Cinema and Evil

Cinema and Evil:
Moral Complexities and the "Dangerous" Film

By

Dara Waldron

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
P U B L I S H I N G

For Ylva, Anton and Karl.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was his world, he said to himself, the sad, oppressive world that God had provided for him, and he was responsible to it,
—Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera.*

INTRODUCTION

"To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at the moment of danger…the danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers,"
—Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

When the words 'film' and 'evil' appear together, opinion is forthcoming. Such is the appeal of film and the understanding of 'evil.' Asked to consider the instrinsic bond between evil and film, even the most indifferent will declare 'Hitchcock,' 'The Omen,' 'Lord of the Rings,' or something of the sort. This kind of spontaneous reaction, no doubt, is testimony to the fact that, to paraphrase Ernesto Laclau's thoughts on democracy, evil is a floating signifier (Laclau in Docherty (ed): 1993; 242). Everybody has his or her tuppence to offer, and so worth devalues. In Laclau's terms, signifiers float. But they float when attachment to a signified ceases. And so, because any attempt to account for what evil actually signifies within certain fields is a complex endeavour, this study is an attempt to assess this endeavour as it pertains to film. Or more precisely, evil–that oldest of moral problems–and its filmic treatment.

The reasons are many for undertaking this. The project developed–and the name testifies to this–from a curious fascination with *Literature and Evil* (1973), a book by French theoretician and general *enfant terrible* Georges Bataille. Bataille's Evil takes its cue from canonical texts (canonised for rather different reasons), and the critical evaluation of these, but the very fact that Evil is underscored with a big 'E' gives a rather salubrious significance to it; somewhat out of kilter with what I, with a Catholic education like Bataille, believed it to be. Bataille's undertaking is as subtle as it is hard-edged. Each chapter focuses on a writer; each is a close reading of a text. Critical assessment of de Sade and the Brontës, to name but a few of the writers sourced in the text, is outrageously *straightforward* in its method. In today's academic climate, Evil, which can act as a byword for many things, can seem outmoded when evaluating actions. If it has a literary mystique it has a similar one in film. For if a lack of research on literature's evil is striking, it is more so in

film. Characters like Neff (Fred McMurray) in Billy Wilder's masterpiece *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1942), or for that matter, Hannibal Lector (Antony Hopkins) in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), capture the ethical imagination either because they are evil or because they are caught in its spell. Neff is a victim of evil, Lector a likeable cannibal.

Having envisaged a not dissimilar study of film and its curious use of evil, for it to grow wings, selection was needed. Yet because selection is an exercise in taste, and taste is an aesthetic process, the project needed to be developed in a way similar to that of Bataille. I felt compelled to look at canonical filmmakers who made what I (somewhat loosely) call 'dangerous' films (which we come to shortly). I had an intuition that these artists would benefit from an exploration of evil, when considered as not solely the preserve of the auteur (as each filmmaker discussed in the book can be referred to in this way) who deals with morally contentious issues, but the preserve of films in which morally contentious issues are intrinsically dangerous in *affect*.

The question then is why choose certain films above others. Why choose one film and indeed the films of one filmmaker over another? The answer is threefold. Firstly, my interest lay in the problematic treatment of evil in film, something filmmakers addressed in this capacity. Because there is a distinct difference between evil understood in the common vernacular, and evil as it is understood as an ethical problem, the research kept coming back to films that responded to evil as problematic. For example, Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) is an intriguing response to the evil of the Holocaust. However, I didn't intuit it a film dangerous as I come to designate the 'dangerous' film theoretically (more of this to come later). Oliver C. Speck echoes my feelings here. Speck believes that *Schindler's List* addresses a viewer with no ethical stake in viewing the film, given that it, "represents the Holocaust (the term is in itself a representation) as an abstract event of a confrontation of good and evil, as well as something that is safely sealed away in the past" (Speck: 2010; 12). Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) is more expedient; if, that is, the crime in the film bore more directly on the problem of evil; the ethical rather than metaphysical in such a high-octane thriller. Secondly, and personally, my interest in the filmic treatment of evil is an interest in film methods used to confront evil.

Hence, an analysis of certain innovative strategies, used to engage the topic of evil as a problem, is at the forefront of the films discussed in the

book. It is for this reason that the book spans a century of filmmaking, with many genres and styles. As the century expands, the filmmaking process takes new directions. Whether the ethical import of the long take used by Van Sant, or the close-up used by Pasolini to dangerously engage the spectator, filmic strategies are used to engage the longstanding problem of evil. It is for this reason Fernando Meirelles's *Cidade de Deus* (City of God (2002)), which, because it makes reference to St. Augustine's famous text, would seem ready-made for such a study, (particularly as it deals with evil in children), didn't make the cut. It is not that Meirelles's film isn't a film about evil. It's rather that, as a formal exercise, it didn't fit the constraints of the dangerous film, as it would come to be elucidated in the book.

Thirdly, the films discussed in this book, albeit, significantly different, have been controversial. Many have been banned. In many cases, the filmic confrontation with evil, and the investigation into its problematic nature has been deemed too unsavoury for public consumption. A number of the films' subject matter have had an equally unsavoury impact on the public register–films dealing with the Moors Murders and the Columbine Massacre are just two examples–by using film to consider the ethical implications of such events. The Dardenne Brothers' *Le fils* (The Son (2002)), discussed at intervals in this book, is an example. The Brothers state that the film responds to the death of James Bulger. Explored in much greater depth in later chapters, suffice to say that in form and content *Le fils* raises significant concerns about how we should respond to evil. The use of handheld cameras realistically framing the action, making us feel as if we are following a real event, accompanies a simple plot about a man who meets his child's child killer. That children have the capacity for evil, perhaps the moral issue of concern in the film, is important. But the decision to tackle such raw subject matter, as well as the way this subject matter is tackled is fascinating. The film comments–formally *and* morally–on evil.

Filmic modes of inquiry need assessment, in conjunction with evil as a concept used to address both form and content. I chose to limit the study of evil required for such an assessment to that bequeathed (to us) from Christianity onwards, beginning with St. Augustine. I took this decision in the knowledge that–in the main–Augustine saw evil as a problem; not necessarily that which could be resolved but one to be responded to. As I was interested in how, like Augustine, filmmakers responded to evil, I turned to Augustine as my first port of call. In order to explore the

response given by various filmmakers, it was necessary to unpack evil as a concept first.

The institutionalisation of religion in the West gathered force from Augustine onwards, with the influence of his writings looming over the topic of evil since. Evil, as Rowlands states in *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe* (2005),

> "Was appropriated by the Roman neoplatonist Plotinus (*c*. AD 204-270), and then worked its way down to a guy called Augustine–St Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430). And Augustine incorporated the idea of a non-physical reality into Christian metaphysics. Everything after can be read as a response to Augustine" (Rowlands: 2005; 220).

Rowlands is correct about the unique contribution Augustine made to the problem of evil. Equally, as Mark Larrimore states in *The Problem of Evil: A Reader,*

> "While experiences of pain, guilt, loss, disappointment, disharmony and senselessness are surely among those experiences all religions help people face, seeing these as constituting a single "problem of evil" is the historical exception. Even in the West, engagement with a single "problem of evil" is intermittent at best. Understanding the "problem of evil" as primarily philosophical–a problem for thought–is rarer yet" (Larrimore (ed): 2001; xviii).

Larrimore emphasises the key concepts which come to contribute to an emerging problematic. Evil is confronted as a problem, one which is most specifically rendered from Augustine onwards. The first chapter traces this in anchor points, around concepts such as the moral and responsibility. It then reads these points through the lens of significant *cultural loci*: the Cathars, Milton, etc. as those influenced by the looming shadow of the Bishop. From this, two methodological strains–somewhat antithetical–come together as the methodology of the book. The first is the struggle with evil in Augustine. Subjects such as the Law, desire, language, excess, and the will are central to this discussion. These are subject areas pioneered in a huge outlay of texts; over a significant period of time. Those influenced by these texts constitute the second methodological strain; Augustine's legacy found in commentaries by Aquinas *et al* as well as considerably less orthodox subject areas. The first chapter begins with these.

The second strain includes the widening exposition of ethics in Lacanian psychoanalysis; in particular the way in which the ethical writings of Lacan–friend and colleague of Bataille–bear on the concept of evil. It also addresses the relationship between Kant and Lacan. Many recent Lacanian scholars, from the Slovenian school spearheaded by the mercurial Slavoj Žižek, to Joan Copjec stateside, have been instrumental in developing Lacanian ethics in the context of the philosophical tradition. While I draw on these thinkers in various instances, particularly in relation to Augustine and his consideration of evil, the contentious, indeed rather absurd claim–in this way inverting cause and effect–that Augustine is the first Lacanian is made, such is the emphasis on the Law in Augustine as it works itself out in Lacan. Of course, this is a wild assertion. It has little 'logical' sense. But given the terrain on which each theoretical work is deployed, and the insignificant differences, there is a sense that evil as a problem is to be confronted in each precise case and in each case precisely.

For Augustine, "reason looks for the truth as it is revealed to enlightened intelligence: desire has an eye for what allures by the promise of sensual enjoyment" (Augustine: 1984; 447). Now for Lacan, reason and desire interests the ethicist in relation to evil. For while Law is rational, based on communal needs and wants, its underside may well be the desire it solicits to transgress. And Augustine knew this only too well. Known to enjoy his 'sin' too much, here is a serial transgressor all too aware of the paradoxes of the Law; that is, attempts to abolish evil having the adverse affect, soliciting desire to transgress. Hence with its quasi-repressive capacity to solicit the desire it appears to relinquish, the Law assumes a dark invasive side for Lacan. To trangress, when considered as crossing the Law itself, is paradoxically considered an effect of the Law. Indeed, the great defender of the Law, and possibly the most influential modern philosopher on evil, Immanuel Kant, is the target at whom both Lacan and Augustine (*sic*) point their arrows. For Kant, the *quo sin non* of modern ethics, has a distinction worth noting: it dispenses with God as origin. There is no G-O-D, big Other of concern, when Kant is on the scene.

Bearing this in mind, and the first chapter is an attempt to bring these strains together as *a* methodology, clarity is needed. Emphasis on the will, as I argue, follows a trajectory from Augustine to Aquinas to Kant. While Kant rejects natural inclinations as the source of evil, he nonetheless engages evil in its precise relation to volition. For Kant, as typically enlightened philosopher, the idea that man is predisposed to evil is–of

course–misguided. Man is responsible for choosing good and evil maxims. As Kant matures, as I also discuss, he distinguishes between good and evil maxims as the 'two extremes' of human volition. Delving into this distinction coincides with the later realisation that evil maxims can *appear* otherwise: appear as the moral law. What appears good, the law and the rights it upholds, is evil.

That we are morally predisposed, or hardwired to do good, in Kantian ethics, is, of course, a fallacy. It is rather that we choose between good or evil maxims. Now, with *radical evil*, a major concept in Kant's later thought, an altogether more disturbing evil is taken to task. If the will had been given priority in choosing good or evil maxims, Kant now deliberates on evil, referred to as *radical evil*, which corrupts the will itself. The sensuousness, or the 'self-love' involved in early ideas of wickedness, as discussed by Augustine, is replaced; in this case by an evil which takes the appearance of good. Hence Kantian 'duty' is utterly corrupted by it. For this reason a key consideration is *radical evil*.

The infamous Eichmann case, which I discuss in relation to *radical evil* in this first chapter and also throughout this book, refers first of all to the crimes of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann was a high-profile Nazi involved in the higher ranks of the organisation. He played an integral role in the genocidal Nazi regime; signing off on the death of millions. Yet the Eichmann trial, which took place in Israel in the 1960s, is morally significant also in relation to the significant commentaries around it; and indeed, most famously by the great Jewish German émigré philosopher Hannah Arendt. Arendt, a survivor of the Nazi regime and its terrors, and one of the great writers on totalitarianism (as 20th century problem), reported on the trial for an American newspaper. Her reference to the 'banality of evil' regarding Eichmann's behaviour led to her being ostracised and attacked from Jewish-American circles on return; accused of betraying her people. Arendt was accused of downplaying the monstrosity of evil. Arendt never denied Eichmann was responsible for the death of millions, yet she did confront his perception of himself as an 'army man,' doing 'the duty' required of him. If an example of an utterly corrupted will was needed, in a man believing the evil he chose a manifestation of its opposite, this was it. For Arendt, Eichmann commited the most horrendous evil while "conscience free."

The important point, and this is pertinent to the following discussion, is not that Eichmann was a robot-army man, unable to stand up to his

superiors, but that the law had corrupted the will which enabled him to so readily choose evil, while at the same equating the law with good. Although we will return to this discussion in Chapter One, Richard Bernstein's following analysis helps consider the difficulty involved,

> "Ever since Kant used the expression "radical evil" (*radikal Böse*) in *Die Religion inerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernuft*, it has been a source of fascination, because it has struck many of his readers (including Arendt) that Kant was dimly aware of the type of evil that exceeds our traditional concepts of evil; perplexity, because it is not clear precisely what Kant means by "radical evil," or how it fits (or does not) with his moral philosophy" (Bernstein: 2002; 12).

Bernstein points to the difficulties of Kantian morality in its later guise; the fact that Kant's mature thought hints at, if not nessarily outlines, the radical nature of certain types of evil. *Radical evil* is not easily unpacked. Recent studies–the specifics of which are considered in the first and final chapter of the book (in an analysis of Michael Haneke's *Das weisse Band* (The White Ribbon (2009))–have been precise in their consideration of *radical evil*, particularly in the aftermath of Eichmann and the Holocaust, and this discussion is central to the methodological strains of the book. Key researchers, Joan Copjec, Peter Dew and Marcus G. Singer, have been instrumental in resurrecting *radical evil* (as versing a radical form of evil) as a problem; helping form the methodology as such. In Kant, the type of evil that dominates the twentieth century is found, and this is central to the methodology developed here.

But, of course, it would be wrong to say that the modern debate ends here. For in recent years the will to violate and 'dehumanise,' once the preserve of philosophy and theology, has been rethought in criminal psychopathology. This is a huge area, and is touched upon at various points. Suffice it to say, research around 'personality' types has gathered momentum in recent years and has many overlaps with the main points of discussion. If an Augustinian-Lacanian axis is forged in the first chapter of this book, viewing the subject as moral agent, while also looking at evil within a wider structural field of motivations, concepts used to explain evil are of particular benefit for behavioural studies. Autonomy is one concern. But so too is the denigration of ""humanistic" philosophy and psychology that treat man as an actor who wills his action and instead sees man as a submitting object of processes that transcend him" (Turkle: 1979; 49-50). That which escapes autonomy as the limit of rational approbation is explored in the first chapter; but this is not to say the will and its bearing on 'personality' or character isn't also at the heart of the discussion.

From this a third methodological strain (one which may well have arisen against the grain of authorial intent) emerges, from which psychopathology, a focal point of films about evil, is brought to bear. As much as we might like to avoid thinking evildoers (as personalities) are naturally formed, neurologically impelled to hurt and dehumanise others, recent studies have returned to 'evil' when faced with this possibility. Linking these studies to earlier writings on evil is of interest. If the following book aims at bringing diverse strains of criticism to bear on evil and cinema, using tools that have had little academic focus, it is in the hope future research will develop these tools. For as much as evil has changed in focus over time, so too has the means for studying it.

If these diverse strains form an eclectic methodology, this is an added bonus. For we live in an age when eclecticism is something we are able to practice. But the main reason I advocate this eclecticism in this book (beginning in the first chapter) is to engage film around moral concerns about a truly global issue: evil. This, I believe is important. For now more than ever, globalisation has changed the dynamic of how we think. Now, more than ever, film needs to be explored outside of national boundaries.

So, having examined evil without any clear application of the methodological framework to wide-ranging case studies in this (first) chapter, the following book may appear strange in its outlay. As reference to film is minimal in the early stages of the text a degree of explanation is needed. Suffice it to say that the dominant Film Studies approach is one I tried to minimise. Why? Well, for one I felt it was necessary to explore evil and its related concepts before immediately channelling them into some kind of 'dangerous' textual expression. For the study of film is a complex negotiation of the verbal and visual, a multi-sensory form of visual art and media, and its content is often the exposition of a particular text. But because evil is complex as a text in itself, well worn as a concept, I felt it necessary to immerse ourselves in its terrain. I felt it important to work through the concept, before seeking to understand its treatment in ethical terms. As Marcus G. Singer notes, the research around extreme evil–outside the domain of theological debate–is relatively thin (Singer: 2004). Therefore, the first part of the study is spent addressing the legacy of the concept.

From Lang to Haneke: the 'Dangerous' Film

Following the theoretical exploration of evil, the genealogy of evil, film can be explored with the tools necessary for engaging with it. Research in present day Film Studies is largely made up of three formats. The first is the monographic study. In this approach a line of development (around a series of concerns) is traced in the work of a particular director. More often than not, the chosen filmic subject is canonised or in the process of canonisation. The 'progress' or high points in a burgeoning career are assessed in this type of analysis; thematic and formal features in variable forms of filmic representation. One could point to many monographs around filmmakers such as Orson Welles as an example; some invariably more challenging than others. A second approach diverges from this method, turning to the director as a subject whose films express the concerns of a particular nation state. The way in which films constitute a National Cinema is the issue; hence concerns with the nation state, the ethico-political community, self/other or other theoretical concepts dominate. Even today, National Cinematic studies remains attractive to the cynically-attuned critic; bent, not just on canonising the directorial celebrity, but on elevating certain films–irrespective of who produced them–to the status of National Cinema.

Thirdly then is the theoretical study. With emphasis given to genre, gender, politics etc., a particular theoretical impetus is explored. But the concept is rarely just ethical. What is bad, immoral or simply evil is rarely broached in film *per se*. Perhaps this book will instigate change. That these fields include many of the most significant ways of researching film means exceptions are not uncommon; even if Film Studies texts whose line of inquiry lies outside these fields are rare. Genre criticism, so important to understanding film, has–to many extents and purposes–stagnated. The study of morality in film has been restricted to those looking at film as a text, working out moral problems on a narrative level, to those who analyse film as itself constitutive of the moral life. While, "the workings of the ethical environment in which we live can be strangely invisible, so too can the workings of cinema" (Wheatley: 2009; 3). For some, the functional use of cinema is itself ripe for moral analysis.

In an interview about his 1994 film, *Benny's Video,* the Austrian director Michael Haneke made reference to 'dangerous fiction.' He used the term 'dangerous' as a descriptor for narrative texts. In the standard, 'dangerous' film, spectators are 'masters of the situation.' The audience

confronts 'danger' in the knowledge that they don't have to deal with its consequences. Film is like a carnival ride: danger is a precursor to the relief on escaping it. However, the concept of danger raises other issues. What if danger makes us feel anything but masters of the situation? And instead of feeling removed and therefore above the situation, our immersion makes our moral evaluation all the more necessary. Haneke's comment is therefore a cue, one necessary for examining reproachable moral themes (such as murder, insanity, sexual transgression as well as child homicide) that have been versed in the filmic capacity to unsettle. Indeed, the paedophiliac murderer in Fritz Lang's *M* (Lang, 1931), discussed in the second chapter, serves as a prod from which a discourse on evil can then emerge, the point of which is to instigate a confrontation in us with good and evil; particularly when 'evil' is presented as anything but one-dimensional. Indeed danger sets this challenge for us. In one sense, a spell is cast over the soon to be christened talkie: the problem of evil. In another the murderer–Beckert (Peter Lorre)–can be confronted as a *victim* of evil. If the ethico-scientific, and indeed legally sanctioned injunction against looking at the human subject as evil is dangerous, *M* is an important place to begin.

That humanistic and anti-humanistic approaches yield equally satisfying results makes *M* an interesting film. Applying a strictly anti-humanistic model enhances the powerful aesthetic elements of the film, as they bring forth the central ethical problem; consisting of the intentional murder of children. But this problem extends to the issue of whether an answer can be found in the confessional plea given by this murderer, as passionately delivered by the man himself? If not, is there something beyond Beckert we should look for, something of 'darkness' battling 'light' that had so entranced the makers of expressionist film, which impacts upon him now? And if so, should we look to the silences instrinsic to psychology to come to an understanding of what is meant by something 'beyond,' 'outside' and so on?

In one sense, it might well be common currency to think of killing as the most derisory act imaginable, certainly of an evil expressed in the wilful destruction of the other as other. And in such murder clear agency exists. Indeed, Beckert is a deviant and manipulative killer. In another sense, Beckert says he doesn't want to kill, doesn't murder children because he wills it. Rather, he says that something other to him motivates him to perform the act in question. Whether this 'something' other, from the perspective of humanist philosophies, is a 'personality:' a disposition

of the subject in question; or, alternatively, a force impacting on the will like some kind of infectious plague is central to the film. Much of the aesthetic qualities of noir (to which we then turn), I argue, consist of amplifying this central ethical problematic.

Of course, *M* is important in other ways. It is, for the large part, a film noir before film noir; a classic serial killer film before serial killer films; a film about evil before Evil. That it is frequently cited as the greatest German film of all time is testament to its danger. Danger lies in dwelling on child murder, against the backdrop of a perpetrator feeling an evil is forcing its will upon him. Hence evil–remembering the film was released in post-Weimar Germany–may well be cosmically destined to infect those unable to withstand its measures. Claiming that the most brutal criminals deserve to be heard, the film maintains a remarkably modern stance, subtly dangerous. For in *M,* as Andrew Spicer claims,

> "Franz Beckert (Peter Lorre) is a tortured outsider caught between rival forces of police and organised crime. Beckert is painfully aware of his condition, that the desires that dictate his actions are beyond his rational control" (Spicer: 2002: 12).

What Kaes inadvertently celebrates is the film's deliberation on evil. He can therefore ask, "why this fascination, this obsession with carnage, murder and mayhem?" before offering the following response,

> "Lang's *M* is implicated in these current questions but responds to them by suggesting through its very form that something else entirely might be negotiated through these films–something that has to do with our lives, our communities, our cultures" (Kaes: 2008; 8).

Kaes is referring to something that transcends culture: Evil.

From here the book detours through the Americana border territory bequeathed to us from that most European of American auteurs, Orson Welles. Far from the obvious custodian of *noir*, Welles, for many, is *the* great auteur. However, the contribution he makes to the 'style,' genre, or whatever term is most suitable as a descriptor for noir, is of major scholarly concern. Not only is Welles central to a niche of noir scholarship, but–in recent years at least–has been theoretically appraised as a filmmaker who navigates the liminal spaces between the Hollywood studio, the independent film, and the art film well before his time. Welles is particularly unique, in part because, as Joan Copjec says, "*film noir* now appears, fifty years after the first films were made, to be a less local

phenomenon" (Copjec (ed): 1996; x). As the provenance of noir advanced into less 'local,' more universal waters, the mercurial Welles followed. This is not least because *Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1958), Welles most insistent study of evil and the film this next chapter takes as its focal point, is a stylistic noir classic. Its classic status lies in its international dimension; the way it explores moral duty. Using the first chapter, particularly the discussion of Kant, as a guide, duty is critically broached regarding immoral acts used to do good. Performing the moral using a particular form of vice is explored regarding Welles's response to a kind of administrative *radical evil*. The danger elicited by *Touch of Evil*, I argue, lies in the clichés it uses to elicit truth. The truth: for Welles, is that immorality otherwise known as a touch of evil sustains moral order. And this truth qualifies as one of the great truths of film noir itself. What makes this film so compelling, this chapter argues, is not so much a corrupt detective with redeemable features, but one who is good only when corrupt.

The middle section turns to evil with reference to the legacy of fascism in Italian film. Looking at those who came to prominence in the 1960s; notably Pier Paolo Pasolini and Liliana Cavani (after the global success of neorealism), the films themselves are–put simply–those that caused most offence. As art films became global 'products' and Italian filmmakers became international stars, the Italian cinema set new parameters for what could and couldn't be shown. My interest, however, derives from cognisance of how Pasolini and Cavani, in films such as *Salò* (Pasolini, 1975) and *The Night Porter* (Cavani, 1973) explore fascism; but fascism, when it concerns not just men and women performing particularly evil deeds against their victims, but a sexual impulse pertaining to life in general. Pasolini and Cavani respond to this. In doing so they focus on what Michel Foucault, in prefacing *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 1* refers to as, "varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of everyday life" (Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari: 1984; xi- xiv). As film texts, these are significant tests of decency. I maintain, however, that moral decency is confronted, not for the sake of it, but so that issues that would come to bear on the aesthetics of violence (as well as violent aesthetics), would become topics of examination. In other words, how the power of fascism is resisted is central. As Gary Indiana says of *Salò*,

"*Salò* resists ordinary synopsis. Every scene is a kind of crowd scene, the whole cast is almost always present, there are no 'dramatic developments'

between monadic protagonists, but rather a generalised, malignant energy field generated between oppressors and victims; the little threads of characterological continuity add up to nothing resembling a series of subplots; the victims are at one minute like children playing a game without a clue to its meaning" (Indiana: 2000; 69).

Like the earlier *Trilogy of Life*, *Salò* quickly attained cult status. Pasolini's brutal murder after the film's release gave sustenance to this. The blending of Sade and Fascism, with its dark comic undertone, is compounded by one of film's most shocking endings: the torture unto death of those who 'broke the rules.' Similarly contentious in its ending, *The Night Porter* would elicit cries of outrage; classified as a 'kinky turn on' masquerading as art. Roger Ebert of *The Chicago Sun Times* went as far as to say, "'The Night Porter' is as nasty as it is lubricious, a despicable attempt to titillate by exploiting memories of persecution and suffering. It is (I know how obscene this sounds), Nazi chic" (Ebert; 1975). Ebert's assessment has a certain truth to it. On one level, Cavani's film can be viewed as morally questionable–committing to a Nazi fashionability that impacted on transgressive S&M advocates. But on a more pertinent level, the film examines guilt. "If virtue consists (in part) in taking pleasure in the right and not in the wrong things," Mary Devereaux asks, "then what is my character now such that I can take pleasure in these things" (Devereaux in Levinson (ed): 1998; 242). Devereaux's point (albeit stressed in a different context to the one employed here) helps in confronting Ebert's response to the film as a moral one. For if the film concerns a victimhood more complex in its formulation than the vanguards of a therapy obsessed society admit, not everybody might want to be a victim in a prescribed sense: what is exploitative isn't as clear-cut as Ebert might think. Masochism, and the film is about masochism (not sado-masochism), requires a contract between oppressor and victim. Performance is part of a contract used to expiate guilt. It is necessary to illustrate how evil performed 'tragically' can serve as the means for confronting evil.

In turning to the present in the final third of the book, three recent films, and the work of internationally acclaimed Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke is considered. Haneke is perhaps the most important living director, in Europe at least. His films have been received as probing inquiries into sensitive subject areas, from the Holocaust, to 9/11, to the War on Terror, to sado-masochism, in a uniquely personal mode of filmmaking; utilising film as a unique mode of inquiry. Probing or prodding of the spectator (of classical realist cinema) untroubled by their entertainment, is just one of the features of Haneke's films. Ethics, where

evil has a central place, is present in a not so obvious guise. Early theatrical releases, from *Der siebente Kontinent* (The Seventh Continent (1989)) to *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance (1994)) can be viewed as films about evil, as can the centrepiece of this trilogy, *Benny's Video* (Haneke, 1994). The trilogy is set within a domain Keith Reader calls a, "cinema of alienated non-communication" (Reader in Quandt (ed): 2011; 377). In this particular domain of cinema, psychological explanation is rarely given. Hence no intent, no psychological reason is given. Because it's the most disturbing instance of this type of film, I have chosen to focus intitally on *Benny's Video*; using it as a springboard into later Haneke films. The film's protagonist and killer, Benny, and his failure to justify the horrible acts he commits is a reason for why the film disturbs: another is the use of the off-screen as a method of representation. *Benny's Video* is, not to mince words, a disturbing account of killing. Yet rather than unpack Haneke's complete oeuvre, as one of the most comprehensive contributions to the cinema of non-justifiable acts of evil in recent years, I explore the shifting concerns with evil that characterise his output in specific terms. I hope a comprehensive study of Haneke and evil will appear. But this is not it.

From *Benny's Video* then to the multiple awards-winning *Das weisse Band* (The White Ribbon (2009)), evil operates on three levels. The first concerns a subject who acts unperturbed by his actions; whose intentions are questionably *unclear*. In the second, a collaborative evil is performed, as intention and the acknowledgment of it become central. There is no doubt that collaboration in evil has a certain fascination in its theorisation. And of course, *Funny Games* (Haneke, 1997 and 2007) seems the most incisive in this regard. As a filmic treatment of an evil based around the actions of two 'posh' adolescent killers, *Funny Games* challenges its spectators to reflect upon their own moral position relating to the types of behaviour they watch on screen. It is, as Oliver C. Speck rightly points out, a "scandalous film" (Speck: 2010; 85). It is, also, close in its aesthetic and ethical aims to Pasolini's *Salò*; more so than other Haneke films from the same period; so I decided to refer to the film(s) without making it (or them) a major anchor point. On the last level, the collaborative turns into the systematic: Haneke now turning to evil consitutive of the *system* of law. Hence the final chapter turns to *radical evil*, and looks to the way in which institutions can shield their members from the responsiblity they hold; particularly as it pertains to *Das weisse Band*.

From the the drowning (and shooting) of up to 200 Algerian protestors in the Seine during a peaceful protest by pro-FLN Algerians in the Parisian 60s, under the orders of the head of police Maurice Papon, to the James Bulger Case in which two-year old Bulger was brutally murdered after his abduction by two ten years old boys in Liverpool in 1993, to the Eichmann trial (in particular Hannah Arendt's report on the event), serious questions are put to the morally attuned Haneke spectator. In this analytical phase the argument that later preoccupations in Haneke films are linked to those present in earlier ones is made: *Caché* (Hidden (2007)) is, for example, *Benny's Video* reworked from a more mature vantage point. For evil, I argue, has an equally fascinating allure in the later 'more mature' Haneke. And yet, even so, and apart from his films displaying a curious attention to evil, arrows pointed at oft-overlooked social considerations are also important to evaluate. Television is just one of these. For Haneke, television fills 'time,' consumes it. And it does this, as Mary-Anne Doane suggests,

> "By ensuring that something happens–it organises itself around the event. There is often a certain slippage between the notion that television covers important events in order to validate itself as a medium and the idea that because an event is covered by television–because it is, in effect, deemed televisual–it is important" (Doane in Mellencamp (ed): 1990; 222).

Doane's approach is of considerable value when accounting for characters like Benny and indeed their need for the 'events' they instigate in normal everyday reality to parallel the virtual recording of them; Benny (Arno Frisch) feels the girl he befriends is 'important' precisely when televisually recording her death. When Benny's father, Georg (Ulrich Mühe), peers over his son's shoulder, at the film he has made, his son appears obviously enamoured by the formal matters on screen, the process of filming the horror relegating the 'real' to an altogether different realm. Not unlike this, Majid's (Maurice Bénichou) suicide in *Caché* is followed by Georges (Daniel Auteuil) returning home to find a recording of the event. In both cases, horrific violence assumes video and 'mediated' form; an evil need to represent death.

In light of this, the secularising of catastrophe on TV, emphasised by the gaze of the newsreader–(frightening if it wasn't so regular a feature of mediatised societies)–finds an echo in the reduction of horror to humdrum banality as found in Haneke films. From 9/11 to the Tsunami disaster, what we see is catastrophism competing on an increasingly global stage. It would be wrong to overlook the importance of this competition, and/or the

discussion to Hanekean scholarship, but I believe it masks often-overlooked moral concerns in Haneke films. That Haneke films concern events such as the James Bulger affair is–of course–one thing of note, the manner in which these are complicated and debated another. With this level of complication in mind, I argue that Haneke confronts us morally. Haneke's world is one in which those who acquiesce with power unquestionably, may well be the considered avatars of a cosmic Evil.

CHAPTER ONE

'TRYING TO SEE DARKNESS':
A GENEALOGY OF EVIL
FROM MANICHEANISM TO BATAILLE

"Why should I seek for love or study it?
It is of God and passes human wit;
I study hatred with great diligence
For that's a passion within my own control
A sort of bosom that can clear the soul
Of everything that is not mind or sense,"
—W.B. Yeats, *Supernatural Songs*.

In taking the verse of my countryman as inspiration for the journey that follows it might be a way to begin by asking if evil is of the 'mind'? Or of the 'real'? The first thinker to dwell on evil in monotheistic theology, St. Augustine, begins in asking this question. Is evil something we know? Something we sense? Or is it simply something we confront? Can we resist evil in the same way that we resist desire? Posing questions like these in relation to an intractable dualism, influencing the Neo-Platonist and religious phases in Augustine–and his writings on evil–will begin this chapter. Augustinian concepts such as privation and perversion are addressed in a considerably more 'general' way. After introducing Augustine, the analysis will expand to include that of the Cathar heresy from the 12th and 13th centuries. I say 'generally' because any such orthodox reading of Augustine, as interpreted by thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, is set against responses to Augustinian theology in the later sections, examining John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), and ethics from Kant to Bataille. After Kant, an interlude is taken, discussing Tom Hooper's *Longford* (2006), the Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007) and Florian Henkel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006).

Augustine and Theology

For English theologian John Hick, the theology of Augustine is the "fountainhead" of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Hick: 1977; xi). In the course of his writing Hick develops an Augustinian position, for want of a better word, based around two explicit conflicts, the first with the Manicheans, and the second with the Pelagians. For Hick, it is lines such as, "I have known my soul and the body that lies upon it, and they have been enemies since the creation" which give an interesting glimpse into the dictates and inspiration for the Manichean movement. That the Self originates in 'darkness' and 'light' is central to this. It is a seductive position for early Augustine. For darkness is associated with the body, while light, by extension, with the soul. The structure of this opposition can be felt in the Manichean creed,

> "We know (1) what is said to have been before there was earth and heaven; we know (2) why God and Satan fought, how Light and Darkness mingled, and who is said to have created; we know (3) why eventually earth and heaven shall pass away, and what shall happen thereafter" (Jonas: 1970; 209).

In the Creed, human life is shown to be the product of "darkness" and "light." In a cosmos such as this, the converging body and soul require processes in which both entities are purified. The verse tells how heaven and earth will converge when this occurs. Put simply, Manicheanism is a moderate form of dualism, downplaying 'free choice,' on which moralism is necessarily founded. It emphasises cosmic determinants in day-to-day life. Augustine's attraction to Manicheanism (as described in the *Confessions*) lay in its simplicity as a creed; in which any discussion of the will is frequented. For as Thomas Aquinas notes, "if there is nothing free in us, but we are moved to will necessarily…….praise and blame, in which moral philosophy consists are swept away" (Aquinas: 1998; 556). Aquinas points to a dualist cosmology where morality lacks foundation, when 'necessity' impinges on free choice. Hence Augustine's assertion,

> "For you have right on your side, O Lord, but we are sinners that have wronged and forsaken you; all is amiss with us. We are bowed down by your chastisement. In justice we have been delivered to the author of sin, the prince of death, because he has coaxed us to make our wills conform with his" (Augustine: 1961; 56).