Anyone who watches a film by Michael Haneke is eventually overwhelmed by a disturbing feeling that is impossible to avoid. His films leave one’s nerves unsettled long after they have ended. The effect is profoundly moving, but it is unlike that induced by a horror film; rather, ordinary life takes on a strangeness that cannot be easily articulated. I have chosen to discuss Haneke’s filmography as the best illustration, in cinema, of what I call self-reflexivity, written with a capital “X” to distinguish this as a form of machinic assemblage that departs from the naïve modernist notions of mirrored self-reflection and its postmodernist redefinition as self-reflexion, with a lowercase “x,” by Giddens, Latour, Foucault, Butler, and others who celebrate a poststructuralist subject of hermeneutical consciousness, a subject of knowledge capable of positioning itself outside...
itself as an objectified cultural object of discourse in order to assert a performative resistance to the Symbolic order, a resistance within a sadomasochistic pact that perverts the law cynically, with self-reflexive irony.

In distinction, self-reflexivity with a capital “X” identifies a desiring machine, a new division of labour between humans and machines that attempts to deterritorialize the spectator’s steady voyeuristic consumption of televised and cinematic media through an active engagement, by mobilizing a particular form of time-image (Deleuze 1989) and a neo-realist style that parodies the melodramatic bourgeois form wherein the self-containment of the personal has been stripped away (Peucker 2000). The spectator cannot enter the frame in Haneke’s anti-narratives but rather is forced to view the situation, usually through long camera takes of characters who have been stripped, by and large, of their psychological intentionality. He does not dwell so much on their faces as on partial objects that repeat and make possible the banality of their existence—like hands, feet, and arms that perform the mechanized rituals of everyday existence. Haneke mobilizes the spectator’s fears, desires, and fantasies, through Verfremdungeffekte (alienation effects) as evoked by Brecht, Eisenstein, and Walter Benjamin, to achieve a sense of astonishment and shock. Cinematic pleasure seems to turn in on itself in an uncanny way.

Much has been critically written on Haneke’s filmography. It seems every year a new book has emerged since his “discovery” by American audiences, with seven of his nine television features produced during his early career in the 1970s and 1980s now re-released with English subtitles. Hence, I hope that this essay makes a unique contribution in maintaining that self-reflexivity, as defined with an uppercase “X,” changes the question of desire from what cinegraphic pictures “want,” a question of desire as “lack,” to what they can “do,” a reorientation to a productive notion of (Haneke’s) desire when it comes to unhinging spectatorship within a society of the synopticon. How might the machinic eye of the cinema as an event, “gaze” at the spectator from that unknowable vanishing point that all realism elides, the place of the Lacanian Real now understood as sinthome—an irrational void that is indifferent to the Symbolic so as to deliver an ethical import? Throughout Haneke’s filmography, the vereisung (chilling) effect of his camera (he calls his first trilogy Vergletscherungs-Trilogie)
carries with it the chill of death by suicide. It is an inhuman gaze, de-anthropomorphized because no one can occupy it. The rays that emanate from that impossible place freeze-frame reality like the long takes that characterize Haneke’s auteurship. The Seventh Continent (1989), his first feature film, ends in communal suicide by the mother, father, and daughter. In Benny’s Video (1992), his next production, there is the effective “death” and breakdown of the family when his parents are arrested as accomplices in Benny’s murder of one of his classmates, a young girl. Finally, in Fragments of Chronology of Chance (1994), the film ends in a shooting spree by a young university student who then takes his own life.

Haneke’s filmography is personally directed against Hollywood cinema and television production in general, disrupting two psychoanalytic subject positions that pervade the representational aesthetic of designer capitalism and its sustaining of the jouissance of the audience through the screen culture of structural violence: the sadomasochism of Hollywood film and the sadism of reality television (Haneke 2008; Metelmann 2003).

Haneke’s filmography attempts to explicitly critique and undo these two subject positions through his mobilization of a particular reflexive machinic assemblage. Haneke, I argue, presents a way out between the standard accepted leftist position in psychoanalytic theory, beginning with Laura Mulvey (1975), in which the ideological effect of spectator fascination (pleasure) offered by mainstream (Hollywood) cinema must be destroyed or at least ruined, and the more recent view, initially articulated by Slavoj Žižek in various forms and brilliantly elaborated in Todd McGowan’s The Real Gaze (2007), wherein spectator fascination is encouraged so that the effects of the Real can then be pondered.

Haneke steers a path between these two positions through the mobilization of a particular time-image, wherein the spectator’s fascination remains intact through the puzzle that his thought-image presents by withholding the unifying signifier of the narrative. The audience expects a satisfying, completed narrative, but Haneke’s anti-narratives thwart such an outcome. This doubles the game that is being played on the screen and in the spectator’s head, yet at the same time the punctum effect of the Real is constantly made available through the mimesis of a realistic form and involuntary memory associated with that form—a phenomenon
I call the virtual Real, which will be explained below. Following Deleuze (1989), Haneke’s films bring “the unconscious mechanisms of thought to consciousness” (160). Thought is brought face to face with its own impossibility—as the unthought; the powerlessness of our thought in contrast with film thought is made evident.

How, then, is this self-reflexivity mobilized so as to be capable of disturbing the accepted frame of spectatorship of television and Hollywood cinema? Haneke has stated that the audience he addresses is precisely the Hollywood crowd who are used to consumptive watching, which situates them most often in a sadomasochistic and sadistic viewing position. It is this viewer he wishes to disturb through his own manipulative neorealistic style, mobilizing various forms of the time-image of the virtual Real. If we consider the three Lacanian psychic registers—the symbolic, the imaginary, and the Real—it is possible to recognize how Haneke’s carefully staged editing, his use of the long take, and his confining of all sound diegetically, following the lead of Robert Bresson, whom he has studied and admires, is able to induce a puzzling uncertainty that cannot be resolved. The narrative, depending on the film, is carried by a movement-image that, by and large, remains distant. Seldom does Haneke include the classic reverse-shot pattern that leads the spectator to identify with the characters. If he does so, it is used with great effect and purpose to alert the audience that something significant is being discussed.7 This movement-image that enables the viewer to seamlessly follow a narrative, however, is disrupted by the irrational or non-relational cut—the black screen—so all we are getting is fragments of characters’ lives, leaving us with a puzzle as to what is going on. These fragments speak to the contingency of life itself, and hence the time-image that emerges presents us with shards of time, forming a crystal-image (as discussed below) in Deleuzian terms. One of the strong themes that continually emerges in Haneke’s films is the continued subversion of the audience’s construction of reality, the assumptions and evaluations that are made to rationalize what’s going on into a coherent story. A simple example is the telling of the so-called “dog” story in the middle of Caché when Anne and Georges are entertaining their friends. During the dinner party, Pierre relates a story about meeting an older woman with a dog, one that involves all sorts of improbable coincidences that seem far-fetched but not impossible. When
all are convinced of this seemingly absurd story, he tells the dinner guests that he was pulling their leg.

This questioning of hermeneutic assurances extends to psychoanalytic analysis as well, since Haneke offers us schizophrenic “unexplainable” behaviour that in some cases ends in suicide. In his first trilogy, both *Seventh Continent* and *71 Fragments* rely on the irrational cut in which the anti-narrative comes together in both cases with an unexplainable suicide based on actual news stories. In *Seventh Continent* mother, father, and daughter commit suicide after demolishing their entire home and flushing all their savings down a toilet. Haneke gives us glimpses over a three-year period of their routinized existence and their inability to communicate with one another despite a life of commodified luxurious living. As spectators, we revisit the utter ordinariness and boredom of their lives, over and over, as these revisitations become memories for us, vivifying a nihilistic existence where everything has been drained of desire, even any hopes for their elementary school daughter, who is clearly disturbed. The implosion of the bourgeois upper-middle-class family indicates the inability to reach outside their walls—neither to their siblings, nor to their aging parents. In *71 Fragments*, a university student appears unable to live up to the demands imposed by exams, by his coach’s expectations of him as a table-tennis champion, and by his parents’ expectations, leading to a psychotic break—the desire to be subjectivized by the big Other, to finally be seen and heard.

In *Benny’s Video*, the middle film of the trilogy, Haneke introduces the Deleuzian crystal-image by way of the video as a recording device. The crystal-image forms the cornerstone of Deleuze’s (1989) time-image. This is a shot that fuses the past of a recorded event with its viewing. The crystal-image is the indivisible unity of the virtual image and the actual image. It is subjective, in the past, and recollected. As a “pure recollection” it exists outside of consciousness, in time. It remains in the temporal past, still alive and ready to be “recalled” by an actual image. We might say that it is an engrammatic image of time stored as memory, ready to intervene in actual events when called on. In contrast, the actual image remains objective, in the present and perceived, whereas the crystal-image lives at the limit of an indiscernible actual and virtual image—Deleuze hints that it is in the Lacanian register of the Real. The crystal-image shapes time as
a constant two-way mirror that splits the present into two heterogeneous directions, “one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past.” David Rodowick (1997) maintains that the time-image fluctuates between actual and virtual, recording or dealing with memory, confusing mental and physical time, actual and virtual, and sometimes marked by incommensurable spatial and temporal links between shots. The twist Haneke gives to this formulation is that the machinic ability of video as a recording device enables him to skilfully disrupt the seemless/seamless flow of the actual with the virtual—one might say producing moments when the crystal-image sends out a disruptive shock ray to the viewer, producing a sense of time that is out of joint. In Benny’s Video the boundary around the actual image—the diegesis as carried by the narrative—is disrupted by the virtual image that is charged with an ethical indictment. At this imaginary psychic register an Entfremdungseffekt (defamiliarization effect) takes place. For at least a moment, there is a “distancing,” an “estrangement” or “defamiliarization.” The viewer is startled as to what is the actual diegesis when it becomes confused with the virtual video recording. It is the video recording that disturbs our scopic looking, delivering its message in its distancing.

In Lacanian terms there is a méconnaisance, a misrecognition, of the image, occurring when the symbolic is re-signified with new meaning. This is best exemplified when Benny’s parents, after speaking to him in his bedroom, have discovered that he has killed the girl and are discussing what now should be done about it. The scene is shot from within Benny’s dark room. Only a crack of brightly lit space is seen through the partly open door. This stock image (which hints at the materiality of the cinematic medium as light entering through the door that acts as a shutter to create an image in the darkened chamber of the bedroom) is shown twice as the voices of the parents, primarily the father, discuss what to do and how to dispose of the body. It appears as if Benny is overhearing everything they are saying from his bedroom. The same shot is again seen toward the end of the film, when we hear the same conversation between the parents we heard and saw earlier through the actual diegetic image. The grain of the image has slightly changed and the voices are quieter, but no less distinct. Another Entfremdungseffekt takes place as spectators soon come to realize that they are watching another one of Benny’s
videos. This time a voice-over conversation between Benny and a policeman with whom he is viewing the video disturbs our viewing, and now this tape will serve to indict both of his parents as accessories after the fact for the murder that their son has committed.

Haneke, however, leaves us with the gaze of surveillance of the Law in the closing shots of Benny’s Video, as cold and impersonal multiple images in the police station spread over the monitors of a surveillance system of the parents entering the interrogation room to (supposedly) be questioned in pursuit of a confession. This camera position—the spectator is watching this surveillance in a shot from above, the so-called “God shot”—transfers into the gaze of the Real, evoking its ethical self-reflexive stance as exemplified by his most successful film Caché. This gaze, placed in the vanishing point of the neo-realist structure, is marked at the end of Benny’s Video and produces a Verfremdungseffekt (an alienation effect, or shock) at the level of the Real, but it is perhaps not sustained long enough to register on the audience, although by placing it at the closing scene Haneke leaves the audience cold and shuddering, as he so often has in his previous films. There is redemption, but it is ever so slight and ever so fleeting and impossible to tell: has Benny finally “felt” something so that he has to confess from overriding guilt, or was this yet another ploy to “get even” with his parents?

Haneke’s film opens with Benny’s video documenting the killing of a pig directly in the spectator’s view; in the middle sections of the film he gives us the méconnaissance of the Imaginary register where the film’s narrative is disrupted by the crystal-image of Benny’s other videos; finally we come to a camera position—Haneke’s own gaze, placed in a nowhere place and space—where both Benny’s videos and the images produced by the surveillance cameras are themselves mastered by this impossible Real position, putting into question the Law itself by the spectator occupying its place of (impossible in this case) judgment. It is this camera position that carries the import of an ethic of the Real in terms of the self-reflexive spectator that forms the structure of Haneke’s neo-realism, what I call the virtual Real (a gaze that is masterfully explored in Caché), this time coming at the end of the film.1 We have been motivated by the film’s diegesis to raise the question: Just who then is responsible for Benny’s murder? Is it the parents, Benny, the spectacular social order, or perhaps

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we viewers who are complicit in its structure? And, if it is all of the above, how are we to disassemble such a structure?

THE GAZE AS VIRTUAL REAL: CACHÉ

Caché opens with a three-minute long shot of the Laurent’s household. As spectators, we again experience a misrecognition of the Imaginary register as we come to recognize that we are watching a video surveillance tape similar to the one at the end of Benny’s Video, but with a twist. It comes from an unknowable or impossible place of the Lacanian Real. It does not exist in the diegesis, only as an impossible place of the camera and, of course, with Haneke behind it. In the opening scene Georges (the protagonist) leaves the apartment to look for the place of the possible camera in Rue de Iris, the name an obvious hint by Haneke that no such surveillance camera can be found. It is perhaps also Haneke’s way of dispelling the myth, first developed by André Bazin (1971) that the long (unedited sequence) camera take as introduced by Italian neo-realist cinema after World War II somehow exposed the truth of reality (verisimilitude) within its frame—that it gave “ontological weight” to the film’s image. Here no “truth” is exposed in the frame but by the force of the frame, which holds Georges hostage to it through surveillance. The virtual Real of this gaze again carries with it an ethical import since it draws out France’s colonial past, notably the incident of 17 October 1961, when the political wing of the main Algerian anticolonial group—the French-based leaders of the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale)—having organized a peaceful demonstration in Paris, was savagely repressed by the police under Maurice Papon for violating an 8:30 p.m. curfew that had been imposed on Muslim French Algerians. An undisclosed number of demonstrators (between 50 and 350) were killed and thrown into the Seine.

In Caché, Haneke ups his game with the spectator by enabling the self-reflexivity to manifest itself through the suturing of the extra-diegetic gaze of the camera position that finds its way indexically by way of the anonymously sent videotapes and child-like images that arrive at the Laurents’ doorstep, forcing viewers to puzzle-solve who is watching them and what they want. All along, Haneke appears to be asking, “What can this film do
through this gaze to unnerve the viewer in relation to Georges’s increasing anxiety?” Haneke puts both the viewer and Georges into a societal tableau, placing them in the “picture” of the contemporary Symbolic order that only the gaze can render possible, which is why Georges seems oblivious to the place of such an impossible “hidden” camera in Majid’s apartment when he reviews with Anne the videotape that has “captured” his visit to Majid. Unlike his suspicion of the surveillance camera, he has no “suspicion” of the camera that “must” have been inside Majid’s apartment that has rendered the videotape that he (with Anne) is viewing. A videotape of his second visit—when Majid commits suicide in front of him—is never seen by him or Anne; rather, it is presented to the viewers, presumably as a recording, from the same impossible position of the gaze.

Spectators viewing the tape of the suicide from the hidden camera position are faced with the way Georges relates to the Algerian Other. The virtual gaze in that room places both Majid and Georges in the tableau of the relations between North African immigrants and the French bourgeoisie who own the culture industry. (Georges is a successful TV host—the character is presumably based on the long-standing Parisian TV literary host Bernard Pivot—and Anne is a successful book publisher.) This indeed is a virtual Real gaze, for it asks of Georges, “What does the Other want?” But it asks the question in a cold, voyeuristic way. This gaze is an “evil eye,” as Lacan speaks of it in Seminar xi. It has ethical import, and Georges is unable to “tame” it, screen off its effects. Georges slowly loses his control. His insensitivity to the Other emerges throughout the unfolding of the gaze’s haunting. The Other (Majid and his son) want to be subjectivized by Georges (allegorically, France as a nation), but Georges refuses. I call this a “virtual gaze” here, since it already carries the memory of France’s colonial past, and hence as a spectre it is a hauntology in Derridean (1994) terms or a hontology in Lacanian terms (as explained below). Indeed, this gaze is coveted by the look of Majid’s son, who (significantly) has no name. His look, capturing the cold power of this gaze, is most evident after Majid’s suicide, when his son confronts Georges at work but Georges ducks into an elevator. Haneke films Majid’s son staring at Georges over the crowded people in the elevator. As spectators we see the exchange of reactions of both men in the elevator’s mirror,
constructed by Haneke in such a way that his camera is not visible, so that it is now carrying the symbolic diegesis.

The virtual hidden gaze in *Caché* that carries with it the *object a* as the cause of desire is not revealed until Georges must come clean to Anne as to what happened during his childhood, the incident between Majid and himself. But even here he fails to come to terms with this incident, and Anne (tellingly) dismisses it as frivolous. He has not been shamed into admitting his grievance, unable to relieve his guilt since there is no one to blame. There is no exculpation for Georges. There is no act he can undertake to purge himself of this memory. He knows unconsciously that he committed a grievous error but is unable to come to terms with it because the Other—Majid—will not let him take that subject position. Both Majid and his son insist that they did not send the videotapes and pictures. Initially Majid held no malice toward Georges, despite Georges’s provocations. Majid’s son also denies sending the tapes, leaving Georges broken—unable to come to grips with his (France’s) involvement in the treatment of the strangers in the land. Majid does not accuse Georges outright; rather, he commits suicide as a symbolic overrepresentation of the suicide that the Algerian French have suffered.

*Time-Image*

Haneke uses the time-image of Bergson’s involuntary memory, that is, “unsolicited” independent memories that are disengaged from the immediate action or perception, to draw out a childhood memory of Georges’s relationship to Majid, an Algerian boy his parents adopted who was orphaned presumably during the 1961 suppression of the peaceful demonstration. This return of the repressed or unwanted involuntary memory is furthered by the haunting of the virtual Real gaze that invades his bunkered house in the “flower district of Fleur that lies adjacent to Rue de Iris.” This virtual Real gaze of Haneke’s camera is mobilized quite differently than in *Benny’s Video*. It is no longer the Imaginary and Symbolic psychic registers that cause the *méconnaissance* of the actual and virtual, but the unknown gaze—the voyeuristic gaze of the unknown position of the camera that collapses the Real and the Imaginary registers to call on a repressed symbolic memory. However, this is not to show *guilt*, for
Georges cannot be called on for his guilt as a six-year-old for his act of selfishness. Like many single children of that age might do, Georges wanted to get rid of Majid so that he need not share his parental love and attention with him. Rather, it is the shame of that incident he is unable to come to grips with, which the ethical Real gaze demands.

_Guilt and Shame_

It is here that Lacanian psychoanalytic theory can be of some use in explicating the ethical import of the virtual Real of Haneke’s camera, especially as developed by Copjec (2006), who explicates Lacan’s position in response to the students of May 1968, a moment of equally historic magnitude, that the role of the analyst should end in the production of shame in the analysand! The videotapes that Georges receives on three occasions are all wrapped in “childhood” memories; that is, they are childlike drawings in crayon of splattered blood and a decapitated chicken. These images, as well as the childlike writings and the surveillance tape, begin to affect Georges. As objects they begin to estrange his Symbolic world. They become overly saturated with associations and recollections to the point that his memory is moved and affected, eventually causing dreams and nightmares. As objects of anxiety these wrapped tapes begin to over-stimulate his thought, get him thinking uncontrollably. They become what Freud called _Vorstellungrepräsentanz_, which designates “the signifier’s otherness to itself” (Copjec 2006, 95), estranging thought. When Georges’s thought begins to unravel, for Lacan (contra Sartre), the gaze of the virtual Real that looks at Georges is _that of his own being_; the sensible cause for Georges’s uncanny sense of being observed by another is found in his own surplus-_jouissance_. This _jouissance_, as the object-cause of our desire, singularizes who he is. Georges is uprooted from his sense of mastery over the world by the sense of inescapable anxiety that these drawings and tapes induce. “The confrontation with _jouissance_ as the ‘origin of [our] own person’ confronts a doubled or forked time where who I am in the present converges with who I was in the past” (Copjec 2006, 104). The anxiety of these childhood images and videotapes touches that part of Georges’s unrealized past that might have caused his history to have been otherwise. He could have let Majid be his surrogate brother rather than...
setting up an incident in which Majid is sent away to an orphanage. In one sense Georges is “riveted” to his French identity, his racial prejudices, and his upper-class intellectual indifference to the plight of Others from which he cannot escape.

To transform his anxiety into guilt, Lacan argues, is a “sham.” The disturbing enigma of Georges’s being, which *jouissance* poses, “vanishes in guilt in favour of a pursuit of knowledge,” such that “certainty is transformed not only into knowledge but also into the relentless pursuit of ever more knowledge” (Copjec 2006, 109). Guilt is a flight from the enigma of Georges’s *jouissance*-being, but not from *jouissance* as such. “The guilt-laden, anxiety-relieved subject still experiences *jouissance*, but this *jouissance* is characterized by Lacan in Seminar xvii as a “sham,” as “counterfeit” (109). It is a “sham” because it gives the false sense that the core of one’s being can be knowable, possessed as an identifiable property. “All of our inherited, unchosen identities—racial, national, ethnic—[that] root us in an actual past that may be lost” now become accessible insofar as we can have knowledge about them and restore an ideal future. Georges is not even able to relieve his anxiety through the “sham” of guilt. He has no desire to take responsibility for his childish envy and make up for his narcissistic act to Majid in the future. What Georges fails to accept is the shame that the act in the past implies, now that he can look back on it with its full implications in relation to Algerian-French relations. In effect, Georges simply repeats the historical racism of his country’s past. Both Majid and his son are arrested by the police and taken in a paddy wagon to be interrogated as to whether they are involved in the harassment of Georges’s family. It is this incident that provokes Majid to commit suicide in front of Georges as a way not only to express his own self-hatred but hatred for Georges as well. Both men, as allegorically representing France and its diaspora, cancel each other out in a death struggle. There are no winners, only losers: this is a “lose-lose” scenario.

Guilt and shame are not alike. With guilt there is an identifiable Other, and the question is whether Georges’s generation can be blamed for the actions of the prefect of the Paris police, Maurice Papon, whose record of public service was marred by a sadistic, racist record of administrative abuse. He was jailed for crimes against humanity and died there.
The symbolism of Majid chopping the head of the *coq* (the symbol of France) is precisely what Georges is unable to live with—the plight of the diaspora within the borders of France. He does not wish to live with the shame of his country’s past racism, unwilling to recognize the full weight of the Algerian conflict for the country’s history. This is a *hontology*, as Lacan put it, a suturing of ontology and shame that his generation must come to terms with. Haneke’s attack on the bourgeois intellectual elite’s indifference (their *insouciance*) to the plight of immigrants and the steady stream of horrific news that anaesthetizes their ability to feel compassion, the postemotionality, as Stjepan Meštrovic (1997) has put it, that forces a “walled mentality” of living in their home as a fortress.

The gaze of the impossibly positioned camera is both virtual and ethical; it is virtual since its extra-diegetic position appears in the series of videotapes that are sent to him as surveillance of his home and as clues as to how to find Majid, his long-lost and vanquished Algerian childhood friend. It also accuses Georges of lying to his wife that he did not find Majid, as a videotape arrives from this impossible camera vantage point, which again fools the viewer into assuming that we are watching the narrative. The ethically virtual gaze carries with it the *force* that haunts the French cultured elite, calling upon them to admit to the shame of their past, to face up to their racial atrocities by no longer turning their backs, satiating their guilt through consumerist gratification and reducing family living to a banal existence—as in *Benny’s Video*, where parenting is carried out through *Zettelerziehung* (literally, a “slips of paper upbringing”): Benny’s parents leave him notes telling him what he is to do that day. Shame haunts, while guilt can be purged. Such a gaze is a force at the core of Georges’s being, his object-cause of desire. It has not been transformed into the power of a superego. For Georges there is no agent that exercises the power over his (presumed) guilt. There is only the exertion—the force of his *jouissance* that is eating at him, and that continues eating at him, *unresolved*, as he goes to bed toward the physical ending of the film after taking two sleeping pills (*caché*), indicating that what is “hidden” will remain unresolved.

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The Child Is Watching
The most controversial is the last scene of the virtual gaze as a long take, in which we see Pierrot and Majid’s son coming together, exchanging a conversation and going their own separate ways, leaving the entire “thriller” unresolved. It was never a “who done it” but a “no done it.” This last scene, again a time-image, can comfortably fit anywhere within the established narrative, conceivably once again enabling spectators to construe any number of scenarios: Were the boys in on it from the start? Do the boys have a homosexual relationship? Does the boys’ relationship give us hope for a new era of race relations? As in so many schools where ethnic minorities mix and mingle, the hope exists that a new understanding can emerge. We see that Pierrot and Majid’s son talk. What they say and how they exchange is left self-reflexively to the viewer, who has been in the position to puzzle a “thought-image” in the best Deleuzian sense through the mobilization of a virtual Real gaze.

The very evocation of this scene also points once more to Haneke’s one hope: the child. He seems to offer an anamorphic perspective regarding school and upbringing of children. As Mecchia (2007) argues, in many respects it is the “wounded” child (as a “child-director”) that has the last say in his films. As we saw, in Benny’s Video, parenting consists of the notes of instructions that Benny’s parents leave behind for him to follow because they lead such busy lives—the so-called Zettelerziehung. In Caché, Pierre goes to a good school, so it is not a question of the quality of institution that the children of the well-off are sent to but rather of parents shirking their responsibility to raise their children to meet the “world” from the lessons they themselves have learnt. Haneke maintains that the bourgeois intellectual elite have shirked their responsibility to take a long hard look at those lessons that they might pass on to their children.

The film’s release in 2005 was both prophetic and poignant, as that very month saw race riots by second and third generation decolonized young people of North African and Arab descent in the suburbs of Paris, when Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior, enflamed the situation by calling them racaille (scum or rabble). It may well be critically said (Gilroy 2007) that Haneke, a white European director, does not have the right to represent the postcolonial condition in France. Majid, after all, has the judgment of history on his side, and in the film Georges simply
repeats that history. However, it was precisely a film such as this, one that offers no direct answers but calls up the question of France’s shame and guilt, that led to a number of television specials over the buried aspects of the Algerian War, which the French New Wave of filmmakers (1954–1962) could not directly tackle. Caché shows what a powerful force the virtual Real for reflexive spectatorship can be.

NOTES

1 Machinic assemblage follows the usage in Deleuze and Guattari (1977) as an ordering of the drives (Triebe) with, in this case, the cinematic apparatus.

2 In the German literature, the following three works present the most thorough reviews of Haneke’s filmography: Metelmann (2003); Wessely, Grabner, and Larcher (2008); and Assheuer and Haneke (2008). In English, Brigitte Peucker’s The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film offers a useful chapter on Haneke (Peucker 2007). See also After Postmodernism: Austrian Literature Film and in Transition (Riemer 2000c), in which essays by Peucker, Thomas Nadar, and Willy Riemer, as well as by Haneke himself, discuss his early work. Since the present essay was first written, a comprehensive work on Haneke’s films, A Companion to Michael Haneke, edited by Roy Grundmann (2010) has appeared.

3 All this has been made possible through French and German cultural support. Haneke’s filmography and televisual work were featured in a film festival held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, 3–15 October 2007. The festival—titled Michael Haneke: A Cinema of Provocation—was organized by Joshua Siegel, assistant curator of the Department of Film, and based on an exhibition curated by Roy Grundmann, a professor of film studies at Boston University.

4 The synopticon reverses the panoptic machinery of the society of the discipline as developed by Michel Foucault. In a synoptic society, the many voyeuristically watch the few, and the few close the seer/seen circuit through their exhibitionism.

5 Auteurship seems to be an apt term to use here, since Haneke has gone on record as saying that he considers as artworks only films that he himself scripted, as opposed to those he adapted for film (such as La Pianiste [2001], which is based on Elfriede Jelinek’s novel Die Klavierspielerin).

6 An example of such a cinema of “displeasure” was attempted by Lizzie Borden’s Working Girls (1986), a “neo-realistic” look at a bordello in New York, where the “working girls,” all young women with their own hopes and desires, are oppressed by their madam, who is interested only in making money. The sex scenes are shot in such a manner that all voyeurism seems completely dissipated by the banality of the routines and the flaccid phalluses of the regular johns.

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In *Caché* (2005), this happens only once, in an exchange between mother (Anne) and son (Pierrot) over his suspicion that she is having an affair. The scene ends with Pierrot running away from her embrace.

Some of the best psychoanalytic interpretations are directed at *La Pianiste*, ironically not considered by Haneke to be part of his art but for which he was awarded the prestigious Grand Prize of the Jury at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival. It also received the Best Foreign Film in 2002. In this sense, Jean Wyatt’s (2005) study of Erika (played in the film by Isabelle Huppert) is quite brilliantly supplemented by Thakur’s (2007) rereading of her analysis to show how Huppert’s psychosis is grounded in the music of Haydn. It is interesting to note that no such psychoanalytic explanation can be so cleverly applied to the *Seventh Continent* or to *71 Fragments*. There is danger, however, in always applying psychoanalytic concepts to “explain” or interpret the behaviour of characters about which so little is known, or to use generalized concepts, like the *interdit* to the “primal scene,” to explain why Haneke forbids close-ups, for example.

My point is thus to confine the Verfremdungseffekts of shock and alienation to the psychic register of the Real, while the Entfremdungseffekts, which produce a distancing or defamiliarization, are better understood at the Imaginary register. Finally, it can be said that the *unheimlich*, or uncanny, aspects emerge in the Symbolic register in the way that the bourgeois home becomes estranged.

Such an Entfremdungseffekt of the image was part of Magritte’s repertoire, as iconically illustrated by *Le Viol* [The Rape] (1934).

After *La Pianiste* (2001), *Caché* (2005) may well be Haneke’s best-known film. It won an astounding number of awards, among them: Best Director, the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, and the “Competition” Prize from the Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique (FIPRESCI), all three at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival; Best Film, Best Director, Best Editor, and the FIPRESCI Prize at the 2005 European Film Awards; the Valladolid International Film Festival’s Fiftyieth Anniversary Prize, also in 2005; the Diagonale Grand Prize for Best Feature Film at the 2006 Diagonale Austrian Film Awards; Best Foreign Language Film at the 2006 Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards; Best Screenplay at both the 2006 Étoiles d’Or (in January) and at the Lumière Awards (in February); and Best Film and Best Director at the 2007 Chlotrudis Awards.

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**WORKS CITED**


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