



Benny's Video

Director: Michael Haneke

©: Wega-Film, Bernard Lang

Production Companies: Wega-Film, Bernard Lang

World Sales: Christa Saredi

Producers: Veit Heiduschka, Bernard Lang

Production Administrator: Christa Preisinger

Production Managers: Michael Katz,

Gebhard Zupan

Production Manager (Egypt Unit): Nabil Shazli

Switzerland Team Production Manager:

Anne-Catherine Lang

Unit Production Manager: Christian Wolf

Unit Production Managers (Egypt Unit): Afaf Fawzi,

Alfred Strobl

Production Assistants (Egypt Unit): Sameh Said,

Pierre Syoufi

Assistant Director: Hanus Polak

Script Supervisor: Johanna Teicht

Screenplay: Michael Haneke

Director of Photography: Christian Berger

Assistant Photographers: Bernhard Pötscher,

Mike Huber

Lighting: Nicolas Cortolezis, Roland Heinrich,

Michael Lang, Stefan Pochlatko

Video Supervisor: Gerhard Stüttler

Stills Photography: Peter Scheiblin

Special Effects: Willi Neuner

Editor: Marie Homolkova

Assistant Editors: Andreas Prochaska, Marie Haider

Production Designers: Christian Schuster,

Friedrich Martan

Set Decorator: Christoph Kanter

Prop Buyer: Peter Ecker

Standby Props: Robert Köstl, Hans Wagner

Stage Construction: Robert Weiland

Costumes: Erika Navas

Wardrobe: Bettina Leidl, Susie Meneghel,

Lydia Polak

Music: Johann Sebastian Bach *

Sound: Karl Schilfelfner

Sound Assistant: Eduard Hofmann

Sound Assistant (Switzerland Unit): Andreas Sigg

Sound Effects: Mel Kutbay

Cast:

Arno Frisch (Benny)

Angela Winkler (mother)

Ulrich Mühle (father)

Ingrid Strassner (young girl)

Stephanie Brehme (Evi)

Stefan Polasek, Christian Pundy, Max Berner,

Hanspeter Müller, Shelly Kästner

Austria-Switzerland 1992©

109 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

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Complicit: The Films of Michael Haneke

Benny's Video

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A skilfully made and disquieting film, *Benny's Video* is also unusually oppressive. Director Haneke has described the trilogy of which this film is the second part (*The Seventh Continent*, made in 1988. was the first) as 'reports on the progressive emotional glaciation of my country'. Polemic might be a better word than report, since the story of Benny works itself out as if illustrating a thesis. Benny could be a case study. His family is well off; both parents work and he is largely left to his own devices. Contact between parents and son is minimal and Benny spends his spare time watching violent action movies and listening to speed metal – he is even shown eating a McDonalds. Haneke makes it clear that Benny is not abnormal; like many other kids, he is emotionally stunted, hooked on cheap, manipulative imagery.

The situation thus set up, we see the results. Benny might be an expert in violent films and in operating gadgetry, but he has no idea how to talk to the girl he eventually kills. It is not too outlandish to view Benny's turning to the gun as a way of sustaining communication, as a macabre chat-up line. Once he has the gun in his hand – and we are surely meant to note the influence of the violent films he has absorbed – he advances the action in the traditional way. He later explains to his father that he shot the girl 'to see what it's like.' The impact of real pain genuinely shocks him and he is driven to finish the job by an urge to stop the hurt. He later films the corpse and himself, perhaps in an attempt to make the act as remote as the deaths he is accustomed to seeing on screen.

Compared to other recent films examining the relationship between 'real' violence and images of it, *Benny's Video* is relatively straightforward. The film-within-a-film structure of *Man Bites Dog*, for example, renders voyeurism problematic. Haneke, however, makes more basic connections: the films Benny watches have had a damaging influence; the camcorder he uses has replaced 'real' experience. However, this simplistic determinism is realised by expertly controlled technique. There is little light in the film, either literally – skies and places are grey, Benny's room is black – or in the relentlessly humourless tone. The settings are all claustrophobic: Benny's bedroom in particular gives the impression of being a sealed area. The only escape into light and space is the unreal one brought about by Benny and his mother's flight to Egypt, partly recorded on video. The overall effect is that of a narrow tunnel along which the plot guides us with grim, remorseless logic.

Another significant feature of Haneke's approach is his refusal of spectacle. Two of the most effective and chilling scenes happen off-stage. We only hear the girl dying and being shot, while Benny runs across the picture; and his parents' incriminating conversation, second time around, is played over a shot of Benny's room, the location of the listening camcorder. Benny and his video are the most graphic example of perverted relationships in a film that is as much social critique as examination of the habits and behaviour of an adolescent influenced by certain sorts of imagery. Haneke, who until

The Seventh Continent worked in television and the theatre, is preoccupied with the way communication can be replaced by exchanges of money and consumption. In fact, it is in the camera's repeated focusing on cash changing

Complicit: The Films of Michael Haneke

Three Paths to the Lake Drei Wege zum See

Sun 1 Jun 12:45; Fri 6 Jun 20:45

Lemmings, Part 1 – Arcadia

Lemminge, Teil 1 – Arkadien

Sun 1 Jun 15:20; Sat 7 Jun 14:50

Lemmings, Part 2 – Injuries

Lemminge, Teil 2 – Verletzungen

Sun 1 Jun 18:20; Sat 7 Jun 17:50

Meet Anne and Georges:

An Introduction to the Worlds of Michael Haneke

Mon 2 Jun 18:10

The White Ribbon Das weiße Band

Mon 2 Jun 20:15 (+ intro by season curator Jelena

Milosavljevic); Mon 23 Jun 20:15; Sat 28 Jun 17:45

Amour

Tue 3 Jun 20:30; Sat 21 Jun 15:00;

Wed 25 Jun 20:30; Sun 29 Jun 18:00

The Seventh Continent Der siebente Kontinent

Wed 4 Jun 20:40; Mon 9 Jun 18:05

25&Under: An Introduction to Michael Haneke

Thu 5 Jun 18:20 Blue Room

Funny Games

Thu 5 Jun 20:45; Sat 21 Jun 18:00;

Sun 29 Jun 15:10

Benny's Video

Sun 8 Jun 18:30; Sun 22 Jun 18:15

The Rebellion Die Rebellion

Tue 10 Jun 20:50; Mon 16 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by

Ruby McGuigan, season curator)

71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance

71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls

Wed 11 Jun 18:10; Tue 17 Jun 20:45

Code Unknown

Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages

Wed 11 Jun 20:35; Tue 24 Jun 20:40;

Sat 28 Jun 15:00

The Castle Das Schloß

Mon 16 Jun 20:40; Mon 23 Jun 18:00

Time of the Wolf Le temps du loup

Tue 17 Jun 18:10; Wed 25 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by

Geoff Andrew, Film Critic, Lecturer and
Programmer)

Funny Games U.S.

Fri 20 Jun 20:50; Thu 26 Jun 18:10

Happy End

Fri 27 Jun 20:45; Mon 30 Jun 18:15

With thanks to

Charlotte Saluard and Jamie Mendonça at

Curzon Film

hands – as well as in the plot's thudding demonstration of Benny quickly learning from his sister's money-spinning plan – that *Benny's Video* is least subtle. Benny's parents are seen as representatives of this corrupt order, and the movie exacts revenge by chewing them up with a dramatically satisfying force. After the murder, Benny's attempt to publicly mark himself as a wrong-doer by shaving his head and having himself dismissed from school is undermined by his parents' erasure of what happened. In the final twist, with the camcorder getting the last say in the replaying of the parents' taped conversation, it is Benny who asserts the reality of the killing and reinstates some moral authority.

Robert Yates, *Sight and Sound*, September 1993

Benny's Video and Haneke's 'project of ethical spectatorship'

The contribution of *Benny's Video* to Haneke's developing project of ethical spectatorship lies with its explicit critique of the cinematic medium. Whereas *The Seventh Continent* serves as an alternative to the dominant forms of cine-televisual representation and presentation – that is, as a negation of these forms – *Benny's Video* integrates aspects of mainstream cinema and television into its structure and content in order to explicitly criticise them. In terms of counter-cinema and political modernist film theory, Haneke's debut feature seems more concerned with the suppression of any clear 'meaning' and the creation of a more authentic form of perception, in which film is as fundamentally unreadable as everyday life. His second film, on the other hand, functions as a critique of the cinematic medium itself, introducing in a protean form some of the techniques that will come to bear heavily upon Haneke's later films: the diegetic screen, the rewind/pause, and the shock moment of violence which opens the film will all recur within subsequent works, albeit within a much altered context. Nonetheless, the purpose of *Benny's Video* is not to look to past forms of representation nor to propose new ones, but to expose the present mainstream conventions of meaning production. In this regard, its allegiances to counter-cinema's binary system of opposition are clear.

Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema: the Ethic of the Image* (Berghahn Books, 2009)

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