The historian knows how vulnerable is the whole texture of facts in which we spend our daily life; it is always in danger of being perforated by single lies or torn to shreds by the organized lying of groups, nations, or classes, or denied and distorted, often carefully covered up by reams of falsehoods or simply allowed to fall into oblivion. Facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established in order to find a secure dwelling place in the domain of human affairs.¹

—Hannah Arendt, *Lying in Politics*

With this chapter, we are back in France, Jules Verne’s home country. In this French story, I look at the ground of difference that separates as well as links the two colonial products Georges Laurent (Daniel Auteuil) and Majid (Maurice Bénichou) in Michael Haneke’s award-winning 2005 film, *Caché (Hidden).*² This space of difference lays bare any claims to a definitive ontological space of Otherness, whose apparent stability in *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours,* anchored a picture of security for the colonizer. The film revolves around the Laurents, who have been receiving anonymous video recordings of the mundane comings and goings of the couple and what appear to be childlike hand drawings. Despite the active involvement of the authorities, the author of these images, their motive, and even when and from where they recorded the images remains unclear to both the viewer and the couple throughout the film.
Immaterial Differences

This last chapter is an amplification and at the same time an extension of the material space that has thus far occupied my attention. In the previous chapters, colonial subjectivity is actualized as a result of its interactions with the physical geography it inhabits. As *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* structures an uncomplicated subjectivity that emanates from, and indeed is dependent upon, colonial structures (both meanings intended), Chamoiseau and Devi’s texts, through a process of restructuring an anchored geography, accentuate the complexities of postcolonial spatial assertions. The two authors problematize the very notion of the passivity of topographical space to portray a physical presence – not only as a register of social change but also as one of the instigators of this change. As I have pointed out before, this topographical space is not an isolated element, instead, anytime evoked it activates an entire matrix of interconnections where, owing to mutual reflexivity, the effects of each change are felt through the entire matrix.

Even as the unfurling of this mutually inflected relationship remains at the center of this chapter, the spatiality it delineates is definitely less tangible. This spatiality will likely cause further consternation among scholars like Chris Philo. Philo is among those who, while commenting on the cultural turn of human geography, bemoan that “we have ended up being less attentive to the more ‘thingy,’ bump-into-able, stubbornly there-in-the-world kinds of matter (the material) with which earlier geographers tended to be more familiar.”3 Joanne Sharp cites Philo’s concerns as an example of “many geographers’ fear of the overly abstract nature of much geography in the wake of the cultural turn which emphasized texts and representations” (74).4 If the fast-paced changes and the ever-expanding disciplinary reach of this turn has provoked fear among geographers, it is not without generating simultaneously a whole plethora of opportunities for other disciplines to reorganize themselves geographically. For instance, one need only look at Kevin Hetherington’s *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics*5 to understand how a corollary of this un-thingy-fication of geography is also a productive spatialization of the cultural landscape. When Hetherington speaks of identity using expressions like “theoretical decentering”; “layering”; “locality”; “outside”; “mapped out”; “position”; and indeed goes on to state that “everywhere can be both a centre and a margin” (23-4), we see how important the inflection of geographical categories has become toward understanding each other and the cultural landscape one inhabits.
Locating Caché

It would not be wrong to state for Haneke’s entire work what Monica Filimon and Fatima Naqvi say about his television production, *Variation*. The director relies “on physical spaces in his film to make larger claims about human interactions” (244). In varied ways the already complex spatial question in Haneke’s cinema is even more pointed for *Caché*. After all, this Paris-based film displays how the bloodshed related to the Algerian war of independence, fought elsewhere and in another time, continues to rend everyday life right here and right now in the very heart of the French republic. Several studies have attempted to understand the violence inherent to the relationship between Georges and Majid as a function of their geographical locations. Their lives are intertwined along national, urban, racial and colonial divisions. For instance, Kate Ince’s essay in the edited volume *The Cinema of Michael Haneke: Europe Utopia* (edited by McCann and Sorfa) analyzes *Caché* to show how Haneke’s “use and realization of existential or lived space” is “crucial to the atmosphere of anxiety and tension generated throughout” Haneke’s cinema (86).

The private (or domestic) space and the colonial violence it produces within a racially charged society have attracted much attention in spatial analyses of *Caché*. Brianne Gallagher, for instance, has analyzed the violence embedded in the division of the “private space of the home” and “the public space of the media” (19). *Caché* is “transmorphing the home space into a site of contention connected to colonialist histories” (Gallagher; 25). Michael Cowan also notes that “in the era of immigration” where “private space is treated as a defensive shell against the outside world and the public space of encounters,” *Caché* brings the “two acts of violence” – state violence and the violence of the domestic family space – “into congruous relation by the film’s plot” (118). Similarly, while discussing the “unjust spatial-affective economy” of Paris, Joy Schaefer shows how *Caché* brings attention to “the systematic dumping of negative social emotions, such as fear and disgust, onto bodies and spaces that are marked as ‘bad’” (52). In other words, the city center designates the good space and the French banlieue (the racially marked suburbs) becomes bad. *Caché*’s experiments with cameras and editing, through which it “re-maps off-screen space in newly disconcerting ways” and “constructs a multiplicity of invisible spaces” have opened up newer ways of conceiving cinematic spatiality (7). Indeed, Peter Eisenman, who also analyzes this “probing of filmic conventions,” concludes that *Caché* offers the possibility of redefining our association with space. Eisenmann shows
how *Caché* changes the very meaning of human sense of vision to open up “perhaps more than any other visual medium, new possibilities for architecture” (129).\(^\text{13}\)

These studies show how topographical space in Haeneke’s work is far from passive. Spatial divisions are not only registers of social change – they are also instigators of this change. This chapter extends the meaning of this *thingy*-fied space that the above studies focus on to understand its implication for the human identity.\(^\text{14}\) For the purposes of this current study, *Caché*’s cinematic technique displays how the violence of the Algerian war is embedded in the architecture of the larger space of colonial identity that one inhabits along with the colonial Other.

It is just this kind of spatiality, where the human subject locates itself and its identity in relation to others, that Elizabeth Grosz explores in her essay “Space, Time, and Bodies.”\(^\text{15}\) Grosz follows feminists like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray in order to understand how “the sex [by extension race and class] is assigned to the body” and how “bodies are assigned a single sex” (84). To show how human subjectivity is able to locate itself in the space that its body occupies, Grosz borrows from Roger Caillois’ sociological and entomological spatial analyses. It is crucial to remember that for the insect world “mimicry is a consequence of the representation of space” (89), and that mimicry, which involves imitating “either other insects or their natural environment” (88), takes place because of the way the insect perceives space around it. The insect mimics and adapts itself based on the way it perceives the existence of this space.

As a corollary to the mimicry in the insect world, Grosz shows that for the human subject to “take up a position as a subject, he [subject] must be able to locate himself as being located in the space occupied by his body” (89). To elaborate just exactly what this interrelation between subjectivity and space might be Grosz turns to Caillois’ example of a psychotic individual who experiences a dissociation between the self and space, and who is “unable to locate where he should be” (89) and instead “he may look at himself from outside himself, as another might” (89-90). Grosz quotes Caillois:

*I know where I am, but I do not feel as if I’m at the spot where I find myself[...]* the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. (Caillois 1984; 30)\(^\text{16}\)
Psychosis, then, is “what Caillois describes as the ‘depersonalization by assimilation to space’” (Grosz 90). Such an individual loses its positionality, and ceases “as it were, to occupy a perspectival point” (Grosz 90), to merge with its perceived space. This psychotic does not belong any more to its body as a unique point in space; a belonging in space that is the “condition under which the subject has a perspective on the world” (89). This subject instead, abandons itself to being spatially located by/as others. The primacy of one’s own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another for whom the subject is merely a point in space and not the focal point around which space is organized. (90)

It is to be understood that it is thus that the “gaze of another” imposes sex, class and race. The subject conforms to its space in the manner that it perceives this space to exist. So, when talking about being “spatially located by/as others,” the spatiality that Grosz evokes is the kind of space that this chapter premises its arguments on as it looks at the two contemporaneous products of Majid and Georges, who are spatially located “by/as” each other. When talking of a psychotic individual who loses itself in the backdrop, becoming just a point in this space and not the point having its own perspective, the important thing to understand is the definition that emerges of the subject and its relationship to the kind of space it represents:

The representation of space is thus a correlate of one’s ability to locate oneself as the point of origin or reference of space: the space represented is a complement of the kind of subject who occupies it. (Grosz 90)

The colonial subject, in the way that it locates itself as well as others (racially, sexually or otherwise), is a function of the way it perceives the identitarian space that surrounds it.

Frantz Fanon’s work, notably Peau noire, masques blancs (Black Skin, White Masks), lays out how both the colonizer and the colonized exist as the psychological detritus of colonialism. For instance, as Jock McCulloch7 points out: in “[Black Skin, White] Masks Fanon’s basic thesis is that the colonised Antillean and his white master live within the grip of a psychoexistential complex” (64). In Grosz’s elaboration of Caillois’ work the psychotic individual appears as an example to demonstrate how human subjectivity is actually an embodied
subjectivity existing in relation to space. The psychotic is not the principle preoccupation of Grosz’s text.

This example nonetheless furnishes a fortuitous similarity at a literal level. Georges is a colonial “psychotic” individual existing “within the grip of a psycho-existential complex” that McCulloch uncovers in Fanon’s work. Metonymically representing the French nation, Georges can only locate himself and others according to the identitarian space of colonialism that surrounds him. Georges, then, functions as the mimicking psychotic who conforms to the identitarian space of colonialism, as he perceives it to exist. In this space, he defines his place of comfort and stability, in relation to, and at the expense of, the colonized Majid, who has to exist as the sanitized Other, its validity determined by the extent to which it can continue to uphold the mirage of the French republican family.

This chapter is an amplification of the material space because it follows just the kind of spatialized understanding that Philo is apprehensive about, to analyze the space of difference that the two colonial subjects, Georges and Majid, occupy. One should not see this chapter as a simple juxtaposition of two separate entities of geopolitical space and another space of ontology. Instead, what it furnishes is further proof of the intertwining coexistence of the human subject and physical space. Humans occupy space. Humans occupy space in relation to each other. Humans understand each other as a function of their spatial knowledge. The “space” in the “synchronic space of difference” that I analyze is not just a metaphoric placeholder for an ambiguous entity. This is a purposefully deployed “space,” because it displays how our relationship to others is inflected with our knowledge acquired through our relationship to the physical world.

It was in anticipation of the arguments I present in this chapter that I had initiated the discussion in the section titled “Postmodern Spaces – Material Histories” of my introductory chapter. I will not restate the debate about the imical relationship between material readings of space and the kind of linguistic vocabulary of difference that I deploy in my readings here. In this book, which claims to read space in the wake of colonialism, it would be unthinkable to concentrate uniquely on the “thingy”-fied geography and not see how spatiality has pervaded our understanding of the world and of each other.

As synchronic elements, both the colonizer and the colonized form a mutually influencing equation of colonial malaise that is no more than a symptom (albeit an important one) of a conditioning process whose coordinates extend over time. The extent to which the two colonial entities are implicated in each other’s formation, and how exactly, can only be understood diachronically; as such the thrust also remains on understanding Caché as an intersection where
the space of the human subject interacts with human history. In other words, following Foucault, this insistence on analyzing the synchronic space is not a “rejection of the proven powers of the historical imagination, nor is it a substitution of a spatialism for historicism.” In a way, this chapter follows Foucault’s plea “for opening up the historical and tightly interwoven sociological imaginations to a deeper appreciation for the human life.” With “interwoven” as the key term, I would call this chapter an attempt to read the human subject as both spatialized and historicized – as the result of a process that is formed over history and in relation to other subjectivities, all of whose aggregates form the contemporary moment. In this process all are connected to each other in a movement of perpetual change, each space defining as well as being defined by others. Implicit in this process of countercolonialism is the impossibility of the definition of a subject. Or, rather, the assertion that all definitions are subjective. One cannot ever find the meaning of these images when it is lies and subterfuge that define the familial metaphor that is Caché.

White Lies

Georges suspects Majid, a long-forgotten childhood association of Algerian origin, of sending the images that have been terrorizing his family, and goes to confront him in his apartment in an underprivileged French neighborhood. After a heated exchange where he threatens Majid with serious consequences if the recordings do not stop, Georges calls up Anne (Juliette Binoche), his wife, from outside the apartment building, and lies to her by saying that the apartment was uninhabited. What the spectator witnesses (knowing that Georges has indeed met Majid in the same apartment a short while ago) is only one of the many familial deceptions. For the Laurents, who have been leading a bourgeois-bohème life of relative material ease in a house full of books in a well-off part of Paris, this lie and its eventual discovery by Anne that provokes an argument between the two, is a particularly important moment effectively displaying the widening fissures in the household. Familial fissures that are central to the film as well as to this chapter.

One finally learns of the colonial and the familial connection between Majid and Georges. When they were both children, Majid’s parents used to work for Georges’ parents. As a result of the violence unleashed on 17 October 1961 by the Parisian police on demonstrators who were protesting the French
government’s war in Algeria, hundreds of people of Algerian descent disappeared. Among them were Majid’s parents. What followed the massacre was the French government’s denial of this crime for many decades afterwards. While later I shall discuss how it was only after an extended contestation in 1997 that the French government finally did open up its archives, that too only selectively, suffice it to say for the moment that this covering up of a colonial crime is the kind of political lie that provoked Haneke to make Caché.

In the meantime, Georges’ parents adopted the orphaned Majid. Resentful of his parents’ decision and envious of the attention given Majid, the boy Georges through his lies ensures that his parents send the orphan to the charge of the authorities. As Caché opens, Georges Laurent has attained fame as a successful literary talk-show host. He leads his bourgeois-bohème life in a Paris townhouse with his wife Anne and son Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky). Majid, it would be found out later, has been leading a humble life in one of the low-cost, high rise apartments located on the periphery of Paris and of French society.

Both the childhood lie to get rid of Majid, the adopted Algerian “brother,” and the national and colonial lie that obscures the reality of 17 October 1961 are the kind of lies that Hannah Arendt writes about. In Lying in Politics, Arendt provides an explanation that can be adapted to understand Caché. This film depicts “single lies,” the kind that Georges advances, and “the organized lying” of a nation, working together to deny the colonial reality of violence related to the Algerian war, perpetrated in Paris, the very heart of the French republic. In this 1972 essay, while discussing lying in general in political history, Arendt presents the example of the Vietnam War and the obfuscation of reality by American administrators. A war, which one must remember, the United States eventually lost. American bureaucrats enacted “pseudoscientific theories” (Young-Bruehl 9) and denied facts that contradicted their “scientific-sounding assertions,” all with the hope that “reality would conform seamlessly to their lies” (Young-Bruehl 9) and they would be able to win the Vietnam War. In deploying this “novel variety of lying” (Young-Bruehl 9), the American bureaucrats were replicating the kind of national lies that France perpetrated regarding their own colonial reality.

Caché, then, is a film that revolves around the lies that deny Majid his place in both the Laurent family and the French republican family. Just as Georges lies to his parents to have the Algerian kin removed from his household, so does the French government purge the memory of the colonial violence related to the Algerian war that took place in Paris. One of the questions this chapter attempts to answer is: How does Caché’s cinematic technique engage with this travesty of colonial history, elaborated to support the fiction of a French nation? This intangible space of
difference, where one articulates the formation of a postcolonial subjectivity without falling prey to the temptation of definitively defining the colonial sign, helps mark Majid’s presence as a hidden member of the family and serves as a reminder that despite all attempts to erase him, traces of Majid’s exclusion surround us.

It is thus that I would like to read the clandestine recordings of the Laurents’ everyday life: just as attempts at finding out the colonial truth, suppressed and mangled, can only end in a cul-de-sac so must the riddle of who sends the tapes remain unresolved. Yet, the presence of these tapes furnishes proof of an ignored historical reality of colonialism. This proof that a colonial past did exist also becomes the first piece of the puzzle that holds the potential to reconstitute meaning. A meaning that, given the individual and the state lies that Arendt talks about, stands forever disfigured. Nonetheless implicit also in the film is a demand to attempt a reading of this disfigured meaning, as subjective as it might be.

Hidden Agenda

Although Georges is convinced of Majid’s involvement in these drawings and recordings, there is no proof to substantiate Georges’ accusations. Even after Majid’s suicide, the cinematic technique of Caché leaves one with the impression that the clandestine recordings of the Laurents’ lives have continued. Toward the end, an apparent calm has been restored as Georges is shown taking some pills and going off to sleep. Apparent, because the culminating scene that follows not only forecloses any possibility of a precise solution but also adds another layer to the intrigue. In this last scene for the very first time in the film one sees Georges’ son, Pierrot, and Majid’s son (Walid Afkir), talking to each other in front of Pierrot’s school. If the dialogues had been audible one could have researched the possibility of them having colluded with each other, but Haneke refuses to fulfill a responsibility that the director believes lies with the spectator:

J’ai écrivé (sic) un vrai dialogue entre les deux [fils] mais je ne vais pas le dire. … Qu’est-ce qu’ils parlent ça doit rester une question pour le spectateur.20

[I wrote a real dialogue between the two [sons] but I won’t reveal it…. What they are talking about is a question for the viewer.]
Distinctly called into the film’s intrigue, the viewer of the film unmistakably understands through Haneke’s explication of this last scene what has been obvious throughout the rest of the film. The film titled Caché (Hidden) might not have disclosed the author of the tapes, but through Haneke’s invitation to scrutinize the secret dialogue, it implicates the viewer into their authorship. As if in a way replicating the identitarian space between Majid and Georges, the space between the viewer and the film now performatively plays out our relationship with the watched subject of the cinematic screen, reminding us that we shall forever remain implicated in the subject of our gaze.

Before I hasten to embrace the director’s refusal to elaborate on this secret as the dominant model through which I could read the refusal to acknowledge other such hidden secrets of the film, perhaps the question one should ask here should be about its title – the overtly hidden element of the film. This title, Ranjana Khanna rightly points out, “asks us to investigate that which is hidden” (242).²¹

In Haneke’s refusal to elaborate on the last sequence between the two sons, there is an indication that “crucial plot information was apparently hidden within the background activity of the image” (223).²² While the last sequence forces us to read that which has been purposefully secreted, the slow unraveling of Georges’ guilt and its connection to a historical event both demand to be read as hiddens – in the sense of being obscure, of not being obvious. In the film’s fictional world, the secret has taken the place of prominence, and we may well try to divine the links to a historical event behind the guilt Georges has been hiding; but following Haneke’s refusal we are never to know for sure that which has been purposefully hidden.

Apart from its adjectival value, Caché as the past participle of the French verb “to hide” further resists any attempts at reconstituting the meaning of the title. One sees neither the subject of hiding – the object that was hidden – nor the subject of the sentence to which this past particle belongs. Who hid what, in other words, is the dominant question. Caught in a bind between the past participle and the adjective, the hidden then appears as a perpetual process that bridges the past to the present and obscures the boundaries between the subject and the object such that one doing the hiding (who, as the unknown subject of the sentence is already hidden) could also be its unknown object. Paradoxically, with what was hidden remaining unknown, whether in the past or the present, only the certainty of something being hidden dominates our understanding of the title. Further reading of Caché will continuously evoke this ambiguity of the secret but without giving any means to conclude if it is hidden or secreted, nor
to say if this hidden does exist but is not meant to be found, like the dialogue between the two sons. In other words, one engages in full awareness that all enunciations of this hidden past are necessarily subjective. One cannot ever recreate it and can only furnish tentative responses. Such complications are not very far from the central intrigue of the film, in which the hidden is present at almost all turns.

The film’s many instances of uncovering (Anne soon learns that Georges lied about meeting Majid) are largely overshadowed by the number of unresolved hiddens. The most obvious among them is the authorship of the clandestine recordings. The second could very well relate to Majid’s role. Is there a link between Anne’s potential infidelity and the guiding intrigue of the film? The forever-secret answers to many such questions then mark the film, making the subject-less act of hiding even more ambiguous. Knowing that the hidden exists instantly makes evident the necessity of questioning, but the answers are nowhere to be found.

The accumulation of questions only leads the viewer into an ever-widening blind spot where the number of hidden elements makes it difficult to define even the very nature of hiddenness. Hence, the film as an accruing puzzle only singles out Caché, that is to say hid/hidden, as the one known fact. It is not the whodunit in this thriller-like film that one needs to worry about, but what exactly happened or rather the purposeful hiding of that which has happened. This is perhaps what makes the film resist “attempts to read it as a puzzle to be decoded.”

Jennifer Szalai expresses justifiable indignation at the number of critics who respond with unequivocal solutions to questions that Haneke poses and allows to “linger without providing many answers.” At the same time, given that the film’s “silences are just as informative as its utterances,” it should not be a surprise that “it elicits a wide range of responses from so many different perspectives” (74). The viewer then experiences the hidden as an all-pervasive element – Caché’s only reality. The manifest invitation in the title to fill in both the subject and the object position of the verb “cacher” is what allows me to read the different “hiddens” in my own manner.

Apart from the film’s links to the October 1961 Paris Massacre and the purposeful omissions as starting points dictated by the director, there are other “hiddens” and their answers in the film. My attempts at calling the viewer into the equation or trying to focus on the cinematic images as an allegory of history may or may not uncover something. However, connecting the film to debates current in the postcolonial world will validate at the very least the relevance of
attempts at answering such questions. Placing myself in the position of the reading subject and of choosing among the many “hiddens” allows me to bring out the connections with the all too present subject of colonialism in a film released in the twenty-first century. Additionally, this reading also reveals me through my choices in the same degree as it will investigate the hidden.

Colonial Family; National Lies

Writing about the “colonial family romance” Françoise Vergès has pointed out how the “rhetoric of the French revolutionary community of brothers paradoxically justified the subjugation of peoples in the name of fraternité, liberté, égalité.”26 Vergès is writing about, of course, how one deploys familial metaphors from the French Revolution to promote colonialism in order to uplift the apparently disadvantaged brethren in the colonies. In elucidating this paradox of colonialism as “the invention of men constructing France as the parents of the colonized” (5); a France which then leads to their destructive subjugation, Vergès might as well have been thinking of the dysfunctional (colonial as well as conjugal) family romance in Caché. This colonization, which for Vergès “was the expansion of republican brotherhood” (4), is very literally reflected in the childhood relationship of Majid and Georges who, entwined in the brotherhood of colonialism, nearly became brothers. If the colonial fiction was establishing an unequal family for France, what Caché reveals through cinematic fiction in its fragmentation of human relations is that this family existed as nothing but a racial construct, whose presence was available in the very heart of Paris.

As the war in Algeria raged on, on 17 October 1961 people of Algerian origin demonstrated against the French government’s colonial policy in Paris. Maurice Papon, the then head of Parisian police, ordered a violent reprisal against the demonstrators. Indeed, that the exact number of casualties until date remains unknown speaks volumes about the uncertainty surrounding this colonial moment, which became the key to Caché. We know, as Georges reminds us, that “Il semble que les parents de Majid étaient de ceux-là” [‘Majid’s parents were apparently among those who disappeared’].

The definitive blow dealt on 17 October 1961 was undoubtedly the most shocking moment, and abundantly displayed how the “fraternal bond dreamed by metropolitan brothers was affected by colonialism and its logic of racism”
(Vergès 5). However, administrative actions and communications aimed solely at controlling the movement of French Muslims were already generating the hate that culminated in these killings.

What happened on 17 October 1961 was not only that “tens of thousands of Algerian demonstrators marching in disciplined rank through the heart of the capital in protest against police repression”27 were the target of state reprisal. In addition to the fact that this was, as Jim House and Neil MacMaster assert, “the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history” (Paris 1), this massacre also brought forth a deep-seated administrative racism. Desirous of containing the activities of “Algerian terrorists” who had been increasingly challenging the French police, Maurice Papon proclaimed a communiqué limiting the movement of Muslims:

En vue de mettre un terme sans délai aux agissements criminels des terroristes algériens, des mesures nouvelles viennent d’être décidées par la préfecture de police […] il est conseillé de la façon la plus pressante aux travailleurs musulmans algériens de s’abstenir de circuler la nuit dans les rues de Paris et de la banlieue parisienne, et plus particulièrement de 20h 30 à 5h 30 du matin.28

[With the objective of putting an end to the criminal actions of Algerian terrorists, new measures have been initiated by the police headquarters […] Algerian Muslim workers are urged to refrain from moving about during night-time in the streets of Paris and in the Parisian suburbs, in particular from 8:30 p.m. to 5:30 a.m.]

This initial proclamation is a cautionary warning of what is in store for “Muslims,” who are clubbed together with “Algerian terrorists,” all of whom when being selectively asked to observe a curfew are at an obvious and a significant remove from the rest of the French family. Furthermore, this collective punishment meted out to a group of people officially recognized as French could only be exercised by following a principle of physical segregation:

Cette mesure est fondée sur la responsabilité collective d’une catégorie de citoyens considérés officiellement comme Français […] pour distinguer un Français musulman d’Algérie d’un Français dit de souche, les policiers se fient à l’apparence physique, au faciès. Le couvre-feu, fondé sur la ségrégation, institué donc le racisme. (Einaudi 86)
[This measure is based on the principle of collective responsibility of a category of citizens officially considered as French [...] to differentiate a French Muslim from Algeria from a so-called native French person, police rely on physical appearance and profiling. The curfew, based on segregation, then institutionalizes racism.]

Papon’s attempt at asserting his position presumably against only “Algerian terrorists” in effect reveals French Muslims as nothing more than a categorization distinct from the non-Algerian French. For French police, the French Muslims from Algeria were very clearly (and perhaps had always been) under suspicion. Should it be a surprise then that soon thereafter the Parisian police killed (or perhaps committed a fratricide against) hundreds of Algerians protesting against the government? In taking the twentieth-century “gradual erosion” in Karen Jacobs’ account of “vision’s key role in the unfolding narrative of modernity” at a literal level, one does have reason to be surprised by the contradictorily dominant role vision played in this colonial exercise at the start of the sixties. This authority of the visual sets the tone for Caché to question its validity – not in the way that would attempt a retelling of this story, but instead a questioning of the very paradigm that determines the operation of the visual. Haneke’s personal investment in the manipulative powers of the image already tells us that Caché too, much like his other films, is going to explore the role of the image as much as it portrays the aftermath of the dismantling of the colonial family, which (re) orphans Majid.

I hesitate to call Majid’s exit from the care of Georges’ family that follows his parents’ disappearance his “second orphaning.” The simultaneous collapse of the colonial familial delusion actually signals his third orphaning. One should read Majid as symptomatic and representative of the many hundreds who were treated to Maurice Papon’s segregationist techniques: expatriated to France and then cut off from belonging to the French national family.

In the context of France trying to sort out a tumultuous relationship with Algeria, and widespread violence in the early nineteen-sixties punctuating debates about the colony’s future vis-à-vis France, Georges’ childhood rejection of his adoptive brother stands as a metaphoric reminder of the failure of a dysfunctional “family romance” of the French Republic. Confronted with the possibility of admitting a sibling to the household, Georges’ inability to share (“Il fallait que je partage tout” [‘I had to share everything’]) signals a definitive end to the fictional tale of fraternité. A child’s lie thus perpetuates and colludes with the national lie.
At this moment, Majid’s destiny becomes one with the Algerians. Implicated in an imagined relationship, with Georges’ metaphoric refusal their erasure from the colonial family, following Papon’s rejection, is complete. Georges’ hidden guilt has given us an individual element of a larger discursive pattern that one needs to read and understand through him. This in no way promises a definitive solution, rather a possibility of speaking about the myth of the larger “family romance” through one localized lie.

For decades after the massacre, successive French governments not only refused to acknowledge it but also actively denied the massacre ever took place. One treated any departure from the acceptable narrative of a happy French republican family as a dirty family secret. Although Papon’s actions did later receive widespread condemnation after a public trial against him, the official denial has been a part of the memory of 17 October 1961 massacre. It is this silence surrounding an unaddressed guilt about the rejection of Algerians in Paris that propelled Haneke to address the colonial angle of Georges Laurent’s lie about his adoptive brother.

This lie, which later evolves into Georges’ many willful distortions (“petits mensonges” ['small lies'], Serge Toubiana calls them in his interview with Haneke), falls on a continuum of exclusionary identarian thinking based on the purposeful selective exclusion of the past. This denial of history defines the operational dynamics of the French colonial household and is pivotal to Caché. In 2005, the year Caché was released, 17 October 1961 was already over forty years old, and there had been only a sketchy reference in France to what Martine Beugnet calls this “blind spot” (228) in the history of the violent repression that forms the essential backdrop for the film. The initial reluctance to recognize and the subsequent exposure of the culpability of the French authorities are two moments that testify to a change – from denial to acknowledgement – of which Caché is an example. That Haneke can release this film in 2005 recognizes the relative willingness to discuss this topic, but that has not always been the case. To a certain extent, despite Haneke’s contemporary efforts, even today, as Catherine Wheatley rightly points out, “the subject remains taboo” (34).

The role of the French government in promulgating various laws and regulations to hamper the unraveling of facts that could shed light on the extent of the French police’s involvement in the massacre illustrates the mechanism underpinning Caché’s association with the past. House and MacMaster describe in detail how the French government refused to divulge many pieces of information pertinent to understanding 17 October 1961. Toward the end of 1997, under growing pressure from the French media, the initial restrictions placed by
the French law on archives were lifted; however, the French government soon resumed curtailing access to historical facts. The “Socialist led government was backtracking or acting in a secretive manner [...] Historians were still not allowed to check [...] through direct access to the original documents, except for three hand-picked historians” (Paris 8-9). Although many incriminating details regarding this massacre did emerge during the trial against Papon for the crimes he committed against humanity during World War II, amnesty “laws concerning the Algerian war would protect him from any conviction relating to his propagation of and participation in violence at that time” (Khanna 240).

Just as the simple search for a resolution to the crimes committed in the past is negated, so does the question of what happened in Georges’ past remain elusive in the movie. Haneke’s film does not provide a resolution but opens the door to an alternate ending than the one this story has been mired in. The film allows us to explore pathways that acknowledge the purposeful ignorance of the very subject so palpably present in the film. It also allows us to bring forth the hidden guilt associated with a colonial past.

Haneke’s treatment is very clearly in conversation with the “historical amnesia” and the “blind spot” (228) that Beugnet comments upon while describing France’s treatment of 17 October 1961. “J’étais super choqué” [‘I was super shocked’], Haneke comments in his interview with Toubiana, “comment on peut avoir...deux cent morts qui sont dans la Seine et personne parle de ça pendant des années ?” [‘How can we have ... two hundred dead people in the Seine and no one talks about it for years?’].

The search that Haneke is alerting to is not for the reasons why these people were floating dead in the Seine, nor is it for the source of the conflict. Neither does his utter disbelief at the massacre translate into activist strategies to counter history-altering efforts like the (eventually unsuccessful) 2005 French law that required schools to show the positive side of French colonialism. Nor is it about counterbalancing the preceding silence by providing elucidation on the facts of the event. Rather, it is to bring to the fore a story of guilt. As Haneke told Christopher Sharrett during an interview (Cineaste; summer 2003), the film is “about the French occupation of Algeria on a broad level, but more personally is a story of guilt and the denial of guilt” (quoted in Wheatley 34).

The guilt and its denial are historical in nature, of which I would say 1961 is only an important punctuation mark that destabilized the foundations of the colonial household. Even today, the French government’s desire to control and dominate its colonial past attests to Maurice Halbwachs’ claim that “the past is constructed not objectively but as myth, in the sense not of fiction, but of a
past constructed collectively by a community in such a way as to serve the political claims of that community.\textsuperscript{36} Georges’ unraveling, while only a single event, is singularly important because it gives us access to the dynamics of historical hiding (and the hiding of history) as represented in \textit{Caché}. Here, when talking about its dissolution, I can discuss the unfolding of this past and its fundamentally irreconcilable relationship with the present.

**Colonial Past; Cinematic Present**

The more I revisit \textit{Caché}, the more I am intrigued by Haneke’s choice of not making an explicit connection with the Algerian War. Haneke answers all too simply a question Toubiana asks about why only a few words in the film connect it to the Algerian war: “Je voulais pas appuyer sur ce point-là” [‘I did not wish to highlight that point’]. It must be remembered that the Algerian war was perhaps one of the most violent battles for independence in modern history – French or otherwise. More importantly, why despite its centrality to Georges-Majid relationship, does Haneke purposefully occlude any reference to the war or the 1961 massacre? What is one to make of this authorial omission and the film’s relationship to the colonial past? \textit{Caché} figures as an acknowledgement of occlusion, which also becomes the first proof of the existence of that which remains hidden. In a Derridian move, the \textit{Caché} in the title finds its relevance in signaling an absence, thereby also making it possible to accept and to approach the buried and the hidden from the past. Michel Laronde organizes “postcolonial literatures according to the nature of their ties with the French nation, with its literature and with the French language.”\textsuperscript{37} I cannot find among the three categories of “the new national literatures, the literatures of ‘contact,’ and the literatures of immigration” one that would accommodate \textit{Caché}. This is not to fault Laronde, whose article looks at the “Literature(s) of Immigration in France” (181-2); instead it is to point to a new space of articulation that revels in a (con)fusión of boundaries – both temporal as well as spatial – producing a multiplicity of discourses. \textit{Caché}, a film about an unknown and unknowable past, is then a case that escapes textbook definitions.

It is because of this insistent simultaneous absence and presence of borders that \textit{Caché} hides and constantly beckons us to uncover the many answers possible to Khanna’s question: “what, exactly is caché” (237)? This sort of performative
presence in engaging both the temporal and the spatial axes stands not only as an example of a (atypical) postcolonial work but also as a reflection back that constantly seeks to change the meaning of the ever-evolving terms colonial and postcolonial. *Caché*, a film about an unknowable past, questions the postcolonial while participating in it and thus, I would argue, postulates an unlimited world determined by limitless boundaries.

The relevance of the unease caused by the video cassettes sent to Georges, which nullify the semblance of calm and stability in Georges’ bourgeois-bohème lifestyle, extends much beyond his household. No more can such fixed definitions as those of the colonizer and the colonized be taken for granted in a new world defined by an unstable sign – this is the fundamental transformation that I read in the film and see as evident from the opening sequence itself. The sequence I discuss below is the very first montage of the film, which from a temporal perspective shows how *Caché* straddles over two spaces. It has become impossible to dissociate the past from the present. The past appears as a constant of the everyday – not as something that precedes it and is over and done with, but as the all-pervasive element that marks much of the film.

The first sequence serves as an allegory of this film’s presentation of the relationship between the past and the present. A scene where Georges watches himself being watched dissolves the colonial binary. Answers to the colonial question are not found in the further reductive definitions of the Other. Instead, the focus shifts to a destabilized self that anchors itself on to the Other. As if already to prepare the background for the familial metaphor that I have been drawing upon, the very first sequence – which recounts the destabilization of Georges’ life – centers on his townhouse, the supposed locus of his familial stability and security. This townhouse instead has been securing them inside, making them thus “prisoners of their own making, or at least of their own circumstances.” That these characters are imprisoned “literally behind bars, and bars” is apparent in the presentation of their townhouse: “the composition of shots of its exterior puts its vertical barred windows center frame; horizontal bars cut across shots; the iron gate clangs (216).”

Ezra and Sillars have rightly pointed out that the first long establishing shot “disrupts our expectations” by not following “cinematic conventions through the length of take, the static camera and the increasingly ambient noise” (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 218). The film opens with a well-lit static shot of a townhouse (Fig. 1), with sparse passing traffic and the chattering of birds making for some ambient noise. There is a jump cut, with the same house being filmed toward the evening with reduced lighting from a different perspective and with reduced ambient noise (Fig. 2). In this second shot, Daniel Auteuil walks out of
the house. A profile wide pan shot follows him across the street and back into the house, where after following his wife in, he locks up the door. The sequence cuts back to the well-lit frontal static camera of the townhouse.

It is only when the moving images of this static shot stop and are being forwarded that the viewer has the first inkling of watching a recording within a film. All this while two voices – Auteuil’s and Binoche’s – continue having a conversation both off and on camera. With the next cut, when the cinematic camera moves inside the Laurents’ living room (Fig. 3), the viewer finally realizes that the opening shot of the film was the work of a hidden camera and it is only the

Figure 1: *Caché*’s opening shot. Laurents’ townhouse. Still from Michael Haneke’s *Caché*, 2006, 00:02:30. DVD.

Figure 2: Georges Laurent (Daniel Auteuil) walking out of his house as Anne (Juliette Binoche) watches. Still from Michael Haneke’s *Caché*, 2006, 00:03:07. DVD.

Figure 3: Georges and Anne watching the clandestine video. Still from Michael Haneke’s *Caché*, 2006, 00:05:01. DVD.
second dimly-lit pan shot that followed Georges, which was the first non-clandestine visual of the film. One also needs to bookmark this opening sequence as representative of many other similar moments where it is only retrospectively that the viewer is able to state definitively if the visuals on the screen belong to the linear cinematic camera or are the product of some previously recorded video.

I could have hastened to point out from the very beginning what the viewer establishes soon afterwards: that these shots belonging to two different moments of the day (the well-lit shot belongs to clandestine recording from a few hours ago; dimly-lit shots belong to the current narrative) form a mise en abyme of a couple watching a video recording of themselves, but that would have restricted the sequence to only one reading.

The clandestine images overlap onto the narrative flow in such a way that these images seem, despite the editorial jump cut, at least initially to be very much a part of a linear narrative and to form together a coherent filmic sequence. It is only once the mise en abyme becomes clear that one can see that there are two distinct shots of the same house at two different times of the day, and also that the opening shot of the film is in fact a recording from the past being replayed in the Laurents’ living room. It lays bare a perceptible lack of temporal continuity between them.

What we have then is the emergence of two distinct narratives, not necessarily oppositional but distinct nonetheless in a way that raises questions about temporal unity and the relationship between the past and the present. This confusion about the two narratives needs to exist, neither explained nor emphasized, but just to be there for the viewer to realize that the “video image does not so much ‘puncture’ through [...] but rather weaves itself” into the narrative. For why else would Haneke shoot “the entire feature in High Definition format” (Beugnet 230), erasing the lines between the clandestine and the narrative video? Using the same format creates the possibility of reading the two as both a single sequence as well as two distinct sequences. They could form a single continuous narrative and two discrete narratives at the same time. “This questioning of the status of the image – both its temporality and its truth value – is repeated throughout *Caché*” (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 218). In other words, the destabilization of temporal unity that remains the deciding motif throughout the film emerges from the very first sequence.39 Georges is made to reckon with a past that remanifests itself at the least expected moment. This dynamic establishes the inseparability of the past from the present, and simultaneously allows an insight into the opposition that Georges’ present faces from the violence of the colonial past.

When the first of the video cassettes (also the very first sequence of the film) of these very bars that form the exterior of the house finds its way in, one
Out of Place: French Family at (Algerian) War

has introduced the virus that will undo this semblance of security. Breaking through, it not only conveys the outside to the sheltered inside but also brings the past into the present. If, according to Beugnet, one needs to read the gaze of the video image in *Caché* as the “objectifying, mechanical yet voyeuristic stare of the surveillance camera” (228), then the (colonial) household is shaken for good. As a sequence that provides the beginning of the disturbance caused by the clandestine recordings of Georges’ life, these shots also establish the lack of temporal unity and the constant question mark about the authorship of visuals that remain recurrent tropes throughout the film.

Georges watching himself as someone watched him earlier in the day is a forceful re-inscription into the present of Georges’ memory; a memory that has been unwittingly colluding with the history of colonialism. This forced autosurveillance is a reminder that, in this continuum of time, one can never disentangle from oneself. It also speaks of a psychological stranglehold of the ever-present gaze of self-introspection that dispenses with Georges’ convenient selective amnesia. Forgetting Majid might seem like the completion of the colonial task but what remains ignored is the role of the person forgetting, who even in this elision of the Other still remains the link between the present and the forgotten. Georges is the witness, if not of the memory then at least of its forgetting. The comprehension not only of the colonial subject at hand but all that composed it over time can only be achieved by a process of contemporaneous unraveling that would explain the dynamics of one’s interaction with the Other within the identitarian space. This is why *Caché* can only begin with this three-shot sequence, where Georges’ past and the present seem to cohabit in shots from different times of the day.

The pan follows Georges from his house (the subject of the clandestine videos) to the position where one would have placed the camera (Fig. 4). After trying unsuccessfully to locate the camera Georges returns. Georges has, then, perused the perspective that captured his past from earlier in the day to reassume the state

Figure 4: Georges tries to locate the placement of the hidden camera. Still from Michael Haneke’s *Caché*, 2006, 00:03:21. DVD.
of the recorded subject, bringing to light in a succinct manner the far more complicated process of introspection that recalibrates the present via the past, today’s self through an earlier self, and an imagined self through an Other self.

By putting himself where the camera could have been, Georges reveals what is soon to become evident to the viewer about the construction of the space of identity: that this space that defines us is a function of our own gaze and that the observer is the observed itself from a different perspective. Indeed, the name of the road in the background toward the top right-hand corner of the frame, “RUE DES IRIS,” evokes the iris of our eyes. Placed conveniently over Georges’ head, as he tries to locate the person who recorded him, this sign, whose ironical presence Georges remains inattentive to, functions as the reminder of what this chapter has been insisting on: we remain oblivious of the truth of a colonial past that stares at us everywhere.

If Grosz’s psychotic merges itself into space according to what it perceives this space to be, then the kind of past that Georges evokes gives us an insight into his, and France’s, contemporary image of themselves. To access the past is to animate the dysfunctional present self that ascertains the past based on our perception of the present. Indeed, it also diffuses the dynamics of opposition between the two supposedly distinct entities of the past and the present. It transforms them from two subsequent elements on the continuum of time into a simultaneous spatial equation where the two are interlinked as mutually influencing juxtapositions.

In addition, it is not the video cassettes themselves but Georges’ flummoxed reactions to them that occupy the film’s attention, in a way suggesting that one needs to find the answers to the colonial trouble in his psychosis and the evasive desire it engenders to disclaim what these cassettes represent. What this film about forgetting the colonized Other does in suspending any allusions to an author of these clandestine videos and yet maintaining Georges as the viewer is to remind us of his inability to escape the colonial subject and the subject of colonialism: both being alive in Georges and indeed due to him. Georges’ isolation is complete, not in a way that would sequester him, although that too is happening, as I shall discuss later, but leaving him isolated as a symptom of the space of colonial identity.

In a way, this reading allows for the obliteration of the Other. Not the other of Majid. It is the conceptual Other, whose inferiority became the basis of colonialism, that gets obliterated. The existence of these videos is solely the function of Georges’ presence. They are not only of him or about him, but also by him, and in being so they point also to his centrality as a link between a forgotten past and the present.
The integrity of a linear history is no more a reality. One cannot forget the colonized Majid, into an unrelated extinct colonial history. The temporal simultaneity that I claim becomes evident in the recording that juxtaposes events alongside each other instead of manifesting them in linear succession to create a history of progression. One is to read Georges simultaneously as the passive subject of surveillance as well as the active pursuer of an answer about the past. If answers are to be sought in (and about) this film mired in questions of history, it is not through a search of origins, be they historical or geographical, but rather through a strategy of subjective articulation. On receiving the first tape, as “Georges and Anne become fixated on discovering where the tape has been shot from – in other words, its geographical point of origin” (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 218), so does Georges follow the videocassette back to the potential point of filming. It is a similar strategy of locating the “point of origin” that occupies my reading of *Caché*’s relocation of history. The caveat being that such an origin is never to be found and remains in flux, with the knowledge that it exists and needs to be articulated.

Such a looking into the past does not work to recreate history but does work like the “propétique du passé”⁴⁰ ['prophetic vision of the past'] that Glissant talks about in his *Caribbean Discourse*. This vision is an exploration “related neither to a schematic chronology nor to a nostalgic lament. It leads to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future […] That is what I call a prophetic vision of the past.”⁴¹ Glissant presents this paradoxical ‘prophetic vision of the past’ as a way of problematizing a domain that existed before this unitary world came into being with its unitary linear history in the sixteenth century.⁴² For my reading of *Caché*, this offers the opportunity of presenting a subjective “prophesy” of a forgotten past associated with 17 October 1961.

Such a practice enjoins us to push the historical narrative to a purposefully indeterminate space, uncertain, unverifiable and constructed; it necessitates the deployment of a vocabulary that allows the discursive space to be forever open. Such temporal destabilization, as this reading of an uncertain memory proposes, goes well against those critics who, in postulating the postcolonial, rely on its modernity-inspired variant that goes in search of a fixed past and essentializes the postcolonial.

In other words, this postcolonial that I see in *Caché* is not a flat contourless present, in which any attempt at understanding history is seen with the same suspicion that has been reserved for the colonial project and its temporal linearity. To succumb to such a flat linearity would mean renouncing all attempts
at understanding the effect of the past in our present and our present understanding of history. By extension, it would leave us with unexplained hiddens whose continued haunting of our present would prolong the very guilt that assails Georges and much of the postcolonial world.

**Escaping Images**

I now turn to the cinematic techniques deployed in *Caché* as an invitation to the viewer to find a larger collective solution. Nowhere is this involvement with the viewer more visible in the film than in the confusing opening shot. When one understands that *Caché*’s very first frame is a clandestine recording of Georges that he happens to be watching, the distinction between the viewer and the viewed suddenly becomes more nuanced, and the binary split between the two enforced by the cinematic screen is diffused. This is the moment when, as the viewers realize they are watching on the screen Georges who is watching himself on another screen, *Caché*’s viewers move from simply viewing a subject to becoming directly implicated in a similar equation.\(^{43}\)

One needs to understand this retrospective understanding of the visuals, which severes the temporal unity of the narrative, as an apostrophe to the viewer who can never take these visuals for granted, as their authorship remains forever in question. Are these images part of the film time, or the work of the clandestine recorder, or perhaps even a part of Georges’ profession of a TV show host? The viewer of *Caché* is never sure of who is watching whom and thus remains implicated in this game of situating one’s perspective.

One scene that explains these dynamics of the viewer’s presence and involvement in the watching comes in the second half of the film, as Georges is editing his show. Pierrot goes missing for a night, only to return the following morning. Having decided to spend the night at a friend’s place, he neglected to call his parents, provoking a minicrisis of sorts. The reason I bring up the apparently innocuous conversation between the father and the son (Georges’ fatherly concern for example: “Pierrot, ça va bien toi?” [‘Are you okay Pierrot?’]) is because of the animated talk show scene that it cuts to. What appears, as soon as the son exits the bathroom, is a shot over Georges’ right shoulder of two guests in a talk show setting discussing the nineteenth-century French poet Rimbaud. Of the four guests, these two dominate most of the incoherent conversation and the
other two are able to squeeze in a few brief comments. Despite being the host, Georges is silent and appears in two over-the-shoulder shots and one cut away in which he is nodding understandingly with his hand to his mouth. What follows does not belie any expectations about Caché. With Georges’ injunction of “Bon bon, stop” [‘Ok, ok, stop’], the screen freezes (literally on the word “stop”). One continues hearing Georges’ voice at the same time as the footage from his show is either being forwarded or reversed. The viewer soon realizes that Georges is on the editing table. Once again, it is only retrospectively that the viewer realizes that the talk-show sequence, unlike the father-son conversation, was in fact part of Georges’ professional life. From the conversation with the son, the scene had cut not to the recording floor of Georges’ live TV program but instead to the scenes of a previously recorded program that Georges was watching on the editing table.

As Georges edits out the unwanted portions, he complicates a tension about the control over images that has by now become a constant in the film. Contrasting his silence during the interview with the imperative to his editor to stop also problematizes his association with a silent history. These images, which reflect the views of the participants Georges was interacting with but which nonetheless are under Georges’ control, allow him to – literally in this case – recreate by selectively modifying his recollection of the past. As in this case, he edits by instructing the editor:

Ça devient trop théorique là. Coupe à ‘on est d’accord sur ça’ et va plus loin quand Teulé parle d’homosexualité.

[It’s becoming too theoretical here. Cut at ‘we agree on this’ and go forward to when Teulé is speaking about homosexuality.]

This sort of altering and obliterating displacement could be commonplace on an editing table. However, in the light of the combination of Georges’ association of denial with his past and his present plagued by clandestine unedited moments of his life, this episode in the editing room is to be understood as an accurate presentation of his preference for selective history. A moment that allows his speech to prevail momentarily over other narratives.

Presenting this editing scene as an example of how “reality is manipulated by TV to be more attractive to viewers,” Haneke provocatively – and perhaps rightly – portrays this as the “terrorism of the mass media today.” In a moment that responds to the very “dumbing down of our societies” that Haneke dreads,
this particular scene, in forcing the viewer to readjust to a shift in temporal narrative, has already called for a participatory involvement that creates as well as reinterprets the sign of history. One is familiar with the fact that a sign is formed both diachronically (over time) and synchronically (through mutual acceptance by members of the community). If this animated debate over the meaning of Rimbaud is a concrete example of how a sign gains universal acceptability then it would not be too far-fetched to see in Georges’ selective editing a disproportionate investment of his own self into this process. Reading this moment as one of Georges’ victory would only be succumbing to the overly powerful pattern of convenient forgetfulness of colonial history that Haneke is challenging. Including the viewer and dissolving this bipartite equation of Georges watching (and editing) Georges (thus also altering the past) to a tripartite one where the viewer watches Georges watching Georges instantly liberates the sign of history from a one-sided stranglehold and provides the necessary outlet of a third perspective on the situation. With the viewer into the game, the hidden act of manipulation is not so hidden anymore.

If Georges is revealed through these images, what does the cinematic screen of *Caché* speak of my relationship with it? A shared collective guilt would be Michael Haneke’s answer (Porton 50-1). And in a French language film based and produced in France it is not just related to France’s past but to a larger question of “dark stains” that are part of collective human unconscious. To repeat Haneke:

I don’t want my film to be seen as specifically about a French problem. It seems to me that, in every country, there are dark corners – dark stains where questions of collective guilt become important. I’m sure in the United States there are other parallel examples of dark stains on the collective unconscious.45

Georges represents an individual manifestation of the many different guilts that confluence together to realize the global “collective unconscious” that Haneke evokes in the creation of this movie. This collective should rather be read as an imperative to the viewer from Haneke that involves the relationship between Georges the viewer and Georges the viewed subject. Both as an expression of caution and an act of indictment, Haneke’s formulation is best read as a stipulation to undertake a similar excavation of the self to isolate the personal contribution to this collective guilt that would reveal within each of us a zone of images from the past, markers that Haneke calls “dark stains.” The resolution of Georges’ unspoken complicity with a history of guilt is exemplified in this
moment of Georges watching Georges. Moreover, in this equation when one evokes a collective, does it not make sense to presume that the viewer too is implicated in a similar relationship with the screen as Georges is with his? Much like Georges, Caché’s viewer is both present and watched in the film, and in including the viewer Caché has developed a strategy that diffuses all binary divides by dissolving the difference-creating cinematic screen.

The screen refuses to become complicit in Georges’ acts of omission. There are indications that this pattern of control and prevarication (familial as well as historical) start to unravel nearly mid-way into the film. Georges and Anne receive another videocassette, this one shot from a moving car, leading up a road into a Parisian banlieue (Romainville – to the northeast of Paris) and onto a blue front door of an apartment with the number “047” written on it. By this time Anne has started becoming suspicious and starts asking questions about an earlier videocassette that featured the house of Georges’ mother (“Qui connaît la maison où t’as passé ton enfance?” [‘Who knows the house where you spent your childhood?’]). Georges firstly starts by lying (“Je sais pas” [‘I don’t know’]). Further on, he does confess to having an inkling about the sender but also simultaneously refuses to divulge who it is. Following an argument where a tearful Anne walks out, Georges visits the apartment in Romainville and after a stormy meeting with Majid (where he threatens Majid: “Tu vas regretter, je te jure.” [‘You will regret it, I swear.’]) he performs yet another act of commission – he lies by telling Anne he found it empty and even convincingly adds a story about how further inquiries revealed the apartment to be a store of some sort.

But – and here is the uncooperating screen that this discussion is leading up to, as a forewarning of how these images are no longer going to be his refuge – Anne discovers Georges’ lie. Another clandestine recording of the conversation between Georges and Majid reveals to Anne not only that Georges had lied but also the exact content of their meeting, forestalling and revealing Georges’ pattern of control and denial of the past, which falsifies testimonies and relies on misrepresentations.

Georges might try to explain his lie as being motivated by concern for Anne, but the ubiquitous presence of these stratagems of self-denial adds layers to an already overpowering guilt. All of them together alert us to the underlying motivation of these isolated acts. Georges’ omission of Majid produces a revisionist strategy concerned with recreating a convenient recognition of the past and a complete erasure of the Other. Despite repeated demands from Anne, Georges refuses to elucidate on the possible reasons for Majid’s anger against him: “Je ne m’en souviens plus” [‘I don’t remember’], he retorts back.
That with these recordings the process of reconciliation with the past is taking hold, not allowing any escape route and thus leading Georges to an explosive personal cul-de-sac, is what Caché tacitly communicates. Georges’ world controlled by images, his job as a talk show host and the all-powerful editing table eloquently direct our attention to a process where, despite his silence, he is the one who holds the power to manipulate images.

To reiterate an earlier contention, this system, however, is not as static and passive as this one-way reading might have us believe. The (almost always) long unedited cuts from the clandestine videos counter the editing table to calibrate temporality. These unedited shots confront Georges with moments he desires to escape. They serve as a reminder that he is trapped in a constant mode of overcoming and will forever remain the one constant of the past that he desires to negate. In a game of catching up, just as these videotapes expose the lies Georges has been telling Anne, these images also slowly escape his control. Even the scene on the editing table, when read retrospectively, abounds already in the disruption of manipulation that the videocassette has carried out for Anne.

Deadly Images

As Georges edits his TV show in the editing bay, he receives a phone call, presumably from Majid, who wishes to meet. Georges goes back to apartment no. 47, is received by Majid, who leads him to the same room where the first meeting between the two had taken place. A visibly irritated Georges refuses the invitation to sit down and reacts angrily to Majid’s declaration of not having anything to do with the cassettes (“Je n’étais pas du tout au courant pour les cassettes.” [‘I knew nothing about the cassettes.’]). What follows is Majid’s suicide. It is the most graphic scene of Caché, and Ipek A. Celik signals it as an example of Haneke’s “terrible realism.”

The initial moment of Majid taking out the knife startles Georges. When Majid cuts his own throat splattering the wall with blood, more than Georges’ complete shock what is noteworthy is the resemblance the blood pattern on the wall bears to the smear of red ink on the anonymous childlike drawings the Laurents have been receiving along with the cassettes (Fig. 5 & 6). Majid’s body blocking the door of the room, with blood still gushing from his neck against the backdrop of a blood pattern that makes a single canvas of the wall and the
door, functions as a continuation of the childlike drawings (Fig. 7). By blocking Georges’ only exit, this blood pattern metaphorically traps Georges – both spatially and temporally – between unwanted and uneditable images.

Georges’ bitter confession soon thereafter to his wife, as he returns home dazed, makes a more explicit connection between the suicide and the drawings (“Tu te rappelles les dessins ? C’était sans doute pour annoncer cette saloperie à l’avance ou bien quoi ?” ['You remember the drawings? Who knows, maybe it was to announce this filth?']). On Anne’s insistence Georges describes his childhood lies that were responsible for having Majid kicked out of the house. First, it

![Figure 5: Drawing – Red smear across the neck of a cock. Still from Michael Haneke’s Caché, 2006, 00:26:20. DVD.](image)

![Figure 6: Drawing – Red smears coming out of a mouth. Still from Michael Haneke’s Caché, 2006, 00:13:40. DVD.](image)

![Figure 7: Majid lying dead, blocking the door. Still from Michael Haneke’s Caché, 2006, 01:25:15. DVD.](image)
was a lie about Majid coughing up blood ("J’ai raconté à maman qu’il crachait du sang" ['I told mom that he was spitting blood']), which a doctor’s examination disproved. Then Georges convinced Majid that his father wanted him to kill an aggressive cock ("Après, je lui dit que papa voulait qu’il tue le coq." ['Then, I told him that papa wanted him to kill a cock.']). A child Majid covered with blood and the beheaded cock gave Georges the opportunity for the final lie, which had the young Majid abandoned: "Et j’ai raconté qu’il avait fait ça pour me faire peur." ['And I said that he did it to scare me.'].

It is not without reason that this chapter has been equating a child’s lie with a national lie. Children imitate what surrounds them, and their imitation “is an act of enormous intellectual complexity” (Grosz 90). To explain better the human subject as a function of the space it occupies, Grosz also turns to the example of a child, for whom imitation of others around it is “a central activity in its acquisition of a social and sexual identity” (Grosz 90). A child’s identity is formed as it fashions itself, through its imitation of others. When the child assumes that “it is like others [its imitation] [...] is conditioned by the child’s acquisition of an image of itself, of an other, and a categorical assimilation of both to a similar general type” (Grosz 90). In other words, Georges’ childhood lies function in Caché as an imitation that conforms to the national lie of exclusion. Papon’s written directives, the ensuing massacre and a decades-long cover up were meant to erase the Algerian from the streets of Paris, from French memory, as well as from the French national family. These national lies were laying out the identitarian spatial template whose imitation became the basis for Georges’ lies. This child’s lie then folds back neatly on to the national lies, and it is the rejection of Majid, common to both lies, that serves as the “general type.” This child’s lie is not only a replication but also a strengthening of this new spatiality of erasure, which complements the fabric of the larger colonial project. It is within the interstices of such a self-reinforcing spatiality that Caché, then, takes it upon itself to show the hiding of the truth from the past. Via Georges it also reveals the French republican family for what it is: a myth.

Majid’s suicide as the ultimate text of the past forces an alternative to a space that has always had Georges and the nation as its foci. Undoubtedly, there is the possibility that this self-immolation “could be interpreted as Haneke’s collusion with the comforting idea that the colonial native can be made to disappear in an instant through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence” (234). Instead of a self-erasure, one needs to read this as the ultimate isolation of a destabilized Georges. Within a colonial spatiality, it is not Majid who gets
eliminated, but Majid the colonial Other that has stopped playing along as fodder. The focus instead shifts to Georges’ guilt.

The killing of Algerians on 17 October 1961 in Paris replicated, within the very heart of the French empire, the colonial violence that was taking place in colonies overseas. These brutal unacknowledged murders by the French police reproduced within the metropolis the workings of the power structures and the colonial dynamics responsible for much of the colonial violence. The dead man slumped on the floor in the presence of Georges condenses the violence from colonial Algeria as well as from Paris within the confines of this room. The difference being that Georges, who denies his role in Majid’s marginalization and indeed blames the Algerian for his current miseries, is now confronted with this violence.

The blood-splattered enclosure completely sequesters Georges and surrounds him with blood-soaked images from the past, which have already been catching up with him in the form of drawings that accompany the videocassettes. The childlike line drawings depict two images: a mouth with a red streak coming out of it, and a cock with a red smear across its neck (Fig. 5 & 6). Majid, by cutting his own neck recalls the bloodletting, blood from the mouth and the blood-covered child that is central to their shared childhood as well as these drawings.

The focus is not the Other; nor can such strategies as turning to the comfort of his editing table allow him to escape the images of his guilt. What had started with Anne discovering Georges’ lie and the contents of his conversation with Majid through clandestine video recordings leads, for the last time, to the same flat no. 47, where circumstances eventually force Georges to reveal to his wife the implications of all that he had been denying.

Following the suicide, and right before Georges returns home to confess to his wife, the spectator sees him exit a cinema hall. The posters adorning the façade of this cinema hall “seem to spell out the various domestic and allegorical configurations in which Georges is implicated, as well as the various narrative and generic routes down which Caché as a film could have gone” (Ezra and Sillars, Hidden 217). In fact, two film posters – Les choristes (based in an orphanage for boys) and La grande séduction (about a doctor being wooed by a small village in French-speaking Canada) – apart from the four that Ezra and Sillars comment upon – Deux frères, Ma mère, Mariages and La mauvaise éducation – do give occasion to bring out the many themes associated with this colonial household that I have been drawing out. Additionally, as generic examples, when looked at together they add up as a collectivity of cinema – to which Caché too belongs.

But more importantly, coming out of a suicide scene filmed in the single long cut, which resembles (and could be from) a clandestine video, when
Georges is seen exiting the cinema he has joined the viewer, once again in doing what the viewer is doing just at that very moment: watching a film. It could be that, as Beugnet signals, going to the cinema after the gruesome self-immolation is a commentary on (the limitations of) cinema. Cinema “is not merely a play on representation but an actual process of thought: contemporary realities are thus thought through the operations of film itself, and refracted through the prism of a specific aesthetic vision” (Beugnet 231).

Coming out of the security of the editing room, having witnessed Majid’s suicide in the long (possibly clandestine) shot, it could also be that “he instinctively disappears into the darkened space of the cinema, presumably to allow the flickering images to efface harsh realities” (247). While these possibilities explain why Georges might have gone to the cinema, a simpler and unanswered question is perhaps more pertinent for the viewer of *Caché*: what did he watch there? In saying that one needs to find the answer in cinema (both the artistic genre and the cinema hall that Georges has visited), I wish to show agreement with Beugnet’s just quoted explanation of cinema as “a process of thought.”

What film did he watch? becomes yet another apostrophe to the viewer to reckon with about yet another cinematic screen. A question that has no answers. *Caché*, a film about clandestine moving images, takes the viewer through multiple mise en abymes, always projecting the false hope of an answer. In a way, it prepares an unending quest for a stable sign without ever fulfilling it. Just as the conversation between Majid and Georges’ sons is never revealed, the sender(s) of these cassettes remain unknown, and thus remains unanswered (among others questions) the question of the relationship between Georges and cinema. And it is with a demand to discover this hidden, unstable sign that a movie like *Caché* addresses us, questions us, and leaves us aware and yet uncertain of our individual understanding of the past in relationship to the present.

Reading the colonial equation via this non-thingy-fied space as I have done above helps understand the staging of these characters and their histories in equations of make-believe hierarchies. Their perception of their location in this space and the creation of this space itself are both fictional constructs; the products of a colonial psychotic’s imagination. Georges as a colonial psychotic, part of the French colonial family, can only imagine the world and his place in it according to identitarian coordinates that are tethered onto Majid. The more Georges tries to negate Majid’s presence the more there are constant reminders of a spatialized identity where Georges locates himself according to Majid.

Within this identitarian dynamics, reflections that emerge in *Caché* on cinema and moving images constantly disrupt all attempts at situating one’s self as
distinct from these tethers. Georges’ lie and the national lie are intertwined. The title of the film, *Caché*, functions as the past participle of the French transitive verb “cacher” and tells us that someone hid something in the past. Intermingling cinematic narratives and the presence of these clandestine images from elsewhere and from another time insistently remind us that what one hid there and then continues to be embedded in the here and now.

If the above paradigm is subjective, where is the true location? Any attempt at a definitive answer is destined for failure. It is not colonization, understood as a fixed sign that one needs to excavate from the past. Rather, one needs to concede that such a sign exists. This acceptance opens up the interesting reality of unanswerable questions that within themselves carry the paradox of something that happened which can be neither discerned nor recreated but yet needs to be understood. The answer in the film lies neither in determining the author of the tapes nor in their contents (these tapes only replicate what Georges, and the viewer, already know about Georges’ life), but instead in accepting the ensuing criminal guilt – that unspoken and unrecognized residue from the colonial past – that they reference.

The imprecise nature of the sign has ramifications for the definition of the Other, as well as the very perception of our world. In an interview, Haneke refuses to define Majid as a vulnerable figure. In fact, the director avoids any clear-cut definitions for the characters central to *Caché*. Firstly, he equates both characters in his assertion that we “don’t know if Georges is telling the truth and we don’t know if Majid is telling the truth,” and then goes on to add that we “don’t really know which one of the characters is lying – just as we don’t know in real life” (my emphases; Porton 50-1). What Haneke reveals is that notwithstanding the film’s (and Haneke’s own) sympathies with the cause of the colonial underdog, the world it represents cannot be read from any position of subjective authority that would reproduce fixed notions of colonial identity couched in the comfort of compartmentalized definitions of victim and aggressor.

One should distinguish this lack of a clear picture from a lack of engagement on Haneke’s part – for this confusion is in itself the answer. At least, that is how I would read the director’s comment that postulates the film as “a lie that can reveal the truth” (Porton 50-1). In this off-handed comment, which draws a relationship of synonymy between these two opposing terms of truth and lie, I infer a similar relationship in *Caché*, where the confusion over the images is what leads to an answer. More specifically, it is not a simple quest for the existence of the truth/lie binary. The focus instead is on the (thrice) repeated affirmation, “we don’t know,” or, rather, as I have been stating – we can’t know.