Funny Games and Richard Moran: Film, Imagination, and Moral Complicity

Paul Schofield
Bates College

> [I]n many contexts we take ourselves, our real, non-fictional selves, to be implicated in what we're feeling and how we're feeling it in the movie theater . . . When we are appalled, or gratified, or vengeful, or aroused, or indignant, we are responding as the very people we are.[1]
>
> —Richard Moran

1. Introduction

A well-off family of three is paid a visit by two young men purporting to seek a favor. Within minutes, the men have incapacitated them all. Over the course of the night, the men torture and humiliate their captives, forcing them to play sadistic games in hopes of having their lives spared. A few attempts at escape are made, but each ultimately fails. One by one, the entire family is murdered, and the perpetrators prepare to repeat the exercise with another set of victims.

That audiences would respond with outrage to a film that can be summarized in this way is unsurprising. But Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997 and 2007) is as likely to perplex as it is to provoke. While subjecting its audience to appallingly gruesome displays of torture and torment, it nevertheless seems intent upon saying *something* about violence in the movies. For the film contains multiple Brechtian moments in which a character on screen nods knowingly at the viewer, addresses questions to her, refers explicitly to the events portrayed as fictitious, and so forth. Such moments signal a metacinematic interest in the film's horrific goings-on. But what exactly is being said, and whether what's being said is particularly interesting, subtle, or deep, has been a source of controversy since the film's release.

In interviews, Haneke tends to express a dim view of cinematic violence, and so this film's metacinematic commentary is typically read as a critique of violence in the movies.[2] But whether it has any genuine insight to share seems open for debate. Critics are divided on the film's merit, with many judging it to be crude, blunt, and obvious. Dana Stevens, in her 2007 review, gives expression to the sentiment most common among the film's detractors: "The direct-address interludes come off as fatuous and hectoring . . . *Funny Games* is 110 minutes of pure reptile-brain jolts (fear, mostly), with a couple of meta-narrative finger wags thrown in."[3] Film scholars have tended to treat the film less dismissively, but my view is that there's more interpretive work left to do if we're to understand fully the film's thinking on these matters.

My hope, in this essay, is to demonstrate that *Funny Games* develops certain themes found in Richard Moran's 1994 paper, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination." While the bulk of Moran's article is devoted to attacking a particular trend in the philosophical aesthetics literature, wherein film viewing is understood as an exercise in make-believe, Moran ends on a constructive note, recommending additional ways that imagination might be deployed for the purpose of appreciating art. His remarks on this subject are intended to be cursory, and there have been, to my knowledge, few attempts to develop them further. But my suggestion is that *Funny Games* uses the resources of its medium to investigate the role of imagination in our engagement with film in ways first suggested by Moran, thereby engaging philosophically with questions about aesthetics, art, and the philosophy of film.[4]

2. The Film

Funny Games is a German language Austrian film released in 1997, which Hanke remade for English-speaking audiences a decade later in hopes of finding an American audience. Though the 2007 version departs from its predecessor in small ways, it is in essence a shot-for-shot remake. I'll

be referring to the remake, unless otherwise noted, but most of what I say applies equally well to either version.

The film begins with a bourgeois family driving to their lake house. George (Tim Roth), Ann (Naomi Watts), and their young son Georgie (Devon Gearhart), play a game in which they attempt to identify operas playing on the car stereo. At home, Ann prepares dinner as two men arrive at the door. The two introduce themselves as Paul (Michael Pitt) and Peter (Brady Corbet). Their stated reason for visiting is that they've been sent by the neighbor to borrow eggs. While Paul goes outside, supposedly to hit a golf ball with George's designer club, Peter repeatedly drops "on accident" the eggs that are given to him. Eventually Ann becomes agitated and makes a scene while ordering the company gone. Paul, who has come in from outside, expresses bemusement, while George and Georgie arrive on the scene. George sides with his wife and requests that the visitors depart, at which point Paul picks up a golf club and strikes him with it, breaking his leg. Sadistically toying with Ann, Paul sends her outside on a hunt for the family dog, which she eventually discovers dead in the back of their car, having been killed, apparently, by Paul with the golf club. Now the whole family is placed in the living room, where they're told they will be forced to play "games" in order to earn the right to live. Paul bets the family that they will not survive until 9:00 the following morning.

What follows is a night of horror, with "games" involving not only physical abuse, but sexual humiliation, as Ann is forced to strip while Peter and Paul evaluate her body. At one point, young Georgie manages to escape, but is recaptured in short order and then is killed by Peter with a shotgun. When Peter and Paul exit the house, the victimized pair devise a plan wherein Ann will walk to town to fetch help, leaving George with his broken leg. But when Ann exits the property, she is soon retrieved by Peter and Paul, who return her to the house. In the living room, Peter and Paul force the pair to play another game, and George is killed with a shotgun. Peter and Paul then take a bound and gagged Ann onto a sailboat. With an hour remaining before the 9:00 deadline, they

casually throw her off the side of the boat, leaving her to drown. They move on to their next family, who they'll presumably victimize in a similar fashion, and the film ends.

Funny Games, I've said, distinguishes itself from typical thrillers or horror pictures with its inclusion of several metacinematic moments. For instance, just before Ann is about to discover the murdered family dog, Paul cranes his neck one hundred and eighty degrees to offer a knowing look directly to the audience—and in the 1997 version, he actually winks. Later, at a moment in which it appears that Ann will simply give up on the games and therefore be killed, Paul pauses to ask the audience whether they're hoping for a "real ending." Closer to the conclusion, Paul uses a remote control to rewind the film, undoing an attack that George has carried out against Peter—acknowledging explicitly, I take it, that the events taking place in a filmic universe are a contrivance. And at the film's conclusion, Paul enters the house of the family he's preparing to victimize next and makes direct eye contact with the audience as the credits begin to roll.

It's these moments that render the film distinctive. It's these moments that suggest the film is up to something more than merely supplying cheap thrills, or satisfying audience appetite for brutality. Nevertheless, questions remain about what, precisely, the film is saying about cinema, how these moments manage to say it, and whether what is said is genuinely insightful.

3. Audience Complicity

Haneke, we've said, intends *Funny Games* as a critique of violence in the movies, or, more precisely, as a critique of finding entertainment in it. However, anyone aiming to advance such a critique must face a familiar defense of such enjoyments. The defense is that the violence depicted onscreen occurs in a fictional universe. That universe, being fictional, contains no actual violence, as it contains no actual *anything*. A murder depicted in a film is no actual murder, torture in a film is not actual torture, and suffering in film is not actual suffering. The audience attends a film with full

knowledge of this, and so when they cheer on the violence, all that they cheer, and all that they intend to cheer, is non-actual violence, which isn't violence at all. And why think there is anything morally illicit about *that*?

This defense presumes a sharp divide between the fictional universe of the film and the real world inhabited by moviegoers. Were a murder to occur inside the theater itself during a screening of *Funny Games*, all admit that it would be abominable to treat it as entertainment. That the world onscreen is fictional, according to the argument, makes all the difference. This all-important divide is breeched, however, when the audience is acknowledged by characters in the film. As Marc Vernet says in his well-known paper "The Look at the Camera," such moments, "[put] the space of the film and the space of the movie theater in direct contact."[5] Viewers are thus understood *not* simply to be peering voyeuristically into a hermetically sealed world, but to occupy a universe in common with fictional persons who possess the capability of addressing them. So when Paul looks into the camera and says, "You want a real ending, right?" our response isn't, "Why is he talking to himself?" or, "Perhaps he's addressing someone situated directly behind the camera." We experience the words as addressing us, qua audience members.

It is significant, I believe, that when the line between the filmic universe and the real world is breeched, it is always the assailant who addresses the camera, giving knowing glances to the audience, asking its opinion, seeking its approval, and attending to its preferences. This all suggests that the acknowledgment emanating from the film is serving to put us into communion with the perpetrators. Indeed, in an interview contained on the DVD for *Cache* (2005), Haneke himself says as much: "The killer communicates with the viewer," he explains. "That means he makes him his accomplice." That character onscreen makes the viewer an accomplice simply by communicating with her is, perhaps, an overly hasty inference. Can a person really implicate another in one's deeds simply by addressing her? Though it seems dubious to suggest that she can, it's worth noting a

weaker way in which such address might connect its recipient to the wrongful action of the person who issues it. Imagine that someone carries out a bad deed in my presence, and then addresses me in a way that presumes we are allies. Even if I've not previously thought of myself as an accomplice, being addressed in this way implicates me. For at the very least, I might wonder what I've done to earn the presumption that I am an ally, and I might further wonder about how I'm required to respond to the presumption now that it's been made explicit. To be addressed as a fellow perpetrator alters the normative circumstances whether I like it or not.

This assertion that we are placed on the side of the killers requires some further attention. The victims, after all, are not themselves monsters, constructed in such a way as to make us think they deserve the torment coming their way. Yet, our alliances are ambiguous. In his essay written for the Criterion Collection release of the Austrian version of the film, Bilge Ebiri writes:

> [A]s much as we may imagine that we're aligned with the victims, *Funny Games* dares to suggest that the opposite is true . . . After all, we have come to watch a thriller, and the villains of *Funny Games* are our shock troops, there to do the audience's bidding with just enough plausible deniability to let us continue with the fantasy that we have nothing to do with the horrors on-screen . . . [V]iolent thrillers always go through the motions of putting us on the side of their protagonists, even as they ultimately deliver on our not-so-secret desire to see those same people victimized, sometimes even killed.[6]

Whether any particular audience member does in fact find themselves on the side of the villains will hinge upon their individual experience of the film. However, the film *does* seem interested in inspiring viewers to self-reflect about their reasons for finding entertainment in a movies such as this. Consider, for instance, the scene in which Ann is forced to strip naked, while Peter and Paul comment on her body. She sobs and begs for mercy while the camera lingers on her, leering much in the way the villains do. However, the camera denies the viewer any glimpse of nudity, which

consumers of horror films and thrillers presumably expect, given the conventions of the genre. In having them frustrated, the viewer has their expectations themselves called to their attention. And surely this signals to the viewer that their expectations to be entertained in this way put them into community with the villains.

Insofar as the film indeed allies the audience with the perpetrators, what is being suggested, exactly? One possibility, I suppose, would be that the film is accusing the audience of being complicit in actual murder. Support for this reading could be drawn from a bit a dialogue between Peter and Paul late in the film, in which Peter says, “Isn’t fiction real? . . . You can see it in the movie, right? . . . Well then it’s just as real as reality.” Taken at face value, however, this suggestion is fatuous. Peter Brunette writes:

> [T]o what extent *could* any self-reflective gesture, an address directly to the audience, ever imply a collaboration between audience and killer? . . . [T]he self-reflexivity, by definition, immediately indicates that what is going on is *playacting*, not real violence, so what exactly can the audience ever be guilty of if it knows that everything is fake?[7]

We’ve returned, it seems, to the defense of cinematic violence with which we began, which is that the violence depicted onscreen occurs in a fictional universe without any actual violence. Characters who address the audience may breech the supposed divide between the fictional universe and ours. But when they do so, they also underscore that the events depicted in the film *are a fiction*. That is, when Peter and Paul address the audience, they address us not as co-conspirators in an actual murder, but *as members of a film audience*—asking us, for instance, whether we’re hoping for some “plausible plot development.” All of this would seem to work against the possibility of being implicated in anything at all. Thus, Ebiri suggests that Hanke, by including these meta-cinematic moments, “pulls us out of the film at precisely the moments when it threatens to become too disturbing to bear.” By doing this, “he seems to reassure us that it’s all just a movie.”[8] We’re left,

then, with a puzzle. If the film is indeed intended as an indictment of the audience—an attempt to reveal our moral complicity in film's goings on—how could placing us on the side of the villains manage to do this when its way of attempting to do so straightforwardly acknowledges that the audience is watching a fiction in which no one is actually tortured or killed?

4. Moran, Feeling, and Imagination

This is the place where, I want to suggest, the film's preoccupations come into contact with themes from Richard Moran's "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination."[9] Much of this paper concerns itself with the view, advocated famously by Kendall Walton, that engagement with the mimetic arts involves imagining oneself into the art's universe, using the artistic artifact as a prop in a complicated game of make-believe.[10] So, for instance, watching *Funny Games* might on such a view be analogized to sophisticated child's play, wherein audiences imagine themselves to be present as the atrocities are carried out. Moran argues that this restricts too narrowly the role of imagination, ultimately recommending the possibility of imaginative engagement of a different sort. It's this other sort of imagining that is relevant to our discussion here, and so I will begin by explaining it.

Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" serves as Moran's point of departure, and so I will commence by quoting a lengthy passage from it:

> But where the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation; this must be allowed to disfigure, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper that I should, enter into such sentiments; and the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I can never relish the composition . . .

> The case is not the same with moral principles, as with speculative opinions of any kind. These are in constant flux and revolution. The son embraces a different system from the father. Nay, there scarcely is any man, who can boast of great constancy and uniformity in this particular. Whatever speculative errors may be found in the polite writings of any age or country, they detract but little from the value of those compositions. There needs but a certain turn of thought or imagination to make us enter into all the opinions, which then prevailed, and relish the sentiments or conclusions derived from them. But a very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarized.[11]

A work of art can easily prompt us to imagine that states of affairs obtain that do not obtain in the real world. So if we're shown Ann and George living in a handsome lake house, then for the purpose of following and engaging with the narrative, we simply hold as true the proposition "Ann and George live in a handsome lake house," or if we're told that Ann and George have a young son, we reason from the premise "Ann and George have a son" for the purposes of engaging the film. Things are different when it comes to morality, however, and this is what Hume is struggling with in the quoted passages. For a work of narrative fiction *cannot* simply stipulate that for the purposes of the narrative, certain acts are good, right, moral, or worthy of sympathy. That is, it cannot, in the way it stipulates that Ann and George live in a handsome lake house, stipulate that Peter and Paul are on the side of the right when they sexually humiliate Ann, or that Peter is worthy of our admiration when he murders young Georgie, or that the family's bourgeois demeanor renders them deserving of dehumanization. Whereas accepting the former set of stipulations requires "but a turn of mind," accepting the latter would require a "very violent effort" indeed.

It can seem a bit mysterious, though, why there would exists this divide between that which can be imagined so unproblematically, and that which should never be imagined and could only be imagined with a very violent effort. Hume's brief attempts to solve the mystery are relatively feeble, and so I'll pass over them without comment. Moran, however, points us in a helpful direction, suggesting that there are different *kinds* of imagination at play here:

> I think we have to distinguish hypothetical and dramatic imagination and the types of resistance appropriate to them. It seems, then, that understanding these passages in Hume requires us to distinguish between two quite different activities, which we may call hypothetical and dramatic imagining. Strictly speaking, neither one of them necessarily involves a genuine alteration of judgment, but in the case of dramatic imaginative rehearsal it's easy to lose track of the difference between supposition and conclusion, between fantasy and acting out.[12]

While hypothetical imagination consists in holding particular propositions as true, dramatic imagining involves immersion of oneself in a worldview. I can, through an act of imagination, hold as fixed all of my other beliefs and hypothetically hold as true a proposition about the existence of a particular family and about the type of home they own. But this is an activity very different in character from, say, imagining oneself into a perspective from which the prospect of torturing an innocent person appears choiceworthy. And it's not difficult to see why the latter would necessitate a violent effort, requiring as it does that one *work* to see the world and the people in it in a radically different light. Moran continues to develop the thought:

> Imaginatively adopting a perspective on something involves something different from the sort of imagination involved in ordinary counterfactual reasoning. Hypothetical reasoning involves seeing what would follow from the truth of some proposition . . . By contrast, imagination with respect to emotional attitudes may

> require such things as dramatic rehearsal, the right mood, the right experiences, a sympathetic nature. It thus says more about a person that he is either able or unable to imagine something in this way, and he bears a different responsibility for it . . . imagination with respect to the cruel, the embarrassing, or the arousing involves something more like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation, rather than just the truth of a specifiable proposition. And imagining along these lines involves something more like genuine rehearsal, 'trying on' the point of view, trying to determine what it is like to inhabit it. It is something I may not be able to do if my heart is not in it.[13]

Imagination of the dramatic sort, then, involves "trying on a point of view." And this, it would seem, *does* morally implicate the person doing the imagining. To begin to see this, think of someone who relishes a racist joke contained in a film. Here it's no defense for her to say that for purposes of the film, it's been stipulated that this sort of thing is a lark, just as it's stipulated that some characters own a lake house. Finding such a joke funny requires not just holding a particular proposition true for the purpose of further reasoning, but sympathizing with the sentiment underlying it. That is, it requires seeing the target race in a hateful or condescending light, and directing certain derogatory feelings toward its members. To do this, one must already occupy a problematic stance toward the racial group or be prepared to do some work in an effort to take it up. Either way, it "says a good deal about someone" (to put it as Moran does) that she's able to enjoy the joke, which is why we might begin to think this person is morally implicated.

In this insight, we can see the beginnings of an answer to the question with which we ended in the previous section—the question about how it's possible for a film that is a mere fiction, depicting wholly unreal events, to morally implicate a viewer. My task in the rest of the paper is to

bring Moran's insights to bear on *Funny Games* itself, specifically in regard to this idea that the audience might be made into "accomplices."

5. Trying On a Point of View in *Funny Games*

Funny Games, I wish to suggest, isn't simply an exercise in moralistic finger-wagging, but an invitation to reflect on the way narrative films prompt us to "try on" points of view, and on how we in the audience become implicated when abiding the prompt. For the film itself does attempt to get us to try on a specific point of view, even as it criticizes us for doing so. In attempting to specify the content of this point of view, we find nothing particularly sophisticated, however. The film goes out of its way to deny that the atrocities carried out onscreen have any deep ideological underpinning—when offering reasons for their deeds, Peter and Paul glibly offer conflicting explanations such as, "The truth is he's white trash. He comes from a filthy, deprived family. Raised poorly, drugs, etc.," and then, "He's a spoiled little brat. He's jaded and disgusted by the emptiness of existence," and then, "You want another version? . . . He's a drug addict." The causal background here—whatever we might be inclined to blame the behavior on—is a non-factor, irrelevant to the film's interests. Indeed, Haneke confirms this reading in his press conference at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, where he denies that the villains harbor deep ideological or political thoughts, of which their actions are outward expressions.[14] The pair are making an existential choice, engaging in an act of self-definition, deciding to torment and torture people for no reason other than to make themselves into torturers. It is this point of view that the film invites us to try on. It invites us, that is, to join the killers in the degradation of others, and to turn away from their humanity. It invites us to feel excitement at the thought of causing anguish and inflicting suffering. It invites us to leave behind societal and moral norms. It invites us to feel satisfaction at withholding sympathy from the victims.

Viewers of *Funny Games* are not likely to assent wholeheartedly to Peter and Paul's amoralist and sadistic perspective, nor are they likely to continue to engage sympathetically with Peter and Paul for the duration. Insofar as one "tries on" the relevant point of view, they are likely to do so only partially and sporadically. As Brunette says, "Haneke puts audience identification into play, as it were . . . oscillating between various poles of empathy and attachment that are being offered."[15] For instance, at an emotional turning point in the film, we're presented with an extended shot in which we're left to watch a wounded George and Ann alone in a room with their murdered son. There's no doubt that we're expected here to be distressed and disgusted. But this reaction is solicited only at the end of a progression in which the audience has presumably become increasingly immersed in the goings on in the film, and in which the allegiance of the audience has been increasingly called into question. So the sympathy one is inclined to feel for the victims serves as a contrast to whatever enjoyment and approval one experienced in the preceding moments. Indeed, the contrast calls attention to this enjoyment and approval, affording the audience an opportunity to reflect on the attitude they took toward the events that led to this atrocity as those events were unfolding. It calls attention to the extent to which the audience had entered into community with the killers.

The moments in which Paul addresses the audience are similarly likely to alert the viewer of the extent to which she's trying on the perpetrators' point of view. For I take it that we are, in these moments, expected to feel disconcerted and exposed, as if we've been caught and "called out." To the extent that a viewer reacts in this way, it says a considerable amount about her relationship to the action on screen, as these feelings of having been exposed are only comprehensible if she's engaged with the goings-on onscreen in a way that morally implicates her—it only makes sense to feel "called out" if she's managed to get herself morally implicated in one way or another. It's tempting, we've said, to suggest that a fiction film is "just a movie," depicting events that never occurred, and therefore incapable of implicating anyone. But as Moran insists, it *says something about the viewer* that

she's able to "try on" a view presented in a film. And whereas Moran can only report on his own experience of engagement with film, *Funny Games* actually gives the viewer the experience of trying on a point of view, while at the same time forcing us to confront our own complicity on the spot. In other words, the hope is that our own experience of watching the film tells against the "it's just a film" defense, or, at the very least, complicates the issue considerably.

The above has focused on the possibility that something is *revealed* about a person when she tries on a point of view. However, entering into a point of view is something that a person *does*. And so it seems possible for a film to *entice us to do something wrongful*, in addition to revealing our bad character, when it solicits our imaginative engagement. *Funny Games* suggests that we might be so enticed. So, halfway through the film, Paul turns to the audience and says, "You're on *their* side, aren't you?" In asking this question, we might introspect and attempt to discover who we're actually rooting for—we can imagine someone reacting to the question with disturbed surprise as she notices that her allegiances are divided, or perhaps that they have drifted toward Peter and Paul. But putting this question explicitly to the audience member can also highlight the choice she has in determining her allegiances. Imaginative engagement is, or can be, *active*, after all. Beginning with the moment she decides which film to see in the first place, and moving on to the moment when she chooses whether to avert her eyes or instead to relish the violence onscreen, a person is exercising agency. As with someone who seeks out a racist comedian and allows herself to marinate in the bigotry, someone who goes to a film advertised as torture porn and then empathetically engages with Paul and Peter is acting in their capacity as an agent. Thus, the concern is not simply what is *revealed* about her, but with what she is *doing*.

The moral wrong inhering in the audience's action is not, of course, one committed against a specific person. It's not as if an audience member is linked to Georgie through an ethical nexus, and acts immorally by committing a wrong against this specific fictitious person. Instead, the moral

trouble consists in the audience member's attempt to assume a posture of mind that eschews concerns about wronging altogether. For the point of view that one is invited to "try on" here is one from which no other person registers as an object of moral concern at all. When we become accomplices with Peter and Paul, others become nothing to us—others are removed from our moral radar, and the question about what we owe to each other does not arise. Thus, we eschew altogether the standpoint from which duties to others grip us in the first place. It would seem that doing this would indeed require a "very violent effort." But it also seems like an effort the film requires us to take, if we're to consume it as entertainment. And making such an effort doesn't just reveal something about a person. It is also a troubling thing to *do*, for it is a significant step toward removing oneself from the moral community altogether.

While *Funny Games* most obviously concerns itself with thrillers and horror, and with the ways they invite audiences to take a dehumanizing perspective on the characters, its concerns about moral complicity generalize. Think, for instance, of a film like D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which tells of the Klu Klux Klan "defending" the nation from black persons after the end of the Civil War. The film is notorious for its racism, but also universally lauded for its artistic merits. So it's often argued that we might condemn the bigotry embedded in it while appreciating its beauty.[16] But armed with the insight supplied to us by *Funny Games*, we might begin to link the film's moral trouble more closely with its artistic merits. For the film arguably invites the viewer to try on a viewpoint from which Klansmen are heroes, and from which blacks are the sub-human enemy to be defeated. Griffith uses, with great skill, the various tools of the medium to inspire audiences to see blacks as a threat, and to feel sympathy toward those who wish to drive them out. So full engagement with the film's artistry requires working to occupy a perspective that is wholly repugnant. To try on the point of view encouraged by the film is, in other words, to try on a point of view from which members of a particular race are seen as lacking humanity. The implications of this

line of thought expand when we contemplate ways in which a film might invite us to try on a point of view that is *not* obviously sinister. Consider, for instance, how Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) might be thought to encourage us to see humanity in beings in which we hadn't seen it in before—to try on a view from which the concern for humanity isn't so narrowly applied, or so specifically tied to biology. At any rate, the possibilities for use of imagination in one's interaction with film appear to be broad, and so we ought to acknowledge that the line of thinking pursued by *Funny Games* seems to have application far beyond considerations about violence in the movies.

6. The Social Aspect of Moral Complicity

I will conclude by considering society's complicity in what happens in the movies. During Paul's asides in *Funny Games*, he sometimes alludes to the fact that the film is created in order to satisfy preexisting preferences of the audience's. For instance, there is a moment when Paul acknowledges that the audience is looking for a particular sort of ending, and implies that he might tailor his actions to make possible such an ending. And in the Austrian version, he makes it clear that he is extending the games so as to ensure that the film has the running time that the audience expects. As Catherine Wheatley puts it, "Paul does not merely acknowledge the audience as spectators, but he also accuses them of being his very *raison d'être*."[17] Thus, the film highlights the fact that it is not simply asking its audience to try on a particular moral point of view, but is responding to preexisting demand. As a general matter, the films that exist are the result of choices that we make collectively. We decide what to patronize. We decide what to praise and what to recommend. We decide which points of view will be offered for the public to "try on."

One could imagine a film that tried to diagnose the societal ills that inspire our demand for these sadistic sorts of films—blaming capitalism, or the breakdown of the family, or secularism. But *Funny Games* offers no such diagnosis, as far as I can tell. What, then, is it trying to say? Recall how

the film refuses to supply us with a plausible causal explanation for Peter's and Paul's behavior, and how it instead presents their choices as existential acts of self-definition. Here, I believe the film is similarly focused on the existential choice we're making as a society or as a culture when we demand certain sorts of art. *Funny Games* is not interested in blaming a sociological factor. It is interested in calling to mind the fact that the very artifact we are consuming is the product of our collective free will, and it is interested in encouraging us to reflect upon that fact. And insofar as we ultimately find Peter and Paul to be objectionable—and by the end, we're certainly supposed to, our complicity not withstanding—we might begin to wonder what our negative judgment of them implies about *us*. For it's their point of view that our society demands the opportunity to try on.

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[1] From an interview published at 3:am Magazine. Retrieved online (10/01/2019) at https://316am.site123.me/articles/keeping-sartre-and-other-passions

[2] Michael Haneke, "Violence and the Media," in Roy Grundmann (Ed.), *A Companion to Michael Haneke* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 575–579.

[3] From her review of the film, retrieved online (9/01/2018) at http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2008/03/michael_hanekes_funny_games.html

[4] Another way to put this point is that I think *Funny Games* "does philosophy," in the way that Stephen Mulhall and Thomas Wartenberg have argued that films can. (See Mulhall, *On Film* (New York: Routledge, 2001) and Wartenberg, *Thinking On Screen: Film as Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2007)).

[5] Marc Vernet, "The Look at the Camera," *Cinema Journal* 28 (1989), pp. 48-63, 48.

[6] Bilge Ebiri, "Don't You Want to See How It Ends?" Retrieved online (10/01/2019) at https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/6347-funny-games-don-t-you-want-to-see-how-it-ends

[7] Peter Brunette, *Michael Haneke* (Champaign: University Of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 58.

[8] "Don't You Want to See How It Ends?"

[9] *The Philosophical Review* 103 (1994), 75-106.

[10] Kendall Walton, *Memesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundation of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[11] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary, Revised Edition*. Ed. E. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), pp. 226-249, 246-247.

[12] Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," p. 104.

[13] Ibid., p. 104.

[14] The press conference is included as a supplement in the Criterion Collection's release of the film.

[15] Brunette, *Michael Haneke*, p. 56.

[16] See Richard Brody, "The Worst Thing About 'Birth of a Nation' is How Good It Is," *The New Yorker,* February 1, 2013. Retrieved online (09/01/2018) at:

https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-worst-thing-about-birth-of-a-nation-is-how-good-it-is

[17] Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke and Cinema: The Ethics of the Image* (New York: Berghan Books, 2009), p. 46.