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Introduction

In several interviews, Michael Haneke has declared that the spectator should think about what he sees on the screen and should engage actively with the film. Indeed, Haneke's films require the viewer to undertake a good deal of intellectual effort, but also, I would suggest, to have some degree of inner peace and emotional fortitude if he or she is to withstand the emotional anxiety caused by the fear and horror his films incite. While these observations could easily apply to any conventional horror film, Haneke places the action of his films in contexts well-known to a typical viewer; he crafts his films in such a way that the situations on the screen seem not improbable, but rather deeply ingrained in the here and the now of contemporary Europe (and the contemporary Western world in general).

What makes these films particularly interesting is the fact that almost all of them take place in contemporary European cities such as Paris and Vienna, or in middle-class summer houses in the Alps – those iconic central European weekend and holiday getaway destinations. At the same time, his films bring our attention to another Europe, the one over-involved in problems linked to international unification and globalization. Haneke's films must be seen in the context of the recent history of Europe: the dissolution of the communist system, German unification, terrorism, mass migratory movements in Europe, and increasing homophobia and terrorist paranoia, as well as general globalization and unification trends within the new global economy and the Western world. Yet the paranoia and fears present in all his films reveal a much deeper preoccupation with the state of the contemporary world expressed in feelings of mourning and melancholia, which surreptitiously emerge from plot, character motivation and film aesthetics.

Haneke expresses melancholia in his early films and masters its expression in his later accomplishments. There is a consistent authorial thread in all his films, whether those only written by him, those written and directed, or those directed and produced. In all his films, similar preoccupations are

present: melancholia and mourning lie behind the films' plots, deeply pervading every layer of the film. Thus, the goal of this essay is twofold: first, to show how melancholia is cinematically communicated by Haneke; and second, to argue that the lost object in these deeply melancholic films is a family that uncannily and synecdochally represents/epitomizes the disappearing or defunct nation-state, which supposedly has no place in the new political and legal system of the European Union.

As portrayed by Haneke, a family/nation-state is linked with tradition and a sense of coherence and unity, while post-national reality and globalization are disturbingly negative. The new social and political developments related to globalization raise constant and repetitive questionings of identity, a deconstruction of space and a reconsideration of borders. These unconscious fears translate into a melancholia that reveals itself through repetition of, among others, certain frightful images; through the alienation of the protagonists; and through an atmosphere of threat and uncertainty. Haneke draws from, and continues upon, earlier tendencies in European cinema, in which existential and philosophical reflections dominated. Trends of mourning and melancholia appear in Italian and French films of the 1960s and 1970s by artists representing the Second Italian Renaissance and the French New Wave, respectively. Like European filmmakers, Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais, whose mourning expressed general existentialist fears linked to the post-World War II trauma, Haneke also relates mourning to specific social and political scenarios. His fears are politically and socially grounded, related to the nature of democracy, to the decline of the nation state, and to various perceptions of Europe's future by Western Europeans.

Mourning and Melancholia

Freud's thoughts on melancholia, later developed and analysed with the focus on "lost object" by Melanie Klein, represent perhaps the best starting point for an analysis of this topic in Haneke's films. In 1915, Freud completed his paper *Mourning and Melancholia*, in which he describes those two phenomena together because both are reactions to the loss "of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on"[1]. However, while he considers mourning as a normal reaction to some loss, melancholia requires treatment because it continues over a long time and is ultimately "useless or even harmful"[2]. Melancholia includes "painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity and a lowering of the

[1] S. Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey, London 1953–1974, vol. 14, p. 243.
[2] Ibidem, p. 244.

self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproach and self-reviling, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment"[3].

What is extremely interesting regarding Freud's observations is that while the lost object is clearly identified by the mourner, for a melancholic the lost object is "of a more ideal kind":

> [T]he patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an **object-loss** which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss which is unconscious[4].

The worthlessness, moral despicability and inferiority resulting from the melancholic musings about loss "point to a loss in regard to his ego"[5] and "the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego"[6]. These same findings were later expanded upon by Klein in her work on the concept of the "lost object."

> In Kleinian theory, we may say that to some extent it is out of pain that the internal object is born. The Freudian hallucination of the object is translated in Kleinian fantasy as a primitive form of projection that is reintroduced anew... For Klein, anxiety about object loss is primarily connected to aggressive fantasies of destruction of the object. In her view, fear of the disappearance of the object may be experienced in a paranoid form – the predominant anxiety being that of being attacked by the object – or *depressive form – the fear of losing the internalized good object*[7]. [Italics mine – J.F.]

Another approach to melancholia which I find particularly inspiring is that of Elias Canetti, with his focus on being "devoured": a melancholic feels guilty and "thinks of oneself as prey"[8]:

> Melancholia begins when flight-transformations are abandoned because they are all felt to be useless. A person in a state of melancholia feels that pursuit is over and he has already been captured. He cannot escape; he cannot find fresh metamorphoses. Everything he attempted has been in vain; he is resigned to his fate and sees himself as prey; first as prey, then as food, and finally as carrion or excrement. The process of depreciation, which makes his own person seem more and more worthless, is figuratively expressed as feelings of guilt. Guilt was originally the same as debt (in German there is still one word for them both). If one is in debt to someone one is to that extent in his power[9].

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[3] Ibidem.
[4] Ibidem, p. 245.
[5] Ibidem, p. 247.
[6] Ibidem, p. 248.
[7] E. Sanchez-Pardo, *Cultures of the Death Drive. Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia*, Durham 2003, p. 53.
[8] E. Canetti, *Crowds as Power*, London 1962, p. 347.
[9] Ibidem.

Freud and Klein, in particular, are helpful in the work of cultural theo-
rists, who have used the above concepts to elucidate many modern works of
art. For instance, Christine Ross in *Aesthetics of Disengagement* describes
recent installation works, photography, and living sculptures in light of these
theories, while Esther Sanchez-Pardo in *Cultures of the Death Drive* analyses
the works of Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Countee Cullen, and Reneé Ma-
gritte. The detailed and insightful analyses of these two authors have served
as great inspiration to my own analysis of European cinemas, and to the work
of Michael Haneke in particular.

Haneke – The Filmmaker

I first heard and read about Haneke on the occasion of the release of his
Benny's Video (1992) and again with the later *Funny Games* (1997), and was
soon fascinated by the honesty in his presentation of a society's anxieties and
uncertainties. Many years later, I decided to discuss Haneke and his films in
class and even dared tackle *Code Inconnu* (2001) in my work with students,
in conference presentations and eventually in publications. I say "dared"
intentionally, because Haneke's films reveal layers of complexity impossible to
penetrate in one reading, slowly revealing themselves only through an agoniz-
ing process of negotiation and rationalization of particular fragments and of
their incomplete visual and aural messages. When *Caché* (2005) was released,
I decided to give Haneke's films their due, to try to present my thoughts about
his films on paper.

Haneke was born in Munich, Germany, in 1942. He spent most of his life
in Vienna, however, where many of his films were made; later, he also made
films in Paris. A student of philosophy, psychology and drama in Vienna, he
became a playwright with the Sudwestfunk Theater Company from 1967–
1970 and later wrote scripts for German television which "materialized" in
several films made for TV. Among them are *After Liverpool* (1974); *Sperrmull*
(1975); *Drei Wege zum See* (1976); *Lemminge Teil I Arkadien, Teil II Ver-
latzungen* (1979); *Variation* (1983); *Wer war Edgar Allan?* (1984); *Schmutz*
(1985); and *Fraulein* (1986).

His first famous film, *The Seventh Continent* (1989), attracted a great
deal of attention. The story of a middle-class family who unexpectedly and
unassumingly kill themselves in an act of collective suicide opened a series of
films that analyse the state of contemporary society. Later films, *Benny's Vi-
deo*, *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), and *Funny Games* only
reinforce these first depressing portrayals of society. To this mature stage of
filmmaking also belong two adaptations of great literary works, *Die Rebellion*
(1993) and *Das Schloss* (1997). These adaptations also explore the absurd, the
incomprehensible, and the bizarre, often resulting from the incomprehensible
nature of chance. His most brilliant films, *Code Inconnu*, *The Piano Teacher*

(2001), *The Time of the Wolf* (2003) and *Caché*, openly address the anxieties of the contemporary person in the Western world, and especially in Europe.

Austria – Haneke's Crèche

As noted above, Haneke has spent most of his adult life in Austria, a small, modern, and beautiful country in Central Europe, with a rich colonialist history in the 17$^{\text{th}}$ and 19$^{\text{th}}$ centuries and one of murky alliances with the Nazi regime during World War II. After 1945, Austria embraced nationalistic values, yet evolved into (or rather returned to) a state organism which, like the Austro-Hungarian empire, embraced international activity and monitored developments in neighbouring countries. In the decades since, Austria has manifested its wish to play an official political role within the broader European community. In the 1960s, it participated in the European Free Trade Association and Chancellor Kreisky's foreign policy initiatives; it made efforts to join the European Union as early as 1989 (Austria officially joined the EU on January 1$^{\text{st}}$, 1995). Yet these official tendencies toward globalization and participation in Europe as a whole were also accompanied by distrust and hesitation on the part of the general population, who expressed a strong anxiety in view of growing immigration and the general relaxation of border policies.

The impact of new immigration policies has been especially visible in the country's capital, Vienna, where Haneke still resides and works; it is a charming city, yet somewhat provincial and sleepy, sheathed in its storied past. Vienna has witnessed several waves of immigration, especially during the late 1970s and again since the early 1990s – mainly from escapees of the communist system in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and East Germany. Especially after 1989, Vienna has become a truly international city due to great numbers of immigrants (both legal and illegal), coming from the east and the south. Yet with its rich history, its great architectural beauty and its culture and science, Vienna has been always perceived by Austrians as the quintessence of their own national identity.

Political historian George Schöpflin may refer specifically to Vienna when he makes the following general statements in the context of national identity:

> [The city is] a premier space for collective action and… [an embodiment] of the collectivity itself. There is, equally, a direct relationship between the nation as a political entity and its expression in the form of a city. The link between citizenship and the city is more than etymological. The city then becomes a part of the symbolic landscape of the nation[10].

However, with globalization and unification, Vienna has become a post-national and globalized place, a hybridized and dialogued social and political

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[10] G. Schöpflin, *Nations, Identity, Power*, Washington 2000, p. 236.

organism. Haneke realized that the characteristics of a city as a locus of national identity has become obsolete; he articulates in writings and interviews that he understands these new trends but is not entirely enthusiastic about them. Yet although he is not specifically nationalistic or anti-globalization in his films, he reveals these attitudes in the ways he presents large cities in his films. Starting with *The Seventh Continent* and on through *Benny's Video*, *71 Fragments of the Chronology of Chance*, *Code Inconnu* and *Caché*, the director highlights such phenomena as growing violence, illegal work, immigration and isolation in the cities.

Early Films

One of Haneke's first films made for television, *Drei Wege zum See*, is a two-hour adaptation of a short story by Ingeborg Bachman. The film tells a story of an aging photographer, Eva (played by Ursula Schult), who "relives" her life in a series of talks with her father and of recollections and memories she presents in quiet monologues delivered via voiceover. Eva is in her fifties and has no family except for her father, whom she regularly visits once a year. She reminisces about her past while she walks in the woods, lies in bed, or rides the train. She is completely submerged in her past and has no concern for her present well-being.

The aesthetics of the film corroborates her state of mind: the present is conveyed in dark, grim colours, as if it did not exist in reality, while the past is bright and clearly delineated. Haneke thus accurately portrays a melancholic who sees the past as a lost object to be mourned and desired at the same time. Eva sees her past clearly in her moments of reflection, a series of passionate love affairs, each of which has lasted for two or three years and ended bitterly. As a well-known photographer, she has been able to fulfil her life professionally and to travel all over the world, but has proven unable to maintain a steady romantic relationship and thus now lives alone.

This film reveals Haneke's early preoccupations: life crises and moral dilemmas; gloomy and subdued aesthetics; and sudden intrusions of memories or thoughts in the form of rapid film inserts appearing in sudden flashes (each lasting 2 to 3 seconds), having nothing to do with the current moment of the film – such a sequence appears at the very beginning of *Drei Wege zum See*, to be explained and contextualized only later. The scene takes place in the airport hotel at which Eva is stuck between flights; she accidentally enters the wrong communal bathroom and encounters a young black man in the white room. However, what would otherwise be an easily explainable event acquires a dreamlike aura of mystery because it is shown as a brief flashback at the very beginning of the film. With this simple technique, Haneke introduces an element of foreboding that dominates the rest of the film. The spectator longs for the mysterious event to be given some explanation, which

finally, only belatedly, arrives. (It is worth noting that this early technique finds its mature and brilliant realization in *Caché*, in which the scene of a young Middle-Eastern boy washing his bloodied hands is crucial to the explication of the main thesis of the film itself.)

Eva cannot change her life; she merely reminisces about and broods over her past. Neither does she pursue a meaningful relationship with her father; instead, at the film's closing, she leaves him and decides never to return. Her inaction, her inertia, makes her deeply melancholic in the sense of a melancholic as the one who, "persuaded of the futility of all action, retires to his or her own interiority to brood and meditate upon the very conditions of the impossibility of action itself"[11].

A similar inability to act, a profound apathy, is present in *Schmutz*, directed by Hans Michael Fruhberg but for which Haneke was a writer/dramaturge; the film could easily have been made by Haneke himself, given its themes and characteristics. The word *schmutz* means "dirt, filth, or smut" in German and aptly describes the content of the film. The film tells the story of a decrepit police station in an abandoned industrial district; it is a sprawling industrial building in a terrible state of disrepair. Walls unpainted for years, its interiors dirty, the building is on the verge of collapse; it is in fact due to be demolished. As a workplace, it is almost unusable.

Again, here, Haneke activates themes of disruption and disappearance in the film: perhaps, he postulates, one's sense of security and significance cease to have any meaning within the process of destabilization, or maybe the ruins and chaos also forecast the deep anxieties of Haneke and his contemporaries concerning changes that the processes of unification will bring about in Europe. In any case, the dysfunctional police station brings to mind closed down and abandoned factories and government institutions in many towns of Eastern Germany, large and small, after the unification in 1990. At that time, East German factories and businesses were regularly closed down because they did not comply with West German standards. Thousands of people became dispossessed, with neither jobs nor money to survive. Others had jobs but had nothing to do – like the protagonists of *Schmutz* at the defunct police station.

As the film opens, a newly-trained policeman is sent to this post and tries to perform his job according to the rules he has been taught. However, nothing ever happens at this police station: he has nothing to report and no one to talk to. The only other police officer there spends his time drinking, watching pornography films, and seducing local women, while the Police Controller "oversees" the work of the station only from afar; still, an imposing figure, immaculately dressed, the Controller tries to enforce order and a sense of work ethics into the two state representatives – with little result. Finally, he fires the fornicator and leaves the other officer to his own fate.

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[11] E. Sanchez-Pardo, op. cit., p. 194.

The new policeman tries to maintain the façade of normalcy by making the same gestures of opening the register of "cases to be solved" and maintaining a professional appearance (combing his hair and keeping his uniform and his own room in order). However, as time goes by, both his exterior and interior façades disintegrate, and he slowly descends into madness and despair. His behaviour becomes erratic; he begins to see strange creatures around his station (for instance, a peacock); he attacks the Controller when the latter tries to persuade the protagonist that he should calmly and responsibly continue his duties.

Finally, the deranged officer kills a young girl in white who mysteriously appears out of nowhere (in an uncanny reference to Fritz Lang's *M*, 1931) and shoots at pigeons flying about in the ruins. When demolition workers appear with an order to destroy the building, he kills one and tries to kill the other one. When other police forces arrive, the building is on fire and collapses spectacularly. Aptly, at the end of the film, an image of the Austrian flag appears as if it were a political stamp upon the inner destruction that results in the outer destruction.

The film appropriately illustrates many meanings of "filth": smut, sexual "dirt"; ideological dirt; political; aesthetic. The sexual dirt defines the sexual relationships depicted in the film: the two women shown are both sexual objects, presented in sexual poses as sexual victims. For instance, one of them is almost killed, consumed, by a fire erupting just as she and her partner engage in a sexual act. The film noir aesthetics reinforces the feelings of uncertainty and deep sadness the spectator feels when witnessing a slow process of human disintegration. Not surprisingly, the grim aesthetics characterizes the inside of the station only, full of shadows and filthy corners. When it comes to the exteriors, the light suddenly changes to bright sunlight in which demolition workers go about their business. This contrast is so conspicuous that it must signify the importance and obvious relief that the demolition brings about. Only through demolition, destruction, or death can the new political organism be built.

The symbolic function of fire, in its purifying and destructive functions, link this film with the much later *71 Fragments*, in which a young man shoots randomly at the customers of a gas station and then commits suicide by shooting himself in the head. In both films, the fire eliminates those members of society who cannot cope, for whom the contemporary reality of Austria and of a changing Europe is too much to bear. Again, guilt combines with loss – here, loss of purity and innocence – making this film a deeply melancholic statement about the lost object in which the protagonists are not only "sick of consciousness and conscience," but who also finally die as if unable to climb out

> from the deep ditch of melancholia, devoured by remorse for the absence of "the other," for the emptiness or privation one believes oneself to be responsible for,

a belief that explains one's striving to confirm loss by enacting it, that is, by destroying both oneself and the loved one[12].

This moment of destruction points to the film's deep melancholia, its seeming abandonment of all hope in a situation having no possible solution. After all, the young protagonist in *Schmutz* cannot leave the station despite the fact that there is no work for him to do. Similarly, the killer in *71 Fragments* sees no sense in living his absurd and sad life.

These themes of internal alienation and despair preoccupied Haneke for some time before *Schmutz*. In 1984, he made a film for television – *Wer war Edgar Allan?* – which addresses themes of obsession in the fate of Edgar Allan Poe, whose life the film illustrates. This beautiful film, with its noir aesthetics and well-crafted traveling shots, portrays a young painter living in squalid conditions in Venice. His only fascinations are art and cocaine, which together bring him on a journey into madness and despair.

A similar despair, but in the context of amour fou, is present in Haneke's other film for television, *Fraulein*. Here, the wife of a captured WWII soldier falls in love with a French worker in Germany. When the husband returns from the war camp, he is sick and depressed, unable to love his wife. She continues her affair with the lover for many years after the end of the war despite the fact that both lovers have remained married to other people and have children in these unions. In this restyling of *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (Fassbinder, 1979), it is not the reconstruction of Germany that Haneke deals with, but rather the destruction of the families of the lovers, who cannot resist the grip of amour fou's madness.

Broken Families

Haneke often translates a longing for the coherence of a nation state into one for the coherence of a family unit, which in his films is threatened consistently. Already in Haneke's early films, fractured families are central. In 1989, he shocked Europe with his first full film made for cinema, *The Seventh Continent*; his other famous films, *Benny's Video* and *Funny Games*, repeat these themes of dystopian families. All the social units he presents in his films – families, couples, father-son relationships, mother-daughter dyads, friends and lovers – are set in opposition to what the protagonists of his films most desire. Tight social units are somehow either broken or prove non-existent, or else they are threatened by disruption or collapse, whether from internal or external forces. The members of these fractured families express their longing for more meaningful human contact, a contact which is painfully needed. Nothing comes of these desires, though, and Haneke's films all

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[12] Ch. Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement. Contemporary Art and Depression*, Minneapolis 2006, p. 3.

end on a negative note. A spectator is usually left yearning for meanings and feelings that are quite simply nowhere to be found in his films.

In *The Seventh Continent*, an affluent middle-class family, comprised of father Georg, mother Anna, and daughter Eva, commit suicide together. Despite living a seemingly happy, successful and normal life, they have conflicts that prevent them from communicating with one another. Eva, in particular, suffers silently from their inadequate communication. In order to get her parents' attention, she pretends that she has lost her vision. Instead of seeking an explanation from her daughter, however, or trying to console her, Anna brutally punishes Eva. One day, the family close down their bank accounts and inform friends and family that they are going away on vacation. Instead, they lock themselves in their apartment and slowly begin to destroy their home bit by bit; they also get rid of their money by flushing it down the toilet. Finally, they commit suicide and are found dead, still in front of their flickering TV, by the police.

The latter part of the film is filtered through bluish colours, which somehow add to the despair. This melancholic hue signifies life on the surface of existence and an internal impossibility to express real feelings and thoughts. Despair seems everlasting for this family and has to end with the suicidal destruction of everybody. Unlike *Decalogue* (1988), in which Krzysztof Kieslowski patiently and compassionately tries to unravel several human lives in ten films taking place in apartment complexes, here Haneke avoids patient explanations and presents people without apology or explanation, roughly and grittily.

In *Benny's Video*, the young protagonist Benny kills a school friend without any reason. Interested only in how pigs are slaughtered, he applies the same method to the girl; he electrocutes her, experimenting dispassionately and recording the act at the same time. The murder is particularly horrifying because it is hidden from the spectator, only to be revealed later on a VCR tape accidentally discovered by the boy's parents. Benny has recorded the murder, fascinated by the act itself, never really pondering its moral and ethical consequences. The terrified parents slowly absorb the enormity of their son's deed, yet they do not report their son or the missing girl to the police. The whole family is caught in a horrific dream, as if suspended in a Kafkaesque un-reality where moral imperatives never materialize.

Only once does the mother wake up from this dream, when she bursts abruptly into tears during a vacation with Benny; when they return home, however, they continue their lives as if nothing had happened. The horrific dream descends once again, and there is no moral explication given. Horror is not communicated verbally, nor is it explained visually in any way, let alone confessed; the deed is never properly acknowledged or forgiven. The family continue their daily existence in complicit silence. Unlike the protagonists of *The Seventh Continent*, the family in *Benny's Video* do not destroy themselves, but continue to live with full awareness of the murder in which all of

them are complicit. The film ends with what Sanchez-Pardo calls a "paranoid-schizoid" situation for the family members:

> [S]ubsequent losses reactivate the primitive paranoid-schizoid position. They are negotiated mimetically, and it is difficult to break the circle of aggression, fear of retaliation and defence that originates at this point […]. [A] fantasy of dispossession of both a social and a psychic space is at work. Reality is perceived as an object destructive space[13].

The film's final scene, showing the family eating dinner in actual silence, epitomizes this secret, deranged social game – *Unheimlich* – within which the family have decided to submerge themselves. The act of murder has become a secret (the *Heimlich*) and any feelings of guilt or sorrow turn into a silent, impenetrable despair. The members of this irretrievably lost family unit carry on behind a façade of superficial appropriateness and compliance with the conventional rules of society.

Haneke is even more shocking and ruthless in his destruction of a family in *Funny Games*. This film tells a story of a middle-class Austrian family – Anna, her husband Georg, and their son Schorschi – who go to their cottage in the countryside for a weekend. There, they are approached by two charming youths, Peter and Paul, who initially want only to borrow some eggs, but later take advantage of the family's naivety, incapacitate the father by shattering his knee cap with a golf club, and play a cruel game of life and death with the mother and the son. In a series of "games" (one of them based on hide-and-seek), they first kill the family's German shepherd, then the little boy; finally, after malicious tormenting of the whole family, they nonchalantly kill the mother by throwing her out alive, bound with tape, into the lake.

The whole narrative, progressing with Hitchcockian dynamism, is elegantly played out in beautiful surroundings of the Austrian Alps: the mountains, the lake, the manicured lawns and elegant cottages all provide a familiar and plausible background to the horrific events unfolding on the screen. Both invaders and invaded speak the language of European middle class – they are well-behaved, polite, and eloquent. Paul and Peter are accepted by the family because they belong to the same social milieu. Their politeness and knowledge of the family's cultural background functions as a smokescreen to their real intentions. The crossing of the property's boundary, the front gate, also implies that the true threat to the unity of the family will come through the front, not the back door. Whether through political decisions or demoralization from within, the family as a homogeneous unit will cease to exist.

At one point in the film, Haneke literally has Paul "rewind" the film in which he is a character, for the unfolding scene would provide too optimistic an ending. Initially, in this scene, the mother grabs the gun and shoots Paul; then, the scene revolves into the one in which Paul grabs the gun and shoots the son. If the first ending were left in place, the film would be merely

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[13] Quoted in: ibidem, p. 194–195.

a conventional thriller. By introducing this moment of "rewinding the tape," Haneke implicates the audience in the process of fabricating violent images for their own vicious and vicarious enjoyment. The actions of Peter and Paul point to the senselessness of emotions. They don't exist in Paul's and Peter's world – emotions are irretrievable, abandoned objects which have no place in the film world.

Family is also made defunct in *71 Fragments*, which tells the concurrent and intersecting stories of several people, each lonely and desperate for human contact. A childless couple yearns to have a child, but when they adopt a young Austrian girl, she refuses to communicate with them and instead clings frantically to a bright winter jacket. In another sequence, an older man seeks contact with his estranged daughter who works at a bank; in order to talk to her privately, he stands in line at the bank where she works. She reluctantly listens to his complaints while other customers stand in line behind him. Elsewhere, a young man plays table tennis obsessively; he fails to talk about his personal problems with his friend, and at the end of the film he goes to a gas station where he shoots at passing strangers and then kills himself. The repetitive table tennis practice by the youth, without any explanation, replicates the monotonous, repetitive ponderings of a melancholic, who may rehearse sad events and thoughts that may or may not have happened in his life and, later, completely exclude himself from the reality surrounding him.

71 Fragments is an emotionally brutal and merciless film interspersed with news clips showing massacres and wars. Ultimately, the final victim of all this mayhem is a lonely boy, an illegal immigrant from Romania; just as he makes first contact with the woman who yearns for children, he is left alone again when she is shot and killed by the young gunman. The boy does not find refuge in Austria because his ersatz family is thus eliminated at the start. The mother figure has become a "lost object," and Austria a country in which happiness proves impossible. As Robin Wood explains in his analysis of *Code Inconnu*, yet in words that apply equally to Haneke's other films, Haneke communicates "a sense of despair with our civilization, its future and ultimately with the human race itself"[14].

In *Code Inconnu*, as well, life in Paris is presented in a mosaic of loosely-related events. In the dominant fragment, we see Anne, an actress in the middle of making a thriller film. Her boyfriend Georges is a photographer who takes pictures of war atrocities in Kosowo. Georges's brother Jean is trying to escape the family farming business. In another parallel fragment, Maria, an illegal immigrant, begs on the streets of Paris; she is caught without her papers and deported. She returns to her husband Dragos and her family in Romania and lies to them about finding a good job as a schoolteacher in Paris. Finally, but not exclusively, there is a fragment with Amadou, a teacher of African descent. (The film starts with Amadou, in fact.) In the beginning sequence, Amadou sees Jean insolently dropping a paper bag in

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[14] R. Wood, *In Search of the* Code Inconnu, "Cineaction" 2003, vol. 62, p. 41.

the lap of begging Maria. When he tries to force Jean to apologize to Maria, he is taken away by the police. This sequence starts a whole series of events that slowly reveals the protagonists of the film.

In other scenes forming the cores of these fragments, we see individuals only loosely related to the main characters, such as Amadou's uncle, who tries to solve the problem of his young nephew. The many supporting characters contribute to the overall picture of a society that itself is like an incomplete and patchy mosaic. Unlike Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999), which organize their fragments in a chronological and logical order, *Code Inconnu*'s characters are secluded: they do not communicate among themselves, nor do they communicate even with the characters occupying the larger spaces of their particular fragments. Nevertheless, together, as inhabitants of Europe, they manage to communicate to the viewer a message of despair, loneliness, and profound isolation. They try to find a place, a meaning in life without identifiable families, states, nations, or communities.

In fact, the social units in *Code Inconnu* are once again defective and false. Amadou thinks he belongs to France, but is attacked by "his own" people. Nor do his African relatives have a sense of identity. They do not know whether they belong to France or Africa. (Some of them do not even know where Africa is.) Anne thinks she has a meaningful relationship with George and is part of the community of dwellers in the building where she lives, only to realize that it is all false. Neither her relationship with George nor that with the community of neighbours is honest or based on principles of love and respect. Anne allows a young girl to be abused in the same building despite the fact that she hears her cries, and she pretends that her relationship with George is sincere. Similarly, honest and caring family relations are a fantasy in the case of George's brother, Jean, who runs away from the family farm, and of Maria, who lies to her family about the nature of her work in Paris.

Both *71 Fragments* and *Code Inconnu* explore the theme of incomplete families in a kind of a nonchalant and distant way. In both of these films, as in the earlier *Schmutz* and *Drei Wege zum See*, families are in the process of disintegration. In his later films, such as *The Hour of the Wolf* and *Caché*, this process of disintegration is more explicit.

Of Borders

Many of Haneke's films also explore people in critical situations of siege or invasion by outside and sometimes inside forces. The situation is rarely explained because the probabilistic scenario is unimportant to the director's purposes; he wants to present people in extreme situations, where moral choices are dictated by the basic needs of life – access to food, water, and shelter, for instance. In *The Hour of the Wolf*, people slowly but systematically

become indifferent beasts. They turn into ruthless bullies and subjugate the weaker, forcing them to endure all kinds of humiliations. By showing such a negative portrayal of society, Haneke reveals a deep anxiety about its present state and, by inversion, a longing for the irretrievably lost: an ideal family, a nation (or nation-state), or, more aptly, an idealized unity with the mother figure, a loss so acute and indescribable that he repeats it in all its permutations. Haneke sees the disruption of family unity through the compromise or collapse of its borders, as if it were a nation or political region.

> [A socio-political unit] literally contains forces that mount up against and amongst one another under the centripetal pressure borders naturally exert. Those forces and pressures may often be uncomfortable, even repressive, and today they may be (seen as) arbitrary and dismissible, but borders provide constant orientation; for most citizens within them, they are like the walls of a house, reassuring rather than confining[15].

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri insist that

> [O]ne of the defining characteristics of the contemporary postmodern world is the decline of the nation-state, which is associated with the real and imaginative porosity of borders. This is opposed to the real divisions and imaginative closures of space on which (modern) societies of discipline and colonialisms were previously built[16].

This porosity of borders is seen by Europeans as disturbing and threatening, as is openly portrayed by Haneke in *Funny Games* and *The Hour of the Wolf*. In both of these films, the protagonists experience unusual invasions into the privacy of their home when they are invaded by the representatives of their own kind in the former film and by the outside enemies in the latter one.

Homophobia and Racism

By far the most shocking film of Haneke's oeuvre – but also, in a curious way, the most clear – is *Caché*, which openly reveals at least a great part of the reason for the destruction or implosion of its bourgeois family: the abandonment of a small Arab child by its parents back in the 1950s. The film is about a Parisian family composed of Georges Laurent, a TV host of a literary talk show, his wife Anne and their teenage son, Pierrot. One day, they receive mysterious surveillance video tapes which reveal details from their private lives. The source of the tapes is so inscrutable that the police cannot give the family any help at all. George tries to find the perpetrator on his own and comes across his former adopted brother, Majid, an Algerian boy. Majid de-

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[15] A. Dudley, *An Atlas of World Cinema*, in: *Remapping World Cinema. Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, eds. S. Dennison and S. Hwee Lim, London 2006, p. 25.

[16] Quoted in: P. Rosen, *Border Times and Geopolitical Frames. The Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture 2006*, "Canadian Journal of Film Studies" 2006, vol. 15, no 2, p. 10.

nies the fact and later commits grisly suicide in front of Georges. The stunned family slowly disintegrates as a result of these events.

Conflating issues of racism with the disruption/destruction of a family, Haneke presents an intriguing thesis: the *other*, the immigrant boy, is as much part of the European family as the white boy. By getting rid of the Middle-Eastern boy, the family effectively cuts away a necessary part of itself. The abandoned son later turns on the family in a sophisticated act of vengeance, which includes voyeuristic stalking and a tactic of terror that leads relentlessly to the protagonist's death by suicide and to the subsequent destruction of the whole family. Neither the mother nor the father understand what is happening, nor do they understand their own son, Pierrot, who seems to be siding with the mysterious oppressors. Perhaps the son himself orchestrated the entire series of events leading to his own father's suicide and thus figuratively eliminated a whole generation of prejudiced Europeans with their deeply ingrained racism. Nevertheless, the past era seems to be gone, erased with one cut to the neck of Majid (now an elderly man), who commits a grisly suicide in front of Georges, the white man, watching this act of suicide in horror. In its place is a state of confusion and uncertainty with nothing clear or obvious.

In his analysis of the situation of in Europe in the 1990s and 2000s, Schöpflin considers the nature of democracy in Europe and its lack of accommodation for immigrants as one of the most important European dilemmas, "how and whether the West can define itself without an alien other that it can regard as external to itself and equally whether Europe or possibly 'Europe' is flexible enough to accommodate cultures that are simultaneously alike and unalike"[17]. These words serve almost as a direct illustration to the themes of Haneke's disturbing films, in which these intercultural accommodations, or rather the lack of them, feature prominently.

While Western Europeans experience unspecified anxieties related to the new, post-national stage in Europe, East Central Europeans also struggle with uncertainty. While Western Europeans may react with disgust and contempt toward poor immigrants from Romania or Bulgaria, those East Europeans also remain apprehensive as to what awaits them in the West. Usually, their lofty expectations of a generous and affluent West are not fulfilled, and they feel profoundly disappointed by the lack of compassion from Westerners. This particular issue clearly emerges in *Code Inconnu*, when a Romanian woman begging in the streets of Paris is treated with suspicion and contempt.

> Central and East Europeans are looking for security, stability, prosperity, identity, status; everything indeed, from which they feel history has deprived them, from membership of their elusive Europe or "Europe," for just as the West creates the image of the East, so the East creates its own image of the West[18].

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[17] G. Schöpflin, *Nations, Identity, Power*, Washington 2000, p. 170.
[18] Ibidem.

This confusion and uncertainty emerges in Haneke's films and manifests itself in the layers of melancholia that smother, if not consume Europeans. Western Europeans afraid of the deluge of immigrants, anticipate social change with fear and guilt. They are consumed not only by the anxieties related to these changes, but also by guilt because they feel this way.

The Lack of Communication

In all his films about despair ending in suicide or murder, Haneke deals with the themes of communication (or rather the lack of it), of alienation and emotional detachment – the feelings only partly displayed, the reasons for action inexplicable. Like Antonioni in his famous trilogy, *L'Aventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'Eclisse* (1962), as well as in his powerful fourth film, *The Red Desert* (1964), Haneke links the lack of communication with the general crisis and uncertainty in the Western societies.

The Piano Teacher only reinforces the paradigm of a deeply dysfunctional family in which the lack of communication is its most profound experience. Erica and her mother form an aberrant family unit, composed of a possessive and destructive mother and a woman-child remaining in a childlike state forever. The film, which won three awards at the Cannes Film Festival, including the Grand Prix, has been called variously "pornographic," "degrading," and "too reliant on excessive violence." Nevertheless, it deals appropriately with the failure of a family and with the discrepancies between the language of the body and the language of speech.

This film about a cold and unresponsive piano teacher, Erica, who seduces her prospective student, Walter, deals with visceral, bodily communication, which is incompatible with the verbal. Erica can communicate the *Unheimlich* only – the deep desires of her body – but is unable to communicate in socially acceptable contexts. Her body communicates its desire or inexplicable longings through self-mutilation, violent and self-serving sexual acts, and the demand for silence when Erica makes love to the boy. Erica can neither communicate anger towards her appalling mother nor her feelings for Walter. In this sadistic but also masochistic scenario, Erica's lack of self-esteem emerges as a symbol of melancholic Europe, mercilessly scrutinizing the other and also itself. By removing any semblance of an emotional relationship in her dealings with Walter, her young sexual object of desire, Erica reveals the emptiness in herself, a dramatic vacuum. She is doomed, lost in her own sexual obsessions, able to hurt her object of love and even to destroy it, as Haneke repetitively destroys the loved object in all his films. The object may be a person, a family, or a social group, or it might be Europe, or it may be a de-centred, heterogeneous, postmodern society in the state of instability. As Erica melancholically devours Walter, so does Haneke destroy the spectator's ideals of social integrity, film after film.

Not only *The Piano Teacher* but also all the other Haneke films present disturbing miscommunications – disturbing because, while sometimes subtle and perverse, they touch a nerve of the members of those communities in which family ties, social identities and ethical principles have been abandoned, derailed and almost imperceptibly changed. In this emotional glaciation, he reflects upon contemporary Europe's confusion and uncertainty amidst its growing prosperity and changing social landscape.

The world of Haneke is similar in its grimness and despair to the world presented in art works such as installations, videos with looped sequences, events with repetitive actions, and contemporary graphics, all of which express "boredom, stillness, communicational rupture, loss of pleasure, withdrawal… and the formal structure of the work (includes) slowing down, near immobility, opacity, and looped repetition of the image, by which a loss of sense of time and relation to the other endows the relationship between the viewer and representation"[19]. In the films of Haneke, we see obsessively repetitive actions, such as playing the drums in *Code Inconnu* or the game of table tennis in *71 Fragments*. These gestures do not solve any dilemma or answer an emotional need; they are like the repetitive ravings of a melancholic person who senselessly repeats gestures or actions to mask the real pain of unfinished or incomplete mourning for the lost object. To reiterate,

> Melancholia arises as an acute response to the dangers and lethal traps with which external reality threatens our objects of love, admiration, and idealization. In a desperate attempt to safeguard the object at risk, its incorporation and preservation inside the psyche seems to be the most effective manoeuvre, but it has a very high cost. Along with the loss, the effacement of the object, a retreat of the subject from reality is also present in acute melancholic states-manic depression and involuntary melancholia. Melancholia is a measure of the intolerance and rejection that external reality imposes upon the individual[20].

Haneke, a Melancholic?

In exploring Haneke's films, I have moved from exasperation to uncertainty, from sadness to a kind of amazed joy. I have both hated the grandeur he exhibits in his films and enjoyed the films' sparkling brilliance, that effervescence of spirit, his sophistication in presenting the visual arguments in his films. At the same time, I have detested Haneke's didacticism, his brutal expositions of ugly truths about inhabitants of mega-cities in central Europe, and his willingness to judge people from his superior position of *filmmaker-philosopher*. Haneke leaves no hope in his films, but throws the spectator into a state of despair and pain that seem to be regurgitated in the melancholic search for a lost object. In this, Haneke himself seems to display the narcissism

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[19] Ch. Ross, op. cit., p. xv.
[20] E. Sanchez-Pardo, op. cit., p. 69.

of a melancholic who, as Freud's pupil and collaborator Karl Abraham puts it, often reveals an artistic over-estimation in his didacticism and self-aggrandizement. Possibly because Haneke deeply understands the hopelessness of contemporary Western life, he expertly puts those "lost objects" on display for the viewer.

> The so-called ideas of inferiority found in the melancholic only seem to be such. Sometimes they in fact represent delusions of grandeur as, for instance, when the patient imagines that he has committed all the evil since the creation of the universe. Even though the self-reproaches may be aimed at the love-object, they signify at the same time a narcissistic over-estimation of the patient's own criminal capacities[21].

In this sense, Haneke announces the end of the world in all his films and produces a cinematic reality – a brutality and a hopelessness – from which there is no escape. This vast area of despair is later intellectually reworked in Haneke's most recent masterpieces, *The White Ribbon* (2009) and *Love* (2012) in which Haneke reveals melancholia in his intellectual analysis of the destruction of family in the context of fatherhood and the internal relations between spouses in the face of death. Due to their philosophical gravity and the existential questions they raise, they require a separate detailed analysis which goes beyond the scope of the present essay.

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Filmography

Michael Haneke
After Liverpool (1974) (TV)
Sperrmull (1975) (TV)
Drei Wege zum See (1976) (TV)
Lemminge Teil I Arkadien, Teil II Verlatzungen (1979) (TV)
Variation (1983) (TV)
Wer war Edgar Allan? (1984) (TV)
Schmutz (1985) (TV)
Fraulein (1986) (TV)
The Seventh Continent (1989)

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[21] K. Abraham, quoted in: ibidem, p. 26.

Benny's Video (1992)
Die Rebellion (1993) (TV)
71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance (*71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, 1994)
Funny Games (1997)
Das Schloss (*The Castle*, 1997)
Code Inconnu (2000)
La Pianiste (*The Piano Teacher*, 2001)
Le Temps du loup (*The Time of the Wolf*, 2003)
Caché (*Hidden*, 2005)
Das Weisse Band – Eine Deutsche Kindergeschichte (*The White Ribbon*, 2009)
Amour (*Love*, 2012)

Other filmmakers
M (Germany, 1931, Fritz Lang)
L'Aventura (Italy, 1960, Michelangelo Antonioni)
La Notte (Italy, 1961, Michelangelo Antonioni)
L'Eclisse (Italy, 1962, Michelangelo Antonioni)
Magnolia (USA, 1999, Paul Thomas Anderson)
Red Desert (Italy, 1964, Michelangelo Antonioni)
Short Cuts (USA, 1993, Robert Altman)
The Marriage of Maria Braun (Germany, 1979, Rainer Werner Fassbinder)

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Streszczenie

Michael Haneke. Żałoba i melancholia w kinie europejskim

W prezentowanym eseju autorka skupia uwagę na reżyserze Michaelu Hanekem i jego najważniejszych filmach w kontekście politycznym i społecznym. Kontekst ten zawiera w sobie niedawne wydarzenia polityczne w Europie, takie jak upadek systemu komunistycznego, zjednoczenie Niemiec, terroryzm, masowe migracje ludności, zjednoczenie Europy oraz wzbierająca homofobia i rasizm. Haneke obrazuje stan współczesnej Europy, z jej lękami i paranoją, poprzez ukazanie stanów świadomości dokładnie badanych już przez Zygmunta Freuda w jego pracach na temat żałoby i melancholii. Po przeanalizowaniu twórczości Hanekego autorka dochodzi do wniosku, że sam reżyser zdradza objawy melancholii, i to w jej narcystycznym aspekcie – cechującym się złudzeniem własnej wielkości, przecenianiem zdolności demaskowania całego zła współczesnego świata.

Summary

In the essay *Michael Haneke. Mourning and Melancholia in European Cinema*, its author concentrates on Michael Haneke and his most important films and their political and social contexts. Such historical phenomena as the dissolution of the communist system, German unification, terrorism, mass migratory movements in Europe, European unification and increasing homophobia and racism constitute a setting to her analysis. Seen through the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and especially through Sigmund Freud's notions of mourning and melancholia, Haneke seems to portray the psychological state of contemporary Europe and its fears and paranoia. After taking the reader for a Hanekian journey, the author concludes that the director himself may be a melancholic with delusions of grandeur and a narcissistic overestimation of his ability to reveal all the evils in the contemporary world.