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The Staged Realism of Michael Haneke's *Caché*
Le réalisme fabriqué dans *Caché* de Michael Haneke

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Résumé de l'article

Le style de Michael Haneke pourrait être qualifié de « réalisme fabriqué », une démarche cinématographique où les éléments de la diégèse sont ouvertement orchestrés et façonnés de manière à soulever de réels enjeux sociaux. Dans *Caché* (2005), cela provoque un court-circuitage entre le récit présenté à l'écran et le regard du spectateur, lequel devient alors à la fois sujet coupable et co-investigateur. Par un rapprochement entre le réalisme fabriqué de Haneke et l'approche documentaire du néo-réalisme défendue par André Bazin, cet article avance que *Caché* est le point culminant du projet réaliste de Haneke. Toutefois, en montrant des animaux se faire réellement abattre, Haneke vient en même temps brouiller les limites inhérentes à son projet.

The Staged Realism of Michael Haneke's *Caché*

Niels Niessen

ABSTRACT

Michael Haneke's style can best be described as staged realism, a cinematographic approach of presenting diegetic events as overtly staged and modelled in order to connect them to real social issues. In *Caché* (2005), this results in a short-circuit between the on-screen narrative and the viewer's act of watching, as a result of which the viewer is created both as a guilty subject and as a co-investigator. Through a juxtaposition of Haneke's staged realism with the neo-realist documentary mode of filmmaking advocated by André Bazin, this article argues that *Caché* is the current apex of Haneke's realist project. However, by staging the real killing of animals, the film simultaneously troubles that project's self-generated limits.

Voir le résumé français à la fin de l'article

Few recent films have drawn as much scholarly attention as Michael Haneke's *Caché* (*Hidden*, 2005). In the special issue which *Screen* devoted to the film in 2007, Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars (2007, p. 211) describe the lure of the film as follows: "Part thriller, part mystery, part ghost story, *Caché* seems to haunt people long after they see it." This article will focus on *Caché*'s implications for cinematic realism, which have remained relatively unexplored. I will argue that Haneke shows that film, in order to gain credibility, must foreground itself as an instrument of lies. Haneke's style can be defined as staged realism, a cinematic approach of presenting diegetic events as overtly staged and modelled in order to connect them to real social issues. Through this approach Haneke positions the viewer as both a guilty subject and a co-investigator.

In order to explore this staging of the viewer I will start with a detailed analysis of *Caché*'s opening and closing sequences, scenes in which Haneke deploys the typically realist techniques

of the long take and the deep focus shot. Building upon John David Rhodes's argument that Haneke stages sustained acts of vision, I will contend that *Caché*, by establishing a short-circuit between diegesis and viewer, performs an ethics of seeing. Finally, through a juxtaposition of Haneke's staged realism with the neo-realist documentary mode of filmmaking described by André Bazin, I will show how Haneke's film relates to the realities behind and in front of the screen. *Caché* is not only the current apex of Haneke's realist project, but also troubles that project's self-generated limits.

Whodunit?

Caché starts with a long, static, deep focus shot down a quiet street in Paris. After about a minute and a half a male and a female voice begin to argue:

> (man) — A*lors?*
> (woman) — *Rien.*
> — *C'était où?*
> — *Dans un sac plastique dans la porte.*

During this dialogue the image switches to a man and woman leaving the house, now filmed at night. After they have re-entered, the initial daytime shot is fast-forwarded, and it becomes clear that the viewer has been watching a videotape, together with the film's characters.

Thus the film has hardly begun, and already it has cast its viewer in the role of viewer. The result of this "ontological shock" (Frey 2006, p. 32) is that from the very beginning *Caché* makes the viewer suspicious of its images. Every time the movie revisits the view of the couple's house, the viewer wonders whether he or she is watching the unfolding diegetic reality or yet another videotape. This unsettling of the viewer's trust is exactly what Haneke aims to achieve. In an interview he states:

> Of course I attempt to stir up the viewer's distrust in the reality value of mediated images… I think that when film wants to be an art form, it has the aesthetic-moral obligation to reflect the questionability and the dangers of its means of manipulation (Grabner 2005, pp. 40-41).

This theme of the manipulative force of mass media is closely connected to the other central theme in Haneke's movies, that of modern Western society and its discontents. In *Caché* the latter is present in the form of Georges's confrontation with a repressed childhood experience, a story that simultaneously operates as an allegory for the surfacing of a scandal in French national history.

It all starts when literary TV show host Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and his wife Anne (Juliette Binoche) receive the video recording of their house. They subsequently receive anonymous phone calls and more tapes which, in addition to showing new "surveillance images" of their residence, contain recordings of the farm Georges grew up on. Although throughout the entire movie it remains unrevealed who is behind these infringements on the couple's private life, it gradually becomes clear that the messages are meant to confront Georges with an incident that occurred in 1961, when he was six years old. In October of that year, after the death of an Algerian couple who had been working on Georges's parents' farm, his parents decided to adopt the Algerian couple's orphaned son Majid. Georges, feeling threatened by the arrival of his new brother, told lies about him, with the result that Majid was sent away to an orphanage.

Georges's repression of this traumatic memory from early life serves as an analogy for mainstream French society's response to the criminal event that for a long time remained a hidden black page in French post-colonial history. For it was not until the late 1990s, with the trial of Maurice Papon, that October 17, 1961, entered French collective memory. On that day, during a demonstration of the Algerian National Liberation Front, French police drowned approximately two hundred Algerians in the Seine.[1] In *Caché*, Majid's parents are among the victims.

Although Georges refers only briefly to this massacre, it broadens his individual problem of repression and guilt to a national and perhaps even universal problem. In an interview with Serge Toubiana, Haneke himself suggests that the film is a moral tale about the theme of how to deal with guilt.[2]

Being a moral tale the film at first seems to unfold as a classical *whodunit*. Throughout the film the question remains: who is

behind the tapes? That Majid sent them himself is unlikely. As Anne remarks, when she and Georges watch another tape that documents Georges and Majid's first re-encounter in Majid's apartment, Majid seems "genuinely surprised" by Georges's visit. Therefore, the only person remaining who has access to both Majid's apartment and his personal history is Majid's son. *Caché* leaves open the possibility that he operates in alliance with Georges and Anne's twelve-year-old son Pierrot, who becomes increasingly emotionally shut off from his parents throughout the film. However, that reading is complicated by the fact that Majid's son gives the impression of being completely honest when shortly after Majid's suicide he assures Georges that he has nothing to do with the tapes.

This problematization of a simple answer calls into question our assumption that the "solution" to *Caché* can be found in the closed realm of its diegesis. Instead of a scene-by-scene search for hidden clues, it seems more fertile to focus on what is really hidden in the recorded image, implying that we have to turn the film camera on itself. How does the camera used to shoot the tapes sent to Georges and Anne relate to the cameras that are used to shoot *Caché*?

A movie that can help examine this question is David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997), another film that commences with a married couple, Renee and Fred, receiving video recordings of their own house. When a police officer who is investigating their case asks them whether they own a video camera, Renee responds: "No, Fred hates them." To this Fred adds: "I like to remember things in my own way . . . not necessarily the way they happened." This comment exactly formulates what is going on in *Lost Highway* itself. On the last tape we see Fred being followed to his bedroom where he murders Renee, a thing that he indeed attempts to remember in his own way once in jail, but the reality of which he is confronted with earlier in the movie through the video images dropped off at his house.

In *Lost Highway* the videotapes operate as the embodiment of a traumatic reality that has been swept under the carpet by waking consciousness, but that sooner or later comes knocking at the front door. The result is the ultimate *Unheimlichkeit*: Fred

no longer feels at home in his own home. In addition, the videotapes in *Caché* embody a return of the real, and in that way their images merge seamlessly into those of Georges's nightmares. Although Georges's dreams show that he too is remembering things in his own way, in his case this is not an attempt to regain control over memory, but the result of his inability to deal with a guilty conscience, to face himself.

Apart from the reality of Georges's past there is another hidden reality of which the tapes are a record: the real presence of the camera that hides behind its images. Therefore our trail of suspects in the whodunit eventually leads to no one other than Michael Haneke. It is he who has placed the tapes! This metanarrative twist woven into the narrative forces the viewer to think beyond the borders of narrative and frame and to turn the film image inside out.

Ethics of Seeing

Formally, *Caché* ends as it started: with a prolonged, stationary deep focus shot. This time we are shown the front entrance of the school of Anne and Georges's son Pierrot. The shot lasts almost four minutes. Like *Caché*'s opening sequence it can be read as referring to surveillance cameras that blindly register everything that falls within their range. Unlike surveillance images, however, which are generally shot from a bird's eye perspective, these two sequences in *Caché* are shot by a camera at eye level. As a result the camera's gaze is anthropomorphized, making us think about the person behind the camera. Once more the viewer is pushed to wonder who is responsible for the image. Moreover, hardened in our distrust by the unexpected turns *Caché*'s plot has taken so far, we are prepared for something to happen, but actually nothing does. We simply see groups of kids, chattering with each other in a lively manner, come out of the school building. When the school stairs begin to empty the image becomes the background for the film's closing titles.

Looking at the children on the school stairs the viewer is expecting to encounter Pierrot. He is indeed there and so is Majid's son, but many viewers, including me, on first viewing fail to notice them. The movie thereby explicitly refuses to yield

to the regular viewer in the theatre, not only in the sense that most people go see a movie only once, but also in that the theatre viewers lack control over the movie's playback time. In fact, in order to read *Caché*, the movie needs to be watched at home, with the remote control. This gives another dimension to the movie's *Unheimlichkeit*, and to the way in which "*Caché* forces us to think about what we allow inside and what we insist remains outside; the ways we . . . construct and imagine the idea of 'home'" (Ezra and Sillars 2007a, p. 215).

Is there a clue to be found in the final scene? Perhaps, because even after my nth viewing of the film's final minutes, having rewound and fast-forwarded the DVD at least as many times as Anne and Georges do with the tapes dropped off at their house, it still has not become totally clear what this scene means in relation to the rest of the movie. And of course, in asking themselves this question, the spectator is already in the position Haneke has designed: that of a critical viewer who does not swallow any image as self-evident.

At the start of this final scene we see Pierrot—longish hair, big backpack, his hands nonchalantly tucked in the pockets of his oversized jeans—coming out of the entrance in the top left-hand corner of the frame. While he stands talking to his friends in front of the entrance, facing away from the viewer, he is approached by Majid's son, who enters the frame from the lower right corner and resolutely climbs the stairs as soon as he notices Pierrot. From this resoluteness, in combination with the boys' overall interaction, it seems as if they have met before without the viewer's knowledge. One could even say that Majid's son behaves like an older brother in the way that he lays a hand on Pierrot's shoulder in order to lead him to a quieter place.

Given their age difference is at least six years—we know Pierrot is twelve—it is unlikely that their relationship is just an ordinary friendship. Also striking when the two of them descend the stairs is that Majid's son looks around a couple of times in order to make sure that nobody notices him. This could be taken as an indication that he is up to something, harbouring a plan that will fall outside of the film's accounting of events, or as a sign that he is not as innocent as he claimed to be

and is indeed behind the tapes. But then again, given the fact that he and his father have already been brutally dragged out of their apartment by the police precisely because they were being suspected of having kidnapped Pierrot, he may be on his guard despite being innocent.

We can only guess, however, because even though in the Toubiana interview Haneke claims to have written a dialogue for the boys' conversation,[3] we hear only ambient noise and the diffuse sound of the chattering schoolchildren. Nevertheless, one is able to distinguish the phrase "*Elle est où?*" which after a very close reading can be attributed to the black-haired girl behind the two boys on the stairs. The response to her question is given by the girl with the purple backpack: "*Elle nique ton père*" ("She's screwing your dad"), at which the first girl bursts into laughter. To call this dialogue the key to the movie would be a stretch, but it certainly is a "virtual Easter egg" *hidden* by Haneke.[4] One of the reasons for the disconnection between Pierrot and his parents is that he suspects his mother of having a secret affair with her employer, a suspicion he offhandedly confronts Anne with when she tries to express her motherly feelings the morning Pierrot returns home from being "missing."[5] As such, the girls' dialogue in the final scene invites us to read Pierrot's apparently friendly contact with Majid's son in light of Haneke's persistent critique of Western culture's conception of the nuclear family as the cornerstone of social cohesion.

The encounter between Pierrot and Majid's son should thus be interpreted as somehow subverting traditional family values, a reading supported by the brief dialogue between the girls just behind them that constitutes the only discernible phrases in the sequence. Whatever the reason for Pierrot and Majid's son's *tête-à-tête*—a mutual interest in competitive swimming, a conspiracy against Pierrot's parents, or something else from which we, just like Anne and Georges, remain excluded—Pierrot seems to trust his older "friend" more than he does his parents. Moreover, their extra-familial relationship indicates a kind of connection that Georges, as both a child and an adult, was unable to form with his adoptive brother Majid. In that sense the boys' encounter at the end of *Caché* can be understood as a hopeful

statement that new generations do not necessarily inherit their parents' failures but perhaps are able to cross social boundaries to develop other, more progressive types of community. Though not the exclusive reading of *Caché*'s slightly mysterious ending, this would mean a tiny spark of hope in an overall sombre statement about modern Western society.

This spark of hope only lights up when the viewer is willing to discern the image, a creation of the viewer as investigator that is largely the result of Haneke's employment of long takes and deep focus shots. As John David Rhodes argues (2006, p. 18), in his attempt to instigate in the viewer an active attitude towards the image, Haneke seems to affiliate himself with the editorial reserve André Bazin praised in Italian neo-realism. Due to its sobriety neo-realist cinema transferred a huge amount of freedom to the spectator, a freedom that at the same time forms a coercion to discern, to interpret and to judge the facts shown on the screen (p. 19). Yet as Rhodes points out, Haneke also undermines the neo-realist approach and the purposes Bazin imagined for it. Haneke not only strives to create "an objective mode of encountering ambiguous facts" (p. 20), he wants to raise the questions of why we are actually looking at particular images and to what extent we think we are able to grasp them. It is in that light that we should understand the "phenomenal plenitude" (p. 20) that Haneke's movies offer.

The image becomes most clearly exhausted at the points where the viewer is shown a long take that not only lacks a technical focus point, but also a visual *focal* point, an element in the picture that guides the viewer's reading, often because of its obvious pertinence to the narrative. Such shots leave it up to the viewer to decide what to focus on and to determine what elements in the picture might pertain to the narrative and how. Using the same deep focus technique with which Orson Welles restored the "reality continuum" (Bazin 1971, p. 28), Haneke shows that through the abundance of reality our perception of reality is inherently incomplete. By foregrounding the fact that reality's meaning is dependent on our willingness and ability to scrutinize the image for potentially meaningful elements, Haneke's images disrupt our sense of reality.

The final sequence in *Caché* is the example *par excellence* of such a prolonged shot in which depth of focus and the apparent absence of a visual focal point go hand in hand. In this shot all elements in the frame appear sharp, from the parked car and the pedestrians in front to the stairs and the two school entrances further back. Depending on the degree of the viewer's alertness the shot presents either an everyday *tableau vivant* of chattering schoolchildren or a site of potential subversion and hope (although the first, "incomplete," reading could also lead to an understanding of the scene as hopeful).

Rhodes states that Haneke, by overloading the viewers with an abundance of facts, not only aims at a rehearsal of representation's inability to coincide with reality, but also attempts to make the viewers reflect upon their own perception. According to Rhodes (2006, p. 20), Haneke's films do not perform "a liquidation of the claims that images make on us." Rather,

> Haneke stages sustained acts of vision—perhaps, merely, of *seeing*. Our participation in these produces a recognition of the way that cinema forces us to stand outside its images, to experience the unknown-ness of the world, our own strangeness to ourselves. Vision as vision becomes a model for vision's, and perhaps cinema's own inefficacy as a mode of action (p. 20).

We could develop Rhodes's idea of vision as vision further by saying that by staging the viewer's relation to the events presented on the screen, Haneke's films establish a short-circuit between viewer and narrative that is essential to Haneke's staged realism. In establishing this short-circuit Haneke's films perform an *ethics of seeing*. By this I mean that *Caché* foregrounds the dependency of the meaning it conveys on the viewer's act of vision. This dependency not only concerns the spectator's willingness and ability to scrutinize the images, but also extends to the entwinement of the diegesis with the spectator's act of watching.

In the whodunit that is *Caché*, the narrative only makes sense when the viewer notices this entwinement. This mediation of the viewer's gaze is most apparent in the film's opening and closing shots which, as I have argued, refer to the images produced

by surveillance cameras. This reference consists primarily in the visual resemblance of these shots to those recorded by closed circuit television (CCTV), the "medium" in which depth of focus and the length of shots are carried to the extreme, and in which montage is either performed automatically by a computer or is absent altogether. Beyond these visual similarities, *Caché*'s beginning and end also invite the viewer to deal with its pieces of footage as if they were CCTV recordings and to scrutinize them for traces of evidence in the "*Caché* file."

This is exactly the way I read these sequences. By rewinding and replaying these scenes numerous times, I hoped to stumble upon "fingerprints" that would help me to solve the film's "Whodunit?" But of course the reality claim with which surveillance images are used stands in stark contrast to *Caché*'s attempt to create discomfort with the image. Whereas surveillance images are generally treated as an objective, non-mediated representation of all that moves within the camera's range, in *Caché* the camera is turned against itself, rendering suspicious the recorded images of the potential crime scene and misleading Georges and the policemen in the story as much as they do the spectator. In Haneke's movie the question "Whodunit?" does not claim to refer to an objective reality moving in front of the camera from which the camera itself is separated, but to the reality behind it, and of which the camera is an inextricable part.

As stated above, since none of *Caché*'s diegetic characters seems to have both the opportunity and the motive to send the tapes and drawings that in retrospect are a foreboding of Majid's suicide, it is Haneke and his crew who come under suspicion of having placed the tapes. This constitutes a meta-narrative twist that is almost seamlessly interwoven with the film's narrative. Possible charge: conspiring against the spectator with the intention to shock. This shock is experienced most unsettlingly in the scene in which Majid commits suicide in his apartment in the presence of Georges, and by extension the viewer. "I truly had no idea about the tapes," Majid assures Georges, while the latter, highly irritated, enters Majid's apartment. This time Georges, who in the previous scene we saw editing his TV show

for the night, is there on Majid's invitation. "I called you because I wanted you to be present," Majid says, upon which he opens his pocket knife and slits his throat.

Georges remains frozen for about thirty seconds. Then for another thirty seconds he wanders hesitantly around Majid's apartment in shock, moving out of the frame and re-entering it. The scene is cut at the moment Georges is about to walk to the door. The very next moment, in the next scene, we see him leaving a movie theatre,[6] a juxtaposition that signifies Georges's inability to confront reality. Like Fred in *Lost Highway*, Georges prefers to remember things in his "own way." When he is directly confronted with repressed reality his only reaction is to deny it and to anaesthetize his guilty conscience with cinema or sleeping pills.

At the same time the juxtaposition of shots invites the viewer to double their perspective on the film. From a narrative perspective Majid is dead. From a meta-narrative perspective his death is foregrounded as staged. Just like the tapes, this brutal act is part of the conspiracy Haneke and his crew have plotted against the viewer, a confrontation with violence that is reminiscent of Haneke's earlier work, most notably of *Funny Games* (1997). However, since this director's intervention takes place at the level of the diegesis, as it does in *Funny Games*, these two perspectives are not just two different takes on the same issue between which the viewer can freely choose or switch; they relate to each other as do the inseparable sides of a Moebius strip. It does not matter whether the viewer *feels* he or she can identify with Haneke's protagonists; he or she is *forced* to identify with them. Just like Georges, the spectator is horrified by Majid's sudden act of self-destruction in order to be violently confronted with his or her almost automatic initial reaction of suspecting Majid or his son of having sent the tapes. The film uses its own mystery structure and our assumptions about that type of narrative to comment on the way in which Anne and Georges, and by extension the viewer, perceive their reality. Moreover, just like Georges the spectator has temporarily fled reality and taken refuge in the cinema.

Austrian Period versus French Period

The movie theatre Georges leaves mirrors our own movie theatres. With his staged realism Haneke, rather than wanting to depict reality, attempts to develop staged constellations that include the position of the viewer. His films are characterized by a model structure, the purpose of which is to make the viewer feel addressed as a white Western subject, a necessarily guilty one in Haneke's view. In a comment on the films from his Austrian trilogy[7] Haneke states that by means of their model structure these films assert that they refer "not [to] the individual case but [to] all of us" (Grabner 2005, p. 33). Haneke's aim is to create "productive unrest" in the recipient.

In *Caché*, this model structure operates through its staging of the main characters' individuality. Rather than belonging to specific protagonists, the names "Anne" and "Georges"—like "Anne" and "Georges" in *Code inconnu* (2000), or "Anna" and "Georg" in *Funny Games* (1997)—refer to an abstract white bourgeois subject. In Haneke's movies this white Western subject is invariably portrayed as a self-alienated and morally corrupt man or woman. The purpose of this overtly stereotypical portrayal is to unsettle the viewers and to include them in the matrix left open by the films' abstractions. This is also the context in which we have to place the disclosure of Georges's dreams or the couple's relationship problems. Rather than appearing as individual psychological dispositions explaining the characters' ways of acting in the specific narrative situations displayed, these elements function as magnified, over-realist distillations of larger issues in Western culture that supersede individual people's psychology, making the characters function as enlarged symbols of those issues.

I therefore disagree with Jörg Metelmann's analysis in "Die Autonomie, das Tragische" (2005), in which he claims that there is a day-and-night difference between Haneke's Austrian and French projects. The reason Metelmann (2005, p. 288, my translation) gives for this alleged transformation in Haneke's oeuvre is that "over the course of years the sign of [Haneke's] aesthetic means has shifted from minus/against to plus/with." Although it is true that Haneke's French movies, especially in

the way they feature art house stars such as Juliette Binoche, Daniel Auteuil and Isabelle Huppert, have become more aesthetic and in that sense less anti-mainstream, I object to Metelmann's black/white distinction between Haneke's artistic periods. In fact, Metelmann's own description of Haneke's "Austrian approach" as "[the dissection] of his object, the horror of the bourgeois nuclear family, in a staged constellation that does not depict 'reality,' but constructs it in order to render the seemingly well-known once more recognizable" (p. 288, my translation) seems highly applicable to Haneke's French-language projects as well.

This similarity should be qualified by the observation that in his selection of the object of horror for his French-language films Haneke no longer limits himself to the bourgeois living room but has expanded his range to the entire French capital. Therefore, in opposition to Metelmann's claim that Haneke has moved away from the model structures characterizing his Austrian years, I would argue that in *Caché*, but also in *Code inconnu*, Haneke has refined his deployment of these structures. Whereas in his Austrian movies the filmmaker and the audience often, in Michael Joshua Rowin's formulation (2005), play "a zero sum game, equal parts sadomasochistic guilt trip and wish fulfillment," in *Code inconnu* and *Caché* spectators are held fully responsible for what is shown to them.

To recap, Haneke resists mainstream psychological realism in a twofold manner. On the one hand he employs camera techniques such as the long take and deep focus shot in order to force the viewer to examine the image as well as to stage sustained acts of vision. The viewer is not directed by the camera, he or she has to look for themselves. On the other hand Haneke provides his narratives with a model structure, with which he coerces the spectator into feeling addressed and even included by the events passing by in front of them. Haneke not only wants to invite viewers to relate themselves to the image on the screen, he wants to *force* them to do so. He achieves this by foregrounding his images as constructed, as non-real and non-realistic. This does not imply that Haneke's movies keep lingering in a post-modern mirror palace in which nothing is what it seems

and no one can be trusted. On the contrary, by raising the question of the reliability of representation, Haneke's movies open up space for thought.

Haneke, the Big Realist

In spite of Haneke's persistent questioning of reality's representability and his insistent treatment of film as a medium of questions instead of answers, his movies are not entirely deprived of any sort of truth or reality claim whatsoever. It is for a good reason that Haneke has been called "the big realist." In what manner, then, do Haneke's movies pretend to tell us something about the world? Having seen that his films do not aim at a rehearsal of reality's infinite retreat, where should we locate the layer of reality in Haneke's staged constellations?

Let's return to the CCTV camera, whose images are supposedly characterized by a one-to-one relation with reality. At first sight these images are reality. At least, that is how they are generally treated by the institutions producing them. However, surveillance cameras not only have the function of registering illegal activities, they also have the performative function of preventing crimes. Their presence operates as a sign of authority, the purpose of which is to provide people with a feeling of security or of being kept an eye on, depending on their intentions. CCTV cameras do not simply give an objective registration of reality, they directly intervene in it. Moreover, even though the eye of the CCTV camera never blinks, its perspective remains highly limited, actually tearing reality apart. Due to the inflexibility of its material and frame as well as that of its users, CCTV does not investigate the reality stretching out beyond the borders of its frame, a beyond where one might find explanations for the crimes it records.

CCTV is not a medium like film or television. Its images are not broadcast, nor are they reproduced and distributed in any other sense. Nevertheless, CCTV demonstrates how a claim to employ the camera as a means of investigation of certain aspects of reality—a description I borrow from Walter Benjamin—only has credibility as long as the objectivity of its gaze is doubted. What does this mean for cinematic realism?

In "An Aesthetic of Reality" Bazin writes (1971, p. 26) that "realism in art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice." Bazin considers this contradiction to be of vital importance for the art of cinema. He states:

> One might group, if not classify in order of importance, the various styles of cinematography in terms of the added measure of reality. We would define as "realist," then, all narrative means tending to bring an added measure of reality to the screen (p. 27).

In other words, in order to be realistic, art somehow has to be more real than reality itself. Realism should not simply mimic reality, it has to reproduce it—that is, to return the bare facts it borrows from reality to reality, with the added qualitative measure of artifice as interest. In doing so, realism restores the continuity of reality which, according to Bazin, had been broken by psychological realism.[8]

What Bazin admires in Italian neo-realism is its "air of documentary, a naturalness nearer to the spoken than to the written account" (Bazin 1971, p. 32). Characteristic of this documentary style of filmmaking are real-life settings and a reserve in the use of stylistic means: "Documentary camera work is identified in our mind with the grey tones of newsreels" (p. 33). Bazin points out that Italian film thereby reminds the viewer of the literary genre of reportage, a genre that is characterized by its ethic of objectivity or seeming objectivity. Neo-realism's purpose is the exposure of "facts," "fragment[s] of concrete reality in [themselves] multiple and full of ambiguity" (p. 37). Through this practice of "quasi-literary journalism" (p. 33), the neo-realist director attempts to increase the trustworthiness of the image depicted on the screen.

Even though this striving for an increased objectivity may sound somehow remote from current filmmaking, is it not exactly what Haneke is after as well? Yes and no. When asked by Franz Grabner whether he really thinks our societies are as aggressive and barren as his films make us believe, Haneke answers that his movies provide a deliberately biased negative perspective on the world we live in, as if wanting to offer a

counterweight to the largely affirmative information stream that is poured over our heads:

> What is this curious demand for "objectivity" in a media world in which the overwhelming majority is concerned with soothing and embellishing? Leave cinema the possibility to speak of the generally neglected sites of reality. Violence and emotional coldness are dominant aspects of our neo-liberal shark society—is it one-sided to represent them by means of a model structure [*modellhaft*]? We live in a violent world (Quoted in Grabner 2005, p. 39, my translation).

The manner in which Haneke carries out his counterattack is in line with Bazin's statement that realism can only be achieved through artifice. The same holds for Haneke's rejection of psychological realism and his use of long takes and deep focus shots, which are directly connected to this rejection. In this sense Haneke's cinema can be placed in the neo-realist tradition. However, even though his purpose is to present "facts" about the underexposed aspects of reality, his staged constellations move away from a documentary style. In this respect his cinematic approach seems more in line with Theodor Adorno's (1982, p. 203) advocacy of a critical cinema that "neither lapses into arts-and-crafts nor slips into a mere documentary mode." With Haneke's movies, the added measure of reality goes beyond the screen. Whereas for Bazin realism can only achieve its goal through artifice, for Haneke it can only do this through manipulating spectators in order to reveal to them their manipulability. As Haneke once formulated his philosophy of cinema, with a nod to Jean-Luc Godard's aphorism that film is "truth at twenty-four frames per second": "film is a lie at twenty-four frames per second in the service of truth" (Porton 2005, p. 51).[9]

One tell-tale aspect of Haneke's movies that is *not* the result of his staged realism is the killing of real animals in order to make a political or artistic statement, to startle the viewer. This theme recurs in nearly all of his films. In *Caché* it pertains to the rooster decapitated by the child Majid. This cruelty towards animals is not simply realistic; it is *real*, in the sense that this rooster is really killed. Regardless of the points that Haneke tries to make with scenes like this—in this case something like the symbolic behead-

ing of the French nation by a social group who feels excluded by its "cockiness"—through the use of "lab rats" Haneke trades realism for reality, thereby undermining his own stance.[10]

These animal scenes are therefore only instructive in spite of themselves, in that they show that too close a match between realism and reality can actually hinder the ethical point about reality being conveyed. In fact, the non-staged quality of these images compromises the reality or truth claim of Haneke's staged realism. At these moments, Haneke inadvertently ricochets against the limits he has set out with his realist project, and in particular his insistence on the existence of a reality that is behind and that perhaps even precedes the representations of violence or otherness with which television or mainstream cinema overload us.

The ambivalent position of the viewer of *Caché* as both a partner-in-crime and a partner in dialogue resembles that of Anne and Georges. Just as the videotapes that they find on their porch point their guilt out to them while simultaneously urging them to come up with an answer, Haneke's movie incites his spectators to reflect on their own complicity in the world's crimes. For both the viewer and for Anne and Georges, the staged reality shown by the recorded image implicitly gives account of the real reality that it hides. However, unlike the tapes in *Caché*, Haneke's films have a clear sender, and moreover they are dropped off at our houses only in a figurative sense. Although viewers might seek to comfort themselves with this idea that the *Unheimlichkeit* of Haneke's moral tales does not really infiltrate their private spheres, and that after all "it's only cinema," *Caché* shows that this is no reason not to worry about the world that the medium is part of.[11]

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NOTES

1. This massacre has also been dealt with in Alain Tasma's film *Nuit noire, 17 octobre*, which like *Caché* was released in 2005.

2. "*Caché*: Entretien avec Michael Haneke par Serge Toubiana." Extra on the 2006 DVD release of *Caché* (*Hidden*).

3. *Ibid.*

4. A similar hidden "clue" is discussed by Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars (2007a, p. 220), who in "*Hidden* in Plain Sight: Bringing Terror Home" point out that the bird's chatter in *Caché*'s opening shot is identical to that in the film's penultimate scene, which forms a flashback to the moment in Georges's boyhood when the young Majid is taken away.

5. For an in-depth analysis of Haneke's critique of patriarchal social relations, see Sharrett 2006.

6. The movies advertised above the theatre's entrance all can be read as referring to the issues at stake in *Caché*: *La mauvaise éducation*, *Ma mère* (earlier in the film Georges visits his mother, who had forgotten about Majid as well), *Mariages!* (with Isabelle Huppert, who plays the title role in Haneke's *La Pianiste*), *Deux frères* and *La grande séduction* (of which the poster screams "SON FILM!"). Interestingly, all of these films were released in France in the first half of 2004, one year before *Caché*.

7. *Der Siebente Kontinent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994).

8. I owe this interpretation to a lecture by Cesare Casarino, part of a graduate seminar entitled "Theories of the (cinematic) image" in the fall semester of 2008 at the University of Minnesota (Department of Comparative Literature & Cultural Studies).

9. *Caché* was shot in video (HDTV). Though a full analysis of the implications of this for the statement above is beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that Haneke in *Caché*, but also in his earlier movies, seeks to juxtapose different technical varieties of the moving sound-image.

10. For an extensive analysis of animal violence in cinema see Lippit 2002.

11. I would like to thank Joost de Bloois, Adair Rounthwaite and the anonymous reviewers from *Cinémas* for their indispensable suggestions and corrections.

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RÉSUMÉ

Le réalisme fabriqué dans *Caché* de Michael Haneke

Niels Niessen

Le style de Michael Haneke pourrait être qualifié de « réalisme fabriqué », une démarche cinématographique où les éléments de la diégèse sont ouvertement orchestrés et façonnés de manière à soulever de réels enjeux sociaux. Dans *Caché* (2005), cela provoque un court-circuitage entre le récit présenté à l'écran et le regard du spectateur, lequel devient alors à la fois sujet coupable et co-investigateur. Par un rapprochement entre le réalisme fabriqué de Haneke et l'approche documentaire du néo-réalisme défendue par André Bazin, cet article avance que *Caché* est le point culminant du projet réaliste de Haneke. Toutefois, en montrant des animaux se faire réellement abattre, Haneke vient en même temps brouiller les limites inhérentes à son projet.