ALEXANDER D. ORNELLA AND STEPHANIE KRAUS, EDITORS, FASCINATINGLY DISTURBING: INTER-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON MICHAEL HANEKE'S CINEMA (ROCHESTER, 2010).

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Ethical Solicitations and the Film Poetics of Michael Haneke's *Caché*

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Paul Arthur describes Michael Haneke's approach to film making as "a reluctant ethics framed largely through negation."[1] While several critics have outlined reasons to support this view, I am inclined to interpret Haneke's aversive ethics as an affirmation of the importance of self-questioning in a context of complex selves and political worlds that defy easy resolution or total explanation. His affirmation, in my view, emerges in and through his practice of using aesthetic techniques to transform ethical dispositions. This humanistic intervention into anesthetizing contemporary habits of perception compliments a strand of thinking in current ethics and political theory that considers how perception works as an aspect of ethical solicitation. I find this

1. Paul Arthur, "Endgame," *Film Comment* 41.6 (2005) 28.

intervention particularly active in the "poetic" technique of Haneke's 2005 film, *Caché,* which provokes thoughtful awareness of destructive habits of socio-political perception through its multilayered engagements with the main character's memory and history. This reading challenges those critics who contend that *Caché* perpetuates the same cultural amnesia, the same dissociation of race issues, portrayed in the film's narrative of the aggressive and fear filled encounters of Georges Laurent, a talk show host of a literary television program, with Majid, who almost became this man's brother many years ago. *Caché*'s artistic value, in my view, derives in part from its ethical solicitations—helping audiences learn what they ought to do by cinematically guiding their imaginative and emotional responses in ways apt to lead to moral insight.[2]

The film does this, in my view, by disturbing deeply ingrained viewing habits: Haneke's "poetic" techniques work at more visceral levels, soliciting awareness of these habits of embedded perception. Walter Benjamin notes film's effect of "deepening . . . apperception," since "the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."[3] How Haneke's film techniques work on the spectator, and what kind of ethical subject is imagined in the process, will be considered in conversation with William E. Connolly's neuropolitical theory of perception, which considers ethics in terms of "how [one might] intervene tactically in the perceptual process"[4] to foster new possibilities for political thinking and action.

2. The moral imagination at work in Haneke's attempts to transform perception through his film art is consistent with a trend in moral philosophy and ethics that considers art as a means to engage and even transform a complex interplay of sensations, emotions, cognition, and dispositions that constitute ethical judgment. For example, in his book, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Berys Gaut argues that art's ability to teach us about morality constitutes one of the aesthetic values in art.

3. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968) 235, 237.

4. William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 26.

Ethics and Perception

Michael Haneke's discussion of his film techniques suggests an abiding concern with ethical issues related to perception and image[5] within contemporary North Atlantic consumer society. Many critics note, for example, Haneke's critique of the deleterious effect of commercial television (and Hollywood film) on socio-political relations given their seductive speed, the assumption of total explanatory power, and the reduction of suffering to mediated, distant, explained representations.[6] As Haneke observes in an interview with Christopher Sharrett, "[a]lienation is a very complex problem, but television is certainly implicated in it." For this reason, Haneke resists film making as the production of consumable objects, in a context where "new technologies, of both media representation and the political world, allow greater damage with ever-increasing speed."[7] His use of layered images, long takes, static shots, and simplified montage slows down the image to provoke contemplation and embodied engagement with film, techniques Jonathan Thomas calls Haneke's "poetics of the pause."[8] Haneke's effort to disturb the spectator, to cinematically "let us experience the world anew,"[9] is sometimes expressed in stark, uncompromising terms: "I've

5. For a strong version of the analogy of art as morality, specifically as perception, see Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), for a weaker version of this analogy, see Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Iris Murdoch's *Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) develops moral philosophy as vision and love. Within film criticism, see Kaja Silverman's "ethics of seeing" as "heteropathic identification" in her *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 76 etc. Many of these thinkers attend to visceral and unconscious responses as ethically important; see also Jeffrey Stout's "Moral Abomination," in his *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontent* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988), and Iris Marion Young's "Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity," in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Despite differences between these approaches, and their sources, there is a common emphasis on a complicated human freedom and perception exercised through imagination, responsiveness, answerability, and attention. My essay considers the politics of such ethics.

6. See, among others, Libby Saxton, "Close Encounters With Distant Suffering: Michael Haneke's Disarming Visions," in *Five Directors: Auterism from Assayas to Ozon*, ed. Kate Ince (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) 84–111; and Jonathan Thomas, "Michael Haneke's New(s) Images," *Art Journal* 67.3 (2008) 80–85.

7. Christopher Sharrett, "The World That Is Known: An Interview with Michael Haneke," *Cineaste* 28 (Summer 2003) 30–31.

8. Thomas, "New(s) Images," 81.

9. Sharrett, "The World that is Known," 31.

been accused of 'raping' the audience in my films, and I admit to that freely—all movies assault the viewer in one way or another. What's different about my films is this: I'm trying to rape the viewer into independence."[10] In less provocative terms, he describes the demanding aesthetic of his films as a kind of Socratic dialogue between director and spectator: "My films are intended as polemical statements against the American 'in-your-face' cinema and its dis-empowerment of the spectator. They make an appeal for a *cinema of insistent questioning* instead of false (because too quick) answers, for *clarifying distance* in place of violating closeness, for *provocation and dialogue* instead of consumption and consensus."[11] Libby Saxton argues that Haneke's film techniques bring violence and suffering into more intimate proximity to spectators, "reinvesting them cinematically with those real, physical properties of which they are drained the moment they enter the media flux."[12] She also contends that "Haneke's theoretical prioritisation of spectatorial work and agency is potentially undermined by his films' tendency to manipulate or wilfully mislead their viewers," techniques which she concludes are "coercive"[13] and "unconducive to the process of dialogue."[14] I have no particular stake in defending Haneke from these charges, but I find them curiously jarring in the context of Saxton's strongly appreciative analysis of his French language films. Is there another way to understand Haneke's ethics and politics of perception? Do we have as much self-willed agency in perception as Saxton appears to assume in making these charges? Do Haneke's films evoke degrees of implication in the lives of others that Saxton finds "coercive" or even obscene?

I don't really know what Haneke intends when he says that if truth appears in film, it is obscene (he wryly inverts Godard's aphorism about truth in film to say that "film is a lie at twenty-four frames per second in the service of truth").[15] He does clarify that obscene

10. John Wray, "Minister of Fear," *New York Times*, 23.09.2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/magazine/23haneke-t.html.

11. Michael Haneke, "Film als Katharsis," *Austria (in)felix: Zum österreichischem Film der 80er Jahre*, ed. Francesco Bono (Graz: Blimp, 1992) 89 (italics added).

12. Saxton, "Close encounters," 89.

13. Ibid., 90.

14. Ibid., 108.

15. "Collective Guilt and Individual Responsibility: An Interview with Michael Haneke," *Cineaste* 31.1 (2005) 51.

truth only appears if films avoid making "the visceral, the horrific or transgressive elements of life consumable."[16] Haneke does not want life or reality or persons treated as something I can eat or buy or fully explain. He wants to disturb the viewer, to invite self-questioning and political awareness, to disrupt a "comforting illusion of being able to completely describe and thus explain the world," thus haunting or provoking the spectator to "'think with' and 'feel with' the film."[17] His films challenge a model of the ethical subject as consumer interpreted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, as a fantasy of self-governed agency, insulated from the influence of others, magically timeless, and dominated by willing.[18] Given consumer practices, including the consumption of media, which reinforce such fantasies, a filmic evocation of characters (and solicitation to spectators) that plumbs a more constrained ethical agency might appear obscene or coercive. Williams describes such agency as implicated in the lives of others, limited by past choices and events which have consequences we did not intend or imagine, reliant upon partially subliminal or pre-conscious perception—as a historical "soul in time."[19] As I demonstrate in a close reading of *Caché*, Haneke elicits a similarly complex ethical agency through filmic techniques which intimate the simultaneous activity and passivity of ethical and political agency. This view, rather than slumping down into a dismal determinism, acknowledges as yet untried possibilities beyond willing and choosing, a religious or at least post-secular dimension of ethics.

Infraperception

In his book, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed*, the political theorist William E. Connolly develops an understanding of perception that compliments Haneke's work, tracing "the animal in us, the spirituality in us, or both"[20] to complicate deliberative models of culture and politics. A Christian theologian, K. Roberts Skerrett, argues in a

16. Sharrett, "The World that is Known," 31.

17. Amos Vogel, "Of Nonexisting Continents: The Cinema of Michael Haneke," *Film Comment* 32.2 (1996) 75.

18. Cf. Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2000) 49–51.

19. Ibid.; see chapters 3, "Remorse," and 4, "Lost Souls," 95–187.

20. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 44.

review of Connolly's work that his model of human freedom sketches responsibility within constraints,[21] imagining both the dynamism and the inertia of human freedom in the flesh:

> Connolly does not try to make . . . visceral registers [of perception/thinking] transparent to consciousness, still less to intentional choice, but he wants to create enough awareness of their inertia and their dynamism that the image of the rational free chooser might lose some of its plausibility for us. In its place, we might imagine a much more organic, multilayered being, whose capacity for freedom develops in critical responsiveness with others over time.[22]

These visceral, inchoate registers of what Connolly calls "infraperception" influence actions and behavior before any conscious choosing is done, animating a generous sensibility toward others or, alternatively, becoming energetically rigid catalysts of cruelty and destructiveness. For this reason, Connolly looks for ways to intervene tactically in infraperception to transform habitual destructive perceptions and dispositions, as well as to foster a more generous, critical responsiveness with others. As interpreted by Skerrett, *Neuropolitics* theorizes thinking/techniques for working on the "personal and political consciousness" through what she calls Connolly's "method of critical *askesis*—working to tease and irritate distinctions that structure our familiar political world—identity/difference, masculine/feminine, reason/faith, secularism/religion, white/black, guilty/innocent."[23] For Connolly, tactical work on ourselves involves awareness of the "formatting of perception," particularly the "fugitive features of everyday perception,"[24] an awareness which he thinks can be significantly aided by television and, even more effectively, by film.

Connolly develops his understanding of "infraperception" using neuroscience, film commentary by Gilles Deleuze and Steven Shaviro, Henri Bergson's theory of perception, and Antonio Damasio's notion of "somatic markers," among others. Perception occurs with great

21. Cf. K. Roberts Skerrett, "The Indispensable Rival: William Connolly's Engagement with Augustine of Hippo," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004) 490.

22. Ibid., 500.

23. Ibid., 495–96.

24. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 26.

speed and is action-oriented—we make assessments of possible actions toward others and their probable actions on us.[25] This process, much like watching a television series over time, involves subtracting a great deal of information, while "virtual memory" (Bergson) brings "intensive traces and fragments"—affect, dispositions, memory, and kinaesthesia—into "infraperception." Connolly offers, as an example of how this works, an emergency while driving: before any explicit image is formed, you jerk the steering wheel in a direction out of harm's way, and only afterwards reflect on what you may have seen, your response quicker than any cognitive processing of the event. Such "infraperception," intensified by layers inaccessible to consciousness and intentional choice, enmeshes us in responses to events in the world using not only the registers of "linguistically complex brain regions . . . but also, proprioceptively, . . . cultural habits, skills, memory traces, and affects mixed into our muscles, skin, gut, and cruder brain regions."[26] Layering of perception adds richness and depth; it allows a complex engagement with a film or television series; it aids us in emergencies. At the same time, these layers of perception, inaccessible to rational cognition, may imbue a current situation with a sense of panic and danger that may become fixed and punitive toward others. Connolly appeals to both religious and secular sources of "techniques of the self" to ask how we might intervene into these registers of pre-conscious perception, affirming a "multidimensional diversity"[27] not defined in racial terms.[28] "*How* do you," Connolly asks, "cultivate presumptive responsiveness and generosity in a pluralistic culture?"[29] Haneke's film techniques in *Caché* raise similar questions about the complexity of ethical and political subjects immersed in histories of past suffering and contestation.

Caché and Politics—Critical Views

Critical responses to *Caché* are divided among those who find that the film perpetuates the mentality it supposedly critiques and is

25. Cf. ibid., 28.

26. Ibid., 36.

27. Ibid., 2–3.

28. See Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Gilroy links race-thinking and identity politics with fascism.

29. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 105.

therefore insufficiently clear in its political-ethical agenda, and those who interpret it as offering an indictment of colonialism.[30] In "Eyes Wide Shut: Of Politics in French cinema," Nico contends that *Caché* is "a refined form of harmless critique" indulging the left-wing intelligentsia it supposedly criticizes. He contends that reviews of the film (in France) keep art and politics safely separate, commenting on technique but not on France's relation to immigrants from its former colonies.[31] David Walsh argues that the film "evades the responsibility of adopting any strong or recognizable attitude toward contemporary society," which he regards as a "concession to a confused and stagnant political climate." Furthermore, Walsh interprets the film as presenting colonialism as the outcome of "individual neglect or iniquity, rather than as the result of objective social processes, outside the control of individuals," a point he develops by noting the absurd equivalency between Georges' guilt about his cruelty as a child and the responsibility of a modern state for criminal acts in its past. For Walsh, Haneke's apparent coldness toward his characters, the absence of psychological realism and serious social analysis, make the film ineffective at exposing and disturbing contemporary society.[32]

The two critics just mentioned separate the individual from the systemic socio-political dynamics they see at work, failing to consider how *form* as well as *content* or *narrative*, embodies social critique. Unlike Walsh, Haneke regards the always already socialized individual as the agent of social cruelty or hopeful change, not "impersonal social forces." This is clear in his questioning of social issues through notions like *Entfremdung* (alienation from oneself) and *emotionale*

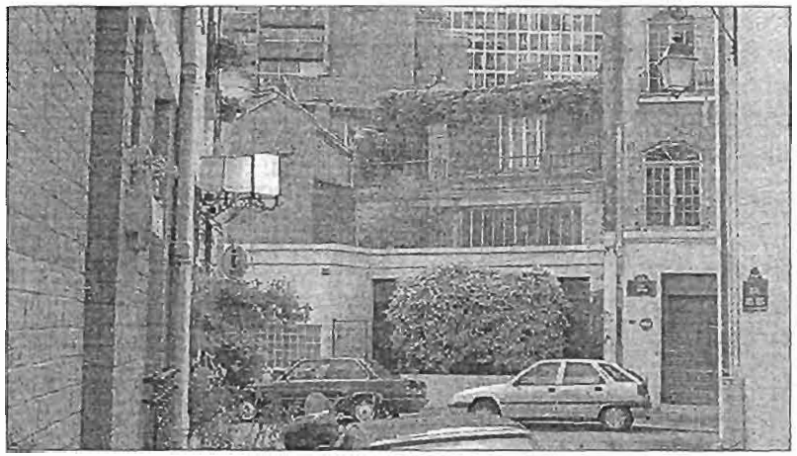
30. For postcolonial assessments of *Caché*, see Thomas's, "New(s) Images," which interprets the film's techniques as a "politics of countermemory"; Brianne Gallagher's "Policing Paris: Private Publics and Architectural Media in Michael Haneke's *Caché*," *Journal for Cultural Research* 12.1 (2008) 19–38, which interprets the porousness of private/public spaces in the film as a "counter-narrative to the state's desire to depoliticize" the continuation of colonial practices on individual immigrant "others"; and Saad Chakali's "Le spectre du colonialisme, l'actualité du néo-colonialisme postcolonial," http://cadrage.net/films/cache.html, which considers the film's "exorçanalyse" deconstruction of a cultural amnesia of French colonialism.

31. Nico, "Eyes Wide Shut: Of politics in French cinema," *Melanine*, http://melanine.org/imprimer.php3?id_article=148.

32. David Walsh, "The Artist Has Not Done the Most Difficult Work," 21.04.2006, http:// www.wsws.org/articles/2006/apr2006/cach-a21.shtml.

Vergletscherung (emotional glaciation).[33] In my view, his representation of the characters' unwitting implication in historical crimes (or their denial of that implication) frustrates critics who want more definitive denouncements of political atrocities. Such denouncements, as the inertia of the communication between Georges and Majid reveals in *Caché,* do not work on the infra-perceptual field and hence do not really change our responses or ability to respond. I contend that Haneke's film aesthetic effectively solicits the ethical and political generosity urged by Connolly using a complexly layered spatial organization of filmic images, the irruption of narrative, and an evocation of the opaque sensorium of bodies implicated in both dynamism and rigidity.

The Infraperceptive Work of *Caché*

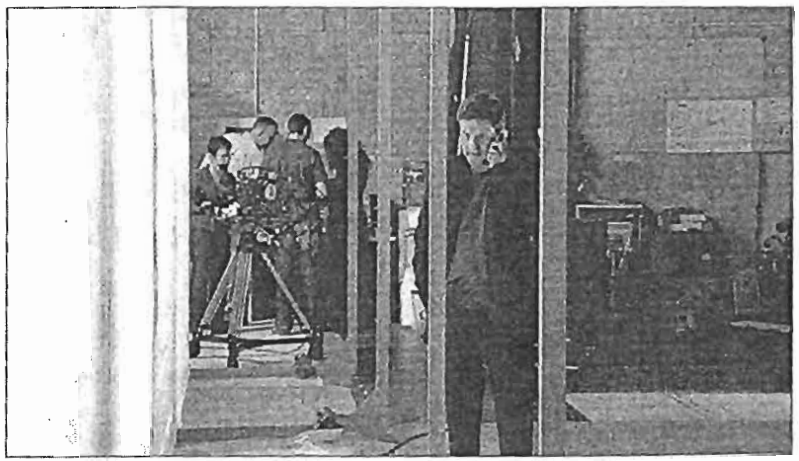


Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

The opening sequence of *Caché* immediately disrupts the spectator's habitual expectation of action and narrative: a static camera films a Parisian townhouse with a security gate and the surrounding street. Superimposed credits appear sequentially across the image, which has very little movement in it (a pedestrian walks from right to left across the framed image, a cyclist rides toward the camera) and only ambient

33. Andrew J. Horton, "De-icing the Emotions: Michael Haneke's Retrospective in London," *Central Europe Review,* 26.10.1998, http://www.ce-review.org/kinoeye5old.html.

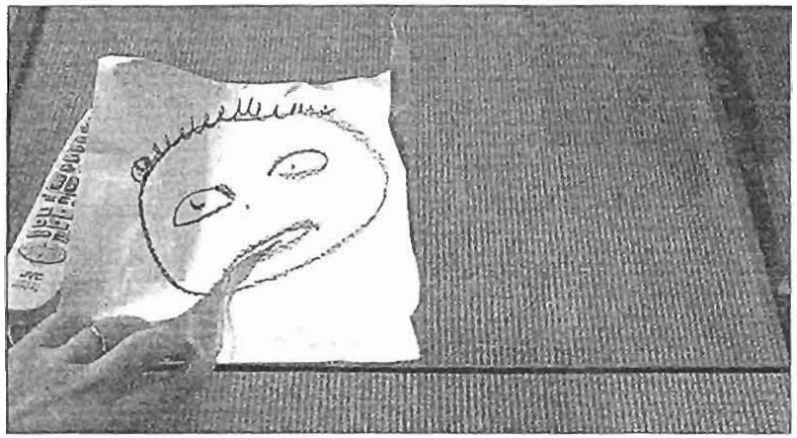
diegetic sound can be heard—distant traffic, birds chirping, the footfalls of a walker. The ninety-degree single-perspective long shot of the house is held for about three minutes until the film cuts to the house from a forty-five-degree angle. Two characters, who we later learn are Georges and Anne Laurent, appear from behind the security gate. He walks out into the street to look for the hidden camera that filmed the tape they've been looking at, and which the audience has been looking at with them, and walks under the street sign, Rue des Iris, to look in the direction from which the camera filmed their house; critics note that the street sign implies the eye, or "iris," of the camera. From behind the gate, Anne urges her husband to come inside; the image cuts back to a static long shot of the house. Anne and Georges discuss the image (heard in voice-over) while they fast-forward, and then rewind it, to study the shot of Georges leaving the house. Thomas interprets the overlay of pre-recorded tape image and present time voice-over in this first sequence as a "perspective of a divided and discontinuous [historical] time,"[34] a narrative structure that he interprets as the "psychic temporality of its traumatized subject" contextualized within a resurgent historical memory of a police-led massacre in Paris on October 17, 1961 that was virtually forgotten by the French public, and uncommented on by the press, for almost forty years.



Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

34. Thomas, "New(s) Images," 84.

After scenes of the couple's dinner with their son Pierrot, who arrives home late, and scenes of his swimming lessons, the static image of the house returns, filmed this time at night. The static shot is interrupted after about a minute by a scene of the closing moments of Georges' television broadcast, when he receives a call from his wife, which he takes backstage in the television studio. The frame is cut by several vertical lines, two of which enclose Georges in mid-foreground, the others enclosing a camera and crew in the background. These frames within the frame—fractured space—recur as a motif in the film, suggesting distinct (unnoticed?), yet inter-related layers of perception going on all the time. That layering is already evident in the first image of the film: the townhouse in the centre of the frame is surrounded by others to the side and in the foreground, and apartment buildings behind it. In the night image of the same scene, the flickering lights in windows draw even more attention to the repeated squares and rectangles of so many human interior spaces viewed at a distance.



Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

The spatial division in the frames disrupts the viewer's expectation of a unified, coherent space of perception—whether the technique used is an image cut into slices or squares (in a shot of Georges behind the scenes in the studio, images of the pool, the bloodied child drawing placed on the glass coffee table), or given a deep focus with moving images of television news footage placed on a wall of books that cuts the image into many smaller rectangles. These interrelated spatial systems seem to conflict, while also effectively reinforcing one another.

Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

Images fractured into smaller rectangles and squares create a density and complexity reiterated in the various spaces Georges occupies: the shelves of books and tapes in Georges' home, his studio, and, in his boss's office, the building outside repeats the pattern of books. In spite of the manipulations Georges engages in as the editor and producer of representations and meanings for his television program, the cultural business of his current "estate," he is also subject to the meaning of the fragmented narratives produced by the unseen others who send him images and tapes, reminding him of what he has forgotten.

As I have intimated earlier in this essay, Haneke characterizes ethical subjectivity in this instance as akin to Rowan Williams' discussion of North Atlantic consumer culture's loss of possibilities of remorse; that is, as understanding "my (or our) current style of self-representation as open to question," vulnerable to criticism by individuals or groups, at the risk of having my (or our) actions impact the lives of others in unwitting or unintended ways.[35] For Connolly, this defines the political character of certain kinds of suffering: "The most complex ethical issues arise in those contexts where suffering is intense and its visitation upon some is bound up with securing the self-confidence, wholeness, transcendence, or cultural merits of others."[36] As I will elaborate later,

35. Williams, *Lost Icons*, 104, 110.

36. William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 51.

Haneke would have us acknowledge as spectators the suffering of both the obviously excluded and marginalized, and also those attempting to secure self-confidence through such exclusions. Georges cannot admit that his personal history involves acts of exclusion (albeit as a child who could not know the broader historical/national reality), which results in the material and cultural dispossession of another human being. As a commentary on France, this pattern of "dense" imagery may suggest the complexity of ethical relations in a cultural and business "estate" under threat by the North African and Middle Eastern communities poorly integrated into French society, and which the beneficiaries of that estate attempt to protect. A number of political theorists observe a correlation between how national histories are understood and contemporary engagements with social spaces as "generative of each other (or mutually *de*generative. . .)."[37] As Haneke has clarified in an interview, he intends the particular situation in *Caché* to provoke reflection upon the "dark corners—dark stains" in every country's history.[38]

Anne tells Georges that another tape has been dropped off at their door, this one wrapped in a child-like drawing of a face with blood spewing from the mouth. The static night-time image of the house and streetscape returns, interrupted briefly by a cut to a curly haired boy looking at the camera, blood dripping from his mouth. From the voice-over dialogue between Anne and Georges the spectator becomes aware that they are watching the tape, and that Anne has observed Georges' startled response at the image of the boy suggested to him by the drawing (later the spectator learns that this image represents a lie he told). In this second tape of images of the house, the camera reappears, this time as a shadow in the headlights of a car, recording Georges' return to the house. The couple rewind and replay the part showing Georges' return, but he shuts the tape off against his wife's objection, the video image of their house replaced by a television news story about injury and chaos. Indifferent to the newscast, the couple stand on either side of this image, reiterating with their bodies the smaller frame of the television within the frame.

37. Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, Theopolitical Visions 1 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008) 174.

38. Haneke, "Collective Guilt," 50.

Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

Throughout the film, television news images of conflict in India, Iraq, Israel, and elsewhere, lends a cosmopolitan "reframing" of the Laurents' troubled domestic and national (French) scene, which the couple ignores as background noise. Haneke's analogy of the film as "a Russian doll with dolls inside dolls inside dolls" to indicate the layering that he sees at work in the story (of the personal, the family, the social, and the political),[39] offers a somewhat static image that implies layers that do not mesh or interact. In my view, Connolly's neuropolitics of infraperception, with dynamic and inert layers that move at "distinctive speeds, capacities, levels of linguistic complexity"[40] illuminates better the intricacy of Haneke's film aesthetic. His halting narrative (interrupted by pre-taped static and tracking shots, constructed memories, dreams) resists the psychologizing to which Connolly also objects, implicating the viewer in an embodied responsiveness to the protagonists that involves thinking and inchoate sensation. Georges is conveyed as a tightly coiled man with an articulate "in-charge" public persona, undone to a certain extent by tapes which animate slow, patient reminders of affect from his past. The techniques used for this characterization return the spectator's attention to the obscurity, yet visceral immediacy, of bodily communication through the film's halt-

39. Karin Badt, "Family is Hell and So Is the World," *Bright Lights*, http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/50/hanekeiv.htm.

40. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 45.

ing narrative and restrained, often misleading, spoken language cues (the narrative implies that all the main characters may be lying about something, or at the very least, withholding information).

The film's narrative continues with Anne's persistent urging that they report the surveillance-type tapes of their house to the police, which Georges refuses to do. They do go to the police station, however, after Anne receives an anonymous call at home asking for her husband, and Georges receives a postcard at work with the image of a bloodied child on it. As they emerge from between parked cars leaving the police station, a cyclist almost runs into them, and George yells at him, calling him an idiot. The altercation between the much taller black man, who challenges Georges to a fight, is only averted from becoming more violent by Anne's intervention.

Their futile (and later reckless) attempts to involve the police underscores how this film, ostensibly a suspense thriller, interrupts the conventions of the detection narrative by refusing to resolve the mystery of who sent the tapes to the Laurent family. In keeping with the thriller genre, however, perception in *Caché* is deeply imbued with fear and a sense of threat. The scene with the cyclist reveals in a condensed form what the entire film considers at a more leisurely pace—how a sense of threat provokes aggression, particularly with those "othered" in some way by race or class or gender. The spectator cannot be sure if the abrupt, querulous tone of the conversations between Anne and Georges is their habitual style of communication or an effect of the arrival of the tapes and drawings; however, in the aggressive scene with the cyclist, Georges shows a certain fixity in his reactive refusal to back down that will be replayed at least three more times in scenes with Majid and also with Majid's son. This dynamic bears out Connolly's insight that in order for new possibilities to emerge in social relations we require not only discursive argument but also techniques to generate awareness of, and to influence, pre-conscious sensibilities in the infra-perceptive field when these become cruel and destructive.

The techniques observed by Connolly which generate ethical and political awareness of perception are evident in Haneke's ethical solicitations to the spectator. Haneke uses a variety of techniques to implicate the spectator[41] in the passive-active agency (perception)

41. Cf. Saxton, "Close Encounters," 103. Libby Saxton contends that Haneke implicates the viewer with his films' deferral of the disclosure of meaning.

of the protagonists. One technique is the disruption of a viewer's assumed omnipotence in relation to the narrative. The spectator often remains uncertain of what exactly she or he is looking at—shot in HD video, the narrative sequences, video images, film news footage, memory, and dream images become indistinguishable, the narrative's past and present an unruly mesh.[42] These layered images are further complicated by the diverse formats in which particular images are reiterated—for example, the crude child's drawing of a face with blood pouring from the mouth (wrapped around a video tape left at the house), reappears on postcards sent to the Laurent family, is repeated in a shot of a child with blood on his face in a darkened livingroom, and then finally returns in Georges' reluctant admission to Anne that the image represents the first of the lies he told to his parents to try to get rid of Majid, the orphaned son of Algerian French farm labourers on the Laurent family estate. Majid's parents had gone to Paris for an FLN demonstration in October 1961 and never returned, likely among the 200 or more killed by police, their bodies thrown into the Seine. The resurfacing of memories for Georges, through the intervention of the tapes sent to his home and office, memories that he would rather ignore and that do not seem to fit his self-perception, lead many critics to read the film as a social analysis of France and its colonial past. My reading builds on this one by considering the modes of perception and ethical subjectivity that underwrite and are also the aftermath of these social atrocities—particularly the entwined movements of terror and aggression, regardless of who might be perceived as wrongdoer,[43] traced in the relation between Georges and Majid, as children and as adults.[44]

42. Cf. ibid., 107–8; Thomas, "New(s) Images," 83–84.

43. Franz Fanon makes this point emphatically in "Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders," in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963) 249–310, with his "inopportune" phenomenology of the trauma of both victims and perpetrators in the Algerian civil war.

44. A technique that conveys this movement in the film is the backlighting of characters, so their faces are obscured when they threaten another person. For example, in a dream sequence with Georges and Majid as children, Majid's face is darkened as he approaches Georges with an axe. In their first encounter as adults, Georges' face is darkened by the backlighting of a window as he stands looming over Majid who is seated at his kitchen table.

In addition to images layered through multiple repetitions and fractured space, Haneke also creates a layered tension between moving images (tracking shots of the drive to the Laurent family estate, Majid's apartment, and the hallway to his apartment) and static images (of the house, the steps at Pierrot's school, a barnyard scene). This tension evokes Georges' dynamic sense of threat and desperation, as well as his inertia. Gilles Deleuze's distinction between "sensory-motor" images ("the movement-image or the action-image") and the emergence of "purely optical and sound situations" (or "the time-image") in post-World War II cinema[45] suggests a way to read the interaction of moving and static shots in *Caché*. The film creates a strong dynamic between the "movement-image"—Georges' attempts to follow clues to the source of the tapes—and the "time-image" *which expose a sensibility of arrested action, an inability to move.* This interplay of arrested action and movement, which reveals Georges' and Majid's active-passive agency, their inability to acknowledge each other, have the potential to teach the spectator, as Connolly argues with reference to other films, about cultural incitements to "thought and thoughtlessness,"[46] how perception and ethical agency is layered and influenced by affect, all of which "can inform reflective techniques we apply to ourselves to stimulate thought and to complicate judgment, or to refine ethical sensibility."[47] For Deleuze, the "time-image" "is double-sided, mutual, both actual and virtual" constituted by "*indiscernibility of the [real and the imaginary]*, a perpetual exchange,"[48] or in Connolly's terms, the multilayered perception of body/brain/culture. The "time-image" is important in terms of ethical solicitation of the viewer, for as Deleuze notes, when a character is incapable of acting or responding, "he has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction: he SEES so that the viewer's problem becomes 'What is there to see in the image?' (and not . . . 'What are we going to see in the next image?')."[49]

45. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 272.

46. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 14.

47. Ibid., 14.

48. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 273.

The "empty, disconnected, abandoned spaces"[50] that come into view through the use of this technique in *Caché*—as a subject for awareness and attention—are both psychic and socio-political. Georges' lies as a child inadvertently initiate the spaces that still haunt him in the present, lies represented in the film as "time-images," indiscernibly exchanging actual and virtual. The effect of lies in creating "empty, disconnected, abandoned spaces" has been noted by literary critics like Susan Stewart, who interprets lying as "the deepest expression of human alienation; they mark the return of speaking subjects to an unintelligible autonomy—the autonomy of the figure receding into the darkness."[51] The film ends with Georges as such a figure of solitude in his darkened bedroom in mid-afternoon, remembering the day that Majid was taken away from the family estate, possibly as a consequence of his lies. The "pathos of distance" (Nietzsche) that this image of Georges implies is also an effect of Haneke's style of characterization: Georges' interiority, his intentions and motivations remain quite opaque to the viewer—underscored by the medium and long shots with which he and other characters are filmed. Haneke also conveys the paradoxical communicativeness and obscurity of the flesh with attention to "the immediate actions and reactions of the flesh itself":[52] characters' postures, sudden abrupt coughing, constrained or more effusive tears, a body's moan as it dies. As Walter Benjamin observes: "the most forgotten alien land is one's own body . . . Kafka called the cough that erupted from within him 'the animal.'"[53] Haneke's style of representing the bodies and actions of his characters invites a paradoxical sensibility of bodily intimacy and strangeness, agency and automatism, which opens the viewer to both the "uncanny insistence"[54] of the characters

50. Ibid.

51. Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 6.

52. Steven Shaviro's reading of Bresson, in *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), as a "literalist of the body" resonates with Haneke's techniques. Shaviro interprets Bresson's materialist aesthetic as a spirituality of abjection and suffering that "produces the effect of evacuating subjectivity" (243).

53. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968) 132.

54. Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 24.

that may be viscerally *experienced*, and a critical responsiveness that may be *thought*.

The blend of still camera shots and POV shots also reiterates the dynamism and inertia of the flesh. The main character, Georges, is "caught" by the camera as a moving or still object, but his active perspective on scenes is also represented. This technique creates what Connolly calls "perspectival parallelism,"[55] a notion based on the work of Stuart Hampshire who developed this idea in the 1970s as a way to understand the materiality of thinking, anticipating later cognitive science research. "Perspectival parallelism" exposes incompatible vectors of perception, by "shifting attention back and forth from the consideration of persons as active observers of the physical world to the consideration of them as also observed subjects, with their bodies in a dual role, as both purposely used instruments of exploration and also as observed objects."[56] As Connolly points out, the first and third person perspectives, bodies as agents of exploration and as objects, are not reducible to each other, but a reflexive relation between the two allows us to sustain awareness of what eludes consciousness and intentional choice (a mesh of cultural elements and physicochemical processes), yet which influences perception and action.[57] This also alerts us to the importance of diverse ethical solicitations, engaging different registers of perception, needed to transform political thinking and action.

Georges' almost helpless defensiveness suggests the "layered effectivity of the past on the present," more susceptible to being worked on with techniques and artistry than attempts at intervention through deep explanation (like Freudian categories) or coherent narrative.[58] This is quite clear in Georges' incapacity for self-questioning, amplified through the critical questions posed to him by others who witness his taped interactions with Majid. Initially represented as a POV scene from Georges' perspective, a video tape shows his encounter with Majid in an apartment in a low rental area in Paris, filmed by a hidden camera from behind Georges' back. Georges begins the conversation

55. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 89.

56. Stuart Hampshire, *Freedom of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 213, cited in Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 89.

57. Cf. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 89–90.

58. Ibid., 40.

in an accusatory tone, asking Majid if he seeks revenge, claiming that he is terrorizing his family, and he ends by threatening him. The scene is reiterated visually and verbally for the spectator when Anne, having watched a tape of Georges' encounter with Majid, asks Georges to explain why he lied about finding no one at the apartment. The end of the encounter, Georges' threats to Majid, is replayed with Georges filmed from the back, and shows how, following his departure, Majid breaks down into tears, which, as Anne tells him, "runs for an hour if you want to watch how he feels." Anne confronts Georges about his lie to her, questioning him pointedly about his relationship with Majid.

Anne unfairly questions George as if he were a rational free chooser at the age of six, able to rationally weigh clearly labelled options and to make a choice. The film persistently exposes this view of human freedom without constraint (which also implies crushing responsibility) as untenable. Although Anne rejects his insistence that he was only a child when he betrayed Majid, the fact that Georges was drawn into a colonial drama when he was a child, and not a fully responsible subject, demonstrates the extent to which human complicity in larger political systems is formed before any individual choices are made. As we have seen, Connolly traces these systemic politics in the flesh, which means that over time, children learn cultural elements like racial difference, elements "interwoven into bodily experience, still [as adults] generating persistent and powerful cues beneath consciousness."[59] The perplexity of Georges' (and Majid's) captivity in and repetition of "torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjection to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them"[60] solicits a critical responsiveness from the spectator, or "heteropathic identification."[61] Such an identification has the potential to, in

59. Skerrett, "The Indispensable Rival," 500.

60. J. M. Coetzee, "Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech," in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 98.

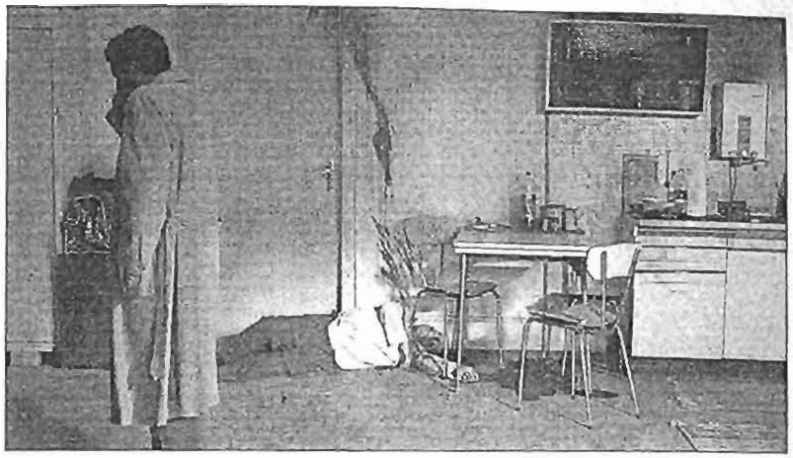
61. In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 15–18, 22–27, 170–87, following the French psychoanalyst Henri Wallon and the German philosopher Max Scheler, Kaja Silverman develops a notion of "identity-at-a-distance," "the productive look," or what Scheler calls "heteropathic identity," as a nearly impossible possibility activated through certain kinds of alternative cinema, of loving culturally despised bodies/others.

Skerrett's words, "tease and irritate distinctions [like innocent/guilty] that structure our familiar political world" exposing the captivity of *both* Majid and Georges within relations of "contestation, domination, and subjection,"[62] as children and as adults, and in and through Majid's death. The dynamics (and inertia) of accusatory questioning (from other or self) reinforce distinctions of innocent/guilty in a context of uncertainty about whether or not Georges is lying in his confession about lies, or whether Majid's and his son's denial of involvement with the tapes is truthful. Accusatory questioning fails to create a space of exploration of individual trauma and responsibility, fails as a technique of working on oneself "by creating aching patches of consciousness in order to transform . . . habitual perceptions and dispositions."[63] Yet the film's techniques—multilayered images, "perspectival parallelism," and the disorienting mesh of different kinds of images used to present the narrative of aggression and denunciation between Georges, Majid, and Majid's son—work on the spectator's perception, provoking not only awareness of a possible destructive inertia of infraperception, but also soliciting a more generous visceral and cognitive response to Majid and Georges than either can offer the other.

The questioning continues with his boss, to whom the last tape was also sent, and Georges remains evasive, though his accusations against Majid intensify—Majid has a "pathological hatred for my family," he is involved in a "reign of terror." The boss's puzzlement is obvious: "Why is he so bitter?"; "He doesn't appear aggressive." These questions resonate provocatively with the sequence of Majid's suicide. Having called Georges to his apartment, speaking in the quiet tones (of defeat? of aggression?) that characterize all of his engagement with Georges, Majid denies having anything to do with the tapes and says, "I wanted you to be present." Majid then slits his throat, sending a spurt of blood up on the beige wallpaper.

62. Skerrett, "The Indispensable Rival," 496.

63. Ibid.



Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

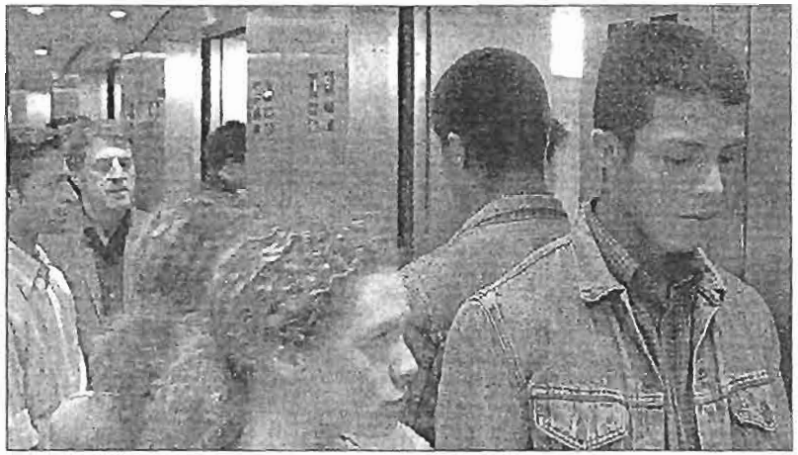
The shot of this scene from the hidden camera exposes Georges' involuntary response, his fear tangible in his arrested pose, his silence punctuated by two short coughs. Georges' animal sounds follow a groan from Majid's body as it slumps against the wall.[64] This terrible "exchange" is a visceral "communication of the body"[65] when other forms of communication fail. Steven Shaviro's comments about the paradoxical fullness of non-redemptive moments in Bresson's films are particularly apt with respect to this scene in *Caché*, which draws attention to a "neglected realm of asubjective affect— the passions and affections, the stresses and transformations of the body."[66] The suicide scene provokes awareness, if not for the protagonist, at least in the spectator, of a kind of communication which often eludes our attention, yet is implicated in generosity (or lack of generosity) toward others. We see Georges next in the cool blue tones of his darkened bedroom, his shock evident as he tells his wife that he wandered for hours before returning home. Anne's questioning of her husband becomes credulous after she learns that Georges stepped over the body on his way out and did not

64. This scene intensifies the representation of the body throughout the film as unwitting exposure of animality, and the literal and psychic effects of time upon the body—characters are marked by aging, and the two times that Daniel Auteil appears naked, in bed or going to bed, unwanted dreams and memories befall him.

65. Sharrett, "The World that is Known," 31.

66. Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 251.

call the police. Through his wife's interrogation, in which she disregards his insinuations that Majid is "sick" and "twisted," Georges finally gives a more expansive account of having lied to his parents in order to get rid of his rival. After inciting Majid to kill the rooster, Georges tells his parents that Majid threatened him with an axe, when the lie about Majid's spitting up blood did not have the desired effect. In spite of this confession, his defensiveness in the telling, and the colors of the room, suggest denial of emotion,[67] even as his actions in the immediate aftermath of the suicide betray its visceral impact on him. George fails to respond to a call to witness Majid's suffering—understandable because Majid's suicide is also *aimed at him* as an act of aggression, and reiterates Georges' perception of the original dynamic when they were both children. This scene shows how terribly complicated it is, even in the face of suffering, to re-establish communication across energetically rigid feelings of renewed terror and threat.



Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

A final confrontation takes place at Georges' work, where Majid's son follows him to his office, and will not leave until he has a chance to confront him, alone, in a washroom. Just prior to this, an image in the office elevator exposes a repudiated proximity between the two

67. As Connolly observes, Kandinsky contrasts the effect of yellow and blue spheres on a spectator, and associates the latter with inward turning movement away from the spectator, like a snail pulling back into its shell. Cf. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 31. To paraphrase Connolly, the color of Georges' perception in this scene is blue.

men—although they are standing on opposite sides of the elevator, the mirrors show Georges standing on the left side of the frame behind a doubled image of Majid's son. (This image inverts an earlier one of Georges in the front seat of the police van with Majid and his son caged in the back, visible just over his right shoulder.)[68]

Caché. Photo: WEGA-Film

In response to Georges' statements about terrorizing his family, Majid's son accuses Georges of depriving his father of a good education, to which Georges responds with further incriminations of how sick he is, just like his father, and what a "sad and wrecked family" he comes from. The son replies, "I wanted to see what it's like to live with a man's life on your conscience; now I know." The proximity these two men repudiate in their escalating violence and suffering is analogous to Haneke's treatment of more explicitly sado-masochistic relations in another film, *La pianiste* (*The Piano Teacher,* 2001): a music student, Walter, denounces Erika, his teacher and lover's masochism with sadistic language and behavior.[69] The characters are caught in a closeness

68. Majid and his son are picked up by the police on suspicion of having a role in Pierrot's disappearance (gone for a night, he neglected to inform his parents that he was staying with a friend). This scene inverts the film's opening sequence in which Anne and George appear from behind their security gate. Both the Laurent family and Majid are "caged" (as Georges refers to Majid's and his son's overnight imprisonment) but Majid's family suffers greater social indignities, greater implication in the animality suggested by that image, regardless of how commonly shared this is.

69. Cf. Stefanie Knauss's article in this volume.

of repudiation that has them stepping further into a dynamic rather than escaping it through their denunciations.

Georges' repeated accusation that Majid (and his son) are "terrorizing" his family is perhaps most revealing. As Connolly points out, the language of terrorism implies a kind of evil that fails to observe the borders of territorial states, that blurs distinctions between crime and war, and exposes "crushing experiences of surprise, devastation, and uncertainty."[70] For Connolly, such an experience exposes the layered character of perception, as it draws upon past events both susceptible to explicit recollection, and those that are not, both of which effect judgment, with the risk that new evils may be perpetrated in responding to the present events.[71] This happens between Majid and Georges. The events of 17 October 1961, briefly alluded to in the film as the background of Georges' efforts to rid his home of a rival child—the police attack on protesters in Paris that left hundreds dead—emerged out of an ongoing conflict between police and the FLN in France, which in turn emerged out of the war of independence in Algeria. Excluding the peaceful protest of October, both sides in these conflicts engaged in tactical terrorism. Haneke's interest, arguably, is in how these broader socio-political dynamics play out in Georges' defensive reactiveness, in Majid's self-destructive aggression and in his son's more confrontational style. The complexity of this history as represented in the film's narrative, its irresolution about who sent the tapes, is reiterated by Haneke's refusal in interviews to arrange the characters into simple dichotomies of innocent/guilty or victim/perpetrator,[72] dichotomies sometimes generated by strong postcolonial readings of the film. The fact remains that someone is harassing the Laurent family with surveillance-type tapes, anonymous phone calls, stark, bloodied images of a child, a rooster, and Georges' face, as well as tapes and images sent to Georges' home and workplace. These tactics, designed to threaten and intimidate the family, also (intentionally) evoke an event in Georges' past that he claims has no effect in the present, something Majid's son disputes. Georges' terror-filled aggression and denial in response to these forceful tactics escalates matters to the point of Majid's suicide which targets Georges as an accomplice/witness.

70. William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 12.

71. Cf. ibid., 13.

72. Cf. Haneke, "Collective Guilt," 50.

The End as Opening?

Caché does not offer solutions, but it nonetheless solicits the spectator to think and feel with the film's cultivation of the infra-perceptive field that has the potential both to enrich sensibilities and to thwart ethical and political generosity. For Connolly, such multilayered perception requires a diversity of solicitations: "Now you enter a domain in which technique, faith, cultivation, and conversion infiltrate practices of argument, critique, and deliberation."[73] Such diversity is not apparent to a critic like David Walsh who finds risible Haneke's assertion that "Georges should really question his whole way of life. But people never want to face up to that sort of thing."[74] While Haneke often flags the theme of guilt in the film indicating the influence of Judeo-Christian culture—the moral imperative of critical self-questioning that David Walsh finds so surprising, also relates to this tradition. Connolly's call for a re-imagination of human freedom within constraints is effectively solicited through *Caché*'s provocation to spectators to work on themselves for political aims of dispelling cruel habitual responses, with the awareness that inchoate layers of infraperception contribute to destructive political habits, like race-thinking, which requires intervention and techniques (at least according to Connolly) emerging out of different theistic and nontheistic sources. These techniques of working on oneself are necessary for the transformation of perception when this becomes fixed in cruel or self-destructive patterns, as in Georges' and Majid's terrible dance. The film provokes "aching patches of consciousness" in the spectator, soliciting her or his feelings and imaginings toward questioning how perception imbued with deep chaotic affect may be susceptible to conversion into less cruel and punitive forms of social interaction.

The penultimate sequence in *Caché* is an uncut long shot of a barnyard held for several minutes. Someone, possibly Georges, watches the few people involved in the scene, hears the persistent chirping of sparrows, the cries of a child trying to escape the man and woman about to take him away to an orphanage, sees the perhaps violent efforts of a man to restrain the child when he is recaptured (it is too far away to be sure). Whatever the complex feelings of Georges' memory

73. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 45.

74. Walsh, "The Artist Has Not Done the Most Difficult Work."

of this event, they constitute his present rigid energy and defensiveness with Majid and his son. Habituated in reactiveness (that Rowan Williams would call a loss of soul), Georges closes his drapes and numbs himself with sleeping pills, a physical image of an impossibility of openness to the "uncanny insistence" of another. Whatever the feelings of this hidden observer—a mixture of shame, elation, grief?—the spectator, judging by reviews, likely feels empathy for the dispossessed child. Haneke would have the spectator acknowledge the "uncanny insistence" of both children, and both adults in their ethical and political stalemate. The memory is there, placed next to the final image of the film, another long shot, this time of the steps of Pierrot's school, where, to the far left of the frame, some spectators will notice that Pierrot is talking to Majid's son—surprising that they know each other. The scene is read both optimistically and pessimistically by critics, exposing, again, the multilayered affect imbuing perception and thinking, this time in the spectator of the film.