



A case of auteur cinema in a changed cultural context: “Funny Games” (1997) and “Funny Games, US” (2007) by Michael Haneke

Aleksandra Biernacka¹

Abstract

The article is a case study of a cross-cultural auteur film-remake by Michael Haneke of his earlier film: Funny Games, US (2007) and Funny Games (Austria 1997), that is a part of a PhD project devoted to the cross-cultural film remakes. The case of the Funny Games, US although an exact frame-by-frame repetition, shows a significant alteration of meanings that arise out of the changed cultural context a remake film is destined to operate in. The different set of ideas and historical experiences modify a seemingly universal for the Western culture problem the film attempts to discuss with. Through cultural, hermeneutical analysis of a particular basic assumptions the films’ discourse is formed on, the author shows how given points lose their adequacy and relevance leading to a final failure of the communication process and a lack of expected reaction to the US-version-of-the-film’s efforts at provoking a serious debate.

Keywords

Film remakes, cross-cultural remakes, cultural context of a meaning

This paper is a case study, a part of a wider project investigating various strategies employed in a process of a cross-cultural remaking of films. The process of transferring a film across borders relies on a transfer of the narrative, that requires modifications of elements of a structure and meaning to a new cultural environment. Particular authors employ various means of translation, whose final effects stem from an exact copy, as in a case of the *Funny Games U.S.* , to changes pertaining to a cultural background (*The Departed* 2006), to vast modifications of every layer of a film structure (*The Pathfinder* 2007). The analysis of the practice fosters numerous theoretical questions that are much beyond a scope of this paper, whose intention is to present one specific example of

¹GSSR Polish Academy of Sciences, abbi30@gmail.com

transformations of a meaning in a changed cultural context, or – more precisely – the alterations that arise out of a different role particular elements start to play in ‘an ongoing pattern of life’ (Geertz 1973: p. 17) of the new sphere.

The cross-cultural remakes are present in a history of the cinema from its earliest beginnings (*Anna Karenina*: 1911 France, 1914 Russia, 1915 US, etc.; *Bel Ami*: 1938 Germany, 1947 US; *Beloved Vagabond*: 1916 France, UK 1923, US 1936; *Bluebeard*: 1901 France, 1909 US, etc.; *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*: Germany 1919, US 1962; *Carmen*: Spain 1910, US 1912, and later many others; *Chicago*: France 1927, US 1942, etc.; *Le Corbeau*: France 1948, US 1951; *Dante’s Inferno*: Italy 1911, US 1924, etc.; *Beggar’s Opera*: Germany 1930, US 1953, etc.; and numerous others – see Druxman 1975). The longevity of that tradition has been also demonstrated by numerous examples of films made in recent years, like *Vanilla Sky* by Cameron Crowe (2001, based on the *Abre Los Ojos* by Alejandro Amenabar), *The Ring* by Gore Verbinsky (2002, from the Hideo Nakata’s *Ringu*), or *Insomnia* by Christopher Nolan (2002, original directed by Erik Skjoldbjærg under the same title).

The sole notion of the remake stirred also numerous discussions as of how to define the concept, how to distinguish between influence, citation, and plagiarism in case of unacknowledged remakes, where to set borders between paraphrasing, allusion, pastiche and “natural” source of finding similar dramatic solutions, how to locate the remake within a wider spectrum of the industry routine, like the sequels, cycles, and series, prompting the emergence of hybrids (Neale 2000), or what is a difference between the remake and adaptation (Verevis 2006). The answers to these questions vary and are determined by the methodology employed by particular scholars, what however arises no special doubt is a necessity of carrying on the analysis not only on a layer of the films’ textual and structural specificity, but in a wider cultural context. The important components of this context are production and industry determinants (copyright law, tendency to minimize risk of a new production and to lower the production costs), external environment (processes of film promotion and reviewing, film criticism, film academies), as well as general film competence of the audience and ways of shaping it (Verevis 2006).

The analysis of the process requires hence a specific methodological approach combining phenomena recurring in the adjoining fields of the literature–film adaptations from one side, and the remakes, cycles, sequels, from the other. The process of moving a foreign language film into a different cultural environment necessitates also the additional cross-cultural studies, leaving aside such questions of concern as differences in the medium language in case of studies of literary adaptations, and the cultural variations within a given nation’s reality that engage the critique of the remakes.

The presented example: *Funny Games* (Austria 1997) and *Funny Games US* (US 2007) is a rare case of an exact copy of film made by the same director, with a differences pertaining at a first sight only to the setting of action, cast of characters and the language spoken. As such, it marks an edge of a spectrum of plethora of various strategies the authors of cross-cultural remakes take advantage of, and at the same time is an ideal object to study a role of the cultural context in influencing the meanings conveyed by the same content. My method of analysis is the hermeneutical one, and lays

upon the relations between original and its U.S. version only – the above questions of a possible influence of a wider social context like, for instance, means of promoting the film are temporarily set aside as there are up to a future research that will be a part of the whole dissertation. The below analysis embraces the structural methodology, but goes beyond it to trace the modifications of meanings and the sources from which their spring in light of the differences between the original's Austrian / European and the U.S. cultural, i.e. historical, mythological and ideological context.

Funny games

Ten years after the critical success of his original *Funny Games* produced in Austria in 1997, Michael Haneke directed the US version of the film – *Funny Games US* re-filmed in English, starring the popular and respected actors: Naomi Watts, Tim Roth, and Michael Pitt. The original drew a lot of attention and stirred in the U.S. many discussions due to its disturbing and ambiguous form of discourse and its subject matter (Rooney 1997, Holden 1999, Sterritt 1998). The later American version is an exact repetition, frame-by-frame adaptation of the original, and with this faithful re-enactment stresses out the universal nature of phenomena the film deals with – the role of violence in popular culture and its long-term negative consequences.

The *Funny Games* develops a story picturing a strong connection between works of popular culture and the aggression of the young towards ordinary people who lead normal, middle-class life on two different levels simultaneously. At the first – the layer of the film's narrative – there is an image of two very young men maltreating and killing a decent family with a ten-year-old son, because of no special reason. At the second – a meta-level of the film-viewer relation – the film conveys a message that a viewer, by finding satisfaction in aggressive and cruel acts present in popular fiction, stimulates the use of violence on screen and therefore bears true responsibility for the tragic lot of the *Funny Games*'s family. The film employs a discourse of domination and enforcement on both the levels, pretending at the same time by means of the film language like long takes, slow, distanced narration, and careful close-ups, that observes the world as an objective, unengaged observer. However, by making the audience responsible for the works of popular culture, *Funny Games* uses the same tool of control as the abusers in the film do, and acts as a mean of strategic and polemical game aimed at proving the validity of its message.

The transition of the Austrian original to the US environment is exact in every detail, and except the story line and dialogue, comprises also the graphics of opening credits, the furniture as well as its placement on the set, and music. The differences concentrate around industry requirements, like the place of shooting, language of dialogues, cast, and very rare, minor, hardly noticeable alterations of dialogue that do not

change the original meaning². The apparent anxiousness to repeat the success of the original did not however bring expected results – the new film got in the U.S. mixed and average reviews, in which many authors blamed Michael Haneke for a patronizing tone and repetitiveness (Lane 2008, Elley 2007, Weitzman 2008, Farber 2008, Kirsonak 2008, Gleiberman 2008). The cause of this rather reserved reception seems to be in fact the director's assumption about a unity of the Western culture in both its European and American materializations. However, the very same scenes and elements gain additional connotations or alter their meanings in the US cultural context due to a subtle differences in actors' interpretations and distinct historical experiences of the audience, that in turn initiate shifts in a way in which the new film is perceived.

Interpretations of actors

The crucial scene of reaching a point of overpowering the family will to resist, is build on humiliation of a woman (Ann's) body and, in result, on disgracing George – the husband and the father. Aggressors force woman to strip down under pressure of hurting Georgie – her 10-year-old son. Naomi Watts takes a little more time in taking off particular parts of her garment in comparison to Susanne Lothar in the Austrian version, what on one level intensifies emotions and the inner conflict of the character, but also moves the scene's center of gravity, evoking the feminist protests and discussions related to the questions of connection between power and sex, and the way it shapes reality (Foucault 1990, Butler 1999, Scott 1988, Loomba 2005). The importance of these debates in the US culture and the concept of a gender as social construct prevailing in feminist and masculine literature of recent decades (Butler 1991, Adams and Saffran 2002) interfere with the film's original, more essentialist and rooted in the European history, mode of discourse, which is based on traditional patriarchal family roles that oppressors use against the victims as a tool to extend their power. The prolonged and noble fight between the honor of a human being and the love of a child that we witness on Naomi Watt's face shakes the balance that the Austrian original sustains by convincing haste and trembling of Susanne Lothar. The original *Funny Games* conveys a picture whose tension is based on a weight given to the emotional ties within a family and to an overwhelming sense of responsibility of the troubled parent that justifies the further complete submission

It is however Tim Roth's interpretation of the role of George, the husband and the father, that stands against a "typical image" of a man in American culture and as such is perplexing and disrupting the film's delicate balance between psychology of characters and the integrity of a plot development. George is helpless, behaves humbly and does not any attempt to free the family, what staggeringly contrasts with the continued

² For example the other way of addressing the oppressors by Ann – a woman in the family – in the first dialogue between them: in Austrian version Ann turns to them by "you", while in the US – she uses "Sir"; or later, when Paul explains their cruelty by the need of keeping on the audience interest, saying about requirements of the "feature film" in Austrian version, and "plausible plot development" in the American one.

efforts of Ann, as well as differs from the peaceful, but strong, stable, and reliable masculine character of Ulrich Mühe, who justifies his behavior with the manacles of the family's head's responsibility. Tim Roth's George's attitude is antithesis of a picture of a man conveyed by a mode of "hegemonic masculinity" that subordinates all the men in the US, including the homosexual men (Carrigan et al. 2002). This dominant ideal arises out of a picture of the frontier-man (Connell 2002) and goes to the Self-Made Man of the 19th century, whose certain features still persist in popular imagery today, especially the active, relative character of manhood that is to be achieved and proved in a process of constant social validation (Kimmel 2002). The active, mobile, self-reliant American man exhibits his wealth as the evidence of the inner strength that let him reach a certain social status. The apparent prosperity of Ann and George compared with George's passivity seems to be in this light hardly comprehensible and this in turn undermines the dramatic and emotional effect of the film that lies upon identification of a viewer with the victim.

The pair of aggressors: Paul played by Michael Pitt, and Peter – Brady Corbet as well as their Austrian counterparts: Arno Frisch, and Frank Giering, use the requirements of polite behavior and affectionate language as the instrument of dominating the family's members. Their kindness and considerate way of talking in connection with rapid, but rare acts of physical violence become a means of oppression through which they increase control and manipulate the victims' demeanor and reactions. They consciously structure their narration, stressing out its performativity (Bhabha 1990) and enforce submission to the rules of a game set by them, and explicitly explained in tone of a host of a TV show. It is a responsibility of participants to comply with "guidelines" and act according to them, otherwise they expose themselves for punishment and additionally deprive themselves of a right to choose among different options as of how they future will look like (all of the options are negative). The minor interpretative differences of actors' creations underline the icy quality of youngsters' characters in the US version and blur the pale signs of emotions that are noticeable in Austrian original. *Funny Games, US* changes also Paul's – the driving force in this tandem – color of hair to blonde, presenting the two boys as white, blonde-haired, upper-middle class, soft-spoken, and sophisticated sadists.

Symbolism of whiteness

Paul's and Peter's whiteness, stressed out by the white cloths and gloves, has originally been one more disturbing catch of imposing the opposite meanings on a standard, everyday objects and sentiments, that is one of the crucial means of building the film's tension and emotional anxiousness of a viewer. The whiteness connoted in European tradition with innocence, cleanness, purity, and goodness brings in evil, cruelty, and sadism. In the *Funny Games, US* the whiteness acquires however a set of significant ideas connected with racial oppression and 'domestic colonialism' (Omi and Winant 1986: p. 40), which due to the film's focus and mode of discourse earn unexpected visibility.

The remarkable contrast between the words and actions of the oppressors strengthens such view additionally. A gentle way of expressing thoughts is punctuated with acts of physical violence in crucial moments, in which the victims start to pursue a way to protect themselves. The apparent care about helpless people changes into mental torture, in situation when the harm and suffering comes from a “care-taker,” who now uses his ability to act to deepen the humiliation and dependency of a sufferer. Even in such situation, the family is kept responsible for its actions, and can only blame itself for its tragic end. This logic is accepted by the family, who is hence unable to take action even when – for a moment – the abusers leave the house. Their attempts to free themselves are chaotic, distracted, slow, as if the paralyzing power of the young men preserved. The discourse of the oppressor prevails, as the victims remain passive and silent. In the original version, due to the film’s place of action, these elements bring in the connotations of a historical subjugation of individuals to the Nazis terror, that however stay aside in the US environment.

The film’s conspicuous whiteness comes in the U.S. context into foreground as if in effort to cease its unmanifested nature in the American culture, where whiteness being the principle of social organization at the same time secures itself invisibility (Lipstitz 1998). It however clashes here with the connotations of the Nazi terror and raises doubts about validity of putting an equation mark between the US experiences of racial inequality and the crimes of fascism. The film’s exposure of only white characters seems to be then more a product of one-sided vision of the world than an attempt to reveal the oppressive tactics of white men. It appears rather to be an effect of a view that does not notice a variety of races and social positions – a work of Eurocentrism, neglecting the sole existence of other than white traditions, and trying to secure the mass base for the European frame of thought (Shohat and Stam 1994).

The film’s ever-present whiteness in a certain way exalts tensions of race relations in a viewer’s mind and evokes already mentioned concept of ‘domestic colonialism.’ All the tactics used by the films’ oppressors are reflections of colonial methods (Said 1979, Shohat and Stam 1994, Loomba 2005) employed in the 19th and 20th centuries’ world history in order to gain political or economical advantage over other nation or class, only that in the *Funny Games* they are used declaratively for the sake of entertainment. In American historical experience of the 20th century, the slow rise of African Americans and other ethnic groups to social equality went through the processes of conscious, explicit and consequent protests against dominant system that had been often identified with a patriarchal order. The “cultures of resistance” become an important and influential element of identity of vast parts of the society (Omi and Winant 1986). The film’s unrelentness in exposing the evils of de facto alternative culture³ tarnishing the patriarchal order by means created by this very tradition, distorts a clarity of the picture as if Haneke stood for the institution that so many people have tried to dismantle. This

³The music that significantly symbolizes, characterizes the young oppressors is heavy metal put in contrast with the opera arias accompanying the exposition of the family.

adds to the strong ambiguity of the film's message in terms of its general attitude toward the patriarchal social order.

Anti- or pro-patriarchal treaty?

The disturbing effects of the film are achieved mainly by shifting, reestablishing the meanings of the most familiar things and values that suddenly turn into obstacle or a sign of menace. The action takes place in an area created for leisure, peace, pleasure and safety – a beautiful neighborhood of big, isolated, vacation houses at a lake. It is a world of private, closed space, to which only the closest and the trusted ones have access. It is also a world of upper middle class with its convenient lives, bourgeois values, picnics, golf, boats, good manners, and opera music. There is no place for others in this restricted area, hence when the other comes into this world in a form of Paul and Peter his behavior and appearance are an essence of a member of a society.

In the process of torturing the victims, young abusers put to use numerous arguments, notions, and things that until now were the symbols and providers of the family's existential assurance. They come as a plague, from a neighboring house of the family's friends, making the friends' help impossible; the isolated house becomes a trap as none hears the family's screams; the men – women stereotypes are exercised to foster an internal conflict within the family; the family ties are exploited to escalate the perplexity of its members; a prayer is applied in the last "game" to harass Ann; and all the technological devices either new or old: cell phone, a car, a boat appear to be useless. The most familiar and internalized convictions suddenly, as an effect of actions of the tyrants, turn against victims, causing pain and further terror. Paul and Peter orchestrate the whole range of previously stable concepts in order to destroy every piece of the bourgeois, patriarchal family's existence.

What mostly strikes and puzzles the family members as well as a viewer is a cold persistency of the youngsters' actions. Their apparent indifference toward and a light tone of "conversation" with Ann and George, presentation of further tortures in a form of a next game, an increasing intensity of humiliating the victims, and the rising boredom, disinterest and a kind of disappointment, accompanying this intensification point to the film's message of a catastrophic influence of popular culture on the youth minds. The unrelentness and continual cruelty signal however also a hidden passion, with which the oppressors develop their "games" from one family they pay a visit to another. This in turn steers suspicions of a kind of retaliation, in which they engage themselves. As if the *Funny Games* presented the narrative of revenge on patriarchal family that normally overpowers free beings, as if it was the stark fantasy of the vengeance upon the representatives of this social order as materialization of Sartre's (1946) warnings against the system depriving people or individual of freedom.

Sartre's remarks on violence and its inevitability found however stern criticism on the other side of Atlantic in work of Hannah Arendt (1969). Considered from the position of the conservative thinker such Sartrean, dark existential vision lacks in proper distinctions between the notions of power and violence, which 'are opposites; where the

one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course its end is a disappearance of power.' (Arendt 1969: pp. 12-13). The use of violence as mechanism of defensive is then in a context of the film's discursive aims, a bold exaggeration. Moreover, it also diminishes chances for improvement, and as such is unrealistic and impractical from the pragmatist point of view. The destructive vision of the *Funny Games* would not be therefore accepted either by the U.S. conservative spectators as a sort of defense of the traditional family a rebus, as it is rooted in the European existentialism rather than in the American pragmatist mode of thought.

A discourse on a meta-level narrative, expending a technique of blurring the borders between previously strictly differentiated often opposing concepts (like between entertainment and aggression, or friendliness and threat), justifies a view that in fact, the aim is to secure a conservation of the traditional patriarchal order. The technique leads to strengthening a possible alternative definitions, as it does in a case of destabilizing, shifting, and re-establishing the basic meanings on a level of the film story (a secluded home becoming a trap, a befriended neighbor as a source of danger, a prayer as an empty word, etc.). The significant alterations on almost every layer of film narration add to fostering a decentralization of a subject of not only the film's characters - victims, but also a viewer under influence of many, intertwined, often strong and contrasting forces. As such, they produce an impression of overwhelming chaos that starts to reign not only in the film, but also in a spectator's mind. Such emotions give usually rise to protest against their reason and to an attempt of finding an alternative, which in case of the *Funny Games* is clearly the carefully arranged, harmonious world of the traditional family.

This closing effect of the film obstructs additionally a chance of influencing the left-wing viewers in the U.S. Except of the already mentioned deprecatory depiction of the impervious to the dominant system alternative activities, *Funny Games*, US significantly differs also from the US accounts on a question of the rising phenomenon of inexplicable violence that occurred in a number of schools in the 90s (Jameson and Campbell 2001), among which the massacre in a high school in Columbine on April 20, 1999 was especially tragic and harmful. The two most famous American examples of authorial statements on a nature of the events, both low – budget films, and at the same time both made out of the leftists positions, inscribe themselves into two very distinct modes of narration.

The *Bowling for Columbine* by Michael Moore (2002) is a documentary film that in form refers to the long tradition of American crusade journalism (Emery et al. 2000, Schudson 1978). It seeks the rationale behind the incident, then directly addresses the problem and focuses on promoting its social solution. Attractive and controversial in form, it precisely defines the situation, proves validity of its statements, and sets an objective of passing the concrete laws in order to avoid the repeated occurrences of this kind. The scope of its reasoning lies within a wide social and political landscape rather than in concentration on the individual, and its aims are clearly identified and fixed.

A commentary on the field of feature film comes from Gus Van Sant and his *Elephant* (2003). Ephemeral in form, an example of experimental style of narration invented by Van Sant in his independent movies (especially *My Own Private Idaho* 1991, *Gerry* 2002, *Last Days* 2005, or *Paranoid Park* 2007). It looks into the matter from an opposite perspective. It steadfastly observes the events in a high school, and among many fragmented episodes, accidental encounters, or suppressed gestures it tries to catch a glimpse of all-embracing picture. There are no simple answers however, and the various potential explanations intermingle in a net of never-ending coincidences and possibilities. The *Elephant* focuses on individual life as a root of social phenomenon, and in a timid and withdrawn way, shows everyday, small disregard, omission, neglecting of other person, hers or his needs and emotions, that at a certain moment may transfer themselves on a wide-ranging plane of social phenomena. The conclusions are to be formulated by the spectators in an effort of reaching the proper solutions.

The two responses of the American culture to the question of a spreading violence among teenagers, so different in style, originate from a point of view of the Communitarian stance. From disparate angles, they both try to reassure balance between individuals and groups in concern of the common good. They call upon action proceeded by deliberate consideration of opinion of ordinary citizen, reflecting 'the basic human needs of all [community's] members' (Etzioni 1993: pp. 255-256). The suppression of different opinion or imposition one's ideals – 'civic or moral' (Etzioni 1993: p. 255) – is a mistake and misperception of the public efficiency. In this light, the *Funny Games*' mode of discourse is doubtful despite of nobility of its assumed intentions. The amalgam of problem of violence and demise of patriarchal family order sets out the frame of discussion that is no longer a lively or convincing argument in the US environment. The communitarian view goes there beyond the alternative: patriarchal family or chaos, by insisting on the functional family, in which all the members actively support each other and strengthen the communities of which they are a part.

The end dialogue

The *Funny Games* takes advantage of auto-referential devices and self-consciousness of the youngsters as fictional characters to convey the message of responsibility for what is one watching. The direct questions asked to the camera by Paul relate to viewer's lust for entertainment satisfied only by means of ever-rising tension and emotions, the requirements of 'plausible plot development.' (*Funny Games*, US). They imply the audience's hypocrisy, inconsistency in indentifying with particular characters and 'sides', and indifference. The final dialogue of the murderers suggests that there is no difference, no strict division between truth and fiction, and one is guilty for his or her deed in spite if it is real or fictitious. The fictional character as such, as Paul and Peter are, cannot be liable for his or her actions for he follows a distinct set of laws, the imagined one that allows to freely move in time, rewind, forward, change the past, and alternate the future. The true consequences of events on the screen affect the real families and real viewers.

This message arises however out of the image constructed on a basis of the opposite conviction: The world surrounding Ann and George supposedly does not take sufficient notice of the perils of popular culture and that is the reason why they have to bear the grave consequences. Yet, in the US context, this communiqué is in danger of being neglected as it rests on a viewer's assumed strict differentiation of reality and fiction, dreams, fantasies, carried on in a spirit of the European rationalism. This distinction is however something intrinsically strange to the way Americans perceive their world, who after developing from a myth of a 'land of opportunity and freedom,' is a space to influence and to shape individually (Turner 1920, Lipset 1997, Kingdon 1999). As Jean Baudrillard (1988, p: 28) put it: 'America is neither dream nor reality. It is hyperreality. [...] Everything here is real and pragmatic, and yet it is all the stuff of dreams too. [...] the perfect simulacrum – that of immanence and material transcription of all values. The Americans, for their part, have no sense of simulation.' The film's European notion of reality as something distinctive from a realm of dreams clashes with the American vision of a constant connection and flow between the two. The argument built upon a taken for granted separateness of the real and the unreal loses hence its relevance.

The question of religion

A similar difference of approaches becomes visible in a last "game" that aggressors name a 'loving wife.' After killing a son, they offer Ann to sacrifice her life instead of George's that they intend to kill at that moment, by saying a prayer. Ann knows none, neither does Paul, only Peter recites a short, childish four verses' invocation to God, which Ann repeats. The scene depicts advanced secularism of modern society, the absence of God and even the esoteric nature of a sole concept of God in the eyes of Ann and the youngsters alike – it shows that only scraps of the religious past survived in people's mind. The apathetic way of reciting the prayer additionally stresses out this indifference and unbelief, making the characters' demeanor evident sign of a complete dominance of the secular over the sacred in their existence.

The US secularism however arises out of opposite position than the European does. In the scope of American ideas the religion and secularism are tightly intertwined, presenting the country as secular and deeply religious at the same time (Warner 2007). The US secularism aims at securing the freedom of religion from a potential danger of the state's negative influence or enforcement (Barber 2002), while European secularism originates from the French Revolution and its insistence on the state free of religious fanaticism (Derrida and Habermas 2003). This difference results in a distinctive character of society's general approach to religion: cold and distant in Europe in comparison to more affectionate in the US. The *Funny Games'* aloof attitude toward God and prayer indicates the European roots of the scene, and differs from a possible American reactions in similar circumstances. Ann's consequent calmness that follows the last repeating of a prayer does not therefore convey such a philosophical significance of a breakthrough as it does in the European context.

Structural characteristics of author cinema

Ambiguity of form and narration so prevalent in the *Funny Games* and the *Funny Games, US* creates the contrast to the linearity of the Hollywood style (Bordwell 1990). Its mode of discourse rests upon the disturbing games of oppressors with victims from one side, and the director with a spectator from the other. The usual lack of consistency of characters in author cinema is this way extended onto the inconsistency of a viewer's identification with particular characters. Additionally, the elusiveness of reasons that lead oppressors to the steady ruthlessness diminishes chances of constructing a narrative containing the goal-oriented characters. On the other side however, the concept of "games" sets numerous deadlines within the action, fostering its development and tension. Similarly, the principle of causality is kept intact and sets an order of the film's temporal organization, what corresponds with the traditional way of filmmaking (Bordwell 1990).

All the other means of constructing the films' narration – continuity editing, mise-en-scene, and the continuous development toward gradual spreading of knowledge about the presented world, which culminates with the last scenes, follow the cause-and-effect classical rule also in a strict way. The narration does not disorient the viewer by providing him with false clues or tropes, but by first using a spectator's belief in what he sees, and second, by presenting the hard-to-stand cruelty, and then taking advantage of a human inclination to negate inconvenient reality. These two instincts: of a belief and repression, start to oppose each other in a process of watching the film and interplay to foster an engagement of a viewer. Such application of natural impulses into a course of decoding a film is something rare even within the author cinema. The direction of constructing the films' message – from opposing view to the one author would like to convey, by putting into the extreme consequences of the first one so that everyone can see the necessity of negating it – is also a rhetorical tool rarely used in American film.

* * *

The authorial decision to move the exact Austrian version to the US environment has not protected the film against the changes in its understanding. The sole interpretations of actors underlie various features of particular characters that consequently evoke a different set of ideas a given scene is perceived with. An inclination of the audience for special ways of interpretations is determined by various historical experiences, everyday live routine and ideological traditions that although similar in Europe and the US, also differ significantly. The tactics of the films' discourse are also strange for the US classical filmmaking, what additionally impedes perception.

The crucial however element seems to be a philosophical inadequacy of the films' arguments. It does not correspond with a major intellectual traditions in the US, what evades its relevance and strengths, making the whole attempt of influencing the public opinion a missed opportunity. It cannot initiate a serious discussion on the importance of phenomenon it deals with, as it tries to frame the debate from a point of view that

originates from divergent reality and experience. The very problem, as it is put in the *Funny Games*' categories, lies beyond the US reality and concern, as there it is already dealt with on completely other social plane, what slowly but significantly brings in the expected results (Jameson and Campbell 2001). The lack of characteristic US components that would form a potential process of cultural adaptation of this particular case of the cross-cultural remake undermines author's ambition to affect the American audiences in their struggle for more sensitive and responsible popular culture.

The *Funny Games* in its European and the US versions is a case of a modified perception of particular notions in a different geographical, social, historical and intellectual context. As far as the original, Austrian film might have been well understood in the US on a basis of a knowledge of (Schütz 1960) the European culture, and its grounding in the historical heritage of the 19th century and the WW2 as a final point of subjugation of an individual by a ruthless social machinery focused on efficiency, the narrative does not correspond with a nature of social and race relations in the US at any time in history. It does not hence resonate with a cultural context of the receiving country, leaving the questions posed to be considered as inadequate in a dynamic process of forming an understanding.

Understanding perceived as a flow between communication and signification proceeding through a mediation of an interpretative scheme (Giddens 1993).

A possible disturbance in a process of forming the understanding correspond moreover with attributes of the central figure the film employs. Its two-fold tension: between a pointless cruelty of the oppressors and fragile humanity of victims from one side, and the film and the viewer from the other, is complex and ephemeral, and requires an effort to be fully comprehended. The figure's shape mirrors the perception, determining a relation of constant fluctuation and correlation between a film and its viewer. This interdependence between a physical form of a dominating figure and the effects it draws upon audience's reception parallels with the nature of signs and processes of connotation and denotation as described by Charles Sanders Peirce (1873, 1991), especially his concept of the physical connection between a sign and its object.

The US version of the *Funny Games* seems to be then misunderstood in a sense of Paul Ricoeur's system of perception of a work (Ricoeur 1976), in which 'understanding' is the first level of a viewer's experience with a text: '[It] accounts for our initial acceptance of the work, our recognition of its importance in our lives, and, in short, our capitulation to its textual force. Without understanding we would pass over a text as we do over perceptual live; it would be a moment of recognition hardly persisting into our future.' (Riceour in Dudley 1984: p. 181). By conserving the original's narration and enunciation, *Funny Games, US* safeguards its original European philosophical specificity and simultaneously estranges potential US spectators. At this point, it dissolves in an undefined space of no cultural significance as 'mutual understanding relies on sharing in the same sphere of meaning' (Ricoeur 1976: p.73).

REFERENCES

- Adams, R. & Savran, D. (eds.) (2002) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Arendt, H. (27th February 1969) "Reflections on Violence." *New York Review of Books*.
 [Online] Available from: mhtml:file://E:\Hannah%20Arendt-on%20Violence.mht
 [Accessed on 15th December 2008]; <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/11395>
 [Accessed on 8th May 2009].
- Barber, B. (21st January 2002) Beyond Jihad Vs. McWorld. *The Nation Magazine*.
- Baudrillard, J. (1988) *America*. Trans. Turner, Ch. London, New York: Verso.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1990) *Nation and Narration*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Bordwell, D. (1990) *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London: Routledge.
- Burgett, B. & Hendler, G. (2007) *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York, London: New York University Press.
- Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Carrigan, T., Connell, B. & Lee, J. (2002) "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." In: Adams, R. & Savran, D. (eds.) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 99-119.
- Connell, R. W. (2002) The History of Masculinity. In: Adams, R. & Savran, D. (eds.) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 245-54.
- Derrida, J. & Habermas, J. (10 June 2003) Europa, jaka śni sie filozofom. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 134.
- Druxman, M. B. (1975) *Make It Again, Sam. A Survey of Movie Remakes*. New Jersey: Barnes and Co.
- Dudley, A. (1984) *Concepts in Film Theory*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Emery, M., Emery, E. & Roberts, N. L. (2000) *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media*. 9th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Etzioni, A. (1994) *The Spirit of Community*. New York: Touchstone.
- Foucault, M. (1990) *History of Sexuality*. Trans. Hurley, R. New York: Vintage Books.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.
- Giddens, A. (1993) *New Rules of Sociological Method*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jameson, K. H. and Campbell, K. K. (2001) *The Interplay of Influence. News, Advertising, Politics, and the Mass Media*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Kimmel, M. (2002) "The Birth of the Self-Made Man." In: Adams, R. and Savran, D. (eds.) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 135-47.
- Kingdon, J. W. (1999) *America the Unusual*. Worth Publishers.
- Lipset, S. M. (1997) *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. Norton
- Lipstitz, G. (1998) *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Loomba, A. (2005) *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Neale, S. (2000) *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge.
- Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1986) *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York, London: Routledge.

- Peirce, Ch. S. (1873) "On the Nature of Signs." In Hoopes, J. (ed.) (1991) *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 141-3.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976) *Interpretation Theory*. Texas Christian University Press.
- Said, E. (1979) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1946) "Existentialism Is a Humanism." In: Kaufman, W. (ed.) (1989) *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. Meridian Publishing Company. Available from: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm> [Accessed on 8th May 2009].
- Schudson M. (1978) *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. Basic Books.
- Schütz, A. (1960) "The Stranger." In: Stein, M. R., Vidich, A. J., White D. M. (Eds.) *Identity and Anxiety. Survival of the Person in Mass Society*. Free Press, Glencoe, Ill.
- Scott, J. W. (1988) *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shohat, E. & Stam, R. (1994) *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Turner, F. J. (1921) *The Frontier in American History*. [Online] Available from: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Frontier_in_American_History [Accessed on 25th Jan. 2013]
- Verevis, C. (2006) *Film Remakes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Warner, M. (2007) "Secularism." In: Burgett, B. and Hendler, G. (eds.) *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York, London: New York University Press, pp. 209-13.

FILM REVIEWS

- Elley, D. (20th October 2007) *Funny Games*. *Variety*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=festivals&jump=review&id=2471&reviewid=VE1117935140&cs=1&p=0> [Accessed 1st May 2009].
- Farber, S. (10th March 2008) *Funny Games US*. *The Hollywood Reporter*. [Online] Available from: http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/film/reviews/article_display.jsp?&rid=10789 [Accessed 1st May 2009].
- Gleiberman, O. (12th March 2008) *Funny Games*. *Entertainment Weekly*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20183709,00.html> [Accessed 1st May 2009].
- Holden, S. (11th March 1998) *Funny Games (1997)*. *The New York Times*. [Online] Available from: <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C0DE6DC1330F932A25750CoA96E958260> [Accessed 20th January 2009].
- Lane, A. (17th March 2008) *Recurring Nightmare*. *The New Yorker*. [Online] Available from: http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2008/03/17/080317cric_cinema_lane [Accessed 1st May 2009].

- Kisonak, R. (18th March 2008) *Funny Games*. *Film Threat*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.filmthreat.com/index.php?section=reviews&Id=10559> [Accessed 1st May 2009].
- Rooney, D. (25th May 1997) *Funny Games*. *Variety*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117329710.html?categoryid=31&cs=1> [Accessed 20th January 2009].
- Sterrit, D. (24th December 1998) *Funny Games*. "4th Annual Mega Movie Guide." *Christian Science Monitor*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.csmonitor.com/1998/1224/122498.feat.feat.2.html> [Accessed 20th January 2009].
- Weitzman, E. (4th June 2008) *Funny Games*. *NY Daily News*. [Online] Available from: http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/movies/2008/03/14/2008-03-14_funny_games_is_a_tortured_attack_on_thri.html [Accessed 1st May 2009].

FILMS

- Abre Los Ojos*. (1997) [Film] Directed by: Alejandro Amenabar. Spain.
- Departed, The*. (2006) [Film] Directed by: Martin Scorsese. USA.
- Funny Games*. (1997) [Film] Directed by: Michael Haneke. Austria.
- Funny Games, US*. (2007) [Film] Directed by: Michael Haneke. USA.
- Bowling for Columbine*. (2002) [Film] Directed by: Michael Moore. USA.
- Elephant*. (2003) [Film] Directed by: Gus Van Sant. USA.
- Gerry*. (2002) [Film] Directed by: Gus Van Sant. USA.
- Insomnia*. (1997) Erik Skjoldbjaerg [Film] Directed by: Norway.
- Insomnia*. (2002) [Film] Directed by: Christopher Nolan. USA.
- Last Days*. (2005) [Film] Directed by: Gus Van Sant. USA.
- My Own Private Idaho*. (1991) [Film] Directed by: Gus Van Sant. USA.
- Paranoid Park*. (2007) [Film] Directed by: Gus Van Sant. USA.
- Pathfinder*. (2007) [Film] Directed by: Marcus Nispel. USA.
- Ringu* (1998) [Film] Directed by: Hideo Nakata. Japan.
- Ring, The*. (2002) [Film] Directed by: Gore Verbinsky. USA.
- Vanilla Sky*. (2001) [Film] Directed by: Cameron Crowe. USA.

Aleksandra Biernacka is a PhD Candidate at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences. She has an MA in Polish Literature and Culture, University of Warsaw and a MA in American Culture Studies, University of Warsaw. Her academic interests focus on film in its international dimensions, transfer of ideas between cultures through artistic artifacts, national narratives as interlacing with one another, globalization and international discourses.