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Catherine Wheatley. *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image.* Film Europa: German Cinema in an International Context. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009. xiv + 216 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-557-6.

Reviewed by Sebastian Heiduschke (Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Oregon State University)

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The Pleasure of Unpleasure: Ethics of Film Spectatorship

Catherine Wheatley's outstanding monograph about Austrian director Michael Haneke's feature films opens with a personal confession of discomfort after her first theatrical exposure to one of the films. Driven by her experience of a "feeling of unease, of discomfort" (p. 1), the author set out to write the first English-language analysis of Haneke's work, not only filling a gap in scholarship, but also introducing a new approach to debates about film spectatorship.[1] Wheatley applies ideas found mainly in the moral philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Stanley Cavell to establish how Haneke approaches filmmaking as an ambitious project of creating an ethical spectator. Her close analysis of eight feature films, excluding the 2007 remake of *Funny Games* (1997) under the title *Funny Games U.S.*, is a captivating book, recommended for anyone interested in film studies and especially useful for scholars working with reception theory.

Beginning with the one-page short "conclusion" of this book seems in order, as it is here that Wheatley answers the central question posed in the title of her first chapter "The Last Moralist?"–with the statement that Haneke is not a moralist, but that "the central question that arises out of Haneke's [ethical] cinema is 'Why is the director doing this to *me*, the spectator?' " (p. 189). In lieu of a traditional conclusion, Wheatley adds a coda to the conclusion, using *Funny Games U.S.* to speculate about Haneke's venture into the U.S. market as an attempt to bring the cinema of aesthetics to "the very audiences ... most in need of it" (p. 194). Her argument, however, is not entirely convincing if one considers that in the five previous chapters, Wheatley shows how Haneke's cinema gradually moves beyond the counter-cinematic images of Jean-Luc Godard, Chantal Akerman, or Jean-Marie Straub and DaniÃ¨le Huillet. In fact, it is the intensive cinematic experience defying Peter Wollen's binary oppositions of counter-cinema's seven cardinal virtues in response to the seven sins of Hollywood mainstream films that prompted Wheatley to construct her theory of Haneke's attempt to create an ethical spectator.[2]

The question posed in the title of the first chapter serves as the point of departure for her thesis: that Haneke's films require viewers to take responsibility for the act of viewing. Wheatley implies that the act of being a spectator in his films also requires the spectator to question the relationship between director and audience. Relying predominantly on German-language scholarship and on reviews of Haneke's films in the popular press was a necessity by default as little research has been done about the filmmaker, a fact that also explains the hiatus of secondary literature between the year 2000 and the publication of this book almost a decade later. Wheatley mentions this lack of scholarly debate as one of the incentives for her to write a study on Haneke.

In chapters 2 to 5, Wheatley develops her theory of Haneke's ethics of spectatorship in a discussion of his

eight feature films for the big screen. Beginning with the rubric "Negotiating Modernism: *Der siebente Kontinent, Benny's Video, 71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufall*," in chapter 2, Wheatley focuses on the early Austrian films as testing grounds of ethical spectatorship reminiscent of counter-cinema. In chapter 3, "The Ethics of Aggression: *Funny Games*," she explains Haneke's development of "unpleasure" as similar to the Kantian notion of morality as the struggle between emotion and reason. Unpleasure is caused by the disruption of a spectator's pleasure drive, which is subsequently replaced by discomfort or even guilt. Chapter 4, "Emotional Engagement and Narrativity: *Code inconnu, La Pianiste, Le Temps du loup*," looks at the first three French-language films, which mark Haneke's shift away from Austrian films towards an international context. Central to this chapter is Wheatley's argument that the films now begin to control the spectators while leaving them autonomous. This paradoxical situation is developed further in the final chapter, "Shame and Guilt: *CachÃ©*," a film that in Wheatley's eyes serves as the culmination of Haneke's ethics project, due to its somewhat self-reflexive character. Common to all chapters is an interweaving of film analysis and theoretical considerations that ingeniously reflect the character of the films under scrutiny.

It is precisely this parallel reading of Haneke and Kant that makes this volume so valuable, as it offers an approach to Haneke's films not influenced by emotional reactions but clear argumentation and thorough readings of his films. The chronological order of film treatment in the book reflects the ways in which Haneke's filmmaking evolved and turned into the "ethical cinema" Wheatley is proposing here. Especially exciting, however, is the fact that it appears as if readers of this book are being allowed insight into Haneke's brain through the use of Kant's moral philosophy. As a consequence of this approach, we realize that Haneke's *oeuvre* no longer reminds us of the satirical violence of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994) or Quentin Tarantino's lack of morality in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), but opens up a truly innovative strategy of looking at film as a philosophical tool that seems to dissect the audience's attitude towards its morals layer by layer. This book is the reason I will go back to my film collection to pull out Haneke's films.

Notes

[1]. It is noteworthy that Roy Grundmann's edited volume *The Companion to Michael Haneke* has been announced as forthcoming with Blackwell Publishing in 2010, after a long silence about Haneke's work among scholars.

[2]. Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter-Cinema: Vent d'Est," *Afterimage* 7 (1972): 6-17.