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„Know your Enemy:
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I dedicate this paper to my family without whom I would not be where I am today.

“In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art”¹
- Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* -

¹ Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux: 1966.

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1. Introduction

Agreeing with Sontag's stance, this study aims at something quite impossible. Art has been interpreted and formulated into countless theories trying to account for what this art is saying and expressing. The 'erotics' of art which are the things that simply avoid boredom when watching a film, looking at a sculpture or reading a text has been suppressed and diminished because of the ambivalence that it creates. These suppressers, art theorists, film critics and those claiming it be, attempt to tie up all the unanswered questions of art into an explanatory parcel because then, art is no longer inconvenient and edgy. It is accounted for. In the words of Susan Sontag:

None of us can ever retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it *said* because one knew (or thought one knew) what it *did*. From now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art. We can only quarrel with one or another means of defense (Sontag 4-5)

I am one of those suppressers. I am looking at the films of the director Michael Haneke. Ignoring the innocence and asking what they express is what lies at the center. His films should not only justify themselves, but also to us, its audience. That is what makes them relevant.

So although this study may embrace an impossible task, it is worth the try to explain and interpret his films from different perspectives and put them in context with works by other directors. Just like various other suppressers before me, I will ask what his films try to communicate and how the viewers can relate to them because this is why art matters anyway: through people talking about it. If his films were just there, they would be meaningless. So my Sisyphean act of interpreting something non-interpretable is not absurd at all. It vindicates not only the strong emotions these films arouse in me; but also the films themselves by doing so.

Michael Haneke is one of the most prominent and equally controversial figures working in the world of cinema today. His creative career extends over a period of thirty years, and has not only earned him almost every conceivable major film prize but also one of the most talked about reputations in the media and public.

The most promising part for a potential study is this controversial aura around his person and his films. Unlike any other director, at least to my knowledge, he is able to stir up the most contradictory of emotions in the public, ranging from uncritical admiration to downright hatred. His works became subject to heated debates no less biased, and both his followers and rejecters still cannot decide whether he despises and condemns his viewers, or respects and cherishes them. The answer to this question is as ambivalent as his films, and I will attempt to explore possible responses on this over the course of the following. One thing however, is quite clear. Haneke's school for scandal was one of the two reasons for choosing him as a central part of this paper.

The other one was his apparent disdain for Hollywood and its cinema. He has outspokenly criticized concrete names working in the Hollywood film industry for making use of specific cinematic strategies to manipulate and distort certain aspects in film, the most important being violence, to gain financial profit from it. His films seem to stand out as absolute antipodes to the mainstream Hollywood cinema in numerous regards. Not only do they diverge formally from pre-fixed Hollywood aesthetics, but they also embrace a moral imposition which is supposed to be lacking in popular productions. This hugely gaping dichotomy provided an ideal platform for discussion and debate.

The aim of this paper is investigation. The title 'sleeping with the enemy' functions as a polemical statement implying that Haneke has more in common with Hollywood than he himself as well as his audience would know. I want to carry out this investigation to illustrate the specific connections his films have with certain Hollywood films, and in what way they differ and unite respectively. This study is concerned with explaining Haneke's aversion to Hollywood and at the same time critically questioning it. It is not only concerned with asking why Hollywood is his enemy, but also *if* [my emphasis] it is his enemy. This question is the main focus of this study, and the aim is to prove or rebuke it.

In the first chapter after this introduction, I will provide a general overview of Haneke's life and works. It outlines biographical information and depicts his familial background, his education, and his initial contact with film and art in general. Besides, I will describe how he found his way into cinema via the theater, his first directorial steps on the stage and later on television which eventually led to his first feature film for the cinema, *The Seventh Continent*. Continuously, I will show how his cinematic language

has further developed, sharpened and extended, his horizon broadened thematically and his cast geographically. The last part of the first chapter deals in greater detail with the important question of cultural ethnicity. Drawing on different opinions whether he is to be considered a French, Austrian, German or European director, I will present my personal concept of Haneke as a 'First World' filmmaker.

The second chapter presents the methodological approach of subscribing Haneke to the cinematic tradition of the Nouvelle Vague. On the basis of the French auteur theory, founded by Andre Bazin, amongst others, in France in the 1960s, certain aspects of his films will be reassessed in the wake of iconic productions by typical representatives of this era such as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut. In addition to this, a large section will be dedicated to the question to what extent Haneke can be considered an 'author'. After establishing the theoretical implications of the authorial concept in cinema, I will try to clarify how Haneke's persona in the public largely differs from the one the audience perceives through his films. On the basis of Catherine Wheatley's distinction between the 'reel' and the 'real' Haneke, it will not only give considerable insight as to why his persona sparks so much controversy, but also how Haneke himself deliberately fosters this process as a self-marketing strategy.

In the third chapter, a theoretical connection will be drawn to Haneke and Adorno and their allegedly similar concept of separating art between high, serious, valid and low, mediocre forms. Referring to some of the negative reactions his sympathy for Adornoean thinking has brought him, I will employ Adorno's and the Frankfurt school's didactical conception that art always has to carry a moral message, as well as mark the differences and similarities to Haneke's view on cinema. Furthermore, Haneke's personal concept of 'entertainment' in contrast to 'distraction' will be analyzed in greater detail.

The fourth chapter is entirely dedicated to Haneke's ambivalent relationship with Hollywood. Introducing what he considers Hollywood's problematic devices, his maxims will come under critical reexamination in the in-depth analysis of one of the culprit's films: Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. After this, his only attempt to set foot in the enemy's land, the US remaking of *Funny Games*, will be looked at more elaborately. Starting with the universal rejection the film has received in America, I will present possible reasons for this panning, and catalogue severe misjudgments Haneke has evidently made about America's cinematic culture and its consumers. In the second part, two other films will be contrasted. His *The Piano Teacher* and Alfred Hitchcock's

Vertigo both raise an enormous number of questions in terms of voyeurism and the portrayal of the female on screen. The emphasis will be put on the difference of the female protagonists in both films, and what they reveal about a sexualized and sexualizing audience that watches them. Furthermore, Hollywood's mechanisms of commercializing violence will be extended to the category of sex and gender, and the focus will be on how Haneke's film satirizes, socializes and protests these mechanisms morally and formally.

The final chapter is solely concerned with Hollywood. Largely defending Hollywood from the hostility it has faced from Haneke, I want to argue that it is a legitimate art form which was responsible for creating a legacy that can be regarded as artistically, culturally and economically significant. Firstly clarifying what I actually mean by the term 'Hollywood', I will then attempt to trace its financial and cultural self-marketing strategies besides the movies, which turned it into a global phenomenon. There will be examples for how Hollywood films have penetrated and influenced its audiences' daily lives and substantially shaped their behavior. Secondly, an historical account on how Hollywood was perceived by outside Europe with a stress again on the French Nouvelle Vague will be provided. Moreover the emergence of a new, more radical form of Hollywood cinema in the 1970s that important political and social movements brought about will be discussed. Thirdly and lastly, on the basis of Thomas Elsaesser's concept of cinematic realism, I will demonstrate what the true artistic achievements of Hollywood are. The paper concludes with a summary of my findings.

This paper is a form of therapy in the Aristotelian sense. By immersing myself in the films of Haneke and Hollywood, rather to find an absolute truth of meaning and content in them, I want to investigate if these two concepts are really shadow and light, or if those seemingly contrary forces interconnect with each other.

2. Biographical Observations

“But since my private life is not available to the public – I have never published anything about myself – they can’t say what I’m like” (Haneke in Wheatley 30)². As can be deduced from this remark, Haneke is notoriously shy and reluctant to provide any information about his private life, and this paper is not concerned with unearthing details about his private life which have nothing to do with his artistic career. As an alternative, Wheatley offers a much more reasonable approach to his biography in focusing on two much more important factors: Haneke’s artistic development as a student of psychology and philosophy to the highly lauded filmmaker he is today; and the cinematic tradition to which his work can be attributed. Based on her findings, I first will attempt to gather the most essential biographical cornerstones, outline Haneke’s steps into the TV and film world, and conclude with embedding his works into a specific tradition.

Michael Haneke was born on 23 March 1942 in the city of Munich, Germany, the son of Beatrix von Degenschild, an Austrian Catholic actress and a Catholic, and the German Protestant theater director, Fritz Haneke. He grew up in the Austrian city of Wiener Neustadt, where he was raised by his mother and his two aunts. Born into an artistic family, his interest in drama, music and literature was spurred on at an early age, largely due to his parents’ professions. During his youth, he wished to become a concert pianist or an actor, and he auditioned at the prestigious Viennese acting school, the Max Reinhardt Seminar. He failed the entrance exam, however, and consequently enrolled at the University of Vienna to study psychology, philosophy and drama. After graduation, he worked as a literary and film critic for numerous local and national newspapers. Alexander Horwath, another prolific Haneke scholar, reports that during those days, Haneke must have appeared as an absolute walking cliché of a young upper middle class intellectual: bearded and well-groomed, he sported almost exclusively black, read existentialist philosophy as well as modernist literature, and became fascinated with the art cinema of Bresson, Tarkovsky, Bergman, Antonioni and the French New Wave, predominately Godard³. What was important in his development was the fact that he came into contact with the cinema while writing about it, or in the words of Wheatley,

² Wheatley, Catherine. *Michael Haneke’s Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.

³ Cf Wheatley 16-19.

“he was a cinephile before he became a cineaste” (Wheatley 16). The films by the leading European directors that were being released at that time made the biggest impression on him, shaping and influencing his own cinematic style. In a 2002 poll carried out by the British film magazine *Sight & Sound*, he named his ten all-time favorite films, including one by American-born director (John Cassavetes) and two films not from the 1960s and 1970s (Chaplin’s *Gold Rush*, and Rossellini’s *Germany Year Zero*).⁴ This not only illustrates his unfettered sympathy for the 1960s and 1970s, it also hints at an alleged Euro-centrism which will be called into question in the subsequent chapters. For now, it is best to observe his directorial beginnings which, interestingly enough, he did not make in cinema, but theater.

In 1967, while still writing film and theater criticism as well as scripts, he started to work for the Südwestfunk Television Company in Germany. Although it gradually became clear to him that the thing he really wanted to do was stage his own scripts, he was not able to find a producer for his works. Unwilling to give up, he directed plays independently, mostly classics and modern drama. His first production was Marguerite Duras’ *Whole Days in the Trees* at the Staatstheater in Baden-Baden, followed by a series of classics, such as Heinrich von Kleist’s *The Broken Jug* in Darmstadt, Georg Friedrich Hebbel’s *Maria Magdalene* in Düsseldorf, Per Olov Enquist’s *The Night of the Tribades* in Hamburg, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s *Stella* in Vienna’s renowned state theater, the Burgtheater. In his essay *Haneke’s Anachronism*, Roy Grundmann believes that by the time of the early 1970s, Haneke had established a reputation as a “prolific and prominent” (Grundmann 7) theater director whose status was comparatively similar to the one of a film director he enjoys today.⁵ According to Grundmann, Haneke picked his plays very carefully, working meticulously on his public perception as a left-leaning intellectual director of and for the bourgeoisie. He chose mostly standards of the European canon as well as new modern works by young playwrights, impressing theatergoers with “intellectual arguments” and “professional skills”, rather than “through improvised performances, absurdist scenarios, neo-dadaist shock experiments, or Marxist-inflected manifestos” (Grundmann 8). What Grundmann is basically saying is that Haneke knew exactly what his audience liked, and how to

⁴ Cf. *BFI Online*. 2012. 31 June 2012.

<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/polls/topten/poll/voter.php?forename=Michael&surname=Haneke>

⁵ Grundmann, Roy: “Introduction: Haneke’s Anachronism”. *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Ed. Roy Grundmann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 1-50.

deliver it. This intrinsic talent for self-fashioning also helped him a great deal throughout his career as a film director, and it will be the main subject in the next chapter.

In 1973, the Südwestfunk offered him the chance to direct his first film for television. Based on the radio play *After Liverpool* by James Saunders, it was aired in 1974, marking his debut as a director on screen. From this time on, he directed no less than ten films for television, including the literary adaptations of Ingeborg Bachmann's novella *Three Paths to the Lake* in 1976, Joseph Roth's novel *The Rebellion* in 1993 as well as Franz Kafka's famous *The Castle* in 1997.⁶ Although his early television works were already anticipating his unique cinematic identity, notably his "reflexivity", the "sparse, cool" form (Wheatley 17), and his famous "fragmented aesthetic", the trademark "disjoint editing", "the dialectical use of found footage" and "allegorical function of music" (Grundmann 13), it wasn't until his first cinematic feature *The Seventh Continent* which, combining all these elements skillfully, brought his name to fame on an international art-house stage.

Released in 1988 by Wega Film Austria, it went on to win the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival as well as the Prize for Best Music and Sound in Film at Ghent⁷. It also premiered at Cannes, and was shown as part of a Film Series at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Dealing with an Austrian middle class family's collective suicide, it became the first part of Haneke's glaciation trilogy, the second part being the 1991 film *Benny's Video*, followed by *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* in 1993. The whole trilogy was considerably successful and bestowed overwhelmingly positive reviews on its maker. *Benny's Video* won Best Film at the European Film Award and was entered into the competition at the New York Film Festival, and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* again premiered at Cannes and received a Golden Hugo Award. Further enhancing his idiosyncratic techniques of editing, cutting, camera movement and score, which already had been his trademark in his early television projects, the trilogy presented "the formal style that had come to characterise his work" (Wheatley 18). After this, he released *Funny Games* in 1997, a shocking satire about the medial representation of violence. The film was subject to heated debates, with people harshly rejecting and high-sky praising it respectively. As is

⁶ Roy Grundmann's filmography provides an excellent overview of Haneke's body of work. Cf. Grundmann, 607-619.

⁷ Cf. Grundmann, 610.

very often the case, highly diverging reception only increases a film's popularity and it not only became a commercial success, but, more importantly, made Haneke very interesting as a potential partner for internationally renowned actors, actresses and producers. Hardly surprising, he subsequently found himself in the lucky position of working with French actress Juliette Binoche and producer Martin Karmitz on his next film – his first in French – entitled *Code Unknown* (1999/2000). His biggest critical success at that stage of his career came immediately afterward, when he returned to Austria with acclaimed actress Isabelle Huppert and a primarily French cast to produce *The Piano Teacher* (2000/2001). Again an adaption of a work by Austrian author Elfriede Jelinek, and her novel *The Piano Teacher*, the film received highly positive reviews, winning the Grand Prix, Best Actor and Best Actress at Cannes and numerous awards at other film festivals. Haneke teamed up with Huppert again, in 2002, in *Time of the Wolf* which was less successful both critically and commercially. But he managed to come back in 2004 with the very profitable *Cache*, shot in French and starring Juliette Binoche and Daniel Auteuil. Winning him the Best Director Award in Cannes and various other accolades, he was regarded one of the most prolific and highly respected filmmakers in Europe, if not the world. Considering his artistic merit, it was hardly surprising that Hollywood started to knock on his door. Haneke responded with an American shot-by-shot remake of his 1997 violent persiflage *Funny Games*, produced by Time Warner Independent, called *Funny Games U.S.* (2007). Aiming to stir up the American crowds and their core problem, violence in movies, the film completely failed and was almost universally panned by critics for reasons discussed later on. However anyone thinking that this first true flop would cause a downfall in his career was in for a surprise. Not only took did he take the blow in his stride, he also accomplished something only six other directors had before. With his historical black-and-white drama, *The White Ribbon* (2008), set in a Protestant eastern German village on the eve of World War I, and his succeeding French modern chamber play, *Love* (2012), about an elderly couple who have to deal with dementia after a stroke, he won the Palme d'Or at Cannes twice, placing him at the peak of his career today.⁸

It is one of the most common of commonplaces that the bigger the success that one experiences outside his or her country, then the stronger this country tries to monopolize the successful, and indeed, cultural imperialism has not spared Haneke.

⁸ Cf. Wheatley, 16-19 and Grundmann, 607-619. For the information on *Love*, his most recent work, I consulted *International Movie Database Online*. 31 June 2012. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1602620/>

There seems to be widespread disagreement on whether he is a quintessential Austrian, German (with his birthplace of Munich, and most of his finance coming from Germany), or simply European filmmaker (with his appeal to its art cinema and his multinational cast of actors). In the following paragraph, I will try to outline different models of nation cinema discourse, under which Haneke has come by various film critics. As a conclusion, I will then present my perspective on the issue.

Admittedly, looking at his manifold career as an artist, things are indeed not as clear-cut and simple. A child of both nations, with an Austrian mother and a German father, Haneke was born in Germany, but has spent most of his life in Austria. He has worked in Austria, Germany and France respectively, and with people in front and behind the camera from a variety of nations.

On the face of it, Haneke appears a quintessentially Austrian filmmaker. His first film for the cinema, *The Seventh Continent*, was produced and shot in Austria, with an all-Austrian cast. Thematically, it dealt with the breaking apart of a typical bourgeoisie family, an issue Haneke has come back to over and over again. Minimalistic in its form, conspicuously emotionless, reluctant for resolution, and unique usage of sound and music, the film not only triggered off what people from this point on called ‘the Haneke style’, but also spawned a common, stereotypical perception of what Austrian Cinema is like. In other words, if the movie is dark and depressing, and it leaves no comfort or hope neither to the characters nor viewers, thematically swings from death, suicide to rape and robbery, it surely has to be Austrian. In an article in the New York Times, Dennis Lim referred to the “tiny country” as home to the “feel bad cinema of the world” (Lim in NY Times)⁹, identifying an inherent element of negativity and scorn in the cinema as typically ‘Austrian’. He first and foremost regards Haneke and the *Seventh Continent* as the initial spark to bring these “analytical attacks on bourgeois complacency” (Lim in NY Times) to international attention. His allies of agony are Barbara Albert, Michael Glawogger, Ulrich Seidl and Nikolaus Geyrhalter, whose movies, mostly set not in Austria but far-off places in the world, share the same pessimistic, bleak outlook with Haneke. In defense of Lim, who thinks this negativity is particularly pathological for Austria; his belief is confirmed by the aforementioned Alexander Horwath, a prolific Haneke scholar and former director of the Austrian Film Museum. Speaking of Austria’s leading filmmakers, he locates “a relatively

⁹ *The New York Times Online*. 2006. 1 August 2012.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/26/movies/26lim.html>

deterministic or depressive or at least pessimistic view of the world” (Horwath in the NY Times).

Another scholar who considers Haneke a pronounced Austrian director is Robert Dassanowsky. His reasons for doing so also seem to be rather disputable. Haneke’s Austrian heritage is “the fragmentary, subjective concept of Viennese impressionism, the distancing effects of Brechtian theater, and, finally the rejection of the false totality of art that Walter Benjamin saw as a strong contribution to the aesthetic/political aim of fascism” (Dassanowsky 254)¹⁰. Apart from the inexplicable connection to Viennese impressionism, and the fact that Brecht was German, he even quotes Haneke denouncing his theory:

In discussions I then always say, the films provoke you so much, whether in France, in America or elsewhere, because you obviously know from your own experience what they are getting at. In other words, my films don’t specifically target Austria, they have to do with the entire advanced industrialized world [...] My films are made for our industrialized West, for our affluent society, that’s where they belong and that’s where they should be seen (Haneke in Dassanowsky 258)

So if Haneke himself claims that he is not a specifically Austrian filmmaker, what is he then? Grundmann suggests that he is neither fully Austrian nor German. To prove his point, he argues that the *Seventh Continent*, although having an all-Austrian cast and telling a story of “an average Austrian family living in an average Austrian town” does only superficially depict “contemporary Austrianness” (Grundmann 11). The film stays mysteriously anonymous; the only hint that it is set in the Upper Austrian city Linz is the license plate in the first shot. The script was based on a true story about a German family who committed suicide in Hamburg. Furthermore, the financing was done on an international level. Therefore, he sees the film as only “incidentally Austrian” (Grundmann 11). Subscribing to his notion, he considers Haneke more of a European filmmaker. And although his literary adaptations are based on texts by exclusively Austrian writers – Kafka, Roth, Bachmann – those writers belonged to another geopolitical reality, the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹¹ Grundmann’s view can be supported, however, in my personal opinion, his definition requires further extension.

¹⁰ Dassanowsky, Robert: *Austrian Cinema: A History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008.

¹¹ I am quite aware that Ingeborg Bachmann worked and lived after the Second World War, but her text *Three Paths to the Lake*, which Haneke adapted, dealt with the inner and outer decay of this very Empire.

Haneke is a 'First World' director. As he has clarified in the above quote, his films deal with the society of the industrialized world, and are therefore concerned with the people living in it. In an interview with Thomas Assheuer, he has explained that all his films are not made for the Third World, because there simply is no target audience for them. Since he himself is living in an affluent society in the industrialized west with its materialistic and idealistic deformities, he can only describe and criticize the world he knows. Nevertheless, he has repeatedly emphasized that this is not because he doesn't consider the Third World worthy of his work. Quite the contrary is true. It would be an arrogant affront to pretend that somebody rich, white and western knows anything at all about life in a South American slum.¹²

Bearing this argument in mind, it would be logical to say that his films also include a Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, US and Japanese audience. All these countries are part of the industrialized first world, however non-European. Consequently, labeling him as a 'European' filmmaker will not suffice. No matter how bold this statement may appear, the only satisfying classification is to consider him a 'First World Director'. His films deal with the social malaise, the failing empathy of ultra-capitalism and of living at the expense of the Third World. These are well-known phenomena that dominate all western societies. The cracking up of the overfed, better-off, middle classed, materialistic, culture-loving, self-complacent family exits in the whole of the West. Whether it is a collective suicide or the cruel torturing of an Austrian, Canadian, Australian, or American family, the sociocultural context is completely independent of its form and content. His films do not contain radical political statements about a certain country, nor do they portray a certain social classes' problem or condition that exclusively exists in Austria. They are abstract, allegorical entities of the First World.

Some scholars have argued that *The White Ribbon* represents an exception because it is set in a specific historical and geographical 'German' context, namely on the eve of World War I in eastern Germany. However, as Haneke is keen to point out, the film's historicity is merely functional, and doesn't change anything about the problems that are introduced here. In an interview with Grundmann he has ensured that *The White Ribbon* is concerned with the roots of terrorism of any kind, and is not to be confused with a historical document about the rise of German National-Socialism:

¹² Assheuer, Thomas. *Nahaufnahme Michael Haneke. Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2008, p 60-61.

I want to avoid the misunderstanding that is incurred when critics receive the film exclusively as a film about German fascism. There are so many causes that led to this specific form that the film couldn't possible name them all. It is something the film is unable to accomplish. Hence, this narrow reception would be a misinterpretation (Haneke in Grundmann 596)¹³

It is an examination of how ideas of values become ideologies and are carried out to fundamentally radical extremes. Whether it is derived from the politically right or left field, fascism always consists of the same self-righteous, anti-humanitarian thinking. The film could very well be set in a different country to a different time; Haneke has only chosen German fascism because it is the “most prominent example” (Haneke in Grundmann 595).¹⁴

Although this may be all very well and true, I would like to argue that this is not his only reason. German fascism is not only the most prominent but also perhaps the most shocking example of fascism, with a systematic extinction of human lives which, in this radical form, has never happened before. Consequently, this singularity of inhumanity creates a lot of fascination. Haneke knows that. In other words, he not only picked this particular time because he is fascinated with the language, the country and the historical context, but also by this unrivalled potential for ‘evilness’. To put it more sharply, he picked German fascism because he hoped some people *would* [emphasis added] confuse it with an accurate document about the origins of the Nazis. People would crave to see how these innocent children turned into monsters, and storm the cinema to witness the hell according to Haneke. This is not to say that most of his viewers are too uneducated to realize the metatext behind the text; it would be absurd. It simply means that Haneke is more capable than others to stir up in the public the most controversial of emotions. It is part of his show business persona, his meticulous self-fashioning, and his continuous building of the brand ‘Haneke the Author’.

¹³ Grundmann, Roy: „Unsentimental Education“. *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Ed. Roy Grundmann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 591-607.

¹⁴ Cf Grundmann, 595-7.

3. Haneke the Author

If one evaluates a large part of the body of criticism dealing with Haneke as an ‘authorial’ filmmaker in the tradition of the Auteur theory, which was developed by French film critic Andre Bazin in France in the 1950s and 1960s, there seems to be universal agreement - in contrast to the question of whether he is a distinctly ‘Austrian’ director or not - that Michael Haneke is a pure auteur filmmaker. But before this claim is put under close examination together with how he is separated or unified from his Hollywood colleagues in this regard, it makes sense to discuss in more detail the historical and theoretical concepts of the Auteur theory. For this, I will use David Bordwell’s chapter on the movement in his book *Film Art*, because it marks the major aspects in a condensed form.

Bordwell sees in the late 1950s and early 1960s a “rise of a new generation of filmmakers around the world” (Bordwell 475)¹⁵. The revolutionary birthplace of this rise was to be found in Paris, where a group of young adult journalists, who wrote for the then-famed film journal *Cahiers de cinema*, rejected the well-established squad of known French filmmakers and demanded a new form of cinema. The ringleaders of this radical group were Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer, and they specifically attacked twenty-one directors for holding the cinema in contempt with their incompetence and ignorance. In the words of Godard:

Your camera movements are ugly, because your subjects are bad, your casts act badly because your dialogue is worthless; in a word you don’t know how to create cinema because you no longer even know what it is. (Godard in Bordwell 475)

What is perhaps more important in the case of this study is that these young men saw no contradiction in criticizing the contemporary cinematic tradition in their country, while at the same time, demonstratively paying homage to downright commercial Hollywood as well as highly hermetic or outdated directors like Renoir, Ophuls and Bresson. According to Bordwell, these young cineastes believed that there was a different kind of artistry in the works of Hawks and Hitchcock, Fuller and Ford, which has set them apart from their French counterparts. What was so unique about them was that all those great

¹⁵ Bordwell, David. *Film Art. An Introduction*. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

American directors were capable of ‘branding’ their films as their own products. In other words, Truffaut, Godard and the likes perceived those directors as ‘auteurs’, as the authors of their films in a literary sense: “We won the day in having it acknowledged in principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a book by Aragon” (Godard in Bordwell 475). Although an auteur did not always write the scripts for his films, his artistic handwriting nevertheless was engraved on the product at all times. Nobody else but Hawks or Hitchcock could have made their own films in their own particular way. Not only did the individual accomplishments of the American masters manage to secure Hollywood a place in the canonical sphere of European-dominated art history along with painting, music and literature; but they also encouraged the French writers themselves to try their hand at making movies. And some of them enjoyed enormous success.

Given the somewhat simplistic conditions, to put it mildly, they, like painters, were stepping for the first time in front of that blank canvas to shoot on location with borrowed money. However, their output was staggering, and in the late 1950s it was clear that this new wave of French filmmakers, the Nouvelle Vague as they were ironically called by journalists had to be taken seriously. By the end of 1959, some of them had already made films for which they became famous later on. Godard filmed *A Bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), Chabrol had even finished his second film *Les Cousins*, and in April, Truffaut’s *Les quatre cent coups* (*The 400 Blows*) went on to win the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.¹⁶

As for artistic innovation, Bordwell locates one of the most essential achievements in introducing what he calls a “casual look” (Bordwell 475). Greatly admiring the Italian Neorealists and directors like De Sica and Rossellini, the New Wave abandoned top-scale studio production in favor of shooting on location, natural lightning and simple lightning supplies. In terms of cinematography, the lack of production money demanded that alternative ways to be found. Therefore, portable equipment was introduced, especially the hand-held camera, which proved to be one of the most useful technical innovations heavily influencing the New Wave cinematic style. Shaky camera movements simulating authenticity were quite common as well as the use of tracking and panning shots carried out in ways unseen before. In *Breathless*, Godard’s cameraman filmed the central character seated in a wheelchair for the

¹⁶ Cf. Bordwell, 475.

shooting of a complex scene in a travel agency's office. Moreover, the film introduced a completely new aspect of discontinuity editing: the jump cut. Dialogues are roughly cut off and picked up in a totally different situation, giving the film a certain *amateur chic* [emphasis added] style.¹⁷

There was not only a casual look in the films of the New Wave, but equally salient, a casual humor. Most of the artists were very familiar with the cinema, they possessed a very detailed knowledge of its traditions and history. Evidently their aim was to deconstruct or criticize certain established conventions by simply making fun of it. In Godard's *Band of Outsiders* for example, the three main characters decide to be silent for a little while, so Godard turns off all the sound.¹⁸

This sheer stupendous knowledge of the cinema was also heavily expressed in intertextuality. Homages were paid to both their European and American idols. Perhaps the most popular example can be found in *Breathless*, in a scene where Jean-Paul Belmondo's character, Michel, stares at a poster of Humphrey Bogart. Employing a shot-reverse-shot between Michel and Bogart, it appears as if the two are staring right at each other. Non-hermetic references of this kind were a typical trademark of these young directors, especially for Godard. In *Vivre sa vie*, the female protagonist watches Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*; the point-of-view shot of her face highly resembles the one she sees on screen.

The reason for this excessive quoting was not so much intellectual bragging, but, according to Bordwell, an acknowledgment "that cinema, like literature and painting, had lofty traditions that could be honored" (Bordwell 476). In referring to various films by the old masters, the New Wave directors not only established a canon like in literature, but also tried to lift the film into the high ranks of the Arts. This is very important to bear in mind, because Haneke fully supports this notion and doesn't grow tired of locating the cradle of the 'art' film in France, which will be discussed later on.

Certainly no less influential for Haneke's work was the New Wave's radical changes concerning plot construction. Causality made way for ambiguity and mystery. Some plot lines were never explained, or deliberately left shady, as Godard demonstrated in his works. In *Vivre sa Vie*, there is no clue whatsoever of why the protagonist Nana is shot at the end. In *Week end*, the infamously gory traffic jam scene feels completely alien to the spectator as it has nothing to do with the development of

¹⁷ Cf. Bordwell, 476.

¹⁸ Cf. Bordwell, 476.

the central characters. However, the single most important device of the movement, which also can be detected in almost every movie by Haneke, is the open end. Michel's last words in *Breathless* are highly enigmatic and subject to widespread debate, the fate of the boy in Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* is unclear, and the film ends with a freeze frame of the boy staring right back at the spectator.

Having established the major aspects of the New Wave movement, they now can be compared to Haneke's works in order to examine how far he can be considered an auteur filmmaker. As it has been noted above, the ambiguous ending is an indispensable signifier in all of his works. The sender of the mysterious video tapes in *Cache* remains in doubt until the resolution in the final sequence, although this is inaudible for the spectator. There is no apparent reason given for the collective suicide of the family in *The Seventh Continent* as well as for the atrocities committed by the two villains, Peter and Paul, in *Funny Games*. Although the children in *The White Ribbon* are far from being sympathetic, the mysterious incidents that terrorize the village are too shocking to be attributed to them. We also do not know what exactly happens to Erika Kohut, the central character in *The Piano Teacher*, after she stabs herself in the last scene of the film. All these features bear great resemblance to the ambiguous endings of the Nouvelle Vague films. What is far more interesting is why.

Generally more than reluctant to discuss the meanings of his movies, the filmmaker nonetheless is always keen to offer an explanation for his constant use of open endings: "It is the purpose of my films to pose certain questions, and it would be counterproductive if I were to answer all these questions myself" (Haneke in Grundmann 582)¹⁹. In other words, he wants to engage the spectator in a complex process of reexamination and interpretation of the just seen material. Not to feed the viewer comfortable, easily-digestible pieces of explanation for every situation is absolutely vital to enable this process. The viewer has to find the answer on his or her own, and only films deviating from this easily accessible film language, promoted by Hollywood blockbusters, can accomplish that:

¹⁹ Sharett, Christopher: "The World That Is Known: An Interview with Michael Haneke". *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Ed. Roy Grundmann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 580-591.

I attempt to provide an alternative to the totalising productions that are typical of the entertainment cinema of American provenance. My approach provides an alternative to the hermetically sealed-off illusion which in effect pretends at an intact reality and thereby deprives the spectator of participation. In the mainstream scenario spectators are right off herded into mere consumerism. (Haneke in Wheatley 22)²⁰

In other words, participation according to Haneke can only happen when the spectators are denied a clear-cut picture of neat, chronological plotlines completing with an understandable, preferably happy ending. Therefore he literally forces the viewer to think and reflect on the film after they have left the movie theater. Although his films share this feature with a great variety of the French films, they differ in terms of humor. The Nouvelle Vague movies were constructed quite differently than their American counterparts (jump cuts, discontinuity editing etc.), however, their originators greatly admired Hollywood productions and were directly influenced by them. They looked the way they did because they simply didn't want to copy the Americans; however their tributes and homages within their films to them were legion. Now, with Haneke, it seems quite the opposite is the case. Considering his opinions about Hollywood Cinema, it feels as if it embodies for him everything that is superficial, hypocritical, amoral, pessimistic, and evidently to be avoided at all costs when making a movie. But before this somewhat 'complicated' relationship with Hollywood comes under close scrutiny, we need to further develop the theory of Haneke as an Author.

In his essay *Authorship and Narration in Art Cinema*²¹, David Bordwell suggests that the different trademarks commonly identified as non-Hollywood such as discontinuity editing, camera movements independent of the action, and open endings, which the New Wave as well as Haneke himself constantly employs, are primarily important for establishing the individual style of an author: "[i]n art cinema, however, the overt self-consciousness of the narration is often paralleled by an extratextual emphasis on the filmmaker as a source" (Bordwell 45). What Bordwell means by this is a kind of marketing process that the film itself as well as outside events accompanying it constantly stimulates. In other words, the film calls attention to itself as the new *Haneke* movie, just like the new *Tarantino* movie. The film is first and foremost

²⁰ Wheatley, Catherine. *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.

²¹ Bordwell, David: "Authorship and Narration in Art Cinema". *Film and Authorship*. Ed. Virginia Wright Wexman. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, University Press, 2003. 42-49.

perceived as the work of a specific author which the audience - much like the new detective novel by a famous crime fiction writer - excitingly awaits. It is constructed, produced and promoted in order to create what Bordwell calls an “authorial signature” (Bordwell, *Authorship* 46), or an aesthetic indicator of a director’s particular style. The viewer recognizes the unique film language of a Tarantino, Haneke, Kubrick, Woody Allen etc. because he or she has seen other works by this director and judges the new film according to the body of work that they are already familiar with. They are considered ‘authors’ of their films because they have established their personal signature on every piece they have done. To put it more bluntly, they try to make the same movie over and over again, only *looking* different [emphasis added]. Nevertheless, there are also a myriad of other, non-cinematic aspects that spur the promotion of the cinematic author:

Film journalism and criticism promote authors, as do film festivals, retrospectives, and academic film study. Director’s statements of intent guide comprehension of the film, while a body of work linked by an authorial signature encourages viewers to read each film as a chapter of an oeuvre. Thus the institutional “author” is available as a source of the formal operation of the film. (Bordwell, *Authorship* 45)

Here, Bordwell very vividly depicts the marketing machinery that, in quite simple terms, brings directors to fame. From Cannes to the Sundance Film Festival, from *Sight and Sound* to *The Village Voice*, from retrospectives in art houses to premiers in multiplexes, this machinery shapes and forms, destroys and shines the reputation of a filmmaker. What is important is that ‘authors’ of films are very aware of their role and contribute greatly to promote themselves as such. In the next section, we shall see in how far Haneke can be considered an author of his works and what he contributes to encourage this notion.

As it has been noted above, there seems to be no doubt at all whether Haneke is an author filmmaker. Catherine Wheatley, who dedicates a whole chapter in her book *The Ethic of the Image* to his authorial persona, thinks that “Haneke’s authorial persona is so visible because his films are marketed as ‘Michael Haneke’ films” (Wheatley 27). Not only is this marketing campaign triggered by the extreme reactions to his films from critics and audiences, but also by Haneke himself. In contrast to classical arts or literature, where the creator of the piece of art is most likely to be dead, he still informs and forms the public opinion about his films and himself by giving interviews,

publishing articles, creating workshops and teaching at film academies. And although Haneke is known for refusing to discuss or reveal the meanings of his films, he nonetheless is not very hesitant when it comes to enhancing his own status as a director. There can be found numerous interviews both in print and online in which he elaborates in great detail on the problems of producing a certain film, the casting of actors, the use of film music, his cinematic idols and so forth. He has written extensively on Bresson, and violence in the media. He has given an enormous amount of interviews to promote his new projects and holds a chair at the Film Academy in Vienna²². In other words, he makes sure that the campaign is up and running for him.

Not only does he work very hard on his authorial image, he also follows closely how his persona is perceived by the public eye. According to Grundmann, the reason for his popularity lies in this interaction between the portrayers and the portrayed:

In this sense, Haneke's auteur persona is not simply the work of a self-fashioned self-promoter, but the result of a complex dialog between the auteur in question and film festival organizers and audiences, film and television producers, feuilleton critics, and "the public" (Grundmann 7).

That is to say, Haneke is very cooperative when it comes to giving his audience stereotypical features of the European art cinema director. Everything is precisely organized, even his wardrobe and appearance. He looks like an European intellectual (dressed in black, white-bearded, turtle neck), speaks like an European intellectual (German and French, no English), and acts like an European intellectual (he listens carefully, speaks eloquently, half-jokingly brags about his literary and philosophical knowledge), he all in all appears pretty much like a Hollywood stereotype of an European intellectual. When it comes to marketing, he obviously knows his enemy.²³

Wheatley is perfectly right in assuming that it is in Haneke's best interest to serve this authorial commercialization equally forceful than his Hollywood colleagues:

²² For these biographical details, cf. Grundmann, Roy, ed. *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Chichester: Wiley, 2010.

²³ Cf Grundmann, 7.

And of course today, television and increased media circulation allow interviews with those involved in a film's production to be published and read around the world at the time of a film's release – often before – and the publicity machine that surrounds not only Hollywood, but also European encourages and even enforces a film's stars and even directors to speak out about it as much as possible. (Wheatley 29)

According to Wheatly, a very interesting effect arises from this. The consequence of Haneke's refusal to issue instructions for the viewers on how his films are to be interpreted urges them to find an answer in the movie on their own. Since he is very protective about his private life, biographical details cannot serve as an explanation. What happens is, that people confuse the "*real* Haneke" with the "*reel* Haneke" (Wheatley 30). Since his private life as a person (the real) is largely unknown, Haneke is exclusively perceived through his films as an authorial authority (the reel). So when people are appalled, shocked or thrilled by his movies, they primarily see the author, the doer who *did* this to them:

[T]he spectator, made uncomfortable by the cinematic experience that they participate in, sees not just the film, *but also its author*, as the source of this unpleasure. So the author emerges through the film: indeed as an imagined figure he is a product of the film – the *reel* Haneke – just as, as a real object, the film is a product of an individual film-maker – the *real* Haneke. (Wheatley 30)

This is to say that the reel Haneke is nothing but the image of the artist, the filmmaker that the audience has in mind when watching his films. It has nothing at all to do with Haneke the eloquent, friendly, white-bearded person in private life, but the artificially constructed *fashion brand* Haneke, the role of the cold, disturbing intellectual artist that is constructed by the media, the press, the public and himself. In a way he is part of his films just like his actors are, however more 'felt' than seen. My key argument that I try to formulate in this section is this:

Haneke's deliberate process of self-fashioning is exactly the one Hollywood employs. There is also a 'real' and 'reel' Tarantino, Scorsese, or Kubrick. Tarantino as the creator of a Tarantino movie is more than obvious, not only because of his highly individualistic cinematic language in terms of score, design, narration and character, but also because of his small appearances in cameo roles in some of his films. He is not only 'felt' but also sometimes seen. His movies are strongly targeted and marketed as

the *new* Tarantino. His appearance is equally coordinated. He looks like a Hollywood outlaw (slightly scruffy, odd black or Hawaiian shirts), talks like one (quick, passionate, using modern expressions like ‘cool’ and ‘awesome’) and behaves accordingly (non-distanced, informal, buddy-like). He mutates himself into the exact counterpart of Haneke; however both are employing the same trick.

It is a deliberate process of constructing the *reel* persona and decorating it excessively with attributes such as ‘ultra-violent’, ‘cynic’ or ‘postmodern’, or, as is the case with Haneke, ‘bleak’, ‘cold’, ‘intellectual’ and ‘elitist’. The last attribute is particularly interesting, because it calls attention to another controversial aspect which he garnered criticism for: his supposedly elitist view on culture and art in general.

4. Haneke and Adorno

In an interview with the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Haneke has claimed that a certain kind of arrogance in art is not a mistake, and that he always has been fascinated by the elitism, especially with the one in religious Protestantism²⁴. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that his view on film and art in general has been accused of elitism, anti-Americanism and European intellectualism.

In a *New York Times* review discussing the American remake *Funny Games US*, A.O. Scott sees Haneke as a self-proclaimed moral Zeus who condescendingly lectures Americans about what is wrong with their cinema as well as with their country: “Americans — to a European intellectual this almost goes without saying — are especially deserving of the kind of moral correction Mr. Haneke takes it upon himself to mete out” (Scott in NY Times)²⁵. Haneke himself admits in another interview with the same newspaper, that his films are designed to disturb and unsettle the viewer, however with a justified moral backup: “all movies assault the viewer in one way or another. What’s different about my films is this: I’m trying to rape the viewer into independence” (Haneke in *New York Times*).²⁶

²⁴ Cf. *FAZ Online*: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kino/regisseur-michael-haneke-eine-gewisse-arroganz-ist-in-der-kunst-kein-fehler-1872669.html>

²⁵ Cf. *New York Times Online*: <http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/movies/14funn.html?ex=1332475200&en=709faf668585ee66&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>

²⁶ Cf. *New York Times Online*: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/magazine/23haneke-t.html?pagewanted=3&_r=1

The question whether Haneke is a Hollywood-hating Judge, Jury and Executioner who is on a personal vendetta to vilify everything the American movie industry produces, or the caring friend, who, though forcefully, wants to smack its violence-obsessed target audience to its senses, shall be discussed in the next chapter. For now, it makes sense to draw a comparison between Haneke and another apparent partner in crime when it comes to looking down on America and the popular Cinema: Theodor Adorno.

In his influential 1944 book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno, together with Max Horkheimer dedicated a whole chapter entitled “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” to formulate their critique of mass culture²⁷. One of the central points in the text is the deliberate manipulation, stultification and enslavement of the people via mass-produced cultural goods such as newspapers, radio programs, popular music and, perhaps the most dangerous of them all, films. Robert Stam, whose accounts on the Frankfurt School in his book *Film Theory* provides a very helpful summary for critical analysis, suggests that both Adorno and Horkheimer held the American movie industry in particular contempt, “whose cinema produced spectators as consumers” (Stam 68). According to them, the whole phenomenon of mass culture can be interpreted “as a consequence of the industry which dictated and channelled public desire” (Stam 69). Popular films, just like songs or radio programs had nothing to do with art at all, but were more or less tools with which the people could be lured into passivity, naivety and obedience:

Commercial films were simply mass-produced commodities engineered by assembly-line techniques, products which themselves stamped out their own passive, automatized audience [...] The culture industry, caught up as it is in the world of commodification and exchange-value, stupefies, narcotizes, zombifies, and objectifies what is symptomatically called its “target audience. (Stam 69)

Considering this, the argument in Adorno’s text doesn’t center around the question whether the cinema is an art form or not – but how long ‘real’ art can survive this lethal threat. According to Stam, Adorno has had heated debates with Walter Benjamin about the legitimate status of film as an art form. He has accused Benjamin of neglecting the potential threats of deception, manipulation and alienation the mass-produced product

²⁷ Cf. Stam, Robert. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

film forces onto its recipients. For him, the medium itself and its didactic implications were unacceptable, let alone counted among the ranks of a Schoenberg piece or a Joyce novel²⁸.

According to him, the big culprit in all this is the ‘Culture Industry’, a somewhat blurry umbrella term he and Horkheimer coined to refer to all the institutions producing and promoting popular culture:

Deploying such Marxist concepts as commodification, reification, and alienation they coined the term “culture industry” to evoke the industrial apparatus which produced and mediated popular culture, as well as the market imperatives underlying it. They chose the term “industry” rather than “mass culture” to avoid the impression that culture arises spontaneously from the masses (Stam 68)

Naturally, developing such radical a stance also implies a harsh critique of the involved, and it was just a logical consequence that Adorno and Horkheimer met with accusations of cultural elitism. In addition to this, the Frankfurt School, with which both scholars have been widely associated, has called attention to itself because of another important aspect which needs to be analyzed when drawing the comparison to Haneke’s works: a distinct anti-Americanism. Herbert Jhering feared that the American film industry is actually more threatening than the Prussian Army, and vast amounts of people are “being ‘co-opted’ by American taste” (Jhering in Stam 64). Stam cites one particular radical representative, the conservative French scholar Georges Duhamel who, bordering on right-wing conservatism, denounces the cinema as “a pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety”, and that it only creates the pathetic hope of “someday being a ‘star’ at Los Angeles” (Duhamel in Stam 64-5). Ironically enough, Adorno who embedded his disdain for the film in a Marxist corset, shared the same scorn and ignorant arrogance for the cinemagoers as a conservative reactionist like Duhamel.

It hardly needs pointing out that Haneke in turn does not share the same scorn for the cinema, quite the opposite. Since he works in this profession, makes a living on it and is both a producer and consumer of popular products²⁹ (at least in the Adorno sense), it would be absurd to consider him a supporter of anti-cinematic doctrines.

²⁸ Cf. Stam, 67.

²⁹ In an interview with the German newspaper *Die ZEIT*, he has admitted to have enjoyed the popular TV series *Sex and the City*. Cf. *Die ZEIT Online*: http://www.zeit.de/2006/04/Interview_Haneke/seite-2

Nevertheless, one doesn't really have to dig deep to discover the hostilities which he very well shared with the Frankfurt School: elitism, anti-Americanism, artistic intellectualism. Why is he connected with a school of thought that condemned the very medium he is working in? Does he really reject art in popular culture? And above all, does he really hate America and its films? But before one can seriously attempt to provide a satisfactory answer to those questions, one needs to examine Haneke's opinion on art in general.

Perhaps the most salient question he poses is the function of art, and especially the one of film. What is the task of a film? Considering his words as well as works, it does not take much effort to deduce a moral responsibility penetrating through his career. He feels obliged to stimulate a process in the viewer which enables him to escape from the stadium of merely consuming the film into emotional unrest, critical reflection and finally decisive action:

As soon as the spectators find themselves alone with the questions posed by the story, without instructions for their ready interpretation, they feel disturbed and begin to assemble their defenses. A productive conflict, I would think. The more radically the answers are withheld, the sooner they will have to find their own (Haneke in Wheatley 27)

Haneke's films do not give answer, nor is it the task of a film to do so. They ask questions. Not stylistic confirmation for the sake of financial or ideological profit, but artistic radicalism for individuality and autonomy. His almost sulky refusal to succumb to Hollywood's narrative and formal conditions brings him ironically close to Adorno again. As Wheatley nicely puts it, Haneke displays "a willingness to argue with them rather than merely trying to please them", he tries, along with Brecht and Adorno, "to make the best art possible", and "to make things less well than one could would be for all those three more an ethical than aesthetical crime" (Wheatley 27). Although Wheatley is absolutely right what the ethical implications of creating art as well as the sought intentional involvement of the audience is concerned, his concept of so-called 'high art' and 'low art' are fundamentally different than Adorno's.

In an interview about his film *Funny Games*, conducted with Christopher Sharrett, he explicitly dismissed a strict separation of ‘serious’ and ‘entertaining’ art³⁰ reminiscent of Adorno’s concept:

I have nothing against popular music and wouldn’t think of playing popular music against classical forms. I’m very skeptical of the false conflict that already exists between so-called “serious” music and music categorized strictly as entertainment. These are totally absurd distinctions [...] (Haneke in Grundmann 583)

Reading this, one cannot help but reconsider the supposedly congenial connection to Adorno. Haneke appears here clearly not as rigidly elitist when it comes to popular art forms. In contrast to the Frankfurt school, for Haneke, a *raison d’être* even for Hollywood blockbusters is not hard to find. In the same interview with the *ZEIT*, he claims to perfectly understand when the average hard-working man coming home from his job emotionally worn out wants to watch everything but one of his films. Mainstream cinema has a distinct social function in that it supposed to ‘scatter’ or ‘disperse’ the viewer so that he can relax and calm down after a hard day’s work. According to him there is nothing wrong with these kinds of movies (mostly from Hollywood) but they cannot be considered art. What is wrong is that most people completely misinterpret the concepts of ‘art’, ‘entertainment’, ‘Zerstreuung’ and ‘distraction’³¹.

He thinks that the German word ‘Unterhaltung’ is falsely translated as ‘entertainment’. The American idea of entertainment is distraction, dispersion and obstruction from critical reflection about certain problems. It is an easy and comfortably drifting off into forms of uncritical fun. Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* can also be ‘unterhaltend’ in the sense of giving pleasure and enriching the mind, but it is never ‘entertaining’.³²

I think these categories are highly critical and contradictory, not only because they imply the elitist Adornoean principle he claims to reject, but also illustrate a profound ignorance towards the artistic accomplishments of American cinema.

³⁰ I am referring to the popular German distinction of ‘Ernstes Kultur’ meaning ‘Serious Culture’ and ‘Unterhaltungskultur’ labeled as ‘Entertainment Culture’. Although primarily applied to musical categories (as with the Haneke quote), it can be stretched to pigeonhole all forms of popular art forms such as films, rock music, video games and comics.

³¹ The Translation of ‘Zerstreuung’ as ‘distraction’ is my own, because it translates most appropriately Haneke’s concept of being comfortably numbed by mainstream media.

³² Cf. *Zeit Online*: http://www.zeit.de/2006/04/Interview_Haneke/seite-3

Haneke's famous essay on Bresson's artistic genius entitled *Terror and Utopia of Form*³³ begins with a quote from the Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Puppet Theatre*:

"Must we, therefore, eat from the tree of knowledge once more, to fall back into the state of innocence?"

"Most certainly, that is the last chapter of the history of the world."
(Haneke 565)

The biblical fall of man which Kleist is referring to here is picked up to promote the desired program of falling back into the state of innocence as viewers. We have been manipulated, corrupted and distracted by American mainstream cinema and its highly amoral implications. Sharply distancing himself from fast-selling conventions, he claims that the only way film can be a true art form is if it looks like Bresson's. However, not only has he embraced the same conservative reactionary views that he allegedly opposes, he also overlooks Kleist's actual intention of deconstructing the concept of 'high' and 'low' art forms, and does a bit of manipulation himself, as the epilog in Fatima Naqvi's book *Trügerische Vertrautheit*³⁴ reveals.

First of all, Haneke manipulates by omitting a crucial part of the quote. In the original, the excerpt is a dialog between a dancer and an anonymous narrator. The full line runs: "Mithin, *sagte ich etwas zerstreut* [emphasis added], müßten wir wieder vom Baum der Erkenntnis essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen" (Kleist 345)³⁵. The part left out means 'Therefore, I said slightly distracted', which contains the crucial point of 'Zerstreuung' or 'distraction'. Naqvi confronts Haneke's vision of a truthful, anti-distraction cinema with Siegfried Kracauer's notion of distraction as revelation. She cites Kracauer's essay *Kult der Zerstreuung* as a major source, in which he has argued that true, authentic forms of cinema can only exist if it is modeled on the distraction of everyday urban life in the city. He strongly criticizes conservative circles who are opposed to distraction per se without acknowledging its blazing actuality. Kracauer wants to eradicate the concepts of 'high art' and 'low art', and encourages the masses to storm into the cinema instead of the elitist institution of the theater.³⁶

³³ Roy Grundmann and Robert Gray provide a full translation of the text. Cf. Haneke, Michael: "Terror and Utopia of Form: Robert Bresson's *Au hazard Balthazar*". *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Ed. Roy Grundmann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 565-575.

³⁴ Naqvi, Fatima. *Trügerische Vertrautheit. Die Filme von Michael Haneke*. Vienna: SYNEMA; 2010.

³⁵ Kleist, Heinrich. „Über das Marionettentheater". *Heinrich von Kleist: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. Ed. Helmut Sembdner. 2nd ed. Munich: DTV, 2008. 338-345.

³⁶ Cf. Naqvi, 149-151.

Ironically enough, Kleist preempted Kracauer's wish to tear down the walls between popular forms of entertainment and the classical arts. According to Naqvi, the Puppet Theatre was considered a low, distracting form of amusement and therefore censored by the Prussian regime. In the text, Kleist clearly sides with the traveling theatres and puppet shows, as he also repels Gottsched's theater reformation and Iffland's attempt to open a National Theater in Berlin.³⁷

One might ask what all this has got to do with Haneke? More than it may seem. With his repeatedly harsh dismissal of Hollywood cinema as non-art, he very much inhibits those conservative values that his beloved and quoted Kleist refused to accept in his time. In other words, he tries to be more papal than the pope in arguing that categories such as 'high' and 'low' art are absurd, and at the same time employing those very categories to condemn television and Hollywood movies as distraction, not even entertainment, let alone art. Naqvi cites one particularly polemic interview with Rüdiger Suchsland, in which Haneke detects a dramatic decrease in the quality of television, televised scripts and audience taste, because they fawn upon the dictatorship of Mainstream Hollywood. Not only has television lost its brilliant directors and shows, it has finally succumbed to the American tradition of ratings before quality.³⁸ Considering this, Haneke seems to be the enemy number one for Kracauer and Kleist, the reactionary, bourgeois, elitist, would-be citizen d'honneur who knows his Adorno well.

To draw a conclusion in this chapter, I would suggest a different answer to the question whether he is a true Adorno disciple or not. Haneke's relationship with Adorno is merely pragmatic. He treats Adorno just like his wardrobe. It is a gimmick, a function, which serves him well in tailoring his reputation to his desires. He cuts out the politically incorrect pieces of Adorno (his elitist view, his antiquated stance on art), but keeps the correct ones (film has a moral implication, should better the people, make them act and think). His Adorno is the one of a bona fide cause, a crusader against the emotional oppression of society, not the one who went so far and condemned jazz music as no art. He embraces his ideal and idealized version of Adorno 'light', or Adorno 'toothless'. The twist in this is that the more moderate his opinion about Adorno gets, the more 'Adorno' he himself becomes.

³⁷ Cf. Naqvi, 150.

³⁸ The interview was conducted by Rüdiger Suchsland in Cologne on 16 June 2005, and was published on the homepage of the film forum *Artechock*. Cf. *Artechock online* http://www.artechock.de/film/text/interview/h/haneke_2006.htm

In this Suchsland interview, he stretches this to almost ironic proportions:

Gucken Sie sich doch bitte mal diese wahnwitzigen Schnitte in einem 08/15-Hollywood-Film an! Darum redet man ja von ‚Zerstreuungskino‘, weil die Zuschauer darin zerstreut werden – [im] wahrsten Sinn des Wortes: In tausend Stücke zerfetzt werden sie von den Eindrücken in ihrer Fülle. (Haneke in Naqvi 153)

What is symptomatic about this excerpt is not so much the continuous Hollywood-bashing, but the war-like rhetoric that does it. Haneke speaks of ‘zerfetzt’ which can be translated as dismembered (in a thousand pieces). Adorno would applaud this and Tarantino fall about laughing. In a way, Haneke uses the same militantly violent mode to fight the films he criticizes for being too violent. Fighting is justified as long as one fights for a good, true form of cinema that can be called art. The only problem is that he determines what art is and what is not. He turns into his own enemy.

5. Haneke’s Hollywood

The disease Haneke diagnoses in Hollywood has a name: violence. In his essay *Violence and the Media*, every film example he lists, that contains a negative treatment of violence, is American. Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* is guilty of “guiltless complicity” (Haneke in Grundmann 576). In using Wagner’s *The Ride of the Valkyries* as musical accompaniment to the brutal shooting of Vietnamese civilians, the film alienates violence from what it actually is: the suffering of others. He appears quite certain to have understood the tactics of the industry: Hollywood sacrifices an authentic representation of violence for a fast-selling form of sensationalistic voyeurism:

The surrogate action banishes the terror of reality [...] The salesman who defines and produces film as a commodity knows that violence is only - and particularly so – a good sell when it is deprived of that which is the true measure of its existence in reality: deeply disconcerting fears of pain and suffering [...] those fears remain non-consumable and are bad for business (Haneke in Grundmann 576)

Apart from the commodity sidestep which echoes again elitist views on popular film as an art form, his thesis appears quite straightforward: Most of Hollywood makers

consider film a product to sell, and in order to do so, the depiction of violence has to be covered-up, taken out of context or downplayed. Interestingly enough, Haneke is quite sure to know all those tricks, and he liberally lays them out one by one:

First, the disengagement of the violence-producing situation from the viewer's own immediate life experiences that elicit identification (the Western, science fiction, horror genres and the like).

Second, the intensification of one's living condition and their jeopardization, which allows the viewer to approve of the act of violence as liberating and positive – because it was the only acceptable solution [...]

*Third, the embedding of the action in a climate of wit and satire [...] from the slapstick of silent film to beat-them-up comedies with Bud Spencer and Terence Hill, from spaghetti westerns right up to war grotesques based on the model of *Catch 22* and the postmodern cynicism of *Pulp Fiction* (Haneke in Grundmann 576-7)*

Disengagement, intensification, satire – this is the Holy Trinity of commercial cinema, and every director, producer, editor and screenwriter has to worship it with “painstaking accuracy” to avoid “a drop in audience numbers and ratings “ (Haneke in Grundmann 577). In other words, if you want to make money with film as a non-artistic form of entertainment, this is what you give your audience to have them buying a ticket.

However plausible this argument may appear, it implies very controversial assumptions: First, Haneke claims that practically every film displaying violence must follow “at least one” (Haneke in Grundmann 576) of those dramatic devices to attract a large audience. Is this to say that every filmmaker who follows at least one of those conditions considers film a commodity to sell, regardless of political or humoristic subtexts, genre conventions, production costs, artistic idiosyncrasies, and moral messages?

Second, if a large audience enjoys films with these conditions, does this fact turn them automatically into an unreflecting, manipulative mass of voyeurs who does not realize that it is being brainwashed by Hollywood productions (only because they can laugh and be shocked in a violent movie without being aware of this)?

Third, are all films employing at least one of those alienating effects consequently technically low, one-dimensional, predictable, cynic, amoral forms of entertainment with no artistic merit whatsoever?

Reexamining this written manifesto, one cannot help but discover that is argument doesn't hold water. This can be seen if one looks at his perspective on the usage of music in films.

In an interview with the Austrian television channel ORF III, he has stated that in ninety percent of all Hollywood films, the extra-diegetic musical usage as well as the score is used to hide the mistakes of the director. For instance, a love scene is given an additional melodramatic touch with violins in the background, and this is phony and unacceptable. The only possible exception, however, is in a non-realistic genre film, in which certain well-known musical elements are totally justified because they are part of the genre. He cites Ennio Morricone's western soundscapes and Bernard Herrmann's works for Hitchcock as examples. In a so called 'realistic' film there is no place for music.³⁹

Haneke's confined view on film score demonstrates his unawareness of how Hollywood operates. Some Hollywood productions are contextually and thematically much more multi-layered than he thinks. Over the course of the next chapter, I will discuss one particularly controversial Hollywood production which became commercially successful and at the same time heavily criticized for its controversial depiction of violence. What I want to illustrate now is the following: that a) this film – although engaging in one or more of the Hanekean dramatic devices – works with a variety of subtexts and symbols which makes it undoubtedly an 'artistic' achievement and not exclusively a commodity to sell; and b) that it includes parameters of humor, gender, genre, race and religion that a younger, Hollywood-prone audience can relate to whereas an older, European-focused spectator like Haneke cannot.

5.1. Pop Fiction – The Mechanisms of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*

In an interview with *Filmmaker Magazine*, Haneke didn't hide his aversion to Tarantino's works. Being asked if he even watches Tarantino's movies, he has responded:

³⁹ Cf. Interview with the ORF III, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyrSpEgssp0> 08:00-09:06

Of course. If you are in the business you need to see at least the most exposed examples. [laughs] But I don't go very often to the cinema. I prefer to see the films I like [laughs] when I have time, so I'm not somebody who's going to see the newest films (Haneke in *Filmmaker Magazine*)⁴⁰

Those most exposed examples are in his regard those films that most blatantly engage in the process of aestheticizing violence into a consumable feature of voyeurism, and the ringleader of these wrongdoers, according to him, is undoubtedly Tarantino. The American director has come under fire several times for his unusually drastic, overtly graphic and controversially humorous style of staging violence in his movies, and indeed, blood-spangled matters are what made his movies popular in the first place. However, as two studies by Seßleen and Metelmann show, not only is his idiosyncratic treatment of violence a complex interaction of culturally significant symbols and audiences' expectations that Haneke misses out on, but it also carries moral implications that unifies the two directors more than one would imagine.

Metelmann sees some parallels in the works of Haneke and Tarantino when it comes to staging brutality. The source of violence in *Pulp Fiction*, for example, is often mysterious, non-causal and random. In the scene when Vincent Vega's gun goes accidentally off in a car and kills a young man, the act of killing just happens for no particular reason or explanation. It is unexpected, blunt and taken out of any moral or aesthetic frame. Metelmann is reasonable in saying that such scenes, for which Tarantino was attacked from sides, do not glamorize violence in fiction, but describe the nature of it in reality: just happening out of the blue for no apparent reason.⁴¹

It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see striking parallels in the method of the Austrian director. In *Funny Games*, the two villains torture and kill the family for no apparent reason. Quite the contrary, in one scene they even ridicule the family's and audience's desperate search for a motif in order to understand these atrocities better. However, as Haneke has pointed out numerous times, this is how it works in bad action movies, but not in real life:

⁴⁰ Cf Interview in *Filmmaker Magazine* with Nick Dawson on 14 March 2008.

<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/news/2008/03/michael-haneke-funny-games-u-s/>

⁴¹ Cf. Metelmann, Jörg. *Zur Kritik der Kinogewalt. Die Filme von Michael Haneke*. Munich: Fink, 2003. P.257.

Tatsächlich ist ja Gewalt meist banal und unspektakulär. Gewaltfilme ästhetisieren diese Banalität und machen sie spektakulär. Wenn jemand in der Realität erschossen wird, ist das meist grausam banal – im Film hingegen fliegt er in Zeitlupe durch die Luft, das Blut spritzt literweise, der Pistolenschuß wie eine Kanone und so weiter. Das ergibt eine Art Überrealismus, der dem Zuschauer das beruhigende Gefühl gibt, die reale Gewalt sei gar nicht gemeint [...] Je spektakulärer ein Gewaltfilm ist, umso unrealistischer ist er auch –und um so genußvoller kann ich ihn mir anschauen. Und dem verweigert sich *Funny Games*. (Haneke in Assheuer 81-2)⁴²

The twist is that this is exactly what happens in *Pulp Fiction*. The killing scene in the car would fit perfectly to support the above quote. Tarantino doesn't hype it up with slow motion, fake blood, and the like; in fact, the actual killing is not even visible for the spectator. It triggers the imagination of the viewer to picture the murder in his or her mind's eye, and this is what a film should do, as Haneke is always keen to point out. In other words, Tarantino has the same goal, but he uses a different method to reach it.

The reason why Haneke scoffs at his films lies probably in the fact that he misses the ironic undertones that inhibit his style. After the nameless man, who is totally irrelevant to the plot, is shot in the car, the two killers argue who will clean up the mess, up to the point when they almost threaten each other. Although this makes the incident highly sarcastic considering the fact that somebody just had been killed, it contributes to Tarantino's mode of starkly contrasting the supposed 'coolness' of violence with a gritty, absurdly real-life situation. To further emphasize this, Metelmann provides another intriguing example. In his directorial debut *Reservoir Dogs*, a captured policeman has his right ear cut off by a gangster who dances and sings to a song from the radio while doing the cutting. Metelmann suggests that Tarantino deliberately uses what Haneke would call embedding violence in a climate of wit and satire, allying the viewer with the perpetrator, only to deconstruct this relationship all the more with a shocking scene. He criticizes the delineation of violence in the cinema by delineating it to almost satirical proportions shortly before smashing it by pointing to its own artificiality:

⁴² Haneke claims that unlike in real life, violence is aesthetically enhanced in action movies by way of slow motion, sound and other gimmicks like fake blood. He calls it 'hyperrealism' and tries to oppose this in *Funny Games*.

Der Prozeß der Verharmlosung durch Musik, Off-Geräusche (überlaute Ballerei) oder narrative Schemata (gute Täter, böse Täter) wird in einem solchen Verfahren nicht reproduziert, sondern gerade transparent gemacht, in einer Art Verfremdung ‚ausgestellt‘, wodurch schließlich das erreicht werden könnte, was Haneke z. B. für sich selbst in Anspruch nimmt [...] (Metelmann 257-8)⁴³

What Metelmann is saying is that whereas Haneke categorically denies complicity of viewer-perpetrator by eliminating any possible way of identification, Tarantino encourages this identification only to let the laughter stick in the throat. However, and this is the really important thing, both directors criticize the insensible indifference with which mainstream Action Cinema tackles the topic of violence. Haneke does so in simulating the horrors of real-life violence on screen; Tarantino, in contrast, draws attention to the unreality of mainstream cinema by deliberately overdoing it up to the point of ridiculousness. The reason why Haneke, who has indoctrinated the European approach of film as a moral institution, has trouble accepting Tarantino's position is because it is a product of America's tradition of cinematic autism. Metelmann thinks that in contrast to European filmmakers, Americans never had a problem with perceiving the depicted world within a film as completely exclusive and believable. Unlike Haneke, who thinks of reality as the world 'out there', Tarantino sees his reality created by the fictitious world of the cinema. His *modus operandi* is not encouraging empathy for the victims (that would be Haneke's), but unmasking the phoniness of Hollywood violence itself.

Coming back to *Pulp Fiction*, the Austrian director has criticized the film as "postmodern cynicism" (Haneke in Grundmann 577), and as Thomas Elsaesser has explained in his essay on the movie, *Postmoderne Männer, verzweifelt lässig: PULP FICTION*⁴⁴, he was not the only one. Most of the critics have dismissed Tarantino's techniques as 'postmodern' without being able to acknowledge the socio-ideological, psychoanalytical, political and pop-cultural subtext that the film contains. In further consequence, I want to discuss some of Elsaesser's points not only to illustrate the film's highly complex artistry, but also the cultural bias which motivated the critics' rejection.

⁴³ Metelmann sees the exact opposite effect this hyperrealism triggers. By overtly enhancing the violence, is ridiculed, satirized and criticized.

⁴⁴ Elsaesser, Thomas. *Hollywood Heute*. Berlin: Bertz & Fischer, 2009. P. 97-116.

There seems to be widespread agreement regardless of personal opinion, that *Pulp Fiction* has become a 'cult movie' not only within the confined areas of US-Independent Cinema, but in Western popular culture in general. The reason why this narratively non-chronological, thematically delicate and dramatically seemingly unimaginative film rose like a phoenix into the pantheon of 'cult' can be found, according to Elsaesser, in the fact that it was able to bring to light some of the most controversial and critical aspects of America's collective memory. But before some of those can be addressed, it is worth shifting the attention to the key word of the whole debate: postmodern.

As Elsaesser rightly notes, both sides seemed to locate a very post-modernistic touch the film carries. Its attackers saw in *Pulp Fiction* a prime example of postmodern cynicism, its 'I-don't-care-what-for-stance, its condescending, apolitical, shallow, hypocritical and irresponsible attitude towards art and society in general. The equally passionate proponents claimed that Tarantino's work is a mimetic act of self-defense and at the same time a moral attack on this postmodern, cynic, irresponsible and artistically little significant money-over-art Age. As we have already seen in connection to violence, his weapon of choice is the one of ironic staging, semiotic stimulus and stylistic autonomy. In other words, he is not engaging in the misery of postmodernism by simply reproducing its forms, but lamenting about the damage it already has done.⁴⁵

Perhaps the biggest achievement of the movie and definitely source of its controversial reception is the establishing of two different realities: the 'verbal reality' with its character and stories, and 'the iconic reality'⁴⁶ with its myriad of references to popular American icons. These two realities are closely intertwined; however, they also work on their own:

Wenn *Pulp Fiction* als postmodern bezeichnet wurde, weil er ein ganzes Universum zeigt, das keine Referenz außerhalb von Film, Fernsehen und Junkfood-Kultur aufweist, dann bemerkt und übersieht das zugleich eine der ungewöhnlichsten Leistungen des Films: dass es ihm gelingt, zwei unterschiedliche Realitäten aufrechtzuerhalten, die eine Art Eigenleben führen. Die verbale Ebene (Dialog) und die Bildebene (Handlung, Schauplätze) erschaffen jeweils autonome Welten, die sich nicht vermischen und doch voneinander abhängig sind (Elsaesser, 101)

⁴⁵ Cf. Elsaesser, 97-9.

⁴⁶ The suggested terms are mine, but are synonymous with Elsaesser's terms of „verbale Ebene“ and „Bildebene“ (Elsaesser 101).

To understand these two realities means to understand *Pulp Fiction*. However, most of its critics (Haneke included) seemed to have trouble recognizing it. On a merely verbal reality, the film also works; it is a realistic, non-stylized portrayal of gangsters, small-time crooks, struggling outcasts and drug dealers in the gritty outskirts of modern Los Angeles where aggression and decaying moral values dominates everyday life. However, Tarantino gave his audience much more than this.⁴⁷

Elsaesser describes the iconic reality of the film as its “texture” (Elsaesser 106). Tarantino creates a verbal, visual and aural sea of signs that not only sensualizes it but also deconstructs its supposedly ‘realistic’ character:

[B]ei Tarantino wird die Überschreitung durch eine “Familie” von Motiven, Metaphern und Topoi eingegrenzt, die wie bei jedem Kunstwerk eine Art poetisches Universum schaffen und den Film strukturieren. Im Fall von *PULP FICTION* stammt die Poetik aus den „Niederungen“ der Kultur: Fastfood, Mode und esoterische Marken (die „kleinen Unterschiede“), Burger (McDonald’s, Burger King, *Big Kahuna Burger*), alkoholfreie Getränke (Sprite, Pepsi Challenge, Milchshakes), *Red Apple*-Zigaretten [...] Diese Verweise werden nicht einfach hingeworfen, sondern schaffen dem Film eine Textur, die (im Prinzip) nicht weniger dicht ist als die Struktur der Metaphern eines Robert-Frost-Gedichtes oder eines Edward-Albee-Stücks (Elsaesser 106)

Elsaesser’s argument raises two points. First, it shows that behind an apparent *staged banality* [emphasis added] there is method in this madness. Every vase, every word, every suit, every song, every haircut or handshake is meticulously planned, contributing to the film’s poetic reality. Tarantino’s virtuosity makes it seem coincidental, but if one digs deeper, several other reoccurring motifs like overdose and drugs, foamy lips, foot massages or Freudian references to anal fixations both physical and metaphorical, will come up, as Elsaesser has pointed out.⁴⁸ Every marked or unmarked signifier functions as an “architectonical element” (Elsaesser 106) in the film’s narrative as well as aesthetic structure. Those who praised the film grew up with those signifiers and celebrated a filmmaker who had found a way to formulate it on screen unmet before him. The radicalness of form with which he orchestrated his work defines the essence of his art. The point I am trying to make is that this is also what Haneke aims at.

⁴⁷ Cf Elsaesser, 111.

⁴⁸ Cf. Elsaesser, 106-7.

In Thomas Assheuer's book, he has proclaimed that formal radicalness is not an aesthetic but a moral category⁴⁹, and he is indeed infamous for his almost rigidly accurate working method. For instance, while shooting *The White Ribbon*, he claims to have auditioned around seven thousand children to find the right ones, and in *Funny Games*, the crew built the house of the family from top to bottom because he wanted it to look more American.⁵⁰

In other words, the textures of Haneke's films are also part of its message. For him, a filmmaker is almost obliged to strive for the 'truest' form of cinema regardless of ratings, reviews and riches. But this is exactly what Tarantino does. *Pulp Fiction* is an embodiment for cinematic radicalism. The reason why Haneke has problems seeing this is because American postmodernism is completely alien to him. Tarantino's brush strokes are not the ones of 'high culture', upper-middle class misery or German history, but those of a garish, neon contemporary, deconstructed American dream. He has declared kitsch and trash as a legitimate subject of art, and exhibits it without passing judgment. He uses marked signifiers and reverses them so that they are completely void of their original semantics. No wonder that Haneke is lost on the film – *Pulp Fiction* is not "[P]ulp Fiction, as Elsaesser fittingly paraphrases.⁵¹ Tarantino doesn't preach to its audience about 'how to see it', how to interpret its layers of signs and (a)moral undercurrents. He just shows. To put it in blunt terms, Tarantino is here more Haneke than Haneke.

As it has been stated earlier on, Haneke's prime parameter when it comes to filmmaking is to raise questions instead of giving answers. However, when Haneke calls *Pulp Fiction* postmodern cynicism and at the same time delivers a movie such as *Funny Games*, he is definitely contradicting himself. On one occasion, Tarantino has called the two killers in the film 'small boys with real guns'.⁵² The violence in the film is totally ambivalent and artificial because the people who commit it are. Vincent and Jules ridicule threaten and eventually murder their victims but these characters are almost overloaded with irony and satire in a way that their actions appear totally overdrawn and gimmicky. Haneke's immediate reaction would most likely be to raise

⁴⁹ Cf. Assheuer, Thomas. *Nahaufnahme Michael Haneke. Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2008, back cover.

⁵⁰ Cf. Grundmann, 597 and Assheuer 74.

⁵¹ Cf. Elsaesser, 110.

⁵² Cf. Elsaesser, 103.

the finger and riposte with referring to his dramatic device of satirizing violence as a means to make it consumable. But this is not what Tarantino does.

In *Pulp Fiction*, violence is an absurdly infantile act. Just like those small boys with their guns, potential violence is inherently nesting in all of us from early on, and we have to learn to deal with it by controlling ourselves. The only way of control is to acknowledge its existence.

Was der Film inszeniert, ist eine andere Art Initiation: in eine Welt der infantilen Grausamkeit, des Schmerzes und der Macht, *ohne jemals aufzuwachen oder in der Erwachsenenwelt anzukommen*. Die heftigen Reaktionen, die der Film mancherorts hervorgerufen hat, sind Zeichen der tief liegenden Ängste, die diese kindliche Welt erzeugt, die ambivalente Äquivalenz von erwachsener Aggression und infantiler Regression [...] (Elsaesser 102)⁵³

Considering this, I cannot help but realize that *Pulp Fiction* accomplished what *Funny Games* failed at. The “ambivalent equivalence of adult aggression and infantile regression” (102), between real pain in real life and funny games on screen, between sympathy for the devils and empathy for the victims, between forced voyeurism and forbidden alliance, between wanting to shoot and not daring to shoot, is so much more visible in Tarantino’s film. Compared to this, *Funny Games* stays remarkably one-dimensional.

Peter and Paul, the two villains, are meant to be archetypes, symbols of meaningless brutality than actual characters.⁵⁴ Just like Vincent and Jules, they ridicule, threaten and eventually kill their victims. However, at no time in the whole movie is there any shadow of a doubt that these are the bad guys, even if they are not meant to be ‘guys’ at all. There is no ambivalence to them whatsoever, no ironic distance, and no mystery. The repeated question about their motif is invalid because stock characters, or perhaps more accurately, ‘features’, do not require one. It is my claim that Haneke’s critique, which aims at films neatly feeding the spectators a reasonable explanation for the killer’s actions, such as various Hollywood rampage films like *Falling Down* or *Death Proof*, misses, because the spectators do not care to know. They cannot take Peter and Paul seriously just in the same sense Haneke can’t all those flawless Hollywood

⁵³ Elsaesser refers here to the dichotomy of infantile wishes to destroy, and the rules of the adult world which prohibits that. *Pulp Fiction* abandons those rules and shows adults acting like children and not being punished for it. This is the source of controversy of the film.

⁵⁴ Haneke has described them as „artifacts“ in an interview with Serge Toubiana, Cf. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5lbMdAuRoQ> 2:55-3:00

heroes and villains. What we see in *Funny Games* is the suffering of the victims, but this suffering feels unreal because the ones doing the suffering are. Peter and Paul neither tell us anything at all about our own highly ambivalent relationship with violence, nor about the highly ambivalent relationship of violence in films. They are just images of the director's disgust with the portrayal of violence in the cinema. Jules and Vincent in turn embody the banal, unspectacular senselessness of violence in real life. The viewer can take them seriously because Tarantino takes them seriously. They are too realistic for archetypes but too cartoonish for real murderers. Elsaesser calls it the "flair of the hypothetical" (Elsaesser 110); the whole film is hyper-realistic and at the same time non-realistic. Its ambiguity makes it controversial, not the content.

The most remarkable achievement by Tarantino, in my opinion, is the fact that he managed to incorporate the narrative structure into the iconic reality. One of the most obvious idiosyncrasies about *Pulp Fiction* is how it is being told. Structured in several episodes which are mixed up, the film starts somewhere in the middle and unfolds its stories in a non-linear order. Not only does this unique narrative illustrate a deviation of Hollywood norms, it also satirizes those norms. Elsaesser believes that the non-chronological narration also belongs to the iconic reality; it is just another playing around with signifiers and decoding them:

Es ist eher eine weitere Spielart der "Umkehrungen" und deshalb Teil derselben Strategie wie das Casting, die Schwarz-Weiß-Umkehrung und all die anderen textuellen Merkmale, die offensichtliche Bedeutung verdrehen und vertauschen [...] Man muss schon sehr begriffsstutzig oder mutwillig sein, um in dieser Gestaltung keine Bedeutung zu suchen oder zu sehen (Elsaesser 110)⁵⁵

What seems to be crystal clear for him, Haneke fails to see. And indeed, it does not require extensive knowledge in film history to recognize in the final showdown at the end of the scene (which chronologically happens in the middle of the story) both a tribute and a tomfoolery of many Western showdowns. Two opposing characters are drawing and staring down the barrel of their guns in a Breakfast Diner (another highly iconic American place, just like the main deserted street of a Wild West town). The twist is, one disarms the other and everybody stays alive, keeps its head and goes home peacefully. This is a structural break with a whole genre, and a radical at that. To make

⁵⁵ Elsaesser believes that the non-chronological narration is also an ironic comment on the stereotypically straightforward narration those gangster films normally employ.

it clearer what Elsaesser means with “Umkehrungen”, he offers an interpretation of the American critic bell hooks⁵⁶, who snaps at the incredibly racially charged scene: Jules, the black gangster, rewards the white guy who wanted to rob him, in handing him all his money. Tarantino actually has the audacity to subvert American history; in reality, the black man was robbed by the white man and not rewarded but punished.⁵⁷

I cited this example to make it understandable what Elsaesser means when he talks about reversing marked signifiers. There are numerous others, for instance the black-white buddy motif of the *Lethal Weapon* series that ran from 1987 to 1998, starring Mel Gibson and Danny Glover, directed by Richard Donner. Jules and Vincent, the satirized counterpart, completely reverse this because the black man is presented as the smart, cool leader, and the white guy the phlegmatic retard. This is to say, that *Pulp Fiction* not only avoids socio-analytical profiling but more than that, deconstructs sociological, sexual and racial Hollywood mainstream stereotypes.⁵⁸

This brings me back to Haneke. His critique of the film’s controversial treatment of violence is based on the assumption that *Pulp Fiction* is realistic; however, this is very arguable. I would like to suggest that the whole film is a deconstruction of what is generally considered ‘realistic’ in a movie. It mimics classical parameters normally to be found in the contemporary Hollywood genres, such as the buddy gangster motif, the Western showdown, the sport drama, the episode structure in the tradition of Robert Altman’s *Short Cuts*, decodes, subverts and remodels it bearing little resemblance to its original significance. Therefore, it is a logical consequence that violence is treated the same way. It presents itself as realistic, but acknowledging the ironic layers, it is highly stylized and unrealistic. Elsaesser’s conclusion leaves hardly anything to be added:

Er verwendet postmoderne, dekonstruktivistische Modelle, indem er Ironie als Strategie der Entleerung einsetzt, wodurch hyperkodierte Begriffe (wie “Nigger”) erst neutralisiert und dann in ihrer Bedeutung umkehrbar werden [...] Er spielt mit dem Realitätsstatus eines “erfundenen” Universums. Der Film ist sowohl hyperrealistisch wie auch nicht-realistisch (Elsaesser 110)⁵⁹

I think this is what Haneke misses or refuses to accept. Naturally, the film is violent; but the violence is not natural. It is a satire about the representation of violence in specific

⁵⁶ She intentionally does not capitalize her name.

⁵⁷ Cf. Elsaesser, 114.

⁵⁸ Cf. Elsaesser, 102.

⁵⁹ The film stages reality so meticulously that its reality becomes surreal in itself. This is what Elsaesser means when he says the film is both hyper-realistic and non-realistic.

film genres which are heavily dominated by it. Interestingly enough, this is what Haneke claims to have achieved with *Funny Games*.

Responding to the question of the film's actual content, Haneke characterized it as a portrayal of violence in media or in film⁶⁰, and that it basically "is in part a parody of the thriller genre" (Haneke in Grundmann 583). This may be true, but it can also be said about Tarantino's film. In fact, it is not only in part parody of the thriller, but persiflage of almost every Hollywood genre. Haneke's disdain for the film can be two-fold. In my opinion, there are those possibilities.

On the one hand, he is simply not familiar with the American tradition that Tarantino satirizes. And although he has expressed his fondness for the Italo-Western in the interview mentioned above, it is hard to imagine that he actually realizes the satirical elements when he brands the film's violence as cynicism. It is also rather implausible that he has fully understood what the film actually tries to tell, its iconic reality, its 'hyper realistic non-reality', its subversive intentions of classical Hollywood stereotypes, when he considers himself an admirer and follower of a French tradition, without being able to speak English.⁶¹ And it is very problematic that he blames Tarantino for his cynicism and at the same time pretends to know his intentions:

Das ist ein unglaubliches Talent, keine Frage. Ich finde, *Pulp Fiction* oder *Reservoir Dogs* sind wunderbar gemachte Filme. Mir ist nur dieser Zynismus unsympathisch. Das ist dieser Zynismus aller Actionfilme, die Gewalt als Konsumartikel feiern: "Das ist so luuustig!" [...] Aber diese Haltung ist mir zutiefst zuwider. Das ist eine absolut unmenschliche Haltung, die natürlich dazu dient, ein bestimmtes Publikum in einem bestimmten Alter möglichst zu amüsieren - und das mag ich nicht. (Haneke Interview with *Skip*)⁶²

In reproaching the film the celebration of violence as a consumer good with an inhumane attitude, as well as ascribing to it the sole intention of amusement, it is evident that Haneke has not been aware of the film's critical position towards the representation of violence in films. It appears symptomatic for his lack of a specific collective frame of reference, when he neglects or leaves the film's main points of concern unmentioned, and downgrades it to a mere stimulation of voyeuristic desires by an unreflective audience.

⁶⁰ Cf. Interview with Serge Toubiana, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5lbMdAuRoQ> 00:20-0:22.

⁶¹ Cf. Interview with *Die ZEIT*, cf. http://www.zeit.de/2006/04/Interview_Haneke/seite-2

⁶² Cf. Interview with *Skip Magazine*, in <http://www.skip.at/interview/1320/>

On the other hand, and this would be my second possibility, he seems to suggest that the audience too is not capable of deciphering Tarantino's texture. If the film is cynically marketing violence as something hip, funny and cool, it is also dangerous because its viewers fall for the trick. But they do not. To support my argument, I'd like to draw on Elsaesser's reciprocal concept of interpretation versus acquisition.

In contrast to interpretation, which is defined by critical distance, Elsaesser offers an alternative model of 'receiving' or 'taking it in': that of acquisition.⁶³ According to him, acquisition is defined by the mimetic, infantile impulse of repetition in order to take possession of something or someone.⁶⁴ Unlike the interpretation, which works through Aristotelian, Freudian or other canonical models to provide one or more possible ways to 'understand' the film, acquisition is not concerned with understanding at all. The core principle lies in the desire of people wanting to possess something. Elsaesser thinks that the fundamental question *Pulp Fiction* asks is the one of belonging. To whom does the black coolness, the word 'nigger', the white trash aesthetics, the Western belong? Who is allowed to use it? And above all, to whom does the film *Pulp Fiction* belong to? The answer is clear:

Wem gehört *Pulp Fiction*, der Film? Eine wichtige Antwort vorab: seinen Fans. Man kann Ihnen keine Interpretation aufzwingen, weil dies ihnen ihre Liebe und ihren Besitz nehmen will – ihre eigene Lieblingsszene, die für sie gültige Bedeutung. Ein Kultfilm kann nicht interpretiert werden; er positioniert seine Zuschauer anders als ein „Text“ (Elsaesser 111)⁶⁵

I think this quote is of utmost importance because it displays one of the major sources in the dichotomy between those to filmmakers. Haneke cherishes a method of watching films instead of watching *at* films. He treats films as 'texts' in the sense of methodological blueprints offering particular problems in society for debate. Its viewers read them in order to do something with them. This is the only function they have.

Pulp Fiction represents an aesthetic of experience, confirmation and immersion instead of a critical reflection. Those who admire it share Tarantino's collective memory of a certain cultural experience, and understand the film's own excess in exploiting it. This cultural experience incorporates every possible aspect in the life of its fans:

⁶³ Elsaesser uses the German term „Aneignung“ Cf. Elsaesser, 111-2.

⁶⁴ The validity of Elsaesser's theory was proven personally in countless attempts to memorize the lines of the final scene.

⁶⁵ Elsaesser asks who the movie *Pulp Fiction* belongs to. His answer: the fans that love and cherish the film without interpreting it. This is the essence of a so-called 'cult film'.

fashion, music, cinema, food, brands and the like. Just like the film imitates reality to acquire it, the fans acquire the film by imitating it. It enables them to perceive the iconic reality and not to confuse it with an attempt to produce a realistic action film that supposed to portray contemporary urban America:

Die Stärke von *Pulp Fiction* liegt darin, dass es ein mythischer Film ist, ein Fantasyfilm, ein Cartoon und kein realistischer Actionfilm wie etwa die *LETHAL WEAPON*-Reihe [...] oder andere Mainstreamfilme, die davon ausgehen, dass das Problem gelöst ist, wenn man ein individualisiertes Beispiel einer Lösung im Film zeigt[...] (Elsaesser 113)⁶⁶

Branding it a cynical action film, as Haneke did in the *Skip*-Interview, not only hints at an underestimation of popular Hollywood cinema, it also indicates that there is often more to it than what is overtly visible. In this section on *Pulp Fiction*, I have tried to debunk his theory of consumable violence within his dramatic devices. Despite of the film's usage of wit, satire and disengagement, the portrayal of violence cannot be considered cynic or problematic because it establishes critical distance by means of ironized signifiers, unfamiliar to Haneke. Furthermore, the film can be attributed to have achieved artistic merit because it calls into question longstanding stereotypes of race, gender, class, and language in a cinematically elaborate form. Finally, audiences who have embraced the film cannot be considered an uncritical mess, because they subscribe to a different model of perception. Here, I have used Elsaesser theory of acquisition and its referential requirements which enable it.

To draw a conclusion, Haneke belongs to an entirely different cinematic tradition than Tarantino. His cinema is the one of a didactic institution, pillorying the manipulative strategies Hollywood employs to make violence consumable. Tarantino's cinema is the one of an aesthetic experience which focuses on the paralyzation of violence by deliberately overdoing or decontextualizing these manipulative strategies.

5.2. Don't make fun of me – Haneke's *Funny Games U.S.*

His 2007 remake *Funny Games U.S.*, set, shot and produced in America, reveals more about Haneke's image of Hollywood than any other of his films. In an interview

⁶⁶ *Pulp Fiction* is a fantasy film, a cartoon in the sense that it doesn't present a solution to a problem which conventional action films do, but is not there in real life.

with the English newspaper *The Guardian*, he has explained why and for whom he has remade the 1997 original *Funny Games* in America:

The first film didn't reach the public I think really ought to see this film. So I decided to make it again. The original was in German, and English-speaking audiences don't often see subtitled films. When I first envisioned *Funny Games* in the mid-1990s, it was my intention to have an American audience watch the movie. It is a reaction to a certain American cinema, its violence, its naivety, the way American cinema toys with human beings. In many American films, violence is made consumable. But because I made *Funny Games* in German with actors not familiar to US audiences, it didn't get through to the people who most needed to see it (Haneke in Jeffries)⁶⁷

As can be clearly deduced from this quote, *Funny Games US* was a result of a deeply felt aversion against not only American cinema and how it utilizes violence and violent images in movies to manipulate its audiences, but perhaps more drastically, how the average American cinemagoer has become alarmingly numb towards the most brutal of images. According to him, Hollywood is very motivated to keep their hegemonic position on the market which enables it to dictate the people's taste. The strategy is clear, at least for him: conceal the permanent manipulation in film by all means; flood the scene with a great variety of interchangeable ultra-violent genre films in which violence is an attractive consumer good; do not show the suffering of the victim, but the coolness of the shooter. The trick works quite well, and the films have enjoyed great popularity and profit.

Therefore, this situation enforced a moral imperative to protest. What is really interesting is the fact that Haneke identifies the problem as primarily an American: "You know, all that torture-porn shit that is so prevalent in America cinema, and in American life. It's the new thing" (Haneke in Jeffries). Aside from the fact that films such as *Hostel*, *Murder Set Pieces* and the *Saw-Series* which are generally counted among the 'torture-porn shit' genre also ran with great success in Europe, it also appears mysterious why Haneke knows so much about American life. Analyzing the film in greater detail will demonstrate that this is not the case.

He has made clear in an interview with the Austrian weekly *Falter* that he only would tackle the project under the condition of Naomi Watts starring in it, and having

⁶⁷ Cf. Interview with Stuart Jeffries in *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/mar/31/austria>

the final cut to avoid back-seat driving by the studio.⁶⁸ However, apart from that, the goal was to stay as faithful to the original as possible:

It was a little battle with myself to see if I can do it shot for shot. But also I had nothing to add to the original, so I didn't change it. What has happened in the 10 years since I made the original makes it even more worthwhile to remake for Americans (Haneke in Jeffries)

The overwhelmingly negative reaction that the film received by American critics was not to a small part motivated by Haneke's incapability to adapt the subject matter to American conditions. It already starts with the title. Appearing to be a perfectly correct English expression, Hamrah argues this is the film's first flaw:

The most brutalizing thing about this movie is the title. *Funny Games* is not a phrase in English. You can't go around pretending it is. Has any natural-born English speaker ever used it? For the remake, Haneke should have translated the title into English. Repeating the same mistake twice is an example of the film's redundancy (Hamrah in *n+I*)⁶⁹

I personally wouldn't go so far as to call the film redundant because of its flawed title, however Hamrah has a point. The authenticity of the expression is highly debatable, and although it makes perfect sense per se in what the film depicts, an idiom even resembling 'funny games' in any field is unknown to me. But Hamrah is right on another occasion. He claims that Haneke has made "the same mistake twice", implying the title also does not work in the German original. Surprisingly enough, it actually doesn't. The equivalent 'lustige⁷⁰ Spiele', again making perfect sense as an adjective and a noun used in combination, is hardly a common idiom in German, unlike for instance 'Brot und Spiele'. I also want to emphasize the point that 'funny games' is not the same as 'these games are funny', 'this game is fun', or 'fun and games' which maybe be possible in authentic English usage. In other words, it was clearly meant as a figure of speech or idiom which draws on the fact that the whole film is supposed to be a parody of the thriller. That is why he also chose an English expression for his German

⁶⁸ Cf. Interview with Michael Omasta in *Falter*, <http://www.falter.at/falter/2008/05/27/es-war-ein-bissertl-muehsam/>

⁶⁹ Cf. Hamrah in *n+I* archives, <http://nplusonemag.com/hamrah-column-1>

⁷⁰ Another possible translation would be 'komische Spiele', for it clearly bears more ambivalence; however 'lustig' contains a more ironic tone considering the brutality of those games, which I think was Haneke's intention.

original. But since the pun is incorrect, Hamrah's critique is justified. It definitely illustrates one of the filmmaker's deficits in 'americanizing' the material.

These deficits continue to be visible throughout the film. When the family enters their home, their dog Lucky awaits them. Now, in the American version, the dog breed is a Golden Retriever named Lucky, in the original, it is a German shepherd called Rolfi. Leland Monk's analysis of this detail is very useful in this context. In his essay *Hollywood Endgames*, he has claimed that Haneke's different choice of dog breed indirectly brings to light his misunderstanding of the American class system. German shepherds are commonly known for their loyalty, nobility, and vigilance, all supposed to be Germanic-Teutonic attributes. The family wants to protect their middle-class paradise from the evils of the outside, also underlined by the fenced-off property. As Monk observes, Golden retrievers are one of the most popular dog breeds in America. However they are appreciated for their friendly behavior towards everyone, their kindness to children, owners and strangers alike.⁷¹

In contrast to Monk, who sees in the Golden retriever a bigger tolerance and open-mindedness of the family, I would argue that Haneke chose it because of its popularity in the United States, a pure symbol of the American wealthy middle class family, advertised as the poster dog in fashion commercials by *Polo Ralph Lauren* and *Brooks Brothers*. The Golden Retriever is the perfect signifier for White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. However, this doesn't correlate with the hermetically sealed off house. In addition, German shepherds can hardly be considered family dogs in Austria as well. They are predominately used by police forces and security companies. In other words, when the family in the original keeps a shepherd, it should signify that they are willing to defend their wealth by any means necessary.

On a side note, in watching the film, I have come across another of those minor discrepancies which leaves me in doubt. When one of the tormentor's asks Ann for eggs, she puts them in a prefabricated egg-tray. Anne, in contrast, wraps them up in the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*, which is normally associated with the class the family also belongs to: liberal, left-leaning haute bourgeoisie. For me, it is not quite clear whether Haneke couldn't find an American equivalent (the New York Times would be a choice), or if he intended to satirize America's obsession with dispensable

⁷¹ Monk, Leland: „Hollywood Endgames.“ *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Ed. Roy Grundmann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 420-37.

ready-made household items, a possibility Monk proposes.⁷² Be that as it may, my point is this: his intention was to put it in an America context, but he committed some mistakes due to his lack of cultural insider knowledge

The first shots of the film are only meant to establish the protagonist's money and privilege. Haneke deliberately picks markers of the affluent upper-middle class. The sailboat, the Land Rover (Monk misses this), the sport of golf, the second house, all evident in both versions, are distinct means to ascribe the Farber family to the high-leveled bourgeoisie. Monk's point of criticism, which I strongly support in this context, is this: Although there is also something like a bourgeoisie in America, their members would never perceive them as such. Americans are class-conscious, but unlike Europeans, "never conscious *of* class" (Monk 422). He thinks that sailing tends to be associated with CEOs and managers, golf is more considered a professional sport practiced by the Tiger Woodses, and shotguns are rather for killing than hunting. All this was ignored or gone unnoticed by Haneke, which is why the film appears slightly outlandish, flawed or 'made' to American eyes:

The remake's depiction of class privilege is no less pointed than the original's but its edge is blunted and blurred by the blandness of a presumed equality in a supposedly democratic sociality. Even in this affluent domain, the United States is, nominally and ideologically, a classless society. In the encounter that initiates the escalating violence, when one of the intruders asks to borrow some eggs, the same scene plays rather differently. (Monk 422)

Monk is absolutely correct in speaking of a 'presumed' equality because it bares open Haneke's error to believe America has the same class structures as Europe. The object of criticism in the film, which is the well-off American middle class, feels artificially constructed because it defines itself differently than the European one. The anthropologic look cannot be applied. I would argue that since America never had a traditional aristocracy and titles of nobilities, the only class distinguisher is money. In other words, familiar background dictates much less behavior and lifestyle patterns than in Europe. Particular signifiers such as golf, sailing, ballet, riding, tennis (the two killer sport Fred Perry and Lacoste shirts), golden retrievers and liberal newspapers are not only items but means which are supposed to exhibit class affiliation. In America, where the dream of the bottom-up self-made millionaire is prevailing, personal preference is

⁷² Cf. Monk, 422.

much more common. The most obvious backup for my argument can be found in the different cultural implications of certain forms of sport.

It would be much more plausible if the child in the US version would have a fascination with soccer or baseball instead of golf or sailing. Even high-profile politicians and artists have openly expressed their fascination with the ‘sports of the masses’. In this context, I want to refer to the fact that well-known writers such as Philip Roth and Richard Ford have made baseball one of their major topics of their works, and the American essayist and public figure Tom Wolf has never made a secret out of his semi-professional career as a baseball player. In addition, Sarah Palin, former Governor of Alaska, has admitted to be a ‘hockey mum’ a term which is supposed to describe the average middle class (white) American mother picking up their children from ice hockey training.⁷³

The reason for this excursion is to show that some sports are culturally charged very differently in the United States. This is evident when compared to Austrian society. Soccer (or the European term football) is much more associated with the lower, uneducated working classes, given the hooligan problem in stadiums as well as the controversial status of players in the media. If successful, football stars generate fans and followers wearing their jersey and supporting the team. Hardly, they function as role models let alone potential subjects for literature and art. There is no comparable German-speaking writer playing in the league of a Roth or Wolf who deals with a popular sport in his books, at least not to my knowledge. There is also no politician who has not even remotely stated anything like Sarah Palin. If one investigates the familiar background of Austria’s and Germany’s most popular football players, it will be almost impossible to find a single example having the same background as Georg Schober.

This is to say that sports are chosen in the Austrian bourgeoisie not because their children’s talent, but because of the family’s place in society. Golf, sailing and tennis are for the financially and culturally advanced; football for the working-classed, uneducated strata⁷⁴. Haneke’s mistake was to assume the same for America. However, in the US, popular forms of sport enjoy a much better reputation and are perceived middle class anyway. In turn, apparent ‘snobbish’ activities like sailing and golf are

⁷³ Cf. Sarah Palin’s statement on youtube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hzkq2ysMVE&feature=related>

⁷⁴ The authentic German term would be ‘bildungsferne Schichten’ which is supposed to simulate political correctness but again carries condescending attitudes because it is exclusively used by the Schobers of Austria.

naturally associated in the fields of professionals and managers, and as Monk appropriately remarks, “shotguns are used *primarily* to blow someone away” (Monk 422).

But not only seems the status symbols of the family ill-chosen, the remake omits some of the most crucial elements of the film’s intention. The link between the horrific actions of Peter and Paul, and the audience’s voyeuristic desire to watch them, which was the main motivation for Haneke to make the movie in the first place, is not carried out with the original’s consequence. As Monk rightly notes:

The efforts to implicate the spectator mostly fall flat in the remake. Michael Pitt never quite establishes the conspiratorial relation to the audience that the marvelous Arno Frisch achieves, with his ironies and insinuations, his twinkle-eyed amusement at *our* desire to see more, his knowing wink to the camera (sadly omitted in the remake). (Monk 424)

Indeed, Paul’s buddy-like fraternizing wink into the camera while Anna is looking for the dead dog, a scene of utmost importance in order to create a relationship between the killer and the audience, is omitted in the remake. As Monk observes in a footnote, also left out is Paul’s joke that the action is not up to full feature-film length, after Georg begs to kill him off so that it is all over. It has to be said that Monk’s interpretation of this omission is somewhat daring:

[T]he omitted line also highlights the writer-director’s desire for more funny games to fill out his feature film, even as he self-consciously foregrounds and immanently critiques American cinema’s appetite for blood and death offered up for consumption like extra-buttery popcorn (Monk 435)

I personally wouldn’t go so far as to see in his cutting of the scenes a personal appetite for destruction which he simultaneously tries to criticize. But what is definitely supportable is his claim that the scene’s omission lowers if not takes away the viewer’s chance to become aware of its role as a potential ally with the killers. In the American version, the idea of an alliance between the manipulator and the manipulated is blocked off by a refusal to pull the auto-reflexive manipulation through to the fullest. Monk thinks this has a great deal to do with “the impermeability of “the fourth wall” in Hollywood cinema as it does with the performance style of the two actors playing Paul” (Monk 424). He thinks Hollywood is uncomfortable with these alienating effects

because it disrupts the audience's expectations of a screened illusion which encourages them to enjoy the film rather than to think about it.

There is another contradiction which must not go unmentioned. In one scene, Haneke apparently lends his audience a hand for a satisfying turn. Ann/a is able to gain control of the shotgun and shoots Peter. Paul is so outraged by this that he grabs a remote control, and literally rewinds the film *Funny Games*, shortly before Peter's death. He plays it again, but now is prepared to take the gun away so that the audience vengeance for bloodlust is disappointed. The thing is, this scene plays quite differently in the remake. Whereas in the original, Peter is smashed against the wall by the shotgun blast, leaving him bloody and eyes-closed on the floor, in the US version Haneke seems to overtake even Tarantino's degree of brutality:

[T]he shot has been digitally enhanced so the hail of hot lead blasts his body across the room and against the wall where it slides to the floor in a crumpled heap, leaving a bloody smear on the wainscoting. Haneke turns up the visceral CGI wattage on this, the most cathartic moment in *Funny Games*, only to hollow out a larger void in the American moviegoer's sensational appetites. (Monk 425)

The reason for my detailed elaboration on this scene is because it represents a very stark contradiction to his cinematic requirements, bans and rules. I want to draw the attention to the above quoted passage from the Assheuer interview in which he claims that when somebody is shot in conventional action films, there are methods used to 'pimp up' the killing. The body is flying around in slow motion; there are gallons of blood splattered all over the place, and the bang of the gun hums like a cannonball. *Funny Games*, however, is refusing to employ such methods.⁷⁵

Reading this after watching Peter getting shot in the American *Funny Games*, it feels as if Haneke has just talked about his own film. He does employ those methods, ascribing to a more violent depiction for a more violent-prone audience. It may be the case that the exposed complicity with aestheticized violence becomes the more visible after 'doing him in' American style. However, at the same time, he breaks his own code of dramatic devices, putting the shooting in a context of satire. The remote control rewind toys with audience's expectations up to the point of ridiculing them. I want to argue that Peter's sarcastic trick, which does not make us alert but laughs at our naivety,

⁷⁵ Cf. Haneke in Assheuer, 80-1.

is not so much the problem as the computer-generated, unrealistic, smarmy approach to imitate a Hollywood aesthetic. It is a highly debatable thing of Haneke to say that he wanted to stay as truthful as possible to the original and at the same time modifies and manipulates particular passages to give the studio (no forth wall), and the audience (gruesome bloodshed) what they want to see.

If one looks at the reception of the film, it becomes clear that his plans did not unfold. Too big is the cultural gap between the European art-house filmmaker's moral endeavors, and America's tolerance to be lectured. The film is Haneke's biggest critical and commercial failure. It took 1.2 million dollars on the domestic American market out of a total of 7.2 million worldwide.⁷⁶ He sees part of the problem in the distributor's totally mistimed premier. In the interview with the *Falter*, he has explained that the film was supposed to have premiered in October which would have been ideal. Instead, they launched it shortly before the Academy Awards at a time when the critics and the general public are only watching the nominated movies.⁷⁷ Although making perfect sense, it is certainly not the only reason why just a considerably small number of people showed up at the cinema.

Firstly, there seemed to be unanimous agreement that *Funny Games US* is a flop in every conceivable way. The contempt that hailed down on the film and its maker was ironically identical with the one Haneke throws at Hollywood. One particular rave reviewer, A.O. Scott from the *New York Times*, has entitled his review "A Vicious Attack on Innocent People, on the Screen and in the Theater" (Scott).⁷⁸ Calling him a sadist, he feels strong scorn for Haneke's prejudice against American's apparent obsession with violence. For him, the director is a smug intellectual European who takes liberties in lecturing American's what is wrong with their cinema. Moreover, he points out that the film is using brutality not to make us aware of our affection for it, but to "feel bad about [ourselves] in the bargain" (Scott). Aside from the fact that Scott becomes considerably the smug intellectual American counterpart himself, it is perhaps more telling that he sees *Funny Games* in a line with Eli Roth's *Hostel*, an excessively violent film which has been harshly criticized and would probably serve as Haneke's prime example for how a film should never look like. Scott, just like Haneke, links this

⁷⁶ Cf. Statistics provided by Monk, 425.

⁷⁷ Cf. Interview with the *Falter*, <http://www.falter.at/falter/2008/05/27/es-war-ein-bissel-muehsam/>

⁷⁸ Cf. Review of the film by A. O Scott in the *New York Times Online*, <http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/03/14/movies/14funn.html?ex=1332475200&en=709faf668585ee66&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>

specific aesthetic of suffering to pornography; however, he thinks that Haneke is engaging in, rather than opposing these pornographic acts.

It is not the scope of this chapter to review the reviewers, although Scott ignores some important facts, in my opinion. It is to demonstrate where and how Haneke's own construct of American cinema collides with the American's. To be able to understand both cultural perspectives it makes sense to look at a review from the German newspaper *Die ZEIT* which offers a different explanation. Thomas Assheuer, whose review is entitled "Wir morden weil wir morden wollen", praises the film for its painful healing the audience of all the violent action films out there. In his opinion, Haneke's pedagogical program, which successfully demonstrates and denounces the spectator's libidinous identification with cinematic brutality, was too didactic for the Americans. The critics felt affronted by a European director who is intruding the privacy of the American nation and blackmailing its people to adapt his way of watching and making films. According to him, the answer as to why the film flopped is plainer than it seems. After the 9/11 attacks, the Guantanamo problem and the torture scandals of Abu Ghraib, America is going through a time of political and emotional turmoil leaving its people in a state of insecurity and nervousness. In this hard hour, along comes a European director with his European champagne problem of cinematic violence. A nation who has to deal with real-life terror in foreign and domestic areas finds it audacious from an outsider to be notified that they are actually also having a problem with terror on screen.⁷⁹

I fully agree with Assheuer's thesis. The state of a society is naturally responsible for the way this society's cinema looks like, and it is not too daring to say that America never could take criticism very well, let alone from an outsider. Daniel Hui, one of the very few critics not slandering the film, seems to confirm Assheuer's argument. A passage in his review "Fun and *Games*", which was published on the *Bright Lights Film Journal*'s homepage, reads almost like a paraphrase:

⁷⁹ Cf. Thomas Assheuer's review of the film in *Die ZEIT*, <http://www.zeit.de/2008/22/Funny-Games>

In these ten years, looking only at the U.S., 9/11 happened and a "war on terror" was declared. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan, and then Iraq. The cultural landscape for the rest of the world, America especially, has changed vastly, and movies reflect this change; many American movies are now filled with paranoia (the same paranoia that gripped American film during World War II and the Cold War); America has always exorcised this fear of the alien Other in movies, and now this fear has found a new target (Hui)⁸⁰

The validity of Hui's point cannot be overstated. America's foreign and domestic problems have slightly cracked its collective self-esteem, and the films its industry produces are tools to fix this by distracting its audience with either brutal tragedies or shallow comedies. For Hui, it is hardly surprising that when a black-dressed, intellectual 'Schulmeister' comes along to show them how manipulated and manipulative they are, things just had to turn sour. Nevertheless, he was astonished how feverishly the film was condemned without paying attention what it actually tries to tell:

It is interesting how personally American critics have taken this new version of **Funny Games**. Most criticize it, under their sarcastic puns, as another anti-America rant by yet another America-hating foreigner. Some attack it as being over-didactic, forcing a message down the audience's throat. Almost all agree that the best way for the audience to learn its message is to boycott it completely (Hui)

Not only is Hui right about a possible message the film tries to convey; he also attacks the attackers' lack of interest to find this message. The detected cynical tone, which is undoubtedly traceable in most of the reviews, as well as the 'you-just-made-this-personal' defense reactions indicate that Assheuer and Hui have spotted the true source for the outcry.

In addition, I would like to present another minor remark to explain the audience's rejection. In the ten years between the original and the remake, the average cinemagoer faced an excessive intensification in the depiction of violence in films. Evidence for this would be the popular *Saw*-Franchise, *Hostel*, *Scream*, *Last House on the Left* and several others which are not only characterized by an overtly graphic staging of physical and psychological violence hardly seen before, but also by an introduction of torture as the main motivator for a film's story. My point is this: with the

⁸⁰ Cf. Daniel Hui's Review of the film in *Bright Lights Film Journal*, <http://brightlightsfilm.com/61/61funnygames.php>

emergence of these films, the torture in *Funny Games US*, seems harmless and outdated for the generation following this 'Nouvelle Vague XXX'. In other words, Haneke has underestimated what its target audience has gotten already used to. For the majority of them, the murdering of a well-off family with a golf club instead of a digitally timed, high-tech jawbreaker as the one in *Saw* must have teetered on the brink of boredom. I think that some of the initial reactions to the film must have been not unease or shock, but disappointment and indifference. Instead of feeling appalled that they paid for a film which tries to provoke them, they probably felt angry having paid for a film not showing more. As shocking as this may seem to Haneke himself, it can be counted as another of those discrepancies between him and his American targets.

Robert Koehler, an American film critic for *Variety* and *Cinema Scope*, confirms this. But unlike most of its colleagues, he holds the remake in high esteem, especially what the linguistic transformation of most of the dialogue is concerned. It is also brilliantly yet differently acted and photographed. The problem lies in the studio's as well as Haneke's wrong marketing strategy of the product:

Is *Funny Games*, he wonders, becoming just another consumer entertainment? Is it destined to be viewed as just another Naomi Watts chiller? Has Warner Independent guaranteed this with its ad poster featuring Watts's big head, with the obvious device of appealing to Ring fans? Is the trailer — viewable all over the Web — a kind of con job, since it's nothing more than your basic teaser for a slasher-thriller? Precisely by remaking his film in America, with an American studio indie division, has Haneke unavoidably played right into the studio's game of peddling consumer products? And with all of this in play, as the film is framed and marketed for the North American public, are the expectations and sets of responses to *Funny Games* certain to widen the gap between the manner in which audiences and critics see movies in general, with Haneke's film as a prime example? All of this and more is not only possible, but certain. (Koehler)⁸¹

Koehler argues that by sheer placing the film in the genre it is supposed to criticize, namely the action-horror-thriller, *Funny Games* was perceived as such. Therefore it generates the same audience expectations that films in this genre normally do, and evidently could only disappoint. To put it in more drastic terms, the studio killed its own movie. Haneke had the final cut but Time Warner made the marketing decisions and consequently steered towards mainstream consumer needs. Koehler's argument is

⁸¹ Cf. Robert Koehler's review of the film on *Cineaste*, <http://www.cineaste.com/articles/funny-games.htm>

certainly valid because it ignores the conventional critical discourse that is prevailing among most of the reviewers. He says that it is not a matter of who doesn't understand whom, but more of what do I buy? The film was a failure, not because of low artistic merit or arrogant ignorance of Americans; it happened because Haneke's product was a different one his distributor tried to sell.

In the second section of his essay, Leland Monk offers another thing gone wrong: casting. As Haneke has made clear in various interviews, the only condition under which he will tackle the project - apart from the final cut - is Naomi Watts as female lead. Monk stresses that Naomi Watts, Tim Roth and Michael Pitt are primarily considered movie stars rather than actors. Thus because of their celebrity status, the audience perceives them as 'Watts as Anne Faber' instead of 'Anne Farber'. Although all three main protagonists have had experience in similar roles and genres; Watts played a tormented mother in the horror blockbuster *The Ring*, Roth a young man on a killing spree in the American heartland, and Pitt, who already portrayed a killer in *Murder by Numbers*, became a sort of a "cinematic poster boy for disaffected sociopaths" (Monk 430). As he rightly observes, "[t] here are fine actors but no movie stars in the 1997 original" (Monk 430), what he actually is implying is that Haneke should have chosen fine but unknown actors instead of stars.⁸²

It hardly needs pointing out that his intention in picking Watts was not *only* [emphasis added] because of her performance in Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, as he has claimed in the *Falter* interview.⁸³ I think he also wanted to boost the box office results by drawing on Watt's popularity. This becomes evident both in and around the film. As Koehler notices, Time Warner exploited her recent success "with its ad poster featuring Watts's big head, with the obvious device of appealing to Ring fans" (Koehler). Even if Haneke had no control over the marketing campaigns of his own work, it came in handy. The modification of Watts's part cannot be explained in any other way:

The camera placement is as discreet as in the original when Paul and Peter force her to disrobe early in their sadistic play. But, as countless male commentators have pointed out, Naomi Watts is onscreen in her bra and panties for a very long time (most provocatively, for the duration of that ten-plus minute shot; in the original Anna wears a slip). Derek Elley called this wardrobe change the most notable difference between the remake and the original (Monk 430)

⁸² Cf. Monk, 430.

⁸³ Cf. Falter interview, <http://www.falter.at/falter/2008/05/27/es-war-ein-bisserl-muehsam/>

Haneke's decision to show more skin is not necessarily to say that sex sells. One can also attempt an opposite reading. Similar to the violence aspect, the stripping bare of Watts is an ironic comment on the prevailing exploitation of the female body in the horror action thrillers to increase ratings. One of fundamental rules of these films is to show a physically attractive female as victim. Whether it is Naomi Watts in the *Ring*, young Eastern European actresses in *Hostel*, or Monica Potter and Martha MacIsaac in *Last House on the Left*, these women are supposed to attract via their attraction. Naturally, their target audience is almost entirely male.

This also happens in *Funny Games*. Shortly before she grabs the gun to kill Paul, she attacks him with her saliva, spitting in his face. There is nothing like that in the original.⁸⁴ Anne is not Anna. As a consequence, Monk sees another genre touched in *Funny Games*: the woman's film. Basically, he is referring to a series of films in the 1930s and 1940s that had a strong individual and individualized female protagonist who suffered in domestic areas for the sake of the spectator's desire. Laura Mulvey has developed this phenomenon in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, and Monk is working with her concept. However, I want to confine myself to Monk's findings because it describes a close connection to Haneke's work. As he notices, the star persona of such women film's actresses (Bette Davis and Joan Crawford would be two popular examples) were so much more powerful and omnipresent than their role, always "[shining] through even when their character was confined to meager and mousy circumstances" (Monk 431). The core of these films was female sacrifice "enacted on the big screen by bigger-than-life movie stars" and the boiling point of this suffering was a woman's crying.

Now, Haneke knows this, at least in Monk's opinion. The movie poster displays an oversized face of Naomi Watts tortured with tears running down her cheek. It can also be interpreted that Haneke wanted to parody the woman's film to criticize the satisfaction of voyeuristic pleasures of a male audience by exposing a female suffering that these films promote:

Here too Haneke is ascetic to the point of astringency, doing with the woman's film what he does with the slasher film. There is no catharsis, no redemption, no ennobling sacrifice in this version of spectacular female suffering [...] In Haneke's version of the woman's film, Ann Farber drowns but not in tears. (Monk 431)

⁸⁴ Cf. Monk, 431.

Monk is here referring to one of the final scenes in which Anne, bound hand and foot on the sailboat, has one last chance to revenge her family by grabbing a knife which is again discovered and taken away before she can do any harm. Immediately afterwards, Paul throws her overboard and she drowns. In refusing to employ the classic Hollywood narrative schemata, he not only deconstructs the thriller, but the whole apparatus, regardless of genre:

[T]he film says an irrevocable good-bye to the Hollywood movie star. It's a triumph of auteurism over the means of production as they have operated hitherto in Hollywood: Haneke just doesn't kill off the movie star; (Monk 432)

Haneke also kills off Watts the female body, the persona, the status. He wins the fight over Hollywood and the dictatorship of the studio system by acquiring the rules and reversing them to satirical proportions. Nowhere is this antithetical process more visible than in the film's ending. As Monk concludes, perhaps Hollywood's primarily Law of the Medes and the Persians is the "Hollywood ending" (Monk 433), a reassurance to all the parties involved that things eventually turn out for the good. Leaving the cinema with something positive and optimistic is of utmost importance, although the intended message often has no relation to real-life circumstances whatsoever. The goal is to make the spectator want to come back again. If somebody dies, he or she (mostly he) dies for the right cause; if there is cruelty it is revenged; if there is evil, it is defeated; However, the world doesn't normally functions this way. And *Funny Games* wants to show this. At the end of his essay, Monk comes up with a very appropriate analogy. He asks if Hollywood, like a human body, can produce enough antibodies for its immune system to fight off the constant viral attacks of *Funny Games*, and the host Haneke.⁸⁵

In other words, he was astonished that the studio agreed to finance it in the first place, with Haneke insisting on his anti-Hollywood doctrines. These doctrines culminate in the movie's idiosyncratic ending which, according to Monk, not only deconstructs Hollywood endings but Hollywood in general.

⁸⁵ Cf. Monk, 433.

The end of Hollywood filmmaking as we know it would mean in this case: spectacular visual effects used to evacuate the craving for sensationally mediated violence; the death of the movie star system, without tears; and the deployment of established films genres only to come up with a new formula frustrates their altogether conventional expectations. *Funny Games U.S.*, Haneke's first (perhaps only) Hollywood film, has a very different sense of an ending that anticipates what a post-Hollywood cinema might be like (Monk 433)

As Monk puts it, Haneke's ending is Hollywood, ending. It is a deliberate undermining of aesthetic, moral and formal categories of a subjectively perceived framework while working within the real framework. The final results are heavily dependent on how these two correspond to each other. Over the course of this chapter, I have tried to illustrate that the aversion that Haneke's American project has spawned is a mixture of cultural misinformation, reciprocal elitism and moral intolerance. The American perspective felt that Haneke was misinformed about American society, elitist in his assumption to be able to better them with European didacticism, and intolerant towards their own way of seeing and feeling films. These points are all convincing and right. However, it doesn't mean Haneke is plain wrong. Before I will proceed to the next section, I finally want to present one of the very view critics who defend the film, exemplifying the enormous ambivalence which this topic involves.

Brian Price notes in his essay *Pain and the Limits of Representation*, that during the time the film was made, the American government just did on a large-scale level what Peter and Paul committed in a domestic area: they tortured.⁸⁶ At the moment of its shooting, US soldiers tortured in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib political and civilian prisoners in "an effort to sustain a war on Iraq, an act of government-sponsored terrorism waged in the name of terror everywhere" (Price 45). The public outrage caused by the film's brutality is to silence or even denounce somebody's being outraged by these forms of brutality that the government of this country engages in. Price explains that under the Bush Administration, torture was not only practiced illegally, but even declared a legitimate form of interrogation to receive information benefiting the United States. He even goes so far to say that the Nuremberg Laws against the use of torture were annihilated⁸⁷.

⁸⁶ Price, Brian: „Pain and the Limits of Representation“. *On Michael Haneke*. Ed. Brian Price and John David Rhodes. Detroit: Wayne State UVP, 2010. 35-50.

⁸⁷ Cf. Price, 45.

In other words, the film's subtext is much more a political statement. Therefore the whole debate about the film is questionable because it addresses the wrong issues:

The cultural and historical differences between Germany, France and America do not matter here. What matters is what they all share: the recurrent presence of torture and a historical trajectory that clearly articulates the stakes of torture today; [...] This is also why the differences between the two versions of *Funny Games* matters so little. What good would it do us to tend, here, to matters of cultural specificity and difference? What would notice is a difference of products. Ann buys organic products and shops at Whole Foods; Anne did not. Georg wears a gray shirt; George a white one (Price 47)

I want to strongly oppose this argument. They do matter because they reflect the way their makers and users live together in society. Keeping a watchdog is not the same as to keep a family dog because it reveals something about the owner's perception of friends and foes. It also shows how in the difference of facts there is also a difference of fiction. When Anne is more often naked than Anna, it does tell us something about how the people should or should not perceive the role of a female body in a film. But most importantly, the choice of different products, gestures and other behavioral patterns was not made out of carelessness or sloppiness. It was made because it targets the controversial usage of those things in all those films it attacks. George has to sail and play golf, Anne has to buy organic food, or otherwise they wouldn't be the same family. However, as it has been shown, societies are way too multilayered to be refashioned precisely one to one. Haneke thought it funny, but Hollywood refused to play the game.

5.3. A Child of the Dead – Voyeurism in *The Piano Teacher*

Another major aspect which manifests certain differences as well as similarities between Haneke's films and Hollywood is voyeurism, and in no other of his works is this topic more effectively visible than in *The Piano Teacher*, his 2001 film starring Isabelle Huppert. Likewise, in no other work by Alfred Hitchcock is voyeurism so central a part than in *Vertigo*⁸⁸. Naturally, what follows is an in-depth analysis of both films, their strategies of looking at the female as subject and object, their devices to

⁸⁸ Others would instantly suggest *Rear Window*; however, the object of voyeurism in both Haneke's and Hitchcock's film is the female subject objectified; consequently, it offers a perfect situation to counter-read these two films.

expose the looker and the looking, and most importantly the question if these devices deviate or resemble each other, coming from a European and (British) American operator respectively.

The Piano Teacher is a literary adaption of Elfriede Jelinek's 1983 novel of the same name, which unlike *Funny Games US*, was a critical and commercial success, receiving numerous prizes at film festivals, Cannes amongst others. My evaluation of the film is based on Fatima Naqvi's and Christopher Kone's essay *The Key to Voyeurism*, an elaborate account on the aspects of the voyeuristic gaze and the subject of the "voyeuse" (Naqvi 127) in Haneke's film.⁸⁹

The authors identify as the central element for voyeurism the key and the keyhole in the film and the novel. They are "symbols for phallic power, repressed female sexuality, and voyeurism at the same time" (128). Arguing from a psychoanalytical standpoint with referring to Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*, the essay draws in detail on Freudian motivations stemmed in a looking (pre)oedipal phallic figure (the mother of Erika Kohut) as well as potential sexual and hierarchical dispositions that inherent other perpetrators of voyeurism, namely the audience as 'lookers' and their implied control impulses of the object they look at; for the sake of theme and argument, I will just touch the former and elaborate on the latter.

The main female protagonist, Erika Kohut, is a middle-aged piano teacher at Vienna Conservatory of Music suffering from a series of psychological, sexual and social problems; but most importantly, she deals with them in a highly voyeuristic manner. The film, to a certain extent, describes these voyeuristic desires also like a voyeur; it follows her obsessive behavior also by looking at and consequently exposing her. The opening scene of the film is a door of an apartment filmed from the inside. Audible is a key sliding into the keyhole and opening it. Erika enters and is surprised by her mother staring at her who in turn is also obsessed with controlling her activities. The mother has been up all night watching television (again looking at something) and waiting for her to come home. A physical fight between her and Erika breaks out, and as Naqvi rightly infers, "the spectators will be hostages, forced to witness the ensuing argument" (129), forced to look at them fighting.

⁸⁹ Cf. Naqvi, Fatima and Christopher Kone: "The key to Voyeurism. Haneke's Adaption of Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*. On Michael Haneke. Ed. Brian Price and John David Rhodes. Detroit: Wayne State UVP, 2010. 126-150.

The beginning of the film not only characterizes the emotionally disturbed relationship between daughter-mother, it also points towards a characterization of a subject or object through looking at it. The fact that Haneke draws on extensively on Jelinek's symbol of key and keyhole to illustrate the sexually-charged content of this voyeuristic process is interesting but of minor importance in this context; I want to focus on the process itself, how it shapes the parties involved, audience included. Consequently, one of the most important moments in the film is the drive-in theater sequence. At night, Erika attends a drive-in cinema on the outskirts of Vienna, but not to watch movies but couples having sex in their cars. As Naqvi points out, in the novel Erika's choice of location is a different tone. In the Jelinek text, she stalks in the Prater Park of Vienna to satisfy her pleasures. However, Haneke's change to Austria's only drive-in cinema implies another important point:

By utilizing this setting, Haneke not only suggest a criticism of the Hollywood blockbusters filling European screens (the 2000 action films *Frequency* and *The Skulls* are being shown) but more importantly establishes a link between cinematic voyeurism in general and the consummation of consumers. As explosions fill the screen, the audience "comes" (131)

This is undoubtedly the most extreme theory of Haneke's Hollywood criticism that anybody, Haneke included, could have formulated. The audience not only participates in the consumable acts violence of Hollywood as consumers themselves, it also satisfies a sexual drive in looking at things and people being destroyed. Naqvi's theory may appear exaggeratedly provocative until one considers Haneke's binary concepts of pornography and obscenity. Responding to the film's alleged overtly pornographic content, he has explained:

I would like to be recognized for making in *La Pianiste* an obscenity, but not a pornographic film. In my definition anything that could be termed obscene departs from the bourgeois norm. Whether concerned with sexuality or violence or another taboo issue, anything that breaks with the norm is obscene [...] By contrast pornography is the opposite, in that it makes into a commodity that which is obscene, makes the unusual consumable, which is the truly scandalous aspect of porno rather than the traditional arguments posed by institutions of society. It isn't the sexual aspect but the commercial aspect of porno that makes it repulsive (Haneke in Grundmann 587-8)

Given these parameters, it makes now Naqvi's argument supportable. Hollywood 'pornographizes' a murder or explosion just like the depiction of a sexual act, or the female body in general. Even further, in his opinion, Hollywood portrays sex much more puritanical and conservative than violence. The cinematic aesthetics in most of the contemporary action films comes dangerously close to the porn film industry which is also predominately American. This is also the reason why according to Christopher Sharret, the American public had big problems with the film's sexual but not violent content, which includes one rape and one knife-stabbing scene.⁹⁰ What I want to say with this is that Naqvi's implication of a sexual satisfaction which is provided by the cinema is valid because Haneke's concept of pornography can also be read not in exclusively sexual but also metaphorical terms. They may not be actually physically ejaculating, but the Hanekean metaphor paraphrases a relation to the conventional way pornographic films are consumed.

Returning to the drive-in scene, the different location also reverses the experience of going to the movies by car. To escape the claustrophobic confines of her apartment, where she is being watched by her mother, she chooses a contradictorily private-public sphere. Unlike in a real cinema, where people gather to witness a motion picture together, they are private in their cars in a public place. Therefore, Erika on the one hand participates in a privately public voyeurism, which everybody commits when going to the movies; but furthermore, she is a sole voyeur looking at people who are in turn voyeurs themselves. Erika double-binds the natural condition of voyeurism because she "undermines the distinction between public and private" (131). The film exhibits her just like she herself exhibits the spectators. It shows Erika first looking, then playing, kissing, masturbating and fellating Walter, her sexual interest, numerous times. She even wears a Burberry trench coat, the "exhibitionist's clichéd trademark" (132), and "puts on a show for the spectator, but to their great discontent, it is never the exciting performance that they want to see" (132).

What is crucial to bear in mind is that unlike the novel, Haneke continuously explores the role of the medium within this medium. In *The Piano Teacher*, he not only casts an eye on Erika's voyeurism, but the spectator's as well. As we shall see later, Hitchcock does the same thing in *Vertigo*; therefore more time should be devoted to this relationship.

⁹⁰ Cf. Grundmann, 588.

As Naqvi argues, the spectator's voyeurism is most evident in the key and keyhole motif. When she leaves the bar to step outside entering the parking lot, she is wearing a Hermes scarf with keys on it, a device which continues throughout the film. Wandering in between the parked cars, she "herself appears in silhouette as a keyhole" (132), looking at the lookers. This shot portrays the cinemagoers as voyeurs' identical to Erika in their impulses. The moment when the focus shifts and Erika becomes an object of voyeurism herself for the spectator (us, not the ones in the drive-in cinema that is), is when she turns and stand against the movie scene. The image of key and keyhole are present on the female body, and "it is through this female keyhole that the spectators watch and get and eyeful" (133).

Succeeding this thought, Naqvi explains that Erika's voyeurism is double-edged sword. On the one hand, the spectator's look at her, on the other, they look with her eyes:

Erika transcends the voyeur's (or voyeuse's) position. Of course, Erika's disavowal of her impotence is connected to her voyeurism, for watching through the keyhole gives her a phallic *jouissance* [...] The spectators are indeed watching random people having sex in the backseats of their cars through her (eyes) and with her [...] The woman in the Burberry trench coat *exhibits* her voyeurism, trying to control the male gaze by displaying herself as keyhole and making use of it simultaneously (133-4)

What I want to emphasize in this passage is not so much the Freudian aspect, but the auto-reflexivity of Erika's voyeurism. There is a paradoxical situation here because she turns into the subject and the object at the same time. In other words, she knows that she is being watched by male spectators and comments on our scopophilia by overtly engaging, almost posing for us. At no point in the movie is this more drastically exercised than in the porn booth scene.

Erika visits a porn booth in a shopping mall to fulfill her fantasies, yet hardly erotic ones. The fact that the primary existence of such booths is to satisfy sexual needs is quite clear, however, it does so by stimulating the voyeuristic pleasure. People reach their satisfaction by watching other people. Erika arrives at the available cabins but all are occupied at this moment, leaving her awkwardly waiting in the aisle being observed by the other guests (naturally all male), also waiting. The men stare at a woman in such a place, and the audience witnesses this. Inside the booth, she selects a porn movie. But immediate before that the spectator is confronted with the 'title menu' of four different

porn movies from which Erika can choose. After she picked one, the camera moves away from the pornographic imagery to focus on Erika's face showing her watching while smelling on pre-used sperm-stained tissues in the booth. Now, Haneke makes us aware, even without addressing the screen, that Erika is both object (the audience's) and subject (the porno) of voyeurism. In Naqvi's opinion, this is the truly innovative contribution of the film to cinematic voyeurism:

We are doing precisely what Erika strives to do throughout the *Piano Teacher*: watch an image as well as watch the object of our gaze watch an image – but without having the object watch us. The film explores the loss of subject-object boundaries since Erika is as much the subject of the gaze as the object of our gaze, as are the spectators, who are recurrently seen by Erika in some frustrating head-on shots, caught in the act of peeping on her (137)

The scene is a comment on both Erika's and our watching her within the confines of the cinematic frame. Establishing this duality of the gaze, he has no interest in piquing our curiosity, nor appealing to our scopophilic tendencies. More likely, he draws attention to the shortcomings of the camera as medium, and does away with the naïve assumption of an objective truth in cinema. Just like *Funny Games*, the film “challenges the spectators with the multiple implications of their voyeurism” (134). He not only controls our Erika's perspective, but also ours. Ultimately, “Haneke controls the image” (134).⁹¹

Another point from *Funny Games* which has been further developed is the juxtaposition of high and low culture forms. Music, and more precisely classical music, is one of the major subjects in the film. Not only does that justify its appearance in the film, being practiced by somebody in a diegetic sense, as he has made clear in an interview.⁹² It is also supposed to demonstrate the absurdity of such distinctions. While Erika is teaching the piano works of famous composer's and giving concerts herself, her mother is spending her days and nights in front of the TV (again the motif of looking) indulged in the news, and documentaries about wildlife, cowboys and other trivia. The sequence before the porn booth scene, Erika is playing Schubert's *Piano Trio in e flat* with other musicians. In the next scene, she is walking towards the sex shop, however, the music stays on; I think it is not too far-fetched to argue that Haneke actually

⁹¹ Cf. Naqvi, 133-4.

⁹² Cf. Interview with the ORF III, 08:00-08:50

switches to an extra-diegetic score in a Hollywood manner, given the melancholic somber nature of the piece and Erika's loneliness. In the ORF III interview, he has complained about directors unleashing the strings to add melodramatic tones to a scene; well, the Schubert passage is played by a Cello and a violin.

Naqvi even goes so far in saying that Schubert, who's *Winterreise* is a central part of the musical motifs, died of Syphilis contracted perhaps by a prostitute. The ancient Greek word for prostitute is 'porne'. In a certain way, Erika herself acts like a prostitute, moving up and down the screen eager to give the audience (and herself) visual pleasure. According to Naqvi, the original meaning of the phrase 'to prostitute oneself' literally meant 'to stand in front of'.⁹³

This may be too exotic a claim to be fully supported, but it points towards an aspect owing more to the original text by Jelinek: Austria's commodification of classical music as a unique selling proposition. Vienna is due to its historical heritage, perceived by most of the outside world as the epicenter of classical music. Hence Austrians, and especially the Viennese, have dedicated themselves to foster this mirage although the artistic content has become increasingly unimportant. The haute bourgeoisie society, still organizing private concerts held in their apartments, treats Mozart, Schubert and Bach just like the buffet after the performance. They wolf it down without any reflection. It is made consumable like the violence in contemporary cinema. It requires not a big amount of imagination to see in this a reflection of the smug name-the-opera-singer game of the Farber couple in *Funny Games*. In both films art has withered away and turned into a status symbol for the middle class. Art is a mere toolkit to impress or to repress. In letting it fail, Haneke suggests that he is not too pleased with contemporary society.

Shifting the focus back on perspective, Erika wants to see and equally be seen. She escapes the piercing stare of her mother and lusts for Walter's romantic glances. Naqvi speaks of "controlling Walter's (and our) gaze" (134). In this sense, she acts very much like the director. Her eyes capture the surroundings for us. Paradoxically, Haneke lets us perceive her experience of the outside world not by employing a first-person angle, but by showing us her watching.

To illustrate this further, I want to refer to the audition scene. Walter is performing in front of the conservatories' professors the pieces he has chosen. While the

⁹³ Cf. Naqvi, 137.

audience hears Walter playing, the only thing that is shown is Erika's face, her minute expressions meeting the sound of the piano. The camera *pretends* [my emphasis] to be dominated by Erika's perspective, because it shows her, but not her perspective. It is a psychological device of the most complex kind. In reality, the director is much more powerful.

Pragmatically, Haneke has the full control over the things we see. His authorial power, however, is most evident in the things we do not see. On more than one occasion, the viewer is left in front of a locked door, unable to witness the on-goings behind it. As Naqvi rightly notices, this is an explicit break with the classical cinema traditions. Hollywood audiences are used to share the omniscient perspective of the director; they can penetrate through every wall, crack, mirror and door, documenting and judging every possible event. In a way, they not only identify with the camera, but *become* [my emphasis] the camera themselves. Haneke knows that unsolved mysteries due to limited views are bad for business in Hollywood. His idiosyncratic control of the gaze is a harsh comment and fierce criticism of this tradition:

The spectators cannot possibly have the sense that they are the subjects of enunciation – as would be the case in classical cinema – and immediately identify with the camera itself [...] by dint of excessively controlling and directing the spectator's gaze there is nothing to see anymore (Naqvi 138)

The last line of Naqvi's statement can be read ironically. Of course there is plenty to see, but we as an audience are forced to trigger our imagination and create our own film in our minds. Looking for neat ready-made explanations for the story's ending the way Hollywood does, is futile in Haneke's work. His deliberate illustration of our limitations as viewers is an educational dictatorship for intellectual independence. By showing only parts of the picture, we are taught not to fall for this fallacy Hollywood propagates, that we can always know the complete truth in reality via film. In a footnote, Naqvi quotes the lead actress of the film, Isabelle Huppert comparing Haneke to her role, and not to the one of Walter. Like Erika, Haneke delivers the male audience's visual pleasure; Erika does so in projecting it on herself and her body, Haneke projects the pleasure on the audience back in showing our craving for it. This accounts for the film's ending. Just after Erika has stabbed her with a kitchen knife, she leaves the Vienna Konzerthaus and walks off the screen. The final sequence is a full shot of the Concert hall at night

with its jail-bar like lines of the façade. In other words, we are denied access. From here onwards, we are on our own.

The moment in which the film's self-reflexivity towards its audience reaches its polemical and political peak is in the letter scene. Erika has written a letter to Walter confessing her secret lust for bondage, humiliation and violence that he is supposed to unleash on her. The scenario is as follows: both are in Erika's room locked from inside so that her mother can only peep through the keyhole. Naqvi is right in recognizing a very strong connection to the key-keyhole motif. The letter symbolizes a key to Erika's most inner self. While Walter reads it aloud, the Hermes scarf with the key pattern is tangling beside him on the chair. One of the points on the masochistic wish list is the taking away of all her door keys so that her mother cannot interfere. In fact, it is an exact inversion of their hierarchy. While Erika is in power to play out her phantasies, her mother is forced into the passive part of the powerless Peeping Tom.⁹⁴

Walter is appalled and shocked by her wishes, and she asks him if he is disgusted by her. Now, what is important is that in doing so, she also poses the question to us, the audience, in a close-up shot of her face facing the camera. As Naqvi concludes:

Within a phallographic social order men are most likely the ones who would engage in masochistic pleasure, since they can get a safe "thrill", temporarily conferring power on the traditionally powerless woman within a sexual game. Here the traditionally powerless woman fantasizes about being dominated and abused by the powerful man, which makes her look even more revolting in the eyes of the audience (Naqvi 139)

Metaphorically speaking, Haneke is paraphrasing Erika's masochistic desire to the spectator's in engaging in such an act made possible by conventional depictions of Hollywood. In being disgust by Erika, we should also be disgusted by ourselves, as Naqvi quotes Wood's conclusion. The auto-reflexive moment hinges on when the male audience becomes aware that in popular melodramas, masochistic pleasure of the heroines equals their own. Erika depicts female suppression and degradation within a man's world even more shocking.

In conversations with Scott Foundas, as well as Stefan Grisseman, Haneke has admitted that *The Piano Teacher* is a parody of a melodrama, just like *Funny Games* is

⁹⁴ Cf. Naqvi 138-9.

a satirical reworking of a typical American action thriller.⁹⁵ The key difference is, whereas *Funny Games* was a deliberate attempt to systematically inverse point after point the condition of the thriller, *The Piano Teacher* can be seen as a satirical reference to the classic melodrama, or perhaps more accurately the tragicomedy. According to him, the genre film is always a lie because it tries to give answers rather than raise questions. So to work the genre authentically and truthfully, one can only make a parody of the genre, and this is what *The Piano Teacher* tries to do.⁹⁶

This is very revealing because it provides a new approach to the film's aesthetics. In a longer footnote, Naqvi elaborates on this. Supporting her argument, I also think that the film reads like persiflage. The story takes place in the well-off areas of a middle class society. Classical music is accompanying this civic landscape, in which a young and wildly naive lover is chasing after his distant object of desire. Emotional confrontations occur on staircases and rooms. The behavioral pattern of Erika corresponds to the typical melodrama heroine's disposition: first ignorance, then lust, love, humiliation, and finally emotional destruction. Only the happy end is missing. A bleak and clinic anti-melodrama with its satirical climax culminating in Erika's extraordinarily longing to be beaten, hurt, humiliated and sodomized, it accurately abandons the unpromising role of the female suffering usually given to women in those movies.

She says that the masochistic drive to witness a fleeing female suffering, which is stimulated in all melodramas, is deconstructed because it also concedes this drive to the heroine herself. The audience slowly becomes aware of their desire because it is constantly disappointed.⁹⁷ However, this disappointment turns to revenge in the form of rape. Erika, who with her abnormal sexual disposition totally takes the wind out of Walter as well as the audience's sails, is punished in an act of helplessness and rage. Walter rapes her. He and the patriarchal hegemony have finally gotten what they wanted.

Wheatley, who dedicates an entire section to a melodramatic reading, confirms this. On the face of it, the plot doesn't seem to call attention to classical Hollywood melodramas, until she cites the promotional description of the 2002 VHS release which praises the work as "a powerful and controversial new drama" (Wheatley 130).

⁹⁵ Cf. Interview with Scott Foundas on *Indiewire* online, http://www.indiewire.com/article/interview_michael_haneke_the_bearded_prophet_of_code_inconnu_and_the_piano

⁹⁶ Cf. Interview with Grissemann, 184-5.

⁹⁷ Cf. Wheatley in Naqvi, 149.

Paraphrasing it as “the story of a repressed woman in her thirties who meets a handsome stranger and embarks upon an affair which will change her world” (130), Wheatley thinks this description could have easily be applied to for instance Douglas Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* or Max Ophüls’ *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. In contrast to Naqvi, who sees the melodramatic parallels more in stereotypical plotlines, Wheatley emphasizes Haneke’s subversive settings and camera movements, drawing on and turning around melodramatic iconography.⁹⁸

She identifies one particular antipode in Douglas Sirk, whose aesthetic approach of stylized, extravagant wardrobe, hedonistic and expensive sets, and unusually bright lightning stands for everything *The Piano Teacher* abandons, and indeed, Haneke has expressed a particular disdain for Sirk’s works.⁹⁹ The film fosters a “minimalist modernism” (Wheatley 131) with predominately black, brown, grey, and white coloring. Sets are sharply cut and defined in a somber, glooming light. Whereas Sirk’s color palate should reflect the emotional problems of his characters, it is this exact lack of color in Haneke’s work, which symbolizes the diseases and deficits in the individual living in Western society. Whereas Sirk’s deep-focuses are supposed to underline the severity of people and things, Haneke’s interaction of long-shots and close-ups stresses this severity between the self and the outside world. Furthermore, Haneke’s lightning doesn’t personalize protagonists. In contrast to Sirk, who immerses the heroine in golden sunshine and the villain in dark shadows, the cold, natural lightning neutralizes and objectifies the character’s aura. The steady images with hardly any motion at all are a stark counterprogram to Sirk’s constant cutting away to imitate sentimental unrest in the protagonists. Many shots in *The Piano Teacher* are from steady positions, restricting the camera’s pan to a limit within a specific frame. Haneke’s subversion of melodramatic conventions also comes to light in choice of settings. Most of the action takes place inside a certain area. Erika is often shown at home with her mother in their apartment or at her working place, the conservatory. Even when she leaves these domestic fields, she is again constrained to a certain fenced-off space, whether this is a shopping mall, parking lot, apartment of a fellow-musicians or ice-skating rink. These

⁹⁸ Cf. 131.

⁹⁹ Interview with Stefan Grisseman in his book *Haneke / Jelinek: Die Klavierspielerin*. Ed. Stefan Grisseman. Vienna: Sonderzahl, 2001. p.185.

confined and confining interiors stand in utter contrast to the affectionate overkill of Sirk's dramas.¹⁰⁰

Wheatley also draws on the film's relation to *Funny Games* which I have stated in the above section. Melodrama in *The Piano Teacher* is tried as a formally satirized, self-referential scheme with an implied morality, just like the thriller in *Funny Games* (Wheatley speaks of suspense which I think is just a component of the whole genre, as is violence). Another combining factor of the two films is Haneke's deliberate attempt to eradicate any possibilities for self-identification with the protagonists, almost a commercial imperative in classical melodramas and action thrillers. Erika's psychologically disturbed relationship with sexuality, society, and family erects a clear distance between herself and a (female) spectator. Peter and Paul's murderous torments seem to be motivated out of a pathological shortcoming to feel empathy for humans and animals which also points towards mentally disturbed behavior syndromes. Erika and Peter/Paul are so alienating to the audience because their actions are not morally justified by stereotypical explanation patterns Hollywood provides and Haneke criticizes. They don't kill because they had an abusive father, drug, money problems or a deep envy for other people's luck in life. They kill because they want to kill. They function almost like protest signs blaming Hollywood for lying to its audience. Now, this is easy to see with Peter and Paul. But does it also apply to Erika? Looking at two scenes more carefully, it becomes clear that it does.

The first one is Erika's attempt to touch her mother sexually. After a big argument she tries to passionately kiss her mother and touch her vagina. As Wheatley notes, this scene "is so heavily laden with psychoanalytical overtones that no reading is necessary" (Wheatley 132), it turns into a pastiche of the Freudian model. Although some critics¹⁰¹ have tried to read the passage in straightforward oedipal terms, their project is doomed to fail because they only end up "cataloguing, rather than decoding [,] the Freudian elements" (Wheatley 132). Instead of getting lost in a variety of possible academic approaches, she recommends to focus on the response the film stirs up in every individual. This reception-dominated style leads me to the second scene which is perhaps the most symptomatic for Haneke's play with audience's expectation.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Wheatley, 131-2.

¹⁰¹ She cites John Champagne's essay 'Undoing Oedipus: Feminism and Michal Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*' as an example.

Towards the end of the film, Erika visits Walter at his ice hockey training. She convinces him to sneak into an empty locker room where she performs fellatio on him. The camera only shows the couple from behind between a tight spot of two lockers. We hear the breathing of both and the movement of the bodies but, unlike in the porn booth, never see the sexual act itself. All of a sudden, Erika leaps forward, pushing Walter aside to vomit on the floor directly in front of the frame. According to Wheatley, Haneke's technique not to film the act, but the aftermath is his comment on the dichotomy of what we see and we want to see:

Here impact occurs at the point at which the spectator's desire to see the sexually explicit – the voyeuristic urge – is either frustrated by the use of off-screen space or directly confronted by the rescindment of satisfaction. Erika's vomiting re-enacts, in a much subtler manner, the rewind scene in *Funny Games*: the spectator's scopophilic desire is fulfilled only for it to be immediately rejected [...] The criticism that Haneke levels at the spectator is not to do with what they have watched, but with what they would *like* to watch (Wheatley 136-7)

By not showing the sex itself, he shows the desire to watch it. In other words, he engages in a process of judgment. The point is, Haneke knows that the average consumer of Hollywood material is not very used to be judged or confronted with his immoral desire, and this leads to the spectator's guilt. His refusal to cater for the audience's voyeurism at the same time proves their critical disposition. It advises them to reflect on what they just have seen, or perhaps more important, why they wanted to see certain things but didn't. Critical awareness emerges from a distanced, non-manipulated relationship between those in front, behind and on the screen.

It is important to discuss another theoretical aspect that Wheatley presents in her essay, particularly with regard to Hitchcock's *Vertigo*; an aspect she terms "second-generation modernism" (133). As it has been shown, the film-within-a-film device is a dominating theme in both *Funny Games* and *The Piano Teacher*. In the Farber's home, the TV is on when the killing takes place, showing Indie 500 car races, and more drastically, indirectly staging the boy being shot when his blood is splashing across the screen. In the Kohut's home, again the TV is constantly running, with Erika's mother resembling an addict watching and drinking every evening. Television "creates a *mis-en-abyme* [sic] of the spectator's situation" (Wheatley 133) highlighting his scopophilic tendencies. The images on the screen are auto-reflexive symbols insofar as they

articulate its semantics through its existence. In less philosophical words, they address the looker in its process of looking at them signifying ‘I am an image I enjoy being looked at!’

Wheatley, who has found an undoubtedly more eloquent expression, calls it “direct address imagery” (133); however, it means the same. She mentions Laura Mulvey’s concept of ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’, which is concerned with the addressee’s look and the effect it has on the object. There are four levels of looks. There is the “intra-diegetic looks, the camera’s look at the profilmic event and the viewer’s look at the image” (133), plus the fourth, which is the object to be looked at:

In Lacanian terms, this is a look imagined by me in the field of the other which surprises me in the act of looking and causes a feeling of shame. Any articulation of images and looks which brings into play the position and activity of the viewer as a distinctly separate factor also destabilizes that position and puts it at risk, for when the scopic drive is brought into focus, the viewer also runs the risk of becoming the object of the look. (Wheatley 133)

Formulated alternatively, her theory means this: We see a) what the TV in the film shows, b) what the camera focuses, c) what the viewer sees through Haneke’s camera, and d) our role as lookers when looking at Erika. She makes us aware of our role as lookers by acting as if she knows that she is being stared at by us. Consequently, we feel ashamed because we catch ourselves looking at her. The hierarchy between viewer and object is twisted and turned, because, once we become aware of our voyeuristic role, we become the object with Erika looking at us. The reason for this theoretical detour is because Hitchcock draws on the exact same concept, however, with totally different means. Before a large scale analysis of the American counterpart can be carried out, it is worth mentioning a few more points.

Elfriede Jelinek, whose novel provided the basis of the film, comes back to the topic of female voyeurism in her magnum opus, the gothic novel *The Children of the Dead*, published in 1995.¹⁰² The text is very important with regard to the film for two reasons. Firstly, it repeatedly questions “the voyeuse’s position at the peephole” (Naqvi, 142) and their implied hierarchies. Secondly, and more essentially, all the characters are zombie-like figures of the undead, comebacks of the victims of the Shoah. The temporal and spatial dimensions in the novel are devaluated and reversed. The characters wander

¹⁰² Jelinek, Elfriede. *Die Kinder der Toten*. Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1997.

through an artificial no-space, in which the concept of space and time itself is obsolete; “the entire inside-outside, up-down model of space is inverted, folded into and through itself into a model of topological space” (Naqvi 142). The voyeurism in the text is taken one step further, because it is not chained to a specific time and place:

Voyeurism in *The Children of the Dead* is also divorced from excitement or stimulation; instead as Gudrun bends down to the keyhole, she seeks respite and relaxation. However, the experience nonetheless becomes bewildering when the firm ground separating the viewer from the viewed gives way. The fantasy of seeing without being seen becomes a phantasmagoria of alteration through perception – the voyeuse is transformed into a supposedly separate object of her vision (Naqvi 143)

In other words, Gudrun, the main heroine of the novel, exercises the same alienating voyeurism than Erika. Haneke “updates the voyeuristic scenario” of *The Children of the Dead* in turning her to some extent into an undead figure as well, exemplified by backgrounds of whiteness and blackness. When Walter rejects her at the ice rink, she stumbles through the door onto the cold, blank space of the white ice. During the rape, she wears in sharp contrast to the dark, non-lit background. Her inert posture resembles a dead body’s, suggesting necrophilia undercurrents, as Naqvi observes.¹⁰³ The reason for my mentioning this fact is because *Vertigo* also heavily draws on the concept of the female undead.

Charles Warren has written an essay on the cinematic intertextuality in Haneke’s films.¹⁰⁴ In it, he detects a strong affinity of Haneke to, amongst others, Hitchcock’s world. If one comes to think of it, many moments of the British-American director reoccur in the Austrian’s films. The dismembering of a body and getting rid of the evidence of *Rear Window* and *Psycho* can be found in *Benny’s Video*. The unexpected menace of the ordinary outside world is both evident in *Psycho*’s Norman Bates, and Peter/Paul. Benny speculates on how his parents dispose of the dead body, as does L.B. Jeffries in *Rear Window* about the killer’s method. In addition both characters have to face the border to adulthood (Jeffries acts and resembles in various occasions an immature child) which they overcome via their involvement in a murder. The birds and Norman Bates represent dangers in all of us, unexpected accidents waiting to happen; so

¹⁰³ Cf. Naqvi, 144-5.

¹⁰⁴ Warren, Charles: “The Unknown Piano Teacher.” *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Ed. Roy Grundmann. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 495-510.

are Peter and Paul.¹⁰⁵ But apart from these minor similarities, it is *Vertigo*, which bears the brunt of the Hitchcock-Haneke mélange.

5.4 Back from the Dead - Voyeurism in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

It needs a note of explanation why exactly this film makes sense for a counter-reading. As the *Sight & Sound* poll shows, the only true American directors which made it into the pantheon of Haneke's all-time favorite films are John Cassavetes and Alfred Hitchcock. Charlie Chaplin, whose *Goldrush* also pops up in the list, was a silent film representing a very different studio system which Haneke is not openly criticizing.¹⁰⁶ In addition to this, although Hitchcock was British-born, completed a considerable part of his filmography in Britain, and can hardly be called a contemporary, some of his most successful works were created in a Hollywood system subject to Hollywood production conditions. In other words, Hitchcock is a typical representative of a Hollywood cinema, and nevertheless receives respect from Haneke. Exploring this dichotomy is nothing less than the goal of this study.

The story of *Vertigo* is relatively straightforward. James Stewart plays Scottie Ferguson, a retired detective suffering from acrophobia. One day, his friend Gavin Elster asks him to investigate the activities of his wife. During the course of his investigation, Scottie becomes obsessed with Elster's wife, and eventually goes insane. It turns out that Elster murdered his wife and used a Judith Barton, who looked very similar to his wife, as an accomplice to cover his tracks. It is not so much what the film tells than with what it deals. Like *The Piano Teacher*, it is laden with voyeurism, manipulation, female suffering and sacrifice. The next chapter therefore is dedicated to discussing the similarities and differences of both films in dealing with these aspects.

On her homepage, Jelinek has declared *Vertigo* her all-time favorite film.¹⁰⁷ Apart from the fact that it is also based on a novel, which is one yet minor similarity to Haneke, it thematizes the female protagonist as a fetish object constructed by a male's voyeurism like no other film before or after it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Warren, 498-9.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. The *Sight & Sound* poll previously quoted.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Her essay on the film is entitled „Der Sieg der versiegenden Quelle. Zu Alfred Hitchcocks „Vertigo“, which is only available on her homepage under <http://www.elfriedejelinek.com/>

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Barr, 26.

Hitchcock's Erika is Madeleine-Judy, portrayed by Kim Novak. The twist is that Madeline was murdered by Elster and replaced by Judy, a small-town girl looking alike. In the middle of the film, the spectator as well as Scottie witnesses Madeleine apparently committing suicide by jumping from a church tower. This was staged by Elster, and in order to confuse Scottie, his wife 'resurrects from the dead', in the form of Judy. Now, the motif of the undead heroine is both present in Erika on the metaphorical level, and in Madeleine in a physical one. Jelinek writes about the female protagonist's death in *Vertigo*:

So wie die weibliche Hauptfigur sich dadurch konstituiert, daß sie zwei ist und doch eine. Diese Heldin ist ihr eigener Zugang und ihr eigener Ausweg, nein: Ausgang gleichzeitig. Sie stirbt zuerst, und dann stirbt sie beim zweiten Mal wirklich, obwohl ja ein Tod, den man überlebt, keiner ist. Sie stirbt sozusagen zum Leben hin, um dann erst, nachdem sie das Leben hat, wirklich zu sterben. (Beim ersten Mal war es mit dem Tod noch nichts, obwohl sie tot war.) (Jelinek)¹⁰⁹

I think what Jelinek drives at is that the film's interplay with a real and fake death generates a transformation from a voyeuristic object to a fetishized object. Until the suicide, Madeleine is a woman wandering the city's museums, graveyards and hotels and streets. She is undoubtedly the center of the male gaze. As Charles Barr in his book on *Vertigo* has remarked, "Novak is female, passive, silent, offering herself as an object of gaze" (Barr 7).¹¹⁰ The male gaze is the one of Scottie, the male spectator who follows her activities. But unlike Erika, who also wanders the city through shopping malls and cinemas, she is not an active part exhibiting her looking. She is the sole object of our voyeurism, Scottie's and the audience's. Unsurprisingly, Barr also mentions Laura Mulvey's theory of the 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. He also identifies the three looks theory which I have earlier on discussed in connection with Wheatley's direct address imagery.

To refashion it on *Vertigo*: a) the first gaze is the one of Scottie looking and looking for Madeleine; b) the second is what the camera shows, discovering Madeleine; c) the third is the audience looking at Scottie's gaze. Only the fourth is missing until the second part of the movie, when she seemingly comes back from the dead. Erika is an active voyeuse herself, looking at images and simultaneously denouncing the audience

¹⁰⁹ Jelinek sees the idiosyncrasy of Madeleine/Judy's identity in her duality. She is two persons and at the same time one. She dies two-fold, first her persona dies, and then she loses her life. But she survives her death and continues to live as another person. In Jelinek's words, she dies 'towards her life'.

¹¹⁰ Barr, Charles. *Vertigo*. London: British Film Institute, 2002.

in her voyeurism. She incorporates the fourth look in being the subject and the object at the same time, whereas Madeleine is until her resurrection only the object. Barr states that Mulvey has used Hitchcock's film as a prime example for the satisfaction of the audience's desire by the director: "In Hitchcock, the male hero does see precisely what the audience sees", (Mulvey in Barr, 10), and further down he rightly clarifies that "the point-of-view (POV) shot allows director and spectator to enjoy the same voyeuristic gaze at the female that the male hero does; for both the character acts as a kind of surrogate" (Barr 10). He enables us to enjoy the same perspective, the same desire to look at the object Madeleine in merging the 'male' gaze (Scottie) with the 'Male' gaze (audience).

I would argue that this is the fundamental difference between not only Erika and Madeleine, but also Hitchcock and Haneke. Hitchcock at first promotes the female as voyeuristic object in simulating that every participant of voyeurism is "all in this together" (Barr 10), audience, director and Scottie sharing one object whereas the object Erika is again subject via a meta-reflexive distance to its voyeurism and voyeurs. The majority of American mainstream nurture the male gaze in showing the female as desired and desirable, suffering object. Haneke nurtures the awareness of it in showing this male gaze.

In this department, Haneke deviates from Hollywood norms more profoundly than everywhere else. However, pigeonholing *Vertigo* with the majority of American mainstream would mean ignoring its critical position towards its own voyeurism; the film is simply too ambivalent for this. Barr's analysis delivers acceptable arguments. It not only deals with the pleasure of the gaze, it also uncovers its mechanisms:

Kim Novak is not simply, as first viewing suggests, playing for Hitchcock the role of a woman being voyeuristically observed; she is playing, for Hitchcock, the part of the woman who is playing, for Elster, the part of the woman being voyeuristically observed. Absorbing at first viewing, when we don't know the full plot, these scenes become even more so when overlaid by the bittersweet awareness that, with Scottie, we have been, and are now again allowing ourselves to be, led on, deceived, by a consummate manipulator, complaisant victim of what has all along been – like all cinema – an illusory construction (Barr 11)

What Barr tries to put forward with in this passage is that Hitchcock looks not only at the looker, but also at the process of looking. Again, the mise-en-abyme motif of Wheatley is evident. It is telling that the most prominent symbol throughout the film is

the endless downward spiral, from the opening titles, to Madeleine's hair, to the painting in the museum, to the gaze itself. Voyeurism in *Vertigo* is an infinite reproduction of this own image. To a certain extent, Elster occupies the same position as Hitchcock, directing Scottie and the spectator's gaze. It is about manipulation through manipulation.

The difference to *The Piano Teacher* is that Erika is also actively involved, whereas Madeleine is passive; until she becomes Judy. Hitchcock plays with the boundaries of a limited frame of reference. Scottie and the spectator do not know the true identity of the woman yet. Judy however does and becomes the powerful active part. The concept of to-be-looked-at from this point on applies to here, becomes she is aware of Scottie's gaze and also confronts it by looking back. In other words, Hitchcock demonstrates the audience's manipulative perspective in firstly setting it up and letting it share with Scottie, and then tearing it down by ascribing to the object Madeline-Judy, a subject reflecting the gaze. Jelinek writes about this substitution of subjects:

Der Mann ist zuerst Zeuge, ein unfähiger (impotenter?) Zeuge von Mord und Vertauschung des ermordeten Objekts (nicht Subjekts!), denn die Frau, die ermordet worden ist, ist kein Subjekt, nicht weil sie tot wäre, sondern weil sie für den, der da schreibt, aus dessen Blickwinkel die Geschichte erzählt wird, Objekt ist, Fetisch, das (in diesem Fall: gewaltsame) Einfügen von Unbelebtem ins Belebte, nein, der Austausch von Obsessionen, vom Schöpferwahn des Mannes, der ja alles geschaffen hat, aber nichts schaffen kann (nicht nur als Impotenter, sondern überhaupt), dieser Austausch also, Zug um Zug, von Leben gegen Tod, aus dem der Protagonist die tote Geliebte wieder zurückholt, indem er sie neu erschafft, weil er sie, bevor er sie neu erschaffen hat, buchstäblich (ja, es ist ja Schrift, also buchstäblich!) nicht erkennt. Und er erkennt sie nicht, weil er sie noch nicht erschaffen hat (Jelinek)¹¹¹

Admittedly, I am not concerned with a psychoanalytical reading, although she raises some valuable points. What I found interesting in her passage is the binary conversion of the object-subject constellation. At first, Scottie is the subject voyeur observing the object Madeline. Then, after her fake death, Scottie like the spectator becomes the object of Judy's gaze with her referential to-be-looked-at-ness. In other words, Scottie and Judy contain elements of Erika. I am persisting on this because it is symptomatic for the two different treatments of voyeurism. In *The Piano Teacher*, Haneke criticizes

¹¹¹ The male subject is a witness of a female subject being murdered. Evidently, the female subject turns into a fetish object for the male. It is the exchange of obsessions between the male who is obsessed with creating and the female who is created. It is an exchange of life and death and of person and personality.

the convention of the commercial male gaze by attacking us in our desires, playing the moral card. Erika stares back (as a female!) at the audience underlining our willing participation to see her as object. The twist is, she is also the subject. Hitchcock plays the aesthetic card. The whole film criticizes the convention by *imitating* [emphasis added] the male gaze. There is a stereotypical male voyeur with his female object. However, with transforming the hierarchical order, the process is reversed and reduced to absurdity. I have argued earlier that Tarantino satirizes cinematic violence by engaging in it, deliberately overstepping the mark and distorting it to expose its artificiality. Hitchcock does exactly the same.

The different tackling of the subject reflects the profound difference of Hollywood and Europe. Haneke's perception of the cinema is strongly influenced by the Enlightenment school of thought, in particular by Lessing's doctrine of the theater as a moral institution. Paraphrasing Kant's thought of enlightenment as the emergence of a man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, Haneke's cinema is the transformation of the viewer's Hollywood-incurred immaturity into independence. In the last chapter, it will be questioned if this trade is at all desirable.

6. Hollywood without Haneke

This final chapter is dedicated to defend the Hollywood cinema as a legitimate art form. As I hope to have demonstrated in this study, Haneke's hostility towards Hollywood is not necessarily aiming at mainstream films per se, but more at considering them art. This fallacy, which originates from a contradictory expectation of what cinema in general should be and do, has to be deconstructed. On the basis of Thomas Elsaesser's introductory essay "Vom New Hollywood zum New Economy Hollywood" in his book *Hollywood Heute*, I will attempt to lay open the artistic and technical achievements of Hollywood blockbusters, outline the economic strategies of the studios which brought them into existence in the first place, juxtapose Hollywood's interdependence with European cinema's, and eventually explore its ongoing fascination and attraction for an enormous amount of people worldwide.

It can be said without fear of contradiction, that cinema as an international phenomenon has never been more omnipresent than today. According to Elsaesser,

attendance figures in American, Asian, Indian and European cinemas have doubled over the last twenty years. The construction of new Cineplexes and Multiplexes often in shopping malls, which to a large degree was responsible for this boost of popularity, was heavily attacked by directors and critics for downgrading and commercializing the art of filmmaking. Elsaesser thinks the opposite is true. The stronger standardization of plots, actors and scripts among blockbuster's proceeds, the stronger a countermovement protesting this process takes place. There are more film festivals, screenings, and special editions available to the public than before Hollywood's rise. Americanization has simultaneously triggered Internationalization, and more films from third world countries are being produced than in the 1960s when France was the cinematic epicenter. Europe alone hosts more film festivals than days a year, and large number of TV networks not only offer feature films, but also documentaries about the cinema. In addition, technological advancement in the forms of DVDs, Flatscreens, digital recording systems, and above all else, the Internet enormously simplified and enhanced access to almost a century of film culture.¹¹²

Interestingly enough, Hollywood's supremacy has always been extensively disputed. During the 1990s, the rise of the machines led to widespread speculation if the cinema will survive its manifold possibility of reproduction. But even before that, perhaps more importantly, Jean-Luc Godard has proclaimed the death of Hollywood in favor for a new European era:

Der Wettbewerb zwischen Europa und Hollywood – beinahe so alt wie das Kino selbst – hatte sich scheinbar zugunsten Europas entschieden, wo Zuschauer über 30 noch ab und zu ins Kino gingen und statt kommerziell ausgerichteter Mainstreamproduktionen lieber Autorenfilme sahen [...] Die neue akademische Disziplin gründete sich also auf die Totsagung Hollywoods, positiv gewendet auf eine nostalgische Feier des goldenen Zeitalters der großen Auteurs wie Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Howard Hawks, die sich im Studiosystem und seinen Genres behauptet hatten (Elsaesser 11-2)¹¹³

Elsaesser clearly stresses a „Verlust der Unschuld“(12), a feeling of loss in the cinema which, rather than the filmmakers, the critics detected. Consequently, this nostalgic

¹¹² Cf. Elsaesser, 11.

¹¹³ Godard supposes a rivalry between Hollywood and Europe which Europe has won because people over thirty years of age still favor auteur films over commercial mainstream productions. This new academic genre (the auteur film) is based on the death of the 'old Hollywood' the studio system with John Ford, Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock as its leading figures.

image introduced radical criticism of contemporary Hollywood forms in the 1970s. The root of all evil was located in the artificial escapism as well as a lack of socio-political realism in those films. Under the pretext of celebrating various new movements, from the Italian Neorealism, to the French Nouvelle Vague, to the New German Film in Germany, to Brazilian's Cinema Novo, the predominately French critics condemned Hollywood for unreflective, patronizing, stereotypical portrayals fostering sexism, capitalism and patriarchy with no artistic merit whatsoever.¹¹⁴

Being under fire from all sides, it is worth asking how Hollywood could sustain this permanent blow over the years. One of the answers for Elsaesser is money. The financial strategy which pervades the industry is in its efficiency second to none. Hollywood is an industry. The effects of its influence are visible in areas other than the cinema. The news on TV, the visual aspects of politics, the design of everyday objects are penetrated and shaped by the American mainstream cinema. Hollywood is a cultural system far exceeding film and movie stars. I would even go a step further than Elsaesser and argue that Hollywood has come to dominate certain aspects of our lives in forming our behavior immortalized and promoted on screen. Especially with a European audience, which tends to be fascinated by American popular culture because of the otherness of it, the influence is particularly powerful.

To back up my argument I would cite here several examples. Ordering pizzas to be delivered at home has become popular since *Home Alone* and other movies exploited the comic potential of the delivery guy. The running TV in a kitchen while having breakfast would be another; consuming popcorn and coke while consuming the film is as prominent in Austria as dressing up like the film hero to attend a premier. Even Haneke was not able to escape it, and he shot a scene at a drive-in theater, a very un-Austrian place which due to the country's often enormous distances just had to be invented in America. The take away coffee cup in urban places like New York City introduced in TV shows such as *Sex and the City* not only made millions for TV channels and studios, but also numerous coffee chains in Europe. American traditions have swept over, and European children eagerly go from door to door on Halloween because they imitate this ritual seen in Hollywood children's movies and series. Policemen eat doughnuts in crime films, and European bakeries offer doughnuts in the morning. Lovesick actresses covered in bedspreads eating ice-cream while watching

¹¹⁴ Cf. Elsaesser 12-3.

daily soaps in sitcoms like *Friends*, the female audience is sharing by imitating this behavior.

What I want to illustrate with this is that Hollywood not only invests in its movies, but in blending this with real-life experience. Elsaesser can only be supported in finding the expression “Verschränkung von materiellen Kräften und symbolischen Werten” (14). Hollywood invests in spreading the images in the world, but equally, in the imagination of this world in its films. The more these images will imitate the reality of the audience, the more this audience will imitate these images.¹¹⁵

Followers of Haneke will pose the question: How can this commercial universe be art? The response given is both conservative and progressive: because there is also a Hollywood behind the money. Elsaesser compares the popular mainstream cinema with a kind of “*lingua franca*” and “*Esperanto der Weltkultur*” (14), which provides a platform of exchange for almost every person familiar with this cinema. The love or hatred for a certain film is a major contribution of one’s personal and collective identity, it opens community, creates fan bases, and establishes a whole cultural movement based on reactions to films. The most remarkable achievement about the American mainstream cinema is that it is not only visible on the screen, but also off of it, in the daily lives of its consumers. It became a shared experience through which a multitude of young people communicated with each other. The assumption that it had no artistic value is totally dismissive, according to Elsaesser:

Im neuen Jahrhundert verursachte die negative Vorstellung, Kino sei nichts als ein Massenbetrug für die junge Generation, kaum mehr als ein Kopfschütteln: Hollywoodfilme von heute sind “Fakes” nur in dem Sinn, dass die Augen Bilder sehen, die der Verstand nicht mehr fassen kann, aber von denen man sich gerne in Erstaunen versetzen lässt, Fantasiewelten, die faszinieren, selbst wenn sie einem die Haare zu Berge stehen lassen (Elsaesser 14)¹¹⁶

It can be said that Elsaesser’s eulogy on Hollywood contains everything Haneke rejects or fails to comprehend about it. Unlike the European school, who introduced an epistemological approach to cinema, the American generation today looks at cinema ontologically. In other words, they do not strive for an absolute truth in film, but for a

¹¹⁵ Cf. Elsaesser, 14.

¹¹⁶ The critique that Hollywood is nothing but a means for mass deception has become entirely unpopular in the new century. Hollywood movies are only ‘fake’ in the sense that they produce pictures which cannot be grasped rationally, but trigger the imagination even if they are non-realistic.

place where variations of the world are imagined: “das Kino als Welt der Möglichkeiten, und damit – zumindest tendenziell – auch als Möglichkeit der Welt” (14). The only reasonable way to legitimize Hollywood as cultural-historic art form is not to compare it with European cinema and how it fails to imitate its aesthetic and formal standards, but how it antagonizes those standards. Mainstream cinema is not European Auteur cinema flawed; it is an autarkic macrocosm with entirely different weighing factors.

The first one is the conception of realism. If Haneke considers his movies ‘realistic’, he assumes a different form of realism. His films are an authentic mimicry accurate in every possible detail of real-life events. However, realism in Hollywood cinema is not concerned with imitating and copying reality, as is the case with Europe. Realism here is psychological design, a blueprint of a fictitious, imagined world. Now, this would hardly be news for critics of Hollywood. But the point they fail to see is that every genre has its own form of authenticity. From the crime thriller to the slapstick comedy, from the fantasy movie to the war film, there are clear-cut conditions on how reality in these films reality has to be constructed. There is realism within a non-realistic world. It is a commonplace that the police hero has to be down and out before he can come back and defeat the enemies. The point is that Hollywood has no interest in an epistemological simulation of reality. Elsaesser speaks of an “Abbildungsrealismus” (16), and he is right in saying that those accusing Hollywood of being too unrealistic in plot, protagonist and accuracy of history, do this from a European standpoint, neglecting to acknowledge that Hollywood does not want to be realistic. It perceives its films more in an allegorical sense, cultural case studies to exemplify, not imitate reality.¹¹⁷

So instead of cataloguing what Hollywood does wrong, the real question its critics should ask is: why is America still dominating over the years and not European cinema:

[D]ie Dominanz Hollywoods auf dem Weltmarkt nicht nur vom Geld und vom “Kulturimperialismus” her zu erklären, sondern auch seiner offensichtlichen Adaptionkraft und „Einführung“ Rechnung zu tragen, zu einer Zeit, in der andere nationale Kinematografien (oder besser: nationale Filmindustrien, vor allem Europa) so viel unflexibler reagiert haben (Elsaesser 15)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Cf. Elsaesser, 16.

¹¹⁸ Hollywood’s dominance on the international market cannot only be explained by its financial power, but also by its ability to adapt to new artistic traditions.

This flexibility Elsaesser identifies in Hollywood's paradoxical skill of overtly reinventing itself while covertly staying the same. It is conservative but not reactionary. On the one hand, audiences all over the world have certain expectations in a Hollywood film which always have to be met by its makers (otherwise it would be a financial disaster given the exorbitant products costs); on the other hand, the cinema not only has to react to new trends in fashion, lifestyle, society, but also set them. During the 1990s, it reached its peak of power in a technological and economic revolution which did not happen in Europe. Management and business models of the "*global economy*"⁽¹⁶⁾ were applied to the studio system, which basically meant merging studios with other broadcast and publishing properties into multinational corporations such as Time Warner, Fox Entertainment Group and the Walt Disney Corporation. In addition, the effects of Silicon Valley's computer companies were seen and heard. Computer-graphic imagery, Dolby surround sound, Special-Effects-devices, and post production have perfected the motion picture. However, in the films the audience still could recognize classic Hollywood myths, such as the hero-against-the-world motif, the boy-meets-girl scheme of romantic comedies, two-outsiders-driving-through-the-country of the Road movie genre, and more critically, killers-torture-a-family-to-be revenged-ritual. James Cameron's *Avatar* may be of technological refinement unmatched before, but it also is a stereotypical hero love story against a villainous outside intruder.¹¹⁹

After the Second World War, the main focus shifted from the question *if* [emphasis added] cinema is art, to *what* cinema is art. From 1945 onwards, the film theory vehemently praised films that were concerned with photographically capturing parts of reality and truthfulness, such as the works of Neo-realists Rossellini and De Sica and the Nouvelle Vague, whereas the American genre cinema with its film noirs, comedies and Westerns was rebuked. This is what Elsaesser calls "epistemologisches Interesse" (18), predominately propagated by French critic Andre Bazin. Film is art with its mechanical possibilities of reproduction capturing life 'as it is' with lay actors, unscripted dialogues and original setting, evident in the works of Rossellini, Bresson¹²⁰ and others. Logically, Hollywood with its studio settings, staged scripts and orchestral sound collages was panned by the critics.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Elsaesser, 16.

¹²⁰ Two of Haneke's favorite directors, cf. <http://mubi.com/lists/michael-haneke-s-top-ten-sight-and-sound-poll>

The number of American directors which passed off as artists in the eyes of the European theory was limited. And even as the countermovement emerged within the Nouvelle Vague, and a generation of French directors found their idols in Ford, Bogart and Hawks, the Bazin model of cinematic reality was still prominent:

[D]er Hollywoodfilm spiegele eine durch und durch konstruierte Welt als “zweite Natur” vor, er halte den Zuschauer gefangen in der Ich-Spaltung des begehrenden Subjekts, er stabilisiere den männlichen Zuschauer und seine ödipale Identität auf Kosten des Bilds der Frau, die zum Objekt des voyeuristischen Blicks und Opfer der fetischisierenden Darstellung ihrer Weiblichkeit als idealisierte Mutter oder Femme fatale werde (Elsaesser 18)¹²¹

This quote could have also been uttered by Haneke himself. Ideological and formal counterfeiting, patriarchal secularization, and heroization of the male at the expense of the female have been the main reproach by him since the seventies. The content of the critique has not changed at all.

This could imply that Hollywood has not become better. It could also imply, and this is more plausible, that the critics haven’t. I want to argue with Elsaesser that instead of an epistemological approach, Hollywood cinema fosters an ontological understanding which involves all five senses, or as I would call it ‘cinema of the senses’. In contrast to European author cinema, which identifies the subject as the spectator ‘seeing’ (with his eyes only) the film and the object as the material on screen, the subject is supposed to melt with the object, ‘perceiving’ the film being a part of it. Evidence of this I have already given in the different characteristics of voyeurism in *The Piano Teacher* in which the object on screen is strictly divided by the subject off screen; in *Vertigo*, it is a deliberate reallocation of these positions.

Perhaps the most salient example for the cultural diversity of these cinemas is the main male protagonist. Hollywood’s most idiosyncratic export is the action hero: pragmatic and efficient problem fixer, morally questionable outcast, morally intact revenger, the cunning detective, calm and collected law enforcer, courageous pioneer and clever kid. All these heroes became brands of a “*single source agency*” (27), a sole power from a single source working against a unification of evil forces in the worlds.¹²²

¹²¹ Hollywood presents an artificially constructed world and offers it as ‘second nature’, it destabilizes the male spectator and its oedipal identity on the expense of the female body which is fetishized and voyeuristically exploited by staging it as an idealized mother or Femme fatale.

¹²² Cf. Elsaesser, 27.

It not only defines an integral part of the Hollywood film, but also constitutes its refutation for the European film. Whereas the classic story in American film is character-dominated with a goal-orientated, autonomous protagonist at its center driven by rational decisions within a linear time frame, the European model contains an indecisive, emotionally troubled hero wandering aimlessly around in urban landscapes or rural wastelands. The end is ambiguously open, the plot reduced to a minimum, explanation for actions and decisions hardly if at all plausible, and the time frame non-chronological including flashbacks, jump cuts and rewinds.

Elsaesser emphasizes that the boundaries of both tradition began to blur more than one would think. Haneke, whose protagonists certainly belong to the latter categories, as do the heroes of Bergman, Antonioni, Wenders, Godard, Fellini and others, perceives his films as an immediate reaction to the state of society – with all its flaws, coincidences, chaos and corruptions. Thus, the only way to be truthful in cinema is to describe this society's irregularities and not dislocate and adhere to an explanatory illusion like Hollywood.¹²³

In doing so, Haneke misses several points. Firstly, at the end of the 1960s, America fell into an emotional, political and ideological crisis. The Vietnam War with their traumatized veterans, the Watergate Scandal, racial segregation, student protests and civil rights movements all contributed to a critical revaluation of the myth of the American Dream. Drastic events of such proportions did not go untouched in the cinema, and in the beginning of the 1970s, a new form of film emerged, commonly known as 'New Hollywood'. Heavily influenced by the Europeans, it showed unmotivated, doubting heroes confronted with cities of urban decay and corruption as well as the provinciality of the American heartland. The directors adapted their European colleagues' aesthetics; plots were more loose and non-causal, music was limited to diegetic sources or cult pop songs, cuts less fast, and setting was original and atypical. Examples of this genre would be *Five Easy Pieces* by Bob Rafelson, Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*, Arthur Penn's *Bonny and Clyde*, Hal Ashby's *The Last Detail*, John Boorman's *Deliverance*, Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* and Terrence Malik's *Badlands*.

So apart from the fact that Hollywood actually had its author cinema as well, it provided other innovations in genre and character. At the beginning of the 1980s,

¹²³ Cf. Elsaesser, 28-9.

Elsaesser reports a wave of films with children as the main protagonists. These ranged from Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, to Columbus' *Home Alone* films, and more recently, the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* franchise. These heroes not only demonstrate the infantile wishes and adolescent antics of its creators, which could be realized in an artificial place like the cinema, but also the oversaturation with the conventional action hero.

Moreover, this type of hero was largely questioned in traumatizing, distorting and satirizing him into pathological, hysterical or autistic outsiders. Elsaesser dedicates lengthy essays to some of the more prominent examples of this category. He mentions John McClain in *Die Hard*, seemingly the poster boy of the action star, played by Bruce Willis as an alcoholic, frustrated, divorced policeman with anger management problems; Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs*, a female FBI-agent working in a male-dominated profession and mentally traumatized by a childhood incident; the autistic and mobbed *Forrest Gump* which struggles not only with his disability but also with the political upheaval in an environment he does not understand; comic heroes like Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*, on the surface an average American teenager but beneath fighting with an oedipal complex, an alcoholic mother and general depression; and eventually the already mentioned Jules and Vincent in *Pulp Fiction* hardly action heroes at all but more anarchistic gangster caricatures.

Even the attribute 'male' is more instable than generally assumed. Elsaesser, who calls it a new "*Typologie des New Man*" (31) enlists various Hollywood films criticizing hierarchal structures and presenting alternative concepts of masculinity. *Midnight Cowboy* deconstructs two myths in bringing in the gay cowboy, as does Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*. Men dress and act as women in Pollack's *Tootsie* and Columbus' *Mrs. Doubtfire*. Homoerotic undercurrents can be found in the genre of the buddy movie, with *The Sting* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* by George Roy Hill being examples.

7. Conclusion

As I have stated in the introduction, the aim was to investigate the cinematic reality of Haneke and Hollywood to find out if they can be considered a total binary. After research carried out, the answer has to be: not really. As unclear an answer this may seem, it reveals the most essential result: that strict boundaries of what typical 'Hollywood' cinema, 'European' cinema and 'art' cinema do not exist. What does exist, however, is the personal construct of such a concept 'Hollywood' and 'Haneke' in every recipient, and the films are judged according to the degree of deviating from this construct. In this conclusion, I want to reevaluate the important questions I have dedicated myself to answer when beginning to work on this paper.

Michael Haneke is not an Austrian, nor a German or European director. The most fitting description I was able to find was 'First World' director. In interviews, he is keen to stress that his films are made for the industrialized Western civilization, for people of his own familial background: the affluent middle class. That is why Americans, Canadians and Australians also can watch his films without being geographically part of Europe. I also mentioned Japan which needs revising at this point. Although being part of the industrialized First World economically and technologically, the cultural and religious gap between Japan's highly hierarchical structures based on honor and legacy and European's and American's suburban middle class family may be too wide for identification.

Michael Haneke is not an Adorno disciple. Although he shares Adorno's views on the function of art as a moral institution, he does not strictly dismiss films traditionally regarded as 'entertainment'. He distinguishes between the German term 'Unterhaltung' as a sophisticated, elaborate art form, and the English 'entertainment' as distraction, meaning films that have a clear purpose but are no art. This is problematic because he simultaneously claims to abhor the separation of high and low arts, as the interview on *Funny Games* shows. Furthermore, as the example with the Kleist text has demonstrated, he is not too reluctant to engage in distraction himself. The fact is that he picks out the politically correct pieces of Adorno's school of thought and tailors it to his public costume. On this note, the 'real' Haneke must not be confused with the 'reel' Haneke, to borrow Weathley's terms. He is actively involved in creating and promoting an image of himself signifying the European high class intellectual as an advertising campaign for his films.

Michael Haneke does not hate Hollywood. But his rejection of it is rooted in inaccurate assumptions of its culture. As his failed *Funny Games US* has revealed, his assumption that the Austrian material could be copied onto American circumstances turned out to be naïve. Not only did he commit a mistake in assuming that both societies were culturally charged identically, as his ill-staged brands have proven; in omitting some of the most crucial meta-textual scenes, the critic of violence while engaging in it was not transparent enough for its target audience. In addition, the violence in *Funny Games* bears significant resemblance to the one by a filmmaker he is continuously criticizing: Quentin Tarantino. In his *Pulp Fiction*, the violent acts are non-causal, arbitrary, interchangeable, unexpected and absurd. The exact same can be said about Peter and Paul, the murderers in *Funny Games*. Moreover, Tarantino draws on a multitude of pop-cultural references with which Haneke is largely unfamiliar. This lies in the fact that both directors stem from a widely different cinematic tradition; Haneke from a European cinema of moral didacticism and formal rigorism; Tarantino emerged from postmodern anything-goes, using and subverting common political and social concepts. The point is that both have moral ambition, but their techniques in illustrating it are totally contrasting.

The second major analysis, *The Piano Teacher* read against Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, unearthed a much starker contrast. Whereas Hitchcock ironically reinforces the male gaze in staging the female protagonist as a fetishized object, Haneke's Erika is both object and subject. She addresses the observing audience by being actively involved in the process of voyeurism, when she visits a porno shop or spies at couples on the drive-in cinema. In *The Piano Teacher* he is more anti-Hollywood than anywhere else, deconstructing the conventional exploitative methods that mainstream cinema uses in objectifying its female characters for the pleasure of the male-dominated audience. Although both films deal with cinematic voyeurism, Haneke found a univocally more critical form towards the way women are shown and seen in Hollywood.

Hollywood is art. Since the 1970s, Hollywood has been criticized and pronounced dead by Europe on various occasions. Ironically, Jean-Luc Godard, one of the major figures of the French Nouvelle Vague first idolized it only to afterwards predict its downfall. Thomas Elsaesser provided reasonable proof why this is not the case, nor going to be in the near future. On the one hand, Hollywood goes beyond its movies. It is a global industry with a financial power unmatched by any other film nation. What makes it so resistant is that all the studios continue to invest in the most

elaborate technology to tell the same old story. Hollywood reworks well-known plot patterns, however visually enhanced, to continuously fashion itself. The reason why the brand 'Hollywood' is so powerful is because it just keeps on repeating that it is.

Secondly, there is a political Hollywood. From the late 1960s onwards, a new wave of films founded the New Hollywood Movement which was heavily influenced by European auteur cinema. I have named trademarks of this such as the undecided, wandering anti-hero, non-linear storylines, the absence of extra-diegetic sound and so forth. Thirdly, Hollywood does not decrease in quality. Film festivals, workshops, exhibitions and retrospectives greatly outnumber days per year. Therefore, reproaching blockbusters to standardize and dictate taste does not hold. Haneke's lament that productions of TV and cinema got worse over time appears almost old-fashioned given the enormous amount of non-Hollywood films being released annually.

At no point in its history was the cinema more diverse, multicultural and accessible than today.

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Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit mit dem Titel „Kenne deinen Feind: Michael Haneke und das Kino Hollywoods“ ist dem österreichischen Regisseur Michael Haneke gewidmet. Ziel dieser Arbeit war es, die Filme Hanekes in Bezug auf zeitgenössische Produktionen der US-amerikanischen Hollywoodindustrie zu analysieren.

Michael Haneke, dessen beruflicher Erfolg außerhalb Österreichs von keinem lebenden Kollegen erreicht wird, zählt zu den bekanntesten, einflussreichsten und ausgezeichnetsten Filmemachern international. Seine Fähigkeit, bestimmte Aspekte in unserer industrialisierten Wohlstandsgesellschaft zu lokalisieren und so zu inszenieren, dass sie für heftige Publikumsreaktionen und ausreichend Gesprächsstoff sorgen, ist einzigartig. Mich hat zum einen der Aspekt der totalen Kontroverse, den seine Person und seine Arbeiten in der Öffentlichkeit auslösen, interessiert.

Zum anderen fiel mir Michael Haneke durch seine angebliche Ablehnung des Hollywoodkinos auf. Der Kontrast zwischen der kinematischen Verkörperung von ‚Kunst‘- und ‚Autorenkinos‘ und der realitätsfernen, ideologisch fragwürdigen, wenngleich populärsten und mächtigsten Filmfabrik, Hollywood, schien mir besonders viel Stoff für eine konfliktreiche Analyse zu offerieren.

Der Untersuchungsmodus dieser Arbeit war ein investigativer. Mir war es wichtig, eine besonders präzise und detailorientierte Analyse der Haneke-Filme zu liefern, und sie in ausführlicher Beziehung zu speziellen Hollywoodproduktionen zu sehen. Im ersten Teil wurde Hanekes einziges Filmprojekt in Amerika, das Remake seines Films *Funny Games*, auf den Aspekt der Gewalt beziehungsweise die mediale Repräsentation von Gewalt im Kino und Hanekes Kritik daran untersucht. Als einer seiner zentralen Angriffsflächen tauchte erneut Quentin Tarantino und sein Werk *Pulp Fiction* auf. Folglich schien es logisch, diesen Film bezüglich seiner Methode, Gewalt zu inszenieren, seines angeblich gewaltverherrlichenden Potenzials und seines zynisch-postmodernistischen Charakters zu untersuchen und ihn mit Hanekes Film zu vergleichen. Thomas Elsaessers Texte erwiesen sich hier als besonders hilfreich, da er sowohl über Haneke als auch Hollywood publiziert hatte. Die zweite Analyse beschäftigte sich mit *Die Klavierspielerin* und Alfred Hitchcocks *Vertigo*. Der Schwerpunkt lag nun auf den unterschiedlichen Repräsentationstechniken von weiblichen Helden auf der Leinwand. Zentral war, zu zeigen, wie beide Regisseure den

filmischen Voyeurismus, der in beiden Filmen thematisiert wird, zu verhandeln und was dies an Implikationen für die Zuschauer bedeutet.

Wichtig war auch die Frage nach Hanekes kultureller und künstlerischer Zugehörigkeit. Der Grund, warum der biographische Teil etwas umfangreicher ausfiel, liegt darin, dass Hanekes Filme fast ausschließlich in dem Milieu spielen, aus dem er selbst stammt. Um seine Kritik daran zu verstehen, muss man wissen woher er kommt. Auch entfachten sich des Öfteren Diskussionen darüber, ob er nun als ein österreichischer, französischer, deutscher oder europäischer Regisseur zu sehen ist. Ich versuchte zu zeigen, dass keine dieser Bezeichnungen zutrifft, und meines Erachtens die passendste ‚Erste Welt‘ Regisseur ist.

Das letzte Kapitel handelt ausschließlich von Hollywood. Es ist ein Versuch, Hollywood als legitime Kunstform zu etablieren, seine künstlerischen Verdienste innerhalb und außerhalb des filmischen Schaffens zu illustrieren, sein ausgeklügeltes Vermarktungs- und Finanzierungssystem zu verstehen, aber auch ein alternatives, politisches Hollywoodkino der 1970er Jahre zu präsentieren, das große Parallelen zum europäischen Autorenkino, zu dem sich auch Haneke zugehörig fühlt, aufweist. Die Arbeit schließt mit einer Zusammenfassung der Forschungsergebnisse.

Die Recherche beinhaltete das mehrmalige Studieren eines Großteils der Arbeiten Hanekes sowie die Lektüre der führenden englisch- und deutschsprachigen Publikationen über seine Person und sein Werk. Des Weiteren wurden auch zahlreiche Rezensionen seiner Filme in deutschen, österreichischen, französischen, amerikanischen und englischen Zeitungen und Filmzeitschriften hinzugezogen, sowie Interviews, die in Internetblogs und Workshops erschienen und veröffentlicht wurden. Was Hollywood betrifft, so sind neben Tarantinos und Hitchcocks Filmen noch Thomas Elsaessers beziehungsweise Charles Barrs Essays zu nennen.

Abschließend ist zu sagen, dass diese Arbeit ein Versuch ist, nicht nur der Kunst eines Michael Haneke näher zu kommen, sondern sie auch von einer Perspektive zu verstehen, die am abwegigsten und absurdesten erscheint: vom Kommerz Hollywoods.

Curriculum Vitae

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Ausbildung

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