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**The Children Are Always Watching: Violence, Distressed Children, and
Signs of Hope in the Cinema of Michael Haneke**

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Abstract

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This thesis is an analysis of director Michael Haneke's theatrically-released films. Using a neoformalist approach, it is a dissection of how the director uniquely employs violence and child and youth characters in his films to critique society while looking for potential signs of hope. I argue that Haneke is a successor to those filmmakers who have taken violence to a new extreme in the cinema. However, Haneke has created a signature form of depicting violence in his films. I also argue that although Haneke typically places child characters in peril, a narrative facet that perhaps turns away some viewers, their placement in such scenarios serves to reflect his consistent view of a crumbling, insensitive society. Despite these representations of violence and children in peril, Haneke still finds places to infuse glimmers of hope in his narratives.

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Introduction

In a 2005 *Bright Lights Film Journal* interview with Michael Haneke, he had this to say about his craft:

Commitment is not a service, it is not something one can choose to have. One either is engaged or is not. And if filmmakers are not committed, I don't think they should be reproached. It's simply a different way of dealing with the world, to approach their art. I think what is essential to film so that it is taken seriously is that it represent not only social concerns, but also debate its very existence: the medium itself, just as is the case with literature and every other serious art form. The question is, is film merely entertainment, or is it more? If it is art, it has to be more. Art can be entertaining. *The Passion of St. Matthew*¹ is entertaining, it is more than diversion, it is concentration, focuses your thoughts...

Interviewer: Do you think cinema can change the world?

No, but it can make it a less sad place than it already is. (Badt, N.p.)

Haneke states his social expectations for cinema and alludes to his fascination with the medium and its possibilities. This work will explore aspects of his filmmaking.

Robert Von Dassanowsky writes in his survey of Austrian cinema history that Haneke's "work has stimulated international cinema discourse on the level not seen since directors of the French New Wave or of New German Cinema" (2005, p. 253). Haneke has made ten theatrically-released feature films since 1989, and his signature--powerfully stark aesthetics--enhance his thematic explorations of society. Needless to say, based on the dark content of his work, Haneke appears to maintain a bleak outlook on society, class relations, and media proliferation. His films examine these themes through the

¹ Haneke refers to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964).

narratives while keeping overtly political implication in the background and typically raising more questions than answers for the audience. Thus, the main research question for this thesis is: Can the films of Michael Haneke be read as strong critiques of society while retaining expressions of hope in society? Other scholars have not yet discussed this question.

Haneke as Filmmaker

Haneke was born in Munich, Germany, on March 23, 1942, at the height of the Nazi stronghold. His father, Fritz Haneke, was a theatre director and actor as was his mother, actress Beatrix von Degenschild. After schooling and a bourgeois upbringing, Haneke attended the University of Vienna and studied psychology, philosophy, and theater. Upon graduation, he worked as a film critic before employment as editor and screenwriter for a small German television station, Südwestfunk. While maintaining a steady stream of theater directing efforts, he debuted as director of a television film in 1974 with *After Liverpool* (Dassanowsky 2005, p. 253; "Michael Haneke," N.p.).

He remained a steady producer of television films for fifteen years until his theatrical film debut *Der siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent* in 1989. The film is a bleak narrative about a modern middle-class family that has become slave to routine. The mother, father, and daughter collectively take their lives after methodically destroying all of their material possessions with the same precision once utilized in their daily tasks. Haneke followed this notable debut with *Benny's Video* in 1992, the story of a young teenage boy obsessed with popular media. Presumably without premeditation, Benny

invites a young woman into his home and murders her with an industrial hog slaughter tool, the entire action captured with his video camera. 1994 saw the release of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls/71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, a fragmented narrative with events revolving around a civilian shooting in an Austrian bank. All three of these films played at the Cannes Film Festival in their respective years of release and loosely form the “glaciation trilogy,” Haneke’s three most focused narratives about alienation from society due to the proliferation of media, over-reliance on capitalist ideology, the disintegration of the family unit, and the decrease in common humanity.

Funny Games followed in 1997, a thriller involving two young men terrorizing a bourgeois family in their vacation home. The film’s dark twist occurs when one of the terrorists acknowledges the audience by facing the camera and speaking towards it and eventually gaining control of the narrative by revising an undesired event with a remote control. In 2000, *Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages/Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys* was released. A fragmented narrative similar to *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, *Code Unknown* tells of cultural relations and miscommunications among modern French citizens. This film was Haneke’s first film not shot in his native German language.

La pianiste/The Piano Teacher, released in 2001, is Haneke’s first theatrical film adapted from a novel, *Die Klavierspielerin*, by Elfriede Jelinek. The film is the story of Erika, a Viennese piano instructor, whose sadomasochistic desires surface when a young student begins to court her. 2003’s *Le temps du loup/Time of the Wolf* is a post-

apocalyptic tale of citizens banding together in a municipal train station after the collapse of societal structure. In 2005's *Caché*, a literary critic receives a series of mysterious videotapes featuring distant, still footage of his surroundings. These lead him to confront a man with whom he shared a home during boyhood and the guilt related to their separation. The film earned Haneke the award for Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival.

In 2007, Haneke made his English-language debut with *Funny Games US*, a shot for shot remake of the film he made ten years earlier, only this time featuring an American family vacationing in New England. Finally, in 2009's *Das weiße Band - Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte/The White Ribbon*, the citizens of a small German village experience a series of callous and violent acts. The local schoolteacher investigates and suspects that a group of children is responsible. The film won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for the U.S. Academy Awards for Best Foreign-language Film and Cinematography.

Due to his consistent attendance with his films at Cannes Film Festival, Haneke has reached an international following and critical acclaim, no doubt bolstered by the U.S. release of a boxed set of his films from Kino. However, the films remain under the supervision of smaller, niche releasing companies and usually play in smaller, more specialized or arthouse theaters. Moreover, his films do not net substantial profits from ticket sales. For example, even with the presence of popular actors Naomi Watts and Tim Roth, *Funny Games US* earned less than \$1.5 million during its domestic release

(Boxofficemojo.com).² Regardless of the financial success of his films, at sixty-nine years of age, Haneke has firmly established a reputation as one of modern cinema's most daring provocateurs.

As Von Dassanowsky suggests, Haneke is a successor to the filmmakers of the French New Wave and New German Cinema, such as Robert Bresson [*Mouchette* (1967), *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966)],³ Volker Schlöndorff [*Der Fangschuß* (1976), *Die Blechtrommel* (1979)], and Wim Wenders [*The American Friend* (1976), *Paris, Texas* (1984)]. Haneke's filmic aesthetics most closely resemble those of Wenders; both filmmakers effectively use silence, deliberate pacing, and reserved characterizations in their work.

To indicate that watching Haneke's films is a generally unpleasant experience may be an understatement for some, and he is certainly aware of this reaction. In an interview with Willy Riemer, Haneke recounted about critical and commercial reactions to his work:

My films are not really targeted for some new kind of audience, for if I had spectators who already understood what I'm trying to do in my films, then I wouldn't have to make this kind of film to begin with. One could say that my films challenge the dominant cinema, the mainstream film that promises entertainment, but actually delivers escapism and distraction. Entertainment, however, can and should be more than that. The spectators that I have in mind for my films, therefore, are the willing consumers of movies that operate with an aesthetics of distraction (Reimer 2000, p. 160).

² Box Office Mojo also reflects a relatively poor foreign gross at just over \$6.5 million.

³ Haneke has expressed specific interest in this film; he published an essay on *Au Hasard Balthazar* entitled "Terror and Utopia of Form" (Haneke in Grundmann *Companion* 2010, p. 565).

The “aesthetics of distraction” to which Haneke refers is key to understanding how his films operate. He intends, as he states, to have his films play for audiences that are expecting a traditional or classical narrative structure, either tragic with rising action and denouement or three-act with a satisfying conclusion. Generally, Haneke’s films do not employ these aesthetics. In fact, some films, like *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* and *Code Unknown*, feature black “spacers,” about a second of black frames, to separate scenes and keep the narrative in fragmented form. Conclusions are typically vague and offer no absolute resolution for the characters. None of Haneke’s films feature non-diegetic music despite a relatively common presence of diegetic music in *The Piano Teacher* and *The White Ribbon*.

Haneke regularly uses recurring character names, employing variations of Anne, George, Eva, and Ben. The “Anne” and “George” personas are adults or parental figures while “Eva” and “Ben” are usually younger. These variations cross cultures as well. Take, for example, the Anne persona appearing as Anna (*The Seventh Continent*, *Funny Games*) for German-language films; Anne (*Caché*, *Time of the Wolf*) for French-language films; and Ann for an English-language film (*Funny Games US*). His actors have variable but similar physical attributes as well: *The Seventh Continent*’s Birgit Doll bears resemblance to *Code Unknown*’s Juliette Binoche, *Funny Games*’s Susanne Lothar to *The Piano Teacher*’s Isabelle Huppert, and so on. These trope variations are the construct of Haneke’s common society, what a loyal fan base might refer to as “Haneke-verse.” Taking a cue from Michel Chion’s analysis of David Lynch, the “Haneke Kit” includes the following items that are easily identifiable: generic characters; lack of non-diegetic

music; stark white or red title fonts over black frames; symmetry in composition; long takes; televisions or radios playing news; attention to bourgeoisie, refugees, and animals (Chion 1995, p. 151). It is important to note that Haneke had established these tropes from his first film and they remain intact in his latest. Rather than developing his aesthetic and style over a period of time, all of the films are the product of a singular voice, perhaps because he had been working in theater and television for quite some time before moving into cinema.

In interviews, a common response from Haneke, when presented with an idea about one of his films, is “that is your interpretation.” I would suggest that necessary supplements for the full effect of Haneke’s films are the readings of his notes and interviews in which Haneke is constantly reminding the viewer that the construction of the narrative is only in place so that the viewer may interpret at will. Moreover, he provides no definite explanation or solution for conflict, one of his most common narrative elements.

Having much experience in theater, Haneke seems to be influenced by Brecht and the notion of Epic Theater. Tropes like the generic character names, non-descript settings, and lack of music keep the viewer aware of the film’s constructed nature. My analysis acknowledges that this Brechtian influence exists, but specific examples of this and their contribution to his aesthetics are not of concern to me in this project.

Haneke has been noted for his use of violence in his films, and, indeed, it is unlike violence common in modern cinema--usually marked by a liberal use of blood and dramatic deaths from gunshots and other weapons. In Haneke’s films, the presence of

violence significantly advances the narrative, as in *Funny Games* and *Caché*, and is sometimes used to chilling effect in off-screen space or the use of audio. Violence exists on a peripheral level in many films as well: the Franco-Algerian War, World War I, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict all have been referenced in Haneke's oeuvre (in *Caché* and *The White Ribbon*.)

Of strong concern in Haneke's films are children and youth. Children are typically confronted with adversity or experience violence. Yet, despite the negativity and pessimism in Haneke's work, some youthful characters retain a sense of integrity and embody a hope for the future, providing the antithesis of the director's overarching proposition that society is sinking and the future is unpromising. Take, for example, young Ben in *Time of the Wolf*. The climax of the film features his character attempting to throw himself into a raging bonfire after he hears a fable about a group of selfless individuals whose action saves a nearby village. Ben wants the same salvation for his group of refugees. His sister Eva embodies a similar efficaciousness when shielding her brother's eyes from violence. In *The White Ribbon*, young Gustav offers his strict father a healthy young bird when the latter's prized pet falls victim to callous human behavior. Why are children so confronted by adversity in the narratives? Why do Haneke's films show such a strong connection to children when offering signs of hope? It is on this contradiction around Haneke's children that I wish to focus my attention.

Scholars on Haneke's Films

Published literature on Haneke generally falls into two categories: the use of narrative and image as it affects the spectator and the presence of political subtexts. The first category includes the majority of authors who are mentioned in this thesis. Catherine Wheatley (2009) finds much to analyze about spectatorship in her *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*. Wheatley is concerned with Haneke's use and revision of modern aesthetics, with much detail given to *Funny Games* and its use of onscreen and off-screen space. This is important because the film explicitly confronts the viewer about his/her moral stance when viewing. In one scene, the terrorist Paul turns and addresses the camera, asking the audience to ponder whether or not the victims will survive until the end. Wheatley addresses how the viewer can potentially negotiate the enjoyment of the film while maintaining a sense of how generic films can enrapture viewers into loathing the violent perpetrators and wishing death for the villains. Tarja Laine (2010) continues this analysis with her essay "Haneke's 'Funny' Games with the Audience," and Peter Brunette (2010) pinpoints scene-by-scene elements to argue a similar claim for viewer responsibility in his *Michael Haneke*. Laine offers a wonderful metaphor:

Haneke's film is a cinematic version of the philosophical riddle of a tree falling in a forest, leading not only to a heightened sense of being an accomplice on the part of the audience but also to asking questions regarding the audience's responsibility, the obligation to think about what it means to look at violent imagery and the pain of others and the capacity to understand the absurdity, randomness, and brutality that the violent images actually show (p. 59).

Fatima Naqvi and Christopher Kone (2010) focus on the spectator's viewing of sadomasochism and violence. Thomas Y. Levin (2010) considers similar ideas while

John David Rhodes (2010) addresses contributions of the visual. Long takes are definitely a Haneke trope and their presence permeates *Code Unknown* on which Rhodes focuses.

On part of the discussion of Haneke's themes and spectator effect is the place of children in his works. In "Games Haneke Plays," Brigitte Peucker (2010) addresses child abuse in Haneke's work, suggesting sources for it in *Peeping Tom* (1960):

Peeping Tom looms large. Powell's film is more than a gloss on Haneke's films, serving as a possible source both for their mini-narratives of child abuse and for a modernist fascination with self-reflexivity and form...the narrative of Powell's film is notable for its realist impulse to see and record the 'true expression,' as well as for the sadistic filmmaker whose films stage real violence. Does it also serve to model the masochistic child who resides in that director and who equates punishment with love, as in *Peeping Tom*?...Perhaps the dynamic most central to Haneke's film work lies in the simultaneous 'acting out' of his 'mastery' over 'puppets' and the inclusion of scenarios of abuse and pain in which a vulnerable childhood self is figured as puppet, too (p. 140).

Eugenie Brinkema (2010) offers a counterpoint to the "puppet master" thesis with her "How to Do Things with Violences":

Benny's Video, most of all among Haneke's work, tempts criticism into making an argument based on an Other-Same relation that pits some form of reality against some form of appearance/spectacle--this is Haneke's explicit auteurist aim, in his oft-stated call to shock the viewer into a recognition of their complicity in the contemporary media environment...But this is the last lie, the final violence, of *Benny's Video*. For if criticism succumbs to this lure and produces a reading that preserves...the proper, originary, or necessary distinction of appearance from the real, then the film theorist, even as she imagines producing a reading that calls for ethical responsibility in the face of mediation's numbing, occludes the force that subtends representation (p. 365).

Brinkema clearly takes issue with scholars that situate culpability upon outlets that represent violence, or any deviance for that matter, as banal.

This thesis is not primarily concerned with spectatorship and audience responsibility but with Haneke's aesthetics, specifically when portraying violence: how it is staged, its explicitness in representation or lack thereof, and how these aesthetics more so than his peers' operate more effectively to convey the significance of violence. As well, this thesis is more concerned as a consequence with how children are presented in the narrative and how this representation reflects societal upheaval. What is Haneke saying about how children are instilled with good or bad values? How and why do children experience this violence and abuse that Peucker suggests Haneke employs like a "puppet master"?

A second category of authors looks closely at political presence in Haneke's oeuvre, and they include Oliver C. Speck (2010), Christopher Sharrett ("Haneke" 2010), and Rosalind Galt (2010). Speck, in his *Funny Frames: The Filmic Concepts of Michael Haneke*, notes that an acknowledgement of global politics as they pertain to the time periods of the respective films is essential to illuminating Haneke's work. Considering the handling of refugees in *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* and *Code Unknown*, he writes:

It is in the treatment of violence that Haneke's films show clear awareness of the politics of Nazi Germany, of which Haneke's own native Austria was a part. Indeed, looking at Haneke's oeuvre, it becomes clear that it does not escape him that the nation that saw itself under the gaze of later generations is also the nation that trained its gaze not to see an enemy but a purely logistical problem (p. 48).

This thesis does not explicitly focus on political subtexts in Haneke's work. It is impossible, however, to analyze the films without noticing their presence and their

connection to violence: political upheaval leads to violence as shown on television programs inserted into the diegesis and in representations of border crossings.

Perhaps it is no surprise that previous scholarship does not train its focus on positive aspects of Haneke's narratives. Thus, in the broad sense of Haneke's oeuvre, and due to his tendency to remain opaque about message and meaning, it seems worthwhile to consider moments of hopefulness in such dark material. Moreover, linking these moments to children makes sense because of their presumed inherent innocence.

Method and Theory

Aesthetic theory will be most useful for this analysis. Haneke's films can be categorized as Political Modernist. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define "political modernism" as "a radical aesthetic that fused left-wing politics with innovative forms and styles" (2003, p. 559). Haneke's films clearly fall into this aesthetic but are less concerned with innovative styles than other political modernist filmmakers who use frenetically engaging visuals or sounds. Rather, the films are innovative in their calculation of events and awareness of time, pacing, and space in the narrative. Like Brecht, Haneke is not interested in creating works that envelop an audience in fantasy but in keeping them always aware of what is onscreen and why. Again, my analysis will not focus on actual audience affect but the films' aesthetic style.

Janet Staiger's "Authorship Approaches" describes different approaches to analyzing a film author's work, and the pertinent approach for this thesis is "authorship as origin" which hypothesizes the author as "free agent" and source of content and style

(2003, pp. 30-33). The evidence of Haneke's social awareness and intent to engage, as well as his recurring motifs, are clearly evidenced in his interviews in comparison to his films. A neo-formalist textual approach will identify these motifs and themes and allow for the analysis of the films.

A film scholar himself, Haneke's "free agent" status also brings to light his efforts to revise Western notions of filmic entertainment, as he often states. With careful construction, one would be remiss not to compare Haneke to Alfred Hitchcock and other auteurs who seem to be acknowledging their audiences through their narrational choices. Therefore, this analysis will also keep a sense of how, like his predecessors, Haneke is still crafting films for the typical moviegoer by infusing them with common tropes but revising them for engaging his audience.

This analysis looks at ten feature films that were theatrically released. Before these films, Haneke had a productive period with his television work, producing *After Liverpool*, *Sperrmüll* (1976), *Drei Wege zum See/ Three Paths to the Lake* (1976), *Lemminge, Teil 1 Arkadien* (1979), *Lemminge, Teil 2 Verletzungen* (1979), *Variation* (1983), *Wer war Edgar Allan?/Who Was Edgar Allan?* (1985), and *Fräulein* (1986). Because these television films are not commercially available nor have they reached an international audience like Haneke's theatrical films, I have excluded them from this work. In keeping my focus on theatrical film work, *Nachruf für einen Mörder* (1991), *Die Rebellion* (1993), and *Das Schloß/The Castle* (1997, based on Kafka's novel and later released theatrically) are excluded despite their production since Haneke began making

theatrical films. This analysis looks at the ten films out of chronological order, placing them in “idea clouds,” clusters of concern.

The Chapters

In chapter one, I argue that Haneke is a successor to those filmmakers who have taken violence to a new extreme in the cinema. However, Haneke has created a unique form of depicting violence in his films. Instead of heavy use of onscreen blood, incidents of violence mainly occur off-screen or are obscured by objects in the frame. Reactions to these instances of violence, however, are typically violent in the narrative (vomit, sadness). His use of violence is of concern for two reasons: he is offering a meta-commentary on current trends of filmic violence, and he is highlighting how violent incidents have a significantly negative effect on society. By calling attention to violence within his narratives, Haneke offers a more visceral “punch” for the viewer. Additionally, the presence of violence as depicted in an unflattering manner seeks to defuse common notions of filmic violence as entertaining or gratuitous.

In chapter two, I argue that although Haneke typically places child characters in peril, a narrative facet that perhaps turns away some viewers, their placement in such scenarios serves to reflect his consistent view of a crumbling, insensitive society. In the chapter, I discuss how Haneke endangers children: children are sometimes recipients of violence and these instances of violence are appropriately emotionally weighted to elicit sympathy. Some child characters are in an opaque form of peril while living under the auspices of their parents, some of who instill violent behavior in their offspring.

Generally, violence involving children erupts from suppression of emotion.

Finally, in chapter three, I argue that despite these representations of violence and children in peril, Haneke still finds places to infuse glimmers of hope in his narrative. Ironically, given his consistent use of child characters as acting violently, Haneke finds much hope to reflect through some children. Some children and youth assume adult roles to protect their families and exhibit extraordinary courage, such as Ben in *Time of the Wolf*, while others embrace their youthful innocence and find relations with other children as in *Code Unknown*. Ultimately, there are more spots of humanity in Haneke's later films, most notably *The White Ribbon*.

In sum, as the director constantly reminds us, the narratives are constructed to be very open to spectator interpretation, so I find these hopeful moments confirm a certain balance in the films--an equal amount of societal critique and call to action with faith in some people to maintain civilized ways of being.

Chapter One: Haneke's Violence

In a 2009 *Newsweek* interview Michael Haneke stated about his common label as a violent director:

It's simply that violence is a part of our society. It's the part that frightens us most when we're confronted with it. But I don't understand why I'm always categorized as a specialist for violence. I don't think that's the only thing that's present in my films. I deal with lots of social issues, like the question of media in our society. Personally, I can't stand violence. In any standard American mainstream movie, there's 20 times more violence than in any one of my films, so I don't know why those directors aren't asked why they're such specialists for violence. (Bain 2009, N.p.)

Indeed, it would be inappropriate to group Haneke with other contemporary film directors who creatively and uniquely depict graphic violence to enhance entertainment value. That Haneke limits frequency of violence to “American mainstream” films may be an incomplete assessment. With filmmakers like French-born Alexandre Aja [*High Tension* (2003), *Piranha* (2010)], New Zealander Peter Jackson [*Braindead* (1992), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03)], and Japanese Takashi Miike [*Ichi the Killer* (2001), *Audition* (1999)] achieving international success with their violent films, it may be fair to state that while the U.S. industry cultivated gratuitous or excessive violence in films, a global group of filmmakers intrigues and stimulates a wider audience with it.

Stephen Prince (1999) pinpoints the genesis of creative domestic cinema violence, or “ultraviolence” as he posits, with the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967) and *The Wild Bunch* (Peckinpah, 1968) after the ending of the Hays Production Code and the shift to the MPAA ratings system. With the breaking down of the barrier of self-

regulation, filmmakers were able to depict violence more graphically and colorfully in their films, and the viewers became more and more desensitized to its effect. Prince believes “ultraviolence” in modern films continues to surmount that of its predecessors, stating:

Contemporary ultraviolence...includes graphic imagery of bodily mutilation. This type of imagery was not part of the Penn-Peckinpah stylistic, beyond the use of squib-work, because that style stressed the kinetic effects of montage, making violence balletic, a dance of death. But graphic mutilation--eye-gouging, impalement, and dismemberment--surfaced in the horror film in the late 1970s and the 1980s, as that genre abandoned the atmospherics of earlier decades and offered instead stomach-churning and gut-wrenching experiences (pp. 14-15).

Indeed, Prince presents a strong argument for the appearance of graphic violence in contemporary film as emerging from the horror genre, with films like *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984), and *Re-Animator* (Gordon, 1985) offering plenty of blood onscreen and providing games of participation with viewers keeping records of onscreen “body counts.”

The graphic bodily mutilation that stood as a tenet of the horror genre before 1990 has become amplified in the horror films of the last decade: the *Saw* (Wan, 2004) and *Final Destination* (Wong, 2000) series generate sequels that offer new and creative ways for victims to experience a grisly death. Meta-horror films like *Grindhouse* (Rodriguez and Tarantino, 2007) and *Piranha* (Aja, 2010) depend on gore and traumatic violence simultaneously to honor and reference but surpass the bloody thrills of their seventies’ exploitation predecessors. Additionally, R-rated action films like *The Expendables* (Stallone, 2010) and *The Mechanic* (West, 2011) include more intense sequences of violence than their eighties’ predecessors while PG-13 rated action films like *Live Free*

or *Die Hard* (Wiseman, 2007) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) push the limits of violence under their rating. The most obvious evidences of the continued expansion of “ultraviolence” are the remakes of the aforementioned horror series *Friday the 13th* (Nispel, 2003) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Bayer, 2010). Both films feature a fresh-faced cast of contemporary young actors but offer a much more violent movie-going experience than their original counterparts.

Per Haneke’s statement, his films are certainly much less violent than those of his peers, especially U.S. films released on or near Halloween. However, all of his films depict violence in a detached or obscure manner (in most cases, and there are exceptions), not unlike depictions of onscreen violence during the period of the Hays Code. A spray of gunfire toward a group of people in *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* or a strike to a woman’s face in *Code Unknown* are as tame as James Cagney’s grapefruit slap in *The Public Enemy* (Wellman, 1931). The most conspicuous difference from other, generic film violence is the absence of blood. How Haneke weaves violence into his narratives, how these moments are staged, and their weight in the chronology of the respective films are key elements in his body of work. I argue that the director creates a more engaging effect from violence through his particular uses of onscreen violence, off-screen/implied violence along with his audio strategies, sexual violence, and animal violence.

Onscreen Violence

Blood typically marks the violence that occurs onscreen in the films. *The Seventh Continent* breaks its narrative into three distinct acts: 1987, 1988, and 1989. Anna and Georg are shown tending like clockwork to the events of their lives, each activity punctuated with a space of black frames. In the third act, they decide collectively to take their lives and that of daughter Eva after systematically destroying all of their belongings. Catherine Wheatley draws a comparison of the film to the work of Chantal Akerman¹ and I tend to agree: there is no storytelling distinction between the three acts (2009, p. 24). The family experiences their daily tasks--eating dinner, brushing teeth, working at a large company--without outward expression. These earlier events do not stand as a contrast to the actions of act three in which the destruction of objects like electronics, glass, and furniture are depicted in the same form of story fragments, each narrative milestone punctuated by black frames. The most character expression emerges after the death of Eva, who was the first of the three to consume the sleeping pill elixir, as Anna weeps over her daughter's corpse. Just before her demise, as if she were falling asleep before a long day of school, Eva recites her daily prayers, "Dear Lord, make me meek, so that I in Heaven shall Thee meet." While *The Seventh Continent* shows the deaths onscreen, suicide by pills is not violent but rather quiet.

¹Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* employs a similar aesthetic. The main character is seen performing daily tasks in real time, highlighting banality and calling attention to its construct.

Funny Games and *Funny Games US*² inch closer to ultraviolence because of their liberal use of visible blood. After Peter and Paul have taken hostage Anne, George, and son Georgie, they commence a series of small games to harass and intimidate their prisoners. The climax of the film shows Anne bravely grabbing a shotgun and shooting Peter directly in his chest. Peter flies back toward the wall and blood explodes from his body. This incident certainly reflects the action film aesthetic with the violent physical motion accompanying Peter's wound serving to punctuate the vengeful nature of his death since the family has endured such horrific terror. Of course, Paul "rewinds" the film as if the shooting never happened, but its inclusion is clearly situates the moment in the ultraviolence trope.

In *The Piano Teacher*, after her rape by Walter, Erika is prepared to perform at a concert but sees him jovially approaching his seat to watch. Using a kitchen knife she intentionally brought, she stabs herself in the heart, and blood begins to seep onto her blouse. She then leaves the venue, her condition after her self-mutilation unclear. This reaction to the rape aligns with the aesthetics to the consequences of her sexual encounter with Walter in the hockey equipment room; it is unclear if Erika experienced any relief or pleasure from the experience. Does her self-mutilation serve as a climax to the sex? Or is this a desperate attempt at suicide after physical and emotional trauma?

² I do not believe Haneke had any intention of having one film laden with more narrative or visual elements than the other. They are to serve as aesthetic examinations of terror and violence that can have the same impact from one culture to another. As both films are shot-for-shot, line-for-line twins, I will refer to the characters and settings of the English-language version.

Caché contains another, more significant instance of onscreen violence. Georges visits Majid's apartment after the latter has been, as the former believes, sending anonymous tapes that contain footage of Georges's apartment and encounters. This is Georges's third attempt to elicit an admission of guilt from Majid. Georges suspects that Majid has been threatening him because, as boys, the two did not get along and Georges caused Majid considerable suffering when Georges suggested that Majid be sent away from their family estate to an orphanage. Majid pulls a shaving razor from his pocket and slices his own throat in front of Georges. The slice sends a powerful stream of blood from Majid's neck onto the wall as he falls to the floor. Blood spills on the floor, and Majid gargles his last breaths. The suicide is shot from a wide angle, with both men's whole bodies in frame. The camera does not move. This is the only instance of bloody human violence within the film and its inclusion and the long take, which allows no relief from the event, is quite shocking in the slowly-paced narrative. Like *The Piano Teacher*, this self-inflicted violence is allowed to play in full view on screen. And like Erika, Majid's intentions for harming himself are ambiguous: was this an act of revenge, to radically present to Georges the effects of his past wrongdoing?

In an interview on the *Caché* DVD, Haneke states:

The theme of the film is also [along with guilt]...coldness. And now we can ask ourselves, 'Does this coldness also come from everything that was swept under the rug?' Not just this childish act but a thousand other things that were also repressed. What did we suppress in order to arrive where we are? That's the somewhat unpleasant aspect of the film. Somewhat disturbing, I hope...It's a very sad film (2005).

He admits that his intent was to disturb his viewers. Perhaps the disturbing nature of Majid's suicide is its unflinching depiction of violence. The soft, bright light and

domestic setting, with characters framed in a dramatic staging for dialogue that presumably will solve the mystery of the film, are key formal aspects that contrast with the horror of the ultraviolence.

Prince posits that violence in film is anticipated through dramatic aesthetics that support narrative tension. This is not evidenced in *Caché* leading up to Majid's suicide.

On the absence of tension, Hugh S. Manon notes:

...the fact that no [viewer] is looking at Georges, and his inability to fathom the Other's nonexistence is what transforms the film from a mystery thriller into a tragedy. If someone were looking at Georges, the solution would be easy enough for a relatively wealthy and respected man. Instead...the film's primary conflict is not that Georges is being attacked but that he cannot divine an answer as to what the Other wants. The videos are...utterly neutral...and the result is the escalation, a kind of 'road rage' of intersubjective presupposition regarding the Other's malicious intent (2010, p. 117).

Onscreen violence is not necessarily visually explicit: bloodless violence takes form in a scene between Anne and an Arab teen in a subway car in *Code Unknown*. In the six-and-a-half minute take, the teen harasses Anne, criticizing her bourgeois status. "I'm just an Arab looking for a little affection," the teen chides, sitting next to her. At the station stop, the teen spits on Anne's face. Mild violence indeed, but humiliating to an innocent bystander in such a public setting. The nearby elderly man confronts the teen, potentially defusing further violence from the teen upon Anne. At the next stop, the teen threatens, "I'll see you around" just before shouting and startling both the elderly man and Anne, the latter of which begins to cry from the stress of the conflict. Thomas Elsaesser, whose analysis of the film includes a comparison to Brechtian aesthetics, suggests that this and another scene:

are not so readily described as Brechtian and might be called distantiation effects only insofar as they ‘create distance which collapses distance,’ that is they create an inner distance, for which there is no room or space--in other words, almost the opposite of distancing (2010, p. 62).

Elsaesser’s statement applies to this scene and the earlier scene: both are shot from the perspective and eye level of a bystander in the respective scenarios. The camera assumes an objective position, simply viewing the violence as if it were a common occurrence in this urban setting. By assuming it is a common occurrence, the film reflects a clear societal problem if violence has become an expected and integrated part of urban life. The aesthetic choice imposes no judgment on these instances of violence: neither Anne nor the teen is framed as more guilty or innocent than the other.³

Whether blood is in the image, violence onscreen often occurs against animals. *Benny’s Video* features the very first use of blood in Haneke’s filmography. The opening shot depicts a pig’s slaughter. A video camera shot briefly passes Benny’s father, who indicates an aversion to being captured on tape. In the unbroken sequence, a farmer loads a hand cannon and shoots the pig in its head, its body convulsing as it dies. The tape pauses, rewinds, and Benny (and us) watch the slaughter again in slow motion. Animal violence does not appear consistently in U.S. cinema because protests are too many for successful box office receipts. However, *Benny’s Video*’s tape resembles a documentary and we are watching it within the narrative from the point of view of, presumably at this point, the person who shot the footage. This layer of separation detaches the viewer from

³ The elderly man should be noted as a “glimmer of hope” because he takes a stand against the violence.

the content of the film because it resembles news or documentary footage and is thus experienced as less disturbing.

Another instance of onscreen representation of animal violence also appears in *Time of the Wolf*. The group taking shelter at the station is systematically slaughtering horses for their meat. In one scene, a horse is shot at point blank range and falls to the ground. A medium shot of the horse writhing on the ground follows, and the hand of one of the refugees enters frame and punctures its throat, allowing a river of blood to spill. That Haneke killed a real horse for the scene is unpleasant for most audiences (Melonfarmers.co.uk).⁴ The presence of copious amounts of blood suggests the ultraviolence aesthetic but adds stark realism to the narrative conflict: the refugees cannot survive without sustenance, and the absence of professional slaughtering facilities indicates their desperation. *Benny's Video*'s pig slaughter shows considerably less and is shot on grainy videotape which results in a lower impact for the violence.

In another instance of depicting violence toward animals, in a flashback sequence, young Georges witnesses Majid sever a chicken's head in *Cache*. As Majid chops with his ax, the chicken's blood splatters on his face in a pattern similar to the splatter of his

⁴ Michael Lawrence proposes that the horse's real slaughter for a fictional film serves the effectiveness of the narrative: "This scene takes place immediately after Anne has unsuccessfully sought justice for her husband's death and informed the leaders that she has recognized her husband's killer among the group. The death of the horse, then, takes place at the precise moment the death of a fictional character is being discussed. The violent death of the horse, the sight of which appears to exacerbate Anne's frustration and grief, is a spectacle of documentary violence within Haneke's most allegorical work and functions as an instance of death in a narrative in which it remains unclear how many humans have died as a result of the unspecified catastrophe. The death of the horse, however, by momentarily puncturing the fiction with documentary time, rends the allegorical texture of the film by cutting out of the film's hypothetical world and into the real world of the horse's life and death" (2010, p. 72-73).

later suicide. In some respects, this flashback⁵ foreshadows Majid's suicide. Majid is deliberately killing an innocent being for the purposes of frightening his younger cohort. After the chop, Majid approaches Georges, who stands in the shaded area of the barn. A shot from Georges's perspective sees Majid in silhouette, his ax ready in his arms, creating a menacing, dynamic composition that, again, reflects aesthetics of the horror genre. A shadow obscures the killer's face, but the potential for more violence is clear from the unmistakable shape of the ax blade. Majid steps forward and raises the ax at Georges just before the scene cuts to black. Hence, Majid makes two attempts in the narrative to instill shock and fear in Georges: both involve a blade, but the later scene lends aesthetic shock because it eschews horror genre conventions.

Finally, in *The White Ribbon*, the inciting incident for the narrative occurs in the first moment wherein the Doctor and his horse roughly stumble over a carefully planted trip wire. The horse is briefly shown contorting on the ground, but the extent of its injuries, and whether or not they were fatal, is unclear.

Overall, Haneke makes violence an integral element of his films because it permeates modern cinema for entertainment value. By graphically portraying the

⁵ Oliver C. Speck calls upon Deleuze when he analyzes *Caché*. When referring to Georges's dream of Majid's chicken slaughter, Speck postulates that "the images of the young Majid are always marked as dream--and memory--images which are presently actualized in George's [sic] mind" (2010, p. 141-142). Georges admits to his mother that he does not know why he dreamt of Majid, and it is unclear in the narrative whether or not Majid's menace was true or a product of Georges's imagination, convincing himself that his ousting of Majid from his home was a direct response to violence. This ambivalence is further complicated by the continued "threats" from the videotapes: footage that is a contained representation of elements of his life. Why is he threatened by such benign, seemingly innocent footage on the tapes? Is he again confusing reality with imagination?

emotional and physical effects of violence, Haneke seeks to redress how violence in cinema can function as a powerful storytelling incident. Further, viewers have become desensitized to violence because of its constant presence in condensed news reports and other media outlets. By calling attention to its presence, rather than a tender rendering, Haneke is attempting to make violence a sensory experience that cannot be ignored.

Off-screen/Implied Violence

Although Haneke sometimes is labeled as a violent director, I have discovered through this research that violence occurs off-screen on many more occasions than onscreen. In some instances, the consequences of violence as depicted off-screen allow for a more effective emotional impact.

In *Funny Games*, Peter (presumably) shoots Georgie in the living room while Paul rummages through the fridge. The camera stays with Paul, and Georgie's death is only audible. After the loud bang of the rifle, Paul becomes aware of what has just happened and summons Peter to leave with him. In an unbroken ten-minute shot, the aftermath of Georgie's execution is brutally on display: blood and entrails are scattered on the television, which still displays a program, and on the walls and carpet. Anne struggles through states of sickening sadness and survival efforts. Her hands and feet tied, she reacts and communicates the weight of the violence, a much more dramatic depiction of a child's death than a brief glimpse of a bullet hitting his body. The lighting on the characters appears unflattering; in fact, they look downright sickened. This aesthetic opposes traditional star photography of actors and actresses in U.S. films as usually softly

powdered and flatteringly lit. This presents another facet of Haneke's use of violence: oftentimes the reactions to violence are more visible and visceral than that violence itself.

This particular shot exemplifies Wheatley's assessment of Haneke's use of "aggressive reflexivity": "This is a 'benign' form of reflexivity, which allows the spectator time to reflect on the image and thus distances them from the action onscreen" (2009, p. 94). This long, unbroken take occurs often in Haneke's work, but *Funny Games* features this "benign reflexivity" while depicting the most direct form of consequence of violence within the narrative. John David Rhodes goes further and suggests, "[t]his scene of child murder is something we are relieved not to witness, but this relief is also appalling, as it seems to exempt us from the spectacle of violence that we had hitherto followed uncomfortably but intently nonetheless" (2010, p. 96). Moore's assessment is intriguing, but the audience is not necessarily saved from the "spectacle" of this act of violence because the presence of the blood splatter, reminiscent of the "slasher" genre, is garishly on display. The "spectacle" of film violence does not solely lie in the violent image but also its physical and visible reaction.

Earlier in *Funny Games*, Anne is forced to remove her clothing at gunpoint only to be critiqued for her shape, not to be raped. While no nudity is shown, Haneke tests the aesthetics of such scenes as can be found in *Straw Dogs* (Peckinpah, 1971) or *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992). In the former, the construction workers and ruffians of a local English village group together and rape Amy while husband David is away. In a previous scene, Amy walks around her home with her breasts exposed, stopping near the window for the workers, who are renovating their house, to see in plain view. When the

group begins to rape Amy, her fear, anxiety, and sadness are understated and ambiguous. The film does not clearly communicate whether or not Amy is enjoying the intercourse, and Peckinpah's aesthetics allow the viewer to be voyeur to an act at once terrible and possibly fulfilling for the character. In *Funny Games*, Anne's emotional state is not as ambiguous in Haneke's film, yet Peter and Paul's perverse examination of her nudity keep the viewer curious to the content of the off-screen space.

Another confrontation of the "spectacle" of violent consequences occurs in *Benny's Video*. Benny invites a young woman to his loft while his parents are away, and, after snacking on pizza, Benny surprises his guest and playfully grabs her into an arresting position. Peter Brunette notes that "the suddenness of the aggressive gesture, which will become an important Haneke signature in some of the later films, constitutes a minor but unnerving surprise to the viewer and hints of worse to come" (2010, p. 27). Brunette identifies the "aggressive" nature of the characters' interplay: Haneke resists building of tension or suspense in the scene and allows the violence to appear organically, as random and inexplicable as the same aggression that occurs in all parts of the world on a personal and political level. Benny does however indicate that he is attempting to mimic a "cop on the U-Bahn," having presumably firsthand observed police aggression on the public transportation system.

This disturbing trend continues as Benny shows the young woman the videotape of the pig's slaughter. Like the mimicking of the police officer, Benny then assumes the role of butcher and shoots the woman with the same deadly weapon used on the pig. When she survives the first two shots, Benny becomes increasingly impatient, and after a

third bullet the young woman eventually expires off-screen. The viewer cannot see Benny murdering the girl; rather, it appears on a monitor as Benny has strategically positioned his video camera to capture his actions. The shot bears a striking resemblance to one in *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968). After Rosemary tells Minnie and Roman the happy news that she is pregnant, Minnie immediately runs to the bedroom and begins a telephone conversation. Rosemary looks on and with the camera acting as her point of view, she peers into the bedroom. The doorframe obscures Minnie's body and her conversation: an object within the diegesis hides the narrative information and Minnie's conversation.

Unbridled sadness appears in many of Haneke's films, usually as the direct reaction to violence. After Eva's death in *The Seventh Continent*, violence takes the form of heavily expressed sorrow. Anna bawls over her daughter's corpse, her voice warbled and shrill. Formally, the film's jarring sound that accompanies Anna as she grinds pills for her own death heavily contrast with the soft volume and balance of imagery in the film's first two acts. Haneke's form also lends an eerie chill to the film's final moments as Georg slowly dies. As suicide is a common theme of his work, his continued use of it in his narratives such as *The Seventh Continent* is a stark contrast to the most common forms of violence against others such as guns or manual combat depicted in contemporary media.

Another example of showing the emotional toll of violence is in *Benny's Video*, Benny's mother accompanies her son to Egypt while the father disposes of the young woman's murdered corpse. While watching television together in their hotel room, the

mother slowly breaks into a fit of crying so physical it causes her to slide from the bed. The trauma of the recent series of events has finally surfaced, suppressed on multiple occasions by the father.

In *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, ping-pong champion Max reaches a breaking point in his sanity and reacts with vitriol when he cannot receive cash from the automated teller machine. Inside the bank, a bystander shoves Max to the floor. This is the film's first instance of violence, onscreen, without blood, but not the climactic scene of violence. Max's return aggression is only shown from a reverse angle. His own suicide (another prime instance of self-inflicted violence) is not shown, either. Yet, a long, unbroken shot of blood spilling from a victim's torso punctuates the sequence. These fragments of the event highlight the narrative's insistence that coincidence unites the characters in this moment. This instance of violence serves as the climax and had been building in the narrative when the audience sees glimpses of Max's stress. Thus, *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* relates to Prince's concept of ultraviolence because, like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Wild Bunch*, the main characters die a violent death at the climax of the story. However, Haneke eschews tradition and depicts only the violent action during its instance, the gun firing, and not its immediate consequences like the bullets striking the victims' bodies. The aftermath of the violence is allowed to play onscreen in almost abstract form (the blood slowly seeping onto to the floor).

Code Unknown contains the least amount of violence of any film in Haneke's oeuvre. A film largely concerned with class relations, there are two prominent moments

of violence,⁶ or the potential of violence. The first occurs just after the opening credits: in a single, unbroken, eight-minute shot, Jean arrives from his father's farm to see his brother, Georges, who he learns from Anne has taken a photography assignment in Kosovo. A despondent Jean drops a crumpled wrapper on a homeless woman, an act that infuriates Amadou. Jean and Amadou begin a physical fight and attract the attention of the police. After some questioning, the police detain the homeless woman (who has no form of identification) and Amadou. Amadou insists on traveling to the police station on his "free will," but the police officers physically suppress him, shoving his head to the ground as the scene cuts to black.⁷ *Code Unknown*'s opening serves to place violence in real-time and therefore create a more visceral narrative event that drives the rest of the film. Although this struggle occurs onscreen, the aggressive nature in which Amadou is shoved out of the frame suggests that further, more intense violence occurs in the narrative gap.

The Piano Teacher features Haneke's first use of sexual violence in his filmography, but the entire scene avoids explicit visual representation of the worst of the violence. Erika has sadomasochistic tendencies that she endures without self-assessment. When Walter, one of her virtuoso students, begins to pursue her sexually, she confesses her painful desires to him in a note. Disgusted, Walter leaves but later meets Erika after his hockey practice. He attempts to have sex with her, removing his pants and laying her

⁶ It is important to mention that more animal violence occurs in *Code Unknown*: the Farmer slaughters his cattle. No blood appears. In fact, the Farmer is not shown killing any cattle at all. The scene begins with the sound of the last cow being shot. Essentially, the scene functions to illustrate his cold, clinical lifestyle.

⁷ The unbroken shot calls to mind violence in *Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948), in which students Brandon and Phillip choke a man at the beginning of the film in a long, seamless take.

on the floor. He shoves his penis into her mouth, and she gags from the force, eventually vomiting from the physical stress. The camera, again in an unbroken take, lingers behind Walter; no actual nudity or penetration is shown.

Later, Walter is not yet satisfied and forces himself into Erika's apartment that she shares with her mother. He rips open her nightgown and exposes her breast, the first instance of nudity in any of Haneke's films. He takes her to the floor and rapes her to climax, her face devoid of emotion but, again, visibly communicating her physical stress. No penetration is shown. The camera lingers on Erika, showing the reaction to the violence. This unflinching perspective of sexual violence is very uncommon in many US films.⁸ Carol J. Clover traces the aesthetic of rape onscreen in her *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*.⁹ She posits,

By the mid-1980's, rape moved virtually offscreen...A striking exception is *The Accused*, which puts rape back on screen in elaborate detail and close to real-life time...Despite considerable individual variation, the general drift is clear: from a more or less justifiable male-centered event to an unjustifiable female-centered one; from the deed of a psychopathic creep to the deed of a "normal" man; from an event construed as an act of sex, in which one or both parties is shown to take some pleasure (if only perverse), to an act of violent humiliation (1992, p. 140).

⁸ In fact, films that graphically depict rape achieve certain notoriety among audiences, such as the aforementioned *Straw Dogs*, Gaspar Noe's *Irreversible* (2002), Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972), and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975).

⁹ Clover traces the development of the rape on film aesthetic using films like *Frenzy* (Hitchcock, 1972), *Straw Dogs*, and *I Spit On Your Grave* (Zarchi, 1972) to contrast *The Accused* (Kaplan, 1988). Since her work was published in 1992, it is worthwhile to note that rape seems to have remained an "act of violent humiliation" when currently presented on screen, most notably with a recent remake of *I Spit On Your Grave* (Monroe, 2010) or the group of male villains in Ward Three in *Blindness* (Meirelles, 2008).

The first sex act could be construed as rape had Erika not told Walter that she desired a violent sexual encounter with him, his domination of her a fulfillment of long-gestating compulsion. However, Haneke's detached, fluid direction of the scene does not definitively indicate if Erika is receiving pleasure or pain. The full-body shot of Walter's thrusting backside does not allow the viewer to see Erika react or wincing in pain. Like *Funny Games*, the audible choking and the appearance of vomit increase the off-screen violence.

Rape appears again in *Time of the Wolf*. Young Eva awakes in the train station, scattered among the other refugees, to the sound of a woman's gagging. She peers around and finds a middle-aged woman being raped at knifepoint. A pile of clothing and supplies obscures the assailant's face; the evidence that the woman is being attacked is a hand clutching her hair and another hand wrapped around her neck with a blade reflecting what little light illuminates the scene. A man sleeps in the foreground and his awareness of the violence next to him is not clear. The assaulted woman's body thrusts forward and her suppressed screams emerge as glottal sounds. This scene of violence is quite effective and falls into Clover's second category of film rape, the female clearly suffering from an injustice to her body. Further, the scene refers to the horror aesthetic: the assailant's identity is unknown, it contains low-key lighting, and the woman's face reflects anguish as if she were the victim in an exploitation film. Even further, her soft cries of pain are an uncanny, strange sound that awake Eva and frighten her.

In the beginning of *Time of the Wolf*, as Georges, Annes, Eva, and Ben unpack at their vacation home, they discover another family has taken shelter there. The father of

the squatting family greets them with the point of a rifle and demands that they leave. Georges calmly negotiates with the father, and it seems they will eventually agree to share supplies and shelter. However, a loud bang silences Georges while Eva and Ben are outside unpacking more from the van. The father has shot Georges, and Annes is splattered with the latter's blood. Annes immediately vomits from the shock. The murder is not shown; it is only audible from outside the house. This is quite surprising and occurs within the first five minutes of the film. This scene reflects, like the rape, aesthetics of horror with the element of surprise in violence.¹⁰ Again, the appearance of blood and the character's reaction (vomit) are the indicators of the emotional intensity of the violence, not the visibility of violence itself.

The White Ribbon contains the most stylized violence in Haneke's work, mainly because the film is shot in black and white. In an interview with Roy Grundmann, Haneke discusses this choice, stating:

The use of black-and-white film is also in the service of alienation. On the one hand, it is meant to give spectators easier access to the time period. Any images we know about this period are black-and-white. This is one of the effects of its use in the film. But the other one is that the black-and-white always constitutes a certain stylization, which...emphasizes the prototypical character of the story. It is an artifact and is being presented as such (*Companion* 2010, p. 600).

¹⁰ It is interesting to note a further similarity to the horror genre in this instance. Georges, played by Daniel Duval, is a seasoned French actor and director. His appearance and quick death in the film mirrors that of Drew Barrymore in *Scream* (Craven, 1996). In *Scream*, Barrymore, prominently featured in advertising for the film, is murdered in the first sequence. Her death is quite unexpected because she had considerable star power and her inclusion in ads and credits presumed her to be a significant part of the narrative. Perhaps Duval's brief appearance similarly elevated the audience's sense of surprise.

That the film is an “artifact” suggests that its presentation of violence reflects that of cinema from its time period: the film’s story takes place in 1913. Prince notes that this Pre-Code violence in the United States was quite extreme. For instance, *Intolerance* (Griffith, 1916) shows “decapitation and other gruesome sights and climaxes” (p. 2).

The White Ribbon contains another instance of self-mutilation. Unlike acts of self-harm in previous films that have been graphically depicted, the Farmer’s hanging suicide is only shown after the fact and is staged in the shadows of a barn. When the Pastor clinically plans the cane lashing punishment of Klara and Martin, the violence occurs behind a closed door. Sigi is discovered bound and with whip marks on his back. Later, a schoolboy tosses Sigi into a lake after a brief scuffle. These instances of violence serve the mystery of the narrative but are very “genteel” as in Prince’s assessment of period filmic violence. Haneke’s common use of the aftermath of violence is fully exemplified here, but this aesthetic also supports his claim that the film is an “artifact.” Sigi’s push into the lake is no more violent than *The Monster* throwing Little Maria into the lake in *Frankenstein* (Whale, 1931). The instances of adult characters inflicting violence upon the children are as moderate in their depiction as the children’s (presumed) acts of violence upon others.

However, the consequences of violence escalate as the narrative progresses. Karli, the boy with Down Syndrome, is found tied to a tree, his eyes gouged to the point of blindness. The injuries are shown in close-up to emphasize the injustice inflicted upon arguably the most innocent member of the village, even though the act of violence is not. The blood on his face is dark and murky, like Pre-Code and Code black-and-white

Hollywood films. Ultimately, *The White Ribbon* contains conventions of the horror genre--its stark contrast with many shadows, the appearance of blood, the unknown identity of the assailant to build tension--but the film aligns itself with representations of classical cinema violence to tell its tale.

When comparing the instances of onscreen violence versus off-screen, it may be surprising to realize that the off-screen instances are typically more chilling and emotionally effective. Haneke certainly proves how effective audio and intimations of violence can elicit as strong a response, if not stronger, than violence may be garishly on display in the frame.

An Aesthetic Revisionist

Is Haneke a “violent” filmmaker? Not necessarily so in terms of graphic display of infliction of pain on characters. But he certainly, as this analysis hopefully illustrates, has achieved a signature manner in which he portrays violence in his narratives. His strategy to display violence serves not only to enhance his unique stark narratives but to promote his negative thoughts on the depiction of violence in Western media. Aside from *Funny Games*, which purposefully features the violent death of the villain, Haneke centers on what is largely absent from the Western media proliferation of violence: the tragedy, emotion, suffering, and acceptance of its trauma. Meanwhile, Haneke has made reference to many different techniques for depicting violence that reflect his distaste and call for revision. Gratuitous or excessive violence, as evidenced in these films, is a

societal problem because it contributes to the viewer's continuing desensitization of violence and its consequences.

Chapter Two: Children in Peril

Vivian Sobchack states in “Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange” the following about child characters:

The secular baby and child have held a privileged place in bourgeois and patriarchal mythology since the nineteenth century. Infancy and childhood have been represented as the cultural site of such “positive” virtues as innocence, transparency, and a “pure” and wonderful curiosity not yet informed by sexuality...Not yet having been *subjected to* the lessons of experience and history, the infant and child signify the *subject of* an experience and history still to be enacted and inscribed. In this way the child becomes the *signifier* of the future. But the child is also the *signified* of the past (1996, p. 148).

Sobchack’s statement is relevant to these next two chapters because the young characters (not necessarily children in all instances) are exposed in many instances to “lessons of experience” or violence under certain circumstances. Their presence in the films still represents “positive virtues” but the violation of them reflects Michael Haneke’s societal critique.

Brigitte Peucker synthesizes the role of child and young characters in Haneke’s oeuvre:

Affect perforates the formalist surface of Haneke’s films, and it often arises from the sight of pain...[I]n all of Haneke’s films there is a recurrent interest in the pain of children. Middle-class parents induce their daughter to join them in suicide in *The Seventh Continent*; a young girl is cruelly murdered in *Benny’s Video*; a little girl who has been promised adoption is passed over for another in *71 Fragments*...a young boy is tortured and killed in *Funny Games*, and so on... (2010, p. 139).

This blanket statement is lifted from her discussion of the gaze as it relates to Haneke’s work, and although there are truly startling moments of violence inflicted upon children

in his films, Haneke employs children to reflect more strongly societal dysfunction than by solely focusing on a single age group (adults or children). “With children one can show the formation of character most efficiently. Of course, adults, too, can be coerced into following an ideology. But the younger are the [easier to manipulate] than we are,” says Haneke in an interview with Roy Grundmann (*Companion* 2010, p. 596).

In most instances, children are the most innocent characters in the narratives. They struggle with overwhelming terror and adversity as in *Funny Games* and *Time of the Wolf*. Some films depict children as lacking free will and becoming victims of violence; others see children committing violence themselves, sometimes from a model passed down from an older generation as in *Benny’s Video*. Children have a certain relationship with animals that reflects an understanding of violence and its consequences, as in *The White Ribbon*.

In this chapter, I will cover how children and youth sometimes react with violence when forced to stifle emotional responses to stimuli, such as Max’s aggression in *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*. I also cover how children and youth sometimes are directly or indirectly exposed to violence, and how this leads in some cases to parents instilling potentially violent behavior in them, as in the opening of *Time of the Wolf*. Finally, some children and youth exhibit an adoption of this violent behavior by showing aggression toward others.

The Stifling of Emotional Response

The children and youth experience difficult events that could potentially elicit a strong emotional response. In most cases, they are forced to swallow emotion and stifle their reaction because of their mothers or fathers. In *The Seventh Continent*, Eva is clearly deprived and in need of attention from her parents, Georg and Anna. While at school, she secludes herself in the restroom and claims to the others that she has mysteriously gone blind. The teacher retrieves her and gathers that she is simply pretending, charging her to open her eyes and react to the teacher's waving hand. At home, Anna receives a phone call from Eva's school about the incident and confronts her daughter, easing her into an admission of guilt by softly reassuring, "I don't want harm you in any way." Eva confesses but Anna strikes her. Anna's failure to communicate honestly with her daughter leads to violence against Eva. This parent-child interaction is an inciting incident in the narrative: Eva is now under authoritarian fear of her mother and will follow parental mandates with haste.

Eva has a developing imagination. When Georg arrives at the vehicle impound to sell the family car, Eva wanders to the nearby river, idly watching the slow-moving dinner cruise ship float by to the diegetic music emitting from the car radio. Later, she is carefully constructing a colored pencil piece on dot matrix printer paper while Georg writes the family's suicide note, describing how he and Anna convinced their daughter that based on church readings death should be welcomed. That Eva is doodling on, presumably, her father's supply of printer paper is quite an effective metaphor. While Anna and Georg decide to take their lives because of a numbed and dull life of

bureaucracy and labor, Eva constructs a fantasy and is able to repurpose elements of such a dull life for mental stimulation.

During their ritual destruction of their household, Georg finally arrives at Eva's fish tank. It appears to be one of the last remaining intact items, so Georg lifts his ax and shatters the glass, spilling the water and fish across the hardwood floor. Eva enters and bursts into tears while Anne comforts her. The apparent consequences of death, in this case a loved pet being sacrificed, are quite frightening for Eva and she quickly understands how fearful she is of her own impending doom. In an interview with Serge Toubiana, Haneke opines this to be a desperate cry against her parents' newly found ideology: "...[W]hen they break the aquarium, when the fish die, it's an image for the internal death of the little girl. She's the only one who doesn't stand for this"¹ (*The Seventh Continent* DVD). Anne stifles Eva's emotions and quells her fears by watching television with her: a soothing distraction while Eva dies first.

Unfortunately, Eva had no choice but to die with her parents. She could have potentially been left with Georg's parents, still alive and well in a nearby village. Eva's lack of free will in this scenario reflects Anna and Georg's selfish decision, founded in their religious beliefs, as evidenced in the letters that Anna writes to Georg's parents.

In *Benny's Video*, Benny spends a large amount of time alone in his family's loft. His devices of pleasure, of course, are his video equipment and film and television: his

¹ Robin Wood sees this moment as the death of "multiplicity": "...Eva runs in, hearing the noise [of the shattering tank], and promptly erupts into horror and hysteria. Suddenly, through the child's reaction, in the midst of this remorseless movement to death, its reality is brought home...through the last gasps of the dying fish in all their different species, and with it the value and multiplicity and wonder of life" (2007, p. 48).

surrogate parents. With what little time he spends outside of home or school, Benny frequents the video store, entranced by violent films that are available for immediate viewing.²

In the first scene showing Benny interacting with his mother and father, Benny is constantly distracted by the news program on his television, barely responding to his very formal parents as if to give them just enough information to let them understand he is busy with his media. Sensing the disconnect, the Father goads, “A little air in here wouldn’t go amiss.” Perhaps Benny’s parents realize they need to re-evaluate the state of their relationship with their son, but demands of life prevent them from addressing it at this moment. Besides, their teen-aged daughter Evi is too free-spirited and requires immediate attention. In the opening scenes, Evi throws a party for friends, but the Father is not pleased to discover its goings-on and forces all of the guests to leave. Benny’s addiction to media seems benign in comparison to Evi’s behavior. The core social problem in the story seems to be Benny’s access to violent images, which the Mother and Father make no attempt to ration to their son and thus allow their relationship with him to subside.

Immediately after Benny murders the female visitor, he is devoid of outward expression of emotion. He removes his clothing and wanders around the household while naked: perhaps he wanted to hide the blood stains on his clothes, but this act of comfort and innocence reminds the viewer that Benny is just a boy, young enough to return to the

² It probably is of little surprise that Benny is consuming mainly US media. In the video store, he watches *The Toxic Avenger* (Herz, Kaufman, 1984) from the notoriously exploitative film company Troma. Also present in the store is a poster for *Graveyard Shift* (Singleton, 1990), another violent horror film adapted from a Stephen King story.

chastity of being naked. He does not react to the implications of his violent act and instead resigns to embrace his naiveté.

Puecker suggests that, again, Benny's behavior stems from behavior passed down from his parents:

Television reportage...has anesthetized our capacity to respond to scenes of suffering. Benny spends his time watching the choreographed violence of action movies and the restrained, 'normalizing' television reporting of scenes of death in Bosnia. In these news programs, images of carnage are accompanied by voices of commentators carefully trained to exclude all emotion, thus rendering a sanitized version of the real precisely where the spectator has come to believe s/he has access to its immediacy...television coverage works hard to keep the shock of catastrophe at bay, and Benny reflects the commentators' calm detachment. Predictably, he cannot distinguish between the simulations and the real; for Benny there is no difference between a death marked by 'ketchup and plastic,' as he puts it at one point, and one that produces real blood (2000, p. 179).

Benny's access to media can only be regulated by his parents, both of whom are intelligent enough to comprehend the negative effects of excessive television viewing and even the mechanics of the video camera (as evidenced when the Mother briefly uses the camera while in Egypt). Still, Benny is able to consume as much media as he desires because he has no regulation; his parents have not instilled in their son the value of education, the function of labor in society, or the impact of community service. Thus, Benny has numbed his intellect through a steady stream of media. Further, the Father can be characterized as just as devoid of emotion as the reportage on television: his stoicism when deciding to dispose of the woman's corpse is the affectionless reaction to the incident that Benny displayed: like Father, like son.

In *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, Max is under pressure³ from his father (presumably) to win his ping-pong championships. In one fragment of the film, the camera fixes upon a television screen. The video playing shows Max fumbling the ball on an important game while two voices, that of Max and another, older male, argue about why the mistakes were made. “You were half asleep! Stop making excuses!” shouts the adult, chastising Max to perform better and find balance. Visible to the right of the television is a soccer trophy from a youth league. Perhaps Max does not necessarily want to play such a fast-paced, accuracy-fueled activity but is pressured to do so from a member of an older generation.

While Max practices earlier in the film, he continuously hits balls in single-second intervals to perfect his service. This stationary, unbroken shot lasts approximately three minutes and is evidence of Haneke’s aesthetics of differentiation, as Peter Brunette remarks:

Haneke himself has explained...how the viewer goes through several stages watching this ultra-repetitious shot--before finally starting to actually look at what is going on... ‘The secret is to find the right length in imagining how I as a viewer would react to that.’...The most uncanny moments in this fragment come when Maximilian continues to swing like an automaton, even when the machine occasionally fails to deliver a ball (2010, p. 45-46).

Indeed, the scene calls attention to itself--some viewers may even feel compelled to check their watch--but Max’s face reflects agonizing distress and his slow decline into murderous rage is compellingly apparent.

³ Max falls into generic convention because of this oppression and the resulting personal boiling point that erupts in violence. This type of character has been portrayed onscreen time and again from *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955) to *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976).

Brunette also suggests that Max's rage also stems from his alienation from society:

There are quite immediate causes of Maximilian's immense frustration--when he is unable to pay for his gasoline because the cashier will only accept cash, yet the bank's ATM doesn't work and no one will allow him to go to the front of the bank line, even though his car is blocking traffic- yet the suggestion stands that a more general over-reliance on the technology that has replaced human communication is equally, and more globally, to blame (2010, p. 48).

Brunette's assessment supports the idea that Max has stifled his emotional responses: he sputters out of gas and has no clear solution for his unforeseen predicament. By chance, Max finds himself in a losing situation that was perhaps avoidable if those he encountered exhibited respectful behavior rather than condescending to Max like his coach/father.

Nevertheless, Max explodes into violent rage, the result of his bottled aggression.

On the film, Haneke states:

I can direct a character of a story in such a way that the sum of the behavioral details do not give a sufficient explanation for the decisions that the character makes--it is for the spectator to find. For this purpose it is important, in my opinion, to strictly avoid literary psychology, that invention of the bourgeois novel of the nineteenth century which by definition 'explains' and thereby re-enforces the existing conditions and right off prevents the exposing of structure (2000, p. 173).

In *Code Unknown*, Demba is accused of drug possession at school. The Father confronts his son, threatening, "I want to believe you, but if you lie to me, you'll regret it all your life." Demba confesses that bullies at school tried to extort money from him, and when he did not comply, he became the scapegoat for the narcotics. A middle-school student, Demba is at an age of self-discovery and insecurity; the threat of violence from

both his peers at school and his father leaves him no choice but to reveal secret information to one side or the other.

A certain tension exists between generations in *The Piano Teacher*. Anna's mother instills in her daughter a rigorous work ethic in her pursuit of piano skills. Anna is indeed a talented player but is emotionally abused under Erika's auspices (this, of course, stemming from Erika's boiling sadomasochistic desires). The young students of the music academy all are able to create pleasing musical arrangements, as evidenced by the string quintet just before Anna's rehearsal with the young male opera singer. The singer scolds Anna for being late to the rehearsal, evidence that he has unfortunately embraced the rigidity of his teacher's generation. Anna, however, is undeterred and finds comfort in Walter's aid onstage (whether or not Walter's aid is simply a sly effort to make Erika jealous is debatable.)

In these examples, all children and youth are forced to suppress emotional responses to potentially traumatic experiences. Whether confronted directly by parents or other adult figures, or simply avoiding outward expression because of inopportune situations, the children behave as they do because Haneke suggests that violence among children stems from a lack of emotional maturation; the family unit must nurture children for a healthy society.

Young Characters Exposed to Violence

In some instances, children also directly experience violence. The most conspicuous example of violence inflicted upon a child character occurs in *Funny Games*,

when Peter blasts Georgie with a rifle and scatters blood across the living room. The protagonists' fateful decision occurs when Anne and George collectively decide to disarm their captor once Paul leaves the room. Georgie's death can thus, in a sense, be attributed to his parents' actions. Of course, on an aesthetic level, Georgie's death functions to elicit audience sympathy and build tension for the climax.

Earlier, Paul covers Georgie's head with a pillowcase and tightens his grip so that Georgie cannot move. The striking image of the child with a bag covering his facial features is eerily similar to imagery of an executed prisoner or a victim of suffocation. As a fearful reaction, Georgie urinates on himself and Paul insults his immaturity. Georgie then summons courage and runs from the captors. After being violated, Georgie transfers affect into action, an event that will become a trope to be analyzed in the next chapter.

Erika suspects that Anna is flirting with Walter during the concert rehearsal in *The Piano Teacher*. In a fit of indignation, she stuffs shattered glass in Anna's coat pocket. When Anna dons the coat, she reaches into the pocket and mangles her hand, crippling her piano skills and forcing her to withdraw from the concert. Throughout the film, Erika exhibits cruel behavior to Anna, insulting and goading her when she claims she is ill and downplaying her musical skills. That Erika reacts with violent anger after the simple suspicion of flirtation suggests a childish jealousy and naiveté. Erika is an adult figure to many young students at the school but her compulsions to sadomasochism surface in such rude and demeaning behavior to the younger generation. Anna exhibits certain naïve tenderness, and Erika's harsh actions far outweigh that of Anna's potential

to divert Walter's attention. Only after Walter rapes Erika does she elicit a sympathetic response equal to that of her student, herself a victim of unchecked aggression.

There are also instances of children indirectly experiencing violence, as well. In *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, the young Romanian boy, Marian, wanders the streets of Paris without supervision or guidance. Inge and Paul, looking to adopt a child, see him interviewed on the local news in a segment probing the plight of refugees within the borders of Austria. The couple takes in Marian and Inge begins to teach him German expressions. While at the bank, Inge asks Marian to stay inside the vehicle while she completes her transaction. While Inge's fate after the shooting is unclear, Marian is an indirect recipient of violence because his new mother is either killed, injured, or otherwise affected by the shooting and he, presumably, must either live motherless with Paul or again wander the streets as a refugee.

In *Code Unknown*, Anne sips wine and irons her clothing while the television nearby plays. In the apartment across the hall, she faintly hears the sound of a child in pain, most likely being abused. Anne ignores the cries and continues her chores. Later, someone has left a note for Anne at her door. She confronts Mrs. Becker, from whose apartment the sounds were coming, but Mrs. Becker denies having written the note. Even later, we witness a funeral for Françoise, whom we presume was under the care of elderly Mrs. Becker. John David Rhodes speculates that Anne is indirectly responsible for the child:

Anne does, of course, flinch and pause in sympathy. She even agonizes over her indecision about how to respond to this abuse in two more scenes...In the end, however, she chooses to exercise her metropolitan right to ignore the cries of the suffering child. We might identify with

what we, as spectators of this unusual but nonetheless realist fiction, imagine is Anne's skepticism: What if what she hears is not actually abuse? What if there is a story that would explain those cries?...Anne cannot be certain about what she hears, and this uncertainty, the product of which is her failure to intervene, contributes, surely, to the death of a child...(2010, pp. 96-97).

Indeed, the child is not seen in the film, but the funeral raises similar questions: what if there is a story that would explain that this dead child is not necessarily that one who was abused? The presence of the grieving Mrs. Becker at the funeral confirms that this was, in fact, the child that Anne heard suffering. Thus, Anne, an able-bodied woman who had the power and option to intervene (unlike Mrs. Becker), chose not to.

In most instances, the affected children are victims of violence because of vengeful behavior. These events occur in civilized, urban or domestic settings in which violence does not normally happen or is otherwise a rare and noteworthy event. Thus, in Haneke's oeuvre, children who appear safe or sheltered are still quite susceptible to violence, usually from an angry adult figure. This is a clearly illustrated societal problem and reminds us that violence can occur in a variety of locations with children being the most vulnerable potential victims.

The Modeling of Violent Behavior⁴

In addition to child characters' susceptibility to violence, many parental characters present their offspring with a violent example through their direct or indirect

⁴ Adult characters instilling violent ideals in their young surfaces quite a bit in contemporary U.S. cinema. This is a central theme in *A History of Violence* (Cronenberg, 2005), *Babel* (Inarritu, 2006), *Menace II Society* (the Hughes brothers, 1993), *A Perfect World* (Eastwood, 1993), *The War* (Avnet, 1994), *The Kingdom* (Berg, 2007), and *Mean Creek* (Estes, 2004).

actions. In *Benny's Video*, the Father insists that Benny and his Mother take respite in Egypt while he disposes of the young woman's murdered corpse. We are shown no resistance to this decision on Benny's part. In an interview with Serge Toubiana, Haneke posits this to be an acceptance of callous ideology:

To show this [tape of the girl's murder] to his parents, on the one hand, perhaps it's out of fear and an inability to speak about it, but at the same time, it's a huge provocation. It's a confrontation. You could interpret it as if he's saying, "See what you've made me"-- For me, that's not the re-creation of the family, it's a total breakdown at that point. If your child shows you this act, that makes it more real than before, when you saw this act. "We're not in a film"--well, we are in a film. But we're in the position of someone who's concerned with what's in the film. I'm the one who came up with it, but even so, when I saw it during the editing, I thought, "The second time you see it [, it is] stronger than the first." Even though the first time, you're very surprised and shocked. But I was much more upset the second time when the parents watch it. Because then, it raises the question of responsibility...In principle, that's the theme of all my films: guilt. How do you deal with this? And the passage in Egypt is also an expression of that. He runs away to avoid responsibility, but at the same time, he becomes more guilty. The mother, because she knows what the father is going to do. Maybe the boy knows too. He knows because he filmed it. He knows more than his parents what it's all about, what his father is doing. But at the same time, he wants to deny his own guilt, by saying, "I didn't want to. It was a moment"...Becoming guilty is a rarely a very clear thing. (*Benny's Video* DVD)

By this time, we fully understand that Haneke provides more questions than answers but stresses "guilt" as important thematic element. Obviously, the culpability for the murder in *Benny's Video* is on the table in Haneke's mind. Regardless of responsibility, by sending Benny to Egypt, the Father transfers guilt to himself and in a sense is causal for his own eventual legal implication. As Haneke states, Benny is despondent about the murder upon his return from Egypt and simply blames his careless impulses for such heinous behavior ("I wanted to see what it felt like"). By doing so, he

is adopting his Father's method of repressing the murder. It is debatable whether or not the Father is disposing of the body to preserve his family unit or to salvage his reputation among his peers. Benny has neither of these concerns in his youth, and by adopting his Father's behavior, he dooms his parents to a life imprisonment: the carrying of guilt for Benny, as Haneke points out, is quite frightening.

In *Time of the Wolf*, as described previously, the father from the squatting family holds Anne and Georges at gun point, demanding they abandon the household and find shelter elsewhere. Whether intentional or not, the father kills Georges and follows through with his request; Anne and her children leave. The father's wife and children are stunned by his actions, weeping and screaming at the bloody sight. The father, in desperation, allows violence of his doing to exist garishly on display for his wife and children to see, not only out of necessity but to demonstrate the lengths of his protective instincts for his family's survival.

Later, Anne encounters the father and his family at the train station, her fury and sadness from her husband's murder resurfacing. Unfortunately, the other refugees cannot hold the father accountable because Anne has no evidence of the murder: she is helpless about the deterioration of authority and represses even further into callous behavior: "eat or be eaten." In these instances of parents instilling violence in their children, it is in response to extraordinary circumstances.

Children also broadcast or convey an understanding of violence and its consequences through violence inflicted upon animals. Benny is obsessed with his video of the hog slaughter in *Benny's Video*, so much so that he analyzes it in slow motion and

exhibits a certain fan behavior by collecting the weapon actually used in the footage.

After he invites the young woman to his home, he shows her the footage with admiration, possibly to help her understand what will happen to her in the ensuing moments.

Moreover, as Benny is aware that the murder is being captured on videotape, perhaps he is displaying an understanding of violence as little more than spectacle when put in the context of the medium: the young woman can thus be treated with the same emotionless disregard as the hog.

The Pastor threatens Martin for masturbating in *The White Ribbon*, warning his son that his “nerves” will deteriorate and he will succumb to death if he continues to pleasure himself. Martin is moved to tears from the death threats. Later, the Pastor discovers his bird, Peepsie, with a scissor blade jammed into its head. As the narrative is purposefully ambiguous as to the identity of the culprits, one can only assume that this act of aggression was Martin’s communication to his father that his threats were translated to violent reaction in his son’s mind. Since Martin is constantly scolded and oppressed by his father, this is the boy’s most direct way of seeking revenge. Martin is aware of his father’s affection for Peepsie and so he exerts what he determines as an equal amount of pain from his father’s lashings onto the bird.

As children and animals elicit similar amounts of sympathy from the viewer because they are both supposedly chaste, it is quite disturbing to see the innocent violating the innocent. Haneke is constantly evaluating how children understand and potentially commit violence but always in reaction to adult figures.

Overall, the young characters in Haneke's films serve to reflect the potential dysfunction of the family unit and how this dysfunction can possibly have a negative ripple effect among society. It is a difficult task to view films that directly confront violence as it pertains to children and youth; perhaps since Haneke consistently stages these instances of violence in familiar settings--a middle-class home, a bank--rather than a decidedly violent setting as commonly viewed in news media, he reminds us that all locales are susceptible to violence and its consequences are always negative. A common humanity, and especially a nurturing and non-violent family setting, are essential to breaking trends of violence stemming from miscommunication and stifled emotions, the most common seeds of violence in urban settings.

Chapter Three: Glimmers of Hope

It may be a difficult task to find what can be referred to as “glimmers of hope” in Haneke’s oeuvre. Upon first viewing, it is as if Haneke wishes ill will upon the viewer, showing at times the lowest misery of human existence. As a critical viewer, it is not enough simply to decipher the how and why Haneke has created these stark, alienating narratives. Haneke’s films are summarily seething with an ever-present sense of the social and political climate underneath the events of the narrative. As he has consistently stated in interviews, it is *our* responsibility as viewers to solve the problems he exposes. Like the final scene of Elia Suleiman’s¹ *Divine Intervention* (2002) wherein Suleiman’s character sits with his mother watching a pressure cooker reach the moments just before it explodes, Haneke strategically places reminders of how current issues constantly surround characters, though they are not all as metaphorically apparent. I refer to these reminders in Haneke’s oeuvre as the “pressure cooker:” visual or thematic elements that serve to keep the viewer alert to how societal dysfunction always erupts from within society (disconnected humans, unfeeling behavior, cultural misunderstandings) but can stem from outward influence (technology).

In broad strokes, the “pressure cooker” becomes less threatening as Haneke proceeds in his films, its presence virtually absent from *Time of the Wolf* and *The White Ribbon*. This may be significant since, as I will discuss in this chapter, these two films

¹ Suleiman, certainly an antecedent of Haneke, is a filmmaker whose politically charged works frequently feature fragmented narratives, instill a sense of alienation, and generally reflect the aesthetics of Haneke.

feature the strongest “glimmers of hope” and the least outward influences on their conflicts. The alienated characters in films like *The Seventh Continent* or *Benny’s Video* are “rehumanized” through personal interaction, sometimes forced to confront their disconnection through unpleasant circumstances. Nevertheless, these instances in the earlier films suggest that the fate of our crumbling society is not irreversible. More apparent, and perhaps more compelling, are child characters who voluntarily assume the role of adults when they are confronted with harm or the threat of harm. These moments suggest that Haneke is perhaps hopeful for future generations to quell common “coldness”² and spread knowledge of violence and the responsibility for its representation.

As previously stated, alienation appears most prominently in Haneke’s first three films, the loosely formed “glaciation trilogy.” I cover how this alienation is not necessarily persistent and those characters that appear to have completely succumbed still sometimes experience an epiphany of sorts, what I will refer to as the “rehumanization.” I will then discuss occurrences of children and youth acting as adults, children bonding, and youth recognizing differences. These moments suggest “glimmers of hope.”

The Effects of Technology and "Rehumanizing"

In the early films, characters have become numbed to interpersonal relationships and assume the persona of automaton but occasionally a single moment may display a fragment of returning to connections with other human beings. Often technology

² Haneke refers to this theme in many DVD interviews.

intervenes to prevent these connections, but when it is removed, contact becomes possible. In *The Seventh Continent*, Georg has been promoted at his company after his supervisor becomes sick. Georg peruses a printout of staggering amounts of numbers, “overseeing” what a machine is slowly churning. The supervisor arrives in Georg’s work space to claim his belongings. We learn that the supervisor has been forced into early retirement because of his excessive absences due to his illness. Georg informs the supervisor that all of his things left behind have been disposed of; the supervisor becomes depressed. With a hint of scorn, the supervisor reclaims a photograph of his dog that has been tacked to the bulletin board (perhaps as an inappropriately callous act of office humor?). After a moment of hesitation, Georg resumes perusing the printout, relegating the supervisor’s presumably lengthy stint as a co-worker to only a memory. In what seems to be a common trope in films that are critical of bureaucracy, Georg is devoid of humanity in quite an uncomfortable moment and stifles emotion by simply burying his gaze into his mundane tasks.

Earlier in the same film, Anna’s brother Alex eats dinner with the family. Music plays³ and the adults discuss investments. Soon, however, Alex begins to sob uncontrollably; Anna comforts him while Georg simply looks on, and Eva gazes with a sense of curiosity. To soothe the troubled Alex, Georg and Anna invite him to watch television with them, their common viewing drowning the potential for more awkward and embarrassing interaction. The television also soothes Eva as she slowly dies after

³ It should be noted that the music played during the dinner is an English-language pop song, another subtle swipe at U.S. media proliferating the globe.

taking her sleeping pills. It is too much to bear for the parents simply to watch their daughter pass without distraction of media.

Only when Georg slowly fades to his own death does the narrative reflect his first-person thoughts of regret. He gazes at the television, which had been delivering the “soothing” television programs but now only displays static: the technological distraction has broken down. His memory flashes to a significant image, his parents, who will presumably be left bereaved. Georg’s flashback is his “rehumanization,” which he only achieved through self-punishment and the silencing of delivery systems for media, but he does, for once, think of other people.

In *Benny’s Video*, the Father commits to dismembering and disposing of the young woman’s body, sending Benny and his Mother to Egypt while he does so. Upon their return, the Father tells his son that he loves him. His distant and cold relationship with his offspring reaffirmed through tragic circumstances and his “rehumanization” painfully apparent. That the Father was willing to keep his son’s crime secret indicates his intentions to preserve his family unit, instead of simply disowning, disconnecting, and potentially continuing his life and career by sweeping the incident under the proverbial rug.

The “pressure cooker” remains intact, however, and Benny implicates his parents in the hiding of the body through his video of the murder. While in Egypt, Benny continues to filter experience through the lens of his video camera, capturing footage of his tours and even journaling on tape, his addressing of the camera eerily suggesting that he has developed a more interpersonal relationship with a piece of technology than with

any actual person. Eventually, the same technology is responsible for the transfer of guilt from Benny to his parents. As discussed in the previous chapter, lack of parental guidance and obsession with technology, Haneke is stating, can only produce undesirable effects.

The trope of technology preventing connections is covered in *Code Unknown*. Georges begins a project in which he photographs people on subway trains using a hidden trigger to discreetly fire the shutter. His photographs are reminiscent of Dorothea Lange, the image of the face displaying remarkable insight into each subject. During this sequence, Georges's voiceover narration describes his recent assignment in Kosovo in which he was captured and imprisoned for lack of credentials. He believes he has been saved, however, by a figure who can only ask in English, without comprehension of its meaning, the question, "What can I do for you?" Georges directly experiences an instance involving his own "dehumanization" of "Others" in a foreign environment. That he could not receive assistance from what he perceived as an objector among his captors reinforces his intuition to gaze at outside worlds through a lens, seeking to embrace those on the other side of a language barrier. His personal photography project is an effort to again "rehumanize" those in his environment, an array of faces from different cultures. Although there is no direct communication between Georges and his subjects, he preserves his interaction for others at which to gaze. In a film with a narrative centered on miscommunication among identity and culture, Georges attempts to reframe his gaze from his own environment and gain a humanistic and sympathetic understanding of his

fellow citizens before his next assignment elsewhere (presumably a foreign, war-torn environment).

Overall, these instances of characters reconnecting with other people are borne from negative or potentially negative circumstances. In the earlier films, the characters seemed doomed from the beginning and are surrounded by technology. In the later films, however, the characters translate emotional response into positive action, especially in *Code Unknown* (including Georges's use of technology for positive personal exploration). Haneke seems to suggest that an effort to keep humanity at the forefront of political or social action, and to practice careful discretion when utilizing technology with interaction, will only bolster society in our near future.

Children Assuming Adult Roles

Child and youth characters frequently are confronted with peril, and some are able to muster courage and valor to complete tasks usually expected of adults. In *Caché*, upon Pierrot's return home from when he was missing, which was revealed to be simply a misunderstanding among parents and children, Pierrot directly confronts his mother about her affair. He is afraid of the dissolution of his family unit and decides to take action for its preservation. Ultimately, whether Anne and Georges's bond will last is unanswered, but Pierrot may now function without buried emotion (unlike his father).

The final scene suggests as well that Pierrot will develop new allies from the mistakes of his father. After Majid kills himself, his son directly confronts Georges at his workplace. In the restroom, Georges furiously goads the son, even attempting to incite

violence. The son refuses, simply stating that he wanted to speak with Georges about his past relationship with Majid and seek closure. Later, Majid's son finds Pierrot at his school and speaks with him as well, the younger generation of the males at the center of the film's conflict communicating after both have experienced intense emotional events.⁴

In *Funny Games*, Georgie is humiliated when he urinates in his pants and sobs, but he finds courage and escapes from Peter and Paul, running to the house next door. Paul follows closely behind. He reaches the house and enters, removing his shoes and pants in an attempt to elude his captor. While silently searching for Paul's whereabouts, Georgie sees a rifle on the floor and slowly creeps toward it. In the bathroom nearby, he sees the legs of another victim, Georgie's face reflecting overwhelming fear. Georgie retrieves the rifle, and Paul flips on the lights. Paul begins to taunt Georgie as he approaches the young boy, chiding him on the steps to actually fire the gun. Georgie primes the gun and pulls the trigger; the gun is not loaded. Although Paul takes the opportunity again to take the boy hostage, Georgie was willing to kill someone in order to protect his parents. When confronted with dire circumstances, a child has shown ultimate courage in an effort to preserve his family unit.

This happens with more subtlety in *The White Ribbon*. Gustav discovers a lame bird and approaches his father, the Pastor, about nursing it back to health. The Pastor is at first hesitant but approves of Gustav's caretaking because it will provide his son with an early lesson in responsibility. Later, the Pastor warns Martin that if Martin does not stop masturbating, he will face illness and possibly death. Martin presumably enacts revenge

⁴ Perhaps, however, Majid's son threatens Pierrot. Their interaction is inaudible.

since the Pastor's bird, Peepsie, is discovered stabbed to death. Sensing his father's sadness from such a heinous act, Gustav presents the Pastor with his own bird, now completely healthy. The Pastor accepts, almost moved to tears at such a selfless gesture.

Gustav is the youngest member (aged probably five or six) of the family, an important narrative element. *The White Ribbon* tells the story of the generation that eventually became adult citizens of Germany under the Third Reich, some of whom were most likely members of the Nazi party and even foot soldiers. However, Roy Grundmann reminds us in an interview with Haneke that "the film does not point toward a certain path of self-destruction" (2010, p. 598). On the upbringing and education of the children in the village, Haneke had this to state in the same interview:

I don't know...how to raise a child the right way. Making a child into a responsible member of society who is not neurotic is one of the most difficult things in the world and, of course, the institutions invariably fail, because they measure everyone and everything by the same yardstick. There doesn't seem to be any other way, but this is dangerous. There is this nice word in English that I learned while making [*Funny Games US*]. The boy who pees in his pants out of fear receives the comment: 'He is not yet housebroken!' When this term, 'housebroken,' was explained to me, I found it to be a very enlightening word. It is the ideal term to describe the concept of bringing someone up. We break the young individual so that he or she becomes tolerable for society (2010, pp. 598-599).

Haneke points his finger at "institutions" and suggests that "housebreaking" youth, raising them with an overbearing or suppressive authoritarian upbringing, may not be the most sensible method. However, as Gustav exemplifies, some youth will overcome these circumstances. Further, Gustav never receives physical discipline but also does not act in a manner that deserves punishment. Both Martin and Klara are among the group of children that the Schoolteacher most prominently suspects as perpetrators of the series of

crimes, and the Pastor indeed disciplines them with violence (whipping with a cane). Regardless of Martin and Klara's culpability, they both are on the receiving end of violence while Gustav is not. Ultimately, Gustav's selfless nature is naturally instilled, perhaps instinctual, rather than "housebroken." Martin and Klara's "housebreaking" is perhaps partially responsible for their suspected mischief.⁵

A child sacrifices (or at least is willing to do so) in *Time of the Wolf*. Eva wakes to see a woman being viciously raped. She is paralyzed with fear and sees that Ben is also roused from his sleep because of the muffled cries of the violated woman. Eva immediately crouches and covers Ben's eyes and ears, instructing him to sleep. When Anne is absent or unavailable, Eva is quick to assume the role of protector for her young brother. This is also evidenced earlier when Ben takes shelter from the rain under the

⁵ I'm particularly struck by the performance of Maria-Victoria Dragus, who played Klara. As the eldest of the Pastor's offspring, she is the "leader" of the mischievous children of the village and is the most prominent of the interrogated. She has an almost glazed look on her face when delivering her dialogue that lends an eerie and mysterious quality to her character, a perfect trait to serve the film. According to Haneke, this aesthetic quality may have been the result of serendipity, as Haneke admits that working with the children was not an easy task: "We auditioned about seven thousand children in order to find the fifteen that we needed. They are different from the way children normally get used in a film, where they are simply nice and chatty. These were emotionally difficult roles that required finding talented children. A whole crew worked on this for half a year. The person in charge of this process was then also present during the complete shoot. He had prepared the children well, so that the work was relatively free of problems. With the very young it is, of course, tedious. A five-year-old concentrates for five minutes and then he is bored. Then you have to take a break and play with him, after which you can continue to shoot a bit more. Working with the older ones wasn't much more difficult than working with professional actors, because they had been very carefully selected and prepared" (Haneke in Grundmann 2010, p. 597.) Working with child actors, Haneke admits, also directly affected the filmmaking techniques and lent starkness to the film's overall aesthetics: "It was clear that the dialog scenes with the small children, for example, could not be filmed in a long take, because they cannot memorize their lines. We had to do shot/countershot. Knowing this in advance is part of the craft of directing, so one doesn't have to improvise" (Haneke in Grundmann 2010, p. 597).

abandoned boxcar. Eva comforts him and attempts to keep him warm. After the death of her father, Eva is determined to protect her family unit by assuming the role of a second mother.

Ben attempts to return the favor.⁶ An elderly man entertains the group of refugees by twirling a razor blade in his mouth. Later, Ben overhears the man referring to a group of people who are scattered in nearby settlements who identify themselves as the “Just” and sacrifice themselves by stripping off their clothing and jumping into a raging bonfire. At the climax of the film, Ben lies among the sleeping refugees, his nose bleeding.⁷ He rouses himself and heads outside and some distance away from the station, settling on building a small fire on the track. Following the example of the “Just,” he strips his clothing and is prepared to burn himself. Fellow refugee Jean intervenes before Ben can make his personal sacrifice. Jean assures Ben that his courage will positively affect all of the displaced citizens, softly stating, “It’s enough that you were ready to do it.” The next and final shot of the film is presumably from the point of view of a train that charges across the French countryside, its wheels smoothly rolling on the tracks. Catherine Wheatley summarizes the significance of this sequence very well, and also posits that Ben’s action can be considered a rejection of a previous generation’s values:

⁶ Self-sacrifice is a common trope among post-apocalyptic narratives, particularly films like *The Road* (Hillcoat, 2009), *Terminator Salvation* (McG, 2009), *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2003), *The Quiet Earth* (Murphy, 1985), and *Alien3* (Fincher, 1992). This final scene reflects, like Haneke’s consistent revision of the aesthetics of violence, a revision of genre tropes not unlike his more outwardly apparent deconstruction of the thriller with *Funny Games*.

⁷ Perhaps Ben is beginning to feel the effects of malnourishment. Whether or not his mental faculties have been affected by lack of nutrition, at this point in the narrative, is unclear.

The children form the film's moral core...[Ben's action] ends the film and acts as a final comment on human nature, suggesting that in humanity's darkest hour there may still be hope. It is by far the most optimistic ending to any of Haneke's films, and it is also the most cathartic. The spectator's fears for the child are allayed, the fascist [Jean] is redeemed by his act of kindness and his tenderness to the boy (2009, pp. 141-142).⁸

This sequence, which served as a large inspiration for the writing of this analysis, is a prime example of a child assuming an adult role. Ben's willingness to sacrifice himself for a greater cause is a stark contrast to the selfish decision of Benny implicating his parents in *Benny's Video*. The largest contrast between these narratives, aside from the temporal setting, is the presence of the "pressure cooker." *Benny's Video* is saturated with media platforms while *Time of the Wolf* is all but devoid of them. Benny's obsessive compulsion to consume media whether traveling through the city or lounging in his bedroom anesthetizes him. As previously stated in Chapter Two, media serve as ambient noise in conversation, such as the Father chastising Benny to seek fresh air, all the while the local news program blares updates of social unrest like an infinite ticker tape. While secluding themselves in Egypt, Benny and his Mother relax in a hotel room, their gaze fixated upon the television⁹ that broadcasts with fanfare a colorful and easily digestible

⁸ Christopher Sharrett has a much darker reading of the final sequence of *Time of the Wolf*: "Culture is represented in this film through some of its primal myths, such as the story of child sacrifice--a narrative central to the Bible--used to revivify a nation. Here the myth is thoroughly deconstructed, as a naked, vulnerable boy stands in front of a bonfire on a railroad track in the film's penultimate scene. Nothing can be redeemed by the sacrifice since nothing has had authentic existence; Haneke makes the apocalypse that causes the narrative's crisis deliberately vague, as if to suggest that humanity itself has long ago produced the apocalypse by its causal cruelties and assumptions, its taken-for-granted emptiness" (2010, p. 219).

⁹ Alex Lykidis posits that this scene foreshadows themes that will play an important role in Haneke's later films: "...Benny has chosen an Arabic-language pop song to listen to on TV, the first moment when the local culture threatens to overwhelm the aural or visual

program sampling of “the Other.” In *Time of the Wolf*, media are a rare commodity, as evidenced when Eva asks to listen to the music from the young man’s radio. By this event, Haneke suggests that future generations will be confronted with opportunities for sacrifice for preserving their family unit or community. Further, he suggests disconnecting from media saturation will lead to the most positive outcome for communities at large.

Youth Bonding

In some films, young characters are able to bond, most through collective musical efforts. The most prominent example of this is *Code Unknown*, which opens with a classroom of deaf children who play charades. The young girl¹⁰ posing the clue simply backs against the wall and cowers to the floor; the other children cannot decipher what she is attempting to communicate. Later, however, the children have all achieved unity through their collective drum beating lessons, the final scene featuring a public concert celebrating their accomplishment. Christopher Sharrett refers to their music as “noise”:

Sheer noise as emblem of the final breakdown of the semantic code becomes a controlling notion...The noise is the drumming (a cultural expression both primal and constrained) of the deaf schoolchildren, who can communicate through this physical action, but the suggestion seems to

economy of the film. At the end of this scene, Benny’s usually stoic and impassive mother breaks down uncontrollably. This is an enigmatic moment, and we can certainly interpret her breakdown as a delayed reaction to the heinousness of Benny’s crime and to her complicity in its cover-up. But her breakdown may also be seen as a response to the failed demarcation of European space from non-European space...and a harbinger of the traumatic multicultural encounters that will become the dominant theme of Haneke’s later films” (2010, p. 456).

¹⁰ This young girl bears a remarkable resemblance to Leni Tanzer, the actress who plays Eva in *The Seventh Continent*.

be that communication happens only at an atomized, insulated level, an act of communion within a minisociety at the margins of a larger, vicious civilization, a situation not unlike that depicted at the end of *Blowup*, wherein Thomas seems to find solace by joining the symbolic games of the mime troupe ("Haneke" 2010, p. 218).

I disagree with Sharrett's argument because this diverse group of children, under the instruction of Franco-African musicians, cannot traditionally communicate but are still able to form a more functional community than the adult characters.¹¹ The final shot of the film features a young boy from the group of deaf children addressing the same classroom from the beginning. Instead of single word emissions, the boy communicates in what appears to be a stream of consciousness. Although the group of children can in a sense be interpreted as a "minisociety," it is a young generation that has made progress in overcoming a disability through a collectively transformative experience.

Counterpoints to this "glimmer of hope" arise but instances of children bonding are in both *Benny's Video* and *The White Ribbon*. In the former, Benny is a member of his school's choir. He utilizes these practice sessions to participate in the sale of pharmaceuticals amongst his peers. Further, Benny and his friends exhibit delinquent behavior such as smoking cigarettes while at a sleepover. Many of the children accused

¹¹ Sharrett makes a wonderful further analysis of music's role in *Code Unknown*. In the opening scene with the inciting event, a man playing music on the street is ignored: "The rhythm and blues street artist, whose exemplary performance goes unnoticed by the key characters just as they are about to unleash the terrible chain of events representing the film's vision of social collapse, is a key moment. Rhythm and blues--one of the liberatory music forms of the world, evolved from the experience of slavery and the betrayal of Reconstruction in the United States--is shown here to be ripped utterly from any social/historical context, having no function as a "reminder" to the racists whose fury is soon unleashed on the Other. The social world that music is supposed to celebrate, certainly the case with older rock and rhythm and blues, is here thoroughly atomized, with lives converging but ultimately broken into discrete, alienated units" ("Haneke" 2010, p. 218).

of the village's crimes in *The White Ribbon* are also members of the church choir in the latter. While the collective creation of music usually bodes well for children in these films, those who reject such communal experience are revealed to be troubled.

Recognizing Differences

Some children recognize that the previous generation embraces values that are not suitable for healthy societal function. In *Caché*, as discussed above, both Majid's son and Pierrot directly confront adults: Majid's son speaks with Georges about Georges's childhood relationship with Majid while Pierrot chides Anne for her infidelity. Through these actions, both young men exhibit intuition and reject Georges's course that represses guilt and shame.

In a more extended instance in *The White Ribbon*, the Schoolteacher invites Eva for a picnic outside the village. Through his voiceover, he comments on his love for her: "She was living with distant cousins who gave her parents regular reports on her behavior. She had become thinner, which made her even prettier. I was ravished again by her mixture of shyness and almost childlike outspokenness." The two banter, and Eva rests her head on his shoulder. The Schoolteacher turns from the road and travels on a perpendicular path, stating that he wants to share lunch with Eva by a secluded pond in the woods. Eva becomes flushed with a look of worry, asking him to turn back. The Schoolteacher reassures her that he has no inappropriate intentions: "How could I disgrace my future wife?" However, he agrees to turn back. Eva thanks him, a bashful glow on her face.

In a narrative loaded with characters whose internal thoughts and actions are not necessarily harmonious, the Schoolteacher chooses dignity over natural impulses. He admits that he was very attracted to her upon seeing her on this particular visit, and he very well could have taken her to the pond and tried to seduce her. However, he also states that he recognizes her “childlike” qualities and instead assumes the role of protector, choosing to guard her innocence.

Both the Schoolteacher and Eva share an “outsider” status to the village where they work. Moreover, the Schoolteacher is the most aware of his peers of the probability of the children’s culpability through his keen senses. Haneke comments on this bond in an interview with Roy Grundmann:

Dramaturgically, I needed a figure who comes from the outside and who can narrate the events in retrospect...[T]he teacher’s love interest also comes from the outside. These characters come from outside the universe of this village, which does function as a model. And through this, the teacher is given the opportunity to reflect critically upon the events in retrospect. At the end of the film he tells the audience that, after the war, he took over his father’s tailor shop. Apparently, he no longer wanted to remain in the service of the kind of education he had been made to represent (Haneke in Grundmann 2010, p. 599)

Indeed, according to his narration, the Schoolteacher does inherit a tailor’s shop and leaves behind his career as educator. He and Eva marry and reside in Eichwald, never coming in contact again with any of the villagers.¹²

¹² The narration in *The White Ribbon*, according to Haneke’s interview with Roy Grundmann, has intriguing discrepancies in its various release markets and could have led to differences in audience reception. Haneke states the following about this voiceover: “At film festivals the film is shown with a completely subtitled print, and this print will also be shown at urban art cinemas. But in the print that will be shown in regular movie theaters, the narrator is going to be dubbed rather than subtitled. By the same actor who speaks the German text and who, of course, has a heavy German accent.

It is important to note that the Schoolteacher and Eva are close in age. However, following the facets of the narrative, the Schoolteacher belongs to the “adults” and Eva to the “youth,” this distinction stemming from Haneke’s choice to provide all young characters with names and all adult characters with labels reflecting their function in the village (i.e., the Pastor, the Baron and Baroness, the Farmer, etc.). The Schoolteacher and Eva are aware of, or at least skeptical, of the generational divide among the villagers. In tears, Eva visits the Schoolteacher late one evening to inform him that she had been fired from her service as nanny to the Baron’s son. The two discuss how they cannot comprehend how the citizens of the village could inflict violence upon each other. Further, Eva explains to the Schoolteacher that she is afraid of how her parents will react to her job loss. That Eva and the Schoolteacher marry and become a family unit can be considered a “glimmer of hope” because they are critical of authority and committed to non-violence against those in the village.¹³

Ultimately, as evidenced in this chapter, Haneke adds more “glimmers of hope” as his oeuvre progresses. *The White Ribbon* proves to feature the most to date. Children are shown to exhibit selflessness when focused on direct action to serve others, as evidenced by Ben in *Time of the Wolf*. Some children show remarkable intellect and

Spectators then get to form their own interpretations. An American viewer might well imagine that the teacher emigrated from Germany. It doesn’t have to mean that--the teacher could also simply have told the story to an American. But one could understand it this way, if one wanted to” (Haneke in Grundmann 2010, p. 599).

¹³ I state that they are committed to non-violence because of this discussion they have, but also because during the Schoolteacher’s direct confrontations with the children about their suspected crimes, he does not threaten them with violence when seeking an admittance of guilt. It should also be noted that the Schoolteacher states that he was drafted and served during World War I.

tenderness in times of distress, like Gustav in *The White Ribbon*. These characters whom appear as “glimmers” are sometimes exposed to violence but all interact with others and gain an understanding of how familial or community preservation is key to a productive society.

Conclusion

Much has been made of [Haneke's] schoolmaster presentation, the way he chastises his audience for perceived wrongs. Yet, whatever the intent, his movies could not exist without violence; they employ it freely while damning its use, creating a kind of double standard where bearing witness is deemed unacceptable for some purposes (crystallized by the rewind scene in 1997's *Funny Games*, where the audience is reprimanded for cheering the murder of an antagonist) but acceptable as a finger-wagging, attention-grabbing device (Cataldo 2010, N.p.).

This quote is from Jesse Cataldo's article "How *The White Ribbon* Fits Into Michael Haneke's Moralizing Cinematic Vision."¹ This is a helpful summation of critical reactions to Haneke's films in general. Cataldo's piece is evidence that Haneke's work is polarizing, but I strongly disagree with his argument. The purpose of my analysis was to identify how the violence in Haneke's films operates to critique society and to point to its hopeful aspects. Indeed, these instances to which Cataldo refers are "attention-grabbing," but they serve necessarily to highlight how standards of violence in cinema have become more and more welcomed for entertainment value rather than punctuating storylines or serving a general dramatic moral.

Ultimately, Haneke's films indicate glaring problems with society and invite the viewer to interpret, gain a critical understanding of, and respond with action to these issues. The films reflect certain condensing of society in that all at large national cultures portrayed in his films--Austria, France, the U.S.--are shown to have similar dysfunction. This dysfunction stems from as mentioned previously, miscommunication, the repression of emotion as by those who wish to preserve their bourgeois position rather than family

¹ Cataldo refers to Haneke as a "schoolmaster," delightful especially since the Schoolteacher is one of the most sympathetic characters of *The White Ribbon*.

or moral value, and the continuing proliferation of technological stimuli that causes psychic numbing.

As suggested by the “glimmers of hope” evident in Haneke’s films, the mustering of humanity and human connection is essential for conflict resolution. In general, as demonstrated in this research, there is more evidence of this possibility in Haneke’s later films than the earlier ones.² In most instances, children are the strongest reflections of hope for society. Careful attention to their upbringing and demonstrating positive moral codes are clear responsibilities for adults. As the title of this thesis states, the children are always watching, not only adult behavior but technology and media as well. Moreover, as Haneke sometimes sets narratives in the past (*The White Ribbon*) and the future (*Time of the Wolf*), he suggests that with the absence of numbing media and more focus on the value of community would come a better, more humane society.

This analysis used a neo-formalist approach as its methodology. For further analysis, new ideas culled from research that employs psychoanalysis might help explain the power of Haneke’s films. For example, there are many strong phallic symbols in Haneke’s work. Benny’s hand cannon in *Benny’s Video* emits a powerful metal bolt into his victim when fired. One could read the scene as a burst of built-up tension and the only way in which Benny can respond is with violence as he has not been educated about sexuality. *The Piano Teacher* is laden with psychoanalytic elements. Erika lives with her mother and sleeps in the same bed with her. This may be a large reason for her repressed

² Perhaps this can be attributed to Haneke’s growing critical and audience attention. As audiences grow, he may be constructing his films with a less caustic tone, allowing viewers to discover his past works on their own accord.

sexual desires that translate to sadomasochism. *Caché*'s entire narrative is constructed around a threatening voyeur.

My research also assumes Haneke as an author of free agency. A different approach may prove different results. As well, as mentioned previously, Haneke can be situated as a descendent from New German Cinema and compared to Wim Wenders and Volker Schlöndorff. How have these filmmakers influenced Haneke and can any of Haneke's aesthetics be attributed to influence from this specific movement in cinema?

The films of this research span twenty years and, as he reminds us in interviews, they are a response to Haneke's dissatisfaction with the rise of representations of ultraviolence, mainly in U.S. cinema. In turn, have Haneke's films had an impact on representing violence?

Reception studies will certainly further this research. This analysis includes brief notes about box-office results for certain films, but I just skim the surface of critical and cultural reaction to the films. If Haneke is to be considered Brechtian, research on viewers' reactions, perhaps through interviews and other case studies, would produce intriguing results. This analysis offers an interpretation of how Haneke's aesthetics are supposed to operate, but an analysis of the reception will serve as evidence of their effectiveness. Further, Haneke's films most likely elicit much different responses in the various countries of their release. How do different cultures perceive them? Do the ratings systems of respective countries of release attract or detract certain audiences?

A valuable research project would involve tracing Haneke's development from his theatrical plays and television films. The television films are relatively obscure, only

available for institutional rental. Do these earlier works display his current aesthetics? Were they as stringent and powerful? What has changed in his style and content?

Haneke is clearly not a completed author. As of this writing, he is in production on a film titled *Amour*. Starring Isabelle Huppert, the film is to be released in 2012. A brief plot synopsis states: “A retired couple deals with aftermath of the wife suffering from a debilitating stroke” (“Amour” 2011, N.p.). Interestingly, Huppert’s character is named Eva, as opposed to the usual Anne or Anna as given to the Haneke’s adult female characters. Is this a clue that Haneke is revising his aesthetics for this new film? Will he say something new about children, youth, and bourgeois culture?

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This thesis was typed by the author.