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***Funny Frames: The Filmic Concepts of Michael Haneke*, Oliver C. Speck. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2010 (260 pages). ISBN: 9781441192851.**

A Review by Jeremiah Ambrose, Trinity College Dublin

The films of Michael Haneke have become some of the most dissected and carefully analysed films in both film theory and film criticism alike. For this reason, it would be easy to assume that another book on Michael Haneke would most likely be a reappropriation of past theoretical concepts. However, this assumption is foiled quite promptly in the introduction to Oliver C. Speck's *Funny Frames: The Filmic Concepts of Michael Haneke*. From the outset, Speck establishes a theoretical approach that addresses his overall concern with Haneke's "shifting frame of reference" (2). After opening with an analysis from a scene in *Code Unknown* (*Code Inconnu*, 2005), Speck introduces what he calls "the image of a shift", which refers to the viewer's process of making meaning and to the process of representation itself (2). In particular, Speck considers the representation of violence, one of the primary theoretical concerns with Haneke's body of work. In choosing to look at both *Benny's Video* (1992) and *Funny Games* (1997 and 2007), he addresses Haneke's often criticised approach of critiquing violence through overtly hyper-violent representations of that violence and highlights how the burden of this "ethical reflection" is placed on the viewer, who is simultaneously involved with the constantly shifting frames of reference that populate Haneke's work (10). To highlight the importance of the viewer's role in the construction of meaning, Speck positions each of the plot reviews towards the end of the book, allowing a more concise analysis of how particular scenes from Haneke's films derive meaning from each viewer's interactions with them. However, the decision to separate the actual plots of these films from the components of meaning as constructed by the viewer runs the risk of leaving the book exposed as a fragmented post-structuralist reading of Haneke's work. It also renders the author's arguments less convincing as they are not grounded within the narrative structures of specific films. Speck's examination of Deleuzian traits in Haneke's work somewhat reifies this abstract reading, while also addressing core components in his cinema such as madness, suicide and childhood. In exploring new ways of appropriating Hanekeian cinema, Speck compensates for his decentred approach by providing additional elements to consider in Haneke's films and, in the process, helping to expand the frames of reference with which this book is primarily concerned.

Speck eschews chapters, instead dividing the book into nine frames, the ninth frame providing plot reviews of the films referenced. The eight remaining frames are split into two sections. The first section explores the relationship between Haneke's work and aspects of Deleuzian theory. The second focuses more intensely on the core components mentioned above. However, these sections are fragmented by Speck's preoccupations with post-structuralism and, as a consequence, cannot be categorised as standard textual divisions.

Frame I elaborates the concept of shifting frames of reference, while also branching out to explore how the paradoxical question of representing the politics of representation inherently synchronises with the works of both Foucault and Deleuze in its demand "that the discourse describe itself from outside the discourse" (38). What results is a kaleidoscopic interpretation of meaning that Speck constructs on the basis of the constantly shifting frames of reference. The use of the opening long shot of a street scene from *Hidden* (*Caché*, 2005) to conceptualise the shifting frames of reference provides a clear and concise understanding of meaning being created through the absence of meaning, and serves to emphasise the inability to cement this meaning fully. In his analysis of Haneke's work as a "Cinema of Cruelty", Speck uses Deleuzian theory to highlight how this cruelty serves to eradicate cliché.[1] Although this approach is developed in detail with reference to both Artaud and Deleuze, it is supplanted by gimmick towards the end of the chapter. In explaining his unusual transition from discussing anti-cinema and the viewer to considering the Cinema of Cruelty, Speck justifies this dislocation by referring to it as a shift in the frame of reference. Although his intention here is obvious, it somewhat contradicts the film-centred shifting frames of reference that he establishes in the Introduction. To engage in this process within the text only serves to complicate his analysis of Haneke's films, and thus further alienates the reader from his concepts.

In Frame II, Speck conducts a survey of Haneke's oeuvre to explore how each of Haneke's films provides "an examination of sickness, alienation, suicide, the concept of guilt and suffering, of communication (that is, non-communication) of anti-realistic types of narration, of violence and the representation of violence" (58). This is achieved through an in-depth analysis of each film. The eschewal of a chronological order appears as another derivative of Speck's attempt to reaffirm the presence of the shifting frames of reference in the text. Although this may seem a clever attempt at highlighting the central concept of the book, Speck's choice to analyse Haneke's oeuvre after his rejection of the "big picture" towards the end of Frame I exposes the contradictory nature of his approach.

In Frames III and IV, Speck further analyses the methods with which Haneke confronts political discourses in his cinema, starting with the close relationship that exists between the cinema of Fassbinder and Haneke. After highlighting that Hanekeian cinema is not concerned with the "truth of events", Speck then directs the reader towards Haneke's use of *aporias* to establish paradoxical and irreducible viewpoints that expose the futility of politics and the tendency of the media to reduce issues to one-sided arguments. In exposing the malleable nature of a subjective "truth", Speck aligns Haneke's aesthetic reappropriation of the past with Deleuzian philosophy. This relationship is presented as an "alternative to the global culture of so-called postmodernity where the past is increasingly obliterated by the eternal present of pervasive mediatisation, apathy of the polis and general deracination" (130). Speck then uses Guy Debord's theses on the *Society of the Spectacle* as a platform to explore the social implications of these processes. What ensues is an analysis that shifts from the initial concern with the external social environment to the internal realm of the dysfunctional family. Haneke's treatment of the family unit demarcates his positioning as Nietzsche's "physician of culture" or what Gilles Deleuze refers to as a "clinician of civilisation", somebody who diagnoses the disease in society (qtd. in Speck 148). Speck supports this argument with a clinical analysis of Haneke's aesthetic. This reintroduces Haneke's use of constantly shifting, multiple frames of reference, and considers how this aesthetic overlaps with Deleuze, demanding a different understanding of history. Speck summarises this chapter best when he states: "Haneke's cinema combines the radicality of a

Debordian take on the mediatisation of events with the Deleuzian response to the postmodern condition" (145). Speck's treatment of Haneke's attack on subjectivity is commendable in that it does not allow the subjective nature of the text to stifle what he is trying to discuss.

Frame V looks at the symptoms attesting to Haneke's prognosis for the postmodern condition that permeates the "reifying effects of consumer capitalism and the role of mass-media in it" (146). With this in mind, Speck promotes the presence of two kinds of madness in Hanekeian cinema. The first corresponds to the absurdity of life in the postmodern world, while the second pertains to a severe criminal act that eradicates all social bonds, leading to a dissection of Haneke's representations of madness throughout his oeuvre. In true Godardian fashion, Haneke uses what Deleuze refers to as the "pedagogy of the image" to educate the viewer about what he envisions as being wrong with contemporary society (*Cinema 1* 13). Speck suggests that the "cure" to the condition that Haneke has diagnosed is connected to a renewed critical stance, which is a byproduct of his pedagogical approach. This prognosis is valorised by its fusion with the various elements that Haneke harnesses to express the absurdity of the postmodern condition.

Frame VI addresses the violence in Haneke's cinema, but, rather than opting for a typical reading, Speck looks specifically at the role of self-aggression in Haneke's oeuvre. This allows for a diverse and interesting analysis, while highlighting a neglected area of Hanekeian scholarship that requires greater consideration. Speck considers in detail both suicide and murder-suicide in several of Haneke's films, using Emile Durkheim's work on the subject to categorise the type of suicide present in Haneke's work. He concludes that representations of suicide in Haneke's films fall into two categories: egoistic and anomic. Both of these concur with his attempts to resolve the postmodern condition and highlight his concern with making the viewer self-aware, so that he/she can actively engage with this deconstruction. This inspection of Deleuze's "society of control" and its relationship with auto-aggression draws to a close with an in-depth analysis of the suicide of Majid (Maurice Bénichou) in *Hidden*. The analysis affirms how Haneke's "violence is moved back to the present, is literally 're-presented'" (177). In other words, Haneke extrapolates one of the central components of postmodern cinema, repackaging it in order to deconstruct it.

In Frame VII, Speck considers "the moral of the long take" (178). He first differentiates between the long take in the form of a static camera and "*le travelling*" shot, which is a tracking shot taken using a dolly. Speck uses the relationship of both these types of long take and what they represent to address how Haneke promotes "a moral perspective on reality" that demarcates a true "cinema of cruelty" (one that is achieved without the visual portrayal of cruelty) (186). However, no message is actively conveyed and Haneke does not take a moralistic standpoint, instead the moral comes as a response to the long take and the shifting frames of reference that are manifested within the absence that it generates.

In Frame VIII, Speck refers to two coincidences that occurred while he was finishing the book. The first of these was that, after the death of Michael Jackson, the clip in which he features in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (*71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* 1994) acquired new meaning. This reframing actualises the shifting frames of reference, demonstrating how this allows for each viewer to create their own meaning and how each meaning created is as unstable as the last. The second coincidence relates to the arrest of a renowned African-American scholar by a white police officer for disorderly conduct. As highlighted by Speck, the resemblance of this scenario to the altercation between Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and the cyclist in *Hidden* speaks to the realism of the scenes in

Haneke's films. Stemming from this, Speck addresses one final component of Hanekeian cinema: the "Funny Frame". He describes this as "the bafflement resulting from the displacement of two completely mismatched frames onto each other" (191). Speck then proceeds towards a hasty conclusion that summarises many of the points made throughout each of the Frames.

Although I criticise some aspects of Speck's book, most of my concerns arise from his attempts to use his writing technique to embody the theories he discusses, which seems like an unnecessary gimmick. Apart from this, his critical theory and visual analyses are adeptly executed, both as regards his Deleuzian approach and his interweaving of additional critical theorists into his arguments. At times, the text feels somewhat over-saturated, which could have been rectified by either making the book longer or omitting some of the aspects addressed. However, in general, one must acknowledge Speck's confidence both in addressing issues prevalent in the core components of Hanekeian cinema and in generating through his writing further paradoxes in relation to those issues. His playful and experimental approach to the filmic concepts of Michael Haneke reminds us that academic texts do not have to be written with only readers like Georges from *Hidden* in mind.

Notes

[1] Antonin Artaud's writings on "The Theatre of Cruelty" address the necessity of cruelty existing at the core of every spectacle. This cruelty is not concerned with Sadism or causing pain, but with the deconstruction of a false reality; Artaud believed that theatre should affect the audience as much as possible. André Bazin expanded on Artaud's theories, exploring the link between this form of "cruelty" and the relationship between audience and filmmakers (Bazin 1982).

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