to “the realm of hi-tech entertainment” (Kellner, 2003:16).

Since he grew up without the continual presence of television, Haneke explains that he was able to learn from the world directly, without an intermediary. In contrast, children today are taught to “perceive reality through television screens” (Haneke in Cieutat, 2000:28), an argument I extend to smartphone screens. While Haneke does not attempt to psychologise or explain Benny’s actions by blaming the media’s ideological power, I do think he implicates the media in influencing the way in which Benny perceives reality, as his world is completely “mediated through video and saturated by spectacle” (Frey, 2010:161). After Benny returns from Egypt with his mother, his father asks him why he killed the girl. After answering he does not know why, he adds, “I wanted to see what it’s like” (*Benny’s Video*, 1992). Haneke has repeatedly told interviewers how he read similar cases in

newspapers about senseless murders committed by boys from bourgeois homes. While none of them were disturbed, mentally ill or drug-addicted, they all admitted they only wanted to see what it would be like to commit violence. *Benny's Video*, and by extension *Funny Games*, does not label youths committing violence in sociological terms as 'other' or 'disturbed', as American films usually do, but rather suggests that the motivation to see what it feels like to inflict senseless violence on strangers is in actual fact "no real motivation at all" (Falcon, 1998:12). Would Benny then have killed the girl if there were less violence in the media? In an interview with *Sight & Sound*, Haneke makes clear that he is not arguing that less violence on television would mean less violence in society. What he argues instead, which is clear in *Benny's Video*, is that by watching a falsified world through a television screen leads spectators to perceive the world only through images. He argues that if a child, who has little or no contact with violence, watches a television series in which a myriad of people get shot, while it may be entertaining, the danger lies in the violence taking on the same level of reality as a Coca-Cola advertisement. For Haneke, "everything becomes drained of reality, so violence appears easy to exercise and with few consequences" (Falcon, 1998:11). That the media has become the chief pedagogue for teaching and representing reality to its spectators is one of the main criticisms that Haneke aims at television, a critique I argue can be extended to our use of smartphones. He argues that people do not perceive reality anymore, but rather television or smartphones' representation thereof. He continues:

Our experiential horizon is very limited. What we know of the world is little more than the mediated world, the image. We have no reality, but a derivative of reality, which is extremely dangerous, most certainly from a political standpoint but in a larger sense to our ability to have a palpable sense of the truth of everyday experience (Haneke in Sharrett, 2010:585).

Instead of our everyday experience revolving around having real encounters and engagements with the outside world, we are glued to our screens that represent and mediate our encounters and engagements. Yet, how does the mediation of the world through a screen affect our relationships? Are we not given a greater purview of the world through our televisions, computers and smartphones?

## **2.4 Modern Society of Spectacles: *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance***

### **2.4.1 Modern Europe in Context: *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and the Second World War**

Now that I have outlined the problematic influence of the media, especially television and its depictions of violence, I now turn to the manner in which the ubiquity of the media facilitates, influences and devalues the relationships of those in modern-day Europe. The impact of the media on the relations in modern day culture can only be illustrated within the context of modern (1990s) Europe, which I will do by drawing from two frameworks contextualised by Peter J. Schwartz and Georg Seeßlen. Schwartz points out that Haneke's critique of German tradition mirrors that of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's key Romantic text *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which links "an empty centre of selfhood with problems of media, taste, commodities, and desire" (2010:340). Werther is a sensitive and passionate young artist who is rejected by his beloved Lotte, a warm-hearted girl who is betrothed to someone else. The rejection experienced by Werther, together with his self-absorption and restlessness, leads him to exclaim: "Oh the gap, the fearful gap, I feel here in my breast! – Often I think if once, just once, I could press her to my heart the gap would all be filled" (Von Goethe, 2012:74). After his rejection, however, young Werther, from the bourgeois class, leaves the rural region where Lotte lives to pursue a respectable career in court. The aristocratic environment he finds himself in, where class and etiquette determines

one's identity, forces Werther's restless and passionate spirit to take a backseat. He attempts to fill the gap or void left by Lotte through various means and seeks to distinguish himself from other bourgeois "in expressions of taste and feeling, in clothing and conduct, as an artist and as a lover" (Schwartz, 2010:340). He reads a great deal and constructs his narrative in line with the literary works he pores over, such as Homer, Goldsmith, Ossian, Rousseau and the Bible (Schwartz, 2010:340). The suit Werther wore when he danced with Lotte the first time, a blue jacket with yellow vest, tan coloured breeches and leather boots, topped by a tall hat with a rounded brim, becomes his favourite outfit. The value of the outfit is bestowed by his memorable first experience with Lotte, which serves as a reminder of and contributes to the prolonging of his illusionary relationship with her (Purdy, 1998:160). In other words, his attire serves as an intimate sign of his personality and experiences. Werther, thus, defines his selfhood through what he reads, the fashion choices he makes, the work he does and the people he surrounds himself with. As Werther's story progresses, however, the distinctions he bases his identity on turns out to be illusory. The identity markers collapse, leading young Werther to commit suicide. The tragic end that Werther succumbs to is "on the one hand a failure of differential self-definition to compensate lack of positive content [...] and on the other a fatal consequence of reality's misdescription by media" (Schwartz, 2010:340). The shaping of a sense of self through different media is a "late eighteenth-century product of bourgeois cultural ascendance", a phenomena that Schwartz also points out that Faust, in Goethe's other famous work, complains that bourgeois tradition, literature, technology and, interestingly enough, "distortions of sunlight through coloured glass" prevents him from experiencing the world directly (2010:340).

The novel had a great impact on German society during its release. The book was reprinted thirty times within sixteen years and spawned a number of suicides; one even drowned herself with a copy of the book in her pocket (Constantine in Von Goethe,

2012:xxvi-xxvii). Many youth attempted to emulate Werther by following his mannerisms, speech, reading habits, fashion sense and dress code, his suit, especially, serving as a “badge of identity” (Purdy, 1998:151,153). By dressing themselves according to Werther’s outfit, young men signalled to others that, they too, possessed the same qualities as Werther such as his “emotions, moral character, political commitment, and capacity for productive work” (Purdy, 1998:154). Daniel L. Purdy attributes *The Sorrows of Young Werther* with contributing to the cultural shift of physical appearance and personal identity that took place in the late eighteenth century (2010:147). What you wore, what you spent your time doing, your interests and acquaintances became markers of identity. Thus, as Schwartz argues, Haneke’s critique of modern Europe has early roots, originating from Goethe’s assessment of how the bourgeoisie identified themselves through their professions and consumerist tendencies. Haneke points out, however, that the problem is still very much present in the twentieth century (Schwartz, 2010:347), a problem that, I argue, is present in the twenty-first century as well.

The second factor that needs to be taken into account in order to understand the context that Haneke’s characters find themselves in is the post-war context. Georg Seeßlen reads Haneke’s first three films in terms of the larger context of Haneke’s work in television that evaluates modern Austria (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), a generation guilty of “concealment in Germany and Austria after the world war” (2010:333). The two generations depicted in his first three films, namely that of the first post-war generation (the Georgs and Annas) and their children (Evi, Benny), have their imaginary place of origin not only in industrialisation and middle-class society, but also, due to its repression, the persistence of fascism (Seeßlen, 2010:333). This is hinted in both *The Seventh Continent* and *Benny’s Video*, when the news on the radio or television informs about a Nazi trial or neo-Nazi activities, the characters just ignore the statements or turn a blind eye, reacting only “in their

orderliness and in their repression to fascist guilt” (Seeßlen, 2010:333). In an interview Haneke contextualises the post-war generation by pointing out that those who came back from the Second World War either kept their ideals intact, or had to ignore the collapse of the world in order to keep on living. In other words, they simply continued to live upright as if the nineteenth century had never ended, “as if God, Emperor and Fatherland were still living, just under a pseudonym” (qtd in Seeßlen, 2010:333). The *Glaciation Trilogy*, thus, looks at the lives of those whose parents passed down those repressed feelings and anxieties. For Haneke there existed a vague fear of “living without a real sense of abode”, resulting in the “hapless furnishing of the synthetic home” (Seeßlen, 2010:333). The icy reactions of Evi, Benny and Anni (the orphan child in *71 Fragments*) throughout the trilogy is thus the final consequence of their parents’ repression through which amplified guilt is carried over from one generation to the next (Seeßlen, 2010:333). These two ideas, namely, consumer ideals as markers of identity and the post-war generation’s repressed feelings and anxieties, are important factors to take into account when reading the actions and decisions of the characters in *71 Fragments*.

#### **2.4.2 The Failure of Communication: *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance***

*71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* expands the setting of the nuclear family of *The Seventh Continent* and *Benny’s Video* to a large cross-section of characters. The variety of characters range from two married couples, two orphans, (one a young girl, the other a Romanian boy), an old pensioner and his daughter, and three university students. Hans and Maria, caught in their working class routine, are concerned about the health of their baby, while Inge and Paul desperately want to adopt a child to “fill their comfortable but empty bourgeois lives” (Grundmann, 2010:378). They attempt to adopt the orphan Anni, but instead settle for Marian, a young refugee from Romania. Mr Tomek is a socially isolated pensioner

who finds it difficult to maintain a relationship with his estranged daughter, while Max, a university student, ends up shooting several of these characters in a bank. For Roy Grundmann, the cross-section of characters and its myriad of stories represent “the complexity, heterogeneity, and interconnectedness of the modern world”, while conveying “the fragmented mode in which this fully globalised, fully mediated world experiences itself” (2010:371). The whole film is told in seventy-one sequences, each separated by a blank spacer. From Mr Tomek’s routine in his apartment, Inge and Paul watching the news, Hans reciting an empty prayer in the bathroom, to Max getting food at a cafeteria and Marian wandering the streets of Vienna, most of the seventy-one sequences are “remarkable only in their unremarkability”, forming a system that “implicates an entire form of society for the crime of one” (Frey, 2003). Adam Bingham, on the other hand, understands the blank spacers to reinforce the theme of alienation and the breakdown of communication in modern society, as each character “exists in their own insular bubble”, while each scene exists “with no connection to any around it” (Bingham, 2005). The “chaotic cosmic ordering of drab, disparate lives” thus corresponds to the “fragmented narrative structure that follows the unconnected characters as their paths crucially intersect” (Bingham, 2005). The film is bookended by two news reports, the first of which depicts news of the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1993, from Georgian refugees fleeing from one of the cities that supporters of the exiled president Zviad Gamsakhurdia captured, to the set-back that the peace talks in Somalia experienced due to the refusal of rebel groups to cooperate, to the crisis in Haiti concerning the resistance of locals towards the American and Canadian troops that train there. I will discuss the other news report bookend later in the chapter. In my reading of *71 Fragments*, I will focus on three key scenes: Max playing Ping-Pong, Mr. Tomek talking to his daughter over the phone and Hans’s declaration of love to Maria, in order to point out how the technological, media-

saturated and industrial world of the characters keep them from experiencing human contact, leading inevitably to frustration, despair and disaster (Bingham, 2005).

About twenty minutes into the film, Max hits Ping-Pong balls that are ejected from an automated machine in a long take that last almost three minutes. A black net stretches across half of the table to contain the balls, enclosing half of the medium shot of Max's body. The balls are discharged at rapid speed, while Max's right arm weaves, almost mechanically, back and forth, hitting most of the balls. The circular motion, while intense and rhythmic, conveys a sense of stasis, a paradox, which Jerry White points out, is "at the core of the film's portrayal of everyday European life; furious activity everywhere and everyone still drowns in inertia" (2009:34). In almost all of the scenes in which Max appears, he is either framed within a larger frame, busy with a puzzle or coordinated into some sort of assembly. Max is introduced in the film sitting on his bed, crouched down to the floor and piecing puzzle pieces together that form a crucifix, while a doorframe surrounds him. He fails at the puzzle and his roommate shows him how to do it, thus losing the bet of twenty shillings. Later, he walks through a hallway in the student hostel into his room, framing him once again, and looking down through the window, which, in the next fragment, he walks outside and sees the outline of a human figure drawn on the pavement. These two fragments are incredibly brief and are cut-off abruptly. During another crucifix puzzle, Max loses his cool at the new participant who also failed to complete the puzzle in a minute by flinging his food tray to the ground. In other fragmented scenes he forms part of a conveyer belt passing and getting food and talks to his mother in a phone booth. The collection of these scenes do not account for or explain Max's murdering spree and suicide at the end of the film. Their formal construction of entrapment and coordination does, however, perhaps hint at Max's lived experience in modern Vienna, reflecting the experience of the Schröbers in *The Seventh Continent*. Even though the few fragments in which Max appear do not rationalise the murders he commits at

the end of the film, the stress and humiliation he experiences (especially the final embarrassment he is subjected to in the bank moments before he shoots everyone) could be viewed as key factors to his behaviour. The symptoms of his breakdown, however, are not completely explained by these markers, suggesting the complexity of his actions.

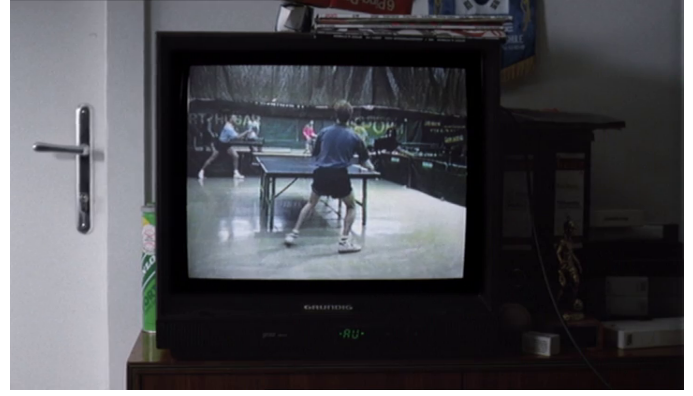


Figure 4: Max plays Ping Pong and watches himself on television

For Roy Grundmann, however, the most revealing scene is when the Ping-Pong coach shows Max a video that recorded him at a tournament. The coach's scornful and wounding comments during Max's performance neutralises the video's "pedagogic potentials, [as he] prefers to use it for discipline, punishment and humiliation" (2010:389). The scene suggests something quite interesting about the glaciation that the characters experience. Glaciation is not just a condition or sickness experienced by society, but is rather the result of the characters' own desire for self-domination. The desire of these middle class and well-educated characters is efficiently put into action: Max is consensually taking part in the pedagogical video exercise. He *wants* to increase his performance and ability and thus subjects himself to the coach's destructive teaching. Since it reveals his mistakes unbiasedly, easy to rewind and replay again, the video is, in other words, the "very instrument of his self-oppression" (Grundmann, 2010:389). By watching his body and performance on television, Max's body becomes an automated machine, which needs to do and fulfil specific mechanics in order to function optimally. The coach barks that his "feet are wrong", he needs to "step back", "follow the ball" and points out that his balance is "up shit creek" (*71 Fragments*).

Together with the mechanical Ping-Pong exercises that Max subjects himself to earlier, Seeßlen argues that there is an inherent numbness in the empty mechanics of Ping-Pong practice. Max understands that his body has to imitate the “matrix of media images” that he is bombarded with, a form of violence that contributes to the loss of the body (Seeßlen, 2010:331). Similar to Georg in *The Seventh Continent* walking past machinery to his desk job, Max is also a modern, human automaton. Schwartz draws a parallel between Max’s mechanical practice of Ping-Pong and the headless, morning rituals of the Schröbers, by recalling Günther Anders’ concept of ‘Promethean shame’, embodying modern man’s embarrassment in his failure of matching the “efficiency, strength, productivity, beauty [and] longevity” of his own technological products (2010:347). Similar to Werther, Max bases his identity on his desires, in other words, his aspiration of playing Ping-Pong like a pro, an identity that crumbles before his eyes on the television.

The 35<sup>th</sup> fragment, halfway through the film, (right after Max’s pedagogic video lesson), depicts Mr Tomek, the old pensioner, on the telephone in an eight-minute long take. Mr Tomek talks to his daughter and granddaughter on the telephone while a television flashes in front of him and a bookcase closes in from the other side. Their conversation is banal and goes in circles. While he waits for the phone to travel between the two recipients on the other line, he glances at the television, its presence filling the void that the disappointing relationship with his daughter is leaving. His loneliness is palatable, while his clear agitation and anger towards his daughter is obvious. He knows he is a burden and scolds her for trying to pretend that he isn’t, voices his frustration of being blamed for being either uninterested (if he does not ask about her husband) or interfering (when he does) and sarcastically apologises for existing. After voicing his irritation with the expression “kisses”, he is criticised by his daughter that he only talks about himself, upon which he retorts “What should I talk about if not myself, then?” (*71 Fragments*). He calls his daughter a spiteful and nasty person and tells

her to stop try and hurt him. He then wants to talk to his granddaughter again. In many ways, the sequence reflects Max's mechanical Ping-Pong long take, as the same tension between stasis and action exist. While not as rhythmic as the ejection of Ping-Pong balls from the machine, Mr Tomek's emotional outbursts likewise intersperses the shot, while the circular conversation reflects Max's motion of "resignation [and] of being forever fated to repeat the same" (White, 2009:35).



Figure 5: Mr Tomek on the telephone

Two fragments after Mr Tomek's phone-call, Hans and Maria are having dinner. Hans gorges himself with salad, rice, meat and beer, while his wife Maria slowly pecks at her food. Before Hans takes another gulp of his beer, he tells Maria "I love you" (*71 Fragments*). Maria stops eating, looks at Hans perplexed and asks what is the matter with him and whether he is drunk. He answers yes, upon which she angrily questions his motives and points out that his words are out of character. "I thought it might help", he says, a claim that Maria does not appreciate. After a moment of silence, Hans suddenly slaps Maria through the face with the back of his hand. Shocked, Maria puts her cutlery down and turns to leave the table. Hans looks down at his food, while Maria sits back into her chair, also looking down. After a while she reaches for his arm, touches it, retreats and returns to her food.

For Seeßlen, Hans' declaration unearths the buried emotions between the couple, leading to the violent outburst. Since his sentence is completely foreign to Maria, those three words must “remain completely foreign, like a tremendous provocation” (Seeßlen, 2010:330). After a brief pause she continues to eat, while Hans plays around with his food and starts to eat later on. They continue just as they have at the start of the scene. Ultimately, nothing changes between Hans and Maria, as the words Hans uses are essentially foreign to them. In the context of the film, Seeßlen argues that the “more language there is in the media, the less language people have themselves” (2010:331). The three words of “I love you” are words that usually carry great value in narratives. In mainstream films, those words magically fix a relationship or bring two quarrelling lovers together. Not, however, in the instance of Hans and Maria. It is not the words that make Maria reach out to Hans, but rather the slap through the face that the words carried with it.



**Figure 6: Hans hits Maria during dinner**

Wheatley argues, however, that the truly remarkable fact about Hans and Maria's scene is “its opacity, its inability to be ‘read’” (2009:67). Even though, when all the fragments are read together, there emerges some sort of congruence, each “subplot struggles

against our attempts to read it as a unified whole” (Wheatley, 2009:68). We do not completely know why Maria was so dumbfounded by Hans’ declaration. Even though we know he rarely says those three words, we do not know why. His explanation that it “might help” perhaps refers to their sick infant and Maria’s frustration, or possibly even alluding to Maria’s depression (his prayer in the bathroom reveals her unhappiness). While it is clear that the family suffers, alongside with Mr Tomek’s loneliness, their story depicts how their mutual alienation and ways of manipulation are characteristic of their relationships (Grundmann, 2010:379). The only way these characters are linked, though, is through the media. When Mr. Tomek watches Marian, the Romanian, homeless boy, on television, there is no fragmenting black marker between his scene and Inge and Paul’s, who watches the same news report. The omission of the black interjection might suggest that, even though they are alienated from one another, the media is the only thing that links all these characters. Thus, for Seeblen, the loss of the body that Max experiences, Mr Tomek’s inability to communicate and the loss of intimacy inherent in Hans and Maria relationship are all “pitted against the excessive influence of the media, [as] people evade one another and then catch one another again in the web of the media” (2010:332). It is certainly true for Inge and Paul who, after being frustrated with Anni, sees Marian on the news and decides to adopt him instead. In being moved by the story of Marian relayed in the news report, the television informed and determined their life-altering decision of adoption. Anni and Marian are thus in indirect competition for Inge and Paul’s attention, as Marian’s social viability is only granted by the neglect and discarding of Anni (Grundmann, 2010:403). The media plays a mediating role, either implicitly or explicitly, in these relationships. The informing role of the media in relationships has been present in *The Seventh Continent* and *Benny’s Video* as well, which might illustrate my point further.

### 2.4.3 Using the Media to Mediate their Relationships: Alexander and Benny

In his seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord defines the spectacle not as “a collection of images; [but] rather...the social relationship between people that is mediated by the images” (1994:4). The relations between people are governed and facilitated by spectacles of media, its presence always looming when people are unable to connect with one another. During a dinner sequence in *The Seventh Continent*, the song “Send Me Roses” by MO starts to play on the radio, filling the silence while the Georg, Anna, Evi and Alexander eat and drink. Georg looks anxiously towards Alexander, asking him whether he should turn the music down. Alexander answers not on his account and the family continues to eat while the music overwhelms the dining room, but Georg decides to turn the music softer in any case. While Anna tells Alexander which spices she used in their meal, Alexander starts to cry. The music is put off while Anna, awkwardly, tries to console him. While the song probably reminded Alexander of something, the manner in which the interfering media robs Haneke’s characters of engaging with one another becomes even clearer in the scene right after Alexander’s breakdown. When Georg, Anna and, a now calm Alexander, watch television, Alexander tells them what his and Anna’s mother told him a few days before she died. He recalls that she wondered “what it would be like if people would have a screen instead of a head so everybody could see their thoughts” (*The Seventh Continent*). Neither Anna nor Georg responds, while their eyes stay glued to the screen. The voice of the television personality, however, fills the silence left by Alexander’s recollection.

The scene reveals two disturbing characteristics of the perceived role of television. Not only do the presence of television allow Anna and Georg to comfortably ignore Alexander and revert their attention back to its commanding gaze, but their mother’s wish, that everybody’s heads be screens in order to expose their innermost thoughts, reveals an alarming belief that undergirds their faith in television. Firstly, it assumes that the projected

images on the screen are always the utmost truth. Secondly, their mother's statement reveals that, not only do people hide their true thoughts and thus become alienated from one other, but that it is up to the media to solve the separation. Their mother attributes the media with the power not only to mediate the relationships between people, but also presupposes that the media plays an integral role in restoring those relationships. Debord's linking of the spectacle with the influence it exerts on human relationships become clear in the trilogy, as the characters use different media to drone out their personal problems. Another example is the family's apartment in *Benny's Video*, which is divided into spaces reserved for private use. Both at the start of the film, when Benny and his mother watch the news and, halfway through, when Benny shows his parents the video of him killing the girl, his father remains at the door and does not enter his techno-sanctuary. Benny's father treats the doorway to Benny's room as a border (Frey, 2011:157), the media-saturated fortress only reserved for Benny. Alexander is unable to voice his pain and difficulty of dealing with his mother's death during dinner, but it is only when they are in front of the television that he has the courage to say something. Seeßlen argues that the three films depict the "loss of the body and language [that] leads to the attempt to send each other messages by way of an electronic medium" (2010:332). While Alexander can only attempt an engagement with his sister and brother-in-law in the *presence* of media (they can also only eat while some form of music plays in the background), Benny communicates his act of murder to his parents *through* media. He is unable to admit that he murdered the girl directly to his parents, which leads him instead to replay the video of her death to them after they watched the news. The video obviously forces a response from them, albeit a cold and rational one, revealing the manner in which Benny is able to exert an influence on his parents via the recording. The control that Benny imposes on his parents via media thus replaces the emotional relationship (Seeßlen, 2010:332), as the

video is talking *for* him and *instead* of him.<sup>14</sup> Different media, be it television or videos, have thus become the “meta-stratum of the global village in which we find ourselves” (Seeblen, 2010:332).

#### **2.4.4 Construction of Identities Through Media-Informed Pedagogy: Evi**

The prolific media culture that Haneke’s characters find themselves influences their relationships with each other, but also, as Douglas Kellner points out, “provides ever more material for fantasy, dreaming, modelling thought and behaviour, and identities” (2003:1). Werther used media such as novels and clothing to build his identity. Similarly, Evi’s decision in *The Seventh Continent* to feign blindness can be traced back to the media and its influence on her behaviour. After Evi’s teacher informs Anna of her daughter’s actions, Anna fails to address Evi’s behaviour and slaps her through the face. After their confrontation, Anna finds a newspaper article underneath Evi’s drawings of a smiling girl with a headline that reads “Blind, but no longer lonely”. While Anna failed to engage with Evi’s actions properly, it is clear that the medium of the newspaper guided Evi’s actions and provided her with the material to model her behaviour accordingly, in the hope of attaining the same outcome as the smiling girl in the picture. The picture shows the smiling girl embraced by someone else, proving to Evi, in its eternal manufacturedness, that even though the girl is blind, she is loved. Simplistically understood by Evi: blindness cures loneliness.

Not only does Evi draw from the medium of the newspaper to guide her actions, the media also informs her, as well as her parents’, fantasy and dreams. Debord argues that for one whom the “real world becomes real images, mere images are transformed into real beings” (1994:18). For the Schröbers as well, images not only influence their behaviour, such as Evi feigning blindness, but transforms into something real. After Anna reads the heading

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<sup>14</sup> When Benny and his mother go to Egypt, his mother also videotapes Benny with a second camera. This implies that “even the relation of mother and child is mediated by the video camera, and that in some sense their meeting ground is the collaborative work of the videotape itself” (Peucker, 2000:183).

of the article, she goes to Evi's bedroom and asks her whether she is lonely or not. An awkward interaction ensues as Evi denies feeling lonely and Anna clumsily lays on her to give a hug. Evi then prays before she goes to sleep: "Dear Lord make me meek so I in Heaven Thee shall meet" (*The Seventh Continent*). It is here that the image of Australia transforms into a real being. Right after her prayer, the image of Australia reappears and fills the whole frame, but differs from its previous appearance: the image has become animated. Haneke's editing choice of connecting Evi's prayer of meeting God in heaven, the world beyond, and the moving image of Australia suggests her conflation of the Christian belief of heaven with the utopia presented by the image of Australia. For Debord, the hope for paradise is no longer projected into the heavens, but rather placed within material life itself as the spectacle is a "technological version of the exiling of human powers in a 'world beyond'" (1994:20). For Evi, the image of Australia is her only reference point of heaven, thus transforming into a visual manifestation of the promise of paradise.



Figure 7: Australia's promise of paradise

It is important to note that the countries referenced throughout the three films, Australia, Egypt and Romania are all east from Austria. Schwartz explains that, for German romantics, the Orient was a dream that served as a counterpart to the complexity of

modernity and a means of escape, which carried the idea that any differences or problems will be solved. However, the dream too often turned to “one of self-dissolution in death, in suicide” (Schwartz, 347:2010). The self-dissolution of the Schröbers in *The Seventh Continent* literally ends in suicide. As they methodologically go around and destroy their possessions and then kill themselves, they reveal that what they are actually seeking in the image of Australia is the “escape from the social-semantic system their things trap them in” (Schwartz, 347:2010).

#### 2.4.5 Becoming Part of the Spectacle

For Seeßlen, the media’s integral role in the three films renders the characters both perpetrator and victim. They fluctuate between observers and those being observed, as they all sooner or later enter the medium (2010:329). The final fragment in *71 Fragments*, the news bookend of the film, encapsulates Seeßlen’s point. After the final series of scenes, Max massacring most of the people in the bank and killing himself, blood oozing from a victim, Max lying face down on his car wheel and Marian still waiting for Inge in the car, the final fragment of the film shows a news broadcast reporting on Max’s horrific shooting spree. The bulletin is integrated with news from the war in Sarajevo and the child abuse claims against Michael Jackson, reports that have already been shown in fragment forty-nine.<sup>15</sup> The massacre at the bank enters the common news stream and is subsumed by other noteworthy bulletins. The characters of the film, depicted with real lives, thus become “subject to a relentlessly impersonal image system. In a world saturated with images, they just become another image” (Wheatley, 2009:70). The shooting, condensed into a brief, fifty-five second news bite, displays the tendency of television to banalise events, subjecting real occurrences

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<sup>15</sup> For Doane, catastrophe always seems to “have something to do with technology and its potential collapse. And it is also always tainted by a fascination with death – so that catastrophe might finally be defined as the conjuncture of the failure of technology and the resulting confrontation with death” (1990:229).

to a kind of levelling process (Doane, 1990:228). The horrific shooting thus attains the same value as the war in Sarajevo and the child molestation accusations of Michael Jackson, a flat line of reality in which three vastly different cases differ only in their time-slot. These newsbites are easily consumable and, as Wheatley points out, since rapidly edited bulletins dull our perception and forecloses any engagement with the actuality of the horrors, the bulletins are, in the end, ultimately meaningless (2009:71).

During the news report, the press interviews a man who spoke to Max just before the shooting. The guiding voice of the neutral news anchor announces that the man has no explanation, after which the man confirms in his interview: “No idea, don’t know. It’s madness” (*71 Fragments*). For Doane, eyewitness accounts of a horrific event carry authority only due to their ‘being there’, since their reported presence makes up for the absent camera. Since the man is interviewed in the area that the massacre took place, as well as the property *on* which Max committed suicide, the man and interviewer’s presence in the space “compensates for the inevitable temporal lag” (Doane, 1990:229). The story assumes ‘realness’ due to the press being there, interviewing those who witnessed the brutality, thus enabling them to subject the catastrophe to “analysis, speculation and explanation” (Doane, 1990:230). For the viewers of the news bulletin the horrific event only attains credibility through its presence on television, revealing our “understanding of natural catastrophe [to be] a fully technological apprehension” (Doane, 1990:231). Since Max and his victims enter the very spectacle that enveloped their lives, the final fragment of the film indicates how “television and ‘real-life’ continuously consume and reflect one another” (Wheatley, 2009:71). Thus, as Debord argues: “All that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (1994:1).

## 2.5 Conclusion: The Media's Ability to Decontextualise

As I have illustrated Cavell's two major arguments with the advertisement of Australia, the act of viewing, firstly, makes displacement appear as our natural condition and, secondly, provides the viewer with the ability to view the world without having to bear its burdens. Clearly, television exacerbates these two conclusions made by Cavell, since the manner in which information is packaged and broadcasted influences the way in which the viewer regains contact with external reality. Since most social and political conflicts are played out on television and smartphone screens, displaying "spectacles such as sensational murder cases, terrorist bombings, celebrity and political sex scandals, and the explosive violence of everyday life" (Kellner, 2003:1), the mixture of information, crises and catastrophic news with shallow entertainment results in, as Haneke has pointed out, the time-slot being the only marker that separates these shows. The editing practices of television, characterised by its speed and conciseness, provides the viewer with linear information that can "quickly [be] consumed and checked off...[offering] the most persuasive guarantee for sanitised emotions, that is, for sterility" (Haneke, 2000:173). The content displayed on television, thus, increasingly loses its resemblance to reality, approximating a pseudo-reality, which, I would argue, displaces the viewer even more.

Doane draws from N. Katherine Hayles' work to point out that, since television makes information "quantifiable by removing it from the context which endowed it with meaning", television is a massive force of decontextualisation (Doane, 1990:225). Television's reorganisation of information, crises and catastrophes makes it possible to "fragment, manipulate, and reconstitute informational texts at will. For a postmodern culture, the manipulation of text and its consequently arbitrary relation to our context *is our* context"

(Hayles in Doane, 1990:225).<sup>16</sup> The viewer thus, desiring to regain contact with the outside world, is presented with a manipulated reality, a pseudo-reality that the viewer believes constitutes the external reality outside of his or her subjectivity. Since the content of television range from commercials to news coverage of the latest disaster to blockbuster movies, television is “the preeminent machine of decontextualisation” (Doane, 1990:225). Doane’s argument could equally be applied to the situation today, perhaps even more, where smartphones provide its users with the ability to scroll, without effort, from horrific images of terrorist attacks and suffering refugees, to cute pictures of cats and Kim Kardashian’s latest nude selfie. Therefore, not only is television a mass tool of decontextualisation, but *all* digital technology in which the viewer is presented with an image stemming from photography. Being presented with a pseudo-reality that is deprived of any context, the viewer’s modern desire to not need any power or responsibility is all the more exacerbated. The decontextualisation that characterise these images draws our attention further away from bearing the other’s burden, since a simple click of a button or a further scroll downward will erase, not only the brutality that has just been witnessed, but also one’s responsibility. The Other’s face is left somewhere else on your newsfeed, unfollowed or simply scrolled past. The instantaneousness of these images is thus just one more aspect that relieves the viewer of bearing any burden for the Other.

Since spectators are used to the programming style of television, entertainment cinema and, I would add, the immediate content available on our smartphones, Haneke believes that those who produce images have a responsibility to find new ways of making images and news fresh and perceptible again, as well as to “restore to them the power that derives from their potential for critical engagement” (Haneke, 2000:172). His films, thus,

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<sup>16</sup> For Debord, the spectacle is a means of unifying society, as it is the “sector where all attention, all consciousness converge. Being isolated – and precisely for that reason – this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalised separation” (1994:3).

serve as a response to the dominant forms of available media, especially television and entertainment cinema:

I attempt to provide an alternative to the totalising productions that are typical of the entertainment cinema of American provenance. My approach provides an alternative to the hermetically sealed-off illusion, which in effect pretends at an intact reality and thereby deprives the spectator of the possibility of critical participation. In the mainstream cinema spectators are right off herded into mere consumerism (Haneke, 2000:172).

The lives of the characters in the *Glaciation Trilogy* are certainly deformed by the various media that saturate their day-to-day lives. How then, does Haneke approach his filmmaking and thus respond to the traditional and entertaining cinema of Hollywood?

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**REFLECTING ON FILM'S AUTOMATISMS:**  
**GENRE, EDITING AND SOUND IN**  
***FUNNY GAMES, CODE UNKNOWN, THE PIANO TEACHER***  
***AND TIME OF THE WOLF***

**3.1 Introduction: Cavell's Automatisms and Haneke's Filmmaking Model**

Cavell borrows the idea of automatism from André Bazin's seminal essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", which, as I have outlined in the previous chapters, refers to the fact that photographs are automatic, manufactured images of the world (Cavell, 1979:20). Due to the automaticity of film's mechanical apprehension of nature, the human subject is unburdened from having to apprehend nature by him- or herself, since a mechanical apparatus is doing the apprehension for and instead of the human subject (Trahair, 2013:1). The concept of automatism, as Lisa Trahair (2013:1) points out, is developed by Cavell at different stages in *The World Viewed*, the first two of which I have already discussed in the previous chapter. To summarise, automatism, firstly, reproduces an unseen world to which the spectator was not present (1979:40), thereby displacing the spectator and making displacement appear as the spectator's natural condition (1979:41). When watching a film, we are invisible to the world that is screened before us, an invisibility which is mechanically assured (Rothman and Keane, 2000:93). This invisibility ensures that spectators remain powerless, watching the world without having to bear its burdens (Cavell, 1979:40). I argue that these two important ideas, that, firstly, the viewing experience of film makes displacement appear as our natural condition and, secondly, that viewing takes responsibility for the world out of our hands, are fundamental underpinnings to understand Haneke's approach to filmmaking.

Cavell's shifts the emphasis during his second discussion on automatism from the unburdened subject's view of the world to the reality of the world that is projected (Trahair, 2013:3). What is film's medium, what forms its basis? The basis that presents us with views of the world is a material medium comprising of "*a succession of automatic world projections*" (Cavell, 1979:72). Cavell explains that 'succession' refers to the motion of the images, the frames that follow one another and the juxtapositions provided by editing, while 'automatic' underscores the mechanical fact of photography, which includes the absence of the "human hand in forming these objects and the absence of its creatures in their screening" (1979:73). The term 'world' that he refers to includes the "ontological facts of photography and its subjects", while 'projection' intends the "phenomenological facts of viewing...[as well as] the continuity of the camera's motion as it ingests the world" (Cavell, 1979:73). Trahair highlights how, from his definition, Cavell's understanding of cinema's automatism, at this point, refers to two different mediums that cinema has at its disposal: Firstly, the photographic apparatus or the camera sensor that captures views of the world<sup>17</sup> and, secondly, the world that *offers itself* to be viewed and recorded. These two mediums are automatisms, because the world gives itself automatically and the camera apprehends it mechanically. In other words, both "the automaticity of the apparatus and the becoming of the world comprise the necessary and essential conditions of cinema" (Trahair, 2013:3). Automatism is a fundamental aspect of cinema that underpins our viewing experience, since no other art form brings us closer to nature. Closeness to nature is, according to Cavell, the purpose of art in modernity, proving that humanity is co-present to nature (Trahair, 2013:3).

In order to continue from the two fundamental ideas that underpins our viewing experience, as well as Cavell's second discussion of automatism, that both the mechanic

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<sup>17</sup> It is not the scope of this essay to outline how digital has changed Cavell's understanding of automatism. While I will touch upon it in the section on *Code Unknown*, D.N. Rodowick reads Cavell's film theory in light of the digitisation of cinema in *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007). For the purposes of my research, I am not going to distinguish between celluloid emulsion that captures light and digital recording (even though Haneke has switched from film stock to digital from *Caché* onwards).

apparatus and the world itself are automatisms of cinema, I now turn my attention to Cavell's third meditation on automatism. His third discussion on automatism will form the foundation of my analysis, in which I map the ways that Haneke's approach to filmmaking serves as a response to the ubiquity of the media outlined in the previous chapter. Cavell's third meditation on automatism takes place in Chapter Fourteen's Automatism in *The World Viewed*. Since the basis of film is a succession of automatic world projections, the material basis of film is given significance by the "artistic discoveries of form and genre and type and technique", features which Cavell also describe as automatisms (1979:105). All art forms have a variety of automatism at their disposal. Poetry, for example, has letters of the alphabet, words, language and sounds of its pronunciation (Trahair, 2013:4). Automatism, thus, is not only restricted to the world giving itself to be viewed and the apparatus recording that what is given, but also includes all filmmaking techniques and practices, such as genres, editing, music and sound (Trahair, 2013:4).

Cavell's understanding of automatism being a general condition of all art allows him to distinguish easily between traditional and modernist art. For Cavell, the distinction between traditional art and modernist art is the manner in which the artwork is related to its automatisms (Trahair, 2013:4). Traditional art simply *uses* its automatisms, by employing them as a means to an end. In other words, the traditional artist knows "best how to activate its automatisms, and how best to entice the muse to do most of the work" (Cavell, 1979:107). Modernist art, however, does not simply use its automatisms, but rather understands automatism as both its "means of freedom and constraint" and thus uses its art to *reflect* on the automatisms it employs (Trahair, 2013:4). While traditional artists take film's automatisms for granted, Cavell argues that the modernist filmmaker does not exist without questioning those specific traditions (1979:15). It is the modernist artist's "awareness and responsibility for the physical basis of its art [that] compels it at once to assert and deny the

control of its art by that basis” (Cavell, 1979:105). A responsible filmmaker, therefore, cannot be without ascribing to the requirements of modernism, reflecting on the automatism he or she employs during the filmmaking process. The conventions of traditional filmmaking do not control and prescribe Haneke’s way of making films. Instead, he employs the automatisms of cinema in order to reflect upon them. This is why Michael Haneke is a modernist filmmaker. Wheatley points out that Haneke’s description as modernist filmmaker is substantiated by both the formal qualities of his films as well as the relevance to and criticisms of modern day Europe (2009:23). The following sections will discuss how Haneke thinks about film’s automatisms, by discussing how he reflects upon classical Hollywood cinema and genre in *Funny Games*, editing and the long take in *Code Unknown*, music in *The Piano Teacher* and sound in *The Time of the Wolf*. Each section will use, as starting point, a section from Haneke’s essay “71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance: Notes to the Film”, which deals with image, editing and sound respectively. These ideas will guide my reading and understanding of Haneke’s approach to, use of and reflection on the automatisms of genre, editing, music and sound.

## **3.2 Subverting the Genre From Within: *Funny Games* and the Thwarting of Classical Hollywood Cinema**

### **3.2.1 Introduction: Classical Hollywood Cinema as Automatism**

Originating from theatrical melodrama, classical<sup>18</sup> Hollywood cinema refers to a tradition that dominated Hollywood film production during the 1930s to 1960s, a style that

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<sup>18</sup> Even though I use Bordwell and Hayward’s term throughout my dissertation to refer to the Hollywood films from the 1910-1960s, I agree with Mark Cousins’ apprehension of applying the word ‘classic’ to American cinema, as if it refers to Hollywood’s heyday or lucrative golden age. For Cousins, classicism in art describes “a period when form and content are in harmony, when there is balance between the style of a work and the emotions or ideas it is trying to express”. American films, instead, are “mostly given to excess rather than balance – their characters are emotional, their stories express yearning”, thus he replaces ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ with “closed romantic realism” to describe the style (Cousins, 2011:15-16).

has infiltrated and shaped mainstream cinema today (Hayward, 2013:80). David Bordwell calls Hollywood Cinema an “excessively obvious cinema”, a mode of filmmaking that aims to be comprehensible, unambiguous and explain the narrative, while striving to “conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and ‘invisible’ storytelling” (Bordwell et al., 1985:1). The style of this cinema, in other words, is subordinate to the narrative, as the type of shots, lighting, editing, *mise-en-scène* and sound never draw attention to themselves, but are rather employed to manufacture a naturalistic form of realism (Hayward, 2013:82). The narrative of a classical Hollywood film is constructed along the lines of the three-act arc, a triadic composition of order/disorder/order-restored (Hayward, 2013:80). In drawing from Cavell’s understanding of automatism, Trahair points out that when traditional film gives us views of the world, it constructs its narrative in accordance to a casual ordering of events. Even though flashbacks may be used, it is usually constructed along the lines of cause and effect. By following such a construction, the stories depicted in traditional film appear natural (Trahair, 2013:4). Her critique is manifested in Robert McKee’s *Story*, one of Hollywood’s screenwriting bibles, in which he advises that audiences want to be “taken to the limit, to where all questions are answered, all emotions satisfied – the end of the line” (1997:140). Since these traditional or classical Hollywood films aim to elucidate characters’ actions, explain events concisely and resolve all conflicts perfectly, spectators are positioned in a position of sagacity. Wheatley argues, however, that the manner in which Hollywood cinema position spectators are morally problematic and that, therefore, the filmmaker “has an ethical imperative to produce a work that breaks with cinematic illusionism and thereby [grant] the spectator the opportunity to engage critically with the cinematic image” (2009:39).<sup>19</sup> I would

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<sup>19</sup> In writing on Haneke, Grundmann refers to Bertolt Brecht’s alienation effects in theatre that kept audiences from blindly identifying with the characters and, instead, made them engage with the play on a conscious level (see Brecht’s essay ‘Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting’ (1936)). Grundmann mentions that Jörg Metelmann doctoral thesis (2003) argues that Haneke has not only applied Brecht’s theories, but has also succeeded in moving beyond him. Even though Haneke has dismissed Brecht’s approach for being too ‘message orientated’, Grundmann agrees with Metelmann’s analysis and points out that Brecht’s influence might have been greater on Haneke than he realises (Grundmann, 2007:8,14).

argue, then, that classical Hollywood cinema is an automatism that allows traditional filmmakers to use its construction and techniques, as McKee calls for, as a means to make their stories appear natural, proclaiming ‘that’s just the way it is’. In *Funny Games*, however, Haneke does not use the classical Hollywood cinema as a means to an end, but rather reflects upon it by subverting it from within.

### **3.2.2 *Funny Games: A Suspense Thriller?***

*Funny Games* (as well as *Funny Games U.S.* (2007)) tells the story of an upper-middle class, nuclear family, Georg, Anna and Georgie (George and Ann in the U.S. version), terrorised by two young men, going by the names of Paul and Peter, who intrudes the family’s home while on holiday. The film starts with the family driving to their house by a lake. They arrive at their luxurious home and settle in, during which Peter appears at their front door and asks if he can borrow some eggs. Anna welcomes him and kindly hands him a few, which Peter drops and breaks to her dismay. When Anna, trying to hide her increasing irritation, gets him a few more eggs, Peter elbows the telephone into the water of the kitchen sink. Anna asks Peter to leave and tries to calm down. Their dog, Rolfi (named Lucky in the U.S. version) barks non-stop. When Anna goes to calm him, Paul has joined Peter in the house. Again, Anna asks them to leave, upon which Georg enters and reprimands his wife for being so hostile and unwelcoming. She asks Georg to get them off the premises. Georg realises, albeit too late, that something is wrong and Paul hits him with a golf club, breaking his leg. They find out that Paul and Peter already killed their dog, which Anna had to find during a game of hot and cold. Paul and Peter then take the family hostage and start to play sadistic games on them, betting that they will not be alive within twelve hours. At one point, Georgie escapes to a neighbouring house, during which a Hitchcockian suspense sequence ensues, ending with Georgie firing a shotgun at Paul that fails to go off. Paul takes Georgie

back to the house and gives Peter permission to play a counting-out game on the victims that would determine who to shoot first. As Paul goes to the kitchen to make a sandwich, Peter shoots Georgie. The two intruders flee from the premise, while Anna and Georg are left with the consequences. After Georg and Anna try and fathom the death of their child, Anna leaves the immobile Georg at home and tries to find help. She attempts to get the attention of passing cars during the middle of the night, only to run into Paul and Peter again who recapture her. They return to the house and continue their game, after which they shoot Georg and take Anna on a lake in a sailboat. They tie her up, throw her overboard to drown and sail back to the coast. The film ends as Paul and Peter enter another house, suggesting that they are going to repeat their game on a new and unsuspecting family.

It is clear from the plot outline that Haneke draws heavily from the generic conventions of the suspense thriller (Wheatley, 2009:79). Charles Derry defines the suspense thriller loosely as a film that “presents a violent and generally murderous antagonism in which the protagonist becomes either an innocent victim or a nonprofessional criminal within a narrative structure that is significantly unmediated by a traditional figure of detection in a central position” (1988:62). While the family is clearly the innocent protagonists and Paul and Peter the tormenting, murderous antagonists, both Georgie and Anna are put in positions that require them to shoot the imposters. There is no help from the outside world, no police to free the victims from their horrific situation. Derry continues by listing binary opposites that characterise the suspense thriller genre, such as life/death, good/evil, order/chaos and redemption/damnation in a narrative with a “constant emphasis on time” (1988:63). The temporal demarcation that Paul and Peter place on the family’s lives heightens the suspense and creates a dreaded expectation in the audience, which are “multiply reversed and extended before they are fulfilled” (Derry, 1988:63). Georgie’s escape reverses the audience’s dreaded expectation by permitting a moment of hope, but his capture extends the audience’s dread.

When Paul and Peter leaves and Anna tries to find help, the tormentors' return extends the suspense that was momentarily lifted, adhering to the genre's promise. Both of these sequences contribute to the increasing pace of the film, giving the audience the sense that "the narrative is gradually and inexorably tightening" (Derry, 1988:63).

Derry claims that the suspense thriller is almost exclusively defined in terms of the films of Alfred Hitchcock, arguing that they can only be deemed suspense thrillers if they somehow relate to "specific works of Hitchcock or general qualities present in his films" (1988:8). Wheatley points out how the sub-genre of the family being victimised by an outside force is a recurring trope in Hitchcock's films, such as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *The Birds*, (1963) and *The Man Who Knew too Much* (1934/1956) (2009:109). The recurring motives of Hitchcock's suspense thrillers reveal the influence that genre has on the construction of and the manner in which the narrative develops. Barry Keith Grant, one of the foremost scholars on genre criticism, defines genre movies as "commercial feature films that, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations" (2007:1). *Funny Games*, especially its first thirty minutes, tells the familiar story of a family victimised by intruders, similar to films such as *Cape Fear* (1962/1991), *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992). Wheatley notes that, in all of these films, the terrorised family consists of three people and a pet, an animal that is usually killed by the antagonist. Even though Haneke does not overtly reference these films, Wheatley argues that the similarities indicate how formulaic the sub-genres of the suspense thriller are, as well as how comprehensively *Funny Games* reproduces the generic conventions of the suspense thriller (2009:81,109). Thomas Schatz explains that, since genre draws from familiar formulas, it provides a collection of *expressions* for filmmakers and an array of *experiences* for audiences. Since filmmakers and viewers have become sensitive to the genre's range of expression, the previous contact that they had with the genre have "coalesced into a system of

value-laden narrative conventions”, a system in which characters perform actions and celebrate values that the audience are all too familiar with (Schatz, 2009:568). Genre, thus, similar to the classical Hollywood structure, is an automatism that provides filmmakers with the means to construct a film as a thrilling end in itself.

The first thirty minutes of *Funny Games* neatly settles the audience into the suspense thriller genre, creating and affirming the expectations that the hordes of previous suspense thrillers have taught them. The audience’s thorough schooling in both television and prior suspense films results in what Theodor Adorno calls a pre-established attitudinal pattern, which determines the manner in which the content will be interpreted (1957:482). In believing that the film is a generic suspense thriller, the audience of *Funny Games* are not reading the horrific victimisation of the family through their own life experience, but rather through their previous experience of suspense thrillers. The first thirty minutes help the audience to recognise the suspense thriller’s familiar cultural arena and troupes: the family of three and a pet being victimised by outsiders. Since these genres usually end with the defeat of the imposing threat (as is the case in *Cape Fear*, *Fatal Attraction* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, in which the antagonists are killed), audiences are thus “fairly certain how the game will be played and how it will end” (Schatz, 2009:572). The manner in which the conflicts that have disturbed the protagonists are resolved, whether temporarily or permanently, are, for Schatz, the most significant aspect of the genre film. The narratives of genre films are escapist as it repeatedly asserts that conflicts and struggles that threaten a community can be solved favourably (2009:572). Schatz argues that a popular film audience have shared needs and expectations that draw them to the cinema. Since genre films resolve basic cultural conflicts, audiences enjoy genre films as it “celebrates our collective sensibilities, providing an array of ideological strategies for negotiating social conflicts” (Schatz, 2009:572). Even though the different films within a genre will present variations on

a cultural theme or conflict, as well as different ways of reaching a resolution, the closure is “generally as familiar as the community and its characters” (Schatz, 2009:572). Schatz’s comments are reiterated by Robin Wood, who likewise points out that a striking and persistent phenomena of classical Hollywood cinema is the happy ending, often serving as a mere “‘emergency exit’ [...] for the spectator, a barely plausible pretence that the problem of the film has raised are now resolved” (Wood, 2009:594).

The generic systems that enable spectators to recognise and understand the narrative, as well as render the film intelligible and explicable, also involves a knowledge of “various regimes of verisimilitude” (Neale, 2012:179). Neale explains that verisimilitude entails that which is probable, likely and plausible, which, in the case of genre, would mean that an audience’s previous knowledge of regimes of verisimilitude would guide them in understanding the rules, norms and laws that govern the world in which the characters find themselves (2012:179). In *Funny Games*, the plausibility that the three family members will die is unlikely, since such a result is contrary to the previous suspense thrillers that they have seen. The norms and rules that govern the world of the characters in *Funny Games* entail that, no matter what, that Paul and Peter will be defeated and that the family’s threatened world will be restored.

### **3.2.3 Drawing from Counter-Cinema**

An important model that Haneke draws from in order to subvert the codes and conventions of the suspense thriller is the radical principles of counter-cinema. In direct contrast to classical Hollywood, counter-cinema is a type of cinema that “questions and subverts existing cinematic codes and conventions” (Hayward, 2013:93). It is a cinema that draws attention to itself, exposes continuity and deconstructs contiguity, as spectators are “intentionally distanced by these practices so they ‘can see what is really there’ and reflect

upon it rather than be seduced into false illusionism” (Hayward, 2013:94). Film theorists such as Peter Wollen<sup>20</sup> and filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Agnès Varda invented the term in order to categorise a filmmaking system that responded to the domination of classical Hollywood cinema (Hayward, 2013:94). In the essay “Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d’est*”, Wollen tabulates the “seven deadly sins of cinema” and the “seven cardinal virtues”, otherwise categorised as the typical Hollywood film and Counter-Cinema (Wollen, 1972:418):

	<b>Deadly Sin (Hollywood)</b>		<b>Cardinal Virtue (Counter-Cinema)</b>
1	Narrative Transitivity	Vs.	Narrative Intransitivity
2	Identification	Vs.	Estrangement
3	Transparency	Vs.	Foregrounding [of the signifier]
4	Single diegesis	Vs.	Multiple diegesis
5	Closure	Vs.	Aperture
6	Pleasure	Vs.	Un-pleasure
7	Fiction	Vs.	Reality

Counter-cinema, thus, actively opposes mainstream cinema and offers an alternative to the discourses of mainstream cinema. Counter-cinematic films, however, are extremely formalist and difficult to watch, which results in two problems. Firstly, the rationality with which counter-cinema operates places audiences in a cold and fixed position vis-à-vis the spectacle, keeping them from considering their own position. Secondly, it attempts to liberate audiences from Hollywood’s illusionism without drawing from the interpellative structures and techniques it stems from, thus ignoring audiences role as consumers of mainstream film (Wheatley, 2009:86).

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Wollen is a film theorist, filmmaker and writer of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1972), who merged structuralist and semiotic film theory in order to reflect upon his various concerns with film, such as feminism, sexuality, the social construction of identity, experimental aesthetics and politics (Braudy and Cohen, 2009:418). He also co-wrote and co-directed six films with Laura Mulvey, among others *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), in which they applied counter cinema techniques (Wheatley, 2009:52).

*Funny Games* neither follows the generic conventions of a suspense thriller through to the end, nor does it solely implement the practices of counter-cinema to its full effect. Wheatley points out that the majority of Haneke's films from *Funny Games* onwards, draw from the generic conventions only in order to subvert them, usually through the principles of counter-cinema. The films of Haneke that are based on genre, such as *Funny Games* which I will use as example, not only ironises the generic conventions from which it stems, but also places the spectator "in a more immediately responsive position than the counter-cinematic principles of pure negation of mainstream convention allow" (Wheatley, 2009:80). The tools of classical Hollywood cinema and genre conventions are therefore mobilised only in order to deconstruct it (Wheatley, 2009:86).

An example of a counter-cinematic technique, the virtue of estrangement, happens at the twenty-eight minute mark, in which a character addresses the audience directly (Wollen, 1972:420). When Paul plays a hot and cold game with Anna so that she can find the dog, he looks into the camera and winks.



Figure 8: Paul winks at the audience

This breaking of the fourth wall is a Brechtian technique in which an actor steps out of character in order to address the audience directly (Brady, 2006:314). The film continues

up until the forty-two minute mark, when Paul makes a bet with the family that they will not be alive in twelve hours' time. He turns his attention to the camera and addresses the audience, in a much more radical sense than his previous address, asking them "What do you think? Do you think they have a chance of winning? Who will you bet on?" (*Funny Games*). The alienation technique does not, however, alienate the audience in the same manner that a counter-cinematic film would, since the first thirty minutes (apart from the first address) have already adhered to the rules of a classic, Hollywood suspense thriller. The audience are made uncomfortable with Paul's address, since they expect that the narrative will conform to the generic conventions of the suspense thriller. Yet, just as spectators become aware of themselves in relation to the cinematic image through the address, Haneke reverts back to classical Hollywood filmmaking, evident in the sequence when Georgie escapes to a neighbouring house, keeping the audience emotionally invested in the fate of the characters.

### **3.2.4 Georgie's Death and the Rewinding of the Diegetic World**

There are two main sequences on which I will focus on that subvert the audience's prescribed, generic expectations. The first of which is the murder of Georgie. At a certain point, Georgie succeeds in escaping from the tormentors. He runs to a neighbouring house (a family which Paul and Peter have already killed). Paul chases after Georgie into the house, in which a Hitchcockian sequence ensues. Tension builds as Georgie treads on the creaking floorboards of the house, while Paul attempts to find him, his shadow lurking beneath the closed doors. As Georgie finds a shotgun and Paul puts heavy metal music on, the editing quickens and the close-ups tighten on the characters. During the chase, a cutback to Anna and Georg continues their situation with Peter, a crossover editing technique that is typical of the suspense thriller (Wheatley, 2009:90). Georgie's escape, however, ends on an anti-climactic note. When Paul eventually finds him, Georgie points the shotgun at him and pulls the

trigger. The gun, however, does not go off and Georgie is taken back to Anna and Georg. This anti-climactic moment still, however, adheres to the suspense thriller genre. Even though the expected cathartic moment proved to be false, the sequence only serves to frustrate the audience's hope and reignite their sense of tension (Wheatley, 2009:91). Paul then orders Peter to play a counting out game on the family in order to determine who to shoot first. Paul leaves the scene to make a sandwich, during which the audience hears a gunshot go off. Haneke then cuts to a close-up of a bloodied television, guffaws and moaning heard off-screen, with Paul and Peter announcing their exit.

What follows is a long take of ten and a half minutes, revealing the loser of the counting out game, as Georgie's body is sprawled across the floor. The death of Georgie contravenes an unwritten Hollywood narrative rule that children are never killed in a suspense thriller, as it is too "emotionally unsettling for an audience to absorb within the limits of the pleasure drive" (Wheatley, 2009:92). Moreover, Hollywood films usually tend to use violence or death as "a cathartic punch line that snaps the intricately crafted spell of suspense...[in which] the dead are forgotten before the bodies even hit the ground" (Pevere, 1997). Haneke, however, does not forget or shy away from Georgie's sprawled-out body. He confronts the audience with a long take that forces them to scrutinise, deconstruct and contemplate the "structure of the representational strategies that informed the creation of this image" (Wheatley, 2009:93). The duration of the take allows the audience to witness the immediate consequences of the death of Georg and Anna's child. Likewise, the long take serves as a contrast to the rapid editing that preceded Georgie's death, ignoring the rules of the suspense thriller and making the audience uncomfortable. The audience's selfish desire to enjoy a narrative situated within the suspense thriller genre is thwarted. By making the audience uncomfortable, Haneke is making them aware of the reality of violence: bodies do not magically disappear. Real death is traumatising and violence is not supposed to be

enjoyed at the cost of those families who have, in real-life, been tortured and murdered. The audience thus experiences discomfort by having to engage with “a set of emotions unfamiliar to the genre” (Wheatley, 2009:92).

Wheatley argues that the aftermath of Georgie’s death to be a ‘benign’ form of reflexivity, echoing the approaches of Robert Bresson and Chantal Akerman, a self-conscious style that “allows the spectator time to reflect on the image and thus distances them from the action on-screen” (2009:94). The second modernist sequence, however, is much more antagonistic. Wheatley calls the rewind sequence in *Funny Games* a form of aggressive reflexivity, recalling the modernist works of Jean-Luc Godard, which is not so much concerned with distancing the spectator, but rather emphasises the spectator’s proximity to the cinematic action (2009:95). After Paul and Peter recapture Anna and return her to the house, they play their final game with her. He tells her that “[w]e’re not up to feature length film yet”, looks at the audience again and says: “Is that enough? But you want a real ending, with plausible plot development, don’t you?” (*Funny Games*). He turns back to Anna and orders her to recite a prayer, first normally and then back to front. Anna, however, sees the shotgun lying on the table. She grabs it, points the gun at Peter and fires, hurling him to the wall, a bloody spectacle. Paul snatches the shotgun from Anna and shouts frantically: “Where’s the remote? Where’s the fucking remote control?” He searches hysterically, finds the remote and presses the rewind button. The whole frame freezes for about three seconds and the entire sequence rewinds up to Anna’s prayer recital, summoning Peter back to life. The frame freezes for three seconds again and replays Paul’s instructions to Anna. When she attempts to grab the shotgun again, Paul snatches it before her, shaking his head, saying: “You shouldn’t have done that, Anna. One doesn’t break the rules. Sorry. You’ve failed.” (*Funny Games*). He tells her to say goodbye to Georg and shoots him off-screen.



Figure 9: Peter is (momentarily) killed by Anna

Peter's (momentary) death, similar to Georgie's escape earlier, serves as another cathartic release for the audience. The blast from Anna's gun results in a violent and bloody spectacle, matching the horror and gore of commercial Hollywood action flicks (Wheatley, 2009:97). The sequence also contains the only on-screen violence and verbal obscenity in the film. At the film's premiere at Cannes the audience's collective sigh of relief was both audible and tangible (Eisenman, 2010:128). Finally, it seems, Haneke is playing according to the rules of the classic Hollywood cinema and the conventions of the suspense thriller. The audience believes that their expectations have finally been met and anticipation fulfilled, yet, by pressing the rewind button, Paul destroys the diegetic world that the audience believed in (Rhodes, 2010:96). Suspense thrillers are only entertaining if they meet the expectations of the audience. The good and innocent protagonists have to win the evil intruders, since genre films promise that the threats are usually killed. The antagonists in *Cape Fear*, *Fatal Attraction* and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* all meet a sticky end, similar to Peter's sudden and grotesque death. Anna's unexpected opportunity to exact revenge on the intruders, who have been winning their games for most of the film's running time, serves as a

cinematic signpost that signals to the audience that the built-up tension can finally be released. What is more final than death? The intruders simply cannot recover from this. Yet, Haneke's radical decision to rewind the scene not only shatters the cathartic release, but also incriminates the audience's perverse thirst for violence. The rewind sequence, although an aggressive and radical technique that (probably) alienates the audience too much, is Haneke's way of refusing the audience pleasure in witnessing Peter's death. The audience realises that they do not have privileged control over the narrative in *Funny Games*, a false belief of sagacity that was taught by previous suspense thrillers (Wheatley, 2009:98).

### 3.2.5 Conclusion

The questions that Paul addresses to the audience expose our perverse desire: what exactly do we want from the film? Do we want to be assured that goodness will, simplistically, always prevail over evil, that the conflict in *Funny Games* will be solved and thus reaffirm our faith in the simplistic nature of reality? While genre films provide audience with narrative sagacity that exceeds that of the diegetic characters, and counter-cinema distanced its audience into a cold and fixed position, *Funny Games* allures the audience with its generic structure yet ruptures the created expectations through distancing techniques. Even though the film is an extreme example of how Haneke draws from both classical Hollywood cinema and counter-cinema in order to get an audience both emotionally invested *and* reflect on the film, he does refine his approach to greater success in *Caché*, which also draws heavily from the suspense thriller genre. Nevertheless, *Funny Games* is an example in which the exchange between the narrative forms of classical Hollywood cinema and counter-cinema are easiest to outline and identify. The rest of his oeuvre, in a much more nuanced way, enter into "dialogue with and draw upon existing narrative forms and genre conventions in order to generate a new spectatorial experience which focuses on the spectator's ethical position in

relation to the film” (Wheatley, 2009:87-88). The rupturing of the audience’s expectations, learned from previous experiences with similar films, are an integral part of Haneke’s filmmaking model that aims to implicate and enable audiences to take part in the meaning-making process. In this way, the automatism of genre is reflected upon to implicate the audience.

### **3.3 The Image and the Edit: Continuity Editing and the Long Take in *Code Unknown***

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

In the notes he wrote for *71 Fragments*, Haneke outlines his approach to the image and editing. As I have discussed in the second chapter, the influence of television on filmic practices have resulted in a rapid flow of attractive images that provide “linear information which can be quickly consumed and checked off” (Haneke, 2000:173). Advertisements, for example, make it difficult for viewers to recognise that what is being shown, since adverts have established the timing standard in which information can be communicated to its recipients (Haneke, 2000:173). Audiences, however, need time to understand what they are seeing, a requirement that the accelerated images of television disallow (Haneke in Sharrett, 2010:568). For Haneke, however, the long take is an aesthetic means that enables audiences to become potential partners in the film, refusing easy and speedy consumption. The use of the long take that preceded Georgie’s death, for example, is a manifestation of real-time that disturbs viewers accustomed to the speed of mainstream films and television, especially if the scene’s content in a long take confronts them with a difficult subject matter that audiences have learned to suppress. By confronting the audience with, for instance, the horrific reality of violence in a take that resembles real-time, the contents thereof will become real and felt, instead of “being merely registered as information to be checked off” (Haneke, 2000:174).

*Code Unknown* tells the story of an actress named Anne who attempts to avoid the violence in Paris. Her boyfriend is a war photographer named Georges while his brother Jean comes in a dispute with Amadou for dumping trash onto a beggar's lap. The beggar, named Maria, gets deported after the police intervene in the dispute. The film follows these characters as they struggle to avoid and navigate themselves through the violence, frustration, xenophobia and Babylonian confusion of languages in modern-day Paris. Haneke wishes, however, to avoid reducing and isolate the film to a single theme, since it would lead one to think along the lines of clichés and banalities (Haneke, 2005(a)). The film, similar to *71 Fragments*, have black spacers that divide sequences, consisting of long takes that are shot from a single perspective. Haneke asked a series of questions to guide his construction of the film, asking whether the “truth [is] the sum of what we see and hear”, if reality can truly be represented and what makes a represented object “real, credible, or more precisely, worthy of being believed?” (Haneke, 2005(a)). Haneke's use of the long take addresses these questions, which I approach by focusing on how Haneke uses long takes and standard Hollywood editing in the segments that deal with Anne, pointing out how Haneke uses the form of the image and editing to reflect on the automatism thereof. Instead of providing a generic reading of the film's famed opening tracking shot, I am rather going to focus on two sequences that follow one another, separated by a scene in a car. Similar to drawing from both classical Hollywood cinema and counter-cinema, Haneke juxtaposes two suspense sequences in which the one employs standard editing techniques, while the other takes place through a static long take. Haneke's contrast of both standard cuts and long takes is a clearer example of how he is reflecting upon the automatisms of editing.

### 3.3.2 The Swimming Pool Sequence: Classical Hollywood Editing

During a visit to Georges' father on the farm, Anne says that she just finished a thriller called *The Collector*. Later in the film, after a sequence that depicts Maria crying over losing her chance to get a work permit, Anne emerges from a swimming pool with a man. The editing immediately kicks in, comfortably shifting between shot/reverse shots, a technique "most commonly used for dialogue" (Hayward, 2013:331), as Anne and her lover splash, banter and play with each other in medium-close up. When Anne pushes him underwater and looks off-screen, her expression changes. "Pierrot!" she screams, a reverse shot revealing a long shot of a small boy climbing on top of a wall. The next shot shows the man coming up for air and looking over to where Anne's attention is, another reverse shot revealing the boy on the edge. The camera then shifts across the 180-degree line to a close-up of Pierrot, while the man orders him not to move and swims to the pool edge. A point of view shot reveals the ground below, situating Pierrot on top of a high apartment block. The camera zooms in to the ground far below and cuts to an extreme close-up of Pierrot's eyes, after which he suddenly slips. The next cut shows the man and Anne climbing out of the pool, running to him from opposite directions. The slide door that the man attempts to open does not budge. Anne runs around another way while the man continues to struggle with the door. He looks screen right as a cut reveals Pierrot holding onto the ledge while his leg dangles over the edge. Anne runs closer, the boy still holding on. Finally, a long shot that zooms into medium shot reveals the man pulling Pierrot to safety. After the two lovers chide Pierrot and embrace one another after the intense moment, another cut shows a different setting and time. Suddenly an off-screen voice commands, "Let's stop there". The image freezes and the man from the swimming pool and Anne stand up from below the screen as the camera pulls back into a sound studio, revealing that what we just witnessed was a projected film on a screen.

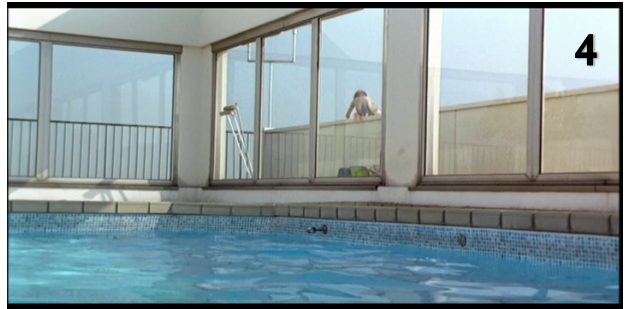


Figure 10: Classical Hollywood editing in *Code Unknown*

Similar to *Funny Games*, Haneke draws from generic conventions to construct a thrilling sequence in order to reveal the “tension between his own modernist methods and those of mainstream commercial cinema” (Wheatley, 2009:122). No narrative signal informs the audience after Maria’s segment that the swimming pool sequence is a film within *Code Unknown*. Wheatley points out that, if we were alert spectators, we would have recognised that the sequence differs drastically from the rest of the film’s style (2009:122). Yet, the standard Hollywood editing, with the shot/reverse shots, zooming and point of view shots, activates our myriad of previous experiences with these techniques. How many spectators did, immediately, notice the difference in style? If the change in style goes unnoticed, the scene’s different construction proves how inured and accustomed we have become to traditional forms of editing.

The sequence, comprising of twenty-four shots, are constructed along the rules of continuity editing, a style that “follows the logic of a chronological narrative” in which time and space are “logically and unproblematically represented” (Hayward, 2013:119). The beginning and ending are clearly demarcated: the lovebirds embracing in the pool, the two embracing after being traumatised by Pierrot’s brush with death. The film does not draw attention to itself through the ‘invisible’ editing, offering a “seamless, spatially and temporally coherent narrative” (Hayward, 2013:119). Husband and wife cajoles in the pool, their son climbs onto the wall, the ground beckons twenty stories below, they see him, he slips, they rush to him, he struggles to get back up and they save him. The production of a linear text is a style that Hayward most readily associates with classical Hollywood cinema (2013:120). The style produces a key effect she defines as seamlessness, whereby audiences are not made aware of the editing, but rather “presented with a narrative that is edited in such a way that it appears to have no breaks, no disconcerting unexplained transitions in time and space” (Hayward, 2013:120). The seamlessness of continuity editing masks, however, both

the labour that goes into manufacturing a film and, consequently, the ideological effect thereof. The unwritten rule that prohibits the killing of children in suspense thrillers, that *Funny Games* breaks, are upheld in the film within *Code Unknown*: Pierrot does not fall from the building. His safety is, however, momentarily jeopardised in order to create a thrilling sequence. The continuity editing thus, in this instance, presents the spectator with an idealistic reality: parents will always catch their children in time. Absurdly, Anne's character immediately draws a lesson from her son's near fatal fall, telling the man during their embrace that she's afraid for Pierrot's life and cannot live on the twentieth floor any longer. The whole sequence also places the spectator in an all-knowing position. One moment the audience is in intimate close-up with the characters, the next moment they see the beckoning ground far below Pierrot. Audiences thus have a sense of unitary vision, providing them with what they believe to be supremacy, since "it's all there, so I know everything that is going on" (Hayward, 2013:120).

### **3.3.3 The Subway Scene: Classical Modernist Style**

Haneke does not use classical Hollywood editing only to manipulate his audience. Rather, he mobilises the techniques in order to expose its manipulative function (Wheatley, 2009:87). While the whole swimming pool sequence takes place in two minutes, one minute for the intense scene and the other for the embracing and moral lesson afterwards, the next sequence takes place over five and a half minutes. A deep focus and static shot reveals various people entering a subway carriage. On the opposite end are two men, standing upright. The one whistles and says "Excuse me, aren't you a top model? Honestly, with your looks, you just have to be in that line" (*Code Unknown*). Upon closer inspection, the back of a woman's head is visible in the farthest seat. She does not respond to the young man's address. After more than a minute of constant taunts and mockery while his friends laughs,

the woman eventually stands up (finally visible as Anne), moves to the foreground of the carriage and sits in front of the camera. While the man continues his verbal abuse, the rest of the passengers nervously try to ignore the harassment. He comes and stands in front of her, asking “Now what will you do? Stand me up again? Hop off into the next car? It’s too easy...” (*Code Unknown*). Anne continues to ignore him, averting his gaze. After a while he sits next to her as the subway slowly comes to a halt. Just as the doors open, he turns, spits Anne in the face and dashes out of the car. An older man sitting on the opposite side reacts and trips the harasser. He returns and calls the old man a jerk. The old man takes off his glasses, gives them to Anne and threatens the young man. He retaliates into the corner, off-screen from the camera. The train pulls away again and they sit through another uncomfortable ride to the next stop in silence. When the subway comes to a halt again, the young harasser says off-screen “I’ll see you around. Don’t worry” and exits the train. Just before it closes, he hollers at them, making them jump. Anne bursts into tears as the train pulls away again. She musters a thank you to the old man next to her. The scene continues for twenty more seconds before the black spacer signals its end.



Figure 11: Long take of Anne in the subway in *Code Unknown*

The camera barely moves from its static position and retains its deep focus throughout the duration of its five and a half minutes. The deep focus allows the audience to read the scene without being manipulated, stitched into the narrative or guided by continuity editing (Hayward, 2013:121). The sequence stands in complete antithesis to the preceding swimming pool sequence, exchanging the traditional, Hollywood editing for a more classically modernist style (Wheatley, 2009:122). If one mapped, for example, the spatial relations more intricately in the swimming pool sequence, it would be clear that time is invariably stretched out and chopped away in its two-minute duration. In the subway sequence, however, time becomes manifest. While many contested definitions of the long take exist, David Bordwell and Kirstin Thompson define a long take as “one run of the camera that records a single shot” (2013:211) and Donato Totaro, in his thesis on the long take, accepts a long take’s duration as being twenty-five seconds or longer (2001:10). Even though long takes may involve tracking, craning, zooming and panning, the camera never moves in Haneke’s subway scene. Steven Spielberg argues that when a long take is used in a film, the director is giving the audience the role of editor as the “audience selects who (or what) they look at while a scene is being played” (Spielberg in Bordwell and Thompson, 2013:214). At first, the audience is straining to see at whom the young man is aiming his insults, an act that enhances their agency and participation in the scene. Audiences are not subjected to a series of edited close-ups or rapid cuts, but are rather allowed to choose what they look at. Bazin addresses the influence of the long take (or ‘depth of focus’ as he refers to) as it affects the “relationship of the minds of the spectators to the image, and in consequence it influences the interpretation of the spectacle” (1946:50). By subjecting the spectator to an unedited and (more or less) unmediated look at the world, the long take will “in the end [...] lay bare for you all its cruelty and ugliness [...] in which the image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it” (1946:45). The use of the long take thus introduces a moral

dimension to the film, since it has the ability to activate audience participation without the subjective influence of an editor. For Bazin, the long take encapsulates three important functions. Firstly, the long take narrows the distance between the spectator and the image, reflecting his or her experience of reality. Due to the manifestation of time, the long take's construct is more in tune with reality and thus more realistic. Secondly, the long take (as I have mentioned before) provides the spectator with a more active role and enables him or her to participate. Spectators are offered a degree of personal choice as their attention and will contribute to the reading of the sequence. Finally, while montage compromises the ambiguity of a scene, the long take introduces and maintains ambiguity as the "uncertainty in which we find ourselves as to the spiritual key or the interpretation we should put on the film is built into the very design of the image" (Bazin, 1946:50).

The single, long take of the subway scene minimises the image's ability to manipulate the audience. What is perhaps most interesting about this scene is its refusal to depict the conflict from a specific character's vantage point or perspective. In contrast to continuity editing, the audience is not offered any sense of unitary vision or spectatorial supremacy. Even though Anne is one of the main characters in the film, the audience is implicated into the scene before they identify her as the victim of the verbal assault. What the audience relate to instead, if anything, are the other passengers who, like them, are spectators to the harassment. After becoming as uncomfortable as the passengers, Anne reveals herself and moves to sit directly opposite the camera (and thus the audience), an effect, which Wheatley argues, implicates the audience even more due to her close proximity and on-profile position (2009:122). The long take thus achieves a much stronger emotional response from the audience than the manipulative editing of the swimming pool scene, since the audience both fear for Anne's part and, since they are paralleled on-screen by the diegetic passengers as spectators, feel guilty for being complicit in witnessing the harassment without acting on the

situation. The emotion involved in witnessing this sequence is thus much more disturbing and complex than the pleasurable suspense evoked by the swimming pool scene (Wheatley, 2009:122). Audiences are not entertained with thrilling suspense from a distance, but are rather implicated and made aware of their passive viewing situation.

The long take in the subway lacks any bright colours and symbolic framing. Some of the steel poles of the carriage obstruct our view, while parts of the old man's face is covered by a headrest. The other passengers in the car neither draw our attention nor are they positioned in such a way that they are easily visible, many of who are sitting with their backs to the camera. The subway sequence, in its banality, encapsulates the *mise-en-scène* that Haneke uses throughout his oeuvre, from *The Seventh Continent* up to *Amour*. They are not known for their beauty or magnificence. Instead, Haneke opts for muddied and opaque images, by scraping away the lacquer of attractiveness. Beautiful and interesting pictures, for him, does not belong in cinema, but rather in an art gallery, for it is only in its context that banal images acquire dignity and beauty (Haneke, 2000:173). Beautiful cinematic images are usually, for Haneke, devoid of mental-tension, while the aesthetic of advertising has become the goal and trademark of cinema. He continues:

Since all of us are inundated with artificial pictures of a 'beautified' reality, one of the most difficult challenges of filmmaking requires that we maintain an unencumbered eye for the reality-value of a picture (2000:173).

A 'beautified' reality in cinema has, in fact, become even more prevalent since Haneke wrote his critique. In the year that *Code Unknown* was released, *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000) was the first film that was wholly subjected to digital correction during post-production (Prince, 2004:28). Cinematographer Roger Deakins spent ten weeks in digital post-production working on the colour timing of the film. Colour timing, or what has since developed into digital grading, entails providing filmmakers with the ability of a painter, thus

controlling the “fine details of colour, shading, contrast, filtration and other attributes of the image – within images that can otherwise appear naturalistic” (Prince, 2004:28). Colour timing is a powerful editing tool that, for example, provided *O Brother* with a postcard, dustbowl and sepia look, draining the sky of its colour (Prince, 2004:28). On a much smaller scale, even Instagram provides ordinary smartphone users with a variety of editing tools and filters to embellish and enhance their digital photographs. Since mainstream cinema and our edited photographs bear little resemblance to their counterpart in reality, Haneke’s films certainly serve as an antithesis to the beautified images we have grown accustomed to.

### 3.3.4 Is Cinema Inherently Manipulative?

In an interview with Christopher Sharrett, Haneke explains how he constructed *Code Unknown* through mostly static sequences by limiting each shot from only one perspective, because he did not want to “patronise or manipulate the viewer, or at least to the smallest degree possible” (Haneke in Sharrett, 2010:587). He goes on to point out that cinema, no matter what, will *always* be a manipulative medium. Every creative decision made by the filmmaker that determines the position of the camera is manipulative to an extent. Wheatley uses the example of a security camera being placed by a specific someone, in a specific place, at a specific angle, aimed at a specific area to point out that all those factors will determine what the security camera will eventually record (2009:120). Like the final image produced by a security camera in *Benny’s Video*, the shot still shows Georg and Anna in long shot from a high angle. As Cavell points out, as I already mentioned, photography crops the world it records, thereby cutting the rest of the world out and thus making the implied presence of the unseen world “as essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents” (1979:24). What you look at is still predetermined by the photographer or filmmaker. The responsibility of the filmmaker, for Haneke, is thus to minimise the level of manipulation you

subject your audience to. Even though Haneke selects what his audience looks at (a subway carriage), his use of long takes eliminates, at least, the manipulation of time, as filmic time will thus approximate real time (we sit with Anne and the passengers for the whole duration of the journey). In terms of the spatial relations and time in the swimming pool sequence, it's unclear how the man gets to Pierrot before Anne's character, even though she seems to be running longer. In shots that are edited, time is manipulated by being either shortened or stretched, or perhaps, as in the swimming pool sequence, a combination of both. Haneke's preference of using continuous long takes is his way of "bowing before the spectator" (Haneke, 2000), showing respect and allowing them to take part in its meaning. By avoiding the false harmonisation provided by standard or continuity editing, Haneke's long takes achieve accuracy, which, he argues, prevail over beauty. Additionally, the long takes should "not flaunt their own complexity" (Haneke, 2000), since attention to the construction of the scene would shift attention away from its content.

It is thus clear that Haneke argues against Bazin's statement of the long take achieving a sense of realism (see Bazin, 1946:45). Bazin's claim that long takes capture reality as it happens is at odds with Haneke's ideas. Cinema, for Haneke, can never represent reality *in toto*. Instead, film must be seen and used as a medium that serves as a *model* of reality, since "reality is too complex to capture" (Haneke, 2014). Haneke's position reflects Cavell's own disagreement with Bazin, as I have pointed out earlier, that the medium of film is a photograph *of* reality and not reality itself (1979:16). Haneke's decision of juxtaposing two different editing systems, one driven by continuity and the other by a modernist style, is to draw attention to the artificiality of the former, while revealing the lesser degree of artificiality of the latter. No matter how 'realistic' a film, no matter how closely one attempts to follow real-life, cinema "is *always* manipulative, never 'objective', in a Bazinian sense" (Wheatley, 2009:120). The aim of contrasting these two different constructions is thus to

create a “space between film and filmic interpellation in which the viewer can make a cognitive analysis of what they are seeing” (Wheatley, 2009:120). He is reflecting on the automatism of editing techniques, revealing its construction and the audience’s implication therein. Haneke made clear that he hopes *Code Unknown* will reveal the kind of traps that audiences fall into when watching a film that utilises the tropes of continuity editing, arguing that the reflection thereof will help them to “should struggle against these traps” (Said in Wheatley, 2009:123).

### **3.3.5 Conclusion**

Haneke reflects on the automatism of film editing by contrasting two scenes, the first of which depends on continuity editing, while the other takes a more modernist stylistic approach. The additional effect of reducing montage to a minimum and using a single take is to “shift responsibility back to the viewer in that more contemplation is required” (Haneke in Sharrett, 2010:587). The subway carriage presents us, like the rest of the film, with a different experience than that of mainstream cinema. The audience is allowed more freedom in choosing what to look at and thereby enabled to play the role of editor. What begins in liberty, however, ends in obligation, since the presentation of the world through a long take requires us to become responsible towards that we are witnessing (Rhodes, 2010:90).

## **3.4 The Use of Music in *The Piano Teacher* and Sound in *Time of the Wolf***

### **3.4.1 Introduction: Music and Sound in the Cinema**

Walter Murch, the film editor and sound designer of well-known films such as *The Conversation* (1974) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), draws a parallel between a foetus’s development and an audience’s perception of sound in cinema. Four and a half months after

conception, the foetus's listening faculty is activated, meaning that, for the next four and a half months, sound is the foetus's only guide to the surrounding world. Since the enclosed and liquid world of the womb keeps the foetus from seeing and smelling, while hinting only to what taste and touch might entail, foetuses "luxuriate in a continuous bath of sounds: the song of our mother's voice, the swash of her breathing, the piping of her intestines, the timpani of her heart" (Murch, 2000). Birth, however, immediately ignites the other four senses. Sight, the strongest of the five, overthrows sound's reign and appoints himself King over the rest of the senses, resulting in sound pulling a "veil of oblivion across her reign and [withdrawing] into the shadows" (Murch, 2000). Why does hearing not dominate our life, since it was the first sense to be activated and developed? Murch finds it mystifying that, even though it was the first sense acquired by human beings, hearing seems to take a backseat, accompanying and supplementing what we see rather than the other way around. The same situation, Murch argues, characterises the relationship between sight and sound in the cinema. Even though the birth of cinema experienced an inversion of biological development, the visuals preceding the arrival of sound, Murch argues that sound has not enjoyed the same analysis as the visuals in cinema. Film sound is rarely appreciated by itself, but rather serves only to enhance the visuals, making "whatever virtues sound brings to film [to be] largely perceived and appreciated by the audience in visual terms – the better the sound, the better the image" (Murch in Chion, 1990:viii).

Cavell speculates that the difference between visual and auditory transcriptions is that we "are fully accustomed to hearing things that are invisible, not present to us, not present with us" (1979:18). Is this perhaps due to our experience of sound as a foetus? Sound as the doorway to the world? That we trust sound, even though we have no idea where it comes from? The foetus has no framework or context to place, form or contextualise the sounds that penetrate the womb. The disposition of the foetus perhaps echoes Cavell's statement that

“our access to another world is normally through voices from it; and why a man can be spoken to by God and survive, but not if he sees God, in which case he is no longer in *this* world” (1979:18). Even though the value of our hearing and listening faculty might be underestimated, its function carries more significance than audiences realise. Haneke points out that audiences’ listening faculty are profoundly more sensitive than their viewing abilities, arguing that “the ear provides a more direct path to the imagination and to the heart of human beings” (2000:174). Since the flood of images on television and various media weaken the audience’s susceptibility of the visual domain, Haneke believes it to be increasingly difficult to create images that leave a strong impression and evoke a reaction from the audience. While the long take certainly adds to Haneke’s aim of making images more perceptible, images still limit the scope of the audience’s imagination, while the soundtrack, however, “gives the spectators more freedom to imagine their own picture” (2000:174).

The two aspects of sound, non-diegetic and diegetic, are employed by Haneke in different ways to activate the audience’s imagination. Haneke rarely uses non-diegetic music or sound in his films. When music is used, however, it is either diegetically motivated or flows into the next scene, separated in time and space from the scene in which the diegetic music originated from. Silence, however, forms a major part in the soundscapes of his films. Elsie Walker argues that Haneke’s sparse use of music, or even absence thereof, contributes to the nature of his films as ‘interrogative texts’. Interrogative texts, similar to modernist artworks, are texts that aim to destabilise spectators, shake them out of complacency in order to “interrogate the medium itself and, by extension, to question dominant ideology” (Walker, 2010:23). Haneke forces his audience to resort to the act of listening through the use of sound taking place off-screen, minimal sound effects and the absence of musical cues that guide the audience’s emotions (Walker, 2010:17). Classical realist texts, on the other hand, allow

spectators “a fantasy of stable mastery over what they perceive within it...[offering] a clear-cut hierarchy of knowledge and, usually, one protagonist’s point of view is proved correct” (Walker, 2010:15). Soundtracks of mainstream cinema, or classic realist texts, not only score inevitably every transition, action, emotional or suspenseful sequence, but also maintains “the stubborn determination to fire all of the musical weapons at the same time” (Kulezic-Wilson, 2008:127). As I have established before, the modernist artist questions the specific traditions that have produced the art in question (Cavell, 1979:15), an approach that is similar to that of interrogative texts. I argue that Haneke uses and reflects upon film’s automatism of sound by rupturing non-diegetic music and punctuating his soundscapes with silences. I will analyse the music in *The Piano Teacher* and the silences in *Time of the Wolf* to point out how Haneke’s use of sound enhances the audience’s agency and activates their imagination, thus enabling them to secure an ethical place film for themselves in the film.

### **3.4.2 The Use and Rupturing of Music in *The Piano Teacher***

Right after Erika and her mother’s fight and reconciliation, the opening credits of *The Piano Teacher* are interjected with piano lessons, the pounding of the keys providing a stark contrast to the silent white on black titles. Between the intercutting scenes of silence and music, an off-screen voice instructs and criticises the hammering fingers. The intercutting between silence and music is a jarring experience for the spectator, since the cuts are not spread out according to tempo or motivated by an audio-visual correlation, nor does it consider sustaining the notes to the end. Instead, the intercutting serves as a violent interruption, making it unclear whether “the silence is interrupting the music or the other way around” (Coulthard, 2012:22). For Coulthard, these interruptions are integral to a film that calls on the audience to listen. The contrast between the uncanny silence of the titles, the resounding piano keys and Erika’s off-screen voice invites audiences to “interrogate its silent

absences, the violence, brutality and death that lie under the surface and aesthetic beauty” (2012:22), making clear the “spectator’s role as active listener and therefore as interlocutor and participant” (2012:23).



Figure 12: Opening titles for *The Piano Teacher*

The audience’s participation is called upon by making them aware of their listening faculty and the role it will play in the film. Later in the film, Erika plays the Piano Trio N° 2 by Schubert on the piano with a cellist and violinist in an apartment, but, as soon as the scene ends, the diegetic music flows into the next scene separated by time and space, as Erika walks through a crowded mall. The disjunction between Erika’s visual locality (determined by the image) and her aural locality (reminded by the music that transferred from the previous sequence) both displaces the spectator and ruptures the border separating the diegetic and non-diegetic soundtrack, as the diegetic music soon takes on a non-diegetic function as Erika moves through the bustling shopping centre. She arrives at an adult porn shop and enters a private booth with a screen that emits pornographic films. Whilst the recital continues on the soundtrack, she puts a coin into the slot of the television booth. As soon as the pornographic arcade swallows Erika’s coin, the music stops abruptly, leaving the audience with the moaning, gurgling and sucking sounds of the pornographic film. Suddenly, the classic and aural beauty of Schubert’s masterpiece is replaced by the banal, obscene and primal sounds of fornication. The music is not permitted to complete its cycle or end when the scene concludes. Rather, the music is broken and severed in its sustain, a “rupturing that

jars, assaults, and disorients the listener”, denying audiences the fullness of the sound and placing them in a permanent state of “dissatisfaction and discomfort as [their] aural expectations and pleasures are thwarted” (Walker, 2010:20). The rupturing of the music and the sudden shift in the film’s soundscape, thus, enhances and amplifies the porn and the audience’s experience thereof.

During an interview, Haneke made it clear that he does not want *The Piano Teacher* to be recognised as a pornographic film, but rather as an obscenity. An obscenity, for Haneke, is “anything that departs from the bourgeois norm”, since the “truth is always obscene”. Pornography, thus, for Haneke, “makes into a commodity that which is obscene” and “makes the unusual consumable” (Haneke in Sharrett, 2010:588). His definition is thus wider than Hayward’s definition, which states pornography as “any set of images that exist solely for the purpose of sexual arousal and feature nudity and explicit sexual acts” (2013:273). Pornography, according to Haneke’s definition, is not limited to explicit nudity and sex. Rather, he thinks that:

[A]ny contemporary art practice is pornographic if it attempts to bandage the wound, so to speak, which is to say our social and psychological wound. Pornography seems to me to be no different from war films, or propaganda films in that it tries to make the visceral, horrific or transgressive elements of life consumable. Propaganda is far more pornographic than a home video of two people [having sex] (Haneke in Sharrett, 2010:588).

It is thus not the explicit nature of a film that contributes to its definition as pornography, but rather the consumability and commerciality of the obscene that is its truly repulsive aspect. If pornography makes the obscene consumable, then I argue that this wide definition of pornography includes, and does not distinguish between, the violent death of an individual or people having sex. If scenes of carnage are packaged in such a way that makes

its horrors consumable, it is certainly included in Haneke's definition of pornography. Walker argues that if scenes of murder and violence run the danger of being too disconcerting for the audience, classic realist texts or classical Hollywood films would use musical scoring to aestheticize the atrocity, resulting in the reassurance of the audience by keeping them safe and at a distance (2010:15). If a musical score aims to aestheticise and commercialise obscenities, then I argue that such music certainly contributes to its pornographic function and consumability. If the Schubert piece continued to play throughout the fornication, the audience would be kept at a safe distance, making Erika's consumption of pornography likewise as consumable for the audience. Yet, the rupturing of the music and subsequent silence of the non-diegetic soundtrack, with only the aural obscenities remaining, makes the audience uncomfortable and heightens their awareness of the pornography. These aural obscenities are to be recalled and drawn upon by the audience later on, when Erika meets Walter in the bathroom and the men's locker room respectively, when similar sucking and wet sounds are heard on the diegetic soundtrack as she performs fellatio. The sounds, thus, not only remind the audience of the pornographic images of the booth, but also allow them to *add* to the recollection, imagining the sexual act shielded by Walter or Erika's body. These sounds are thus mobilised in such a way that the audience's imagination is activated.

### **3.4.3 Listening to the Silences in *Time of the Wolf***

The rupturing of sound, is not, however, the most interesting aspect of Haneke's soundscapes. Rather, it is in "the silences themselves that we find the loudest call to listen and strongest imperative to interrogate, contemplate and resonate" (Coulthard, 2010:20). There are no non-diegetic music or score in *Time of the Wolf*. The audience is, rather, confronted with an austere soundtrack characterised by silences. The film takes place in an unspecified time and place after an unidentified catastrophe hit. The film starts with Georges,

Anne, Eva and Benny arriving at their house in the woods, apparently to hide or escape from the ensuing anarchy and lawlessness. Another family, however, already took ownership of the house and threatens them. After the usual back and forth, the husband of the intruding family, unexpectedly, shoots and kills Georges. Anne, Eva and Benny are forced to leave and fend for themselves. As they walk through forsaken and desolate towns and empty streets, the clicking noise of the bike and sounds of the dystopic landscape hauntingly accentuates the silence around them.

While complete cinematic silences are extremely rare, Haneke's perceived silences are rather "complex and layered acoustic creations" (Coulthard, 2010:21). Silences in film are firstly achieved by recording room tone, since all spaces, regardless of its sonority, emits a resonance. The addition of other noises, such as footsteps, breathing or ordinary, human movements all contribute to the foley of a film's soundtrack. Silences in film, then, are not muteness, but rather a "relative or approximate silence of background acoustic elements of space and room tone" (Coulthard, 2010:21). The first evening after Georges' death, Anne, Eva and Benny enter a shed where they consume some meat and a can of cola in silence. Even though the eating and drinking is filmed in a frontal close-up, the focus on them is heightened by the amplification of their chewing and swallowing noises. The amplified sound of such banal activity in a room of silence makes the witnessing thereof almost unbearable, heightening audience awareness and, perhaps even, their irritation. The volume of the consumption is an example of how Haneke uses sound to acoustically assault his audience through its "intensity, abrasiveness and detail", calling the audience to listen closely and accept that the "banal, seemingly pointless detail can be heard and must be listened to" (Coulthard, 2010:22).

After another day scouring for food and walking along empty and foggy roads, they arrive at a barn. They decide to spend the night, during which a hysterical Eva wakes Anne

and tells her that Benny has disappeared. The film has made clear, so far, that all electricity has been cut. The barn is thus pitch black, with only the sound of Eva and Anne's voices orientating the audience. Without any visuals to guide them, the audience is forced to resort to the act of listening, an act which Jean-Luc Nancy defines as "straining towards a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible" (2007:6). Whatever the psychology or trauma driving his actions, Benny's disappearance attains significance due to the death of his father, as well as the budgie he buried moments before. Benny's sensitivity towards the budgie certainly aligns the audience with him; along with the sympathy they feel towards him for losing his father and the desolate surrounding dystopia. For Nancy, to be listening is "always to be on the edge of meaning" (2007:7). Now that they are plunged into darkness, yet invested in his fate, the audience is forced to listen, not only to imagine what is happening in the dark barn, but also forced to consider and strain towards a possible reason for Benny's desertion, their listening faculty their only guide.

The audience experiences an uncertainty akin to Anne and Eva, enhanced by the darkness and fortified by the silence that surrounds them. As Anne and Eva scourge the barn, they use a lighter to kindle shreds of hay to illuminate the dark barn. The flame brightens only part of the frame, with the edges of the dark night encroaching upon the simmer of light. The hay, however, burns out quickly, plunging them (and the audience) back into darkness. The sound, however, does not fade like the quenched flame. The to and fro between the glow of the fire and darkness of the night keeps the visuals from being the primary guide in reading the scene, reinstating the sound, to use Murch's phrase, as Queen of the senses again. Listening, then, is the only sense that provides spectators coherence in the scene, guiding and helping them as they strain to follow what is going on. As Anne and Eva go outside and shout his name into the dark void, they wait a few seconds to listen for a response, echoing the audience's act of listening for Benny's voice as well. The responding silence to Anne and

Eva's appeals are not, as argued by Nancy, a privation or deprivation, since silence is an "arrangement of resonance...as when in a perfect condition of silence you hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave" (2007:21). The non-responsiveness, thus, not only forces Anne and Eva to become aware of the resonance of their own bodies, but the audience is also implicated, in that straining to listen, they are likewise forced to consider their own bodies in the viewing (and listening) experience. Silence, then, is the "essence rather than absence of sound, and the body of the subject is its origin and endpoint" (Coulthard, 2012:19). Benny's disappearance into the night proves that listening, whether it be Anne and Eva or the audience, to be an "active process in time and space, that moves, resounds and reverberates and the subject it constitutes is likewise in movement and agitation" (Coulthard, 2012:19). Anne takes the lighter and some excess hay and decides to plunge into the darkness to find her son. She leaves Eva behind to attend to the fire outside that will mark the position of the barn. She braves the darkness and repeatedly shouts Benny's name, with no response. As the audience strains to listen for some sort of response, a blaring sheep is heard in the distance, but, just as the flame withers again, Anne suddenly hears something next to her. "Is someone there?" she asks into the darkness. Silence. Some shuffling is heard, but it is unclear whether Anne is fidgeting for more hay or if the supposed threat is closing in on her. No musical cues guide the audience's reading of the scene. Instead, the audience is left to visualise what the darkness around Anne holds, with only aural vestiges to inform their imagination. Audiences are forced to engage with Anne and Eva's predicament through their listening faculty. Engaging with the characters' predicament is not, however, the only effect that listening has on an audience.



Figure 13: Anne looks for Benny in *Time of the Wolf*

#### 3.4.4 Listening as an Approach to the Self

The use of sound does more than simply force the audience to engage with the film since, for Nancy, listening always entails “straining towards or in an approach to the self” (2007:9). While the sequence in *Time of the Wolf* only uses silence in conjunction with a narrative problem for the characters, other instances in Haneke’s oeuvre pair the absence of sound with a moral or ethical problem or conflict. Georgie’s death in *Funny Games* and Anne’s verbal harassment on the subway in *Code Unknown* all use sound to implicate the audience in its disturbing and obscene content. The soundtrack of the aftermath of Georgie’s death is filled by the blazing sound of the television, in which racing cars and screeching tyres fill the diegetic soundscape. When Anna goes over to the television to turn it off, her action cloaks the living room in silence. All that is heard is Paul and Peter’s car pulling out the driveway outside. Silence. After a while, Anna tells Georg that they have gone. More silence. If one listens closely, Georg’s shuffling and breathing is barely audible through the silence of death that dominates the scene. Even though sounds of Anna jumping to Georg, Georg’s breakdown and Anna’s consolation fill the soundtrack during the remaining eight minutes of the scene, no other sound or music is heard. The audience is thus forced to consider and face Georgie’s death in silence for the duration of the sequence. Apart from the

static long take, the depth of field and positioning of the characters, what makes Anne's verbal harassment so unnerving on the subway in *Code Unknown* is the constant droning and humming of the train. The scene's impact also, obviously, derives from the young man's teasing and verbal obscenities. The audience listens, however, to his verbal obscenities not only to interpret what he says linguistically, but also to strain towards a reason as to *why* he is doing it. Did Anne do something to provoke him? Will he, during his monologue, divulge the reason he is harassing her? As Nancy attests, to listen is always to strain towards a meaning that is not immediately accessible (2007:6). The larger theme of *Code Unknown*, the disposition of the Third World and the western world's implication in their poverty, is caught between the young man's utterances and the audience's listening faculty. Thus, by straining towards a meaning that might explain his actions, audiences have to draw from their own experiences in the world to charge it with significance. On the other hand, Coulthard points out that those silences in Haneke's films, such as the one that fills the soundscape in the aftermath of Georgie's death in *Funny Games*, make audiences aware of the film listening to them, simultaneously making their act of listening explicit and requiring their silence in response to the quietness on-screen. Moments of silence, such as these, "exposes us, renders the act of listening subjective and imperative in its reflexivity" (Coulthard, 2012:27). When the audience is made aware of themselves and forced to use their imagination, however, especially in a scene in which violence or something obscene is taking place, the silences work "to transform these aural moments into ethical ones" (Coulthard, 2010:21).

Nancy's major argument in *Listening* is that it is only through silence that the listener can approach the self, for it is "in the absence of noises, music or voices that the subject's self can be heard" (Coulthard, 2012:19). The approach to self, as expounded by Nancy, is not an approach to the I, nor to the self of an other, but rather to the "form or structure of *self* as such, that is to say, to the form, structure and movement of an infinite referral" (2007:9). In

other words, the resonant subject or self is not a subject in the phenomenological or philosophical sense. Rather it is “the place of resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment” (Nancy in Coulthard, 2012:19). Since listening enables the subject to “enter into tension and to be on the lookout for a relation to self” Nancy stresses that it is not a relationship to the I or to an other, but rather “the *relationship in self*, so to speak, as it forms a ‘self’ or a ‘to itself’ in general, and if something like that ever does reach the end of its formation” (2007:12). The listening that Haneke requires in the scenes of Benny’s disappearance in *Time of the Wolf*, Georgie’s death in *Funny Games* and Anne’s harassment in *Code Unknown* demands the audience to listen resonantly, a straining that is not aimed at full comprehension, but rather, as Coulthard calls it, an “unsettling openness”, since “[m]ysteries without answers, open-ended stories, inaccessible and inscrutable characters [...] are the cornerstones of Haneke’s persistent ambiguity” (2012:17). Even though Benny returns to Anne and Eva the next morning in *Time of the Wolf*, an explanation is never given for his choice to desert them. Instead, they are met with Benny’s silence, his muteness continuing for the rest of the film. The audience’s engagement with the previous scene in which Anne and Eva were looking for Benny, as well as the scenes that preceded it, are the only vestiges the audience can draw from in order to decipher Benny’s actions. These mostly silent sequences require the audience to make “necessary leaps of intellectual imagination” (Walker, 2010:23), ascribing a meaning to Benny’s disappearance and his subsequent vow of silence. Georgie’s death is never atoned for in *Funny Games* and Anne’s humiliation is never dealt with afterwards in *Code Unknown*. She does not draw a moral lesson like her on-screen counterpart in the swimming pool scene; rather the audience is left to decide for themselves what Anne’s response to the verbal assault is. These films simply continue to the end, giving the audience the freedom and (aural) space to contemplate these obscenities themselves.

### 3.4.5 Conclusion

Juliette Binoche has revealed in an interview that Haneke literally writes silences into his screenplays by indicating, for example, ‘pause’, ‘short pause’ ‘long-pause’. His writing is similar to the notation of music, resembling the precise calculation of quarter, half notes and rests (Binoche in Montmayeur, 2005). Haneke constructs his films in a manner similar to that of music structures, an aural attentiveness that Coulthard points out “operates in concert with Haneke’s ethical concentrations on guilt, self-reflection, failed interpersonal communication and the implication of the spectator and bystander” (2012:17). She points out that the specificity of Haneke’s acoustic structure is integral to informing our responsibility and duty, an imperative and necessity to “fulfil our own rights and duties as listeners and to make what is heard our own” (Coulthard, 2012:26). When silences are used in films to make the audience aware of themselves, it creates an ethical part for them in the film, since “we are its interlocutors and are thus complicit in the silence” (Coulthard, 2012:26). Silences in film are a direct call to audiences, which demand that they listen. This call is what Coulthard terms an “overt recognition of complicity” which forms an essential part of Haneke’s modernist approach, creating an “uncomfortable viewing space where one is forced to confront one’s own role as spectator and is required to respond to the film” (2012:26). Unlike most films, all the end titles of Haneke’s films (except *Funny Games*) scroll over the screen in complete silence. There is no music accompaniment to the credits, no aural vignette encapsulating the film’s feeling or theme. Rather, the end credits leave the audience in a tangible silence after the viewing experience. The silence of the titles are, in a way, the film’s final comment and call on the audience to act, as “if the film were done talking and now demanding that the audience respond” (Coulthard, 2012:26-27).

At the start of Nancy’s treaty on listening, he asks what “secret is at stake when one *truly* listens...[w]hat secret is yielded – hence, also made public – when we listen to a voice,

an instrument, or a sound just for itself?” (2007:5). Coulthard argues that the yielded secret during the act of listening is not only the absence of subjectivity, but also the terror that the subject experiences in confronting subjectivity itself, in other words, the “horror of our own void of subjectivity is the terror at the heart of silence. In the absence of the once present soundtrack, we are left with nothing but the call to auscultate ourselves, to listen to our own living bodies and our own subjectivity” (Coulthard, 2012:28). Haneke’s reflection on the automatism of music and sound, through rupturing, amplification or deafening silences, call on audiences to listen, imagine and place themselves in the film by contributing to its meaning-making process.

### **3.5 Conclusion: The Filmmaker’s Responsibility**

At the start of this essay, I emphasised Cavell’s two fundamental ideas concerning the act of viewing: the fact that film makes displacement appear as our natural condition and that viewing offers us respite from our responsibility to the world. The manner in which classical Hollywood cinema and genre allow spectators to assume a position of sagacity that exceeds that of the diegetic characters, traditional forms of editing guide and manipulate audiences and music aestheticise a film’s obscene content, all contribute, aggravate and magnify the spectator’s desire not to need power or bear the world’s burdens. Wheatley identifies an ethical problem inherent to the viewing process, arguing that the manner in which Hollywood cinema positions audiences “in a position of suspended awareness” to be morally problematic. Therefore filmmakers have an “ethical imperative to produce a work that breaks with cinematic illusionism and thereby grant the spectator the opportunity to engage critically with the cinematic image” (2009:39).

By reflecting on his use of automatisms during filmmaking, Haneke’s modernist films achieve the implication of the audience and provide them with the opportunity to secure an

ethical position for themselves in the film. There is thus a shift in emphasis from filmmaker to spectator. Cavell's argument, as well as Haneke's approach to filmmaking, questions the spectator's motivations when watching a film. What do audiences watch and what are their motivations for watching something, especially if the film in question contains gratuitous violence that draw from real-life situations? The film does not watch me watching it; the (entertaining) violence is not present to me, so why do I have to be held accountable? Cinematic automatism that are traditionally employed simply put a spell on audiences in which they become "unaware of themselves and the world around them", a reason, perhaps, why "we are so much more able to accept, and even enjoy, on-screen scenes or scenarios of immorality – of violence, revenge, rape – which we would never stand for outside the cinema" (Wheatley, 2009:42). Since audiences *choose* to watch such films, because, as the cliché goes, "I want to escape and just enjoy something for once", because "life is too difficult as it is", I argue that it is such a motivation that is irresponsible towards those whose real-life and horrific experience provided material for our viewing pleasure. The Holocaust, for example, does not exist purely to provide filmic material for *Schindler's List*, nor the Second World War for *Downfall*. Instead Haneke, like Resnais does in the case of *Night & Fog*, draws from horrors and obscenities such as the torture of families and the rape of women, for *Funny Games* and *The Piano Teacher* respectively, in order to make audiences aware of their displaced position as spectators and to make them realise that they *are indeed* responsible for what they watching. They cannot want to not bear the burdens of the world, since the afflictions of the world are visible and calling them out on the screen right in front of them. As is clear from this chapter, Haneke constructs his film in such a way that the spectator is given the possibility of participating in the film. A spectator is no longer a mere consumer that "ingest[s] spoon-fed images, but rather the very person who completes the film. [A film's] framework is born not on screen, but in the spectator's mind" (Haneke,

2000). Since the ubiquity of the media has had such a profound influence on our viewing habits, Haneke responds to the problem by reflecting on film's automatism, thus enabling him to implicate and provide the spectator with an ethical part in the film.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MICHAEL HANEKE'S RESPONSIBILITY AND

### THE AUDIENCE'S RESPONSE-ABILITY

### IN *CACHÉ*, *THE WHITE RIBBON* AND *AMOUR*

#### 4.1 Introduction: Spectatorship

##### 4.1.1 Michael Haneke's Experience at the Cinema

In his essay "Terror and Utopia of Form: Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar*", Michael Haneke recounts his first film-going experiences, all of which put him in a state of shock. His first memory of going to the cinema was when his grandmother took him to see Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948). Haneke vividly recalls how the theatre grew darker as the majestic curtain slowly lifted, revealing the surging waves crashing around the gloomy castle of Elsinore (Haneke, 2010(a):565). After less than five minutes, however, his grandmother was forced to leave the theatre, because the moving images frightened the six-year old Haneke. Later that same year, on a cold and rainy day in Denmark, Haneke was taken to the cinema to watch a film that took place in Africa. He recalls how mystified he was by the images that revealed creatures he had never seen before, as racing antelope and grazing rhinoceroses flashed along the Jeep's purview. He was in a state of rapture, captivated and astonished by the flashing images. After the lights went on and he emerged from the cineplex, however, he could not believe that he was not in Africa anymore. Even though he was surrounded by wild animals and the open savannah minutes before, how did "the theatre, which for me had been like a car I was travelling in, have driven back – and especially so quickly – to northern, cold Copenhagen?" (Haneke, 2010(a):565).

Haneke's first two experiences reveal the displacement, as Cavell argues, inherent to the act of spectatorship. In her book *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On* (2007),

Michelle Aaron argues that one of the reasons why we love to watch films is because it gives us, similar to the young Michael Haneke in Copenhagen, the possibility and pleasure “of seeing things we would not normally be able to see” (2007:87). Drawing from psychoanalysis film theory, Aaron explains that movies depend upon the spectator accepting the illusion of film as a form of reality. She describes this acceptance as a tacit or unacknowledged agreement between the spectator and spectacle, stipulating that the audience has to suspend their disbelief and ignore the fact that they are watching a fabrication (2007:91). By ignoring the film’s fabrication and disavowing the fact that they are watching an illusion, audiences are encouraged to accept the spectacle as a form of reality. Since mainstream film, through continuity techniques, appeals to authenticity, the cinematic spectacle “stands in for reality” and reassures the spectator “that nothing is amiss” (Aaron, 2007:92). To recall Cavell’s claim, that the “screen overcomes our fixed distance” and “makes displacement appear as our natural condition” (Cavell, 1979:41), a cinematic spectacle that appeals to authenticity intensifies the displacement experienced by the spectator. Even though Haneke was in Denmark and physically distanced from Africa, he unconsciously suspended his awareness of the film’s fabrication. The film thus overcame the distance between the savannah and Denmark. Since the young Haneke was not used to being *displaced from yet present to* another world, as opposed to most consumers of media today, his displacement from the African plains confused him. In his article, Haneke admits that he finds it difficult to explain the confusion he experienced regarding his displacement from Africa to today’s generation who grow up in a world “unthinkable without the constant presence of competing floods of images”(2010(a):566). As opposed to a young Haneke, we are used to being displaced from the world that we view on our screens, since, as Cavell argues, film has made our displacement appear and seem natural.

Another effect that a disavowal of film's illusion brings about is the audience's feelings of invisibility, since they witness a world that they are not present to. The silver screen, Cavell writes, "screens me from the world it holds – that is, makes me invisible", as well as "screens its existence from me" (1979:24). The film did not acknowledge Haneke's presence to the African savannah. He remained invisible to the wild animals and the diegetic world of the film. For the spectator, or in this instance, Haneke, that the projected world of Africa "does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality" (Cavell, 1979:24). The problem with disavowal, of ignoring the fact that one is watching a film and thus becoming invisible, is that it "staves off that which is threatening" and allows the audience to "indulge in fantasy without suffering the consequences for it" (Aaron, 2007:92). Even though film overcomes our distance, the spectator is still in a position of safety, a position that is maintained through disavowal. In other words, the contractual disavowal between audience and spectacle "sustains the safety of the spectator, licensing a safe indulgence in the real, with the promise that it is only temporary: when the spectacle stops, so too will the submission to it as real" (Aaron, 2007:92). I recall Cavell's argument that I have outlined in previous chapters, that "movies allow the audience to be mechanically absent" (1979:25), in order to illustrate the manner in which spectators become invisible to the spectacle in front of them. It does not matter that, when watching the suffering of others that "I do nothing in the face of tragedy", or, when someone slips on a banana peel, that "I laugh at the folly of others" (Cavell, 1979:26). The audience's helplessness towards the spectacle "is mechanically assured", since "I am present not at something happening, which I must confirm, but at something that has happened, which I absorb (like a memory)" (Cavell, 1979:26). Haneke's first two notable experiences at the cinema rest upon the fact that those films assured his absence and invisibility towards the spectacle on-screen, displacing him from the world that the screen held.

Haneke's third account of film spectatorship that put him in a state of shock was when, during his final year in senior high school, he watched Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* (1963). The film effortlessly made the viewer an accomplice to its exuberant protagonist. He recalls how, during a breath-taking chase sequence, the hero stopped in his tracks, turned to face the camera (the audience) and "commented upon the difficulty of his predicament, thereby making me aware of mine" (Haneke, 2010(a):566). The breaking of the fourth wall was as shocking as his two previous experiences and, even though he was aware by this stage that films are not real, he had distanced himself physically and mentally from its unnerving immediacy. Tom Jones's direct address, however, made Haneke aware of his complicity with the film and its protagonist, making it clear that he and the audience were largely victims of the filmmaker's privileged viewpoint, instead of "partners of those whom we paid to 'entertain' us" (Haneke, 2010(a):567). Haneke's invisibility, assured by the mechanic nature of those films he watched prior *Tom Jones*, was ruptured, his presence as spectator made visible by Tom's address. The address thus not only acknowledged his presence to the spectacle, but also made him aware of his complicity.

Reflecting upon the shocking discovery of his complicity, Haneke remembered those first two experiences at the cinema that put him in a state of shock, recalling how frightened he initially was and how enthralled he had become. By becoming aware of his complicity, however, Haneke began "to see the cinema with different eyes" and to "distrust those storytellers who pretended to render unbroken reality" (2010(a):567). In a similar vein, Aaron challenges the spectator's seemingly innocent position vis-à-vis the spectacle and argues "not simply for the spectator's complicity in its creation and endurance, but for the spectator's complicity in its often disturbing content" (2007:92). How are audiences complicit in the act of spectatorship and why is this problematic, especially when the content thereof is thrilling, disturbing or violent?

#### 4.1.2 The Spectator's Complicity

At the start of this dissertation I argued that, even though mainstream film allows us respite from bearing the burdens of the world, we cannot wish *not* to need power or bear another's burdens, as there is an ethical demand on us to be responsible for one another. My existence is predicated upon another. Furthermore, I maintained that our invisible complicity to the spectacle in front of us is aggravated when we watch scenes of violence and atrocity. An example that Haneke uses in which we are unaware of our complicity is the famous sequence in *Apocalypse Now*, in which Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* bullhorns over speakers while local Vietnamese flee from the attacking Americans. The launching of missiles and rat-tat-tat of bullets rain over the Vietnamese as they are catapulted into the air and ripped to pieces. The spectator is positioned as a co-passenger in the helicopter, yet, since our displacement from the spectacle is mechanically assured, we are allowed to revel in the spectacle without being held accountable for the carnage that ensues. Our invisibility renders us guiltless. To what extent, however, can Haneke's critique be justified?

Almost a third into Sam Mendes' *Jarhead* (2005), a group of soldiers watch the news that announces Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. After the Ambassador of Kuwait's call for aid from the United States, Corporal Alan Troy announces to the young soldiers in the room that they are going to war. The next scene shows the troops watching the famous scene from *Apocalypse Now* in a cinema, cheering and applauding as the helicopters near the Vietnamese village. They become restless with eager anticipation, munching their popcorn and mimicking the movements of the on-screen soldiers. The anticipation builds until, as the diegetic helicopters open fire on the locals, private Anthony Swofford, the protagonist of *Jarhead*, revelling and losing himself in the spectacular carnage, erupts in ecstasy: "Shoot them motherfuckers!!" (*Jarhead*). Haneke points out that the sequence allows audiences, as evident in Anthony and the troops of *Jarhead*, to experience the action as surrogates. Echoing

Cavell's diagnosis that film unburdens us of responsibility, the "mythical narrative mode and an aestheticising mode of representation allow a safe release of our own fears and desires" (Haneke, 2010(b):576). Up until that point in the film, the young soldiers in *Jarhead* have not experienced any real combat or action. *Apocalypse Now*, however, meets their atavistic thirst and desire for destruction by positioning them alongside the onslaught aimed at the Vietnamese. The film thus provides a safe release for their desire to fight the enemy, as the attacking, on-screen US Army "transcends the helplessness and powerlessness of the viewer with [their] accomplishments" (Haneke, 2010(b):576).<sup>21</sup>

Who is at fault with providing the soldiers of *Jarhead* with the opportunity to see the carnage and violence that eludes them in real-life, witness the death and destruction of the Vietnamese without bearing the burden of having done so, displaced and at a safe distance, yet immediate enough to enjoy the thrill? Or, moreover, how can the soldiers become *aware* of their role as spectators? Before a screening of *Benny's Video*, Haneke said that the problem is not violence in films or media *per se*, but rather the manner in which it is employed. When one questions the presence of violence in the media, one is forced to aim one's criticisms at institutions and organisations "where responsibility is notoriously hard to personalise and accountability rarely demanded" (Haneke, 2010(b):575). Instead, Haneke argues that the question must be shifted towards the *form* of representation, in other words, the formalist principles that guide the filmmaker's decisions in representing violence. By reframing the question of whether violence should be allowed in the media to a question of representation, the accountability and responsibility is put on the shoulders of individuals: the editor, the journalist and, as my main focus will be, the film director (Haneke, 2010(b):575). The question

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<sup>21</sup> There are many readings that argue that the scene in *Apocalypse Now* is actually a critical comment on the horrors of the Vietnam war (see, for example, Jean Baudrillard's essay on the film in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981)). I would point out, however, that the reaction of the soldiers in *Jarhead* indicates that the scene does not make its audience aware of their invisibility *enough*. As Haneke says, we as the audience ride "along in the helicopter, firing on the Vietnamese scattering in panic below us, and we do it without a guilty conscience because we – at least in the moment of action – do not become aware of this role" (Haneke, 2010(b):576).

then, applied to *Apocalypse Now*, is how can the film make the spectators of *Jarhead* aware of their invisibility, and thus their complicity, in the spectacular onslaught on the Vietnamese?

At the end of his essay on ‘Violence and the Media’, Haneke asks how filmmakers can give audiences the chance to recognise the loss of reality and their own implication in it, thereby emancipating them “from being a victim of the medium to its potential partner” (2010(b):579). He continues:

The question is not: “What am I allowed to show?” but rather: “What chance do I give the viewer to recognise what it is I am showing?” The question – limited to the topic of violence – is not: “How do I show violence?”, but rather “How do I show the *viewer* his *own position* vis-à-vis violence and its portrayal?” (2010(b):579).

Haneke believes that the filmmaker has the responsibility of giving the audience the chance to recognise that what is being shown. When the complexities of violence are, for example, adjusted in order to fit the mould of a suspense thriller, the audience does not recognise the pain, suffering, horror and irrecoverability that characterises real violence, but rather simply a spectacular representation thereof. Instead, the filmmaker has the responsibility of, firstly, revealing the spectator’s invisible position as consumer of violence and, secondly, restoring the pain and suffering inherent to violence and the irrecoverability of its depiction.

So far, this dissertation is hinged on Cavell’s two ideas, that, firstly, film offers us respite from bearing the burdens of the world and, secondly, the act of viewing makes displacement appear as our natural condition. While the mechanic nature of film assures our safe and displaced position, I argue that, since we are relational beings, we cannot wish for unaccountability and invisibility, because we are responsible for each other. My introductory chapter, thus, asked how filmmakers can destabilise, challenge and disrupt the spectator’s

wish not to bear another's burdens and hold the audience accountable and responsible for what they are watching. In other words, how can the filmmaker meet his or her responsibility of ensuring the audience's response-ability? In order to contextualise the question, I continued in Chapter Two with *content*, arguing that film and television has a problematic influence on our perceptions of violence, especially since we are invisible during the act of viewing and displaced from the brutality on-screen. The third chapter focused on *form*, mapping the ways in which Haneke reflects on the automatism of cinema in order to enable the audience to secure an ethical place for themselves in the film. The separate discussions on content (Chapter Two) and form (Chapter Three) laid the groundwork for this chapter, in which I argue that the manner in which *both content and form* are organised are crucial elements in responsible filmmaking. I will respond to the question I posed in the introductory chapter, of how a filmmaker meets his or her responsibility of ensuring the audience's response-ability, in three separate sections. Firstly, I will define responsibility according to Levinas' ethical edict of 'thou shalt not kill' through a reading of Georges and Majid's relationship in *Caché*. Thereafter, I will draw from Kelly Oliver's work to read *The White Ribbon*, in which I will engage with, enhance and perhaps challenge Haneke's idea of audience recognition, by arguing that responsible filmmaking entails enabling the audience to bear witness. I will look at how Haneke takes responsibility for his audience by addressing them in such way that not only are *they* recognised *by* him, but also that they are able to *recognise that what is being shown* and thus put in a position of bearing witness to the film. Through bearing witness, instead of passive spectatorship, I argue that audiences will become partners in the film and be able to respond, response-ability, as well as secure an ethical place for themselves in the film. My argument will continue in my reading of *Amour*, in which I illustrate how Georges' recognition of and approach to Anne's suffering meets Judith Butler's formulation of responsibility. Moreover, I will use Butler's work to illustrate how

Haneke enables the spectator to recognise the Other and how he keeps the audience's recognition thereof alive and on-going. Finally, I will draw from Haneke's final film that had a profound effect on him, in order to conclude how the content (I outlined in Chapter Two) and the form (I outlined in Chapter Three) and the harmonisation thereof is critical for the filmmaker's responsibility and the audience's response-ability.

## **4.2 Responsibility: The Face-to-Face Encounter of *Caché***

### **4.2.1 Emmanuel Levinas and My Place Under the Sun**

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I turned to Emmanuel Levinas' radical writings on responsibility in order to argue why we cannot, as Cavell says, wish for invisibility and respite from bearing the burdens of the world when watching a film. We ought to regard ourselves infinitely and endlessly responsible for each other. By drawing from Dostoevsky's statement, that "[e]ach of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others" (qtd in Levinas, 1969:146). Levinas suggests a mode of being in which "I am endlessly obligated to the Other", an "ethical relation which forever precedes and exceeds the egoism and tyranny of ontology" (Hand, 1989:1). Western philosophy, for Levinas, has mostly been preoccupied with ontology, which reduces the "other to the same" by "interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" (1969:43). In other words, Western philosophy violates that what is different by incorporating it into a pre-existing totality (Downing and Saxton, 2010:4). In contrast, Levinas' ethics precedes ontology. Before a subject is capable of choice, his or her formation takes place in a 'preontological' sphere called "outside of being" (Butler, 2005:85-86). The primary scene 'where' or 'when' this formation takes place, however, cannot be described, since it "precedes and even conditions the spatio-temporal coordinates that circumscribe the ontological domain" (Butler, 2005:86). Since Levinas' ethics precedes ontology, an "ethics as

first philosophy” (Levinas in Hand, 1989:75), his ethics is thus not governed by moral laws or principles that are generated ontologically. Instead, Levinas defines ethics as the “calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other” (1969:43). Ethics, for Levinas, arises in relation to the Other, a figure that represents our infinite and ethical relation to the world around us (Butler, 2005:x). Our encounter with the Other, an encounter that takes place face-to-face<sup>22</sup>, is a “primordial encounter with alterity which disturbs our solitary enjoyment of the world, our illusionary position of omnipotence and sovereignty” (Downing and Saxton, 2010:3). My encounter with something other than me makes me aware that something exists beyond me, something that I cannot grasp. In other words, Levinas underpins his entire philosophy upon the encounter with the Other, an encounter which claims that “there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other” (Levinas in Wright et al., 1988:172).

Why am I endlessly and boundlessly responsible for another? Blaise Pascal claims in *Penseés* that, by claiming a place for yourself under the sun, you are marking the beginning of, what he calls, the “usurpation of all the earth” (1958:84).<sup>23</sup> Levinas is fond of quoting Pascal’s assertion and, in order to respond to the question of our existence or ‘one’s right to be’ in the context of the Other, he uses Pascal’s argument to ask:

My being-in-the-world or my ‘place in the sun’, my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved or driven out into a third world;

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<sup>22</sup> Libby Saxton notes that, even though Levinas uses visual vocabulary to describe the ‘face’, the Other’s ‘face’ is not a phenomenon of the visible world or an object that we can perceive, but rather that which “cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond” (Levinas in Saxton, 2007:5).

<sup>23</sup> In his introduction to the *Levinas Reader* (1989), Séan Hand explains that Levinas uses Pascal’s statement to reject the violence at the heart of ontology as first philosophy. Our responsibility for the Other’s death is an inescapable answerability, a position that forms subjectivity, an individual ‘I’. Even though this ‘I’ questions its right to be, it has an unquestionable and primary obligation to the other. For this reason, ethical philosophy “must remain the first philosophy” (1989:4-5).

are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? (Levinas, 1989:82).

Are we all guilty of usurping someone else's place under the sun? Should guilt not rather be placed on those who have *physically* stripped, appropriated and killed in order to secure their place under the sun? Or are we, instead, like Georges in *Caché*, renouncing our responsibility because we deem ourselves innocent?

#### 4.2.2 Georges' Encounter with Majid

*Caché* tells the story of Georges, a television talk-show host, and Anne Laurent who live in a bourgeois, Parisian neighbourhood with their son, Pierrot. The family is victimised by unmarked videotapes that arrive on their doorstep, the first of which display static shots of their house. Anne also receives anonymous phone calls and Pierrot gets disturbing drawings at school, all of which increases the sense that they are being harassed. The second videotape shows Georges' childhood home, while another guides the viewer to an apartment. Following the directions of the video to the apartment, Georges finds Majid, an Algerian who his parents intended to adopt after the Paris massacre of 1961.<sup>24</sup> Georges confronts Majid about the tapes, upon which he denies any involvement. Georges' guilt about the past, however, manifests through dreams of Majid coughing blood and cutting the head off a rooster. After Georges and Majid's confrontation, Pierrot does not return home from school. Georges and Anne assume he is kidnapped and immediately contact the police to share their suspicions about Majid. The police take Majid and his son into custody, but both deny involvement with

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<sup>24</sup> On the 17th of October 1961, about twenty thousand Algerian men, women and children peacefully took part in a demonstration in the centre of Paris. The march was against the discriminatory decree issued by the French government that imposed a curfew on Algerian workers. The demonstrating mass of Algerians sparked fear among the French authorities, leading Maurice Papon to order their execution. To this day, the total number killed remains a mystery. An estimated body count ranges, however, from two to two hundred (Jacomard, 2012:258-259).

Pierrot's disappearance, which leads to their release the next morning. Pierrot then returns home from his friend's house where he spent the night. After the false alarm, Majid invites Georges over to his apartment and once again denies his involvement with the surveillance tapes and Pierrot's disappearance. He then takes a razorblade, slits his throat and dies. Georges does not go to the police immediately, but instead seeks refuge at the cinema. He returns home afterwards, tells Anne what happened and reveals that, when he was a boy, he told lies about Majid to keep his parents from adopting him. The next day, Majid's son goes to Georges' office and asks Georges how it feels to have a man's life on his conscience. Georges, however, rejects the accusations and goes home to sleep. In the final sequence, captured through a long shot of the front steps of a school, Pierrot and Majid's son meet. They have an inaudible conversation and separate, after which the credits start rolling over the screen.

Levinas' concept of the face, or the approach of the face is, for him, "the most basic mode of responsibility" (Levinas in Kearney, 1986:23). The face that Levinas describes, however, is not necessarily or exclusively a human face, but rather "communicates what is human, what is precarious, what is injurable" (Butler, 2004:xviii). The face of the Other places a moral claim upon me, asking to "not let him die alone", which, if that would happen, would make me an accomplice in his death (Levinas in Kearney, 1986:23). The moral claim that the face makes thus evokes the biblical command of "thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13, KJV)<sup>25</sup>, revealing that, in relation to the face, "I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other" (Levinas in Kearney, 1986:23). Consequently, the ethics that Levinas advocates places the other's life above my own and regards the other's right to exist as more important. The primacy that the other's life enjoys, for Levinas, is epitomised in the edict of 'thou shalt not

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<sup>25</sup> Levinas makes clear that he does not draw from Biblical verses to prove his philosophy, but rather to illustrate his arguments (Levinas in Poirié, 1987:62).

kill', which claims, "you shall not jeopardise the life of the other" (Levinas in Kearney, 1986:24).

How does my place under the sun usurp, appropriate or jeopardise the place of another? Additionally, is the command of 'thou shalt not kill' limited to the physical act of murder? Levinas explains that the commandment does not only prohibit physical murder, but also includes the various ways in which we, figuratively, kill each other. For Levinas, the ethical edict pertains to how, in the course of our lives and in different ways, we kill someone by taking their place underneath the sun. He says that the commandment must be understood in terms of having something that the other does not, for example, if you sit down at the table in the morning and drink coffee, you "kill an Ethiopian who doesn't have any coffee" (Levinas in Wright et al., 1988:173). In other words, we "kill" when we drink coffee while the other has none; someone else could have had the coffee I drank this morning. The coffee I drink, the food I eat, the bed I sleep in, the house I stay in, the clothes I wear, the books I read and the company I enjoy all take the place of someone else who could have used, experienced and enjoyed them. When I claim a place for myself under the sun, I automatically and inevitably appropriate a place that someone else could have assumed.

Does Georges obey the commandment of 'thou shalt not kill'? Or is his place under the sun more important to him than that of another? I argue that the surveillance tapes reveal Georges' attitude towards those around him and his (non-)compliance to the commandment. All of the videotapes that Georges and Anne receive depict or target a *domicilium*, a home. While the first two record the Laurents' house, the third tape reveals Georges' childhood home and the last two show the way to and interior of Majid's apartment block and apartment itself. Georges interprets the gaze of the first videotape, together with the anonymous phone calls and disturbing drawings, as a threat to his home. During playback of the second cassette, a sudden insert of a young Algerian boy with blood on his chin interrupts the

diegetic video. When the shot of the Laurents' house return, Anne asks Georges if something is wrong. Even though the audience can only see the long shot of the house, the diegetic soundscape of Georges and Anne's living room surrounding the scene suggests Georges' disturbed expression, revealing the insert to be a(n) (imaginary) memory that intruded his viewing. Since Georges interprets the static shots as a threat to his *domicilium*, the second video, without pointing to any concrete evidence, exposes Georges' fear of the Other. As we will come to learn later in the film, the Algerian boy that momentarily intruded upon Georges' memory is Majid. Georges' harboured hostility for Majid, an antagonism that remained dormant for years, thus gets stirred and roused by the threatening surveillance.

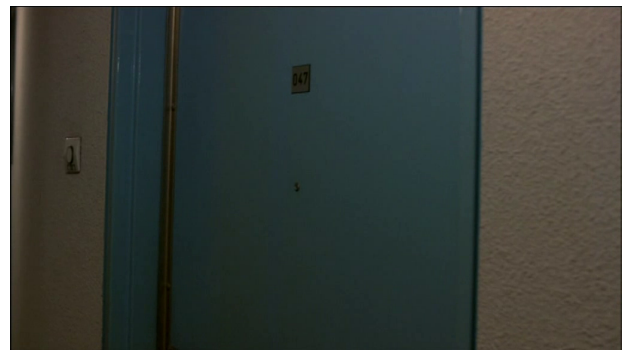


Figure 14: The *domicilium* on the five videotapes

The videos also trigger, or perhaps reveal, the cracks in Georges and Anne's marriage. When the third videotape arrives, displaying Georges' childhood home, he does not share his suspicions that it might be Majid. He does, however, make the mistake of telling Anne that he has a vague idea who the blackmailer might be. Georges' hint sends Anne into a furious frenzy and she accuses her husband of not trusting her. Georges, however, remains stubborn and charges Anne of "doing exactly what he wants" (*Caché*), suggesting that the criminal's intention is to disrupt their relationship. Babak Amou'oghli, however, argues that Georges' accusation reveals not his fear of the stranger trespassing on his family and home, but rather his fear of letting *anyone* trespass into *his* world (2011:45). Suddenly, Anne is trespassing on him as well. The videos threaten Georges' privacy, his inner life and secrets, forcing him to reveal them to Anne.

Georges, however, will go to great lengths to keep his life, personal space and secrets to himself. He wants to live according to his rules. After the fourth video reveals Majid's residence, Georges goes to his apartment to confront him. He threatens Majid: "If you interfere in my life, scare my family or damage me, you'll regret it, I swear" (*Caché*). The videos, serving as a catalyst, reveals Georges' fundamental flaw, that is, his utter determination of protecting his domain and home at the cost of others (Amou'oghli, 2011:45). Even Majid poses the question to Georges: "What wouldn't we do not to lose what's ours?" (*Caché*). The videos, then, do not so much suggest someone threatening his physical home, but rather that what the home represents: Georges' place under the sun. Amou'oghli argues that Georges has, throughout his life, constantly defended his place under the sun, a desire that Georges is willing to pursue, achieve and maintain at the cost of the Other. If that means removing Majid, then so be it. By telling his parents that Majid wanted to scare him by decapitating the rooster, because six-year old Georges did not want to share his bedroom with Majid, Georges initially defended his external property. Forty years later,

what started out as a defence of his bedroom, turned into the safeguarding of his internal property, in other words his *ipseity* (selfhood) and sense of mental integrity (Amou'oghli, 2011:46). Georges place under the sun is not limited to his *domicilium*, his career or family, but rather his claim to himself, his subjectivity. By claiming his right to himself and his right to existence, Georges ignores those lives that might be jeopardised by such a proclamation.

But can Georges be held responsible for what he did when he was six-years old? When Anne asks what Georges possibly could have lied about that would make Majid want to take revenge forty years later, Georges shrugs: “The usual stuff kids lie about. Things you make up. Stupid stuff” (*Caché*). He continues that, after Majid was taken to the orphanage, he forgot about Majid and his parents’ intent of adoption. When Anne questions his indifference, he defends himself, saying, “I don’t feel responsible for it. Why should I?” (*Caché*). Similarly, his confrontation with Majid reveals the extent of his outrage and frustration of being held accountable for something he did when he was a child: “You were older and stronger than me. I had no choice” (*Caché*). Levinas’ formulation of ethics and responsibility, however, disputes Georges’ defence of the ignorant child. Even though we may be outraged at being ethically responsible for one whom we do not choose, as Georges believes he is justified in not wanting to share a bedroom with Majid (and thus cannot be held accountable to the actions of his six-year old self), Butler reminds us that we need to remember Levinas’ formulation of responsibility. Our responsibility precedes any choices that we may or may not have made, meaning that when we encounter and are forced to respond to the face of the Other, the situation feels “horrible, impossible and where the desire for murderous revenge feels overwhelming” (Butler, 2005:92). Georges is initially convinced that Majid sent the tapes and interprets them as an act of terrorism against his *ipseity*. The threat of the tapes, together with Pierrot’s disappearance, gives Georges reasons to “visit Majid, threaten him

and to have him arrested, all of which will appear to push the Algerian to his death” (Kline, 2010:554).

For Levinas, however, the Other becomes my neighbour “precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me and in so doing recalls my responsibility and calls me into question” (1989:83). Majid has never summoned, called or begged Georges in the literal sense; actually, he makes it quite clear during their confrontation that he never wanted anything from Georges. Instead, Majid’s ‘face’ is that which calls Georges’ spontaneity and freedom into question, makes Georges aware of his desire to maintain his place under the sun and enjoy a life free from responsibility. Majid’s presence reveals the cracks in Georges’ perceived self-sufficiency and sovereignty. Georges makes the mistake of limiting his framework of responsibility to his ontology, in other words, to those acts he committed and lies he told when he was six years old. What happened to the Algerians at the hands of Maurice Papon, is not, according to Georges, applicable to his ontology and thus not his responsibility. True responsibility, however, arises in a sphere that is preontological, that is, before the formation of Georges’ subjectivity. The responsibility that Levinas argues for goes “beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself” (1989:83). In this sense, Georges became responsible for Majid before anything else, before Majid’s parents were killed, before they worked for Georges’ parents and before France colonised Algeria. Georges’ responsibility, actually, surfaced before his formation as subject. His responsibility for Majid thus stems from an “unrepresentable past that was never present and is more ancient than consciousness”, a preontological stage in which my “responsibility for my neighbour, for the other man, for the stranger or the sojourner, to which nothing in the rigorously ontological order binds me” arose (Levinas, 1989:84). Nothing in the ontological order binds Georges to Majid. If responsibility is confined only to our decisions, actions and

reality, in other words, to our ontology, then one could argue that Georges is justified in rejecting his responsibility for Majid's. What moral or ethical rules, generated ontologically, will determine his culpability? Will a court of law be able to incriminate Georges? As he makes clear to Majid's son, near the end of the film, that "you'll never give me a bad conscience about your father's sad or wrecked life; I'm not to blame" (*Caché*), the moral code that Georges lives by, as well as the legal principles that govern society, does not incriminate him. But if responsibility precedes our ontology, meaning that our actions and decisions have no bearing on what we are responsible for, then Georges is endlessly responsible for Majid. In the face of Majid, to apply Levinas' words, Georges is "inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one" (1989:84). Georges has an obligation towards Majid that he cannot refuse. The Other that Majid represents, that endless ethical relation that makes Georges responsible for him, makes Majid his neighbour and his brother.

#### 4.2.3 Haneke's Responsibility: Georges (and the Audience's) Wish for Invisibility and Respite from the World

After Georges witnesses Majid's horrific and visceral suicide, a long shot of a sidewalk shows Georges emerging from a cinema, underneath the film poster of *Deux frères* (Two Brothers) (2004):



Figure 15: Georges emerges from the cinema

Georges' decision to go to the cinema after witnessing Majid's suicide recalls, once again, Cavell's diagnosis of the modern spectator not wanting to bear the burdens of the world. In refusing to take responsibility for Majid, Georges has failed the ethical edict of 'thou shalt not kill'. Even though he has 'killed' Majid countless times in his lifespan by usurping Majid's place under the sun, the physical suicide signifies the extent to which Georges has driven the Other to death. Georges' wish for invisibility, his desire to live his life according to his rules and without being responsible for those around him, even after witnessing Majid's suicide, drives him to the cinema, the act of spectatorship providing him, albeit momentarily, with the self-sovereign position he craves. He does not want to face the burden of having witnessed Majid's suicide, at least not yet. Thus, before he goes to the police, before he informs Anne about everything, Georges goes to the cinema. His outing not only reveals his desire to escape from his current predicament, but also for his wish for respite from being complicit in, and responsible for, Majid's life.

My reading of the relationship between Georges and Majid in *Caché* through the lens of Levinas' theory of the Other serves to illustrate the ways in which we are endlessly bound to and responsible for each other. I agree with Kelly Oliver's apprehension, however, of using the language of subject and other to theorise and interpret relations, since the dichotomy itself is "a result of the pathology of oppression" (2001:3).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, I think Levinas' conception of the 'Other' as a placeholder reflecting the endless ethical relations around us is a helpful illustration of not only our relations as spectators, but also the relations of filmmakers. Filmmakers are endlessly responsible for their audience, because, in many ways, Georges represents the spectator that does not want to bear the burdens of the world. If what Levinas says is true, that our subjectivity is formed preontologically and that we are

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<sup>26</sup> Oliver argues that, while to imagine oneself as a subject, you give "the impression that [you] are an individual who possess a sovereign will and...that [you] have agency", while, if another is regarded as other, you deny them the "the sovereignty and agency of subjectivity" (2001:3). This type of language, thus, "enables the dehumanisation inherent in oppression and domination" (Oliver, 2001:3).

endlessly responsible for each other, then I argue that it is problematic that spectators are offered the opportunity of ignoring, even forgetting, their relations and responsibility during the act of spectatorship. After his confrontation with Majid's son, Georges goes back home, takes sleeping pills, closes the curtains, undresses, climbs into bed and pulls the bedspread over his body. The dark bedroom replicates the dark auditorium of a cinema, enabling Georges to go to sleep, forget about the world and lose himself in his dreams (the penultimate scene of a young Majid being taken away being, most probably, Georges final dream in the film). Recalling the post-9/11 cocooning I discussed in Chapter Two, and similar to Georges' escape to the cinema or his bedroom, spectators are also allowed to flee from the world and its responsibilities when they watch a film and, to recall the famous metaphor, "sleep in the bed of the image" (Daney, 1976:262).

Haneke, however, assumes his responsibility as a filmmaker and does not allow his audience to 'sleep in the bed of the image'. Haneke's responsibility to his audience, I argue, is twofold: firstly, he has a responsibility towards those who he is representing in the film and, secondly, he has a responsibility to ensure the audience's response-ability. He fulfils those responsibilities through the form of his film, that is, by drawing from the automatisms of cinema and then reflecting upon them as such, as I argued in Chapter Three. He also addresses topics that deal with ethical and moral questions regarding our place in society and the violence that we inflict upon each other, as opposed to the content on television I described in Chapter Two. In other words, his content echoes the form of his filmmaking. In creating a modernist film that implicates the audience, dealing with scenarios that ask difficult questions regarding our position in the world, yet refusing closure and answers, his responsibility towards his audience is met by refusing audiences their wish for invisibility and their desire to not bear the burdens of the world. He offers them an ethical place in the film. Even though Georges failed in responding to the call of Majid, Haneke is clearly asking

a different response from his audience. Not only does he call on us to take part in the meaning-making process of the film, but he also demands that we take responsibility for the Other whose place in the sun we have usurped.

The question is, however, does a film audience usurp the place of the Other during the act of viewing? If Levinas' philosophy is hinged on the idea of 'thou shalt not kill', how does the act of spectatorship usurp the place of another under the sun? I argue that Levinas' theory can be applied to the act of filmmaking and spectatorship as well. By watching a film, I argue that we *do* usurp the place of the Other under the sun, kill the Other, *if that what we are watching are generated at the cost of real, horrific and violent experiences that provide material for our viewing pleasure*. In this way, Haneke's critique of Spielberg's use of form and the unsuitability thereof in representing the concentration camps in *Schindler's List* carries greater weight when considered in light of Pascal's maxim. Are the experiences of those who were subjected to the gas chambers in real-life not jeopardised when it is deployed in service of a cheap thrill, that is, of giving us the chance to consider whether water or gas will come out of the shower's nozzle?

### **4.3 Response-ability: Bearing Witness and *The White Ribbon***

#### **4.3.1 Encounter with the Other: Opacity as a Precondition for Responsibility**

While Haneke criticises *Downfall* and *Schindler's List* for simplifying the complex histories of Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust for entertainment's sake, I mentioned at the start of this dissertation that he regards Alain Resnais' *Night & Fog* as the only film that deals with the Holocaust responsibly. What makes *Night & Fog* a responsible film? At a certain point in *Night & Fog*, Resnais' voiceover lists the ranking of German officials in the Jewish concentration camps. He ends at the top Commandant, who oversees the routine of the camp, saying that the Commandant claims to know nothing of the camp, but then:

Who does know anything? The reality of these camps, despised by those who built them, and unfathomable to those who endured them – what hope do we have of truly capturing this reality? We can but show you the outer shell, the surface (*Night & Fog*).

This is perhaps why Haneke regards *Night & Fog* to be the only film that deals with concentration camps responsibly. Resnais admits his ignorance and inability to capture the horrors that went on inside the Jewish concentration camps and remains humble in dealing with a subject whose lived experience he does not know. By admitting that he is unable to capture the horrors of the concentration camps proves that he does not know and will never be able to know the lived experience of the Jews in the gas chambers. There resides a truth in such an experience, an unattainable truth, which filmmakers should respect by admitting permanent, unfeigned ignorance. Since he approaches the difficult subject matter with humility and responsibility, I argue that the lived experience of those who truly suffered in the concentration camps or, their place under the sun, are not jeopardised or usurped by Resnais or the audience. Instead, he respects their place under the sun and the experience they were subjected to, without claiming or appropriating it for entertainment's sake.

If Resnais met his responsibility towards the subject matter, how does the audience respond to a film that refuses answers and acknowledges, openly, its inability to represent the Holocaust as a knowable totality? How does it form, influence or, perhaps even, change the audience's position as spectators? In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler argues that a "theory of subject formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge<sup>27</sup> can serve a conception of ethics and, indeed, responsibility" (2005:19). For her, responsibility can only be assumed when one is made aware of the limits inherent to knowing oneself. In terms of spectatorship, an audience can only become responsible when they become aware of the

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<sup>27</sup> It is not that Butler says we cannot know ourselves at all. To be aware of the opacity inherent to one's self is still, after all, to know something about oneself: "To know oneself as limited is still to know something about oneself, even if one's knowing is afflicted by the limitation that one knows" (Butler, 2005:46).

limits of self-knowledge. I can never know myself completely. If the subject, or, as I argue, the audience, is “opaque to itself, not fully translucent and knowable to itself, it is not thereby licenced to do what it wants or to ignore its obligations to others” (Butler, 2005:19-20). Understood through Butler’s formulation, *Night & Fog* is constructed in such a way that the film is opaque to the audience, as opposed to a film that is transparent, explanatory and all-knowing in its dealings with the Holocaust. The film admits its inability to know and represent and, instead, acknowledges the limits of its knowledge about the Holocaust. By being confronted with the opacity of the film, audiences are made aware of their own inability to know the Holocaust. While a film such as *Schindler’s List* attempts to represent the Holocaust as a knowable totality, thereby allowing the audience a privileged vantage point that eluded those who actually were in the concentration camps, *Night & Fog* refuses such a position to its audience.

These moments of opacity about ourselves, or “unknowingness” as Butler refers to, only emerge when we are put in the context of relations that call upon “primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematisation” (2005:20). It is only when an audience is put in relation to something that they do not know that they become aware of their own opacity. The echoes of Levinas’ face-to-face encounter in Butler’s argument is clear if one recalls the preontological sphere in which responsibility for the Other is established, a responsibility that stems “from a time before my freedom – before my (*moi*) beginning, before any present” (1989:84). Since we cannot trace the relations that took place preontologically, our formation as subjects is thus “formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us...[revealing] opacity [to be] built into our formation” (Butler, 2005:20). If opacity is part of what constitutes our subjectivity, then Resnais is correct in stating that he cannot attempt to represent the Holocaust as a knowable totality. Our opacity to ourselves is part of what constitutes us as human beings. Mainstream

films, however, usually attempt to construct narratives that aim to explain the ways in which we are related to each other, extracting meaning and purpose from a reality that is complex and confusing. As I pointed out in Chapter Three, the narratives of Hollywood films are usually constructed along the lines of cause and effect, in which the film answers all the questions and satisfies all the emotions of the audience (McKee, 1997:140). The construction of narratives in order to produce a coherent whole or knowable totality leads, however, to a false sense of unity and knowingness. A narrative that positions the audience as privileged, all-knowing and sagacious, as McKee appeals for, fails to make audiences aware of the opacity that constitute their subjectivity. In other words, if a film depicts a world in which complete self-knowledge is attainable and everything can be known, the audience is not confronted with the limits that are inherent to their subjectivity and that of others. Not being aware of their opacity, audiences are allowed to revel and enjoy a film without being obligated or responsible for it.

If moments of unknowingness arise in relation to the Other, that we become aware of our own opacity when confronted with another we do not know, Butler argues that it is “precisely by virtue of the subject’s opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds” (2005:20). As the film succeeds in conveying the irrecoverability of the Holocaust and the audience becomes opaque to themselves when watching *Night & Fog*, the viewing situation becomes a face-to-face encounter. Since the audience is not allowed to know the Holocaust completely, they are confronted with what they do not know, which means that they are made aware of their responsibility towards the representation of the Holocaust. These moments of unknowingness that arise when the audience watches *Night & Fog*, however, can only occur if the audience recognises them as such. Is that what Haneke means when he calls for audience recognition, to let them recognise the irrecoverability attached to violence and thus become aware of their own

opacity? Certainly, to an extent, but how do we recognise an unknowability? Kelly Oliver asks how it is possible to recognise something that is unfamiliar and disruptive, for, “[i]f it is unfamiliar, how can we perceive it or know it or recognise it?” (2001:2). What she calls for, instead, is to go beyond recognition towards an act of *witnessing*, a process that relies on address and response (2001:2). Before I continue with the opacity of the Other (which I will do with *Amour*), I will make a brief detour in outlining the act of witnessing. I will explain and contextualise Oliver’s theory of witnessing through a reading of *The White Ribbon*, by arguing that, by positioning the audiences as witnesses, Haneke enables audiences to not only recognise that what is shown, but also go beyond recognition in order to secure an ethical position for themselves in the film.

#### **4.3.2 The Audience’s Response-ability: Bearing Witness**

In her book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001), Kelly Oliver recalls the testimony of a woman who witnessed the uprising of Jewish prisoners who set fire to Auschwitz. While the woman remembers seeing four chimneys burn down, historians pointed out there was only one chimney, a mistake that motivated them to disqualify her testimony on the grounds of unreliability. Psychoanalysts, however, countered the historians’ mistrust by arguing that the woman was not testifying to the number of chimneys, but rather to something more profound and important, which is “the seemingly unimaginable occurrence of Jewish resistance at Auschwitz, that is to say, the *historical truth* of Jewish resistance at Auschwitz” (Oliver, 2001:1). Oliver explains that the woman was trying to witness to something that *cannot be perceived*, that is, something *unrecognisable* that goes *beyond comprehension*. Moreover, the woman’s position and identity structured her experience. She was a Jew in Auschwitz, a prisoner in a deadly, anti-Semitic concentration camp and a woman in the mid-twentieth century. She thus occupied a “particular historical position in a

concrete context that constitute[d] her actuality as well as her possibilities” (Oliver, 2001:16). We are therefore compelled to interpret her testimony through the lens of her socio-historical position. Due to her point of view, her witness to the Jewish resistance is undeniably unique and distinct.

For Oliver our lived experience is thus sustained between the tension of our subject position and subjectivity. What is the difference between the two? The woman’s subject position, for example, is her socio-historical position in the culture and context of occupied Poland. In other words, history, circumstance and her relations with the finite world determined her position as subject. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is “experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability that are constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness, which is fundamentally ethical” (Oliver, 2001:17). In other words, the woman’s subjectivity is dependent on her sense of agency and ability to respond to her ethical environment and to others in it. Did she have a sense of agency in Auschwitz? For Oliver, our sense of agency and ability to respond is destroyed by oppression, torture and persecution, which lead to the destruction of our subjectivity (2001:17). The woman’s chance to witness to the horrors she experienced before the historians and psychoanalysts, however, restored her subjectivity. Thus, for Oliver, witnessing forms the basis of, or restores, our subjectivity, since the roots of our subjectivity is both our ability to *be addressed* (address-ability) and our ability *to respond* to the address (response-ability) (2001:7). Echoing Levinas’ theory of responsibility, Oliver draws from psychology and neuroscience to argue that our receptivity to the energies in our environments makes us ethically obligated to each other, since “we *are* by virtue of our environment and by virtue of relationships with other people” (2001:15). Our ethical responsibilities and obligations are thus rooted in our subjectivity, requiring us to “respond to our environment and other people in ways that open up rather than close off the possibility of response” (Oliver, 2001:15). Her understanding of subjectivity resonates with

Butler's theory of subject formation, which, as I mentioned before, and will elaborate on later, is formed in the context of relations that are irrecoverable and opaque to us.

Audiences have different *subject positions*. Every single spectator occupies a specific socio-historical position in a specific culture, which will influence the manner in which they interpret and experience a film. Their *subjectivity*, however, is only constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness. If the audience's address-ability forms part of their subjectivity, then the film has to address the audience in such a way that they have to respond, in other words, make them aware of their response-ability. When we are addressed by something that is opaque to us, we become response-able and, by implication, responsible. Similar to Haneke having his invisibility ruptured by Tom Jones' address, he became aware of his response-ability, that is, aware of his position as spectator and subjectivity, and thus responded to the address: he became aware of his complicity. In this way, Haneke became responsible for the viewing situation, a responsibility that has, eventually, made him the filmmaker he is today. The responsibility intrinsic to subjectivity, for Oliver, is twofold. Firstly, responsibility carries the possibility of response, called response-ability. Secondly, born from the possibility of response, we have an ethical obligation to not only respond to others but also to enable response-ability from them (Oliver, 2001:15). As a filmmaker with subjectivity, Haneke's responsibility calls on him to address his audience by enabling them to become response-able. He has an ethical obligation to respond to his audience and, consequently, enable their response-ability. If the process of witnessing constitutes our subjectivity through our ability to be addressed by and respond to another, then I argue that audiences should, as opposed to passive spectators, be positioned as witnesses to a film, so that, through address and response, they are made aware of their subjectivity as spectators.

### 4.3.3 The Audience as Witness in *The White Ribbon*

How does Haneke reposition his spectators as witnesses? After the opening credits of *The White Ribbon*, over a black screen, a voice narrates:

I don't know if the story I want to tell you is entirely true. Some of it I only know from hearsay. After so many years, a lot of it is still obscure and many questions remain unanswered. But I feel I must talk about the strange events that occurred in our village. They could perhaps clarify certain things that happened in this country (*The White Ribbon*).

Within the first two sentences, the narrator admits the unreliability of his account. He confesses that he will not be able to give a comprehensive report, since he is uncertain about the specificities. Even though the country he refers to, Germany, has a complex and dreadful history, he never explicitly mentions the Second World War or Nazism, leaving the audience to make, if they please, the connection themselves. Nevertheless, the narrator hopes that the story he bore witness to might shed some light on the complexities that characterised Germany in the twentieth century. Fourteen minutes into the film, his identity is revealed as the teacher, proving that he was an eyewitness to most of the occurrences. Even though he experienced most of the incidents first hand, he admits his inability of providing an encompassing account of the strange events that took place in the village. In other words, he does not construct a knowable totality as McKee calls for in his screenwriting bible, in his retelling of the story. Instead, his narrative is punctuated with uncertainties, such as “If I remember correctly...” (*The White Ribbon*). All the scenes and recollections are up for the audience to interpret themselves, since the narrator is not willing to read any situation for or instead of the audience. By admitting his ignorance regarding the strange events that are about to unfold, the narrator addresses the audience by inviting them to *witness* the occurrences that took place in the village of Eichwald.

The strange occurrences that the teacher witnesses to are instances of violence that took place in the village. He narrates various events such as the accident of the doctor, whose horse tripped over a wire spun between two trees, the torture of the baron's son, Sigi, who was found upside down in the sawmill, his trousers pulled down and bleeding from lashes, the burning of the barn and the disfigurement of Karli's eyes, the midwife's child who suffers from Down syndrome. He also narrates the death of the farmhand's wife who fell through the floor of the sawmill and their eldest son, Max, exacting revenge on the baron by destroying his crop. The eldest son's vengeance, however, drives the farmhand to suicide, leaving his eight children to fend for themselves. While the perpetrators of these acts of violence, apart from Max, are never revealed to the audience, the teacher has his suspicions as to who might be culpable. When the steward's wife gives birth to a boy, Ferdinand is unhappy about the baby's gender. Later, the baby gets sick due to a window that was left open. When Ferdinand's sister, Erna, tells the teacher that she dreamt her brother opened the window, she also says she dreamt that something will happen to Karli. After Erna's 'premonition' comes true and Karli is severely attacked, the teacher realises that the children, especially Klara and Martin, might be implicated in the acts of violence that has plagued the village.



**Figure 16: The teacher questions Klara and Martin**

In addition to the violence, the teacher also witnesses to other events that took place in the village that might contextualise the strange occurrences. After Klara and Martin arrive home one evening and their father, the pastor, warns them of their punishment and caning

that will follow the next day, the teacher finds Martin balancing himself treacherously on a wooden beam high above the ground near the river. He orders him down, rebukes his behaviour and asks why Martin would do something so dangerous. Martin answers that he was giving God a chance to kill him and, since God did not do so, “he must be pleased” (*The White Ribbon*). Later in the film, a young boy named Rudi asks his older sister Anna what the word ‘dead’ means. She answers that ‘dead’ refers to when you stop living and that, eventually, everyone will die. Rudi throws his bowl of soup to the ground in frustration, angry at the dismal prospects of mortality. After his mother falls down the sawmill, Kurti curiously approaches her body as it awaits burial, lifting the white cloth that covers her lifeless face. The flirting with, frustration of and curiosity with death has an effect on the youth of the village who, clearly, becomes disillusioned by their parents’ blindness to their hypocrisy and passivity, especially the pastor, the doctor and the baron of the estate. After the pastor arouses Martin’s guilt for his masturbatory behaviour, the next scene depicts the doctor having intercourse with the midwife. At a different stage, Rudi walks in on his father, the doctor, molesting Anna. Max, on the other hand, blames the baron for the death of his mother. When his father fails to do something about it, he takes matters into his own hands by destroying the baron’s cabbages. When the baron’s wife expresses her fear of the villagers, her husband ignores her qualms and, instead, questions her suspected adultery.

Through the teacher’s narration and Haneke’s construction, the audience witnesses the atrocities, oppression and hypocrisy that characterise the village. What does the audience’s position as witnesses entail? Oliver attaches a double meaning to the act of *witnessing*. Witnessing, firstly, entails an *eyewitness* testimony that is based on first-hand experience. The second meaning, which she deems the heart of subjectivity, entails *bearing witness* to something that goes beyond recognition and cannot be seen (2001:16). The teacher that narrates the film witnessed the strange events that occurred in the village and invites the

audience to do the same. Both the teacher and audience are thus witnesses, in both senses of the word, to the events of *The White Ribbon*. The teacher was, firstly, an *eyewitness* to what happened in the village, even if most of it is based on hearsay. Secondly, by relaying his testimony, he is declaring that he *bore witness* to something that goes beyond that which can be seen. Similar to the Jewish woman who bore witness to something that goes beyond her perceptions and recognition, that is, Jewish resistance, the narrator bore witness to something that goes beyond recognition as well. In narrating a story in which he does not have all the answers, yet bore witness to, the teacher is hoping that he might shed some light on the generation that grew up to become the Nazi's. Is this how the seeds of fascism was sown? Will these children become complicit, as adults, in the Holocaust? Being invited by the teacher's narration to be *eyewitnesses* to that which he witnessed, the narrator enables the audience to *bear witness* to these occurrences that might make them consider, for themselves, whether the seeds of fascisms was sown in patriarchal and rigid Protestant German societies in the beginning of the twentieth century (see Haneke in Calhoun, 2009). The beginning of the First World War signalled the first big shift in societies, breaking away from the feudal systems that existed for thousands of years. Yet, Haneke maintains that the film is not solely preoccupied with the rise of German fascism, but rather aims to analyse the origins of evil, radicalism and terrorism in any given country (Haneke in Calhoun, 2009). By witnessing the events of *The White Ribbon*, the audience is given the opportunity to respond to Haneke's investigation of the origins of terror. How does the audience's position as eyewitnesses and bearing witness enable them to respond?

For Oliver, the tension that exists between eyewitness testimony and bearing witness "both positions the subject in finite history and necessitates the infinite response-ability of subjectivity" (2001:16). The audience is not only positioned in terms of the finite history of early twentieth century Germany, but are also situated in an infinite relation with a history

which necessitates, in the end, their response. Since, Haneke argues, most films about the Holocaust get caught up in the history and thereby fail to implicate the audience, Haneke argues that *The White Ribbon* carries a universal significance, suggesting the existence of a link between our behaviour at home and that of the outer world (Haneke in Calhoun, 2009). He wishes to show how forms of oppression can make one believe a liberator who comes along and promises salvation. He draws a similarity with the Pied Piper who comes and saves a village from a rat infestation, is refused payment and thus charms the children away from the village, and Adolf Hitler, who promised salvation to the generation who grew up in an oppressive, feudal system before the First World War and was subjected to harsh and poor conditions thereafter. For Haneke, it is the “war that takes place between people that makes them receptive to such ideologies” (Haneke in Calhoun, 2009). Through the microcosm of Eichwald, Haneke hopes that, through witnessing, the audience will be able to think about the ways in which the seeds of fascism and terrorism are sown. In order to recognise these seeds and the slow violence that steadily and stealthily produces bouts of visible violence, the audience must recognise something that goes beyond recognition.

How does the audience move beyond recognition through witnessing, for example, the experiences of Martin? The audience’s repositioning in *The White Ribbon* as witnesses enables them, I argue, to testify both to something that they can see with their eyes, for example Martin’s punishment and humiliation at the hands of his father, as well as to bear witness to something that they cannot see, which is the inklings of Martin’s gravitation towards fascist ideology. In bearing witness to something that audiences believe through faith, as opposed to the juridical sense of witnessing that of first-hand knowledge (Oliver, 2001:18), I argue that the audience responds to Martin’s story in a way that allows them to take part in the film’s meaning-making process. Martin’s character is opaque to the audience: he challenges God by walking on a wooden beam, we hear his yelps of pain when he is

caned, we do not see him masturbating, yet we see his hands tied to his bed. We never see him commit any of the heinous crimes that plague the village and he never confesses to them. Yet, through witnessing, we attempt to formulate, strain to understand and try to comprehend the effect of Martin's upbringing and how he processes these experiences that might formulate the fascist ideology he will, most probably, support in twenty years' time. As Oliver argues, we *are* by virtue *of* others. Our response-ability to Martin's story, thus, makes us aware of the "ethical and social responsibility to those others who sustain us" (2001:19). We have, in other words, not only become response-able to Martin's experience, but also responsible for what his experience might mean to others and to us today.



Figure 17: Martin being accused by his father

Haneke sustains his audience's subjectivity through the process of witnessing. He thus has a "responsibility to [the audience's] response-ability, to the ability to respond" (Oliver, 2001:19). Oliver explains that we have an obligation to ensure that others are enabled to respond in such a way that "opens up rather than closes off the possibility of response" (2001:19). She draws from Levinas to explain that we are responsible for the other's response-ability. In terms of filmmaking, then, filmmakers are responsible for the audience's response-ability, in other words, for the audience's ability to respond. This

responsibility is, for Oliver, an absolute necessity if we wish to “serve subjectivity, and therefore humanity” (2001:19). A filmmaker’s responsibility towards the audience is thus an imperative and duty to his or her neighbour, the spectator. In *The White Ribbon*, Haneke upholds his responsibility by constructing, not only Martin’s experience, but also the whole story of the village, in such a way that it is open for interpretation, which, consequently, opens the possibility of response from the audience. Devices such as the contradictory and fragmentary nature of the characters’ experiences (most of it off-screen), the black and white cinematography as well as the use of the narrator aims to “create a distance from a false naturalism that suggests we know exactly what happened” (Haneke in Calhoun, 2009). The knowable totality is exchanged for one that is fractured and opaque. We have to keep the possibility of response open. How is the possibility of response kept open? In order to answer the question, I will now return to Butler’s postulation about our opacity in order to, in keeping with Oliver’s witnessing, elucidate how an on-going recognition, or beyond recognition, keeps the Other alive.

#### **4.4. I Will Never Know You: On-Going Recognition in *Amour***

##### **4.4.1 Inflicting Ethical Violence: “I Know You”**

When a film projects a world that is knowable, understandable and explainable, the audience is, consequently, offered a position of sagacity, knowingness and power. They get the opportunity to see a world in which all contradictions and complexities are solved for the sake of a happy and conclusive ending. They are not confronted with the opacity present in themselves, since the world viewed affirms that everything is transparent and explainable. When a film presents such a simplistic and naïve view of the world, in which each cause has an effect and every problem can be solved, the film testifies to a worldview that is false. We are not able to recognise the Other, because such a worldview does not allow for differences,

contradictions, complexities and the opacity that, not only constitutes our humanity, but also binds us together. Butler makes clear that our own opacity occasions our capacity to confer recognition on someone else, an ethics that is “based on our shared, invariable and partial blindness about ourselves” (2005:41). We need to be confronted with opacity in order to become aware of our own opacity. Therefore, if a film acknowledges its own opacity, that is, its inability to present a world as a knowable totality, then the film recognises the audience’s opacity, makes them *aware* of their own opacity, which, consequently, enables them to recognise the film and the Other depicted in it. When it comes to scenes of pain and suffering, how can an audience recognise the horrors of violence if not made aware of the opacity and irrecoverability thereof? When pain and suffering is depicted as a knowable totality, understandable and transparent, or, even, as *entertainment*, we usurp the place of the Other who experienced and suffered such brutality and horror in real-life. Will our recognition, however, ever be enough? Or should the filmmaker ensure that the audience *continues* to recognise the irrecoverability of suffering, thereby keeping their awareness of the Other’s opacity alive?

*Amour* tells the story of Georges and Anne<sup>28</sup> who are two octogenarian, married musicians living in a bourgeoisie apartment in Paris. One morning, Anne suffers a stroke. After her operation fails, she is paralysed on her right side and put in a wheelchair. She makes Georges promise that he will never let her be taken to a hospital or nursing home again. Georges starts to take care of her, but she expresses her wish to die after her attempted suicide is foiled when he returns home. Georges continues to take care of Anne while her

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<sup>28</sup> By now its clear that most of Haneke’s characters are called Georges and Anne (French films) or Georg and Anna (German-speaking films). Evi/Eva and Benny are also recurring names. By naming most of his characters the same, Haneke aims to work “against the individualisation that the naming of fictional characters conventionally aspires to”, thereby inviting “spectators to conceive of these characters as related to one another [...], as representing multiple versions of a particular type, not particular individuals at all” (Lawrence, 2010:75). Similar to the first eight minutes of *The Seventh Continent*, in which the Schröbers are introduced without faces or personality, the names also suggest that his characters simultaneously refer to no one and everyone. For Michael Lawrence, the names are indicative of the characters’ “incarnations or reincarnations rather than distinct fictional human individuals realistically represented in consecutive films” (2010:75).

condition goes from bad to worse. Their daughter, Eva, wants her father to place her in some sort of care, but Georges refuses. As the film progresses, Anne loses most of her bodily functions as well as her ability to speak coherently. Near the end of the film, Georges consoles Anne by telling her a story from his childhood. When he finishes the story and she calms down, he reaches for a pillow and smothers her until she dies. After he buys flowers, cuts the tips off, chooses a dress from Anne's closet and tapes the door shut, he wakes up one morning and sees Anne washing the dishes. Upon her request, he takes his shoes, puts on his coat and follows her out of the apartment.

Similar to the narrator's invitation to the audience in *The White Ribbon*, Haneke forces us to not only watch, but also *witness* the events that lead up to Anne's death (Wijdicks, 2013:25). Anne's stroke is not spectacular, her suffering is not depicted in the closed romantic way that typical Hollywood films do, there are no elucidations about her or Georges' feelings, no emotional music underscoring their experience or any sentimental last words. As Eelco Wijdicks, a professor of neurology, points out, many films<sup>29</sup> that deal with degenerative neurologic diseases either represent the condition poorly or exaggerate a certain aspect thereof. Many would focus on, for example, the desire to engage with the patient and maintain the loving relationship, resulting in a sentimental or melodramatic story that aims to make the disease understandable and thus consumable for the audience. *Amour*, on the other hand, deals with the "human toll on relationships when a love one declines, facing the constant threat of crumbling away until there is no vitality left" (Wijdicks, 2013:25). In keeping Anne's suffering free from sentimentality, Haneke allows the audience to recognise her pain as something that is irrecoverable and impenetrable. Since her suffering is not romanticised, the audience is forced to suspend their expectations for a sealed-off and

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<sup>29</sup> Wijdicks' examples include *Iris* (2001), *Away From Her* (2006), which deals with Alzheimer's disease, and *Legends of the Fall* (1994), *Flawless* (2007) and *Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007), which depict characters that suffer a stroke.

clarifying depiction of suffering. Her degeneration is opaque, making the audience aware of their own opacity and thus enabling their response-ability.

Since a subject is formed when the limits of self-knowledge is acknowledged (Butler, 2005:19), Butler argues that by suspending the demand for self-identity or complete coherence when encountering the Other, we counter a certain ethical violence. Ethical violence, she explains, demands that we “manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require others to do the same” (2005:42). This, once again, recalls Levinas’ concern of usurping the place of the Other for one’s own benefit. By claiming my place under the sun, like Georges in *Caché*, and refusing to acknowledge the mistakes, flaws or contradictions that exist within me, through me or by virtue of me, I inflict ethical violence on the Other. Thus, if we claim to know ourselves fully and present ourselves coherently, we then “fail in some ways that are nevertheless essential to who we are” (Butler, 2005:42). There is a scene in *Amour* in which a nurse combs a bedridden Anne’s hair, narrating her actions as if to an infant: “There you go...You want to look your very best so everybody can admire you. There. You want to look? Hold on.” She holds up a mirror, but Anne, with the little movement and agency she has left, turns her head away. The nurse, however, continues in her childish voice: “Well? Isn’t that beautiful?” (*Amour*). The next day, Georges fires her. She is furious and protests: “Who do you think you are? I’ve been doing this for years. I don’t need you to teach me my job” and adds, “You are a mean old man. I pity you” (*Amour*). When the scene is read through Butler’s formulation of ethical violence, the nurse’s action reveals her maintenance of self-identity, of knowing herself fully and coherently and the ethical violence such confidence inflicts. She knows *who* she is: a nurse with many years of experience. Nobody can tell her how to do her job. Thus, by implication, she claims to know and understand Anne as well. She objectifies Anne and treats her as a simple, disabled patient. She does not, however, respect Anne’s suffering or acknowledge the person, with

experiences, tastes, desires and beliefs, behind the suffering. If she acknowledged Anne's personhood, she would have combed her hair with reverence, respectful of the other she is serving. In other words, it is easier for the nurse to treat Anne like a child if she claims to know and understand Anne, which is, to her, simply a disabled and elderly patient. By protecting her *ipseity*, the nurse objectifies Anne and inflicts ethical violence on her personhood. Georges, however, knows that Anne is a person to whom he is, before all others, responsible for. When he tells the nurse that "I sincerely hope that one day somebody treats you like you treat your patients and that you have no way to defend yourself" (*Amour*), he makes the nurse's arrogance visible. She, however, remains blind to the ethical violence she inflicts through claiming to know herself and Anne fully. Even her interaction with Georges reveals how she pigeonholes him as well, as simply a "mean old man". She does not allow for the possibility that he might be right or that she might have done something wrong. Her arrogance, self-importance and self-assurance lead her to usurp a place that could have been filled with compassion, support and love.



Figure 18: Anne refuses to look into the mirror

#### 4.4.2 The Ethical Stance and Suspending Judgment: “Who Are You?”

After Georges tells Anne a story from his childhood, she remarks that she has never heard the story before, upon which he answers that there are a lot of stories he has never told her. Teasingly, she warns him that he should be careful not to ruin his image during old age through these unheard of stories. When Georges playfully asks her which image she refers to, Anne answers him: “You are a monster sometimes, but you are kind” (*Amour*). The paradox in Anne’s baffling answer reveals, I argue, the opacity she acknowledges in Georges’ character. Her answer also, perhaps, indicates her refusal to pigeonhole Georges, thereby allowing for contradictions in his character. She is thus receptive to the possibility of always learning something new about him. Butler theorises that we should all assume an ethical stance towards one another. The ethical stance consists in asking the question “Who are you?” If we ask the question because we have a desire to recognise another, the desire is under an obligation to “keep itself alive as desire and not to resolve itself” (2005:43). If we ask the question, however, in order to know another fully, in other words, to be able to say ‘Oh, now I know who you are’, we cease to recognise the other (Butler, 2005:43). The question that the ethical stance entails, thus, has to be asked without expecting a full or final answer. Georges and Anne both understand that, even though they have been married for many years, they will never know each other completely. The fact that, right before her death, Georges tells her another story of his childhood that she has not heard before, proves how they keep getting to know each other. In the same vein, Oliver says that phrases such as “I cannot know you”, “I cannot be you” and “I will never master you” allow for relationships to not only continue recognising each other, but also to move beyond domination. Our relationships are sustained by asking who you are and allowing the question to go unanswered. We must never expect a final answer. But, as soon as I claim to know you, declare that I understand you fully, I stop “having a relationship with you and instead have a

relationship with myself, with my own projections onto you. When I think I know you, the relationship is over” (Oliver, 2001:210). In this way, the relationship between Georges and Anne is sustained, even after death, because, for them, there is always one more thing to know and learn of the other.

Georges approaches Anne’s slow deterioration in a similar way. He recognises her pain as unique and as something that he will never understand. Yet, by acknowledging the opacity inherent to her suffering and the inaccessibility of her experience, he is able to respond (response-ability) and thus become responsible for her. In a similar way, the audience becomes response-able to Anne’s suffering due to the opacity and restraint of Haneke’s depiction. Haneke has mentioned his disdain for actors who portray someone suffering or dying with dramatic fury. For Haneke, the effect of such a spectacular representation of violence, suffering or death is twofold. Firstly, such a representation robs individuals, who truly suffered and died in real-life, of their last possession, which is the truth of such an experience. Secondly, it robs spectators of their most precious possession as viewers, namely their imagination. Audiences are “forced into the humiliating perspective of a voyeur at the keyhole who has no choice but to feel what is being felt [...] and think what is being thought” (Haneke, 2010(a):569). Such a representation reduces the irrecoverability of someone’s suffering in real-life for a sentimental, emotional and entertaining version thereof, sealing off the possibility of response. Anne’s slow deterioration, however, is not acted with dramatic fury in order to evoke melodramatic tears from the curious eyes that ogle at her suffering. But does a teary reaction not count as a response? Since the audience is privileged in witnessing Anne’s degeneration by being intimately present, their proximity allows, yet does not guarantee, an ethical response. Susan Sontag criticises photographs of atrocity that aim to move those who see it. She argues that, even though an emotional response to brutality seems sincere, being moved is not necessarily better. The illusionary proximity between spectators

and the cruelty depicted suggests a link between those that suffer and the privileged viewer. Sontag argues, however, that this link is false. The proximity to atrocity, however, usually generates a feeling of sentimentality and makes us sympathetic, causing us to believe that we are not accomplices in that which caused the suffering, but rather that our “sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence<sup>30</sup>” (Sontag, 2003:91-92). While photographs of pain or suffering performed with dramatic fury aim to make us teary eyed and emotional, such a sealed-off form of representation allows us to absolve ourselves of the pain and suffering of those who truly experience pain and suffering. We argue that, since we cried during the film, we have done our part, our ‘tears are our bit’, but in actual fact our emotional driven reactions to such provocative images are “exactly what keeps us at a distance from them” (Aaron, 2007:116-117). In essence, the sealed-off illusion that such spectacular representation provides serves only to satisfy our solipsistic desire for catharsis.

If Anne’s suffering was performed with melodramatic emotion in order to evoke tears, the audience is not taking responsibility for the horrors that old age might entail, but is rather absolved from responsibility. Being moved to tears or sympathy is the audience’s solipsistic way of reassuring themselves that they are able to recognise the horrors of old age, but that is usually all, as “involuntary emotion is the opposite of reflection and implication” (Aaron, 2007:116). The audience is not able to reflect on the suffering they witness, because they are too engrossed in their solipsistic emotions. Crying is a form of catharsis. Haneke, however, does not allow for catharsis. Neither does he allow the audience respite from their complicity and responsibility. Even though the audience might expect *Amour* to serve their desire for catharsis or even shed light on the pain and suffering that old age might bring, in other words,

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<sup>30</sup> Aaron misquotes Sontag in her book by mistaking “impotence” for “importance” (Aaron, 2007:117). Even though this is an error, I find it interesting that Aaron’s (mis-)quotation still makes sense when read in the context of Sontag’s work. If we become teary-eyed when witnessing horrors, not only does our sympathy keep us from doing anything about another’s suffering (impotence), but our tears is a way of reassuring ourselves that we are able to not only recognise suffering, but also to respond to it in our own solipsistic way. Our sympathy, then, also proclaims our arrogance (importance) of thinking we understand and fathom the suffering that we see.

explicate the Other through its depiction, once again, we must not expect an answer that will satisfy. By asking “who are you, Anne?” or “what is suffering like when one has a stroke?”, we learn more by letting the question go unanswered. Similar to Georges’ approach to Anne’s suffering, Haneke refuses the audience *to know* or *to understand* the suffering that Anne is going through. By refusing the audience the satisfaction of a full answer and letting the question remain open and enduring, Haneke enables the Other to live, since “life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it” (Butler, 2005:43). The perishing and deterioration of a loved one exceeds any account a filmmaker can recreate. Anne’s pain and suffering can only be conveyed ethically if Haneke remains reverent to that what he does not know. The audience will then, in turn, be able to respond to her suffering. Her suffering remains opaque to me, I cannot and will never be able to understand the suffering she is going through. Thus, I can respond to, engage with, struggle with and wrestle with the morality that faces, not only Anne and Georges, but also us all.

But how, then, do we respond to Georges smothering of Anne? Haneke gives no explicit explanation for Georges’ decision nor does he pronounce judgment over Georges’ action. Is the onus placed on the audience? How do we judge Georges’ action? For Butler, before we can judge another, we must be in some relation to them, since our relations ground and inform our ethical judgments (2005:45). The audience is already related and ethically bounded to Georges, through the opacity of his character and his decision to smother Anne. Before we condemn his actions, then, we must remember that we are *related* to Georges, regardless whether his actions merit condemnation. Butler says that if we remember that we are related to those who we condemn, we still have the chance to learn and be addressed by them, as well as to be educated by “what their personhood says about the range of human possibility that exists” (2005:45). Can we discover something about Georges’ love and humanity through his decision to kill his wife? Haneke’s suspension of judgment together

with the audience's relation to Georges, allows the audience to be addressed by and then respond to Georges' action. Our response-ability to Georges' action through a suspension of judgment enables our responsibility, because, as Butler says, one of the ways we become responsible for another is when we suspend our judgments, for "[c]ondemnation, denunciation and excoriation work as quick ways to posit an ontological difference between judge and judged, even to purge oneself of the other" (2005:46). If we condemn Georges for smothering Anne without regarding our infinite relation to him, we run the risk of purging and externalising ourselves of our opacity (Butler, 2005:46). The ethical stance that Georges takes towards Anne, our relation to her suffering and Haneke's suspension of judgment all work together to enable the audience to reflect ethically on the pain, suffering and eventual death that takes place in *Amour*. In the context of the film's title, what is love when the one you love wants to die? *Who are you, amour?* In order to address the question, truly respond to the question and strain towards a possible answer, the question is left unanswered, it remains open and, just as Anne leads Georges out of the apartment at the end of the film, lets the other live. Haneke suspends his judgment and, thereby, asks his audience to do the same.



Figure 19: Leaving the apartment at the end of *Amour*

#### 4.5 Conclusion: Harmonisation of Content and Form in *Au hasard Balthazar*

At the start of this chapter, I mentioned Haneke's experience of watching *Hamlet* and a film set in Africa, fascinations which presented a new world through displacement, while *Tom Jones* recognised his presence and made him aware of his complicity. Even though he realised that his position as spectator rendered him into a "helpless victim of the story being told and its teller" (Haneke, 2010(a):567), Haneke admits that he still hungered for cinematic stories. Nevertheless, he was still bothered by the idea that he was being manipulated through these enchanting experiences (2010(a):567). Then, as a university student a few years later, Haneke's saw Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966). The film tells the life story of a donkey, baptised Balthazar, who is adopted by a French family. He grows up with Marie, the daughter in the family, but is separated from her after a few years. Balthazar goes from owner to owner, most of who treat him cruelly and exploit him, while Marie likewise suffers at the hands of some of Balthazar's various owners. The film ends when Balthazar is shot whilst carrying a load for smugglers as they attempt to cross a border. He dies the next morning. While spectators are usually "aligned with an on-screen suffering character who tells us what to react and to feel" (Aaron, 2007:115), Haneke points out that Balthazar neither invites identification nor prescribes the audience with emotions. Instead, Balthazar is a "projection screen, a blank sheet of paper, whose sole task is to be filled with the viewers' thoughts and feelings" (2010(a):568). While actors peddle their "ability to exteriorise emotion", Balthazar does not pretend to suffer or grieve when he is exploited (Haneke, 2010(a):569). His death at the end of the film, for example, is not spectacular or loaded with sentimentality. Balthazar's expression remains motionless, even though blood oozes from his bullet's wound. After a herd of sheepdogs bark and sheep encircle him, their bells ringing, Balthazar is revealed on the ground, breathing his last. *Au hasard Balthazar* stands in contrast to Cavell's critique of film allowing us to view the world unseen and relieving us of its burdens. Rather, the film

succeeds at implicating the audience, as the audience is invited to bear witness to Balthazar's life and thus enabled to respond.

Apart from the donkey's ability to embody the automatism of real-life through its inability to act and pretend, what about *Au hasard Balthazar* satisfied Haneke's misgivings regarding film's power to manipulate? Haneke cites Robert Bresson's *Notes sur le cinématographe* (1975) in which the filmmaker wrote: "Do not think of your film beyond the means that you have chosen for yourself" (2010(a):573).<sup>31</sup> Haneke applies Bresson's adage in today's media saturated society, a culture in which the form determines the content (as I discussed in Chapter Two), to mean that a film's form can never determine its content. Haneke argues that, when one watches *Au hasard Balthazar*, it is impossible to tell whether the means, or form, determined the content or vice versa. For Haneke, the unity of content and form makes everything dissolve into pure relationality, since it leaves "no room for ideology or interpretation of the world, commentary or consolation" (2010(a):573). Instead, the audience is given the chance to relate to the film, respond to the film and draw their own conclusions. While audiences are usually "luxuriously accommodated within the lies" by films and media in which form is given precedent over content, *Au hasard Balthazar* opens the hearts and minds of the spectators through a language which captures "the traces of life" (Haneke, 2010(a):573). By harmonising the film's content and form, I argue that Bresson imbues *Au hasard Balthazar* with the same opacity that constitutes our subjectivity, since his film's form does not allow for a coherent and all-knowing perspective.

Opacity is thus an important precondition for responsibility, an effect that is achieved only through the filmmaker's techniques of reduction and omission. In *Caché*, *The White Ribbon* and *Amour* Haneke omits critical information. We do not know who sent the tapes in *Caché* and are neither consoled with an answer to the First World's implication in the Third

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<sup>31</sup> "Ne pense pas à ton film en dehors des moyens que tu t'es fait" (Bresson, 1975).

World's poverty. We are left to connect the dots between fascism and the children's upbringing in *The White Ribbon* ourselves. We are not given the privilege of leaving the theatre after *Amour* with a sense of closure, consolation or reassurance, but instead are forced to respond to and confront the reality of old age and the true meaning of love. In other words, "[r]eduction and omission become the magic keys to activating the viewer", a technique which, for Haneke, takes the spectator seriously (Haneke, 2010(a):573). If it is Haneke's responsibility to address the audience in such a way that they become aware of their addressability and response-ability, then reduction and omission of that what cannot be known, that is, the Other's experience, enables Haneke to address the audience responsibly. As soon as I 'know who you are', that is, as soon as I understand and fathom the other (or the film itself, or its protagonists, or its unbroken reality), then I am no longer addressed by the film. The film ceases to impinge upon me, ceases to require a response from me and fails to keep my response-ability alive. The ethical power of recognition retains its power only if we consider it to be unsatisfiable (Butler, 2005:43). If a film, and by implication, life, can only be understood as precisely *that which exceeds* any account we can give of it, then, I argue, the filmmaker has an obligation to admit that his or her account will break down at a certain point. For only when a filmmaker constructs a film that is opaque, will a film continue to address me and, by implication, require a response.

What are the 'magical keys' that should be omitted in order to capture that which exceeds representation? Haneke identifies five aspects that Bresson omitted from *Au hasard Balthazar* (2010(a):573-574), omissions which I argue Haneke strives for in his own films. Firstly, the actors' persuasive gestures should be omitted, since it invites and prescribes the audience with emotions. As I mentioned before, Anne does not suffer with theatrical passion in *Amour*, but rather imbues her performance with restraint. Secondly, what should be omitted are any psychological or sociological explanations that might aim to explain and thus simplify

the complex ways in which we relate to one another. There are no psychological explanations to buffer the audience's reading of Georges and Anne, but rather only the fragments chronicling Anne's deterioration. For Haneke, it is rather these experiences that should enjoy our attention, not a psychological explanation thereof. Thirdly, Bresson omits the representation of the world as a knowable totality or any kind of wholeness in *Au hasard Balthazar*, which includes the representation of the body. As *Amour* progresses, Anne's body is reduced in representation, from its entirety to limbs and torso, sectionalised, conveying the breakdown of the body and the loss of identity. Additionally, the layout of their apartment is also obscure, until it is revealed at the very end of the film. Fourthly, what should be omitted is the unusual, for it will "defraud the misery of everyday existence of its dignity" (Haneke, 2010(a):574). Banal activities such as Georges feeding and washing a bedridden Anne, as well as the exercises he does with her, captures the tedious routines that fill the days of those living with a person with a neurological illness. Finally, what should be omitted, is "happiness, because its depiction would desecrate suffering and pain" (Haneke, 2010(a):574). The absence of happiness, or sentimental closure in *Amour*, allows the otherness of Anne's suffering to continue in the spectators minds, seeing that no consolation is provided to reassure them as they leave the theatre.

These five omissions or retractions, according to Haneke, respect the audience's capacity for perception and their imagination, which, as I have argued, enable their responsibility. As Butler says, one can only take responsibility for oneself when one avows "the limits of any self-understanding" and thereby "establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject [or film] but as the predicament of the human community" (2005:83). We recognise the Other's humanity when we admit that we cannot, and never will, know another or ourselves completely. If we claim that we do, we usurp the place of the Other under the sun, kill the Other, especially when we watch films that are generated at the cost of real,

horrific and violent experiences that provide material for our viewing pleasure. The filmmaker must ensure that audiences recognise the violence through the process of witnessing, an ongoing process that is kept alive by the adage of 'I can never know you fully'. When filmmakers adhere to Bresson's statement, that a film must never exceed its means, and a harmonisation of form and content is achieved, I argue that the audience has the best chance of securing an ethical place for themselves in the film. With their minds suddenly opened, the audience is able to respond responsibly and let the Other live, for it restates the place of the Other under the sun and places greater value on the Other's life than my desire for sagacity or entertainment.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

When we go to the cinema, stare at the television, and watch videos on the Internet or scroll on our smartphones, we are, like the Schröbers in *The Seventh Continent*, present to a world that is not present to us (Cavell, 1979:23). We get to see a world to which we are invisible. Not only are we displaced from the world that we are viewing, but, also, our displacement feels and seems natural (Cavell, 1979:41). Furthermore, like Benny's movies and videogames in *Benny's Video*, our screens are saturated with violence, enabling us to watch scenes of atrocity, murder, pain and suffering without being held accountable for doing so. Television, the Internet and smartphones are massive tools of decontextualisation, an instantaneous flow of information in which violence becomes interchangeable and domesticated in its image (Doane, 1990:225). A simple click of a button or a further scroll downward will erase the brutality and horror that filled the four corners of the screen moments ago. Similar to the murdered characters that become part of the news bulletin in *71 Fragments*, we watch our neighbours, those who we are responsible for, suffer violence on an impersonal image system. Those who produce these images have a responsibility, as Haneke says, to make these images of violence and horror perceptible again that would enable the viewer's critical engagement (2000:172). Haneke's films, thus, serve as a response to the dominant forms of media, with the aim not only to represent violence in ways that are ethical and respectful towards those who truly suffered, but also to ensure that audiences are not manipulated and thereby enabled to take part in the meaning-making process.

Do we go to the cinema, like Georges in *Caché*, in order to escape our responsibilities to each other? Do we seek refuge and reassurance in the cinema? Like the swimming pool sequence in *Code Unknown*, or the first thirty minutes in *Funny Games*, we want to enjoy

films contained by and restricted to genre. We want to be reassured: children will always be caught before they fall from a building. Cinematic automatisms that are simply employed as a means to an end make audiences forget about the world and allow them to lose themselves in the thrilling suspense. Reality does not, unfortunately, adhere to the rules of genre or the conventions of narrative: intruders like Paul and Peter in *Funny Games* can murder a whole family. When we are confronted with a difficult situation, like Anne's search for Benny in *Time of the Wolf*, there will be no music to accompany the mood. The manner in which classical Hollywood cinema and genre, however, allow spectators to assume a position of sagacity that exceeds that of the diegetic characters, traditional forms of editing guide and manipulate audiences and music aestheticise a film's obscene content, all contribute, aggravate and meet the spectator's desire not to bear the burdens of the world. We wish for respite from our complicity in the world (Cavell, 1979:40). Yet, is this not, also, a wish for self-assertion? Do we use films to assert ourselves, to incite, fuel and satisfy our desires, like Erika in *The Piano Teacher*, or our atavistic thirst for destruction, like the soldiers in *Jarhead*? If we wish to assert ourselves at the expense of "any consideration of the world, of consequence, and, indeed, of others", Butler argues that we feed a "'moral narcissism' whose pleasure resides in its ability to transcend the concrete world that conditions its actions" (Butler, 2005:105). Do audiences not transcend the world when they watch a film in which they are elevated above the characters, empowered to view the world as all-knowing and sagacious, yet invisible, spectators? The manner in which Haneke ruptures the "hermetically sealed-off illusion" (2000: 172) provided by escapist and entertainment cinema, however, is by changing the way in which his films are related to their automatisms. While traditional film simply uses automatisms as a means to an end, the modernist filmmaker questions traditional automatisms by reflecting upon them (Trahair, 2013:4). Thus, by reflecting on the use of genre, editing, long takes, music and sound, Haneke ruptures the audience's wish for

invisibility, reassurance and easy answers. Instead, he implicates the audience and provides them with an ethical place in the film.

As Pascal says, as soon as we claim our place under the sun, we automatically usurp the place of another (1958:84). We therefore have a responsibility to the Other, a responsibility that precedes our ontology. Applied to the act of spectatorship, I argue that we usurp the place of those who truly suffered when we watch films that are generated at the cost of real, horrific and violent experiences for entertainment's sake. If we are, as Dostoevsky writes, responsible for everyone before everyone, then filmmakers are, firstly, guilty before all:

There is only one salvation for you: take yourself up, and make yourself responsible for all the sins of men. For indeed it is so, my friend, and the moment you make yourself sincerely responsible for everything and everyone, you will see at once that it is really so, that it is you who are guilty on behalf of all and for all (Dostoevsky, 2004:320).

If filmmakers 'take themselves up' and make themselves responsible for their audience, they can enable audiences to become responsible as well. No longer will audiences be able to take refuge in the cinema, be invisible to the world that they are viewing and free from the burdens of the world. Instead, they become responsible for themselves and their neighbour. Thus, Haneke's responsibility as filmmaker is twofold: firstly, he has a responsibility towards those individuals and experiences that he is representing in the film and, secondly, he has a responsibility towards his audience. He fulfils his responsibilities by approaching both his content and form in responsible ways. The content or narratives of his films ask ethical and moral questions regarding our relations with others in society, as well as the violence we consume via the media and inflict upon each other. The form, on the other hand, draws from the automatism of cinema and then reflects upon them. The two

approaches thus incite audiences to reflect on the film. Butler explains that one can only become reflexive when incited by another to do so, explaining that “one person’s discourse leads another into self-reflection” (2005:125). Haneke thus achieves his audience’s self-reflexivity through the film’s discourse, as Haneke’s address arrives as “an incitement, a form of seduction, an imposition or demand from outside to which [we] yield” (Butler, 2005:125). The content and form both reflect, in separate and specific ways, Haneke’s intention of taking responsibility for his audience.

Since the content and form echo Haneke’s responsible approach to filmmaking, the harmonisation thereof ensures that he neither imposes his opinion or interpretation of a given subject, nor does he offer commentary or consolation to the audience (Haneke, (2010(a):573). Instead, he asks what a given subject or question might mean to them. Similar to the narrator in *The White Ribbon*, we are not sagacious. Even though we might believe that we are wholly perspicacious beings (Butler, 2005:102), we do not have the ability to understand and explain everything quickly, accurately and in its totality. Like Georges in *Amour*, we can never know the Other completely (Butler, 2005:43), just as moments of unknowingness about ourselves only arise in relation to others: opacity is a part of who we are (2005:20). Opacity is therefore a precondition for responsibility. We can only become responsible for another when we are made aware of the opacity intrinsic to ourselves. Haneke’s films are constructed as an opacity that does not explain, elucidate or interpret for us, but rather question, probe and provoke us. He thus invites us to witness the film. The result of the process of witnessing, in being addressed by Haneke (address-ability) and responding to his address (response-ability) is the formation of the audience’s subjectivity (Oliver, 2001:7). Even though every single spectator occupies a different subject position, that is, a specific socio-historical position that influences and determines the manner in which they interpret a film, their subjectivity can only be constituted when they encounter otherness, an encounter with another that questions

their place under the sun. When we are addressed by something that is opaque to us, we become response-able and, by implication, responsible. Audiences thus become accountable for the viewing experience, for it is the formation of our subjectivity and opacity that influence the ways in which we “conceive of our relationships and responsibilities to others, especially others whom we perceive as different from ourselves” (Oliver, 2001:19). Thus, if a filmmaker addresses the audience through the film’s opacity, that is, presents a world that rejects a knowable totality, then the film recognises the audience’s opacity, makes them *aware* of their own opacity, which, consequently, enables them to move beyond recognition of the film and the Other depicted in it. Audiences can now respond in a way that is ethical and responsible.

So when we watch a film that attempts to humanise Hitler through melodramatic techniques, like *Downfall*, we are presented with a representation that aims to elucidate, explain and contain him. When we are grippingly waiting to see whether water or gas will come out of the showerhead in *Schindler’s List*, we are spared the realities of the gas chambers. We erroneously believe that we get to *know* the dictator and the gas chambers through the representation. But this is not ethical. Butler calls on us to admit that ethics, our responsibility towards the Other, requires that we “risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness” (Butler, 2005:136). We risk ourselves when we are confronted with a Hitler that eludes containment, explication and clarification; we risk ourselves when we are confronted with our inability to enter the gas chambers, as in *Night and Fog*. In risking ourselves, we are confronted with our inability to know Hitler or the gas chambers in its totality. We, therefore, have to ask, again, *who are you, Hitler; who are you, gas chambers*. And continue to do so. For those who truly suffered continue to live only if we continue to ask. If we are willing to undergo such an ordeal, to be confronted with the opacity of the Other, to “become undone in relation to others”, we are provided with the chance of

becoming human (Butler, 2005:136), and, as I would add, to bear the burdens of the world. I come undone when I watch a film by Michael Haneke, a position which gives me the chance “to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient ‘I’ as a kind of possession” (Butler, 2005:136). If audiences are addressed by a responsible filmmaker, claimed and bound by a film that questions their place under the sun, moved and prompted to respond and thereby relinquish their invisibility, audiences will assume responsibility for the Other. As Father Zosima says in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the moment we admit we are responsible for everything and everyone, we realise that we are guilty on behalf of and for all. We are guilty for desiring refuge from the world in the cinema, for being entertained at the cost of those who truly suffered, for wanting respite from our responsibility. Thus, in our media saturated society, filmmakers have the opportunity to make spectators human again, to remind them that they are relational beings and that they are responsible for each other. If cinema has, so far, allowed me to witness a world that I am not present to, enabled me to see things I would not normally be able to see and offered me respite from my complicity, then responsible filmmaking will address and rupture my invisibility, vacate my self-sufficiency, make me response-able and, in turn, offer me the privilege of sharing the burdens of my neighbour. For only when filmmakers uphold their responsibility, will an audience be able to respond and secure an ethical place for themselves in return.

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