

# MODERN PAINTERS

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**HILARIOUS!**  
Michael Haneke's  
shot-for-shot  
remake of *Funny Games*

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THE ECSTATIC  
ART AND LIFE OF

# DOROTHY IANNONE

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# DOUBLE

In 1997 Michael Haneke hit German cinemas with a brutal tale of a family holiday gone terribly wrong.

By JENNIFER KRASINSKI

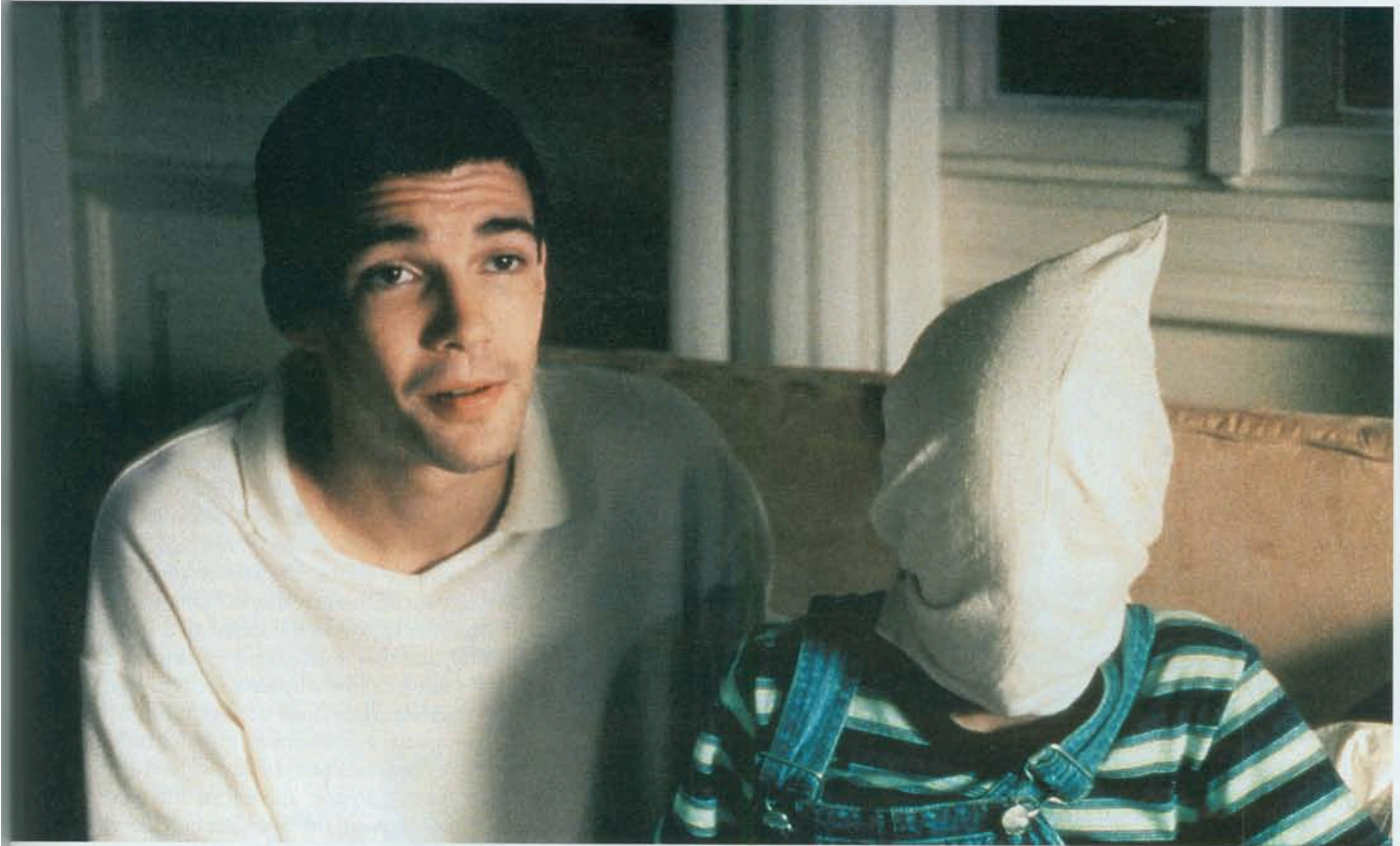
Few if any Hollywood films of 2008 promise to be as agitating—and illuminating—as one that was originally released in 1997 and has now been remade, shot-for-shot for American audiences, by its Austrian writer-director, Michael Haneke. *Funny Games U.S.*\* retells the story of *Funny Games*, in which a handsome, well-to-do family (father, mother, and young son, played in the new version by Tim Roth, Naomi Watts, and Devon Gearhart, respectively) arrive for a holiday at their waterfront weekend home only to find themselves the doomed captives of Peter and Paul (Brady Corbet and Michael Pitt), two immaculate degenerates who want to make a little merriment of their own. The scenario that follows is unrelentingly brutal but steadfastly defiant of the usual vulgarities of cinematic violence, a balancing act that

is but one of the feats that have earned Haneke his reputation as both a master and a muckraker of contemporary film.

Over the course of nine features—particularly in *Der siebente Kontinent* (*The Seventh Continent*, 1989), *Benny's Video* (1992), *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (*71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, 1994), *Code inconnu* (*Code Unknown*, 2000), *Caché* (*Hidden*, 2005), and, of course, *Funny Games*—the 65-year-old Haneke has turned his eye time and again to the subject of violence, its representations as well as its records, and the casualties of contemporary culture's rabid faith in the mediated image. His infamous dictum that a film is "twenty-four lies per second" (upending Godard's "cinema is truth at twenty-four frames per second") articulates an aesthetic that challenges the ways and means of watching, and requires an audience to remain alert and ever suspicious of the fictions it is

# VISION

Now, with a Hollywood "Funny Games," he's remade it for the audience that needs to see it most.



FROM TOP: MICHAEL HANEKE, STILL FROM *FUNNY GAMES*, 1997, 108 MIN. COURTESY KINO INTERNATIONAL. MICHAEL HANEKE, STILL FROM *FUNNY GAMES*, 2007, 112 MIN. PHOTO: DARIUS KHONDJI, © 2007 WARNER BROS. INDEPENDENT, INC., COURTESY WARNER BROS. INDEPENDENT PICTURES.



MICHAEL HANEKE, STILL FROM FUNNY GAMES, 2007, 112 MIN. PHOTO: DARIUS KHONDJI. © 2007 WARNER BROS. INDEPENDENT, INC. COURTESY WARNER BROS. INDEPENDENT PICTURES.

being shown. Haneke's screenplays forgo a tidy arc in favor of an artful accrual of scenes, each of which in essence rewrites, by the meticulous apportioning of information, all the scenes preceding it. His camera seems to harness both his prowess and his contempt for imagemaking, a friction producing a photographic frame that, with Bressonian precision, admits grand absences and perpetually refers us to the world that is excluded from view.

Of course it is Haneke's reputation for this brand of insurgence that causes one to suspect that *Funny Games U.S.* is something of a Trojan horse, for the film (even more than the original) may be his barest and most literal attack on the subject of cinematic violence, with American audiences as its explicit target. From hairpin turns of genre—thriller to horror to comedy and back again—to a villain's direct address to the audience through the camera lens, to a dead-eyed examination of effect without the buffer of cause, *Funny Games U.S.* mercilessly exposes the tatty seams of Hollywood's blueprint storytelling. Viewers expecting to see monsters may be unsettled to find themselves staring into mirrors instead.

When I met Haneke last October in New York, on the occasion of his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (he would leave the following day for Boston to attend his retrospective at the Harvard Film Archive and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), the pressing question was not, as it had been for *Funny Games*, Why watch this film?—but rather, Why watch this film again? Although the remake is a routine enterprise in cinema, a director remaking his or her own film shot-for-shot is unprecedented, and the formal exactitude of *Funny Games U.S.* produces something that is as critically unwieldy as it is politically astute. I had foolishly hoped for some kind of sign or secret handshake from Haneke confirming that I had in fact cracked

the film's codes to reveal his intentions, but throughout our conversation he politely deferred to the audience's powers of invention, and when it came to interpretation, preferred to keep open a door to possibility: "The film is supposed to happen in the mind of the viewer," he said, "and not on the screen." In this case, he has left his film to a writer who—by virtue of her overzealous imagination—has many ideas but little confirmation that what follows is the truth as Haneke sees it.

When I asked Haneke why he remade *Funny Games* in a near-cloned version, he said quite simply that

**When told how different his film looks in today's cultural climate, Haneke replied, "Images are always surpassed by reality almost at the moment they are being made."**

the film was always intended for American audiences, whom it never truly reached. "[*Funny Games*], due to the fact that it's in German, had of course missed the larger audience. . . . So now the film has arrived where it was supposed to be from the beginning." Moreover, he added that "the current situation hasn't changed"—that a decade after the creation of the original film, mediated violence retains its ubiquity and widespread complacent consumption in the US. As for remaking the film shot-for-shot, he declared, "I had no need to do it differently."

But even if one takes Haneke's dry remarks at face value, there are other forces to be considered, ones that elicit conversations about context and the production of meaning with regard to the work of art, and that invite inquiry into the integrity of cinematic authorship. I asked Haneke if "remake" is even the correct word to use when discussing *Funny Games U.S.* After all, "remake" implies a reworking

of another film to assert the presence of a new auteur (Jonathan Demme's *The Manchurian Candidate* and Peter Jackson's *King Kong* are two examples). "One could say 'original' and 'copy,' 'first' and 'second,'" I offered by way of clarifying, to which he matter-of-factly replied, "The title of the new one is *Funny Games U.S.*" Those audience members who have not seen *Funny Games* will undoubtedly be filled with shock and horror, and find themselves taking on the film's primary challenge to reassess their ways of and reasons for watching. ("You can always make the audience aware, the viewer aware, of how wrong their picture of reality is," said Haneke. "The media tries to give us the impression as if it were reality, and that is dangerous—politically dangerous.") But for those who have seen the first, who are *rewatching*, *Funny Games U.S.* will appear as a kind of palimpsest, a double image in which they see the ghosts of previous performances, hear echoes in each line of dialogue, and notice differences and slippages between the two versions that produce additional meaning.

For example, in the opening sequence, the family drive along pastoral roads in their SUV, pulling a sailboat behind them. To pass the time, the father and mother make a game of playing snippets of classical music on the stereo for each other and guessing the respective composers. The mother is winning, and everyone smiles as they enjoy a pleasant trip to the country. They soon pull up to the

gates of their neighbors' driveway, through which the family see them on the lawn. The mother, Anna, teases her friends for having their golf clubs out: "Practicing's not fair!" she shouts. When she asks for the neighbors' help unhitching the boat from the car and getting it into the water, they pause for a beat before agreeing to do so later. The family drive on, but not before the mother and father remark on the presence of two unknown guests with the neighbors, and the son wonders aloud why he did not see his friend their daughter.

By the end of the film—indeed, long before it—the audience will have "rewritten" this scene, having learned that the neighbors' "guests" are in fact the sadistic Peter and Paul; and the cruel irony is that if anyone was "practicing" anything, it was the boys honing their torture skills. A secondary joke is perhaps that, although these words were first uttered in 1997, the 2008 version has not changed; Haneke's "practicing" seems unfair,

because it does not change the family's fate—rather, it seals it twice over. I asked Haneke if Anna's line "Practicing's not fair" can be read as his wink to the audience with regard to this film's being a remake. "No," he said, chuckling. "It's just the translation of the first film's line."

But there are other "translations" that are less negotiable to an American ear. For example, the names of the father and son are George and Georgie, and although these are indeed the names used in the first *Funny Games* (and they're names Haneke uses repeatedly for the male leads in his films), to an American audience in 2008 the Georges ring in as the Bushes, senior and junior. (To stretch the point a little further, the mother's name, Anna, possesses an assonant twinning with Barbara and Laura.) What is interesting is not so much that coincidence occurs but how forcefully it takes over, and how, because of the difference in context, the film's dire events now have the smack of retribution (at least in the mind of this left-leaning writer). Reviewers may feel a great deal less empathy for the bourgeois family who in *Funny Games* seemed the victims of senseless violence, and might not be able to help but wonder if this time George, Anna, and Georgie may have done something to deserve their fate.

"Images are always in a way surpassed by reality almost at the moment they are being made," said Haneke when I told him how different his film looks today, as watched through the lattice of current events and the cultural climate. Since 1997 Americans have experienced the shock of 9/11 and the horror of its fallout; the proliferation of the "torture-porn" horror film genre and its crude metabolizing of American guilt and fear in the face of revelations about the treatment of the detainees at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib; the circulation of the digital images (JPEGs, etc.—the *abject* photograph) taken as trophies by those who committed these crimes; semantic loopholing by an administration designating these actions "abuse" rather than "torture"; and a newly appointed attorney general, Michael Mukasey, unwilling or unable to legally categorize the practice of waterboarding at all. (One highly doubts that what happens to our beautiful family in *Funny Games U.S.* would ever be described as "abuse.") Of course, history inevitably interrupts meaning and proves that images are not indelible documents but always subject to review.



RENÉ MAGRITTE,  
LES AMANTS, 1928.  
OIL ON CANVAS,  
23 1/16 X 28 1/16 IN.  
© BANQUE D'IMAGES,  
ADAGP/ART RESOURCE,  
NEW YORK.

JEAN-LUC GODARD,  
STILL FROM LE PETIT SOLDAT,  
1963. 88 MIN. COURTESY  
PHOTOFEST, NEW YORK.

SATAR JABAR STANDING  
ON A BOX WITH WIRES  
CONNECTED TO HIS BODY,  
ABU GHRAIB PRISON,  
IRAQ, 2003.



So heavy is the current accumulation of images that, where one could once seek refuge in the aesthetic precedent of certain pictures in *Funny Games*, it is less possible to do so in *Funny Games U.S.* For example, take the stark image of Georgie with his head thrust by Paul into a pillowcase: it is harder today to hide one's eyes behind the memory of Magritte's *Les Amants* or Godard's Bruno Forestier in *Le Petit Soldat*, precedents that temper the shock of seeing with the reassuring cushion of fiction's lineages. Now the gravity of fact is

greater than that of fiction, and Georgie's head is plastered with JPEGs from Abu Ghraib.

And what of the phenomenon of the remake in general? Although Haneke's film slyly sidesteps certain complications by boldly declaring his authorship—the shot-for-shot announces, "I did it right the first time"—it also creates a rupture in its interpretation. What are the duties and responsibilities of a film critic when presented with a remake? To forget? To compare? This conundrum is sorely lacking consideration, perhaps because the remake has been around almost as long as film itself. Postponing the larger questions regarding a remake's ethical implications (for cinema is the only medium that bears the indignity of being a "property" to be potentially vandalized rather than a work of art to be preserved), it is impossible to ignore that, in the current atmosphere of American

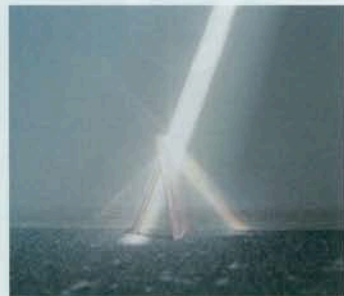
cultural isolationism, remaking a film has become a kind of colonialist act, cannibalizing foreign cinema and masticating it for a supposedly toothless domestic audience (Martin Scorsese's Oscar-winning *The Departed*, based on the Hong Kong film *Infernal Affairs*, is a recent example). Indeed, that *Funny Games U.S.* remains insistently true to its original form and intent may alert us to an anemia in the American viewer's experience of cinema and to what edifying elements may be missing from culture filtered through Hollywood.

As an endnote, consider the perplexing fact that Haneke has optioned continues on p. 110

## INDEX

### Introducing

**MELANIE SCHIFF**'s work will be in the 2008 Whitney Biennial. She is represented by Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago ([kavigupta.com](http://kavigupta.com)). Her website is [melanieschiff.net](http://melanieschiff.net).



**PRISM, 2005.** LAMBDA PRINT, 30 X 35 IN. COURTESY KAVI GUPTA GALLERY, CHICAGO.

**FUTOSHI MIYAGI** is represented by Daniel Reich Gallery, New York ([danielreichgallery.com](http://danielreichgallery.com)). His website is [fmiyagi.com](http://fmiyagi.com).



**AFTERNOON RECESS, 2007.** C-PRINT, 20 X 16 IN. COURTESY DANIEL REICH GALLERY, NEW YORK.

### Do Not Go Genitally

**DOROTHY IANNONE** will have a solo exhibition from March 11 to April 18 at Galerie Steinek, Vienna ([steinek.at](http://steinek.at)).

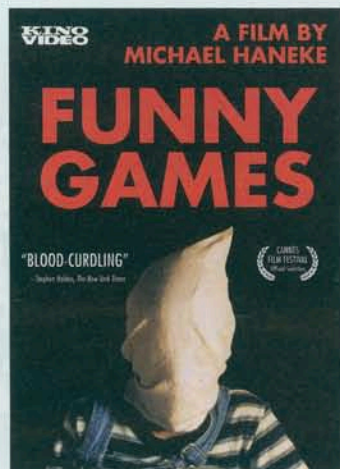
### Double Vision

continued from p. 77 the rights to his film *Caché* to the American production company Imagine Entertainment, with Ron Howard currently slated to direct and Brian Grazer to produce a 2009 release. Though only time will tell what, if anything, comes of this project, it is likely that Hollywood will have its way with Haneke's screenplay and transform it into the kind of film against which, one assumes, the director asserts himself. But

perhaps this too is another of Haneke's Trojan horses? After all, how will we now see and understand a remake of any kind after watching *Funny Games U.S.*? Perhaps *Caché* will carry on this conversation (even if inadvertently), although the darker lesson may be that it is time for us to better mind our fictions before they master us.

"At the time of my interview with Haneke, he remarked that *Funny Games U.S.* was his title for the remake but that the American distributors had decided to release it simply as *Funny Games*. "Maybe they didn't like the irony of my idea of calling it *Funny Games U.S.*," he said, laughing. To honor his original intent and for the purposes of clarity, in this essay I will refer to the 2008 version as *Funny Games U.S.*

**FUNNY GAMES** opens February 15 in the U.S.



DVD COVER FOR *FUNNY GAMES*, 1997.

### The Politics of Craft

**LIZ COLLINS** will present *Knitting Nation* as part of the "Gestures of Resistance" conference at the College Art Association in February in Dallas ([collegeart.org](http://collegeart.org)). Her work is included in the group shows "Evolution Revolution," February 22–June 15, RISD Museum, Providence ([risd.edu/museum.cfm](http://risd.edu/museum.cfm)); "Giving Shelter," March 1–29, 516 Arts, Albuquerque; "Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting," April 25–August 24, Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis ([indianamuseum.org](http://indianamuseum.org)); and "Vested Interest," May 25–September 6, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin ([jmkaac.org](http://jmkaac.org)). In July she will be a keynote speaker at the conference "In the Loop: Knitting Past, Present and Future," in Winchester, England.



**LIZ COLLINS, KNITTING NATION PHASE: KNITTING DURING WARTIME, 2005.** PERFORMANCE AND INSTALLATION VIEW, THE MUSTER, GOVERNORS ISLAND, NEW YORK, 2005. PHOTO: KIM STODDARD, COURTESY THE ARTIST.

**SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER** has or will have work featured in the following exhibitions: "Pricked: Extreme Embroidery," through March 9, Museum of Arts & Design, New York ([madmuseum.org](http://madmuseum.org)); "Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting," April 25–August 24, Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis ([indianamuseum.org](http://indianamuseum.org)); and "Thread as the Line," May 2–June 12, Ellipse Arts Center, Arlington, Virginia ([ellipseartscenter.blogspot.com](http://ellipseartscenter.blogspot.com)).



**SABRINA GSCHWANDTNER, INSTALLATION VIEW OF WARTIME KNITTING CIRCLE, 2007.** MUSEUM OF DESIGN, NEW YORK. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

**CAT MAZZA** has or will have work in the following exhibitions: "Stitch for Senate" through next January at the Museum of World Culture, Göteborg, Sweden ([varldskulturmuseet.se](http://varldskulturmuseet.se)); and "Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting," April 25–August 24, Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis ([indianamuseum.org](http://indianamuseum.org)).



**CAT MAZZA, NIKE BLANKET PETITION (DETAIL), 2007.** YARN, 6 X 14 FT. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

**ALLISON SMITH** will have work in the following exhibitions: "Inner and Outer Space," April 25–January 11, 2009, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh ([mattressfactory.org](http://mattressfactory.org)); "On Procession," May 2–August 10, Indianapolis Museum of Art ([imamuseum.org](http://imamuseum.org)); and "The Old, Weird America," May 3–July 20, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston ([camh.org](http://camh.org)).



**ALLISON SMITH, NOTION NANNY (DETAIL), 2005–2007.** MIXED MEDIA, 84 X 48 X 48 IN. PHOTO: SIBILA SAVAGE, COURTESY THE ARTIST. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE: MATRIX222, AND THE SAATCHI GALLERY, LONDON.

### Working Practice

**STEVE RODEN AND STEPHEN VITIELLO**'s as-yet-untitled project, curated by Regine Basha, will be on view from September 28 to February 2009, in Marfa, Texas, and is hosted by Ballroom Marfa ([ballroommarfa.org](http://ballroommarfa.org)).

**STEVE RODEN** will have a solo exhibition in June at Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles ([vielmetter.com](http://vielmetter.com)). He has work in the group show "Space Is the Place," through April 13 at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati ([contemporaryartscenter.org](http://contemporaryartscenter.org)), which travels in June to the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York. His website is [inbetweennoise.com](http://inbetweennoise.com).

**STEPHEN VITIELLO** has upcoming solo exhibitions in March at Museum 52, London ([museum52.com](http://museum52.com)), and *DiverseWorks*, Houston, May 2–June 14 ([diverseworks.org](http://diverseworks.org)). His work will be in a two-person show, with Claire Watkins, June 6–30, at *Transmission*, Richmond, Virginia ([transmissionrva.com](http://transmissionrva.com)). His website is [stephenvitiello.com](http://stephenvitiello.com).



**MICROPHONES SET UP TO CAPTURE AMBIENT SOUND.** PHOTO: STEPHEN VITIELLO, COURTESY THE ARTISTS.

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