



Funny Games

Director: Michael Haneke
Production Company: Wega-Film
Supported by: Österreichisches Filminstitut, Österreichischer Rundfunk, Wiener Filmförderungsfonds, Land Österreich
Executive Producer: Veit Heiduschka
Producer: Veit Heiduschka
Production Manager: Werner Reitmeier
Unit Production Managers: Alfred Strobl, Phillip Kaiser
Post-production: Michael Katz, Ulrike Lässer
Production Administrator: Helga Fuchs
Assistant Director: Hanus Polak Jr
Script Supervisors: Katharina Biró, Jessica Hausner
Screenplay: Michael Haneke
Director of Photography: Jürgen Jürges
Special Effects/Make-up: Waldemar Pokromski
Editor: Andreas Prochaska
Art Director: Christoph Kanter
Costumes: Lisy Christl
Wardrobe: Katharina Nikl
Music: Georg Friedrich Händel, Pietro Mascagni, W.A. Mozart, John Zorn
Sound: Walter Amann
Mixer: Hannes Eder
Sound Editor: Bernhard Bamberger
Special Effects/Stunts: Mac Steinmeier, Danny Bellens, Willy Neuner
Animals: Animal Action
Dog Trainer: April Morley
Cast:
Susanne Lothar (*Anna Schober*)
Ulrich Mühe (*Georg Schober*)
Arno Frisch (*Paul*)
Frank Giering (*Peter*)
Stefan Clapczynski (*Georg 'Schorsch' Schober*)
Doris Kunstmann (*Gerda*)
Christoph Bantzer (*Fred Berlinger*)
Wolfgang Glück (*Robert*)
Susanne Meneghel (*Gerda's sister*)
Monika Zallinger (*Eva Berlinger*)
Austria 1997©
109 mins
35mm

Content warning: Contains scenes of torture, violence and implied animal harm

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SIGHT AND SOUND

DISCOMFORT MOVIES

Funny Games

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

Michael Haneke on 'Funny Games'

How have audiences reacted to Funny Games so far?

Some people really related to the film because of the means used to tackle the subject, while others were so directly affected and shocked that they weren't in a position to engage with it on the level of ideas. I think it's largely dependent on the individual's sensibility towards violence. I intended to make the film in such a way that in the first instance you can't distance yourself from it, you can't coldly analyse it. Instead you feel very disturbed, and in order to free yourself from these feelings you're forced to engage with the film's ideas. With some people this process happens more quickly than with others: a French critic left the preview screening snorting with rage and calling the film 'shit'; three months later he was saying it was a masterpiece.

So the intention is the audience has to work through the film afterwards?

That's the intention with every work of drama. Underneath the immediate level of understanding is a deeper level that can be accessed after the fact. As a filmmaker you always aspire to this, but whether it succeeds is another matter. It's the basis of the old-fashioned idea of catharsis: that the viewer is placed in an extreme situation that opens the window on his or her subjectivity a bit wider.

But since the audience for Funny Games isn't necessarily the action-movie audience, aren't you in danger of preaching to the converted?

If I were a novelist writing a book about ecological issues, I'd have two options: to write something artistically adequate and forsake the majority of my readers, or to write something populist and reach as many readers as possible. The question is: am I primarily an ecologist or an artist?

And you are primarily an artist?

Well, that's for others to decide. What I would say is that I choose methods that allow my theme to be explored on the most developed level possible, and so run the risk of not being understood by certain people. But this is as much a problem of the way the film is discussed by the critics beforehand – once a film is labelled an 'art film', the public stays away. I don't believe the film is so complicated that anybody walking in off the street can't understand it. I don't think that's the case with any of my films. In our cultural industries there's a need to pigeonhole. Something belongs either here or there. This is the dilemma of a culture industry dominated by film as a consumer item and not as an art form. But without this problem I wouldn't have made this film – if action cinema didn't dominate our media landscape with its depiction of reality, I'd probably make love stories.

In both Benny's Video and Funny Games television appears almost as the enemy. Are you really saying that the problem rests with television or video?

No, the problem doesn't reside there. *Funny Games* deals in the final analysis with the presence of violence in the visual media. Of course this means that television plays a role, just as video did in *Benny's Video*.

DISCOMFORT MOVIES

Eraserhead

Mon 1 Jul 20:40 (+ extended intro to the season by curator Kimberley Sheehan); Sun 14 Jul 17:50; Sat 27 Jul 20:50

The Lost Weekend

Sat 6 Jul 15:10; Sun 21 Jul 17:45; Mon 29 Jul 20:40

Requiem for a Dream

Sat 6 Jul 20:45; Fri 19 Jul 18:20

A Woman under the Influence

Sun 7 Jul 19:30; Sun 28 Jul 17:20

Bug

Mon 8 Jul 18:15; Thu 25 Jul 20:50

They Shoot Horses, Don't They?

Tue 9 Jul 18:10; Mon 22 Jul 20:35

Threads

Thu 11 Jul 18:15; Sun 21 Jul 15:15

Possession

Mon 15 Jul 18:00

Funny Games

Mon 15 Jul 20:45; Sat 27 Jul 14:15

Climax + Strasbourg 1518

Tue 16 Jul 18:10; Sun 28 Jul 20:20

Crash + Titane

Sat 20 Jul 18:15, 18:30

Audition Ôdishon

Wed 24 Jul 20:45; Wed 31 Jul 18:15

Skinamarink

Sun 28 Jul 14:20; Wed 31 Jul 20:45

Relaxed Screening: Eraserhead + intro and discussion

Mon 29 Jul 18:10

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But the last thing I'm trying to suggest is that if there was less violence on television then we'd all be better people. What I do believe is that through this permanent falsifying of the world in the media, leading us to perceive the world only in terms of images, a dangerous situation is being created in the area of violence. In our situation we have little direct regular personal experience of real violence, thank goodness. But if I'm a child sitting in front of an evening television series in which 20 people are shot and it's all very entertaining and I have no personal experience of violence, then it's not going to become something terrible in my mind. And I think that this permanent presence of violence – in television series, films, documentaries – means that a Coca-Cola advertisement takes on the same level of reality as news footage. That's the danger: everything becomes drained of reality, so violence appears easy to exercise and with few consequences. Hence inhibitions about being violent are reduced.

There are moments in Funny Games – Georgie's escape to the house next door, Anna being picked up on the road by the killers when we think she's escaped – that remind me of American horror movies.

In order to attack a genre, you first have to establish it. I'm using the thriller here, but I could have attacked the horror genre – it just would have looked different. Elements from the history of the thriller appear as quotes – the classical opening, the scene when the boy escapes to the villa – very classical, like Hitchcock. And the audience only engages fully with the film when they don't know what's going to happen, when they allow themselves hope.

I was thinking of the sub-genre of the violation movie: The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, I Spit on Your Grave, Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer. They focus on terrorisation, victimising the audience and making straightforward escapist pleasure problematic.

I've seen *Henry*, but not the other two. For me *Henry* isn't a horror film but a film critical of the media that compromises its subject because it's too comical at times. If the audience has the opportunity to laugh, then they've freed themselves from the trap. It's the same with *Man Bites Dog* – through its irony and humour it becomes a consumer film, becomes what it sets out to critique. That's one reason why it was so successful: it allowed the viewers to leave the cinema relaxed, not having to defend themselves against it.

Why are the characters in Funny Games all so bourgeois and the youths polite and well mannered?

Because I didn't want the violence to be explicable in sociological terms and the youths to be written off as 'other', as happens with American films. When the film came out I collected seven different newspaper articles from seven different countries describing similar cases: boys from *bourgeois* homes, not deprived or drug-addicted, but who just wanted to see what it would be like. In a sense, too, the film is a critique of the *bourgeois* milieu. The fact that this family can't escape is due to the way they've tried to insulate themselves from the world with their money, they've locked themselves in.

Richard Falcon, *Sight and Sound*, May 1998