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Money, Violence, and the Financialized Self in Michael Haneke's *Glaciation Trilogy*

On 27 January 2006, Michael Haneke premiered his first opera production, a staging of *Don Giovanni* on the occasion of Mozart's 250th birthday. Reverting to the original title—*Il dissoluto punito ossia il Don Giovanni* [*The Libertine Punished or Don Giovanni*]¹—Haneke's opera unfolds at night on the top floor of a high-rise tower. Set against a business district skyline, this high finance version presents Don Giovanni as a senior executive aided and abetted by his assistant Leporello. When Giovanni sexual assaults fellow company executive Donna Anna, the Commendatore—her father and their boss—attempts to defend his daughter but is killed by the title figure. In this twenty-first century rendering, Giovanni the debauched financial player ultimately pays for his transgressions when the cleaning staff defenestrate him.

The debut at the venerable Opéra National de Paris received mixed reviews. While the production was reportedly booed on opening night, critics lauded it. One reviewer wrote of the Commendatore's murder: "Einen so kalten, unbehausten Don Giovanni hat man auf der Opernbühne noch nicht gesehen" (Spahn). Haneke's opera intertwines sex, violence, and money. Reflecting on the significance of wealth in his staging of *Don Giovanni*, the director concludes: "in unserer Zeit ist die Dominanz der Macht des Geldes nicht zu übersehen" (*Haneke über Haneke* 292). Following the 2007–2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, Haneke's critique of financial capitalism remains as relevant as ever. In 2015, the Opéra National de Paris revived the opera to critical acclaim. The work illustrates not only the role of global capital but also the violent effects it produces across society, as characterized by the infamous Giovanni, at one end of the spectrum, and the anonymous cleaners who dispose of him, at the other. Haneke's exploration of the nexus between finance and violence leading up to the global financial crisis is not new. He has, in fact, dealt critically with the topic since his earliest films.

This essay argues that Haneke's "glaciation trilogy"¹ actively engages the mounting financialization of the self during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Financialization describes "the web of interrelated processes—economic, political, social, technological, cultural etc.—through which finance has extended its influence beyond the marketplace and into other realms of social life" (van der Zwan 101n1).²

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The study begins with the destruction of money scene in *Der siebente Kontinent* (1989), Haneke's first feature. The film depicts a middle-class husband and wife, who systematically destroy possessions and their home in preparation for murder-suicide with their young daughter. The essay then revisits Robert Bresson's 1983 film *L'argent*, based on Leo Tolstoy's "The Forged Coupon" (1911), and explores the motifs of money, debt, and violence in these texts. *L'argent* follows the circulation of a counterfeit note that leads to an innocent delivery man losing his job. He later participates as a get-away driver in a failed bank robbery, goes to prison, and commits multiple murders upon his release. As part of Bresson's exploration of money in society, the film highlights the relatively new automated teller machine (ATM) and underscores its susceptibility to theft of both money and identity. The study then moves to Haneke's second feature, *Benny's Video* (1992). Benny, a teenager obsessed with technology and violence, kills a girl in the home of his bourgeois parents, who subsequently help him cover up the murder. The film features a pyramid scheme game and concludes with Benny deploying the financial strategy of hedging against risk to protect himself from arrest. Finally, in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994), various figures are brought together in a shooting at a Viennese bank. The massacre is triggered by the inability of the perpetrator to withdraw money from a cash machine. Early examples of financialization run throughout Haneke's trilogy and are inextricably bound with violence. While both Bresson and Haneke focus on money, the latter emphasizes the increasing financialization of daily life in these early films. Haneke picks up the ATM cue in Bresson's last film and focuses on the ascent of the risk-managing, financialized self in his critique of violence in the era of financial capitalism.

Money Down the Toilet

At an early screening of *Der siebente Kontinent*, the scene considered most controversial was not one of violence directed toward another living being. Rather, as the director recounts, thirty to forty audience members left the theater during a two-minute sequence in which a married couple flushes the remainder of their savings down the toilet (*Haneke über Haneke* 160). The screenplay details the balance of the family's liquid assets following their carefully planned and meticulously executed withdrawal from society: "zum Teil fallen ganze Scheine und Münzen ins Klo. So lange, bis die vierhundertachtundsiebzigttausend Schilling und sechzig Groschen plus der Erlös des Wagens plus die Brieftascheninhalte der Familienmitglieder verschwunden sind" (*Der siebente Kontinent* 117). Recalling the audience's visceral reaction to the depiction, Haneke remarks: "Geldvernichtung ist eines der letzten echten Tabus, noch mehr als der Tod eines Fisches oder eines Kindes. Man kann alles zeigen, nur das nicht" (*Haneke über Haneke* 160).³ The provocative filmmaker, of course, shows all three. In juxtaposing these prohibitions, he throws into relief the relationship between money and violence that runs throughout the trilogy. The methodical destruction of money is both

universal and particular, for the currency is both legal tender and Austrian schillings. Moreover, the scene represents a time—the late 1980s—when hard cash could conceivably represent the remaining wealth of a bourgeois family intent on its own destruction. Finally, the couple's destruction of their assets and what remains of their money is a violent gesture toward those surviving them.

Stylistically, the scene combines two of the director's signature close-up shots: "on objects of exchange" and "on objects of ritualized actions" (Speck 5). In this case, money exemplifies the former and the toilet the latter.⁴ The shock value lies in the intersection of the two. Money, regardless of its form or country of origin, does not belong here. Haneke employs the device of the shared point of view to accentuate the shot. We share the view of the person transforming Austrian currency into scraps of paper and flushing it. Commenting on a scene in the 2005 film *Caché*, Speck writes: "the viewer is forced to acknowledge that it is not the usual looking *at* something that is at stake here, but a looking *with* somebody" (30). Unlike in *Caché*, Haneke achieves the desired effect in his earlier film without the aid of recorded media. Money serves as both medium and message. For the couple planning murder-suicide, active disengagement from the system of economic circulation is the penultimate step to removing themselves entirely from society. They nevertheless encounter resistance in the smallest denominations. The scene depicts them casting not only torn bills but also coins into the toilet. While the notes may be more easily destroyed and discarded, one can easily imagine the coins settling into traps and bends, awaiting discovery not much worse for the wear. The contrast between the disposable notes and the resilient coins underscores the enduring questions surrounding the nature, value, and role of money in society.

The money scene demonstrates Haneke's stated desire "to jolt spectators out of their attitude of consumerism," on the one hand, and his critique of "life in the affluent world of the highly industrialized West," on the other (*71 Fragments* 174–75). Studies of his early features rightly call attention to his engagement with the "consumer culture of late capitalism," the "implosion of selfhood with the social-semantic bankruptcy of things," "our oversaturated consumer society," the "creeping horror of bourgeois alienation," and the "disgust, hatred, and immense contempt for the middle class and today's consumer capitalism that the viewer encounters in the films of Michael Haneke" (Peucker 130; Schwartz 344; Kuttner 152; Noys 148; Speck 131). The vivisection of consumerism in the trilogy indeed exposes, without explanation, the conditions that contribute to familial and societal conflict. Yet, Haneke offers more than a critique of consumerism in these films. He engages the expanding financialization of daily life, particularly with respect to managing risk, and its effects on society.

The ATM in Bresson and Haneke

Haneke's admiration for Robert Bresson is well documented, and he pays homage to the French director's last film *L'argent* with detailed shots of money exchanging

hands throughout the trilogy (Leisch-Kiesel 319; Schwartz 344). More significant for Haneke, I contend, is the automated teller machine (ATM) in *L'argent*. Bresson's focus on this fairly new technology offers a point of departure for Haneke. In the conclusion of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, the ATM plays a key role. Haneke amplifies the depersonalization of banking introduced in Bresson's film in his depiction of the financialized self gone awry.

L'argent (1983) opens with a close-up of an ATM. However, one might not recognize the apparatus without having seen the promotional trailer, which begins with a hand retrieving a debit card from an ATM and continues with other machines completing transactions and dispensing funds that are quickly pocketed. The film preview emphasizes the technological innovation of the ATM and underscores the evolving nature of exchange. "Extracting banknotes from a metal box inserted into a brick wall was, in 1983 at least, the epitome of depersonalized monetary transaction" (Brady 238). In contrast to the numerous shots of money travelling from hand to hand in *L'argent*, Bresson here glimpses the future of money: it will be exchanged between banks and their customers via ATMs. Of course, this form of "depersonalized" banking has both advantages and disadvantages. The trailer shows the ease with which one can retrieve money on demand. In the film, Bresson reveals that the hands making withdrawals may not always correspond to the names on the accounts against which the money is drawn.

Compared with its barely perceptible appearance in the opening credits, the ATM takes center stage when a character in the film demonstrates a scheme to steal money from these machines. Lucien is a former employee of the photography shop, where a counterfeit note was unwittingly accepted at the beginning of the film and then intentionally used by the proprietor to pay a bill, which sets in motion the precipitous downfall of a fuel delivery driver. Lucien rigs an ATM to retain a customer's debit card. With the newly obtained card and a stolen-over-the-shoulder personal identification number, he effortlessly withdraws money from the ATM. Jones writes of the scene: "[Bresson] intended Lucien's scam to play a bigger part in the film, closer to Michel's flurry of successes as a pickpocket [in *Pickpocket* (1959)]: in a quick montage, cash machines all over Paris were to be emptied of their loot. We are left with only this brief, almost comically detailed scene" (63–64). While the montage scene was cut from the film, Bresson incorporates it into the preview, which remarkably provides no other elements of the plot.

The ATM in *L'argent* suggests a future of impersonal exchange. By substituting the human interaction of a bank teller with the convenience of a 24-hour cash machine, the banking industry creates a system more susceptible to theft. Nevertheless, the benefit to customers of having access to one's money outside of banking hours (for a fee) and in various locations outweighs the risks. That is, until the ATM does not function as expected. Should panic incite a bank run and everybody want their money all at once, ATMs would be even more limited than banks, which maintain only a fraction of their assets in cash. In the conclusion of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, Haneke demonstrates a more mundane ATM

experience that precipitates a personal crisis leading to the murder of innocent victims. When the university student Max needs money for gas, he discovers that the nearest ATM is out of service. His attempt to make a traditional withdrawal from a bank also fails, prompting him to retrieve a pistol from the car and kill three people in the bank before committing suicide. The violent ending brings together various figures in the film and concludes the trilogy with the emphatic intersection of banking and violence. To understand how Haneke both credits Bresson and picks up where his ATM scene and trailer end, let us return to the text upon which *L'argent* is based: "The Forged Coupon" (1911) by Leo Tolstoy.

"Where is the money?" Debt, Counterfeiting, and Theft

Bresson's film closely follows the beginning of the Tolstoy story, in which a father refuses his fifteen-year-old son an advance on his monthly allowance of three rubles. The teenager owes a classmate twice this amount, which he had borrowed for the theater. Shortly after the father—head of fiscal affairs at a government office—denies this request, the son receives a message demanding immediate repayment, his third such notice. He decides to pawn his watch, but a friend convinces him to simply change the denomination on the two-and-a-half-ruble coupon that his father had given him.⁵ He then buys a picture frame at a photography shop with the new twelve-and-a-half-ruble coupon and keeps the change returned in cash. The son pockets a ten-ruble note, while the friend "borrows" the rest, promising to repay it. Unbeknownst to the teenager dabbling in forgery, he sets off a series of events that ultimately leads to multiple murders.

Tolstoy and Bresson follow the fake money. The proprietor of the photography shop recognizes the counterfeit note accepted by his employee but chooses to pay a bill with it. When the unsuspecting peasant selling firewood in the story and the fuel delivery man in the film attempt to spend the forged coupon and counterfeit money, respectively, they are detained but released by the police. The accused then confront the shop owners to no avail and have their day in court. Yet neither receives justice because in each case the proprietor bribes an employee to commit perjury. Adding further insult to injury, the court reprimands the workers for bringing unfounded charges against reputable citizens. Finally, in both texts, the bribed employee later steals from the owner, first a petty amount, then—following dismissal for theft—all the cash on hand, only to repay a portion of it eventually. The return of stolen money is the final reference to Tolstoy in Bresson's film (Jones 30).

After the opening act of counterfeiting in "The Forged Coupon" and *L'argent*, money is traded for goods and services, stolen in varying amounts, given as aid, and prompts a murder spree. These depictions of life in early twentieth-century Russia and late twentieth-century France demonstrate the traditional functions of money. It has value, is exchanged, serves as a unit of account—the father in Tolstoy (and possibly Bresson) oversees financial matters at work, and can be used to repay debt. Money also generates violence in these texts. In "The Forged

Coupon," the man who kills the wronged peasant goes on to murder two people at an inn and then a pensioner and her family. Bresson's adaptation transforms the fuel delivery man into the perpetrator. In both examples, the murderer prefaces the killing of the kind pensioner with the question: "Where is the money?"

Haneke's early films also emphasize the relationship between money and violence; however, the economic landscape has changed. For Haneke, money is not the catalyst of violence. Rather, it represents the transition to financial capitalism and its greater effects. When the couple in *Der siebente Kontinent* withdraws their savings in order to destroy it, Haneke underscores the emotional appeal of cash while also demarcating the shifting role of money and banking in an increasingly financialized world. In *Benny's Video*, the director portrays a family that embraces financial speculation and a teenager who turns his parents' risk into his own reward. Finally, in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, the lack of cash compounded by a failed ATM transaction leads to a deadly bank shooting.

The Financialized Self

Throughout the trilogy, Haneke depicts various attempts by individuals to secure themselves in an uncertain world. The demolition of the family home, destruction of all possessions, and flushing of money in *Der siebente Kontinent* illustrate the couple's total commitment to avoiding future loss. Only by severing all ties and removing themselves from the world through murder-suicide can the Schobers assure no risk. Of course, this suicidal logic circumvents loss at the expense of human life. In Haneke's second feature, *Benny's Video*, the title character and his family welcome risk and see its potential for profit. The trendy pyramid scheme game introduced to the family by Benny's sister provides her brother with a model not only for making money but also, and more importantly, for managing risk. Benny is a quick study and exemplifies the risk-embracing "financialized self" (Martin 195). The financialized self welcomes the challenges of financialization: "Expectations may fail to materialize and losses may be incurred, but the parameters of loss and the appropriate responses could themselves be anticipated through any number of hedge maneuvers" (Martin 196). The prospect of losing money is fundamental to risky ventures, but it is countered by taking an opposite position. In other words, calculated bets are placed on both sides. Benny exemplifies this approach with the deployment of a decisive hedging tactic in the conclusion of the film, when he sets up his parents to take the fall for the murder he committed. In *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, when the university student Max responds violently to the contingencies of daily life, Haneke illustrates the deadly application of leverage when faced with neither money nor time.

The opening scene of *Benny's Video* shows a pig being killed for slaughter with a captive bolt gun, a device that does not fire a projectile. The recording made by Benny is then paused, rewound, and replayed in slow motion. The next scene shows a party hosted by Benny's older sister Evi in the family home. He records

her explaining the rules of the “Pilotenspiel,” complete with diagram (1 pilot, 2 co-pilots, 4 crew members, 8 passengers), to her guests. A 1987 article in *Die Zeit* describes this pyramid scheme game, which had taken Berlin by storm: “Das ‘Pilotenspiel’ ist ein Glücksspiel nach Art der Kettenbriefe, bei dem es darum geht, eine Aufnahmegebühr von 3000 Mark irgendwann vervielfacht zurückzubekommen, indem neue Mitspieler ihre Aufnahmegebühren an den jeweils Spielältesten entrichten” (“Kettenbriefe”). As Evi explains, everyone aboard the plane pays the pilot in cash, then he or she “fliegt weg.” The co-pilots become pilots, the others move up a level, and “der ganze Zauber” begins again. When a guest asks about a potential lack of passengers, someone offers a reassuring response. However, he is interrupted by Evi and Benny’s father, who has unexpectedly returned home. This reasonable question goes unanswered, but it does not appear to concern others at the party. Benny’s video shows plenty of players and a few happy winners before the gathering is dispersed. Later, their mother explains that, according to Evi, her friend had won 70,000 schillings while playing the game. When Evi asked her mother for 10,000 schillings to start a game, she gave her half. Their daughter came up with the rest. Inspired by events at home, Benny seeks players for his own “Pilotenspiel” at school with the pitch: “Wenn du nichts einsetzt, kannst du auch nichts gewinnen.” After one student declines, noting that he does not receive a weekly allowance of 500 schillings like Benny, another is keen to invest early.⁶ Having studied the video, presumably, Benny the aspiring entrepreneur not only learns how to play the game but also how to sell it, and he quickly finds willing participants among his adolescent friends.

During choir practice, Benny’s classmates secretly exchange money for the “Pilotenspiel” and pills. Haneke clearly alludes here to the prison chapel scene in *L’argent*, where the hands of prisoners furtively trade contra band items, including canteen coupons. Metelmann writes of Haneke’s choir scene: “Die Dramaturgie der Gesichter und Hände arbeitet sehr genau diesen Kontrast zwischen den noch ‘unschuldigen’ und schon ‘profitgierigen’ Kindern heraus” (88). Benny, following the lead of his sister and with the implicit approval of his bourgeois parents, indubitably falls into the second category. He loses his innocence shortly after this scene, when he uses a stolen bolt gun to murder a girl in his room, which Metelmann fittingly describes as his “cockpit” (89). When Benny shows his parents video evidence of the murder, they choose not to turn him in to the authorities, fearing the consequence for both him and them. Instead, the father devises a plan to dismember the body and dispose of it through the plumbing. Unlike the money scene in *Der siebente Kontinent*, we do not see the bodily remains entering the sewage system. While father cleans up the crime scene, mother and son take a trip to Egypt with a cover story of grandmother’s death. Upon their return, everything appears to have returned to normal. Evi, unaware of the murder and the subsequent cover up, is planning another “Pilotenspiel” party. The parents not only approve of it but also praise her business acumen. Furthermore, mother suggests to father that they host a party for *their* friends, noting a recent “Pilotenspiel”

in Munich had stakes of 100,000 DM. Evi's first event provided a model for her younger brother, and now her parents want to be in on the action as well. However, their late arrival to the pyramid scheme does not bode well for them, despite family ties. Whereas they see only the potential for profit in the game, Benny learns how to secure his position at the expense of others. The conclusion of the film illustrates the "sovereignty effect" Vogl describes in *The Ascendancy of Finance*, when Haneke reveals how Benny "transform[s] his own risks into others' dangers, positioning himself as a creditor of last resort" (165). Benny's hedge maneuver aims to safeguard his future despite the toll on his family.

Following Benny's introduction of the game at school, the film offers no indication of how his new venture performs. The surprise ending, however, shows that Benny quickly combined his technical savvy with the newfound interest in not only turning a quick profit but also, and more importantly, in managing risk. As it turns out, he had surreptitiously recorded the discussion between his parents regarding how to deal with the dead body. Metelmann aptly designates the conversation a "Krisenmanagement-Situation" (95). The film concludes with Benny reporting his parents to the police. Benny's video serves as the ultimate hedge against his closest allies, elevating them from accessories after the fact to the prime suspects. There is no apparent reason for Benny to frame his mother and father. Nevertheless, the fully financialized Benny must secure himself against risk at the cost of betraying his parents. When the police ask Benny why he is coming forward now, he responds with "so halt" (whatever/because), echoing the words of his murder victim. After meeting her outside of his local video store and inviting her back to his house, he had asked about her interest in videos, to which she replied: "Ich weiß nicht. So halt." Naqvi questions Benny's response at the police station: "Is this a further sign of indifference on his part, an acceptance of the status quo, or an attempt to spurn his parents' treatment of the murder (in a rewind-erase-replay mode, they extinguish all traces of the corpse)? Is this ambiguous German 'so halt' less a 'whatever' gesture than a 'because' one?" (61). Benny's nonchalant answer reveals nothing about his decision. He has a similar response when his father, after the trip to Egypt, asks why Benny did it. "Was?", Benny replies, before adding: "Ich weiß nicht." The most he offers is that he "wollte sehen wie es ist ... wahrscheinlich." These cryptic responses provide no meaning for his actions. Nevertheless, Benny's surprising accusation against his parents is absolutely calculated and underscores Haneke's attention to structural rather than psychological explanations.⁷

This coda accentuates a fundamental tenet of the financialized self: embrace risk. Whereas Benny's parents respond to the imminent peril resulting from their son's actions, Benny protects himself from future hazard by strategically employing the incriminating video to reduce the chance of being caught and held accountable for the murder he committed. His video camera records models of both violence and financial strategies that he studies and later employs. It also captures him discussing the crime and cover up; yet, his video postcard from Egypt is

shared only with the audience, as far as we know. The clandestine recording of his parents discussing how to deal with the dead body in their son's closet is his way out, his opportunity to "fly off," and start a new game. The main figures in the trilogy approach risk differently, from suicidal escape to calculated manipulation, and extreme violence is tied to the potential for loss, as they move from destroying their own families to those of others.

Leveraging Violence

In *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, Haneke moves away from the Bressonian close-ups of money exchanging hands featured in the first two films. He shifts the focus to quotidian events at a bank, on the one hand, and the trafficking of a stolen pistol, on the other. The two intersect in the violent conclusion announced at the beginning of the film: "Am 23.12.93 erschöß der 19-jährige Student Maximilian B. in der Zweigstelle einer Wiener Bank drei Menschen und tötete sich kurz darauf selbst mit einem Schuß in den Kopf." This preview suggests a possible bank robbery, but as we eventually learn, the violence that unfolds at this branch has nothing to do with theft. Contrast this with *L'argent*, where a failed bank robbery lands the fuel delivery man turned getaway driver in prison and hastens his descent from honest worker to ruthless murderer.

Without revealing a clear motive for the shooting, Haneke details the events leading up to the massacre that unfolds in the bank. The scenes related to the pistol, the cross puzzle, and the Mikado game are key fragments depicting the conditions that contribute to the film's conclusion. The university student Max first appears in a scene in which he loses a bet of 20 schillings to his roommate Hanno because he is unable to assemble a cross-shaped puzzle in less than a minute. When he does not want to pay, he is reminded that "Wetttschulden sind Ehrensulden." The puzzle returns in the first of two cafeteria scenes. The wager has since increased fivefold to 100 shillings. Failing to solve the puzzle in time, an unhappy loser refuses to pay Max's roommate and destroys the pieces. Max responds with a violent outburst for which he immediately apologizes. This short scene recalls the seemingly uncontrollable physical responses of Bresson's delivery man in *L'argent* when he is "caught" with counterfeit notes and when he threatens a guard in the prison mess hall. More significantly, a witness to Max's eruption is the same person who acquires and then casually delivers the stolen gun to him in the salad bar line. When Max's roommate later shows him a computer program he created based on the cross puzzle, Max enquires about the marketability of the game. The young software developer responds that it is unfortunately too rudimentary. The money-making aspect of the game is limited to those willing to wager on an apparently simple puzzle. The factor of time is the real challenge for players, and they ultimately run out of it. The cross puzzle is not a game of chance but rather one of skill. It favors those who already know the solution and venture to capitalize on it.

The game of Mikado, in contrast, combines chance (how the sticks fall) and skill (how one removes them), as Hanno explains: "Das is' Geschicklichkeit gegen Zufall." Although Max has not played this game in some time, he recalls that attaining the Mikado (emperor) stick can help one win. With the game underway, the roommate suggests a wager involving the pistol, but Max wants his friend's watch. However, the watch has too much sentimental value—a graduation gift from his parents—to risk losing, so the bet gets called off. The proposition suggests that Max is willing to trade the gun for something he could show off publicly. The timepiece may also allude to the beginning of *L'argent*, when the teenage considers selling his watch to cover his debts, but his friend convinces him that counterfeiting money is a better option. In both films, the watch scenes suggest that a different outcome may have been possible, had key figures acted differently. By retaining the pistol, Max has it at his disposal when confronted with circumstances beyond his power at the bank.

The conclusion of *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* brings the film's main figures together in a bank. The fragments leading up to the massacre are set shortly before Christmas at a gas station and a bank across the street. Both locations are busy with customers, and tempers are short. Stuck in traffic while running an errand, Max is pressed for time because he must catch a train to his parents. The turning point comes when Max is short of cash after fueling up and unable to pay with a debit card. The surly gas station attendant directs him to the ATM across the street. Inconvenience turns to irritation as he finds the machine out of service. By the early 1990s, cash machines had become part of the urban landscape (Bátiz-Lazo 137–39). Accordingly, Max expects money to appear when he inserts his bank card and enters a personal identification number. The unexpected yet mundane failure of his transaction leads to the violence that follows. When he cuts the line at the bank to explain his situation to the teller, the unhappy customer he interrupts shoves him to the ground. Circumstances rapidly transform a busy day into an increasingly bad one. Lacking an acceptable form of payment, he goes back to the car and sits there until an impatient patron honks in frustration. At this point, Max casually reenters the bank and shoots indiscriminately. He also fires shots at drivers while returning to the car, where he commits suicide.

Max responds to the contingencies of daily life with deadly force. The weapon in his possession provides a feeling of security in an uncertain world, and faced with unexpected challenges and hostilities, he employs the only leverage he has. With his Mikado in hand, Max enjoys sovereignty for a few moments. Yet, the world of risk quickly returns, and he chooses escape through suicide. Unlike the Schobers in *Der siebente Kontinent*, his victims are not family but strangers. Three images follow the shooting: blood pooling around the security guard, Max dead at the wheel, and a child sitting in a car. The boy is a recently adopted Romanian orphan named Marion. The film begins with his clandestine migration to Austria and follows his path to adoption by a Viennese couple. News segments

are interspersed throughout the film, and the final one begins with the tragedy at the bank: three victims and the shooter died at the scene; while the motive is unknown, it was not a robbery. Is it any consolation, Haneke appears to ask, that the dead are victims of chance rather than of a get rich quick scheme? Of course, one can speculate about alternative scenarios. What if Max had lost his pistol to the bet? What if Max could have paid with cash? What if the ATM had functioned properly? What if the bank customer had not pushed him? However, this is not the narrative Haneke presents. Max not only has a stolen pistol, but he also has it with him on an errand in somebody else's car and, most significantly, he uses it to murder three people and then kill himself.

Escapes from Daily Life and the Bank

Vacations and exotic getaways are significant in each of the trilogy films. In *Der siebente Kontinent*, when the bank clerk asks why the Schobers are closing their account and if they might consider a loan instead, Anna says they are moving to Australia. Haneke's original title for the film was "Australien" (*Der siebente Kontinent* 42). A travel poster advertising a beach scene appears at key moments throughout the film. Kuttentberg interprets the advertisement as "a symbol of an exit strategy" hinting at the pending murder-suicide (161). The poster promotes an escape from daily life, to which most vacationers must eventually return. In the case of the Schobers, however, the distant shore serves not only as a placeholder for their suicide pact but also as a cover story to conceal their resolute goal of self-annihilation. Haneke discloses the full import of the Australian travel poster only belatedly, after the couple has fully executed their plan. In the second film, Benny's parents hastily book an escape to Egypt under the pretense of his grandmother's funeral. There Benny records experiences at tourist attractions and in the hotel as well as a video postcard that acknowledges the cover-up and implicates his parents. This footage may serve as further evidence against them, should he employ it as such. In *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, Marion and his adoptive mother visit the bank just before the shooting transpires to withdraw money for their upcoming holiday. In the car ride over, she teaches him some German words including "Bank" and "Geld." Max, too, wishes he could flee the escalating pressure associated with not having enough money on hand. Just before he enters the bank for the first time, he looks briefly at the travel agency next door, longing to get away, it seems. The images of exotic destinations illustrate the desire to escape mundane existence (the Schobers), relieve unexpected stress (Max), or actually get away with murder (Benny). The primary figures in these films ostensibly have the means to go on holiday, underscoring Haneke's critique of the affluent West. Instead, they choose to destroy themselves, their families, and innocent strangers in perverse attempts to secure their own uncertain worlds.

Max, like the Schobers, chooses an exit with no return, one that eradicates all risk by removing oneself from the world. This suicidal calculus comes at the cost

of human life, not to mention the incalculable effects of those losses. The last film in the trilogy, unlike the first, does not identify all the murder victims. They may include a mother, a father, a grandparent, or another child. We do, however, know that Marion is waiting in the car. Did his mother return him there after witnessing the scuffle between Max and the bank customer? Perhaps she concluded her transactions after Max's initial exit and is running another errand. Was she among those killed in the bank, thus robbing Marion of another guardian? Or will she and her husband continue their new life with him? Haneke leaves her return and the future of this immigrant adoptee open, challenging his audience to reflect critically on the effects of the violence that unfolds in and around the bank. Marion's situation and that of his mother may have a more positive outcome, but this is by no means certain.

The role of the bank and banking varies throughout the trilogy. In *Der siebente Kontinent*, the Schober's visit illustrates the function of the bank as a financial institution that accepts deposits and makes loans. While the emptying of their account is peculiar, the money is theirs to take and do with as they please. Contrast this abundance of cash with Max's banking experience in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*, which underscores the absence of money, particularly when he most needs it. While there is no bank in *Benny's Video*, the title character strategically "position[s] himself as a creditor of last resort" (Vogl 165). In other words, Benny becomes the bank. Expanding on Vogl's analysis of risk, Konings argues that "the neoliberal subject faces the imperative of establishing itself as a bank of sorts" (112). Benny's machinations, once revealed, suggest that he has fully embraced this imperative, applying the necessary leverage to secure his own exposure, on the one hand, and exponentially increasing the substantial risk his parents took to protect their family, on the other. The fully financialized Benny sees the potential risks facing him and does not hesitate to exchange his family for better individual prospects. His actions, though not motivated by money, reflect modern banking, which depends on uncertainty and navigates it by "mak[ing] the unknowability of the future manageable" with the promise of bank money, "our least uncertain bet" (Konings 17).⁸

Conclusion

Following *Der siebente Kontinent* and before the release of *Benny's Video*, Haneke announces his trilogy in a short text titled "Film als Katharsis." He describes the films as "Berichte vom Fortschreiten der emotionalen Vergletscherung meines Landes" and emphasizes their clinical depictions of "Ausnahmefällen" documenting social indifference in modern bourgeois society (89). Haneke concludes the piece by calling for a provocative cinema that focuses viewer attention, fosters critical reflection, and promotes discussion. The director certainly accomplished these goals in both early and later films, as the scope of his inquiry expanded beyond Austria. Haneke's depictions of extreme violence distinguished the trilogy and be-

came a signature of his oeuvre, yet his corresponding representations of money, banking, and financialization in the three films have been largely overlooked.

The primary figures in the trilogy approach money and risk differently. The husband and wife in *Der siebente Kontinent* destroy their savings as part of an absolute withdrawal from society. Unwilling to accept any future risk, they commit murder-suicide with their young daughter but only after methodically destroying all of their property and cash, thus leaving no inheritance for surviving family. Money has no value for the young couple intent on self-annihilation, and they have no reason to invest in the future. The teenager in *Benny's Video*, on the other hand, embraces both money and financialization. He exemplifies the risk-managing, financialized self. With his sights set on the future, he effortlessly moves on from the murder he recently committed and unflinchingly sacrifices his parents to protect himself. Finally, Haneke shows the financialized self run amok in *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*. The university student's attempt to secure himself in an uncertain world with a stolen pistol results in a bank shooting and his suicide, triggered by a shortage of cash and an out-of-service ATM.

Set against the shifting financial landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Haneke's studies in despair, struggle, and anguish illuminate financialization and its effects. The stories he chronicles are exceptional in their violence; however, the increasingly financialized world he portrays is not. In the decades since Haneke's first feature, financial capitalism has expanded across the globe and infiltrated all aspects of life. While the fictionalization of financial culprits, or the financialization of fictional ones like Don Giovanni, often focuses on powerful and wealthy figures, Haneke draws our attention in the trilogy to the financialization of daily life and the individual suffering it can produce.

Notes

¹ The trilogy includes *Der siebente Kontinent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992), and *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994).

² I follow van der Zwan's useful definitions of "finance" and "financial capitalism" as well: "The term *finance* [...] describe[s] the management of money and other assets by households, businesses and governments. *Finance capitalism* or *financial capitalism*, then, denotes a form of capitalism, in which finance has become the dominant function in the economy and has extended its influence to other areas of life (e.g. social and political)" (101n1).

³ On the death of animals in Haneke, see Lawrence.

⁴ Noys relates the scene to "the Freudian fantasy of money as voidable excrement" (144).

⁵ Kahn explains the function of the coupon: "the pre-revolutionary Russian economy was financed by credit in the form of hard currency designated as units of silver and paper credit of different kinds. Debt instruments or obligations such as bonds or vouchers could be issued by local banks or other lending agencies. Some types of promissory notes were printed with attached stubs or tabs on which a sum or percentage would be printed (these were called a *kupon* as opposed to a guaranteed note or *veksel*). Notes of this type were

purchased by borrowers and used as the equivalent of ready cash. The bearer of the coupon could redeem its assigned value on presenting it to the issuer" (Tolstoy 212–13).

⁶ For Martin, the allowance introduces financialization into the home: "The allowance is for learning, not a reward for good behavior. [. . .] The allowance permits engagement with the market, while the private sphere of the household remains unpaid" (63, 66). Recall that a request for an advance on allowance also begins the Tolstoy story and the Bresson film.

⁷ Haneke rejects psychological portraits à la "the bourgeois novel of the nineteenth century which by definition 'explains' and thereby reinforces the existing conditions and right off prevents the exposing of structure" (71 *Fragments* 172).

⁸ Konings underscores the role of bank money: "Of course, modern citizens no longer think of their money as bank obligations; they think of it as legal tender, guaranteed by the state. But money has always remained bank money in a crucial sense: insofar as the state has a 'money printing press,' this is fully bound up with the internalization of banking functions into the machinery of government. The creation of a national currency can only happen through the unification of a banking system through a central bank" (17).

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