

**BEING-TOWARDS-DEATH:
HEIDEGGERIAN ONTOLOGY IN
SELECTED FILMS OF MICHAEL HANEKE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates certain existential themes found in the work of Austrian director Michael Haneke. As such the focus is on the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, specifically Heidegger's notion of Being as always being-towards-death. There are six films under discussion – the three films comprising his *Vergletscherung-trilogie* (*Der Siebente Kontinent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*), and his later films *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste*, and *Caché*.

Michael Haneke has been lauded as “Austria’s most esteemed and most controversial active filmmaker” (Frey 2003:1), a director whose work transgresses the boundaries of mainstream film in terms of both its form and content. In fact, the director argues, he is responsible for “rap[ing] the spectator to independence”. Haneke’s work features a solid measure of existential themes, examining the alienation and isolation of the individual, the despair brought on by the monotony of modern society, and the seeming meaninglessness of man’s existence. This study aims to show that much of Haneke’s existential thought can be drawn back to Heidegger’s concept of Being, and the various ways in which Being is constituted. Focusing particularly on the notion of Being as being-towards-death, two other constitutive elements are also included – Being as always being-in-the-world and Being as always being-with-others. Being-in-the-world is examined on two fronts, looking at Haneke’s treatment of the public space, and of the domestic setting of the home. Being-with-others is likewise elucidated in terms of the perspective Haneke offers on society as Heidegger’s *Das Man*, and the more intimate relationships within the family unit. By coupling these elements with Heidegger’s notions of thrownness, anxiety and the nothing, this study thus investigates how Haneke’s rendition of being-in-the-world and being-with-others inevitably, and fundamentally, means being-towards-death.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Michael Haneke has been lauded as “Austria’s most esteemed and most controversial active filmmaker” (Frey 2003:1), a director whose work transgresses the boundaries of mainstream film in terms of both its form and content, as Haneke (quoted in Frey 2003:6) argues, “rap[ing] the spectator to independence”. In the last number of years Haneke has also gained much international acclaim, with *La Pianiste/The Piano Teacher* (2001) winning the *Grand Prix*, and most recently, *Das Weisse Band/The White Ribbon* (2009), winning the prized *Palme d’Or*, both at the Cannes International Film Festival. Although the last number of years have seen an upsurge in critical discourse surrounding Haneke’s work, there are still important gaps within the field of study. The existential components of Haneke’s work, a very important philosophical underpinning which can be found across his oeuvre, are one of these instances, and are seldom commented upon. It is these existential components which this study discusses, specifically focusing on their intersection with Martin Heidegger’s work on the concept of *Dasein* (Being), particularly as being-towards-death. Different recurring elements within Haneke’s oeuvre are discussed. Being-in-the-world, as a situation where the individual finds itself “in a world to which it must orient itself, and from which it can never escape or separate itself” (Tuttle 2005 [1996]:63), is investigated in light of the way in which Haneke frames contemporary society as alienating and isolating, juxtaposing the commodified spiritual death of the public space with the numbing emotional death of the private space. Being-with-others, as Heidegger’s “expression for the philosophical position that human Being is a priori in a world with others; that it possesses from the beginning a public dimension that is not only intersubjective but constitutive of its very Being” (Tuttle 2005 [1996]:66), is likewise examined on two fronts. This entails how the individual’s relationship to both the private others, the family, and the public others, society, constitutes his Being but also is a large part of his being-towards-death. This being-towards-death is examined on three fronts. The first is the role of anxiety in Haneke’s oeuvre, as a narrative signifier of Heidegger’s (1929:sp) notion of the nothing, the second the ontological significance of the physical deaths of characters – their Heideggerian demise. The third strain examines the oeuvre’s narrative obsession with death within the context of death as an existential element, where Heidegger (1962 [1927]:284) attests that “dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially”.

1.1 Rationale and need for study

Despite the critical acclaim Haneke has received over the course of his career the critical investigations into his work had, up until 2009, been few and far between. During the course of this study this slowly started changing, with a sudden surge of interest in the director's work, and a number of very interesting studies were published on the director between 2009 and 2011. This has been an important shift, as the density and complexity of Haneke's work warrants scholarly examination. Haneke's "status as one of a new generation of auteurs currently leading European cinema" (Wheatley 2009:14), and the fact that he addresses a number of crucial issues pertaining to postmodern society, adds to the importance of critical theory being conducted on his body of work. Some of the studies that have been published frame Haneke's work in the context of postmodern philosophy, most notably drawing from the philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard and Marc Augè. Haneke scholar Catherine Wheatley has taken a modernist turn, coupling Haneke's films with the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Despite these philosophical meanderings no study of Haneke's existential themes has been made. Although there are those who consider existentialism an outdated philosophical perspective (Schroeder 2005:xiii) it could be argued that it still bears contemporary relevance, and that it elucidates many of the mired elements of the postmodern condition (Guignon 2004:1). From this vantage point this study thus also argues that the greater field of existentialism greatly contributes to an understanding of Haneke's work.

Although he did not see himself as an existentialist, philosopher Martin Heidegger has long been paired with the field (Macquarrie 1972:5). His contribution to existentialism is not only a very profound engagement with the element of *Dasein* (Being), but indeed Heidegger himself is considered as one of the most important philosophers of the last century (Kockelmans 1986:vii). Heidegger's work has in fact influenced many of the most prominent philosophers of the last eighty years (Guignon 2004:3). To my knowledge no study has been conducted that pertinently points out the correlation between Heideggerian ontology¹ and Haneke's work. By thus focusing on a neglected theme of Haneke's oeuvre, and coupling it with a philosophical mode of analysis which has not often been paired with elements of visual culture, much less film, this study positions itself

¹ Heideggerian philosophy has indeed been paired with other filmmakers, most importantly the work of director Terence Malick, in studies conducted by Marc Furstenau and Leslie MacEvoy (2003), Robert Sinnerbrink (2006) and John Rhym (2010). The notion of pairing Heideggerian philosophy with film is first seen in Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1971).

as a step towards redressing this imbalance.

1.2 Aim of the study

The study investigates certain existential strains found in the work of Michael Haneke. It focuses on the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, specifically Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* (Being) as always being-towards-death.

It could be argued that Haneke's entire oeuvre features a certain measure of existential themes (Ritzenhoff 2008:144), examining the alienation and isolation of the individual, the despair brought on by the monotony of modern society, and the seeming meaninglessness of man's existence. In the first three films of Haneke's oeuvre, commonly referred to as the *Vergletscherung-trilogie/Glaciation trilogy*, comprising the films *Der Siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls/71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), the examination of these themes are quite blatantly clear in terms of plot and visual iconography. This changes in his later films, ranging from *Funny Games* (1997), to the most recent *Das Weisse Band*, where a more subtle approach is taken by the director, yet one which manages to masterfully immerse every frame with existential despair. For the purposes of this study there are thus six films that will specifically be focused on – the director's first three films, the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, as well as three of his later films, *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste* and *Caché*. These six films have not only garnered the most critical discourse, but have also been completely overlooked in terms of their existential themes, and have thus been chosen as the most apt vehicles for the analysis that this study brings to the table. In so doing the choice of films also serve to illustrate the trajectory of Haneke's existential thought, ranging from quite an obvious treatment of the existential themes in Haneke's early films, to a more subtle and nuanced approach later.

This study argues that much of Haneke's existential thought, in both his early and later work, can be traced back to Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, and the various ways in which *Dasein* is constituted. Focusing particularly on the notion of *Dasein* as being-towards-death, two other constitutive elements are also included – Being as always being-in-the-world and Being as always being-with-others. By situating Heidegger's existential ontology within the context of the greater field of existentialism, and by positioning

Haneke's oeuvre within the body of critical work that has been published on it, the study thus investigates how Haneke's rendition of being-in-the-world and being-with-others inevitably, and fundamentally, means being-towards-death.

1.3 Literature study

The literature this study draws from is located in two spheres. The first is critical discourse on the cinema of Michael Haneke. There are roughly two strands of discourse that are important in this regard. The first strand comprises a number of articles that had been published on Haneke's work at a point where there was still relatively little written on the auteur. These articles are scattered in academic journals in a variety of disciplines, ranging from film studies to comparative literature and psychoanalysis. Within this strain this study has drawn from a number of articles. This includes early overviews of the director's work, including Mattias Frey's *A Cinema of Disturbance: The Films of Michael Haneke in Context* (2003), Maximilian Le Cain's *Do the Right Thing: The Films of Michael Haneke* (2003), and Roy Grundmann's *Auteur de Force: Michael Haneke's "Cinema of Glaciation"* (2007). David Sorfa's *Uneasy Domesticity in the Films of Michael Haneke* (2006) is employed, shedding light on Haneke's treatment of the trope of the home, an important element within the study. Frey's *Supermodernity, Capital, and Narcissus: The French Connection to Michael Haneke's Benny's Video* (2002) is informative in its sketching of the various philosophical strains that Haneke's work could be paired with. I also draw from studies pertaining to some of the director's individual films. Here Gail Hart's *Michael Haneke's Funny Games and Schiller's Coercive Classicism* (2006) is elucidating in terms of its reading of *Funny Games*, and Asbjørn Grønstad's *Downcast Eyes: Michael Haneke and the Cinema of Intrusion* (2008) in terms of *Caché*. Likewise Jean Ma's *Discordant Desires, Violent Refrains: La Pianiste* (2007) and Gautum Basu Thakur's *Re-reading Michael Haneke's La Pianiste: Schizo-politics and the Critique of Consumer Culture* (2007) are of the articles employed in the case of *La Pianiste*.

The second strand of discourse surrounding Haneke's oeuvre that this study relies on is located in the period 2009 – 2011, when a slew of books on the director were published. Catherine Wheatley's *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image* (2009) and Brian Price and John David Rhodes' *On Michael Haneke* (2010) are important in this regard. Stefanie Knauss and Alexander D Ornella's *Fascinatingly Disturbing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on*

Michael Haneke's Cinema (2010) and Oliver C Speck's *Funny Frames: The Filmic Concepts of Michael Haneke* (2010) are also very valuable texts that this study grapples with on various levels. A range of interviews conducted with the director by various journalists, and published in a variety of publications, including *Cineaste* and the *Bright Lights Film Journal*, are also drawn from. Although not strictly literature, the interviews that Serge Toubiana conducted with the director, and which form part of the special features on the DVD releases of some of his films, have also been useful.

The second sphere of research relates to Heidegger's existential philosophy, particularly his notion of Being as always being-towards-death. The sources drawn from here are of a primary and secondary nature. Primary sources include Heidegger's *Zein und Seit/Being and Time* (1927), *Was ist Metaphysik/What is Metaphysics?* (1929) and *Die Frage nach der Technik/The Question Concerning Technology* (1954). Secondary reading on Heidegger includes work by a number of Heidegger scholars. The most prominent texts here include Samuel Ijsseling's *Heidegger. Denken en Danken, Geven en Zijn* (1964), Otto Pöggeler's *Martin Heidegger: De Weg van zijn Denken* (1969) and SJ McGrath's profound *A (Very) Critical Introduction to Heidegger* (2008), which has played a very important part in the formulation of my argument. A number of edited anthologies addressing various aspects of Heidegger's work are also important in this regard, including Charles Guignon's *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (1993), which has proved invaluable. Wider philosophical references are of course also employed, including *A Companion to Continental Philosophy* (1999 [1998]), edited by Simon Critchley and William R Schroeder, and the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), edited by Edward Craig. To elucidate the criticism that Heidegger's work has elicited a number of sources are drawn from. These include Leora Batnitzky's *Leo Strass and Emmanuel Levinas. Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation* (2006), and Seyla Benhabib's *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (1996). Further information is drawn from *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (2002), Hans Jonas' *The Gnostic Religion* (1992 [1958]) and Richard Wolin's *Heidegger's Children* (2003 [2001]).

The process of framing Heidegger's work within the greater field of existentialism is supported by a number of primary existentialist texts. This includes Søren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* (1941 [1849]) and *Fear and Trembling* (2005 [1843]), Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006 [1883 – 1885]) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (2006 [1887]), and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* (2003 [1946]) and *Being and Nothingness* (1992 [1943]). This is supplemented by a variety of secondary texts,

including John Macquarrie's *Existentialism* (1972), David Cooper's *Existentialism. A reconstruction* (1999 [1990]) and *Existentialism. Basic writings* (2001), edited by Charles Guignon and D Pereboom.

1.4 Methodological approach

This study investigates Haneke's oeuvre by coupling a hermeneutic framework of analysis with the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger. The cyclical process of hermeneutic interpretation (Wachterhauser 1986:23), which Brice Wachterhauser (1986:16) outlines as "a historically situated, linguistically mediated, contextualist and antifoundationalist theory of understanding", is employed to outline the ways in which Heidegger's existential philosophy can be traced in the films under discussion. As a qualitative study it includes a literature review, looking at the relevant texts related to both Haneke and Heidegger. As very little has been written about the existential strands in Haneke's work the main texts referred to here are books and articles focusing on other themes of his oeuvre, but which in the process elucidate certain of the themes in the scope of the present investigation. The tracing of Heideggerian ontology within Haneke's oeuvre takes place in the light of Heidegger's ontological delineation in his texts *Being and Time*, *What is Metaphysics?* and *The Question Concerning Technology*, supplemented by a number of secondary sources. This will then provide the backdrop for a detailed analysis of the six films under discussion. This analysis focuses on three different elements, the first being how the Heideggerian strains of Being manifest in the trilogy's narratives. The second is the visual symbols employed in Haneke's frame, particularly those of homes, stark public spaces, cameras and televisions. The last is an examination of Haneke's formalistic trends, and how his cinematographic, mise-en-scène and lighting choices contribute to the Heideggerian notion of being-towards-death.

1.5 Overview of chapters

The present enquiry into the strains of Heideggerian ontology found in the oeuvre of Michael Haneke commences with a chapter on Haneke's body of work. This includes some biographical background on the director himself, as well as an overview of his

oeuvre, looking at the critical and commercial success of his different films. The chapter also includes some background on the director's various films, including his choice of actors, language of production and plot details. It is then possible to move onto a discussion of the critical discourse that surrounds Haneke's work, looking at the various thematic and formalistic elements that have been analysed by in the past. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Haneke's own views on his work.

Chapter three is an exploration of Martin Heidegger's question of Being. It includes Heidegger's biographical background, and then moves onto a brief overview of the major themes in his work, including the meaning and nature of Being, hermeneutics and the nature of understanding, and language. It then contextualises Heidegger's existential ontology within the greater field of existentialism. In the process it charts the trajectory of existentialist thought, elucidating the key authors and texts. It also gives a brief overview of the most important existential themes. Before discussing Heidegger's delineation of Being the chapter looks at the main criticism that has been levelled at the philosopher's ontology, outlining the concerns of, amongst others, his students Hans Jonas and Emmanuel Levinas.

At this point the stage is set for the elucidation of Heidegger's concept of Being, *Dasein*. Three different delineations of Being are then elaborated upon, which all have a particular bearing on the existential strains that will be discussed in terms of Haneke's oeuvre. This chapter thus first looks at Being as being-in-the world, a state which Heidegger (1962 [1927]:79) defines as "the relationship of Being which two entities extended 'in' space have to each other with regard to their location in that space". It then links this Being as always being-in-the-world with another one of Being's delineations, that of Being as always being-with-others. This being-with-others encompasses the fact that, according to Heidegger (1962 [1927]:155, emphasis original) "the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of *Dasein* is a *with-world*. Being-in is *Being-with-Others*, Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with*". Finally it examines the notion of Being as always being-towards-death, which Michael Haar (1993:3) elucidates as "only by way of a relation to its death can *Dasein* grasp its own temporality". Piotr Hoffman (1993:197) argues that "Dasein's authenticity requires the lucid acceptance of one's own death, it is precisely because *Dasein*'s totality can be revealed only in its being-towards-death", and this becomes particularly significant within the context of Haneke's work, as a theme which can be traced across his oeuvre.

Chapter four applies the delineations of *Dasein*, demarcated in chapter three, in an analysis of Haneke's first three films, his *Vergleitscherung-trilogie*. It specifically focuses on the way in which Being as being-in-the-world and being-with-others are manifested in these three films. This analysis thus looks at three different elements within that delineation. The first is the notion of thrownness, which Haneke places within the context of postmodernity and its sprawl of urban discontents. The second is Haneke's treatment of the public space as a marker of Western society's commodified existence. This is linked to Haneke's depiction of the larger social framework within which the individual functions, and how the director explores the way society manifests itself as *Das Man*. The third strain focuses on how Haneke depicts the private space of home not as a safe haven from these commodified public spaces, but instead as a cocoon of death. This is in turn linked to Haneke's depiction of the family unit as sterile and disconnected. Chapter five presents the same three-part structure, but its focus is Haneke's later films, specifically *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste* and *Caché*.

The emphasis on Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world and being-with-others in chapters four and five is eventually followed by the third, and most significant of the three strains of Heideggerian ontology employed in the present analysis – the notion of Being as always being-towards-death, which comprises chapter six. Examining all six films that form part of the scope of this study, this chapter examines three common themes laced within Haneke's oeuvre – that of anxiety, where, as Haar (1993:41) contends, an awakening to one's *Dasein* is "marked by ... a climate of anxiety", the notion of the Heideggerian demise (or physical death), and lastly, existential death. The ways in which Haneke's films employ the concept of nothingness (Heidegger's *das Nichts*) in their greater existential framework, and reflect the notion of thrownness as a trajectory towards death, are also discussed.

Chapter seven is a conclusion to the study. It offers a brief summary of the chapters, and ties up a number of loose ends. This includes drawing links between the criticism levelled at Heidegger and that levelled at Haneke, and a discussion on how these overlap. The chapter also suggests the possible contributions that the study has made to both the understanding of Heideggerian ontology when used within the framework of visual studies, and to the body of work which theorises the work of Michael Haneke. The limitations of the study are pointed out and suggestions for future research are made.

Chapter 2: An introduction to Michael Haneke

Before launching into an analysis of the six Michael Haneke films under discussion, some background on the director's life and work is perhaps warranted. This background covers a number of fronts. Firstly I will briefly recount Haneke's biographical background, including his main career shifts, delineating the path that eventually brought him to directing feature films. The discussion then moves onto an overview of Haneke's oeuvre, noting the countries Haneke has chosen to work in, and the critical and commercial success of his various films. Defining Haneke's oeuvre in terms of three periods of production, the next section provides a more detailed background of his various films. This includes information regarding plot and narrative, some thematic elements, and the actors Haneke chose to work with. To frame my own analysis I also offer an introductory look at the critical discourse of Haneke's oeuvre, delineated as two waves of critical thinking about the director's work. The discussion concludes with some of the director's own thoughts on his work.

2.1 Haneke's life and work

2.1.1 Biographical background

Michael Haneke is an Austrian filmmaker born in Munich in 1942. His family were involved in the theatre, his father Fritz Haneke a theatre director, and his mother Beatrix von Degenschild, an actress. Haneke grew up with his aunt in Vienna, but as with all of Haneke's biographical information, very little detail about this arrangement, or the reasons for it, is available. What is known is that after graduating from high school Haneke pursued his studies at the University of Vienna, majoring in psychology, philosophy, and theatre. Upon finishing his degree he worked as a film and literature critic for various newspapers, and Alexander Horwath (1991:15) describes Haneke as being very interested in modernist literature, and existential philosophy.² By 1970 Haneke was back behind the stage, writing, directing and producing plays. This was followed by a period as television director for the German public broadcaster Südwestfunk, where Haneke eventually directed eleven television films between 1974 and 1997. During that period Haneke married and had four children, and made his first feature film, *Der Siebente*

² Unfortunately very little is known about Haneke's specific interests within the sphere of existential philosophy, and Horwath does not elucidate his statement any further.

Kontinent, in 1989.

2.1.2 Overview of Haneke's oeuvre

Der Siebente Kontinent forms part of what is commonly known as the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, and includes the films *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. The trilogy, as well as Haneke's next film, *Funny Games*, were all in Haneke's native German. This changed with *Code Inconnu / Code Unknown* (2000), when Haneke stopped making films in Austria, moving his filmmaking activities to France, where better funding was available (Frey 2003:2). All his films from *Code Inconnu* until the last film released, *Das Weisse Band* (2009), have consequently been in French, even in the case of films not set in a French-speaking country, like *La Pianiste*,³ an adaptation of the novel by Elfriede Jelinek. Other films from this period include *Caché* and *Le Temps du Loup* (2003). Haneke's films have enjoyed different levels of success. His first films garnered critical praise, and were nominated for a number of European awards (Wheatley 2009:18), but were by no means box-office successes, each film grossing less than \$500 000 worldwide, and the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* films grossing considerably less.⁴ It is only later, with films such as *La Pianiste*, which won the *Grand Prix* award at the Cannes International Film Festival, and *Das Weisse Band*,⁵ which won the prized *Palme d'Or* award, also at the Cannes International Film Festival, that his work has been internationally recognised. This international recognition has also had a significant effect on the box-office earnings of his films, starting with *La Pianiste*, which earned more than \$9 million worldwide, and which has steadily increased with each subsequent film, with *Das Weisse Band* grossing \$19 million worldwide.

2.2 Background: Films

2.2.1 The *Vergletscherung-trilogie*

Michael Haneke's first three films, produced between 1989 and 1994, are commonly

³ *La Pianiste* is set in a French-speaking Vienna.

⁴ These figures are drawn from information appearing on the website Box Office Mojo, which details the gross domestic and foreign box office earnings of various international films.

⁵ *Das Weisse Band* marks Haneke's shift away from his Francophile emphasis of the last number of years, with a film both set in Germany and a screenplay written in German.

referred to as the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* (*Glaciation trilogy*). The trilogy, consisting of the films *Der Siebente Kontinent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, was first dubbed as such after Haneke (2000:174) referred to the common theme of the emotional glaciation of society which underlies all three films. The films have little in common in terms of plot. *Der Siebente Kontinent*, starring Dieter Berner, Birgit Doll and Leni Tanzer, depicts an upper-middle class Austrian family who become discontent with their suburban, late-capitalist lifestyle, eventually systematically destroying their entire home, and then committing suicide. Based on a true story and the only film co-written with another screenwriter (in this case Johanna Teicht) the film marked Haneke's debut as feature filmmaker with the common themes he would return to again and again in his later films – a bleak view of contemporary society, the complex dynamics underlying relationships within families and within the broader social sphere, the menacing way in which violence is always lurking beneath the supposed civil veneer of our lifeworld, and the irrefutable presence of death.

Haneke followed *Der Siebente Kontinent* with *Benny's Video*. Starring Arno Frisch, Angela Winkler and Ulrich Mühe, the film introduces the viewer to the 14-year old Benny and his family, and to Benny's world of endless technological simulacrum, of a room full of cameras, television and computer screens. During the course of the narrative the dysfunctional communication between Benny and his other family members is explored, particularly within the context of him killing a girl he brings home one day from the video store, with a bolt gun he stole from his family's farm. The film is marked by the way in which violence and reality are technologically mediated within Western society, themes which have since ebbed and flowed throughout Haneke's oeuvre. They are also prominent in Haneke's last instalment of the trilogy.

The *Vergletscherung-trilogie* concludes with *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. The film showcases eight different parallel narratives that seem to have nothing in common with one another. Each narrative focuses on one or two characters of widely diverse genders, ages and socio-economic backgrounds, depicting the very mundane elements of their daily lives, until the point where all the characters die in a random shooting. The film stars Gabriel Cosmin Urdes, Lukas Miko, Otto Grünmandl, Anne Bennent, and Udo Samel, who had also starred in *Der Siebente Kontinent*. This trend of re-casting actors used in earlier films has become a hallmark of Haneke's career, Michael Lawrence (2010:65) referring to Haneke having a "stable of actors", many of whom crop up again in his later

films.

2.2.2 Films released 1997 – 2003

Haneke's next film, the last of his films to be set in Austria and filmed in German, *Funny Games*, evades easy description. Starring Susanne Lothar, Frank Giering, and Ulrich Mühe and Arno Frisch, who both starred in *Benny's Video*, the film features a seemingly simple narrative of a family vacationing at their summer home, who meets two young strangers who come asking to borrow eggs and stay to torture the family and eventually kill them. Whereas the subject matter may suggest a schlock approach, Haneke's method of layering the film with different levels of problematic engagement adds to its ambiguous nature. *Funny Games* also continues Haneke's trend of not only recasting actors from earlier films, but also recycling the same names of characters. Permutations of the names Georg, Anna, and Eva are used for the characters of father, mother, son and daughter, as is also the case in *Funny Games*.

As mentioned earlier, *Funny Games* marks the end of what some theorists have delineated as his Austrian-German phase. His next film, *Code Inconnu. Récit Incomplet de divers Voyages*, was set and shot in France, and the international financing he was able to procure at this point in his career is evidenced not only by the geographical shift, but also in his casting choices, moving from relatively unknown actors to A-list art-house actors. *Code Inconnu* thus features actress Juliette Binoche, alongside Thierry Neuvic and Alexandre Hamidi. Whereas his first four films dealt mainly with the covert and overt violence of Austrian society, *Code Inconnu* marks a thematic departure for Haneke, his narratives shifting to a wider European context, examining the complexities of post-colonial Europe. As in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, Haneke again plays with various parallel narratives in the film. Set in Paris, this includes the narrative of Binoche's character Anne, an actress, and her boyfriend Georges, a press photographer in war-torn countries, both French, and two immigrants, the homeless Maria, from Romania, and Amadou, from Mali.

In 2001 Haneke's adaptation of Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* was released. *La Pianiste* returns to Haneke's original Austrian setting, but continues the trend of now shooting in French. It also mirrors *Code Inconnu* in its choice of actors, casting A-list Isabelle Hupert as the music professor Erika Kohut, alongside Annie Girardot and Benoît Magimel. The film chronicles Kohut's tumultuous relationship with her mother, and her foray into various

elements of fetishist sexuality, including self-mutilation, voyeurism and sadomasochism. As already mentioned this film marked Haneke's international breakthrough, winning various awards around the world, including the *Grand Prix* award at the Cannes Film Festival. Isabelle Hupert returned for the lead role of Anna in Haneke's 2003 film, *Le Temps du Loup*. Deriving its title from Norse mythology and the concept of the *Ragnarök*, the film is a harrowing tale of a family trying to survive in post-apocalyptic Europe. Set in France and written in French, the film also stars Anaïs Demoustier, Lucas Biscombe, and Hakim Taleb, and continues to touch on Haneke's tropes of immigrant anxiety in contemporary Europe.

2.2.3 Films released 2005 – 2009

The immigrant conflict is again revisited in Haneke's 2005 film *Caché*. The film is set in Paris, written in French, and tells the story of the upper-middle class Laurent family, Anne (Juliet Binoche), Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and their son Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky). The family starts receiving videotapes through the mail, surveillance-style camera footage of their home, along with crude childlike drawings of violent acts. As the mystery unravels Georges again comes into contact with Majid (Maurice Bénichou), the child of Algerian immigrants with links to Georges's family history. *Caché* was followed by Haneke's shot-by-shot remake of *Funny Games* in English, in an American setting, now titled *Funny Games US*. Starring Naomi Watts, Tim Roth, Michael Pitt and Brady Corbet, the film was a commercial failure, grossing just more than it had cost to produce.

Haneke's latest film, *Das Weisse Band*, was released in 2009. It brought Haneke his first *Palme d'Or* award at the Cannes International Film Festival, and received an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film, as well as a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film. Also Haneke's first film to be shot in black and white, it is set in pre-World War One Germany, its narrative concerned with a small German village where mysterious events are taking place. The film stars, among others, Christian Friedel, Ulrich Tukur and Josef Bierbichler. Less overtly violent than Haneke's earlier films, *Das Weisse Band* is more subtle in its rendering of cruelty and violence.

2.3 The critical discourse of Haneke's oeuvre

2.3.1 The first wave

The discourse surrounding Haneke's oeuvre can roughly be divided into two waves of critical engagement. The first wave of discourse originated around 1991, with the publication of Alexander Horwath's *Der Siebente Kontinent: Michael Haneke und Seine Film*, the first book to be published on Haneke's work. This was followed by articles mostly written by European film theorists, and includes the work of Herbert Hrachovec (1996) and Karl Suppan (1998). British and American interest in Haneke's work followed a little while later, and the first English articles on his films started appearing in film journals around this time, of which Amos Vogel's *Of Non-existing Continents: The Cinema of Michael Haneke* (1996) is perhaps the earliest. There are two elements that characterise this first wave of critical thought – the multidisciplinary nature of the research done, and the approach taken to categorise Haneke's work. This approach categorised Haneke's oeuvre based on language, country of production and subsequent origin of financing, delineating two periods in Haneke's career as filmmaker – the German-Austrian period, and the French-France period.⁶ The distinction is drawn further, toward subject matter, where Haneke's German-Austrian period is seen to deal with issues which pertain to Austrian society, while his later films branch out into more widely applicable international themes, with a particular emphasis on the racial (immigrant-driven) conflict in Europe.

According to this typology a thematic delineation of his oeuvre would then entail a focus on roughly four main themes. The first is the aforementioned focus on conflict between Europe and its immigrant-influx. This postcolonial take on the harsh lines of division which still exist in contemporary society is seen in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, *Le Temps du Loup*, *Code Inconnu*, and *Caché*. His treatment of this theme takes on different manifestations. One of the narrative fragments of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* features a young Romanian boy who enters Austria illegally and is living on the streets of Vienna. The character is used to offset the wealth and subsequent clinical coldness of Austrian society, his inability to speak German becoming symbolic of the communication divide between the wealthy European countries and their struggling neighbours whose immigrants are hoping for a better life within their borders. *Le Temps du Loup* employs a post-apocalyptic horror vision of displaced families to comment on the

⁶ Mattias Frey's *A Cinema of Disturbance: The Films of Michael Haneke* (2003) is one of the clearest (and earliest) examples of this categorisation, and it continues throughout the Haneke discourse, including in the research done by theorists such as Gautam Basu Thakur (2007).

way Europe has shrugged off these aforementioned neighbours, countries like Bosnia and Serbia, where people live in conditions shockingly different to what is considered normal in countries such as Haneke's native Austria.

Code Inconnu is the first of Haneke's films that explicitly deals with the racial violence that erupts from the conflict between the once-coloniser and once-colonised, examining how the master-slave power relations are still firmly in place. This theme is picked up again in *Caché*, where the character of Georges Laurent, an upper-middle class presenter of a television show on French literature, is confronted by a ghost from his past, the son of an Algerian couple who used to work for his parents. The boy, who lost his parents during the Algerian riots in Paris in 1961, has grown up and seeks vengeance from Georges, who convinced his parents to not adopt the orphaned child. The festering bitterness and hate that results from the colonial injustices are brought into play here, with the film elucidating the complex history and its lingering social palimpsests, Max Silverman (2007:5) arguing that "*Caché* offers some hope that the 'infernal circle' of the colonial paradigm may be broken by the dialogue and shifting perspectives of a postcolonial paradigm". Asbjørn Grønstad (2008:141) extends this idea even further, contending that "Haneke's poetics of negation marks the confluence of many of the values of cinematic modernism, on the one hand and, on the other, what is inarguably the most ethically perceptive and politically sincere response from the film establishment to the global transformations that have taken place since 9/11".

Within this first wave of critical theory, the second thematic strain of Haneke's oeuvre is that of sadomasochistic sexuality and the notion of perversity. It is however only prominently featured in one of Haneke's films, *La Pianiste*, and most of the articles that were published on the film during this first wave utilised it as their point of departure. The film tells the story of Erika, whose penchant for Schubert and sadomasochism, voyeuristic tendencies, and the incestuous relationship with her mother have provided scholars with ample material for psychoanalytic readings of the film. John Champagne (2002:2) considers it "a film about the impossibility of female desire", while Jon Davies (2003:1) suggests that "Haneke presents her sexual masochism as a pathological sublimation of her repressed emotions and abusive relationship with her mother" casting Erika's desires as perverse instead of acknowledging that sexuality exists within a trajectory of possible permutations.

The reading of Haneke's work as *Zivilisationskritik*⁷ (civilisation critique) figures as the third thematic strain explored in the first wave of critical discourse on Haneke's work, and has branched out into a sphere of discourse where Western society comes under fire for its obsessive consumption, its lack of meaningful communication, and the way in which it is constantly shaped by the glare of the popular media. Haneke's *Vergleitscherung-trilogie* has borne the brunt of this discourse, these themes being blatantly obvious across all three of his early films. Mattias Frey (2002:2), for instance, links *Benny's Video* to the work of Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, Marc Augé, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, situating Haneke's spaces within the context of Augé's concept of supermodernity, which suggests that the postmodern spaces in which we function make it impossible for us to establish any meaningful connections with others, a salient point when considering the dysfunctional human interaction so common in Haneke's oeuvre. But certain theorists have argued that Haneke does not limit this critique to the *Vergleitscherung-trilogie*, but continues the critique in his later films as well, as Gautam Basu Thakur (2007:140) contends concerning *La Pianiste* – "*La Pianiste* is not a melodramatic film about a psychologically disturbed character and her relationship with her mother; rather, more importantly, it is a meticulously crafted critique of modern culture".

This critique of modern culture is extended in the last trope of discourse to be discussed, that of violence and the media. The way in which Haneke's films deal with the nature of violence, the viewer's complicity in and response to cinematic torture, and the ethical and moral responsibility of the filmmaker have all been exhaustively commented upon by Haneke scholars. Amos Vogel (1996:73) was one of the first theorists to discuss the contentious way Haneke handles violence, focusing specifically on the *Vergleitscherung-trilogie*. Vogel is interested in the way in which a film like *Benny's Video* trumps audience expectation in its brute, yet off-screen depiction of murder, and the coupling of media and violence throughout the film, opening up a whole different avenue of investigation. These early films are still important within this trope of critical discourse. Brigitte Peucker further (2000:176) argues that "in each film, a socio-political concern with the fragmentation of the family as an organic unit can be said to play itself out at the level of the plot through a series of acts of violence to the body", and this strand of discourse erupted with Haneke's next film, *Funny Games*. Typified by its "ludic violence" (Hart 2006:65) and "lack of moral doubt" (Le Cain 2003:8), *Funny Games* has since perhaps become Haneke's most written-about film, with verdicts rendered by theorists ranging from enraging to enlightening. Haneke's American remake of the film, titled *Funny Games*

7 As mentioned by, among others, Frey (2002, 2003, 2010).

US, again brought the film into the spotlight, with reviews erring decidedly on a negative front, albeit mostly from American critics. Oliver C Speck (2010:87) suggests that the Anglo-Saxon culture class viewer's discomfort with Haneke's film arises from the fact that the director suggests "that the typical viewer is just as complacent about violence, just as unreflected, as the consumer of cheap thrills". It should be noted that this theme did not only garner attention in *Funny Games*, but extends to Haneke's later European films. The way in which violence (toward the self, and toward the other) is laced throughout *La Pianiste*, and is a recurring motif in films such as *Code Inconnu* and *Le Temps du Loup*, has also widely been discussed (cf. Gallagher 2008; Hutchison 2003; Ma 2007; Sorfa 2006; Wigmore 2007).

2.3.2 The second wave

The publication of Catherine Wheatley's 2009 study *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*, could perhaps be said to mark the start of the second wave of critical discourse on Haneke's work. Considering the density of Haneke's films and the way in which they lend themselves to interpretation, there was surprisingly little written on his work during the 1990s and early 2000s. This started changing in the late 2000s, when a boom of critical engagement took place in 2009 and 2010, with no fewer than nine books published on his work, along with a host of academic articles. Again it is interesting to note the multidisciplinary nature of these engagements, working from such diverse fields as spectatorship theory, theological studies, and psychoanalysis. It could also be argued that the second wave features a less rigid approach when it comes to categorising Haneke's work, employing more holistic frameworks to consider the entirety of his oeuvre, not subdividing it into pockets of thematic similarity. Wheatley's study can be considered within this rubric, employing a combination of spectatorship theory and Kantian ethics to both position Haneke as one of the last modernist filmmakers (Wheatley 2009:22), and suggest the existence of a certain ethic inherent to his auteurist cause. Likewise Speck, in his *Funny Frames: The Filmic Concepts of Michael Haneke* (2010), "frames" Haneke's work within a "hermeneutic construction" which functions as "the image of a shift" (Speck 2010:2). Speck argues that what many theorists have termed as Haneke's films advocating a "return-to" earlier, modern values/morals/traditions is anything but that, and that to position Haneke as an ethical moralist/modernist goes against the grain of his entire oeuvre.

Some of the themes of the first wave of discourse are revisited in the second wave, but in

reinterpreted ways. Gerhard Larcher (2010:58) suggests that “Haneke observes closely, yet from a distance. He is an empiricist of social and private violence, who leaves ruptures and dislocations as they are, and even more, he opens up gaps, which provoke something in the audience and which require their reaction and attention”, highlighting how the role of the audience becomes perhaps one of the most important focal points of second-wave discourse. This reinterpretation is for instance also seen in second-wave discussions of violence, as Stefanie Knauss and Alexander Ornella (2010:2) argue that “in particular in *Funny Games* or *Benny’s Video* ... he makes it clear that the consumers of such media violence are far from innocent victims of what media force them to watch, but rather accomplices in this culture of violence and contempt of the dignity of the human person”.

The role of the director as social prophet also becomes significant within this strain, as Christian Wessely (2010:81) explains,

Haneke’s films are a provocation. But “to provoke” ... does not only mean to needle someone, but literally to summon, to request or – even more interesting – to wake someone up. Haneke clearly assumes that a filmmaker has a social responsibility, and he tries to fulfill it for himself by shaking up society and awaking it from the sweet slumber of ignorance.

This reinterpretation is also marked by a focus on subtle nuances of the classic Haneke themes, Brian Price and John Rhodes (2010) suggesting that “how to entertain and to probe both Haneke’s clarity and his opacity is the challenge for those who wish to think about his work”. In this way, for instance, one finds psychoanalytic explorations of guilt and the gaze in *Caché* (Manon 2010), and discussions of “the ontological question of television” (Sutherland 2010:170) in Haneke’s work. It also includes elements of Haneke’s oeuvre that have not yet garnered much attention, such as the role of prayer (Zordan 2010:127), or Haneke’s “recurrent interest in the pain of children” (Peucker 2010:26).

This study draws from both first and second-wave discourse to establish a theoretical framework for positioning Haneke’s films. At times the presented argument might however err on the side of second-wave discourse. The second wave’s more holistic approach complements my notion of how Haneke not merely employs existential themes in a haphazard, superficial manner, but has it ebb and flow throughout his entire oeuvre, in both form and content. At this juncture a discussion of Haneke’s own perspective on his work is perhaps warranted.

2.4 Haneke on Haneke

Far from playing the reclusive auteur, reticent about speaking about his own work, Haneke has consistently, throughout his film career, granted interviews and spoken at length about his cinematic project.⁸ This not only reveals a few interesting truths about the director himself, but also about his purported intentions as an artist working within contemporary society. Thus drawing from these interviews (in both print and audiovisual format), as well as Haneke's own notes on certain of his films, a few recurring strains come to the fore. This includes Haneke's insistence on film as "an artificial construct" (Porton 2005:51), his role within the process of creating that object of illusion, and his thoughts on the greater role of the artist, specifically within the context of offering a foil to commercial filmmaking. These discussions introduce other elements of the director's thought – his insistence on polysemic readings of his films, his status among film theorists as a moralist filmmaker, and the applicability of his films to not only the locale in which they are set, but to the entirety of the developed world. Lastly, and particularly insightful for the purposes of this study, a brief overview of Haneke's philosophic and religious involvement will be discussed.

Based on his influences in film and literature, Haneke has been classified by some theorists as one of the last modernist filmmakers (Wheatley 2009:22), and echoes of the modernist ethic are found in great abundance in his views on his own work. In a *Cineaste* interview of 2005, Haneke speaks about the craft of filmmaking in decidedly modernist terms: "Film is an artificial construct. It pretends to reconstruct reality. But it doesn't do that – it's a manipulative form. It's a lie that can reveal the truth. But if a film isn't a work of art, it's just complicit with the process of manipulation" (Porton 2005:51). This view is found again and again in Haneke's speaking about the cinematic project, with various sub-currents becoming a familiar refrain through the various discussions. This includes his notion that the artist is only responsible for raising certain issues, highlighting them in the mind and subconscious of the viewer, but not providing answers of any kind (Grundmann 2009:10). Haneke even admits his irritation at the viewer's need for answers, since "only liars have the answers" (Day 2009:sp). The frustration viewers have at the lack of information offered by the director in his films, including a lack of plausible character psychology to explain the often violent behaviour on-screen, and the fragmentary nature of the plot presented to the viewer, are well documented. It is also something, the viewer

⁸ The inclusion of quite hefty interviews on his individual films, conducted by Serge Toubiana, as part of the special features on DVD's of Haneke's films, ensure that it is not only the Haneke scholar who has access to the director's views on, and interpretation of, his own work, but the viewer in general.

learns, that is not a haphazard event but clearly informed by the director's cinematic ethic. Haneke likens his strategic exclusion in both his thematic and formalistic choices to that found in modernist literature (Horwath 2009:28), also reiterating his appreciation of the modernist emphasis on a cohesion between form and content, and his attempt at mirroring this.

There are other elements in Haneke's cinematic strategy that also allude to this modernist underpinning. This includes his firm and consistent iteration that his oeuvre is intended as a reaction to mainstream film (Porton 2005:51). This juxtaposition between his films and the popular nature of mainstream film again evokes the modernist high/low art distinction, which is reinforced by Haneke's many references to Theodor Adorno, arguably the poster child of this dichotomy. Haneke positions his films as a foil to the reassuring qualities of mainstream cinema ('Every film rapes the viewer' 2009:sp), telling Christopher Sharrett (2003:31) in a *Cineaste* interview that "my objective is to unsettle the viewer and to take away any consolation or self-satisfaction". This strategy, Haneke argues, is part of the way in which film does not necessarily change the world, but makes it "a less sad place than it already is" (Badt 2005:sp). The implication that Haneke's films are thus part of this process of rendering the world as less sad than it already is, is again a provocation, especially in the light of the way in which Haneke's films have enraged certain viewers and critics. In fact, this animosity the director's work evokes is clearly seen in many of the questions posed to the director in the interviews conducted over the last ten years. These range from "you leave your viewers in a state of hopelessness" (Oehmke & Beyer 2009:sp) to "why should we go to the movies just to be slapped in the face?" (Oehmke & Beyer 2009:sp). This view is echoed by film theorists such as Charles Martig (2010:36), who, in his article *How much Haneke do we deserve?*, aggressively suggests that "Haneke is actually motivated by an artistic approach that tries to push everything to the extreme: the spectators themselves become part of this turmoil, in fact they themselves become the object of the abuse". These contrasting opinions offered on Haneke's work by the director himself and those at the mercy of what Martig (2010:35) refers to as Haneke's "philosophical-cinematic sadism", can perhaps best be understood not only within Haneke's discussion of his own role as an artist, but also his greater worldview.

Haneke's worldview is a favourite theme that trails throughout discussions critics and journalists have with the auteur, and which, according to the director, also frequently

crops up when speaking to viewers of his films.⁹ Although Haneke seems hesitant to speak about his personal life, he does illuminate some of the fundamental ideas that inform his thinking about the world. This includes his understanding of contemporary society within the Western world, his feelings towards greater humanity, and subsequently, his stance on what some theorists have termed the moralistic underpinning of his films (Wheatley 2009:20-21). Haneke answers accusations of his films as portraying a very nihilist perspective on the world by suggesting that “there is just as much evil in all of us as there is good” (Day 2009:sp), reiterating in a different interview, “everyone is capable of everything, of all kinds of viciousness as well as the opposite” (Horwath 2009:30). This view of a lost humanity is also reflected in the director’s view on Western society, arguing that it is “loveless” (Horwath 2009:29). And in fact, Haneke makes a point of consistently reminding critics and viewers that his films are not commentaries on the locales in which they are set, but that the themes of each film are applicable within every Western country, and that he is indeed diagnosing a wider cross-continental affliction (Porton 2005:50; Grundmann 2009:11). Within this framework, and considering the subject matter of Haneke’s films, of collective family suicide, of children killing strangers and blaming it on their parents, of severely dysfunctional families and romantic relationships, and of the cruelty of life in late capitalist Western society, it becomes quite clear why some theorists read the director’s oeuvre as a largely moralist project. The issue of morals come up quite often in interviews with the director, and Haneke (Funny Games: Michael Haneke interview:sp), in a Culture.com interview, makes his position quite clear:

It all depends on what you mean by a ‘moralist’. If you mean a preacher, then I hope I’m not one. But on the other hand there is such a thing as aesthetic morality. I think that respect for the audience is also a matter of morality, treating the audience as grown-ups. I don’t want to treat the audience as if they are more stupid than I am. And that is, if you like, a moral stance.¹⁰

This “moral stance” is perhaps best discussed in the light of Haneke’s insistence on the audience’s role in his work.

The one element that Haneke returns to most often in his various conversations over the years, is the importance he seems to attach to polyemic readings of his work, stating that “a hundred people in front of a screen in a cinema sees not one film, they see a hundred films” (Haneke 2000:171). He consistently reiterates the lack of agency the viewer has in watching mainstream film, where all decisions are made for them by the director,

9 In an interview with Richard Porton (2005:50) in the winter edition of *Cineaste*, Haneke amusingly recalls a screening of *Der Siebente Kontinent* where an audience member, greatly disturbed by the film, asked him if he had had an unhappy childhood.

10 It should however be noted that Haneke does at times depart from such a respectful framing of society, and of his audience, defending the way in which the vague elements of his films infuriate viewers by claiming that “the dumber people are the more they feel the need for a broad set of shoulders they can lay their head against” (Adams 2009:sp).

suggesting that part of his role as filmmaker is to reinstate the viewer in a position of power in the process of meaning-making (Grundmann 2009:13). It is interesting to note how the director is constantly reminding reviewers that their readings of his films are only their personal interpretation, and that an adherence to such a monolithic view robs his work of its multidimensional possibilities (Grundmann 2009:9). Yet his liberal post-Barthesian position is at times undermined by the director's own misgivings about certain readings of his work, and quite a few instances are presented where Haneke clearly disagrees with interpretations suggested by his audience. This is highlighted by his admission in a 2009 interview that "unfortunately, you're helpless when people interpret your work wrongly" (Adams 2009:sp). This also corresponds to the strong sense of confidence Haneke seems to have in his own work, where, on being asked if he would change anything about his earlier films, usually responds with "just a shot or two" (Funny Games: Michael Haneke Interview:sp), an attitude reflected in his shot-by-shot American remake of *Funny Games*, *Funny Games US*, which the director argues was done in such a way because "I had no need to do it differently" (Krasinski 2008:76).

Working within a hermeneutic framework of interpretation, which itself fits into the greater post-Barthesian discourse of current visual culture studies, Haneke's views on his work will obviously not be an important underpinning of this study. They will thus be incorporated in a sparing manner in the analysis of the films done within the next number of chapters, to either elucidate elements of Haneke's films that seem particularly obscure, or add another perspective within the critical discourse surrounding the director's oeuvre. A last element that should be taken into consideration, particularly within the light of the fact that this study explores the existential nature of Haneke's work, is his personal views on religion and existentialism. As the director is very reluctant to speak about his personal life the information to be garnered on these subjects is little. What *is* known is that Haneke was raised Protestant, and had, just like Heidegger, wanted to become a priest in his teenage years, but that he does not have any kind of religious faith anymore. As he tells Alexander Horwath (2009:28), "faith per se is something positive; it generates meaning. I for one have no religious faith anymore. Tough luck! Because if you do, you have a different, more contented view of life". Haneke has also refused questions about whether he still believes in the existence of God, arguing that these types of questions are akin to questions about his sexual behaviour, and that he considers it too intimate to discuss with journalists (Day 2009:sp). Film critic and curator Horwath, who has been an acquaintance of Haneke's since the early 1970s, has also commented on his intense interest in existentialist thought during this time. Considering the surprisingly little scope that the

existential themes in Haneke's work have garnered in critical discourse, it is perhaps not surprising that this strain of enquiry has also not been followed up by any journalists or critics interviewing Haneke, and Horwath's (1991:15) lone reference thus remains the only pointer to the director's interest in existential philosophy.

2.5 Conclusion

In his interview with Horwath (2009:29), Haneke admits to viewing "the society I live in as pretty loveless", something which comes as no surprise to those familiar with the director's work. In order to analyse the existential foundation I suspect might play an important role in understanding Haneke's films, a number of elements are thus elucidated in this chapter. This includes some information on Haneke's biographical background, as well as providing an overview of the director's different films, ranging from his first feature film, *Der Siebente Kontinent* in 1989, to his most recent film, *Das Weisse Band*, in 2009. The 10 films that span his 22 year career as feature film director are further discussed within the context of the different modes of discourse that have developed around Haneke's work over the course of his career. Two main strands of discourse are delineated; a first strand that originates around 1991, that focuses on the director's recurring themes of postcolonialism, sadomasochistic sexuality, violence and media, and life within postmodern society. The second strand of discourse develops around 2009, and is marked by its multidisciplinary nature. The chapter concludes with an examination of the ways in which Haneke has chosen to categorise his own work, and the philosophical and moral frameworks he employs in speaking to the audience. It also highlights the apparent existential interest the director has shown. In order to then fully understand the existential impetus *this* study positions at the centre of its critical enquiry, an introduction to Martin Heidegger is indeed warranted at this point.

Chapter 3: An introduction to Martin Heidegger

In order to adequately discuss the manifestation of Heideggerian ontology in the work of Michael Haneke, it is perhaps necessary to firstly discuss various elements related to Heidegger's life and work. This chapter thus includes a brief overview of Heidegger's life, delineating both his biographical brass tacks and his intellectual genealogy. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the major themes found within Heidegger's philosophy, explaining the four phases of thought, to steal John Caputo's (1999:223) term, that his work could be categorised in. In order to contextualise the one phase that this study is particularly interested in, that of existential philosophy, an overview of this movement is also included. In addition, as an introduction to Heidegger's existential ontology, the major criticism levelled at his philosophy is outlined, particularly focusing on the criticism of his former students, including Hans Jonas and Emmanuel Levinas. The chapter finally concludes with a discussion of Heidegger's existential ontology. This discussion is configured around a few of the philosopher's core concepts – *Dasein*, Being as being-in-the-world, Being as being-with-others, and finally, Being as being-towards-death.

3.1 Heidegger's life and work

3.1.1 Biographical background

Martin Heidegger was born in Meßkirch, Germany in 1889. After finishing school he spent two years at Freiburg University, pursuing his studies to become a priest. Heidegger later diverged from this theological path, eventually earning his doctorate in philosophy in 1913, and started teaching at Freiburg University in 1915. It was at Freiburg that Heidegger met and eventually was mentored by Edmund Husserl, a philosopher whose work would have a great influence on Heidegger's philosophy. Heidegger would however later depart from Husserl's thinking in quite a substantial way. Heidegger ultimately left Freiburg University for Marburg University, taking up the position of professor in 1923. Heidegger's most seminal work, *Being and Time*, was published in 1927, and shortly thereafter Heidegger returned to Freiburg to replace the retiring Husserl as the chair of philosophy. He would eventually become rector of the university after Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, and joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The fact that Heidegger publicly espoused Hitler's cause has been one of the greatest

causes of criticism against him, and against his work (Sheehan 1998:3). This has been compounded by the fact that Heidegger never publicly apologized for his stance on Nazism, nor retracted any of the pro-Nazi statements made. This has, not surprisingly, exposed his philosophy for critique on moral and ethical grounds. Heidegger stepped down from the rectorate post in 1934, and spent the next number of years living a solitary life writing in the Black Forest. From 1950 onwards he again started teaching on occasion, and died in 1976.

Aside from *Being and Time* Heidegger published a large number of philosophical texts. Most of these texts, including *Einführung in die Metaphysik/An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953) and *Die Frage nach der Technik/The Question Concerning Technology* (1949), were published as part of the *Gesamtausgabe/Collected Edition*, a collection of Heidegger's most important work, and which currently spans 102 volumes. The collection has not yet been completed.

3.1.2 Overview of the main themes in Heidegger's work

Although the particular focus of this study is an aspect of Heidegger's existential philosophy, it is important to note that his body of work also comprises a number of other important elements. Caputo (1999:223) argues that Heidegger's thinking can be split into four distinct phases, of which the existential turn would be the second phase. The first was Heidegger's theological thinking, which stemmed from his time spent in seminary. His thesis at Freiburg University was concerned with medieval scholastic logic (Caputo 1999:223), and influences at this time include Husserl, Thomas of Erfurt, Meister Eckhart and Saint Augustine. Heidegger started breaking away from this Christian-Catholic impetus towards 1919, although his theological background would remain to play an important role in his thinking, appropriating certain concepts from the Christian tradition (McGrath 2008:102).¹¹ He started investigating the meaning of Being, and entered his existential phase. Although Heidegger did not see himself as an existentialist (McGrath 2008:6), it could be argued that his most seminal work does indeed fulfil the requirements of an existentialist way of thinking. Apart from the existential themes which *Being and Time* and a number of other works from this period are concerned with, Heidegger was at

¹¹ McGrath (2006:12) makes a convincing argument for the idea that Heidegger's later philosophy is still greatly influenced by the Lutheran tradition, even suggesting that "*Sein und Zeit* is not a secularisation of Luther but a hermeneutical complement to Luther, in a sense, a Lutheran phenomenology of Dasein". Heidegger's notion of death, the importance of anxiety, and even the role of the conscience bear interesting links to his earlier religious education.

this point in time also writing about language. His focus on hermeneutics and understanding, as well as the links between language and being-in-the-world, would contribute to his later writings which saw language as the house of Being (Heidegger 1993:193). Influences from this time again include Husserl, but also Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard.

In 1936 Heidegger's thinking again bore signs of transformation. Caputo (1999:228) notes that Heidegger started writing in "a deeply poetic tone", abnegating many elements he had written about earlier, including the notions of human subjectivity, metaphysics and humanism (Caputo 1999:230). This poetic tone is also seen in his emphasis on meditative thinking, and the 1989 publication *Beiträge zur Philosophie/Contributions to Philosophy* marks this *Kehre* in the philosopher's thought. Heidegger's final phase can be read as a continuation of the *Kehre* in the sense that it was concerned with delineating Being in a different manner than he had done before. It again stressed the poetry that was needed at this time, a period of technological ascendancy that marks the end of an epoch (Caputo 1999:233). Heidegger felt that a re-dreaming was necessary to create a new epoch which would hearken back to the start of the first epoch, when Greek thinking established the notion of the West.

3.2 An introduction to existentialism

Despite Heidegger's disregard for the term, a study of his work would be incomplete without briefly contextualising the philosopher's existential strains within the greater field of existentialism. Yet pinning down the brass tacks of existentialism remains a problematic project. There tends to be some argument about its exact history and delineation, whom to include and exclude. This is of course compounded by the fact that Heidegger was not alone in his refusal to enter the club of existentialists – most of the thinkers aligned with the term expressed similar sentiments. In this brief introduction I thus direct my thinking along the axes of, respectively, David E Cooper, Charles Guignon and SJ McGrath's thoughts on the framing of the movement. Within this makeshift delineation I briefly discuss existentialism's main historical trajectory, including its seminal thinkers and texts, and Heidegger's position within such a history. The discussion then moves onto the main themes found within existential philosophy.

David E Cooper (1999 [1990]:5) frames existentialism by arguing that it occupies a place within a larger genealogy of philosophical thought about the nature of existence, perhaps

stemming from the philosophy of existential phenomenology. Cooper (1999 [1990]:13) does however acknowledge that “in its mature form, [existentialism] could not have developed much earlier than it did”. Charles Guignon (2001:xiv) expounds this notion by suggesting that the final blossoming of the existentialist movement resulted from the modern worldview first propagated in philosophy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It comes as no surprise that this modern worldview, largely shaped by the increasing emphasis on science, and subsequently fuelled by the modernist ideals of objectivity, rationality and progress, cast reality in radically new terms. Not only is the general idea of an inherently meaningful, coherent cosmos discounted, but the notion of God and his relation to the earth and humanity is largely lost. Guignon (2001:xv) explains this modern worldview by stating that “to see things in this way requires ... to see the universe as a vast aggregate of meaningless brute objects, lacking any inherent value or significance”. This line of thought eventually leads to a view of the world as not only fundamentally indifferent to those who inhabit it, but also characterised by a lack of any inherent meaning, a world permeated by nothingness.

Exploring existentialism in historical terms is, as already mentioned, not the easiest of tasks. There seems to be two lines of thought. The first is the generally accepted idea that “very much a mid-twentieth century philosophy, existentialism thematizes modern dread in the face of sudden mass mobilization, technological warfare, and the dehumanization of urban life” (McGrath 2008:7). The second line of thought highlights the problematic consequences of such a historically specific delineation of existentialism, arguing that “to describe existentialism as an expression of an age ... is to suggest that its claims could be only temporarily and locally valid” (Cooper 1999 [1990]:13). Although I agree with the sentiments put forth by the second line of thought, and view the claims made by existentialism as not only valid for a specific historical period, I also think that it would be naive to discount the formative influence of modernity. The historical trajectory of important figures and texts that I thus offer attempts to tread a fine line between these two lines of thought. Within this trajectory there are thus four key philosophers – Søren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980), and a number of key texts. These key texts include Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* (1882), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883 – 1885) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), and Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946). There are also a number of other, slightly more marginal figures including Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Jaspers, José Ortega y Gasset, and Martin Buber.

3.2.1 Existential themes and dissidents

Perhaps the most salient existential theme, and one which is a central tenet of Heidegger's characterising of *Dasein*, is the idea that being is fundamentally an issue for human beings (Guignon 2001:xviii). This notion of self-reflexivity and awareness is echoed in the work of major existential philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre, as well as in that of more minor figures, like Jaspers and Gasset. In Sartre's case (2003 [1946]:91) this line of thought develops into his famous dictum *existence precedes essence*, which highlights the malleable nature of being, the way in which it is not pre-determined. Instead being is always evolving, moulding itself as it spins between the individual and the lifeworld it has been thrown into. Sartre (2003 [1946]:91) argues that, rather than being a victim of a set destiny and a set sense of personhood, the individual plays a very active role in determining his own being. His everyday life, and the choices he makes as part of that, constitutes a large part of that agency. In line with this sense of change and evolution, both Heidegger and Sartre emphasise the temporal nature of being, as an "ongoing happening" which reflects its "particular sort of temporal structure" (Guignon 2001:xix).

This conception of being highlights our fundamental freedom as human beings. This freedom is a double-edged sword – on the one hand the freedom of one's being entails liberation, excitement, possibilities. On the other hand it places the individual within a world devoid of greater meaning, greater agency, ultimately devoid of God. The engendered responsibility is thus so great that it emphasises only the alienation of the individual, and the very real fact that he is dependent only upon himself (Cooper 1999 [1990]:3). This sense of alienation and unease is a common thread which runs throughout existential philosophy, bearing a variety of different names – Kierkegaard's despair, Sartre's nausea, Heidegger's anxiety. Conceptualised in various ways throughout the different philosophers' work, this feeling of alienation and unease is a result of a variety of factors, which can include the very act of existing, the sense of homelessness which existence invokes, and the realisation of our own responsibility in making meaning. Yet this feeling is generally regarded as playing a redemptive role within the existential project, most notably because it forces the individual to become aware of his own being, and his place in a fundamentally indifferent world.

Existential nausea (or anxiety, or despair, depending over which philosopher's shoulder you're looking) also fulfils a third purpose, that of separating the individual from the

greater group of people he shares his world with. The issue of co-habitation, on a very practical as well as intensely metaphoric level, is relevant in the work of most existential philosophers. In Heidegger's terms this means that being is always already being-with-others, as Guignon (2001:xxv) writes, "we are always 'thrown' into a concrete context with determinate meanings and values laid out by the practices of a particular historical community". This co-existence is however not cast in an entirely positive light – whilst Heidegger warns about the dangers of *Das Man* (the They), Nietzsche addresses the problematic nature of the herd, of an existence within a group which renders the individual spiritually neutered, devoid of creativity. Kierkegaard too considers this problem, writing about the nature of "the public", as Guignon (2001:xxx) explains, "in our day-to-day existence, we tend to drift along into the public ways of acting, doing what 'one' does and we assume that our lives are justified so long as we are conforming to the norms and conventions accepted in our social world". Functioning as part of the herd, of the public, of *Das Man*, means that the individual shies away from an authentic existence,¹² and the question of his being.

There are two main strands of criticism levelled at existential philosophy. The first strand of criticism sketches it as a philosophy only relevant to people who are living in the first world, and belong to the upper-middle classes. The second focuses on what is seen as existentialism's moral relativity, especially in the light of Heidegger's Nazism and Sartre's somewhat dubious comments on violence and anarchy. Both of these strains of criticism can to some degree also be drawn back to the work of Michael Haneke, as can elements of the greater criticism of Heidegger's work in particular.

3.3 The critical backlash against Heidegger's work, and his greater legacy

Although *Being and Time* has been cited by many as perhaps the most important philosophical text of the twentieth century, it has also, along with Heidegger's later body of work, elicited its fair share of criticism. It is interesting to note that of the most important criticism levelled at Heidegger's philosophy comes from his former students, a

¹² An in-depth delineation of Heidegger's notion of authenticity is offered later in this chapter. Within the current context it is however worth mentioning that authenticity refers to the individual's willingness to embrace his own finitude, and thus by implication, his death.

group which includes Hans Jonas, Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas and Leo Strauss. This becomes an especially interesting element considering that all these students were of Jewish descent, as Richard Wolin (2003 [2001]:2-3) explains – “Heidegger’s most gifted students – many of whom were Jewish – strove to confront their profound indebtedness to German intellectual traditions given the obscene uses to which those traditions had been put during the Nazi era”. The fact that Heidegger never publicly apologised for his involvement with Nazism aggravated this situation, and Wolin (2003 [2001]:3) argues that that places Heidegger in a position shared by many “Germans of his generation ... [who] never engaged in a serious attempt to work through the sins of the German past”.

As mentioned earlier, this problematic aspect of Heidegger’s personal life also constitutes the greatest measure of criticism against his work. But the critique by Heidegger’s former students also lies on a number of other fronts. Karl Löwith, who has the distinction of being Heidegger’s first dissertation student, examined Heidegger’s work in the light of the Nazi movement. Arguing that Nazism should not be situated within a particular German context, but that its roots can rather be found within the greater history of the West, Löwith examines *Being and Time* by seeking “out the intellectual roots of the crisis in the nineteenth century, when educated men and women abandoned the balance of German classicism (Goethe and Hegel) for the extremes of existentialism, scientism, and nihilism” (Wolin 2003 [2001]:13).

Approaching Heidegger’s philosophy from a decidedly different angle one finds the criticism of student Hans Jonas. Jonas writes at length about the problematic nature of the lack of ethics in Heidegger’s work (Wolin 2003 [2001]:103), but also considers Heidegger’s *Being and Time* within its greater existential framework. Jonas attacks the nihilism of existentialism, which he traces back to what he considers is its fundamental similarity to Gnosticism. From this vantage point the existential project, which Heidegger’s work forms part of, is criticised firstly for positing itself as a meta-narrative explaining the nature of human existence across all of history. Jonas (1992 [1958]:321) then explains existentialism’s relationship to Gnosticism by suggesting that

Existentialism, which claims to be the explication of the fundamentals of human existence as such, is the philosophy of a particular, historically fated situation of human existence: and an analogous (though in other respects very different) situation had given rise to an analogous response in the past.

Jonas also criticises the dualism between man and world which seems to result from

existentialism, and which is made clear in *Being and Time*, a dualism Jonas perceives as negative, destructive. This jarred relationship between man and world forms part of existentialism's nihilist enterprise. Jonas (1992 [1958]:338) goes on to explore Heidegger's philosophy of temporality to finally purport that "the same cause which is at the root of nihilism is also at the root of the radical temporality of Heidegger's scheme of existence, in which the present is nothing but the moment of crisis between past and future".

This nihilist perspective of Heidegger's philosophy hints at the criticism levelled by another of Heidegger's students, Hannah Arendt. Arendt was particularly concerned about Heidegger's sketching of the concept of the world, where she suggests that "'world' has become an utterly impersonal and loveless notion. As such ... [Heidegger's] description threatens to backslide into the 'objectivating' discourse that *Being and Time* sought to surmount" (Wolin 2003 [2001]:42). Arendt is joined by fellow student Leo Strauss (1989:32), who in turn questions whether anxiety, which is at the basis of existentialism, should be seen as the most fundamental experience of life. Strauss (1989:32) does not negate the existence and prevalence of anxiety. Instead his reading of Heidegger's philosophy brings to the fore a second concern, which is that anxiety is a malaise particular to our time, and not, as Heidegger would suggest, to the entire history of man. Strauss also extends his criticism to two other important elements. The first is the lack of ethics within the existential enterprise, which Strauss (1989:36) argues by stating that "to be, in an authentic way, means to be in an authentic way to others: to be true to oneself is incompatible with being false to others. Thus there would seem to exist the possibility of an existential ethics, which would have to be, however, a strictly formal ethics", but laments the fact that "Heidegger never believed in the possibility of an ethics". The second concern Strauss voices is related to Heidegger's religious perspective. Strauss (1989:38) points out what he believes is a discrepancy in Heidegger's religious argument, where he purports that

Heidegger demanded from philosophy that it should liberate itself completely from traditional or inherited notions which were survivals of former ways of thinking. He mentioned especially concepts that were of Christian theological origin. Yet his understanding of existence was obviously of Christian origin (conscience, guilt, unto death, anguish).

This discrepancy is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Heidegger's ontology.¹³

¹³ SJ McGrath considers this discrepancy in his *Early Heidegger and Medieval Scholasticism: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (2006). A similar ambiguous relationship with religion is also found in Michael Haneke's work, as will be discussed later.

Emmanuel Levinas, the student who introduced Heidegger to France (Critchley 2002:1), continues the critique of Heidegger's ethical basis. Levinas (2003 [1982]:9) was profoundly influenced by the philosopher's thinking, whilst at the same time experiencing a "profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy". His criticism of Heidegger's philosophy lies mainly on two interrelated fronts – Heidegger's view of the others the individual shares his world with, and the implications such a view has on ethical and moral terms. Levinas argues that by sketching people as the impersonal, inauthentic *Das Man*, Heidegger renders it impossible for the individual to interact with others on a personal front, on a front where their shared humanity is the common link. When this level of indifference exists between people, the heinous crimes against humanity that took place in the last century, of which the Holocaust is the most salient (and in this Heideggerian context, relevant) example, are made possible. Levinas sketches this indifferent attitude to those the individual shares his world with as being underpinned by a general lack of ethics. This lack of ethics is the main reason Levinas sees Heidegger's philosophy as morally bankrupt, as Leora Batnitzky (2006:9) explains, "for both Strauss and Levinas, in declaring an end to metaphysics Heidegger also declared an end to absolute claims about morality".

Despite these criticisms Heidegger's legacy within the context of continental philosophy is immense and far-reaching; in the words of Jürgen Habermas and John McCumber (1989:434), his work presents to the world "the most profound turning-point in German philosophy since Hegel". Caputo (1999:231) even suggests that "in the broadest sense, every important Continental movement today stands under Heidegger's shadow and has to define itself in terms of his "destruction of metaphysics". Although his reputation has been severely tainted by his involvement with Nazism, many critics argue that his work is still incredibly valid for our time, as Michael Zimmerman (1993:501) notes:

Today's planetary ecological and social problems, which result at least in part from modernity's project of gaining technological control over nature, provide grounds for continuing to study Martin Heidegger's critique of modernity and its domineering impulse, despite the fact that that same critique once led him to embrace National Socialism.

But the influence of other elements of his philosophy can also not be discounted. The way in which "Heidegger makes interpretive understanding the central mode of human existence" (Hoy 1993:170) played a large part in what has been termed the "hermeneutic turn" of Continental philosophy. This has been a very influential movement in the second part of the last century, where "hermeneutics is no longer conceived of as simply one

minor branch of philosophy. Instead, philosophy itself becomes hermeneutic” (Hoy 1993:172). Based on Heidegger’s take on interpretive understanding, and developed further (albeit in different directions) by Hans-Georg Gadamer (another of Heidegger’s former students), and Jacques Derrida, the hermeneutic turn sparked a revolution in thought. Ironically this would also lead to Heidegger, forever cursing the modern cause, ending up as the de facto grandfather of postmodernism. Postmodern conceptions of being, understanding and temporality have crystallised in the wake of the change in thought wrought by *Being and Time*, and are part of Heidegger’s larger legacy. Lastly it should also be noted that Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is still, despite the philosopher’s protestations to the contrary (Caputo 1999:229), considered the most important text within the existentialist canon (Dreyfus 1993:289). As the present enquiry is concerned with this particular aspect of Heidegger’s work, it is thus to the concept of *Dasein* that the discussion now turns.

3.4 Heidegger’s existential ontology

3.4.1 *Dasein*

Heidegger starts his existential enquiry into the nature of being by firstly positing the question of what it means to be, to exist, which in turn introduces his second question, what it means to be the type of being which can ask such a question, thus introducing the concept of *Dasein*. These questions, Heidegger argues, are important largely because being is such a slippery signifier, one which philosophy has largely been unable to define, and which Heidegger (1962 [1927]:23) terms the darkest concept of all. As McGrath (2008:61) contends, “the history of philosophy, Heidegger tells us, is the history of the forgetfulness of being. Not only do we have a problem posing the question of being today, *Being and Time* reminds us that we have always elided the question”. In his effort to define Being Heidegger thus rejects a number of tenets which he believes has, in the history of philosophy, stood in the way of understanding being. This includes a shift away from the onto-theological orientation of the philosophical tradition. Within Heidegger’s terminology onto-theology is used as another term for metaphysics, which Heidegger considers problematic because it renders moot the very important question of what he terms *Dasein*, Being. If, according to the metaphysical tradition which undergirds most of Western philosophy, all beings originate from an original substance which precedes existence, like Plato’s forms, or Aristotle’s’ unmoved mover, *Dasein* too is always already

explained. As McGrath (2008:73) so succinctly puts forth, “metaphysics ... allows us to elide the question of the meaning of being by presenting the origin of beings as a foregone conclusion: we always already know where beings come from (God); hence we can ... limit our thinking to the ontic”.

Within Heidegger’s (1962 [1927]:31, emphasis original) view this is a grave mistake, as he explains in *Being and Time*, “all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task”. Heidegger attempts to do just that in his examination of *Dasein*. He starts by countering the onto-theological stance by situating *Dasein* as something devoid of metaphysical roots. Since it does not originate from some primary original essence (like a Creator, or God), *Dasein* itself has no determinate essence. Instead it has the freedom to make itself, and awaken the individual to his Being, as Otto Pöggeler (1994:41) argues, “as potentiality-for-Being or understanding, *Dasein* is ‘primarily a Being-possible’”. Shying away from a more abstract, metaphysical sketching of Being, Samuel Ijsseling (1986:133) suggests that Heidegger’s *Dasein* is “structurally characterized by a fundamental openness to the world and to itself ... This openness, the possibility that there be something to do, to see and to say is of a primarily practical nature”. This “openness” reveals the multi-layered nature of *Dasein* – not only does it have the ability to enquire into its own being, but it also understands that very being (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:78). This means that *Dasein* is always in the process of moving towards an understanding of its being, in Heidegger’s (1962 [1927]:287) terms, akin to the way a “fruit brings itself to ripeness”. It is this characteristic of *Dasein* which illustrates the fact that the word means both being *here*, and being *there* – not only does *Dasein* reflect the current state of its being, but it also always already has within itself the possibilities of its future development.

Continuing his quest to define being, Heidegger rejects a second tenet which he believes has stood in the way of understanding being. This tenet is centred around the notion of being as an essence configured outside its world. Jill Hargis (2007:56) explains this by suggesting that Heidegger works with “a phenomenology that grounded human existence fully within its temporal and physical world”. Thus *Dasein* has at once both the freedom to make itself, of having no determinate essence, but is still constrained by the circumstances it finds itself in, by its world. Heidegger’s use of the concept *world* here denotes the historic set of circumstances without which *Dasein* could not exist, and always already implies the concept of a shared existence, Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* as *Mitsein*.

At its core, the concept of *Mitsein* negates the idea of the individual existing as an independent entity configuring its own being. Its existence is dependent on the intersubjective nature of the relationships that he is always already intertwined in (Tuttle 2005 [1996]:66). It is impossible to escape; it is a very real part of his being. This highlights the fundamentally situated nature of *Dasein* – the individual exists within a certain lifeworld, and that lifeworld, of a specific time and place, is what makes *Dasein* possible in the first place. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:36) indeed reiterates that “the kind of Being which belongs to *Dasein* is rather such that, in understanding its own Being, it has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant – in terms of the ‘world’”. It is this situatedness which also makes our understanding of Being possible, as McGrath (2008:8) argues, “understanding is not only mediated by history, it is constituted by it”. This reveals *Dasein*’s inherent temporal nature, Heidegger (1962 [1927]:1) stating that “our provisional aim is the interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being”, which Heidegger (1962 [1927]:40) also refers to as “temporal determinateness”. McGrath (2008:59) even suggests that “time makes possible the language of existence/nonexistence”. *Dasein* is thus “*situatief begrens*d” (Pöggeler 1969:68), existing within the parameters of a world.

3.4.2 Being as being-in-the-world

Dasein’s fundamental situatedness reflects the first central tenet of the nature of Being – Being as always being-in-the-world. One’s existence is only made possible by the fact that it is existence within a particular world, one which man only escapes through death. IJsseling (1964:75) explains that it comprises of “het veld van belangstelling en interesse, van betrokkenheid en bekommernis ... het gehele veld van verre en nabije betekenissen/the field of interests, of involvement and care ... the entire field of close and distant meanings”. This world is one over which the individual has little, or no control over, as McGrath (2008:65) reiterates, “*Dasein* finds itself ‘thrown’ (*geworfen*) – in the midst of other *Dasein* and ‘innerworldly things’ that it does not create or control – into moods, horizons of interpretations, and historical discourses that began prior to its arrival and will continue after it is gone”. *Dasein* thus finds itself always already implicated within a particular set of temporal, historical and linguistic relations, to which the individual orientates himself by initiating a relationship with the world which is based on care.

Care is a very important part of Heidegger's delineation of Being as being-in-the-world. As Heidegger (1962 [1927]:84) explains, "because Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein, its Being towards the world [Sein zur Welt] is essentially concern". This concern illustrates man's relationship to the world, one that at once originates from his familiarity with the world, and highlights his personal involvement and contribution to its functioning. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:80) illuminates this idea by explaining the etymology of the words *being-in-the-world*, noting that "'In' is derived from 'innan' – 'to reside', 'habitare,' 'to dwell' ... 'An' signifies 'I am accustomed', 'I am familiar with', 'I look after something'".

Pöggeler (1969:66) reiterates the importance of this concern, or care, by suggesting that it is "the fundamental structure of Dasein". It is characterised by its pragmatic nature; the individual cares about the world because of his personal involvement in it; the world affects both his life and his Being. Consequently Hargis (2007:57) argues that "Heidegger's fundamental ontology is the search for an understanding of the world as the home of being", and this extends not only to the relationship between the individual and the other people who co-inhabit his world, but also the relationship between the individual and the objects he encounters in the world. Heidegger sees these objects as equipment, equipment which is never neutral, but is "functionally related to all the projects, thoughts, and concerns of Dasein" (Tuttle 2005 [1996]:58).

Heidegger thus delineates care as consisting of three elements – anxiety, facticity and fallenness. Anxiety will be discussed in greater detail later, in relation to its relationship with Being as always being-towards-death. Facticity bears some resemblance to thrownness, as the concrete situations we have not chosen, and that we cannot control or escape from.¹⁴ Falling, on the other hand, is the way in which *Dasein* seems to always be turning away from the truth of its Being, from the reality of its situatedness within a particular facticity, which Howard Tuttle (2005 [1996]:60) describes as *Dasein* being "concerned with the present and yet ... [being] alienated and turned away from the actuality of its own world". Heidegger (1962 [1927]:225) even argues that "Being-in-the-world is in each case for the sake of itself. The Self, however, is proximally and for the most part inauthentic, the they-self. Being-in-the-world is always fallen".

¹⁴ Jill Hargis (2007:54) makes a compelling case for reading Heidegger's delineation of being-in-the-world as specifically linked to the experience of the modern, and of life within a modern society. Although this is not the focus of the current discussion it does bear some interesting significance to Michael Haneke's treatment of being-in-the-world, and the modern condition.

The distinction between authentic/inauthentic is an important part of Heidegger's delineation of *Dasein*, as well as his eventual exploration of *Das Man*. To be inauthentic, in Heidegger's terms, means an attempt to escape one's temporality, that which is fundamentally a marker of *Dasein*. As Caputo (1999:227) explains, "Dasein does not 'have' temporality as a defining feature, but Dasein is temporality, the very process of temporalizing, of tim-ing (*Zeitigung*)". An authentic sense of *Dasein* would thus consequently entail a *Dasein* which embraces its temporality, embraces its situatedness in the world and its always impending being-towards-death. Ijsseling (1964:134) considers Heidegger's authenticity as something which implies a very strong connection to both its *Dasein*, and the world it inhabits. The enquiry into being, it could thus be argued, starts by a negation of the inauthentic practice of falling, where McGrath (2008:74) contends that "the early Heidegger tells us that we neither can nor should want to extricate ourselves from that into which we have been thrown: to understand is to think our way into the strengths and limits of the way of seeing constitutive of our time". Heidegger links this temporal worldview with the machinations of *Das Man*, an element of the individual's being-with-others.

3.4.3 Being as being-with-others

If, as Hargis (2007:57) contends, "being reveals itself only in the world of relations between people and between people and entities in their world", then the individual's being-in-the-world also already implies a being-with-others. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:155) asserts this by stating that "the world of *Dasein* is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with-Others*. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mitdasein*]" . It is a world the individual does not wholly occupy, but needs to share with others. This is an element of his *Dasein* which he has no choice over; it prefigures his existence in the world. The others of the individual's world are, to a certain extent, the most important elements of what make up that world, and his relationship to them is what makes the relationship to any other objects, Heidegger's *equipment*, possible. As Heidegger (1962 [1927]:154) subsequently writes,

The Others who are thus 'encountered' in a ready-to-hand environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such 'Things' are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others – a world which is always mine too in advance.

IJselling (1964:92) equates this idea with the notion of the individual inheriting his world from those he shares it with and those that came before him – “de taal die ik spreek, het huis dat ik bewoon, de vrijheid die ik geniet, het denken dat ik doe, het geloof dat ik belijd, dat alles is een geschenk/the language I speak, the home I live in, the freedom I enjoy, the thoughts I have, the faith I profess, all of this is a gift”.

Although this relationship with others is for the most part one of care, Heidegger does however delineate instances in which the relationship with others leads towards an inauthentic *Dasein*, and not an authentic one. As explained earlier, whereas an authentic *Dasein* accepts and embraces his/her finitude, an inauthentic *Dasein* denies it, or flees from it. It is this inauthentic case of *Dasein* which Heidegger connotes with the concept of *Das Man*, or the They. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:154) defines *Das Man* by suggesting that “by ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too”. By being-in-the-world and sharing that world with others, the individual is slowly immersed in the machinations of *Das Man*, to such an extent that Heidegger (1962: [1927]164) argues that “this Being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own *Dasein* completely into the kind of Being of ‘the Others’, in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the ‘they’ is unfolded”.

It is when the individual cannot extricate himself from the common discourse of the multitudes that the authenticity of his *Dasein* is called into question. This entails an adherence to the common ideals of *Das Man*, which in turn has been “constituted by the way things have been publicly interpreted” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:296). Hargis (2007:58) interprets this as an instance of distantiality, where “instead of experiencing one’s world and the Being in it, *Dasein* is distracted by the competitive and petty concerns of modernity, leaving *Dasein* distant from that which should be most important to it”. It could be argued that the most important element of *Dasein*’s constitution it negates, is the fact that Being is always already being-towards-death. For *Das Man* death is not a reality, it is something far off in the future, which plays no direct role in their everyday lives. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:298) suggests that *Das Man*’s nonchalant attitude about death acts as a tranquilising agent, a soporific lullaby of inauthenticity. As perhaps the most fundamental element of Being, the individual’s being-towards-death is glossed over, conveniently forgotten. It is to this fundamental element that the discussion now turns.

3.4.4 Being as being-towards-death

The indeterminate nature of *Dasein* entails that the individual needs to embrace the freedom of his existence. This means embracing the notion of death, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:284) attests, “in dying, it is shown that mineness and existence are ontologically constitutive for death. Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially”. This acceptance of death is the marker of an authentic *Dasein*, but can only be experienced through the death of others. Those who are left behind, Heidegger (1962 [1927]:281) argues, “can thus gain an experience of death, all the more so because *Dasein* is essentially Being with Others”. Indeed the nature of *Dasein* is such that it is always reminding those who remain of that which is no more – “when we speak of ‘Being-with’, we always have in view Being with one another in the same world. The deceased has abandoned our ‘world’ and left it behind. But *in terms of that world* those who remain can still *be with him*” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:282).

This awareness of death, which is necessary for an authentic *Dasein*, Heidegger suggests, comes at the price of the individual realising his own finitude, of understanding that death is always impending (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:294). This in turn causes great anxiety. Differing from fear, anxiety is not linked to something specific which can either happen or be averted, but as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:231) contends, “that in the face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite”. Also, as death is all-pervasive, anxiety in turn is neither here nor there (Hoffman 1993:202), in fact Heidegger (1962 [1927]:231) purports, “what threatens is nowhere”, linking anxiety to Heidegger’s notion of the nothing. Heidegger does however establish a link between the anxiety the individual experiences and the fact that his *Dasein* is fundamentally tied to its being-in-the-world. In fact, Heidegger (1962 [1927]:230-231) argues “that in the face of which one has anxiety ... is *Being-in-the-world as such*”, and that the individual only really understands his primordial being-in-the-world once he has experienced this anxiety (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:232). The people and objects that constitute the individual’s world are however not the cause of his anxiety, where Heidegger (1962 [1927]:231) suggests that “what oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it the summation of everything present-at-hand; it is rather the *possibility* of the ready-to-hand in general; that is to say, it is the world itself”. Yet anxiety causes the individual to lose touch with the relevancy of these people and objects to his life, a state in which “the world has the character of completely lacking significance” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:231). It is at this juncture that the individual can return to his own existential experience.

This return to the individual existential experience showcases how Heidegger sees anxiety as functioning in freeing the individual from the common reality accepted by *Das Man*. This process is of paramount importance, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:227) suggests that “as one of Dasein’s possibilities of Being, anxiety – together with Dasein itself as disclosed in it – provides the phenomenal basis for explicitly grasping Dasein’s primordial totality of Being”. *Das Man*’s attitude towards death is one of downplaying or evading it, always trying to distract man from his fundamental finitude. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:297) explains this by stating that in the case of *Das Man*, “death is understood as an indefinite something which, above all, must duly arrive from somewhere or other, but which is proximally *not yet present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat”. It is this constant effort to distract from the true nature of *Dasein*, as that which is always already being-towards-death, that Heidegger (1962 [1927]:298) finds problematic, because as he writes, “it is already a matter of public acceptance that ‘thinking about death’ is a cowardly fear, a sign of insecurity on the part of Dasein, and a sombre way of fleeing from the world. *The ‘they’ does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death*”. In this way the experience of anxiety becomes invaluable, as

In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The ‘world’ can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with of Others ... Anxiety throws Dasein back upon that which it is anxious about - its authentic potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:232).

It is this being-in-the-world which introduces the individual to the nothing.

In “*What is Metaphysics?*” Heidegger (1929:[sp]) notes that man becomes familiar with the nothing “in the fundamental mood of anxiety”. McGrath (2008:68) contends that “the question at the origin of Western philosophy, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ would never have occurred to us ... if the nothing were not hovering over everything as the source and fate of things that come to be”. The nothingness that the individual experiences is closely linked to his experience of being thrown into the world. The experience of being thrown is primordially linked to the individual’s *Dasein* which is being-towards-death. This death is not the dying of the physical body, which Heidegger (1962 [1927]:291) terms its *demise*, but that towards which *Dasein* is always extending itself, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:289) writes, “the ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-towards-the-end* of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. ‘As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die’”. As beings whose existence is delimited by

our being-in-the-world we are always already defined by death.

3.5 Conclusion

Karl Löwith (1994 [1986]:44-45) describes how Heidegger's students used to refer to him as "the little magician from Messkirch' ... His lecturing method consisted in constructing an edifice of ideas, which he himself then dismantled again so as to baffle fascinated listeners, only to leave them up in the air". In many respects this sounds like the experience of watching a Michael Haneke film, which I hope the following chapters will elucidate. In order to discuss Michael Haneke's work within the context of Heideggerian ontology, this chapter thus examined a number of relevant Heideggerian elements. This includes briefly looking at Heidegger's life, as well as the trajectory of his philosophy, and the various themes he wrote about over the course of his life. It framed Heidegger's existential ontology within the context of the greater field of existential philosophy, as well as pointing out what the main themes of dissonance has been from the philosopher's critics. Lastly it delineated the various concepts that form part of Heidegger's existential ontology, and discussed the interplay between *Dasein* and being-in-the-world, being-with-others, and being-towards-death. Within the work of Michael Haneke, this interplay becomes glaringly obvious, and it is to his films that this study thus now turns.

Chapter 4: Heideggerian ontology in the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*

Having sketched the greater context of this study, that of Michael Haneke's oeuvre and Martin Heidegger's existential ontology, it is to an analysis of Haneke's first three films, the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, that the discussion now turns. This analysis is configured around two elements of Heidegger's philosophy of Being – being as being-in-the-world, and being as being-with-others. These constitutive elements of Being are necessary in understanding Heidegger's notion of being-towards-death, which will be discussed at a later point in this study. Within this chapter the way in which Haneke's *Vergletscherung-trilogie* configures being-in-the-world and being-towards-death is analysed on three fronts. The first examines the role of the postmodern milieu in which Haneke's work is situated, a world of hyper technology and rampant consumerism. The second and third fronts of analysis elucidate two delineations of space (being-in-the-world), and people (being-with-others). The discussion is thus firstly centred around the way in which Heidegger's ontology of Being is found in Haneke's sketching of the public space, and of greater society. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Haneke's treatment of the private space, and the family unit.

4.1 Thrownness: Postmodernity and its discontents

It could be argued that throughout his oeuvre Michael Haneke offers the viewer a scathing critique on postmodern Western culture.¹⁵ The pessimism with which he portrays this technologically advanced society of late capitalism¹⁶ is most adamant in the

¹⁵ Throughout my analysis of Haneke's work I will be drawing on RL Rutsky's (1999:15-16) definition of the postmodern as a shift from the modern in its "conception of technology", where Rutsky (1999:4) frames postmodernity as comprised of "high technology". As Rutsky explains,

High technology is simulacral technology: a technology "of reproduction rather than of production," as Fredric Jameson has said of late-capitalist or postmodern technologies. What this technology reproduces – and thus puts "into play" – is representation itself, style itself. But then, representation and style have always been technological, supplementary, simulacral. In high tech, however, this simulacral status becomes an end in itself, rather than merely a means to an end of a copy of an original.

Of course Heidegger himself had written extensively about technology within the context of modernity in *The Question Concerning Technology*, a text which informs Rutsky's discussion of the postmodern and its relation to technology. That being said, although Heidegger's thoughts on modernism and how it becomes defined by technology will be incorporated into my discussion in a cursory manner, the current study does not provide the space for exploring this in full, particularly because of Haneke's emphasis on postmodernity as opposed to Heidegger's emphasis on modernity.

¹⁶ As drawn from Fredric Jameson's (2000:188) conception of the different stages of capitalism, and postmodernity's space within that of late capitalism.

Vergletscherung-trilogie, a stocktaking of how postmodernity has changed man's being-in-the-world as well as his being-with-others. This stocktaking reveals Haneke's perception of postmodernity as engendering a society cold and clinical in its ambition and hierarchical structuring. These postmodernist rules of engagement, Haneke's films seem to say, have brought about a wasteland of emotional and spiritual bankruptcy.¹⁷ Using an art form both highly technologically *and* capitalistically charged to deliver this critique, Maxmillian Le Cain (2003:9) has remarked that "Haneke's films ... diagnose the latest often technology-inflected forms of spiritual and emotional paralysis that are frequently ignored or treated only indirectly ... by the cinema". This diagnosis is made by placing his characters in relief to their thrown environment.

We are thrown, Heidegger suggests, into "circumstances to which we must orient our existence" (Tuttle 2005 [1996]:58). Within Haneke's films the viewer is confronted with characters that thus seem to be thrown into a world lodged between the modernist dregs of technological progress and postmodernity's disillusioned consumption. The late capitalist character of the thrown world is postulated throughout the trilogy by the characters' constant iteration of how hard they have worked for their positions and their lifestyles, but also through Haneke's focus on the spaces clearly signifying capitalist rhetoric, like that of the corporation Georg works for in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, or the bank in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. Haneke's not-so-subtle criticism of this system is also espoused throughout, but perhaps nowhere as explicitly as in the destruction of the household goods and money in *Der Siebente Kontinent* (figure 1). All three of the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* films take place in cities,¹⁸ industrial landscapes of city lights, highways and supermarkets. It reflects a monotonous existence in a world characterised by an ever-increasing proliferation of objects – rows and rows of packaged foods in supermarkets, houses full of furniture and appliances, highways full of cars that all look the same. The uniformity of the landscape is mirrored in the uniformity of the emotional and spiritual dispositions in the characters of these three films. The family in *Der Siebente Kontinent* is plagued by the same sense of meaninglessness as is Benny and his family in

17 Speck (2010:131) argues against reading Haneke's characters as "bankrupt consumers who have completely bought into capitalism", suggesting that it functions as "an implied conservative message that weakens or even belies the critical import of Haneke's films". Although I agree with Speck's general thesis of how Haneke's films certainly do not advocate a return-to a simpler, less technologically-driven time, I would suggest that Haneke pertinently chooses the tropes of capitalism and high culture and the class of the *bourgeoisie* because it hits his upper-middle class, cultured audience where it hurts the most.

18 *Benny's Video* is the one exception of the trilogy where the viewer finds a quite prominent interplay between the spaces of the city and the country. The infamous opening scene of *Benny's Video* features the killing of a pig in the pastoral space of an Austrian farm, where the distinction between those living on the farm (and responsible for the killing of the pig) is made in relief to those very clearly *not* living on the farm (Benny's parents). They seem out of place, not quite sure what to do whilst the pig is about to be killed. Benny clearly does not share their interest in the farm, mentioning to the girl he brings home that "it's so dead out there ... so boring".

Benny's Video, and which becomes the common refrain in the lives of all the characters of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, finding themselves in a world they did not create and have little control over, but which has largely shaped their Being. There is a sense of emotional numbing which pervades these narratives and their characters, modernity's obsession with progress now relegated to a life devoted to objects.



Figure 1: Anna flushing the family's savings down the toilet,
Der Siebente Kontinent. 1989.

Gautam Basu Thakur (2007:151) expounds this notion by stating that "Haneke's critique of consumerism is precisely a critique of this subjective destitution within a fantastical mechanised culture that promises an 'end of dissatisfaction' but destroys our ability to think or feel without being prompted by consumer products". This notion of a mechanised culture is one of the important themes which Heidegger's work in *Being and Time* remarks upon. Heidegger is especially concerned with the technological changes that had marked modernity, and the influence this would have on the individual's sense of authentic *Dasein*. He seems to be especially concerned about the view of technology as a neutral element, instead arguing that the way in which technology is used by mankind has very specific consequences (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:287).

In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger extends this critique, articulating two terms that are central to the discourse of technology – *technē* and *physis*. Within Heidegger's delineation *physis* is that which evolves naturally, which carries within itself the seed of its own evolution. *Technē*, in contrast, born out of human interference, is artificially constructed. SJ McGrath (2008:70) elucidates the tension between these two

terms by explaining that, according to Heidegger,

A culture whose *technē* is in dialogue with *physis* ... does not control or dominate the presence of beings, but waits for the event of their emergence. Modern *technē*, by contrast, makes everything available all the time ... nothing comes to be or disappears on its own because we have reduced everything to something that is constantly available.

Within this framework Heidegger's disillusionment with modernity becomes clear. It also bears interesting links to Haneke's dissatisfaction with the mechanised culture of postmodernity, which the director depicts as an endless conveyor belt of consumer products and existential angst.



Figure 2: Benny's room, awash with monitors and videotapes, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

Another element of Heidegger's (1954:sp) sketching of technology that is relevant to the study of Haneke's work, particularly within the context of the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, is that of *Gestell*, or Enframing. Continuing from the premise that technology is never neutral, Heidegger highlights the fact that the technology used by man directly affects his way of seeing the world, and consequently his being-in-the-world. Technology therefore frames man's perspective on reality, and thus wields an immense amount of power. Within Haneke's work this power becomes tangible, and his use of television sets, highways, and cameras (figure 2) render them objects of *Gestell* that play a very real role in the oscillation of *Dasein*. Considering Heidegger's sentiment, McGrath (2008:76) elucidates this by stating that "we do not feel at home in the technological world we have made for ourselves ... and we have lost our trusted guides". It is within this world of a

technologically-induced homelessness that Haneke's work can be situated.

4.2 The commodified existence of the public space, and postmodern society as *Das Man*

In the *Vergleitscherung-trilogie* Haneke's being-in-the-world and being-with-others is reflected in the characters' engagement with two types of spaces, public and private,¹⁹ and two types of 'Others' – the masses, or *Das Man*, and the more intimate relations within the family. When discussing Haneke's depiction of being-in-the-world it should be noted that a number of theorists (Frey 2003:3) have remarked upon the fact that Haneke's public spaces are what Marc Augé (1995) terms *non-places*, supermarkets, highways, airport terminals, postmodern spaces in which no organic personal growth or interpersonal communication is possible. This is indeed the case, with many of the primary spaces in which the characters function classified as non-places – the supermarket, bank and car wash in *Der Siebente Kontinent* (figure 3), Benny's favourite video store and the McDonald's in *Benny's Video*, as well as the subway which houses the Romanian boy or the bank in which all the characters of the film finally die, in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. These spaces are all characterised by the unequivocal way in which Haneke renders the city, and these non-places in particular, as sterile, cold, a place of isolation and alienation. In formalistic terms this is achieved by Haneke's use of stark, white interiors, harsh lighting, and awkward framing, and his almost ritualistic reiteration of certain soulless images of the city, of endless highways that don't seem to go anywhere, of anonymous apartment blocks and office buildings, of rows and rows of consumer products wrapped in endless layers of plastic, mirroring the disconnected emotional dispositions of those walking the aisles.

19 Speck (2010:79) argues that the families in Haneke's films act "in bad faith by erecting a bad immanence, a shutting out the outside world in the vain attempt to resurrect what has long been lost in postmodernity: the difference between public and private space". I partly agree with Speck's notion, conceding that Haneke's treatment of space, and especially the interplay between the mass media and the private space, certainly does elide the formal dialectic of private and public space, but these distinctions do however still exist in Haneke's oeuvre. Although there are many similarities between Haneke's rendering of the public and private space (as Chapter 4 and 5 hopefully points out), the spaces ultimately serve different purposes within Haneke's greater ontological project. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the public space/private space dichotomy is still called upon.



Figure 3: Georg and Anna in the car wash, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989

Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world is partly founded on the idea of the individual's *Dasein* being formed by the world into which he is thrown, and the spaces which he cares about. The intrinsic isolation and alienation of the world of Haneke (and Heidegger) is reflected in the way in which the public space, which conjures up thoughts of community, and connection, functions as anything but that.²⁰ The world outside Benny's bedroom window only reveals highways²¹ full of cars that all look the same, transporting people he does not know (figure 4). This is also seen in the mise-en-scène of Haneke's frames, as Monica Filimon (2010:245) argues, "fragmentation, isolation, and strict geometrical grids govern both the public and private diegetic spaces of the film". The degree of indifference in Haneke's public spaces is so extreme it often verges on cruelty. The way in which the Romanian boy in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* appropriates the subway as his new home is perhaps the most salient example in this regard (figure 5), but others abound,

²⁰ It should be noted that although Heidegger's formal categories of being are universal and thus not intended to be bound to any historical epoch, but instead as ways in which the human condition and man's existential nature can be understood, Heidegger also often swerves from this initial course and writes about *Dasein* specifically within the context of modernity, the period Heidegger himself experienced. Heidegger's notion that "... every understanding of Being is shaped by some sense of time" (Caputo 1999:225) thus paradoxically also reflects back on his own time, to such an extent that a number of scholars, including Hargis (2007:54) have commented on Heidegger's tenuous relationship with modernity, as she writes, "although Heidegger's *Das Man* was intended as an essential ontological category, it is so imbued with the conservative objections to the modern, industrial, urban masses that it operates more as a criticism of modern norms than as an ontological or timeless characteristic". This tension in Haneke's conception of being finds a worthy ontological partner in Haneke's own complex relationship with the postmodern.

²¹ Images of highways take up a central position in the taxonomy of Haneke's frames, an almost ritualistic metaphor the director consistently invokes. It could be argued that in Haneke's view the highway not only functions as the ultimate non-place, but is consequently also the public space which signifies most accurately the progress of postmodernity and the Western world, seamlessly encapsulating the modernist wet dream of speed, efficiency and technology.

like Evi's school or the car wash in *Der Siebente Kontinent*. The public spaces are where the characters interact with those that make their being-in-the-world possible, yet the interaction remains superficial. When Anna is in the supermarket in *Der Siebente Kontinent* she notices only the till and the goods which are being purchased, not once looking into the face of the cashier; the face of the video shop attendant in *Benny's Video* is similarly never seen, only the videos and money that are exchanged.

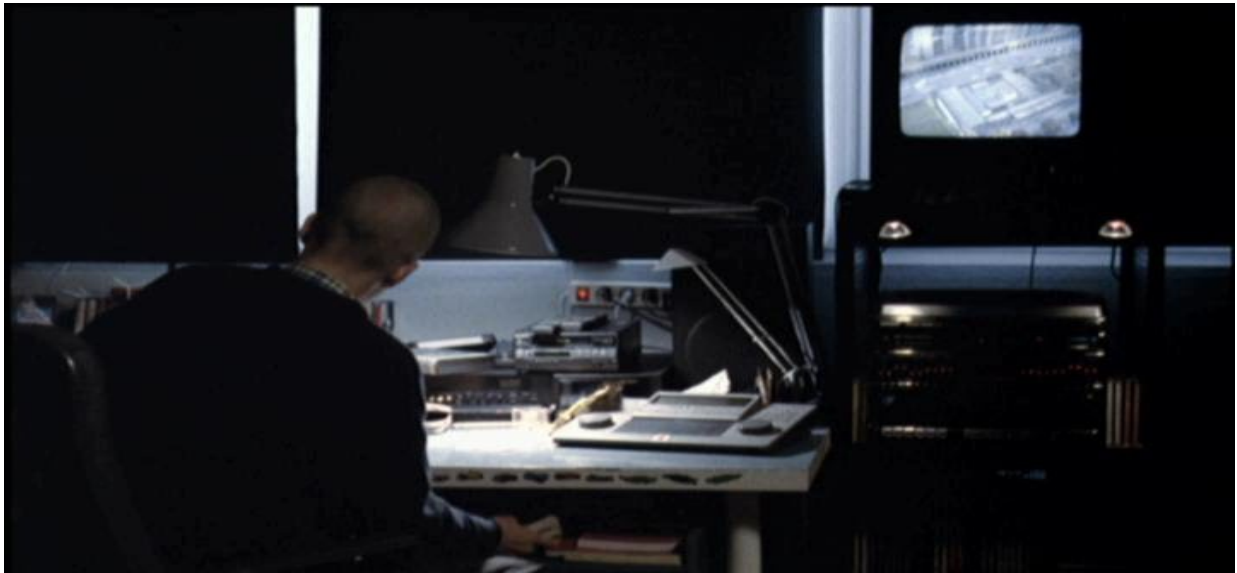


Figure 4: The view outside Benny's window. *Benny's Video*. 1992.

Other elements that mark the individual's being-with-others can also be traced across the trilogy. It remains a very formal engagement, cold, uncomfortable, and often competitive. In this way Georg's encounter with his former boss in *Der Siebente Kontinent* becomes symptomatic of the way in which being-with functions in the following two films that comprise the trilogy – the lack of any real interest in the others that are encountered, and an unwillingness to bridge that divide. This is also reflected in the lack of sex found in Haneke's narratives, a lack so pronounced that it warrants comment.²² The sex that takes place within marriages will be discussed later in this chapter, but it remains very interesting that, within the scope of the six films presently under discussion, almost no sex takes place outside the marital structure.²³ There seems to be a complete lack of any sexual engagement (of any kind, including sexually charged flirtation) between strangers in Haneke's first three films, an unexpected element within post-religious contemporary

²² As has been remarked upon by, among others, Knauss (2010:217).

²³ The only instance where non-marital copulation does possibly take place is in *La Pianiste*, at the drive-in. As the marital status of the couple is however not disclosed it is impossible to make a conclusive statement on the matter.

Western society. In this way it seems positively absurd that no sexual overture ever occurs between Benny and the girl he brings home. The viewer's expectation of some form of sexual contact (understandably, given the context of two pubescent teenagers alone at home) is consistently thwarted, and when the climax of the scene does finally occur it only recalls the violent nature of the sexual act, none of the intimacy or excitement.



Figure 5: Haneke's non-spaces: the subway, *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. 1994.

In some cases Haneke's rendering of being-with mirrors the cruelty found in the public space, an element the director has commented upon: "I ... believe that we live in a permanent state of civil war ... the war of carelessness and unkindness, which is something all of us participate in day in day out. The daily wounds from this civil war are perhaps the real reasons behind the so-called 'real' wars" (cited in Grabner 2010:14). An early instance of this is found in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, where the story told by the old woman in Anna's ophthalmology practice beautifully illustrates such cruelty,²⁴ and in later instances this cruelty reaches violent and harrowing heights, as when Benny shoots the unknown girl, eventually killing her, in *Benny's Video*. Haneke's public spaces, shot in dim, muted colours, emphasise the individual's loneliness and despair, stark depictions of individuals getting lost in the uniformity of both the millions of objects-to-hand that make up their world, and *Das Man*.

²⁴ The old lady recounts an event that had transpired in her youth. She and her classmates had teased a friend about wearing glasses, and was in turn cursed by the bespectacled friend, told that one day they would all need glasses, too. The old lady then tells Anna that indeed within a few years of this happening the whole class was wearing glasses.

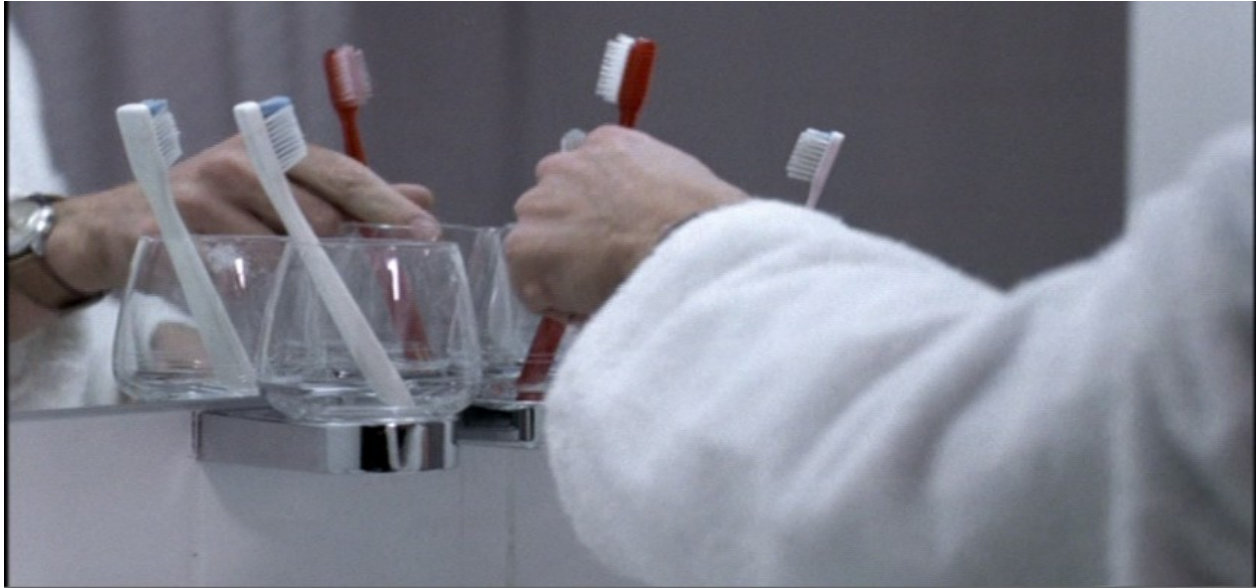


Figure 6: The mundane elements of the everyday, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

Das Man takes up a central position within the *Vergleitscherung-trilogie*. Tuttle (2005 [1996]:66) notes that “‘being-with’ indicates that Dasein exists to others in a publicly encounterable world of common meanings, languages, practices, and manipulations”. Otto Pöggeler (1994:43) defines *Das Man* by explaining that “Dasein understands itself and Being in general in terms of the beings which can be encountered. Dasein does not live at all as itself, but rather as ‘one lives’; life ‘is lived’ by means of the ‘dictatorship’ of ... *Das Man*”. Within Haneke’s oeuvre *Das Man* is framed within the parameters of the bourgeoisie, the privileged culture class. In fact, it is quite interesting to note that across almost all of Haneke’s oeuvre the viewer finds narratives largely consisting of upper-middle class European subjects, and theorists like Christopher Sharrett (2010:212) have argued that Haneke’s films express “the irrelevance of high culture to the current world”. As *Das Man* distracts the individual from an authentic *Dasein* by its negation of death, linking the notion of *Das Man* to a particular class allows Haneke to frame this distraction in the form of the mechanisms of capitalist Western society. In *Der Siebente Kontinent* Anna and Georg’s realisation of their subservience to *Das Man* comes in the form of the monotony of the everyday routine which keeps the system in check. Haneke spends the first half of the film chronicling, in minute detail, the routine of their days and years, of waking, eating, working, sleeping, the camera focusing on the objects which form part of these routines (beds, coffee machines, cars, pencils) but which are also only in the possession of the characters because the routine makes it possible for them to buy these things (figure 6). The same pattern is found in both *Benny’s Video* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, where the characters seem to be consumed with the concerns of an

everyday existence; conversations such as Benny's parents discussing the benefits of a pyramid scheme, or Maximilian calling home to tell his parents about exams he'll be writing, abound. There seems little reference to any greater existential framework of life, and yet the notion of death permeates the frames through Haneke's incessant long takes, which force the viewer to look beyond *Das Man's* distractions and become aware of the impending being-towards-death that anxiously tugs away at his characters.

It could be argued that *Das Man* is represented so veraciously in Haneke's films precisely because of his lack of characterisation and typification, an element a few theorists have commented upon. Scott Loren and Jörg Metelman (2010:207) contend that "another irritating strategy of Haneke's early films was his strict dramaturgic refusal to grant his figures a consistent and plausible psychological basis for their actions", yet I would argue the opposite. Instead of being irritating, this choice enables Haneke to illustrate the numbing evening-out of *Das Man's* influence, of producing types instead of personalities. This is of course also seen in the fact that most of Haneke's characters have variations of the same name – Anne/Anna, Georg/Georges, Eva/Evi. This approach makes sense within both Haneke's greater ontological framework, and his obvious discomfort with the postmodern project.



Figure 7: Haneke's omnipresent television news,
71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls. 1994.

This discomfort with the postmodern project is also seen in Haneke's consistent focus on how reality has been mediatised. It could perhaps even be suggested that the way in which the media mediates reality in Haneke's films becomes a second mechanism in

which *Das Man* distracts the individual from his being-towards-death. Many theorists have commented upon the role of television news in Haneke's oeuvre, with a television on in the background, unwatched, in most of his scenes (figure 7). The realities the world faces, and the existential wake-up call this could represent to the individual, is consistently diluted by rendering it into a secondary narrative, by removing it from the lifeworld of the individual by casting it within the realm of that which is virtual, and therefore cannot permeate his or her existential parameters.²⁵ Speck (2010:83) remarks that "as soon as something real is represented, it is reproduced in another format. The atrocities that take place in another country are immediately mediatized", which immediately also casts allusions to Rutzky's (1999:4) framing of the postmodern as encompassing "simulacral technology". In *Benny's Video* this mediatization is taken a step further, with not only the incessant presence of television news permeating the film, but also Benny's own mediation of reality via his camera²⁶. It is interesting to note that most of the key scenes in the film are presented to the viewer through the double-bind of two frames – Benny's frame within Haneke's frame. In what are perhaps the two most prominent scenes, the one of the killing of the pig, and the scene where the girl is killed, the events are presented in this way. When Benny's parents learn of the killing they are similarly shown the video of the event, a technique which is mirrored towards the end of the film when Benny shows the police the video of his parents discussing how to get rid of the girl's body (figure 8). This constant deferring of reality, and ultimately of death, thus functions as a very prominent way in which technology aids *Das Man* in its distraction.

25 Meghan Sutherland (2010:184) makes a compelling case for this, worth quoting at length:

Reformulating the relation between media and being along these lines holds powerful implications for both philosophy and politics. First and foremost, the trope of visitation gives us a way of conceptualizing some of the more confounding ways in which visual media technologies transform the work of enframing by layering at least two hegemonic productions of order over one another: on one register, the 'imagined communities' that they connect as social formations and, on another, the particular representations of the world that immediately appear as characterizations of those formations. This process of layering – where the content of the television image serves as the unstable guarantor of its own technological form – is one of the most underthought aspects of how the medium helps produce the world.

26 Benny is constantly filming the various spaces and events that comprise his lifeworld – his home, his family, and the trip he and his mother takes to Egypt, to name but a few.



Figure 8: Benny's camera recording his parents' conversation, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

4.3 The private space as cocoon of death, and the family

Death creeps up on Haneke's characters not only in the public spaces, but the director elaborates on this being-in-the-world and being-with-others by juxtaposing the public space with the private. Just as Haneke's public space elides the traditional notions of community and connection that a public space connotes, his private space, the home, becomes an inverse form of the warmth and life that the idea of home conjures up. The home of Georg and Anna, of Benny and his family, and of the various individuals whose narratives make up *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, all emphasise the alienation, isolation and despair the individuals living within them experience. Drawing from the work of Brigitte Peucker, Speck (2010:132) has rightly observed that this is mirrored in the formalist characteristics of the film: "Looking at the dysfunctional families in the glaciation-trilogy ... form and content mirror each other, i.e., that the characters' attempts to cope with their fragmented lives is itself narrated in a fragmented style". The fact that any interaction between members of a family is often shot from a distance (a significant example being the dinner table scene with Anna's brother in *Der Siebente Kontinent*) not only distances the viewer from the characters, but also serves to underscore the complete disconnect that marks all relationships within the frame (figure 9).



Figure 9: The isolated family in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

There is no comfort to be found in this being-with-others which is of the most intimate kind.²⁷ In *Der Siebente Kontinent* this is played out in the utter silence of the film, with Georg, Anna and Evi barely speaking to one another, entire scenes (such as the scenes in the car wash) taking place without any words being spoken. Even when Anna tells Evi she loves her it is delivered in a cold, emotionless tone. This inability to communicate what is felt is echoed earlier in the film, when Anna's brother notes how their dead mother, before her death, said that she had always wished that people had screens instead of heads, so that you could easily read what they thought and felt. But it is not only language that is strained in the film; affection and sex are similarly stunted. There is very little physical affection between family members, with Anna not even hugging her brother the last time she knows she will ever see him. Georg and Anna's sex is brief, devoid of words or even kisses. The noticeable lack of sex in Haneke's films has been commented upon, but it is interesting to note that while Haneke depicts no sex between strangers, the sex that takes place within marriages, as is the case with Georg and Anna, seems to be as cold as the rest of the engagement between his characters. This is underscored by Stefanie Knauss (2010:219), suggesting that "his negation of the conventional formal means of representing sex is intensified by his clinically aseptic mise-en-scène, the sheer contrary nature of the lush, sensual atmosphere of most soft-porn or erotic films". In all of these instances of both sex and general affection, Haneke does not play a particularly subtle

²⁷ It could be argued that Haneke's typification of being-with-others is not that far removed from Heidegger's own charting of this primary element of Being. The way in which Heidegger consistently frames those one shares one's world with as being a part of *Das Man* immediately casts them in a negative light, and renders the relationship one might have with them as 'inauthentic'. This quite radically nihilist conceptualisation of man's relationship to his other(s) is thus, in Heideggerian terms, yet another way in which the world is rendered as a fundamentally hostile space.

hand in illustrating the coldness and isolation that marks his characters being-in-the-world, with Evi's antics of feigned blindness, and the newspaper heading of "Blind but not alone" which Anna finds later, being blatantly obvious.



Figure 10: Benny and his father speaking in his bathroom, never once facing one another directly, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

Benny's Video has Haneke presenting a somewhat more subtle approach, but the isolation and lack of emotional currency within families is still a major theme. Benny's family is almost never at home, and when they are the communication between the family members always happens through an intermediate form of technology. Benny speaks to his father whilst in the bathroom, their eyes only meeting in the mirror, Benny having his back to his father, never turning around to face him directly (figure 10). When Benny tells his parents of the incident with the girl there is a similar spatial positioning, all three of them standing with their backs to one another, looking at a screen on which the footage of the murder is playing. This mise-en-scène becomes the prevalent representational mode in the film, with characters rarely ever speaking directly to one another, making eye contact, but rather standing or sitting behind one another when speaking. This spatial disconnect is also seen in *Egypt* where Benny and his mother share a room, their beds right next to one another, but even in that intimate spatial relation they appear as strangers. But it is not only Benny's family who seem to have this disconnected relationship; the fact that the family of the girl who dies is completely absent from the narrative, apart from a mere mention, questions the very notions of safety and nurturing individuals supposedly have within a family. Being the title character this is perhaps most obvious in the case of Benny, who, the

viewer realises, has no real relationship with any person in his life.



Figure 11: Strained conversation between the security guard and his wife,
71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls. 1994.

In *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* the viewer is confronted with different domestic settings in which despair and dysfunction are the norm. Through the utilisation of long takes Haneke forces the viewer to confront the extreme level of dysfunction, of acute isolation, loneliness, and lack of communication and affection between family members. On a very basic level the film, continuing the trend set by the first two parts of the trilogy, is marked by a lack of any facial expressions traditionally linked to happiness or friendliness, and instances in which characters smile are very rare. The stony expressions of characters are so prevalent it would almost become gimmicky, if it were not so clear to the viewer why this lack of positive bodily engagement exists. In fact, the film's narratives read as a list of ways not to live your life: The old man who spends his days indoors, alone, fighting with his daughter over the telephone, the couple with a newborn baby who never get any sleep and no longer have anything to say to one another, spending meal times trying to bridge the gap between them but failing every time,²⁸ the young Romanian boy who flees to Austria, leaving behind a home of poverty. But these narratives also offer scathing clues to how Haneke views the being-with-others which the

²⁸ This scene is perhaps one of the most powerful scenes in Haneke's oeuvre (figure 11). The way in which Haneke manages to capture the absolute lack of companionship between the married couple paints a harsher portrait of the realities of the being-with that is marriage than anywhere else in his later films.

family offers. The scene between the elderly man and his daughter speaking over the phone, for instance, is one of Haneke's greatest cinematic feats (figure 12). The isolation of the *mise-en-scène* is strengthened by the fact that the viewer is only privy to one side of the conversation. The man's conversational tone oscillates between being loving (or trying to be, at least), and being manipulative and vindictive. It could be argued that this says almost as much about the extreme ambiguity inherent to these relationships as does the fact that he consistently stalls the ending of the phone call, again and again thinking of ways to keep his daughter on the line, despite the strained nature of the phone call. I would suggest that this scene is perhaps a summary of all the family relations found not only in the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, but across Haneke's oeuvre. Again it should be mentioned that Haneke masterfully pairs this emotional wasteland with frames that are existentially bare – homes with stark interiors, cool, dark colours and stripped-down shots and cuts.



Figure 12: Elderly man speaking to his family on the telephone,
71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls. 1994.

David Sorfa (2006:98) has remarked that Haneke's homes are the result of "modern consumerism", bringing about "an *unheimlich* unease in what should be perfectly happy families".²⁹ This is reflected in the camera's pre-occupation with the objects in these houses, and not the people.³⁰ The most salient example of this is the first ten minutes of

29 Heidegger's own use of the word "*unheimlich*" can be denoted in various ways. One of these instances correlates closely to the way in which Haneke delineates the concepts of family and the home. Another of Heidegger's delineations of the *unheimlich* refers to the state which *Das Man* attempts to escape from the nothing through an obsessive unauthentic domesticity (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:233).

30 In *Benny's Video* the objects in Benny's family home speak not only of modern consumerism, but also of the way in which Haneke couples this privileged class with high culture. The staggering amount of paintings and art prints in the home is the best example of this, emphasising not only their class, but consequently also their level of education.

Der Siebente Kontinent, in which the camera records the daily routine of Georg, Anna en Evi without once showing their faces, instead focusing on the objects in the house. This again links back to the notion of class discussed earlier in this chapter, and the status of most of the characters in Haneke's *Vergletscherung-trilogie* (with the exception of some of the characters in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*) as members of a privileged, bourgeois class. There is specific emphasis on the fact that the characters are financially comfortable, an element that is first mentioned in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, where Anna's letter recounts to her mother and father-in-law their stable and prosperous financial position, pointing out how hard they have worked for it. Whilst Anna reads the letter the camera positions Georg in the trappings of his work, a classic industrial setting connoting the cogs of capitalist Western society, immediately establishing a link between this privileged class and its part in the capitalist machine. The way in which modern life has brought about a proliferation of user goods has in effect crowded out the interpersonal connections between the members of a family. Not only that, but it has also successfully insulated the family from the reality of the outside world. In Haneke's films this is seen through the omnipresence of the television screen and its broadcasting of world news. Blaring news of natural disasters, terrorist conflicts and individual crimes is a strain which runs throughout many of the scenes in all three of the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* films, and is indeed a hallmark of Haneke's oeuvre, where as stated a television is always on in the background, yet rarely watched. The characters are constantly exposed to the reality of their being-in-the-world and their being-with-others, but the news of these events reaching them through the television set dilutes its impact, turns tragedy and disaster into mere white noise.

4.4 Conclusion

Haneke's first three films seem to set the tone for the rest of his oeuvre. Possibly the films in which the director's penchant for existential themes are most blatant, they deal with being-in-the-world and being-with-others in a quite despairing manner. These films are marked by their severely pessimistic rendering of the postmodern world and the life of the late capitalist consumer, which, I argue, is that into which his characters are, in a Heideggerian sense, *thrown*. Haneke explores this postmodern and late capitalist world by placing his characters in two types of spaces, public and private, and amidst two types of others, society, and the family. The commodified nature of the public space makes an authentic sense of *Dasein* impossible, as does the proximity of society, which takes on the

stifling form of Heidegger's *Das Man*. Yet Haneke does not even provide a reprieve in the more intimate spaces of the home, amidst family. Instead the viewer finds a being-with which is still characterised by isolation and alienation. Within this context Haneke traces the trajectory towards an authentic sense of *Dasein*, through elements of existential anxiety and the nothing, with some of his characters embracing their thrownness, their being-towards-death. Others remain distracted by *Das Man*'s idle talk over everyday concerns, never reaching authenticity. Haneke revisits many of these tropes in his later films, and recasts others. It is thus to an analysis of *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste*, and *Caché*, that this discussion now turns.

Chapter 5: Heideggerian ontology in *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste*, and *Caché*

This chapter continues the analysis of Michael Haneke's rendering of being-in-the-world and being-with-others, shifting its attention from the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* to three of the director's later films – *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste*, and *Caché*. It follows the same structure as the previous discussion, framing Haneke's rendition of being-in-the-world and being-with-others on three fronts. It firstly sketches the postmodern paradigm that Haneke's characters are thrown into, tracing the way in which his later films develop the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* tropes of postmodernity and late capitalism. It then moves onto a discussion of how being-in-the-world figures within the realm of public space in these particular films. This is coupled with the way in which Haneke's *Das Man* evolves to encompass the notion of the bourgeois culture class. The discussion is, as in the previous chapter, concluded by a look at being-in-the-world within the context of the home, and being-with-others within the context of the family.

5.1 Thrownness: Postmodernity and its discontents

In the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* Haneke rendered the landscape of postmodern society devoid of emotional or spiritual capital. In his later films, three of which are discussed here (*Funny Games*, *La Pianiste*, and *Caché*), Haneke continues to critique Western society. It would however seem that he not only does so in a less blatant manner than in his first three films, but also shifts some of the emphasis found in the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* to targets already remarked upon within them, but not yet fully explored. Technology is rethought and its earlier scapegoat status renegotiated, and some of the tropes that Haneke had successfully used to communicate elements such as disconnection and emotional paralysis, like the city, are recast and employed in different ways. I would thus argue that Haneke returns to some of the themes found in the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, but considers them in new ways. He also introduces new tropes to communicate the existential quandaries man faces in post-industrial society, the desolation of man's being-in-the-world and his being-with-others. In this way Haneke indeed echoes Heidegger's (1962 [1927]:23) sentiment that "the very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again".



Figure 13: Georges and Anne Laurent in their upper-middle class home, *Caché*. 2005.

One of the motifs Haneke carries through from his first three films is that of late capitalism. The bourgeois culture class,³¹ which will be discussed throughout this chapter, still figures as the most important characters in Haneke's films at this point, and it is their world in which the narratives of the films are set. The city is still a marker of this late capitalist trope, producing the spaces in which the bourgeois culture class exists, the spaces into which they are *geworfen* and must make sense of the world, but other familiar elements from the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* also make important appearances. There is again an emphasis on how hard the protagonists in the various films have worked for their lifestyles, for their homes and cars and leisure time, and again Haneke focuses on the objects that proliferate their lives, albeit in a more subtle way than the intense close-ups of objects found in, for instance, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. The object still dominates in these post-1996 films, not because the viewer's attention is consciously focused on them by the filmmaker, but simply because the objects fill every frame – the expensive lake house and SUV in *Funny Games* (figure 14), the cluttered apartment and Erika's wardrobe in *La Pianiste*, the cars, and furniture and books that abound in almost every frame of *Caché* (figure 13). But it is not only the consumption of objects that foreground these films, but also consumption in a wider regard, and specifically the consumption of culture, of

31 The bourgeois culture class is distinguished by what Pierre Bourdieu terms *cultural capital*. Bourdieu (Fowler 2000:12) defines cultural capital as that which is acquired by the dominant class, and which is fundamentally centred around high levels of education. This education is then employed as "assets in a competitive game of power", and by virtue of its relative scarcity, cultural capital is quite valuable. Those who possess cultural capital are furthermore characterised by their aesthetic disposition (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]:30).

consumable experiences. The characters of both *La Pianiste* and *Caché* are involved in the culture industry, consuming culture, but none of them create anything original themselves. Erika merely plays the notes written by other composers, Anne publishes the works of others but does not write anything herself, and Georges critiques literature but does not produce any of his own creative work.



Figure 14: Objects fill the frame – the Schobers in their SUV, *Funny Games*. 1997.

It is this culture class that dominates Haneke's films that acts as a signifier for postmodernity and the city, and which also links to both the postcolonial tensions evident in some of Haneke's films, and the general sense of emotional disconnect and dysfunction which manifests itself in individuals and families. The bourgeoisie, educated and privy to a host of privileges, on the receiving end of the late capitalist system, are on the forefront in all three films discussed in this chapter. In true Haneke style, this focus is not of a positive kind, and Oliver C Speck (2010:103) argues that

Not since the days of Rainer Werner Fassbinder has cinema seen the disgust, hatred, and immense contempt for the middle class and today's consumer capitalism that the viewer encounters in the films of Michael Haneke ... the films by Haneke and those by Fassbinder are governed by a cold will to dismantle the foundation of the bourgeois society they are depicting.

Nowhere is this more evident than in *Funny Games*. Already in the opening scene Haneke sketches the family within the tropes of the bourgeois culture class – the expensive car, the stylishly understated clothing, the single child in the backseat (figure 15). Their game of

identifying different pieces of classical music is a further indication of their background and level of education. But it is also used as formalist device to aurally prepare the viewer for the way in which this peaceful bourgeois existence will soon be invaded, by the overlaying of the John Zorn song on the film's soundtrack. The markers of the culture class are seen throughout the rest of the film – the holiday home, the golf bag, the yacht, as Speck (2010:17) argues, “culture here becomes a pawn in a game, a piece of a larger picture that signals the membership in an exclusive community”. Peter and Paul's choice of targeting these types of privileged families (from the beginning and end of the film we deduce that Anna and Georg are not their first bourgeois victims), is what is of interest here, and what Haneke is trying to say about this element within the context of how it sketches being-in-the-world, and being-with-others.



Figure 15: More references to the culture class – classic understated clothing, classical music playing over the car stereo, the single child in the backseat, *Funny Games*. 1997.

The culture class is revisited in *La Pianiste*, with Erika Kohut's world of the Vienna Conservatory of Music, of piano recitals and wealthy Austrian families,³² despite her and her mother's social standing being of a somewhat lower kind. The double entendre of money and class crops up throughout the film, with constant references to Erika's spending (particularly on expensive clothing) and their not-too-promising financial situation. Haneke not only juxtaposes class structures in *La Pianiste*, but also offers the viewer the dialectic of “high” and “low” culture. In her quest for voyeuristic thrills Erika straddles both high and popular art, seamlessly moving from her formal recital room to

32 Speck (2010:16) rightly mentions that it is the piano teacher's “status as *Kulturschaffende* (a generic term for people who work in fields connected to the arts)” that connects her to “Vienna's upper class”.

more popular spaces, like sex shops and drive-in theatres. This coupling of the high art culture and a more financially independent class is continued in Haneke's *Caché*. Anne and Georges Laurent are not only in a financially comfortable position, but, as already mentioned, both also work in the culture industry – Anne as publisher and Georges as host of a television programme on literature. Their world is offset by that of Majid, who lives outside of the privileged confines of money and culture, and the fact that Georges was the main instigator in Majid's fate problematises the disparity between the two classes to an even greater extent.

It is not only the culture class which Haneke picks up again in his later films, but also the theme of the city. In fact, Haneke's much more subtle rendering of his auteurist themes in his later films is seen in the way in which he uses the coupling between the culture class and the urban environment to connote the same elements of dissatisfaction with postmodernity seen in the *Vergleitscherung-trilogie*. There is none of the repetitive imagery of the city in these later films, but instead the notion of the city is invoked by the way of life of the characters depicted, like the cars, clothes and homes in *Funny Games* and *Caché*. Setting *Funny Games* in the country by default creates a certain tension with the city. But it could be argued that in this film Haneke develops his metaphor of the city in ways not dependent on the material signifiers of the city, of highways and supermarkets and fast food joints. Instead he links the city and postmodern society in such a way that all spaces, regardless of their status as traditionally "urban" or "pastoral", are seen as being "in the city". This occurs purely based on the way in which postmodernity has rendered the West as one long strip mall of a non-place. In *La Pianiste* Vienna seems to play a minor role, the city's landmarks barely featured, few scenes shot in public spaces, but for one minor element – the whole city speaks French. Having a French-speaking Austrian city re-incorporates some of the more traditional themes Haneke has drawn from the cityscape. It brings about a sense of alienation, displacement, again reminding the viewer of the thrown environment of his being, an element which becomes especially problematic within the context of Samuel IJselling's (1986:134) explanation: "... Being does not happen somewhere in the heavens or among the stars. Rather, it takes place precisely there, where man fulfills his humanity, his being-human ... *Dasein* is the place where Being takes place".

5.2 The commodified existence of the public space, and postmodern society as *Das Man*

It is not only Haneke's sketching of the problematic nature of postmodern society in his post-*Vergletscherung-trilogie* films that seems more nuanced, but indeed his sketching of the commodified existence of the public space, an important part of the individual's being-in-the-world, is also recast. As Heidegger (1962 [1927]:83) argues, "not until we understand Being-in-the-world as an essential structure of Dasein can we have any insight into Dasein's existential spatiality", and in Haneke's case he again casts being-in-the-world as integrally related to the individual's experience of the city. Most noticeable in this regard is the fact that the repetitive images of the city, so prevalent in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, *Benny's Video*, and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, are missing. Although both *La Pianiste* and *Caché* are again set in cities, Vienna and Paris respectively, Haneke refrains from using the same numbing urban mise-en-scène seen earlier in his oeuvre. Instead, he changes tactics. These spaces are still rendered as alien, as disconcertingly uninterested, even cruel, but other elements are used to portray this – Haneke's use of the anonymous city, and his predilection for marginalised parts of the city. Firstly, the cities in Haneke's films could be classified as anonymous cities because of their lack of characterising signifiers. Haneke shies away from using any overtly recognizable urban elements that could immediately position *La Pianiste* as being set in Vienna, or from positioning *Caché* as being set in Paris. Indeed, this notion of the anonymous city is already seen in the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*, where the only indication that *Der Siebente Kontinent* is set in Linz is the number plate at the beginning of the film, and both *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* are devoid of clues as to the specific city they are supposed to be featuring. Directors often use certain indexical signs as shorthand for particular cities – shots of the Eiffel Tower or the Arc de Triomphe for an instant Paris, of Piccadilly Circus or Buckingham Palace for London, or of Brooklyn Bridge or Times Square for New York. Haneke negates such an easy labelling of his locales, offering the viewer no iconic landmarks, indeed delivering little identifying information outside of unknown street names (*Caché's* Rue de Iris perhaps being the most prominent example), and generic shops, such as corner cafés or news agents. By stripping his cities of their characteristic qualities, by reducing them all to a mere combination of urban amenities, Haneke renders them interchangeable, and extends the notion of the non-place to envelop an entire city; indeed, Haneke's anonymous cities are non-cities.

Haneke's seeming penchant for non-gentrified spaces is the second element which positions the public space as isolating and alien, an element which is not only important to understand within Haneke's larger ontological project, but also within Heidegger's (1962 [1927]:83) study of being, as he explains, "not until we understand Being-in-the-world as an essential structure of Dasein can we have any insight into Dasein's existential spatiality". In *La Pianiste* there are three main spaces in which the viewer finds Erika. The first is the home, the second the Conservatory of Music where she teaches, and the third various commercial spaces around Vienna. This third grouping stands out not only because of its jarring discrepancy with one of Erika's other main spaces, that of the formal and high class Conservatory, but also because it consistently highlights the lack of real human interaction in Erika's life. In the sex shop Erika visits she is pitted in contrast to the copulating figures she watches on-screen, as a lone figure disconnected from the proximity to another that actual sex involves, instead relegated to consume only the scraps on the metaphorical floor, in this case the discarded tissues anonymous men had earlier used to clean up their semen. Even the porn film that Erika watches establishes this notion of isolation, where all three figures involved in the act are only shown in the same frame once, very briefly, and the rest of the clip consists of shots focusing only on one of the three partners, presenting them as cut off from the rest of the bodies they are intimately interacting with. Later in the film Erika visits another rather marginalised space where the same sense of displacement is found. This is evoked not only by the fact that Erika is much older than the teenagers and young adults who come to the drive-in for entertainment and backseat-bound sex, but most saliently because of Erika's lack of partaking in the activities of said backseats. Although Erika is in the midst of the real action happening on the lot, far away from the glare of the big screen, she is looking at what others are doing, she is *outside* the cars staring at the writhing bodies *within*. The fact that she is caught in the act only exaggerates this inside/outside dialectic, and the violent way in which she is chased off the lot further establishes her as outsider, the space itself alienating.³³

In *Caché* Haneke's use of the marginalised space is less extreme than that found in *La Pianiste*, but it still serves to underscore the discrepancy between the world of Georges Laurent and that of Majid. Most of the public spaces that are seen in *Caché* are upper-middle class spaces – the studios where Georges works, a trendy, minimalist cafe where

³³ A third space which could be mentioned here, although it does not strictly fit into the categorisation outlined above, is the skating rink to where Erika follows Walter. Not only does Haneke's frame position Erika behind bars, and again in a position of looking in on the interaction of others, but the brief scene she witnesses on the ice, of the male hockey players encircling the two young female skaters, again presents the viewer with an interplay between inside and outside, and with the notion of isolation.

Anne and her boss meet for coffee, or Pierrot's school. Juxtaposed with these spaces is the neighbourhood in which Majid lives. Haneke shows the viewer three elements thereof, the first being some shots of the streets of the neighbourhood Romainville, an interesting choice made by Haneke considering that this outlying neighbourhood of Paris is not connected to the city's metro system, signifying its outsider status, its existence on the margins. The other elements that are shown include apartment blocks and low-cost housing, including Majid's own dilapidated apartment block, with its dark and dank corridors, and a similarly dark and dirty Romainville supermarket where coffee comes from a vending machine. These spaces are perhaps so depressing because they are neglected spaces, where poor individuals live in cramped quarters. They also signify the importance attached by those in power to the immigrant communities living in these spaces, of their indifference to the way those outside their own bubble of bourgeois culture class live. In *La Pianiste* and *Caché* in particular these spaces are however still commodified spaces, a trope Haneke again extends from his earlier work. The commodified nature of the public space does however take on a different form. There is less of a focus on non-places such as fast food joints and supermarkets, and more of a focus on the commodification of the public space on two fronts – the commodification of sex, and the commodification of culture, within the context of the culture industry. The commodification of sex is found specifically in *La Pianiste*, where Erika's forays to the sex shops recasts sex as a commodity, and the commodification of culture to a large extent is found in *Caché*, where both Georges and Anne have occupations in the culture industry, promoting literature.



Figure 16: Paul torturing Schorsch, *Funny Games*. 1997.

It is not only in his sketching of public space that Haneke re-establishes certain tropes originating from the *Vergleitschrunge-trilogie*, while adding a few new ones in the process. This extends to the interaction between Haneke's protagonists and those they share their world with, where "Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being" (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:160). It could be argued that there are three main elements that characterise this interaction with others – complexity, violence and cruelty, and coldness and superficiality. The most extreme form of this being-with-others can perhaps be found in Haneke's *Funny Games*, where being-with-others automatically equals death. The being-with in this film is, more than anything, marked by violence and cruelty, a fact which the slow and grinding torture and eventual killing of all three family members attests to (figures 16 and 17). But other Haneke favourites also crop up again, such as the lack of communication that characterises the relationships between those that share a world. Not only is there the loss of the telephone, symbolic of any contact with the outside world, which happens through Peter's phone-in-sink manoeuvre. But it is extended in the way in which no straight answers are ever given to questions asked of Peter and Paul by Georg and Anna, making any real communication impossible.



Figure 17: Peter and Paul torturing Anna, *Funny Games*. 1997.

Another element which marks the relations with others in *Funny Games* is the way in which these relations seem to take on the form of a game. This is however an always already unfair game (even though Peter and Paul may consider it a "nice game, a family game"), as the family are never informed about the rules of the game, rendering this

being-with relation as fundamentally unequal. But here I would suggest that Haneke uses the game as a method of confronting the distractions brought about by *Das Man*. *Das Man* is of course, as explained earlier, again signified by the family in its capacity as part of the bourgeois culture class. Thus, within a Heideggerian framework, they are marked by the fact that their “Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away [abgefallen] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the ‘world’. “Falleness” into the ‘world’ means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:220).

As rightly observed by Brigitte Peucker (2010:22-23), these games are children’s games (hot and cold, cat in the sack, and a version of eeny, meeny, miny, mo), and this becomes interesting if one considers the fact that in Haneke’s first three films children are often sketched as being more open to *Dasein*, more in touch with an authentic sense of Being. These “children’s games” thus figure as ways of rupturing the docility of *Das Man*. This in turn links to the non-psychologising of characters which is again continued in this film, and which arguably reaches its zenith in the characters of Peter and Paul. These two thugs are not real people, but types, and in this case types that are employed by Haneke to showcase the way in which others firstly torture us into an awareness of *Dasein*, but also places the audience, as an extension of *Das Man*, in a position where they have no control over what’s happening.



Figure 18: Paul winking at the audience, *Funny Games*. 1997.

The fact that the audience, as part of *Das Man*, is also targeted in *Funny Games*, is part of

what makes the film so disturbing to watch. The funny game is not only played with the family, but also with us, the audience, as is seen through the elements that shatter the diegesis of the film, like Paul winking at the camera (figure 18), or asking the audience to bet on the outcome of the family's fate. It is not only Georg, Anna, and young Schorsch who are tortured in the film, but thus also the audience, and although I agree with Brian Price (2010:37) that the level of torture endured by the audience is not close to what the family experiences, I also feel that the theorist should not underestimate the traumatic nature of what the audience experiences merely watching the film. Within Haneke's project, and within a Heideggerian delineation, this torture not only awakens the family from the distraction of *Das Man*, but also attempts to awaken the audience from this same distraction.

As mentioned earlier this notion of the audience being tortured while watching one of Haneke's films is by no means a new idea, and it is also one which the director continues to play with in his controversial *La Pianiste*. In fact, I would argue that the film is driven by such a strong undercurrent of repulsion that the audience spends a large part of the film experiencing nausea, feeling sick.³⁴ Speck (2010:87) argues that this is because "Haneke's films operate from the perspective of the 'ego-ideal,' allowing the middle-class subject to look at itself, showing its repulsive side, thereby causing guilt and an aggressive reaction", which in the present delineation again positions the audience as part of *Das Man*. The causes for feeling repulsed in this film are of course numerous, including the problematic relations between characters on-screen, but most of it ultimately stems from Erika's sexuality, which, in the critical discourse surrounding *La Pianiste*, has been referred to as "deviant", "perverse", etc.³⁵ Where Haneke's films are usually marked by their almost complete lack of sex or sexual suggestion, *La Pianiste* employs sex as a major part of its narrative, but, as Stefanie Knauss (2010:226) attests, "in his films this physical involvement does not occur through the (usually positively associated) arousal produced by showing beautiful bodies engaged in sexual acts. Instead, in *The Piano Teacher* in particular, he shocks his viewers physically through the evocation of the sensations of disgust and pain ..."

Haneke's portrayal of being-with-others is thus intimately linked to sex and its status as

34 This nausea could, I suspect, be successfully analysed within Jean-Paul Sartre's delineation of existential nausea. The current study does not however provide the space for such a reading, and is something that will be explored in later research.

35 As is seen in, for instance, J Champagne's *Undoing Oedipus: Feminism and Michael Haneke's The Piano Teacher* (2002), and J Davies' *Masochism in Michael Haneke's La Pianiste and Catherine Breillat's Romance* (2003).

relationship signifier, but it could be argued that the abundance of sex and sexual undercurrents in *La Pianiste* fulfils a very similar function as the complete lack of sex in Haneke's earlier films. Where the lack of sex in Haneke's narratives communicated the way in which the being-with-others of his characters is characterised by a lack of any real connection to others, a lack of interaction, the sex in *La Pianiste* can on one level be read as communicating these same elements. The physical interaction (affection is too exaggerated a term to use here) and eventual intercourse between Erika and Walter shows no real enjoyment on Erika's part (and in some cases, no enjoyment on Walter's part either), with Erika barely ever touching Walter in any way (figure 19), the sense of connection which physical interaction usually engenders, completely missing. Erika reiterates this position, also in terms of Walter, throughout the film, with statements like "I have no feelings. Get that into your head". Their being-with is similarly complicated because although Erika's sadomasochistic kinks might be arousing to her, they are not to Walter, and any possibility of a being-with marked by understanding, love, and mutual pleasure is thus rendered moot.



Figure 19: Walter reading the letter Erika has written, detailing her desires, *La Pianiste*. 2001.

Erika's relationship to others is also reflected in the way she engages with bodily fluids, both those of others and of her own. Erika embraces that which is there in isolation, which does not necessitate her needing to interact with an other (as is seen in her sniffing the discarded tissues used to clean up the semen of masturbating men in the sex shop (figure 20), or her inducing of "menstrual blood" through genital mutilation), and which she can thus control. But anything which is part of a relationship, which connects her with another person, is rejected and experienced as revolting, as is seen in Erika's reaction to Walter's semen after she has fellated him to climax. Walter's climaxing in her mouth

crosses the line, it turns this relation into a relationship, and it could be argued that it is that shift which makes Erika nauseous. The being-with which is illustrated through Haneke's portrayal of sex in this film is thus centred around humiliation, pain, and extreme forms of power play, and Erika's voyeurism adds another disconnected element, speaking only of her isolation amidst others.



Figure 20: Erika watching pornography, sniffing the semen tissues of the men who used the cubicle before her, *La Pianiste*. 2001.

It could in fact be argued that Erika's being-with-others, as something "which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being" (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:160) is marked by a strange phenomenon, in that she does not have a real relationship with anyone aside from her mother. The lack of Erika's relationships is consummated in the relationship with the mother as all other types of relationships are missing – all the others that would ordinarily comprise her being-with have been mapped onto the mother. Some of the behaviour seen between Erika and her mother thus mimics these different kinds of relationships, the vicious fighting and pulling of hair resembling childhood fights between siblings, Erika's attempts at intimately kissing her mother and looking at her naked body more closely resembling the relations generally found between lovers. And although there are others in Erika's world, her "relationship" with them is again a re-visitation of some old Haneke stalwarts. These "relationships" are firstly cold and impersonal, as can be seen in Erika's dealings with the various colleagues that are shown in the film. In general attempts at friendliness are not welcomed, as is seen at the piano recital where Erika initially meets Walter, where both mother and daughter largely shun the attempts others make at

drawing them in. This of course ultimately culminates in the fact that Erika has no friendships of any kind, which one could argue is largely based on her relationships being so superficial.

But in *La Pianiste* Haneke's portrayal of being as being-with-others also showcases some returning elements from an earlier part of his oeuvre, like a being-with-others that is characterised by cruelty and jealousy. Erika's cruel streak is perhaps best seen in her dealings with her students, in particular the boy she sees looking at porn at a newsstand, and the young, nervous girl she consistently targets through her cruel tirades and the eventual sabotaging of the girl's career as pianist³⁶. The attention the girl gets from Walter aggravates Erika's jealousy, and her need to look out for herself and further her own gain. This can be seen from the conversation between Erika and her mother in bed, about not allowing the girl to usurp Erika's position as prime pianist. The being-with in the film is thus always competitive, and Erika's role as pedagogue positions her as a prime example of how the abuse of power, and the perpetuating of violence (of both a psychological and physical kind), permeates the film through Erika's dealings with her students, and on a primal, primary level, her mother. As Knauss (2010:223) argues, "Erika and Walter are only two examples chosen to represent a wider society which is unable to organize itself in a way that power is not distributed unilaterally and subsequently abused".

The abuse of power, and the superficiality of relationships, is also a recurring theme in Haneke's *Caché*. A sense of deep, strong friendship is lacking in the Laurents' lives, even though we see more "friends" of the couple than in any other Haneke film. Their friendships are superficial, based more on social propriety and custom than on real feelings of love and affection and support. These friendships are also marked by their lack of truthfulness and honesty, as is seen in Georges' desire to not tell any of their friends about how they are being terrorised, and where it seems as if the overriding need of the Laurents is to not upset the status quo, to not seem in any way out of place in their bourgeois milieu. But the true hallmark of the being-with-others which is proffered in *Caché* is the *complexity* of the relationships represented, and which is of course centred around the two figures of Georges Laurent and Majid. On account of their history Georges and Majid are both public others and private others to one another, and the oscillations of shame and guilt weave brittle links between their childhoods and the present day.

³⁶ Erika not only reprimands the boy whilst in the store, but also treats him quite harshly in their next session together, verbally humiliating him. In the case of the girl Erika sabotages her career as pianist by placing shards of glass in her coat pockets, which cut the girl's fingers and prevent her from playing the piano.

This complexity of being-with inevitably leads to violence, not only between Georges and Majid, but also extends to the next generation, between Georges and Majid's son. One of the fascinating elements of *Caché* is the fact that in formalistic terms the film is brighter than Haneke's earlier films, using more light in his frames and less of his characteristic dark hues, allowing more spacious compositions and avoiding the claustrophobia of the frames of films such as *La Pianiste* or *Benny's Video*. The film thus creates the impression of a world less riddled with darkness and death, and yet despite these aesthetic changes there still seems to be a permanent hostility under the surface which is just waiting to break out, as is seen by the very violent way Georges reacts when the cyclist almost crashes into him and Anne (figure 21). It could be argued that this hostility, and its manifestation of violence, is largely based on the otherness of those the world is shared with. This links back to Haneke's not-so-subtle postcolonial critique, which theorists such as Patrick Crowley (2010) and Rosalind Galt (2010) have remarked upon. Such a postcolonial critique is for instance seen in the tension between once-coloniser and once-colonised, with Georges' irritation with the very formal ways in which Majid's son addresses him during their hostile confrontation at Georges' workplace.



Figure 21: Confrontation between Georges and an African immigrant, *Caché*. 2005.

This theme of violence that Haneke again picks up on also speaks of other elements, and in *Caché* the emphasis seems to fall on contemporary Western society which is supposedly a postcolonial space, but where reality hardly reflects that. The violent way in which

Majid and his son are treated by the (white) police officers are a prime example of this, and I would agree with Speck (2010:98) that in his handling of these postcolonial elements Haneke is not necessarily only alluding to France, but that such a reading would “severely constrict the films’ effect by limiting it to a specific nation and a specific historical situation. I would argue here for a more abstract view, insofar as this film could be remade in practically every urban setting throughout the first world”. Georges is thus presented as the everyman of contemporary Western society, and their social life reflects that. Not even the token black guest at their dinner party, whose identity is not questioned because her way of life and behaviour fits in with theirs, is positioned as other.

In Heidegger’s delineation of being *Das Man* is never far behind, and in *Caché* it is again *Das Man* which distracts the Laurents from an authentic *Dasein*. As mentioned earlier Haneke again pivots *Das Man* as the *bourgeois* culture class, the everyday life of a class who has very little to be concerned about outside of trivial matters. There has been much speculation about the symbolic value of the Rue de Iris (the street’s name of course alluding to the iris of the eye, or the iris of the camera), where the Laurents live, but within this framework I would suggest that it symbolises their being part of a culture class that is *seen*, that matters. Majid, and his forefathers before him, are part of a class that is not seen, who does not matter. It can thus then also be argued that the docility of *Das Man*, the way “Dasein ‘falls prey to’ the beings one encounters within the world” (Pöggeler 1994:43), is thus ruptured by the tapes and the re-entering of Majid into the lives of the Laurents, because the tape records, and because the awareness of being watched brings about an existential questioning of their lives. This questioning reminds the Laurents of their being-in-the-world and their being-with-others, and in the end that being is also being-towards-death, as they (and especially Georges) walk further and further down the path the tapes and illustrations have opened up.



Figure 22: Majid's son confronting Georges at work, *Caché*. 2005.

Just as the separation between family and others in *Caché* is compromised because of Majid and Georges' complex history, so the demarcation of public and private space in the film is similarly blurry. The invisible camera which films the tapes that are sent to the Laurents films both public and private spaces, in a way which renders the two almost interchangeable. The public space in which the viewer finds the Laurents, like the coffee shop where Anne meets her boss, is theirs because their money makes it possible to enter these spaces, technically just rendering it another private space. This of course brings about very strong insider/outsider relations within public spaces, as is seen when Majid's son attempts to visit Georges' work (figure 22). He is not welcome there because he does not have the education which would enable him to work there, but concurrently he is of course sans education because his family is poor. The only truly "public" space could perhaps be the steps of Pierrot's school, in which others can meet and interact, as is evidenced by the last scene of the film.

5.3 The private space as cocoon of death, and the family

The post-*Vergletscherung-trilogie* films see Haneke returning to one of his favourite themes, that of the family. In fact, as in the case of *Der Siebente Kontinent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, the family is a central focus in *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste* and *Caché*. Whereas the attack in the earlier films mostly originates from within,

this focus shifts in the later films to also include attack from outside. In fact, in *Funny Games*, where the outside attack on the family perhaps reaches its zenith in Haneke's oeuvre, the viewer is, arguably for the first time in Haneke's work, faced with a family who clearly need one another, love one another, protect and comfort one another. Ironically in this case it seems that it is violence and torture that turn three disparate people into a family, but the very fact that Haneke manages to bring about this integration makes the film that much harder to watch (figure 23). Yet *Funny Games* seems the exception, and the relationships within the other instances closely resemble earlier patterns. In *La Pianiste* the relationship between Erika and her mother is severely dysfunctional, often violent. It is largely based on mutual manipulation and abuse, with power a contentious element constantly struggled for. The relationship is also marked by its severe lack of boundaries. Erika's mother does not treat her as an adult, constantly monitoring her every move and accompanying her to recitals, carrying around a cardigan in case Erika gets cold. But in turn Erika is guilty of incestuous behaviour, best epitomised by the incident where Erika violently forces herself on her mother, kissing her passionately.



Figure 23: The Schober family being assaulted, *Funny Games*. 1997.

There are also other characteristic traits by which Haneke's families are known. Families are by nature divided, and that inside/outside relation has a very definitive impact on those involved. The most salient example of this is found in *Caché*, where the narrative presents two distinct families which could have been one, where fissures between its "members" render them strangers to one another, as Majid accuses Georges, "If you saw

me on the street, you would have walked right past me". *Caché* is thus the story of two fathers and two sons, but ironically Majid's family seems closer than Georges and Pierrot, or even Georges and his mother does, both those relationships distant and marked by strain. It could be argued that this is because Majid is not part of the bourgeois culture class, and is thus not as distracted by *Das Man*, so that there is a stronger sense of being-with in his family. In fact, one of the interesting motifs that finds its way to *Caché* from the earlier *Vergleitscherung-trilogie* is the fact that the Laurents' primary focus is not their family, but that their attention is largely focused on their jobs, the day-to-day running of their lives and lifestyles, as Georges explains to his mother – "Mostly we chug along. There are no great highs or lows ... We're all very busy, but that's about it". Georges and Anne never know where Pierrot is, although one does get the feeling that Georges and Anne really love Pierrot, and seem genuinely pleased when Pierrot wins his swimming gala. They also seem genuinely upset when he goes missing, yet there is a similar sense of disconnection between them and their son, as is seen between the parents and Benny in *Benny's Video*. It is as if the love that exists between them never manages to cross this innate chasm of disconnectedness, never manages to translate into relationships that are strong, and whole. Indeed what Speck (2010:98) affirms is true – the Laurents "are not bad people", and there does seem to be more passion in the family than in Haneke's earlier families in *Der Siebente Kontinent* and *Benny's Video*, where Georges and Anne and Pierrot at least openly fight instead of just silently being hostile toward one another. In fact, in an interesting throwback to *Benny's Video* a similar scene is found in *Caché*, with father and son talking to one another in the bathroom. Where all eye contact is done through the mirror in *Benny's Video*, Benny and his father never directly looking at one another, a similar conversation takes place between Georges and Pierrot, also in the bathroom, but this time face to face.

Another recurring element from earlier narratives is the way in which families are permeated by secrets. The characters live secret lives, are constantly hiding things, lying. These secrets and lies can be small, like Pierrot not telling his parents where he is,³⁷ or larger, like Georges keeping parts of his dealings with Majid secret from Anne. In *La Pianiste* Erika is constantly lying to her mother about everything. She lies about clothes she has bought, about her trips to the drive-in or the sex store, about her relationship with Walter. But these familial relationships that Haneke presents are then also based on exposing one another. As a child Georges supposedly exposes who Majid really is, casting

37 Making for an anxious few minutes in the film, Pierrot disappears on the way home from school, and Georg and Anna fear he may have been abducted by Majid. It is later found out that he had been sleeping over at a friend's house without alerting his parents to the plan.

suspicion on his character, and as adult Majid exposes Georges' childhood lies and adult errant behaviour. Of course, as has been commented upon by various theorists, including Speck (2010:93), the very title of the film alludes to hidden things that need to be exposed.³⁸ In *La Pianiste* Erika's mother attempts to expose her secrets and lies at every turn, looking through her wardrobe for contraband dresses, calling up after her to see if she really is where she said she was going, calling Erika out on the "menstrual blood" dripping from her leg. But Erika in turn exposes the mother, famously declaring after she had wrestled her mother's night dress from her body, "I saw the hairs on your sex". And as that struggle attests, in Haneke's films this exposure within the family very often leads to violence.

The homes in Haneke's early films are for the most part places of violence. In his later films this trend continues, stripping the hearth of its mythic qualities of love, safety and security. The most extreme example of this recasting of the home would of course again point in the direction of *Funny Games*. The home in *Funny Games* is not only the place of torture, and the place where death springs from, but it is also a labyrinth from which the characters cannot escape, are powerless within. The home presents the space for violence done unto others, but both *La Pianiste* and *Caché* extend this to violence done unto the self, with Erika's self-mutilation and Majid's horrific suicide. Erika's home is of course not only a place of violence, but also of manipulation, and abuse, its defining characteristic being the reigning hostility which permeates the space. A large part of the scenes taking place in the home Erika shares with her mother are marked by these violent elements, ranging from Erika's mother cutting up Erika's clothing in fits of rage whenever some conflict between the two of them occur, to more physical bouts of violent fighting between the two women (figure 24).



Figure 24: Erika and her mother, fighting, *La Pianiste*. 2001.

³⁸ The French word *caché* means 'hidden' in English.

It could be argued that as Peter and Paul prevent the family from leaving the home in *Funny Games*, this act of destroying Erika's clothes is her mother's symbolic attempt at keeping Erika within the confines of the home too. The mother is perhaps the most jealous figure within Haneke's oeuvre, and her jealousy of Erika's life outside the home drives these acts of destruction in an effort of taking that life from Erika, of preventing her from going outside. Erika's mother also plays the part of jealous protector of the home, not wanting anyone but Erika to enter it, and appearing to be especially upset when Walter crosses the threshold. This notion of the home being protected is also seen in both *Funny Games* and *Caché* (figure 25), where Speck (2010:94) remarks that "The upper-middle class couple, Anne and Georg, does not live in a gated community as their doubles in *Funny Games* do, but their house, armed against intrusion from the outside, appears like a prison". In *Caché* this notion is reiterated throughout by the way in which Haneke's camera returns to shots of the security enclosure which separates the Laurent house from the street, and fundamentally the tapes that are sent to Georges are so upsetting to the family because they signify that the home is no longer protected.



Figure 25: The Laurent home and its security enclosures, *Caché*. 2005.

In *Caché*, where the notions of inclusion and exclusion are at the heart of the narrative, the home is also the space in which those demarcations are first instated. Through Georges'

lies Majid is removed from the parental Laurent home, and this loss of the home has a definitive impact on the course of his life, perhaps suggesting that Haneke's homes are incubators of being, the original space in which being-in-the-world and being-with-others is negotiated, and defined. In *La Pianiste* this negotiation is largely influenced not only by the hostility of the home, as was discussed earlier, but also by the complete lack of boundaries which exist between Erika and her mother. The lack of boundaries is, in its most extreme form, visible in Erika's attempt at violently kissing her mother. More subtle nuances can also be traced throughout the film. This includes Erika sleeping in her mother's room, right next to the mother in a pose akin to the marriage bed, and the fact that Erika has no key for her own bedroom, and has to devise all kinds of ways to keep her mother from entering the room.



Figure 26: The deserted air of the Schober holiday home, *Funny Games*. 1997.

On a formalistic level the homes in *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste* and *Caché* are less cold and clinical than Haneke's earlier homes, but they could still not really be labelled as warm and welcoming. The holiday home in *Funny Games* has a deserted air, a sinister premonition of the events that will soon unfold (figure 26), and Erika's home in *La Pianiste* is marked by its claustrophobic nature, the mise-en-scène of Haneke's frame mirroring the lack of emotional boundaries between mother and daughter. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in *Caché* the home also figures as one of the main signifiers of class. The Laurents' status as being part of the culture class is reflected in the home's many books, the modernist furniture, what Morgan Clendaniel (2011:sp) terms their "white people food", in their bottles of wine. But Majid's home is obviously a marker of

his class too – the small apartment with its strange room divisions, the cheap wallpaper and mismatched furniture, make-shift kitchen with its two-plate stove (figure 27). These aesthetic markers extend beyond the furnishings of the home to also include the clothes of the characters, Majid’s disheveled look, with his dirty, un-ironed shirt, offsetting Georges and Anne’s smooth, groomed, well-dressed demeanour.



Figure 27: Majid in his rundown apartment, *Caché*. 2005.

The last element of the home which harks back to Haneke’s *Vergleitscherung-trilogie* films, is the way in which the home is again mediatised. Perhaps most reminiscent of the role the camera plays in *Benny’s Video*, *Caché* revisits this theme in the way in which the Laurent home is consistently mediatised. There is the double bind of the two cameras (that of the director, and of whoever films the family) through which the audience receives access to the home,³⁹ and there is the constant presence of the television, Haneke’s all-seeing eye, which also features very prominently in both *Funny Games* and *La Pianiste*. It is this mediatisation of the home, of everyday reality, which Haneke presents to the viewer in his own capacity as auteur, and which forms part of his ongoing ontological project, that is so reminiscent of Heidegger’s ontology of being.

39 It should be noted that the video camera never enters the home, but only films the facade of the house.

5.4 Conclusion

In essence it seems that Haneke's later films thus, for the most part, continue his sketching of being-in-the-world and being-with-others as an alienating experience, founded on a lack of communication, connection, and grace. There are however a number of instances where the director develops tropes from the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* in new ways. The most important of these is perhaps the fact that Haneke sketches the bourgeois culture class as the signifier for postmodernity and the city. His rendition of the commodified nature of the public space, and of society as *Das Man*, elucidates a number of new elements, specifically the commodification of culture, and the commodification of sex. There are varied attempts at escaping the inauthentic *Dasein* of *Das Man*, some that are successful, others that are not. The relationships with those the characters share their world with are marked not only by indifference, but also cruelty and violence. The home too remains a contentious space, in many cases the fundamental site of violence. It thus follows that the family does not escape Haneke's harsh eye, and it too remains a hostile space in which an authentic *Dasein* is a constant struggle.

But within Heidegger's three-fold conception of being there is a last element which needs to be considered within Haneke's oeuvre, one which permeates his frames, saturates his narratives. If, as McGrath (2008:76) contends, "Heidegger believes himself called to prophetically announce the advent of this unimaginable new epoch that is beginning to unconceal itself, at least for the poets and thinkers", Haneke answers the call with the way in which his films constantly remind the viewer of their being-towards-death. It is thus to death, to the "horrific and unthinkable convergence of nothingness and being" (McGrath 2008:68), that this discussion now turns.

Chapter 6: Being as being-towards-death

The foray into Haneke's rendition of being-in-the-world and being-with-others now makes it possible to examine how being-towards-death figures in the director's films. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:295, emphasis original) argues that

Factually, there are many who, proximally and for the most part, do not know about death; but this must not be passed off as a ground for proving that Being-towards-death does not belong to Dasein 'universally'. It only proves that proximally and for the most part Dasein covers up its ownmost Being-towards-death, fleeing *in the face* of it.

This analysis thus explores the ways in which *Dasein* flees from its being-towards-death in the six films discussed thus far – the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* films, as well as *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste* and *Caché*. It examines the Heideggerian tropes of anxiety and the nothing, and how death permeates all of Haneke's frames, saturating his narratives.

6.1 The *Vergletscherung-trilogie*: *Der Siebente Kontinent*

The title of *Der Siebente Kontinent* refers to Antarctica, the continent to which the term *Vergletscherung-trilogie* (*Glaciation* trilogy) also alludes to. This term already signals a certain underlying sense of the clinical and the cold, and all three of the films are marked by their chronicling of the inevitability of emotional and spiritual death, and how this often culminates in a physical death, which Heidegger terms man's *demise*. Heidegger's notion of thrownness is perhaps a suitable place to start this trajectory towards death, and within the context of *Der Siebente Kontinent* the viewer finds a family thrown into a world of plenty, yet who are deeply unhappy. Throughout the film the family's life is narrated by either Georg or Anna, in a letter written to Georg's parents. Anna recounts their situation, them having a home, good jobs, a comfortable financial position, concluding that everything is going well. Yet there is a sense of the nothing which pervades the narrative, and which the family cannot escape. It is within this sense of the nothing that the first flickering of authentic *Dasein* can later be seen.

The nothing can be seen in various elements in the film. The first, and perhaps most salient instance, is the way in which it manifests itself in the seeming meaninglessness of their daily routine, which Haneke chronicles in minute detail (figure 28), and the lack of communication or connection between the family members. But Haneke also continues this trope of the nothing in more subtle ways, like the characters' dialogue, in which there

is a constant reiteration of the word *nothing*, as it becomes an answer to almost any given question. The nothing is also there in Haneke's obsessive silences, one of the director's auteurist traits. All Haneke's films are marked by this silence that does not adhere to the traditional notions of silence as peaceful and comforting, and *Der Siebente Kontinent* is no different. Haneke's silences speak of isolation, of alienation, of emptiness. They speak of the void, and thus figure as symbolic of the nothing.



Figure 28: The meaninglessness of the daily routine, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

The numbing effect of *Das Man's* striving towards the distraction of materiality is evident in both Georg and Anna, and the first true awakening to a sense of authentic *Dasein* is to be found in Evi, their little girl (figure 29).⁴⁰ In fact, it could be argued that in Haneke's oeuvre he consistently sketches children as harbingers of authentic *Dasein*,⁴¹ in themselves

40 It should be noted that apart from Evi there is another character in *Der Siebente Kontinent* who seems to be more in touch with *Dasein's* being-towards-death – Anna's brother, Alexander. Alexander is characterised by how distraught he is after his parents' death, and his emotional outbursts at unexpected times. He does however play a rather marginal role within the film, and the character type is not found in any Haneke films thereafter.

41 Christopher Sharrett (2010:213) contends that "children, always linked to bourgeois society's scenarios for the continuation of its repressions and oppressions, are in this case (and perhaps in the more general instance) tied to murder and self-destruction, arguable the real impulse of bourgeois, patriarchal civilization". To go so far as to link children in Haneke's oeuvre with murder and self-destruction is perhaps a bit tenuous, but I would instead argue that Haneke consistently uses children in a capacity which links them not to murder specifically, but to death in general. I also do not agree with Sharrett's notion that this is only a hallmark of bourgeois, patriarchal civilization, but instead that it is a marker of Being, and is thus applicable in much wider terms.

more susceptible to the awakening of *Dasein*.⁴² Evi's prayer (*Dear Lord make me meek/ so I in heaven thee shall meet*) is the first overt reference to death in the film, and it is also Evi who displays different forms of anxiety, lying to her teacher about being blind, obsessively scratching her body in a nervous itch. This anxiety is symptomatic of Heidegger's notion of the realisation of man's finitude, a finitude which is intimately linked to time. Heidegger delineates Being as time, and time is a constant refrain throughout the film. The way in which the narrative is divided, delimiting three years in the family's life, two that chronicle their mundane daily routine which is kept in check through watches and clocks, and a third in which an acceptance of the inherent finitude of time brings about the family's death, creates a framework where Being and time are equated. Haneke's signature long takes are also already evidenced here, another instance where, it could be argued, the director forces the viewer to make this link between time and its relation to Being.



Figure 29: Evi as the harbinger of *Dasein*, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

⁴² This notion of the child as harbinger of *Dasein* can perhaps also be further developed as a continuation of Friedrich Nietzsche's (2006 [1883 – 1885]:42) notion of the playing child, used in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a symbol of the post-nihilistic life. It could perhaps be argued that both Nietzsche and Haneke's use of the child as that which hearkens back to a more innocent time, can also be critiqued as a strategic move of escapism. Such a move would, within the greater context of Heideggerian ontology, then figure as an instance of inauthentic *Dasein*, and thus be rendered moot. The present study does however not provide the necessary space and research scope to explore Nietzsche's existential philosophy in depth, and this line of argument is thus left open for future research.

The way in which death causes an abrupt end to time,⁴³ ruptures the *Das Man* docility of the family in the form of a death of another. It is when the family are confronted by an accident scene on the highway, the bodies of the dead lying alongside the road, that “death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:262). This juncture marks the shift of Georg and Anna’s sense of *Dasein* towards an authentic understanding of their Being as being-towards-death. The process that ensues becomes a visible revolt against *Das Man*’s soporific wiles of consumer distraction, where the world in which they find themselves loses all relevance, where “it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being, *towards* its end” (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:295, emphasis original).



Figure 30: Georg and Evi destroying their home, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

In preparation for their deaths the family destroys their house and all its contents (figure 30). The obsessiveness with which this is done, the minute detail to which is seen in making sure that nothing remains whole, is mirrored in Haneke’s cinematography. Roughly half of the film is spent chronicling this systematic demolition. The viewer is offered frame after frame of clothes torn to shreds, crockery shattered, cupboards of which only splinters remain. Time as existential component is again employed in a very tangible manner, by forcing the audience to watch as this demolition takes place in (almost) real-time. This detailed destruction signals not only the revolt against what *Das Man* stands for, but simultaneously points to the way in which violence and death are inescapable

⁴³ Sharrett (2010:213) comments on the way in which death is a recurring refrain throughout the film through the music Haneke chose for its soundtrack. He mentions the use of “Alban Berg’s violin concerto ‘To the Memory of an Angel,’ written on the occasion of the death of the daughter of Walter Gropius and Alma Mahler ... and the fragment of a Bach chorale referenced by the father (‘I look forward to my death’), which Haneke remarks may be seen as the film’s anthem”.

aspects of man's being. By violently destroying what they have spent their lives gathering they not only acknowledge the way in which this has distracted them from an authentic *Dasein*, but they also embrace finitude, death, and the ceasing of time. It could also be argued that the destruction of the house plays another role, outside of the diegesis of the film, that of waking up the audience to an authentic understanding of *Dasein*. Considering Haneke's existential project in the rest of his oeuvre this seems quite plausible, and the painful experience of watching the destruction of the house, for an audience of mostly bourgeois culture class patrons, is one of the ways in which Haneke taunts the audience, challenges their docility.



Figure 31: Image of the Australian beach and ocean, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

It is at this juncture that the image of the Australian beach and ocean, which has made an appearance during the film on a number of occasions, is again seen (figure 31). It could be argued that the image figures as a symbol for authentic *Dasein*, that which comes when death has been accepted, as Gerhard Larcher (2010:60) argues, "death appears as a friend, as a metaphorical destination for emigration – the poster from Australia continuously luring the family away". This equating of death with the Australian image is mirrored in the conversation Georg and Anna have with the teller at the bank, where they tell him that they are "emigrating to Australia". But whereas the first images of this Australian beach and ocean are static, the image starts moving later, and this movement too figures as an indication of the slow awakening of *Dasein* which is taking place, as the image is no longer a static dream but one in which time, and thus Being, has entered into. It is thus that

Georg, after both his wife and daughter have drunk of the poison that will kill them, and have died, is busy ending his own life that he spends his last few living minutes writing all three their names on the wall of the room in which the dead and almost-dead are now lying. He writes not only their names but also the days on which they were born and the day on which they died, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:38) writes, “we shall point to temporality as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call ‘Dasein’”. Being becomes time.



Figure 32: Georg, Anna and Evi dying in front of the television, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

There is a last element which should be considered here, that of the television. The television set is present throughout this last sequence (figure 32), an image which will re-appear throughout the rest of Haneke’s oeuvre. Although Meghan Sutherland (2010:184) argues that the “television both abides and effects death”, I contend that the reverse is true, and that within Haneke’s oeuvre the television always figures as one of *Das Man’s* distractions from death. The fact that the film ends with the image of the television (figure 33) is again a throwback to Haneke’s engagement with the audience – once the family is dead Haneke is still reminding the audience of their tendency to be distracted from an authentic sense of *Dasein*, and it is this distraction that the rest of his oeuvre will attempt to negate.



Figure 33: The only object left in the home, *Der Siebente Kontinent*. 1989.

6.2 The *Vergletscherung*-trilogie: *Benny's Video*

Benny's Video reiterates the sense of thrownness evoked by *Der Siebente Kontinent*, presenting the viewer with a character existing in an industrial, upper-middle class landscape of objects and technological grandeur, but which is marked by nothingness, a being-in-the-world devoid of meaning. Haneke again plays with certain elements found in his first feature film, such as the image of the television set at the beginning of the film, which of course was the last frame of *Der Siebente Kontinent*. As was argued earlier, within Haneke's oeuvre the television set connotes the distractions of *Das Man*, preventing the individual from engaging with an authentic sense of *Dasein*. As the last shot of *Der Siebente Kontinent*, of the television screen after the death of the family, still reminds the audience of their tendency towards distraction, so the first shot of *Benny's Video* again calls attention to this distraction, and to the audience's complicity in their inauthentic *Dasein*.

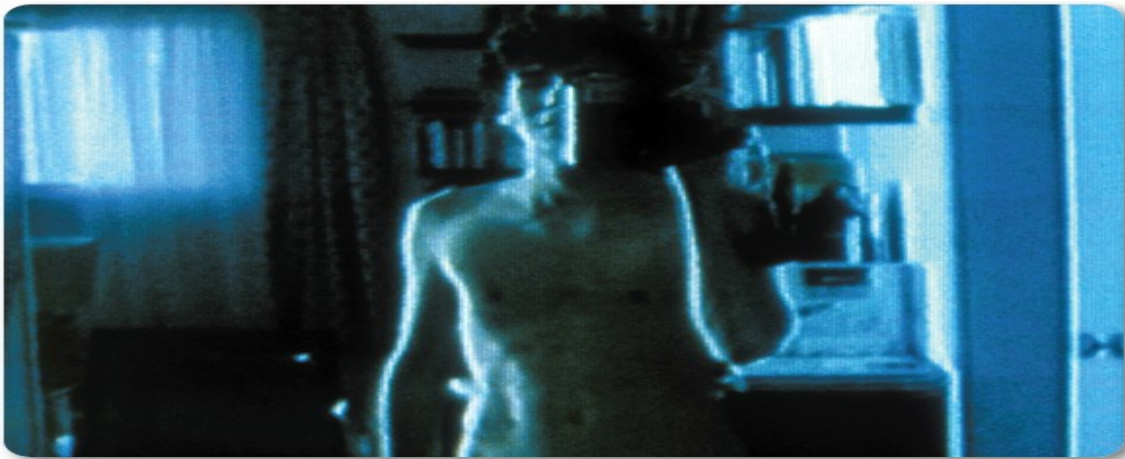


Figure 34: Benny filming himself, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

There are other elements from *Der Siebente Kontinent* that also make a reappearance, like consistently denoting the nothing by the use of the word *nothing* as an answer to any given question, and by Haneke's use of silence, which too is used not in positive, peaceful terms, but as a marker of the nothing. Benny, the film's central character, makes home videos (figure 34), and these videos become symptomatic of the way in which his attitude to death and finitude changes over the course of the film, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:287) explains, "when, for instance, a fruit is unripe, it goes towards its ripeness ... The fruit brings itself to ripeness, and such a bringing of itself is a characteristic of its Being as a fruit". At first Benny has a complex relationship with the notion of finitude, in true Heideggerian style constantly oscillating between accepting death and squirming away from it. This is first played out in the opening sequence, where Benny watches a home video of a pig being slaughtered, again and again rewinding the tape to watch the moment at which the bolt gun enters the pig's head (figure 35). This constant rewinding seems to speak of both a fascination with death itself as well as a denial of its finality; in Benny's world reality has become a video tape which can subvert time and bring the pig back to life, it is, after all, just a case of "ketchup and plastic".⁴⁴ Benny's ambiguity is seen in a number of various instances. He has a conversation about death with the girl he brings home from the video store, telling her that he did not want to look into the coffin at his grandfather's funeral. When he later kills the girl, on what seems to be a dare, this oscillation between fascination and negation becomes particularly clear. When Benny's father later asks him why he shot the girl, he replies "Because I wanted to know what it's like".⁴⁵ This sense of embracing death is seen in how easily Benny shoots her. But then he immediately panics, rushing around and telling her to stop screaming. He then shoots her again, a number of times, and then leaves the room without looking at her. Later he is lured back, touching the dead girl in a caressing manner, and goes through her school

44 This line is found in the conversation between Benny and the girl, where he explains to her how the special effects in action films are orchestrated.

45 Gerhard Larcher's (2010:60) reading of *Benny's Video* is also relevant here, linking to both the notions of the nothing and the "redemptive" purposes which Benny's killing of the girl serves in terms of his awakening *Dasein*. Larcher (2010:60) argues that "the film talks about his chance for breaking through the virtual reality of a mediatised world to discover his proper self and existence and about the possibility the boy is offered for gaining reality by accepting his guilt in spite of the temptation to simply 'consume' his crime", arguing from a theological perspective which provides space for the notions of being, redemption and hope. In fact, he continues by contending that

Looking at it from the perspective of fundamental theology, one could say that these films deal with the fundamental act of faith as a break-through towards existence *ex negativo* and in a very subtle way, so that the gain of reality *per se* is represented as the contrast to the state of sin as a loss of reality. Self-identity and coherence in our experiences of the world, which neither in Haneke's films nor in modern literature can be taken for granted, are developed through the visual fragments of his images as a trace of hope.

A very radical reading of the film's violent and seemingly immoral elements, Larcher's fundamental theology and this study's Heideggerian framework seem strange but apt bedfellows.

suitcase. Then abruptly Benny acts as if no death has occurred, visiting a friend and doing his homework. Then he oscillates back, again touching the girl's corpse, smearing her blood over his naked body. When Benny is finally ready to tell his parents, he shaves his head.



Figure 35: Killing of the pig, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

Benny's oscillation ceases when he has his hair shaved off, an act which can be read as a rite of passage in which he accepts the event that has occurred, accepts death, his finitude and his own part in the ending of time for another. It is at this point that his father's allegiance to *Das Man* becomes clear, telling Benny that the rebellion that the shaved head signifies does not bide well with society; there are rules and people need to keep to them. The way in which *Das Man* distracts from and negates death takes on various forms in the case of Benny's parents. One of the first instances of this distraction is at the party held at their house by their daughter Evi, to launch a pyramid scheme. As Sharrett (2010:215) notes, "... we see a video of a get-rich-quick party, where well-dressed, upwardly mobile couples, many of them clients of Georg or Anna ... stuff themselves as the party sounds turn into the Bach lyrics," and it is these lyrics which already speak of the distraction of *Das Man*: "*Despite the ancient dragon/ despite the gaping jaws of death/ despite the constant fear/ let the world rage and toss/ I stand here and I sing/ in perfect calm*". But perhaps the best example of *Das Man*'s negation of death is seen in the reaction of Benny's parents to the death of the girl – they are only concerned with how to get rid of the girl's body, with the object-to-hand (Heidegger 1962 [1927]:102) with which they have now been left. The

reality of her death, and of that death occurring at the hands of their son, is glossed over, lost in the details of how to dispose of the corpse. Their attitude echoes what Heidegger (1962 [1927]:165) terms *Das Man's* “‘levelling down’ of the possibilities of Being”, as he explains –

In this averageness with which it prescribes what can and may be ventured it keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force.



Figure 36: Benny shaving off his hair, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

Benny's parents not only distract themselves, but also attempt to distract Benny. He has no part in getting rid of the corpse, but instead is taken to Egypt for a holiday. But there is no getting away from death, it seems – even Egypt is awash with pyramids, mausoleums for the dead. And whilst Benny is still filming, his light-hearted footage of kite-flying or of his mother in the bathroom acts only as reminders to the viewer of the *actual* nature of Benny's videos. Apart from the video of the pig slaughter the most important video Benny makes is of how he kills the girl, and as Michael Lawrence (2010:71) argues, “the repeated playing and replaying of, first, the video of the pig's death and, second, the video of the girl's death, invites the spectator to equate the two events”. Both of these videos are thus wound up with the idea of death and its ending of time, but Benny's acceptance of death, which occurs after his complex rituals with the girl's body and the shaving of his

head (figure 36), changes his interaction with this particular video tape. Where the video of the pig was constantly re-played, rewinded again and again to bring the pig back to life, no such treatment is given to the tape of the girl. There is no rewinding, and she remains dead (figure 37).



Figure 37: The dead girl, *Benny's Video*. 1992.

Once Benny returns from Egypt his videotapes have been taken away, and his curtains are open for the first time in the film, and the real view outside the window is seen, not one mediated by Benny's camera. Reality is no longer mediated, and does not distract Benny from his being-in-the-world and his being-towards-death. The last two of Benny's videos the viewer watches is one in which he films the discussion between his mother and father about getting rid of the girl's corpse, and of his father being arrested by the police. These videos mark Benny's changed attitude towards death, the video which finds its way to the police will place both his parents in jail, serving "time", in essence, losing it. Benny's final videos are thus configured around annulling *Das Man's* distraction, a being-with-others which forces his parents to acknowledge death, and the finitude of time.

6.3 The *Vergletscherung-trilogie*: 71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls

The last instalment of the *Vergletscherung-trilogie* presents the viewer with different parallel narratives which showcase random fragments of people's lives. There is no overarching narrative or sense of pattern to the moments Haneke has chosen to depict, a technique

which becomes a narrativising and thematising of the nothing. As in the earlier two films there is a quality to Haneke's frame that is despairing and seems to emphasise the isolation of each character, and that underscores the being-towards-death of their *Dasein*. These frames are marked by their static quality, where the camera does not move but stays in one place for the duration of the scene. This is for instance seen in Maximillian B's seven-minute long ping pong match which he plays against himself, and the old man's twelve-minute conversation with his daughter, alone in a cold apartment. It also applies to the security guard and his wife's severely strained dinner conversation, where the camera records their discord in the detached manner that marks all of Haneke's frames.

The characters of the film, who do not know one another, all share a common strain in the ways in which their lives are all tinged by death. The young Romanian boy has left behind a war of dying children, the old man is faced with the reality of his old-age and the running out of time, the security guard in a job which by its very nature keeps him close to death. There is the soldier, whose life is configured around the death of others, the childless couple who has a life marked by their inability to conceive, of bringing forth life, and the orphaned girl who has an identity predicated around the death of her parents. The way in which death is a constant in the lives of these characters is also seen in their anxiety. All the characters display a certain anxious disposition which seems to influence every sphere of their lives, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:232, emphasis original) writes, "anxiety is not only anxiety in the face of something, but, as a state-of-mind, it is also *anxiety about* something ... That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world itself". This anxiety of the nothing is manifested through a fearfulness that undergirds so many of the everyday events the characters engage in. The old man who fears speaking to his granddaughter over the telephone, the childless couple fearing whether the orphaned girl likes visiting them, and Maximillian's fears about his studies and the frustration of a malfunctioning ATM. Yet it could be argued that despite the nothingness that pervades their personal narratives, and their subsequent anxiety, there is little of an authentic *Dasein* which shows itself, of a realisation of how their being hearkens towards death.

This distraction from death takes on one primary form, which links back to a theme from the two preceding films of the trilogy. This is the notion of Western society's progress, stemming from technological development and resulting in material wealth, which makes the fact that the characters all die in a bank an ironic throwback on Haneke's part. The characters of the film are completely caught up in the day-to-day running of their lives within this late capitalist machine, death an enduring refrain which they can't hear above

the thundering of *Das Man's* ideology. Haneke's camera lingers on these trimmings of Western society, again – large, ostentatious buildings, underground trains and brand-new computers, intricate security systems, again using the long take to establish the relation between time and being. Although this film, as is the case in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, also ends in the death of all the film's characters, it lacks the realisation and conviction of the first film; the characters never see beyond *Das Man's* distraction to find an authentic *Dasein*. Here I disagree with Oliver C Speck's (2010:165) notion that "the young man who runs amok at the end of *71 Fragments* is, indeed, a double of the families from *The Seventh Continent* and *Benny's Video* and not their opposite" (figure 38). Speck not only conflates the two families who, in my opinion, are at different ends of the *Dasein* spectrum, but also because the random nature of Maximillian's murder-suicide does not show any of the slow progression towards *Dasein* which is seen in the Schober family in *Der Siebente Kontinent* and in Benny in *Benny's Video*. Their demise merely underscores their inability to break free from *Das Man*, dying together, in its collective bind, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:288) predicts – "for the most part, *Dasein* ends in unfulfilment".



Figure 38: Maximillian shooting the customers in the bank,
71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls. 1994.

This nihilist strain which pervades the film is also one of the few instances in Haneke's oeuvre where he comments on the inability of religion to offer any hope of true redemption, in the form of authentic *Dasein*, or comfort within the context of being as being-towards-death. The image of the cross is used throughout the film in the form of the

puzzle that Maximillian and his fellow students attempt to solve,⁴⁶ and within Haneke's oeuvre there is the notion of religion as puzzle, a distant foreign element, and which is ultimately rather unsatisfactory. In *Benny's Video* and *Der Siebente Kontinent* religion sneaks in through ominous religious choral music, and through Evi's prayer. This prayer is echoed in the scene where the security guard prays in the bathroom, and it fulfils the same function as all the trappings of religion that appear in Haneke's narratives, of ultimately being empty signifiers, more superstitious than spiritual, and as Davide Zordan (2010:131) rightly attests, "the proximity of the camera to its objects reinforces the closeness and intimacy of the space in which the scene takes place. Because of the limitation of the depth of field zone, the image appears flat, just like Hans' prayer". This of course links to Heidegger's own attempts at the negation of religion in *Being and Time*,⁴⁷ as SJ McGrath (2008:19) argues, "it is not theologically insignificant that God appears nowhere in *Being and Time* – not even as a desire or cultural artifact. That Dasein has no natural religious life is an implicitly theological position, a rejection of the doctrine of natural theology", and Haneke continues this project.



Figure 39: Romanian orphan, harbinger of *Dasein*,
71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls. 1994.

Ultimately it could be argued that Haneke does not however cast Being as being-towards-death in a completely unfulfilled light, and again it comes in the form of the child.

46 The puzzle consists of various fragments of paper that the participants need to organise correctly so as to form the shape of a cross.

47 Whether Heidegger was successful in this attempted negation is still a contested issue, with some of his critics, like John Caputo, arguing that strains of his religious upbringing and education are found throughout his philosophical writing, including the existential ontology outlined in *Being and Time*.

Children, ever the harbingers of *Dasein* in Haneke's narratives, take up two prominent roles in the film – that of the Romanian boy, and the sullen orphaned girl. If there is any character in the film who has some awareness of the reality of Being and its relation to death it is the Romanian boy (figure 39). His identity is defined by the way in which death has influenced every sphere of his lifeworld, and he appears in one of the very last frames of the film, the camera lingering on him waiting in the car for his adopted mother who will not return, who has just been killed in the bank. Of all Haneke's films *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* is perhaps the one instance in which an authentic sense of *Dasein* is never conclusively reached, an element which instils the film with a sense of hesitancy, of decisions left unresolved. It is at this juncture that Haneke's choice of ending the film with the shots of the Romanian boy become significant, a reminder of the possibility of authentic *Dasein* still existing.

6.4 *Funny Games*

Writing about how hard it is to watch *Funny Games* has become de rigueur amongst Haneke scholars, Haneke himself famously remarking that he does not expect viewers to sit through the entire 108 minutes of extreme emotional and physical torture painstakingly wreaked on the unsuspecting family. Indeed, *Funny Games* is Haneke's most visceral film, and one where it is not only the family who are praying for death to come, and to come soon, but the audience too. It is also perhaps the film in Haneke's oeuvre which is most blatant about Being and its relation to death. Again many theorists have remarked upon the irony of the reaction the film evokes as none of the extreme violence takes place onscreen, and is merely expressed through sound. In this way the film could also be pegged as showing an immense amount of restraint on the director's side as he treads the very fine line between the Hollywood-style pornography of violence he is critiquing, and his own depiction of the violence that erupts in our being-with-others.

Death is perhaps most obvious in *Funny Games* in the violence which dominates the narrative, but in a Heideggerian sense death is laced throughout the early part of the film too, before any of the torture has started taking place. This occurs largely through the sense of anxiety which infuses the film, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:231) attests, "that which threatens cannot bring itself close from a definite direction within what is close by; it is already 'there' and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath, and yet it is nowhere". Haneke fills simple activities like loosening the sails of a yacht, or borrowing eggs from a neighbour, with enough existential dread that there can be no

uncertainty about the underlying themes that will later come into play in a more blatant manner. But indeed the notion of Being as always being-towards-death can be discerned even earlier than these anxiety-laced scenes. The iconic poster for *Funny Games*, showing nothing but the young boy Schorschi with a pillow case over his head (figure 40), is rife with the suggestion of anxiety, *geworfenheid*, and death. These elements are extended to the film's opening scene. The now-famous scene offers an aerial shot of the family car, with sweeping classical music that forms part of the family's in-transit guessing game, which is violently disrupted by an angry soundtrack overlay by John Zorn. This rupturing of the diegesis already signals that all is not as it seems, that violence and death can intercept and direct life, and that ultimately the individual has no control over these elements, is to a large extent rendered helpless in his thrown state.



Figure 40: *Funny Games* poster. 1992.

Not only is *Funny Games* very radical in its depiction of violence and the way in which it co-opts the audience into this relation of being-with, but also in sketching *Das Man*. As was discussed in the previous chapter, it could be argued that as in the case of all the families that dominate Haneke's narratives, the Georg and Anna of *Funny Games* are

markers of *Das Man* based on their status as part of the bourgeois culture class. In fact, the audience knows very little about these characters outside of this information that is to be gleaned. Within this reading the film is rendered almost militant in its underlying suggestion, that *Das Man* can only truly reach an understanding of authentic *Dasein* through the funny game, and in this instance the funny game being pain and torture, eventually leading to death, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:302, emphasis original) explains, “the ‘they’ covers up what is peculiar in death’s certainty – *that it is possible at any moment*”. The film is in fact a two-hour reiteration of this fact, with the family slowly, mercilessly driven to that point, not only of emotional death, but also of eventual physical death. Again Haneke employs his signature long takes to also establish the relation between being and time, which reaches what is perhaps its culmination within Haneke’s oeuvre, during the scene where Schorschi is shot whilst the camera lingers on Paul making a sandwich in the kitchen (figure 41). Being, time and death are in one instant encapsulated in Haneke’s frame, echoing Heidegger’s (1962 [1927]:39) notion that “time must be brought to light – and genuinely conceived – as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it”. Trying to solve the riddle of who Peter and Paul are, and why they are attacking the family, is thus irrelevant – Haneke’s lack of character psychology (another element that can be traced across his oeuvre) makes it clear that they are types, just as the family are a type of *Das Man*. In fact, Haneke consistently thwarts any attempts at psychologising Peter and Paul, with conversations about their possible background and histories relegated to just another “funny game”. The director also positions them solely in terms of their being in control of the game (dressed as they are in attire fitting for the playing of games, in their neat white shorts and white shirts), of acting as ring leaders in this painful awakening to *Dasein*.



Figure 41: Paul making a sandwich while Peter shoots Schorschi in the next room, *Funny Games*. 1997.

Within this reading another interesting element to consider is the fact that not only does the family awaken to their *Dasein* through pain and torture leading to death, but also becomes a family through what happens to them. For the first time in Haneke's oeuvre the complacency seen within families and amongst its members is shattered, and the viewer is faced with a family who looks after one another and fights for their parents, or child, or spouse (figure 42). Part of what is thus so traumatic about the viewing experience of *Funny Games* is not only the fact that the audience identifies with the family based on their belonging to the same class, but also because what is targeted here is a family, not mere isolated individuals who have been numbed by the monotony of their lives and thus have little energy left over for the well-being of others. The anxiety that the family experiences as part of this process of awakening to authentic *Dasein* is thus also extended to the audience, who are forced to deal not only with the existential anxiety the film invokes, but also with the Sartrean notion of existential nausea, which again relates back to Heidegger's (1962 [1927]:67) notion that "we are ourselves the entities to be analysed. The Being of any such entity is in each case mine".



Figure 42: The making of a family, *Funny Games*. 1997.

Haneke's positioning of the child as harbinger of *Dasein* takes on an interesting form in *Funny Games*. The image of the child is firstly invoked by the use of the "children's games" that are initiated by Peter and Paul throughout the film, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, like eeny meeny miny mo, or cat in the sack, and that initiate the process of pain and of being-towards-death. The child secondly makes its appearance in the character of Schorschi, the son of Georg and Anna. Unlike a number of other children in

Haneke's narratives, like Evi in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, Benny in *Benny's Video*, or even Pierrot in *Caché*, young Schorschi is very much in the background. Not much is heard of him, as a character he does not feature in any way that provides him with an own personality or subjectivity (as is for instance seen in the case of Evi in *Der Siebente Kontinent*), but ultimately the boy still occupies this Hanekean position as harbinger of *Dasein*. Despite his relatively low personal agency his death figures as the precursor to the family's understanding of *Dasein*, of awareness and acceptance of death, as he is also the first family member to die. The first thing Anna does after his death is switch off the television (figure 43), which should be considered within Haneke's framing within his oeuvre of the television as a sign of reality being mediatised, of being a distracting element. The moment the boy dies the circle is complete, the awakening of *Dasein* has begun, and that which could distract is switched off.

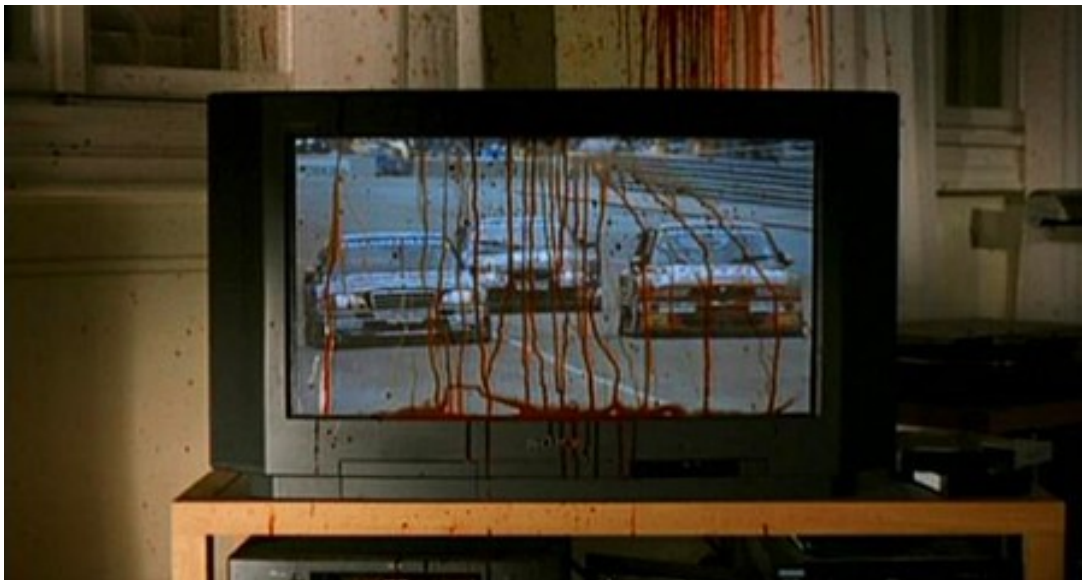


Figure 43: Blood-splattered television screen, just after Schorschi's been shot, *Funny Games*. 1997.

The final element which renders *Funny Games* as perhaps Haneke's most radical film in its existential message, is the way in which it sketches being-towards-death, and its concomitant authentic *Dasein*, as something that cannot be escaped, and the load of which cannot be lightened. Others cannot aid one in this painful process of reaching an authentic sense of *Dasein* and embracing one's finitude, as is seen in the disconnect between the families that fall prey to Peter and Paul, who cannot help one another. But Haneke also casts doubts on other elements that are traditionally seen as aides in man's existential journey, most notably on religion. Within Haneke's oeuvre religion consistently offers no help, as was already discussed in terms of its manifestations in for instance *Der Siebente Kontinent* and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, and *Funny Games* is no different.

Haneke again offers a quite subtle, yet scathing critique on the worthlessness of religion within this perilous search of being, especially when it is around issues of being-towards-death. This is highlighted by the inefficacy of Anna's prayer (figure 44) to bring about any miraculous redemption from their horrific scenario, ironically the same prayer that is prayed by Evi in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, while she is dying. It could be argued here that Anna is forced to pray (by the perpetrators, but ultimately also by Haneke), for the express reason of showing the utter absence of God, or any other redemptive reality. Indeed by Anna confessing that she knows no prayers Haneke illustrates the notion of exactly how post-God Western society has become.



Figure 44: Anna praying, *Funny Games*. 1997.

6.5 *La Pianiste*

As was mentioned in chapter 1, *La Pianiste*, Haneke's only cinematic adaptation, sparked a flurry of controversy upon its release in 2001, critics positing Haneke as either genius or perverse, or both. He was attacked for the apparent misogynist depiction of Erika Kohut, praised by others for his courage to tackle a narrative so rife with non-heteronormative sexuality. Some critics even went so far as to suggest that Haneke had now become a director of melodramas. From the outset it should be noted that I consider *La Pianiste* one of Haneke's most complex films. Any kind of analysis of the film is marred by this complexity, necessitating the need for shifting frameworks to accommodate the different

layers of the text. In this I agree with Speck (2010:139), who posits that

In trying to assess the different devices used by Haneke, we can see not only a systematic and radical refusal of any closure, either in form or content, but, indeed, the systematic destruction of any possibility for a reconciliation of these fragments on any level. No frame, to stay with the metaphor is entirely closed: the rules of the genre are established, then suddenly broken, images change their ontological status, suture is promised, then permanently refused, etc.

Identifying the ways in which being thus etches itself into the film in terms of being-towards-death necessitates a framework that periodically shifts to accommodate Haneke's unravelling complexity.

The most important discrepancy between *La Pianiste* and the films that precede it within Haneke's oeuvre, would be the way in which death, such a prevalent, blatant force in Haneke's other films, keeps a relatively low profile in *La Pianiste*. There are very few direct allusions to it, no instances of Heideggerian demise, apart from, of course, Erika's possible death at the end (figure 45).⁴⁸ Instead death manifests itself in subtle forms. The nothing is one of the most important ways in which death figures throughout the film. The nothing is an undercurrent to Erika's life, saturating every part of it – the seeming meaninglessness of her existence, the loneliness and isolation of her life. There is a general sense of discontentment that reigns in both Erika and her mother's lives, as is clearly evidenced by Erika's passive aggression at work and the mother's incessant harping on about them not owning their own apartment, or Erika's nights out without her. This also links to the way in which the nothing also figures in the general sense of disappointment that prevails in the film, of the expectations characters have of life not being met, of hoping for and dreaming of better lives that are never realised.



Figure 45: Erika stabbing herself, *La Pianiste*. 2001.

⁴⁸ Erika stabs herself in the shoulder at the end of the film, but it is unclear whether this injury is fatal.

This is perhaps illustrated most concretely by the Schubert piece that is played throughout the film, *Winterreise*, and which is the piece that Erika's students play as part of their class with her. It is also the piece with which the film opens.⁴⁹ The piece speaks of how people lie in bed at night disappointed with their lives, "dreaming of things they don't have". Not only does this general sense of disappointment and discontent allude to the way in which the nothing permeates the lives of the characters, but the use of *Winterreise* also picks up on Haneke's notion of the emotional glaciation as explored in the *Vergletscherungstrilogie*. But the nothing has other manifestations too, like existential anxiety. Heidegger (1962 [1927]:226-227) elucidates this anxiety by writing that "one of Dasein's possibilities of Being, anxiety – together with Dasein itself as disclosed in it – provides the phenomenal basis for explicitly grasping Dasein's primordial totality of Being", and this is seen in the ways Erika deals with the world. Erika feels threatened at every turn – at home, in the lair of her mother, at work, jealously guarding her own little Schubert domain, anxiously keeping students away from it, especially the young girl who, it has been suggested, reminds her of herself. But within this existential anxiety there are also allusions to the violence which is such an integral part of Erika's life, violence which, I hope to argue, is part of an effort Erika invokes to break away from the confines of *Das Man*.

Whether Erika's sexuality should be posited as problematic already reveals the depth of the opinion divide, with early analyses of *La Pianiste*, which labelled Erika as "perverse", slated by later theorists working with frameworks of sex-positive feminism, or greater awareness of the BDSM⁵⁰ branch of alternative sexuality. Siding myself with these later readings of Erika's behaviour, I would argue that Erika's "perversion" is her attempt at freeing herself from the stifling distraction brought on by *Das Man*. Erika's sexuality is shocking, it challenges the notions of accepted sexuality within the status quo. It is by definition non-heteronormative – tendencies of sexual self-mutilation, of voyeurism, and

⁴⁹ *Winterreise*

In the village
The dogs are barking, the chains are rattling;
The people are sleeping in their beds,
Dreaming of things they don't have,
Refreshing themselves in good and bad.

And in the morning all will have vanished.
Oh well, they had their share of pleasure
And hope that what they missed
Can be found again on their pillows.

Drive me out with your barking, you vigilant dogs,
Don't let me rest when it's time for slumber.
I am finished with all my dreams.
Why should I linger among the sleepers?

⁵⁰ Bondage, Discipline, Sadism and Masochism.

of relations with others that are marked by sadomasochistic leanings are not within the confines of sexual “normality”. This challenging of the heteronormative is the second reason for the existential nausea that permeates the film. Not only is there the nothingness with which Erika is confronted at every turn, but the heteronormative audience, themselves part of the *Das Man* culture class that Haneke is consistently criticising, finds Erika and these attempts at liberation from *Das Man* repulsive, albeit on only a subconscious level.

It is within this context that Erika’s relationship with her mother gains an added dimension, and where a shift of framework is called for. Not only does the relationship between the two women illustrate the complexities of being-with-others, but the mother also plays a role in Erika’s trajectory towards *Dasein* because of her position of belonging to *Das Man*. The markers of *Das Man* are rife on the mother – the way in which her thoughts and speech are consumed by everyday concerns, by financial matters, and the importance she attaches to what other people think of her and Erika. Her home is also characterised by the ever-present blaring of the television in the background, one of Haneke’s favourite signifiers of *Das Man*’s distraction. But moreover the mother’s dysfunctional relationship with Erika illustrates the complexity of this process of becoming aware of one’s existential status and enslavement to *Dasein*. Erika’s oscillation between authentic and inauthentic *Dasein* is played out in Erika’s ambivalent behaviour towards her – hating her, then loving her, hitting her, then kissing her.

It is this same repulsion that Walter experiences towards Erika, a character who perhaps is the film’s most distinct personification of *Das Man*. Erika’s sadomasochistic advances towards Walter do not bring about any real connection between the two of them, but eventually only serves to underscore her assumed perversity.⁵¹ As Erika wilfully chooses Walter, knowing that he would probably not share her sadomasochistic kinks, she is setting herself up for failure. Yet it could be argued that it is indeed a redemptive failure. The relationship with Walter, and the process of confronting him with her sexual desires of being dominated, results in her being cast out as other. This experience of being cast out reinforces the lonely notion of the nothing which has permeated her life up until this point. Through this process her *Dasein* comes into being, which will ultimately culminate in her own being-towards-death at the end of the life, of death at her own hand. Christian Wessely (2010:92) comments on the way in which Haneke’s formalistic choices in terms of

51 Had Erika chosen someone with a similar sexual profile to her own she might have had a different response. But as Walter’s sexuality falls within the confines of the heteronormative, Erika’s sadomasochistic admissions only serve to further cast her out as other.

editing links the scenes in which Erika mutilates her vagina and in which she stabs herself at the end, and indeed this illustrates the way in which Erika employs violence (and sex as violence), in this existential process of reaching an authentic *Dasein*.

6.6 *Caché*

As was discussed in the previous chapter, *Caché* is a film of two distinct yet intertwining narratives. It is Georges' story, but it is as much Majid's story. As their experiences of being-in-the-world and being-with-others has shown marked differences it would also figure that their experience of being-towards-death are dissimilar, and the way that death manifests in their individual lives casts an important light on their *Dasein*. It could be argued that Georges is very much oblivious to death, not particularly aware of his own being or the way in which this being is also a being-*with*. His being-towards-death is thus concomitantly *caché*, it is hidden. In Georges' life there are eventually a number of elements through which death creeps up on him – through history, specifically the story of Majid's parents, through the video tapes and illustrations that bring back memories of the past, and ultimately through the figure of Majid himself, and through his suicide. There are of course also other elements in Georges' life, outside of Majid, that could have served the same purpose of confronting him with death, such as the fact that his mother is old and weak and may die soon. But one does seem to get the idea that Georges is relatively emotionally removed from those that are closest to him, and his indifference to a large extent prevents him from engaging with the reality of his mother's impending death. This inability, or perhaps unwillingness to engage, also influences the way he experiences his dreams about Majid – although they have the potential of awakening a certain sense of existential anxiety, of engaging with death, Georges seems merely unsettled by them without being genuinely affected or changed.



Figure 46: Georges' dream, Majid slaughtering a chicken, *Caché*. 2005.

In Majid's case, however, based on the status of his class and socio-economic position, there is a far greater familiarity with death. In *Benny's Video* already there is the link that is made between the way in which the farmers on Benny's parents' farm are the ones killing the pig whilst Benny's bourgeois culture class parents look on, and this same composition is repeated in *Caché* with the killing of the chicken (figure 46). Majid, as part of the worker's class, is the one slaughtering the chicken, being sprayed with its blood, while Georges looks on in horror. In addition, Majid's identity as orphan is also defined by the death of his parents, and growing up in an orphanage his being-with-others is one that is predicated upon death, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:281) explains, "Dasein can thus gain experience of death, all the more so because Dasein is essentially Being with Others". But it stretches even further – Majid's parents were killed because of their revolt against a colonial system which itself is based on oppression and death. For this reason Majid's suicide (figure 48) is not an altogether foreign move; death has already become part of his identity.

As with most of Haneke's other films thrownness plays an important role in *Caché*, but again it manifests differently in the case of different characters. Majid's experience of thrownness already originates in his childhood, thrown into a world where as an orphan he needs to fend for himself. This extends into adulthood, where Majid does not have the privileges of education, class or money, and is thrown into a world indifferent to his plight. Haneke places Georges in contrast to this lifelong trajectory of thrownness. Georges' sense of thrownness only really starts with the advent of the tapes and illustrations being sent to his home, and this also marks only the second time in which his vulnerability in terms of being-in-the-world is felt, the first time of course being as a child when faced with the threat of Majid joining his family and challenging his privileged status as only child. But through this sense of thrownness which Georges experiences as adult, upon the arrival of the video tapes and illustrations, he also becomes aware of the way in which the nothing saturates his life, and life in general. Haneke illustrates this in a very practical manner by the constant reiteration of the word *rien* (nothing) throughout the film, and the viewer loses count of how many times it is used in conversation – between Georges and Anne, between Anne and Pierrot, between Majid and Georges or Georges and his mother. But the way in which the video tapes and illustrations throw Georges into a world in which he needs to confront his being-with-others and his being-towards-death also marks the point at which Georges' existential anxiety first takes root. Through the course of the film the viewer can see how Georges becomes visibly more anxious with the passing of time, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:235) argues, "in anxiety there lies the possibility of a disclosure

which is quite distinctive; for anxiety individualizes. This individualization brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being". The tapes are also significant for another reason, to both Georges and the audience, as illustrations of time. The fact that the video camera is stationary, that it presents a mostly static image, becomes in itself a recording of time, and thus brings the question of being to the fore.

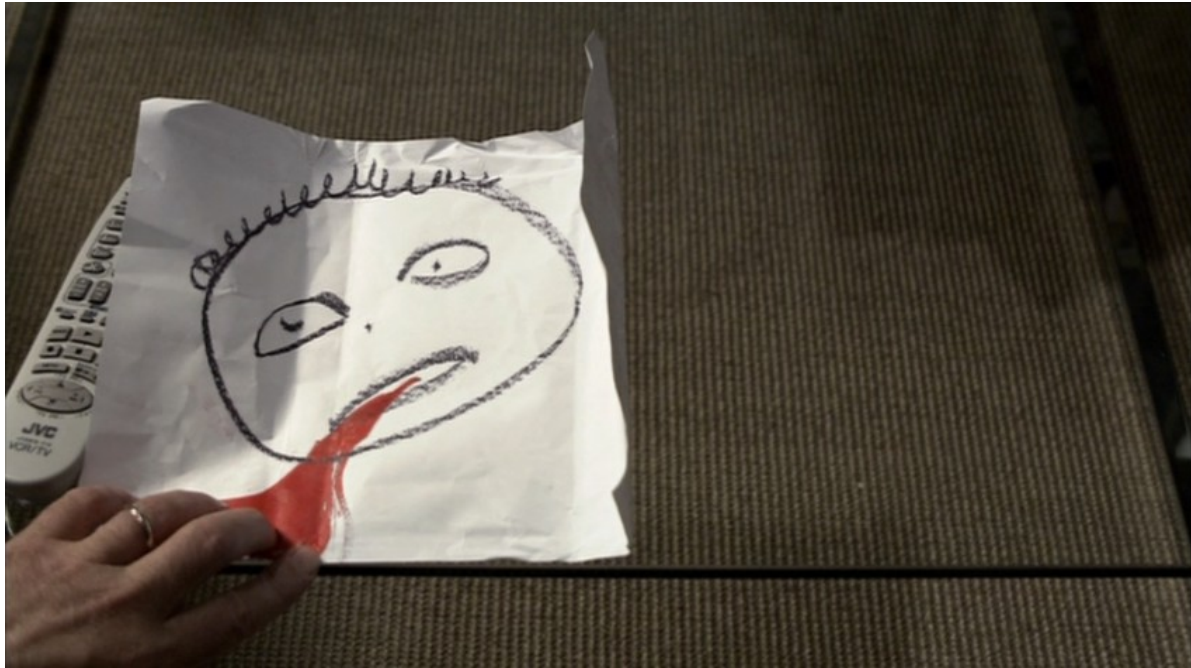


Figure 47: One of the drawings Georges receives along with the videotapes, *Caché*. 2005.

Haneke's strategy of introducing authentic *Dasein* into the narrative again comes in the form of a child. As has been mentioned, Haneke often uses children as harbingers of *Dasein*, and in *Caché* this motif features in a number of ways. The first is in the illustration that Georges receives along with the first videotape, of a child coughing up blood (figure 47). It is this illustration which ruptures his docile *Das Man* existence, and marks the start of his existential anxiety. Added to this is the fact that Majid and Georges' history is a childhood history, is concerned with events that transpired when both were still children. In many instances *Caché* can in fact be seen as the narrative of the child – not only in terms of Georges and Majid, but also of the next generation, of Pierrot and Majid's son, as Haneke so slyly suggests in the closing frames of the film. *Dasein* also haunts Georges in his dreams, which keep on taking him back to his childhood – of Majid slaughtering the chicken, of him coughing up blood, and finally being taken away from the farm by orphanage personnel. The potential of Georges' first awakening to *Dasein*, of his first

existential encounter with the notion of being-in-the-world and being-towards-death already takes place at this childhood juncture, but already there he chooses against it, chooses against the other, and through his lies Majid is sent away from the family. The childhood strain continues in the tape that Georges is sent of his childhood home, the home from which Majid was excluded. Even in their conversation as adults allusions to childhood and Haneke's notion of games is seen, when Georges asks Majid, "Is this a game? Do you want to play?"

As is the case with *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, *Caché* seems to be one of the instances in Haneke's oeuvre where no discernible sense of authentic *Dasein* is eventually reached by Georges. There is no evidence of such an awakening that is visible to the audience, and in fact it would seem as if Georges, when faced with the existential implications of the nothing, consistently tries to escape that which he is being confronted with. This is for instance seen in the way Georges flees to the cinema after Majid has killed himself, as Heidegger (1962 [1927]:298, emphasis original) contends, "in this manner the 'they' provides ... a constant tranquilization about death. At bottom, however, this is a tranquilization not only for him who is 'dying' but just as much for those who 'console' him". It could be argued that Haneke casts a wider net here, not only implying that Georges reaches no authentic *Dasein* because of his need to escape and be distracted, but also that cinema becomes a space where that which Georges symbolises, the bourgeois culture class of *Das Man*, is distracted from their own being-towards-death.



Figure 48: Majid, just after slitting his own throat while Georges watches, *Caché*. 2005.

6.7 Conclusion

Haneke's films are imbued with existential anxiety. Death creeps up on his characters in various different ways, and their roads to an authentic *Dasein*, where death is no longer denied, take on various manifestations. In the *Vergleitscherung-trilogie* Haneke plays with the way postmodern late-capitalist society distracts the individual from his *Dasein*, presenting the viewer with characters oscillating between authenticity and inauthenticity. In *Der Siebente Kontinent* this is resolved through the destruction of a family home and a mass suicide. In *Benny's Video* Benny's murder of a young stranger highlights the distracting qualities of *Das Man*, and is an integral part of Benny's own embrace of death. *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* is perhaps a bit of an anomaly within this trajectory of *Dasein* and death, as very few, if any, of the characters reach an authentic sense of Being. The film does however continue the trope of the child as harbinger of *Dasein*, first appearing in *Der Siebente Kontinent*, which I argue Haneke consistently uses throughout his oeuvre. The child makes a reappearance in the next film under discussion – *Funny Games*. *Funny Games* is saturated with the possibility of death, but also presents the viewer with the radical notion that the family is awakened to their true *Dasein* through pain and torture, which will eventually lead to death. *La Pianiste* continues this radical tradition, where, I argue, Erika Kohut's 'perverse', non-heteronormative sexuality is her attempt at negating *Das Man* and embracing her being-towards-death, which the film's ending succinctly illustrates. In the last film discussed, *Caché*, death becomes enmeshed with class struggles, post-colonial thrownness, and the tangible anxiety of Georges Laurent.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the existential themes in director Michael Haneke's work, framing six of the director's films within the existential ontology of philosopher Martin Heidegger. To conclude this study I highlight the various theoretical perspectives used in the analysis, as well as tracing the trajectory of my argument. The discussion then moves onto a final look at the criticism that has been levelled at both Heidegger's existential ontology and Michael Haneke's films, and how these two strains link and engage in various interesting ways. This is further developed to include my own perspective on both Heidegger's ontology and Haneke's cinematic project. In the process it illuminates the contributions made by this study, as well as the limitations of this particular research, and outlines the possibilities for future research.

7.1 Summary of chapters

The first chapter outlines the need for a study specifically investigating the existential strains that permeate Haneke's work, highlighting the lack of research in this particular area. It outlines the general research question, specifically how Heidegger's notion of Being as always being-towards-death is manifested within Haneke's oeuvre. It further explains how such an investigation is predicated on two other constitutive elements of Heideggerian ontology, the notions of being-in-the-world, and being-with-others. The chapter also includes a delineation of the literature study, which encompasses two distinct spheres. It firstly outlines the sources employed in theorising Michael Haneke's work, including the director's own thoughts on his films. It then moves onto the relevant sources pertaining to Heidegger's philosophy, which includes primary and secondary sources on Heidegger's existential ontology. Also included within this sphere are sources of critique of Heidegger's philosophy, and sources that pertain to the general field of existentialism.

Chapter two introduces the work of Michael Haneke. It provides some biographical information about Haneke's life before moving onto an overview of his career as feature film director. This includes briefly discussing the ten films the director has made between 1989 and 2009, mapping the critical and commercial success of the various films, and the geographical and linguistic trajectory his oeuvre has followed. In order to later theorise

my own perspective on Haneke's work, the chapter also includes an overview of the discourse around Haneke's films. I categorise this discourse in two waves of critical engagement, with the first wave originating around 1991, with the publication of Alexander Horwath's book *Der Siebente Kontinent, Michael Haneke und seine Filme*. This wave is characterised by a certain topology of discussing Haneke's work, as well as the prominence of certain themes – postcolonial investigations, the problematic nature of Haneke's cinematic violence, sadomasochistic sexuality and the notion of perversity, as well as Haneke's work as *Zivilisationkritiek*. The second wave originates around 2009 with the publication of Catherine Wheatley's *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*. The second wave is characterised by the interdisciplinary nature of its discourse, and the ways in which first wave themes are revisited and reinterpreted. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Haneke's own thoughts on his films, including the director's view of the artifice of film, his own role as artist, and the value of polycentric readings of his works.

The third chapter of this study introduces the existential ontology of Martin Heidegger. It briefly discusses Heidegger's biographical background before launching into an overview of the main themes of the philosopher's work. In order to frame Heidegger's ontology within the greater field of existentialism, the discussion then shifts to an overview of existential philosophy; delineating its main themes, authors and texts. It also discusses the main instances of criticism that have been levelled at it. Having thus contextualised Heidegger's ontology within its greater field of existentialism, the discussion then turns to the criticism levelled at Heidegger's philosophy. It includes a brief look at his legacy, leading to an exploration of Heidegger's thoughts on being. This section of the chapter defines Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, and then situates *Dasein* within Heidegger's three delineations of being: being-in-the-world, being-with-others, and being-towards-death. In the process it touches on a number of important Heideggerian concepts, including *Das Man*, thrownness, care, anxiety and nothingness.

Chapters four, five and six are concerned with the analysis of the six films under discussion, within the delineated framework of Heideggerian ontology. Chapter four and five specifically deal with the notions of being-in-the-world and being-with-others. In chapter four the cinematic focus is Haneke's first three films, his *Vergleitscherung-trilogie*, whilst chapter five looks at three of his later films, *Funny Games*, *La Pianiste*, and *Caché*. Both chapters examine his films on three fronts. They firstly look at the role of the postmodern capitalist milieu in which the films are situated, and the pessimism that marks Haneke's treatment of, amongst other things, technology and consumption. The

second element under discussion is Haneke's rendition of being-in-the-world within the context of the public space, and of being-with-others within the context of *Das Man*. It examines the isolation and alienation experienced by Haneke's characters in their interaction with those whom they share their world with, and the tropes of cruelty and indifference that mark so many of Haneke's public spaces. These two chapters lastly discuss being-in-the-world within the private sphere of the home, and being-with-others within the family unit. It examines the different ways Haneke's families function, ranging from disconnected to dysfunctional. It also looks at how Haneke sketches the private space of the home, and the role it plays in the awakening of authentic *Dasein*.

Against the backdrop of the analysis of Haneke's rendition of Being, found in chapters four and five, chapter six explores the third part of Heidegger's delineation of Being: being-towards-death. It traces Haneke's sketching of being-towards-death in all six films that this study investigates, elucidating the various ways his characters deal with the notions of anxiety and thrownness in their oscillation between authentic and inauthentic instances of *Dasein*.

7.2 Contribution and limitations of study, and suggestions for further research

This study's contributions lie on a number of fronts. It firstly contributes to the growing field of research on Michael Haneke's work. It specifically fills an important gap with regards to the director's treatment of existential themes, which has up until now not been adequately analysed. It also contributes to the pairing of Heideggerian philosophy with film studies, an approach which has gained popularity over the last number of years. In this way it also contributes to the multidisciplinary nature that the greater field of visual culture studies considers so central to its discourse.

There are a number of elements that are at once limitations of this study as well as possibilities for further research. Most of these limitations are bound to the length and scope constraints of research at this level. In this way a wider analysis of the Heideggerian ontology in Haneke's entire oeuvre was not possible in this study, and only six of his ten films are considered for analysis. The remaining four films all lend themselves to a similar examination, and would indeed provide a more complete perspective on Haneke's existential project. In the same vein this study has only been able to look at the existential impetus of Heidegger's thought, and indeed a wider existential enquiry into Haneke's

films could prove very worthwhile. There are other themes that this study also highlights that could perhaps be studied in closer detail. This includes the interplay between Heidegger's views on modernity and technology and Haneke's perspective on postmodernity and technology, or even a delineation of Haneke's work within the context of Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of existential nausea.

7.3 Concluding remarks

At this point, as the discussion concerning the ontological significance of Haneke's films draws to a close, there are still a few loose ends to tie up. With this in mind I would like to examine the interesting intersection between the criticism levelled at Heidegger's existential ontology and Haneke's films. In the process I would like to point out a number of elements that I find disconcerting about the work of both figures.

Martin Heidegger and Michael Haneke seem strange bedfellows. Born 50 years apart, both in Germany, Heidegger went on to become the most important philosopher of the modern era, and Haneke one of the most controversial and subversive directors of his generation. Both have elicited criticism from various fronts. In Heidegger's case, as was explained in chapter three, the criticism is mainly based on what his critics read as the nihilist tendencies of his existential ontology, and on the moral and ethical relativism that his philosophy enables. When one looks at Haneke two similar strands of criticism manifest themselves – critics firstly address the fundamental nihilism underlying his films, and secondly comment on the way in which his cinematic shock tactics often cause more damage than the Hollywood tradition he is allegedly trying to critique.

The first strain of criticism that is levelled at Heidegger questions the ethical and moral relativity of his existential ontology. Leora Batnitzky (2006:9) elucidates the way in which this relativity is also linked to Heidegger's negation of onto-theology, arguing that both Levinas and Strauss felt that "in declaring an end to metaphysics Heidegger also declared an end to absolute claims about morality". For Leo Strauss (1989:36) the notion of existentialism is not at odds with a being-with-others that is marked by ethical and moral behaviour. Yet the philosopher argues that within Heidegger's delineation of Being such an ethical relation is impossible, as "Heidegger never believed in the possibility of an ethics" (Strauss 1989:36). This of course becomes a salient point within the context of

Heidegger's own political choices. Hannah Arendt, Heidegger's former student, contributes to this discussion by questioning Heidegger's view of both the world, and the others with whom the world is shared. Arendt argues that the most fundamental element of Being should not be considered being-towards-death, but the *Mitsein* that also marks the being of the individual. The pre-eminence of this *Mitsein*, this being-with-others, ensures that the other can never be abused (Benhabib 1996:53).

This abuse of the other takes an interesting turn in Haneke's case. One of the most common notions of criticism levelled at the director is that he is guilty of sadistic filmmaking, of torturing his audience. Most of this criticism is centred around the way in which the director handles the issue of violence in his films. Haneke argues that his techniques of representation are a defence against Hollywood's mindless violence and high-definition blood and gore, but his critics have been quick to point out that he may just be managing the reverse. In fact, certain critics (cf. Ornella 2010:59) even suggest that whilst Haneke attempts to position the viewer as perpetrator, revealing their complicity, they in fact rather become victims of the director's cinematic violence.

This notion of torture is not new to anyone who has been exposed to Haneke's films. In fact, it often seems as if the director might even derive pleasure from the way in which his material traumatises his audience. I would thus agree with Oliver C Speck (2010:186) in positioning Haneke's films as part the "cinema of cruelty", but also with Brigitte Peucker (2010:23) who highlights Haneke's penchant for using games as narrative devices, thus suggesting that "the director has a game to play as well, and it is cat and mouse". It does however seem to be a game which is always already in Haneke's favour, not least because of his unwillingness to offer the viewer any position which is not mired in nothingness. Some of the director's harsher critics get so riled up by his cinematic sadism that they do not recognise the many important discoveries about Being, and about society, that these techniques elucidate. This is perhaps best illustrated by Charles Martig's amusing six page tirade against Haneke's films in *How Much Haneke Do We Deserve? Against Sadistic-philosophical Tendencies in Filmmaking* (2010). Yet it is impossible not to experience a level of unease at Haneke's methods, not least because of the perspective on the being-in-the-world and the being-with-others that it offers. Subsequently, within a Heideggerian delineation, I am also not sure whether, as Arendt and Levinas argue, the pre-eminence of *Mitsein* is the answer to Heidegger's ontological nihilism, although I do agree with their notion that *Being and Time* leaves a moral and ethical vacuum.

The fact that both Haneke and Heidegger are accused of fostering nihilist undertones in their work is in no way surprising. Heidegger's insistence on the prevalence of the nothing, of an ontology configured around death, renders existence and his idea of an authentic Dasein, a rather despairing state. Haneke is no different. Aside from the thematic strains of his films (a family commits suicide/a boy murders a young girl and his parents chop up her body into smaller pieces and flush it down the toilet/a young man walks into a bank and kills everyone in it, and that's just the *Vergletscherung-trilogie*), Haneke's formalistic choices have done little to avail himself of criticism. Sparse, empty frames, painful long shots and instances of representation that err on the side of torturing the audience have become his trademarks. As was discussed in chapter three, Hans Jonas frames the nihilist undertones of Heidegger's ontology within its greater field of existentialism, and argues that its roots can be drawn back to the Gnostic tradition (Jonas 1992:321). Jonas suggests that the way in which Gnosticism supports the idea of a dualism between man and world which is fundamentally destructive, is similar to the dualism between man and world that existentialism puts forth. Jonas continues this trajectory of thought by arguing that "the same cause which is at the root of nihilism is also at the root of the radical temporality of Heidegger's scheme of existence, in which the present is nothing but the moment of crisis between past and future" (Wolin 2001:338). Although I to some extent agree with Jonas's argument, and see the validity of drawing such a link between Gnosticism and existentialism; my concern when it comes to Heidegger's philosophy is more in line with what McGrath discusses towards the end of his *Heidegger. A (Very) Critical Introduction*.

Within McGrath's (2008:111-112) reading of Heidegger, the nihilist undertones of Heidegger's ontology are seen as stemming directly from the philosopher's insistence on the importance of the nothing. McGrath thus suggests that because Heidegger's entire ontology is framed by the nothing it makes any break from the nihilist worldview impossible. In this way it almost becomes a self-referential ontology, in which everything but the nothing can be questioned, and where, because of the pre-eminence of nothingness, that question is always already rendered moot. Perhaps the most fundamental implication for such a state of affairs is the position in which it puts God, or rather, the way in which the idea of God is completely negated. McGrath (2008:111-112) aptly summarises this scenario –

Dasein has no access to anything beyond time, no metaphysical knowledge of the divine, no natural religiousness or consciousness of God. The terms of this position change somewhat after *Being and Time*, but the nontheistic orientation remains the same. In this reconfiguration of Western ontology the question of God, and the

related question of the ultimate good, can no longer be asked.

In my opinion this is the most problematic element of Heidegger's ontology, and the fundamental reason for the nihilist impulse thereof. I suspect that Heidegger would perhaps disagree with McGrath's reading, positing nothingness as a necessary, even positive point of departure in our road toward an existence devoid of metaphysical crutches. Within such a conception nihilism is not necessarily a negative element. Alas my understanding of nothingness is not as optimistic. Consequently my view of nihilism departs from that of Heidegger, instead positing it as a despairing state of affairs in which the subject no longer has any recourse to an element outside his own making. In the process of breaking away from the onto-theological, Heidegger wittingly or unwittingly replaces it with his own theology of the nothing. When it comes to Haneke, this issue becomes especially significant.

Haneke's films are laced with nihilism at every front. Within the context outlined above, it could be argued that his work in fact only truly makes sense when considered within the Nietzschean paradigm of a world where God is dead. Gerhard Larcher (2010:59) defines this strand of Haneke's work in quite an arresting manner:

Looking at it from the perspective of a theology of history, Haneke's films represent a meticulous description of human existence under the conditions of the death of God, and this also means under the conditions of the disintegration of the traditional idea of the human being in a situation of spiritual and moral exhaustion.

The way in which this loss of God manifests itself in Haneke's frames takes a few different forms.⁵² The first is perhaps in the very little currency that hope carries in the director's oeuvre, and which has been evident throughout the analysis of the films in the study. Theorists are divided on the matter of Haneke and hope. Larcher (2010:57) argues that although Haneke does not offer any outright instances of hope, the director does encourage his viewers to search for such a possibility of redemption on their own. Frey (2010:164) in turn purports that "his cinema finds its creative redemption precisely in the binary flat line of the new media he has so vociferously denounced". Stefanie Knauss (2010:233), in her analysis of Haneke's work, accuses the director of not offering any "new, positive visions" to compensate for the harshness of what he presents to the audience. I am not as optimistic as Larcher or Frey, more prone to believe that by the time Haneke is done with the audience they are too bludgeoned to do anything but recover from his

⁵² It is not insignificant that his work has recently drawn the interest of theologians, who have written about Haneke's work within their own discipline (cf. Larcher (2010), Hoelzl (2010), Zordan (2010)).

onslaught. Nor do I see how new media can counter Haneke's fundamental fatalism. More in line with Knauss's sentiment, I fear that the lack of hope in Haneke's oeuvre is his greatest misstep. But this is underpinned by the second, and perhaps more frightening manifestation. This manifestation is in optic terms, which makes sense considering that Haneke's entire oeuvre is permeated with tropes of the visual. The director employs his own camera, as well as the simulacral double bind of cameras within his frame, to constantly engage the viewer to look, to notice. In a throwback to Haneke's *Caché*, however, the question of who is looking, and who is watching, gains critical mass within Haneke's greater ontological project.⁵³ What is perhaps the most traumatic element of Haneke's work is the reality that no one is watching, ever. God is not there.

An avid Heideggerian at the time, I started this study as part of an ongoing interest in the existential, specifically within the context of postmodern life. I was intrigued by the way Haneke saturated his frames and narratives with existential angst, whilst I was at the same time struggling with many elements of the director's work. It has become de rigueur for theorists to speak about how hard they find it to stomach Haneke's films,⁵⁴ Christian Wessely (2010:80) perhaps stating it most succinctly by confessing that "I am a declared fan of his films even though I cannot really cope with some of them". This has been my truth too. Being exposed to Haneke's films are at once enlightening and utterly traumatising, often to the extent of feeling violated. His films render the viewer sick to the stomach, physically bearing the stigmata of existential nausea in themselves. This constant oscillation between cathartic enlightenment on the one hand, and violating despair on the other is of course Haneke's hallmark, yet it renders the viewer in an almost impossible position. In writing about *Code Inconnu* John Rhodes (2010:97) suggests that "we are implicated unbearably in the film's dilemmas. Wrong media cannot be watched rightly. Thus, we are wrong for watching and wrong for not watching and wrong in every way that we watch", and this perhaps sums up Haneke's cinematic project. In a world edged by nothingness and where representation itself is a simulacral myth the answer is always already death. In my opinion it could consequently almost be argued that Haneke's greatest fault as director, to follow Peucker's line of reasoning, is that the game Haneke plays with the audience is a labyrinthine hide and seek. In Haneke's cinema the director sends the audience into his labyrinth of nothingness, counting as they find a place to hide. But no one ever comes searching. The viewer remains lost in Haneke's theology of despair.

53 For a psychoanalytic perspective on the lack of the look of the other in *Caché*, see Manon (2010).

54 Knauss (2010:227) is even more explicit in her voicing of the same sentiment, noting that "watching one of Haneke's films is usually a sensation that hurts like the cuts with which Erika hurts her vagina ..."

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