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Ethical–aesthetic critique of moral organization: Inspirations from Michael Haneke's cinematic work

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This paper looks at the work of the Austrian film-maker Michael Haneke as an inspiration for developing an ethical–aesthetic critique of organization. Haneke's practice of film-making is located in the tradition of an 'ethical parrhesia', the courageous and often dangerous 'truth-telling', which aims at the transformation of being. Haneke's approach is then illustrated with an analysis of his film *The White Ribbon.* This example is taken to illustrate an ethical critique of moral organization and for analysing strategies that seek to instigate the open-ended moral reflection. By discussing implications of this form of critique, the paper contributes to the development of a critical aesthetics of organization that seeks to open a reflexive space on how we are formed in social and organizational life, and at what costs.

Keywords: Haneke; parrhesia; ethics; aesthetics; organization; film

Introduction

Within management and organization studies, there has been an increased interest in aesthetic and artistic practices in order to develop alternative forms of knowing management and organization (e.g. Hancock 2005; Taylor and Hansen 2005; Guillet de Monthoux 2007; Sørensen 2010a, 2010b). Researchers in this field have drawn on novels, where management and organization are often portrayed in much more complex, multilayered and vivid ways than in 'scientific' texts or textbooks (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux 1994). Others have explored how visual media such as photography and art photography can contribute to a more sensitive (e.g. Strati 2000) or critical understanding of organizational life (e.g. Warren 2005; Cohen, Hancock, and Tyler 2006). The medium of film, which combines narrative and visual elements, has been used within management and organization studies in various ways. Some researchers have drawn on films for illustrating organizational phenomena, such as organizational violence (e.g. Linstead 1997). Other authors go further and argue that filmic representations provide a unique approach to understanding organizations and various facets of organizational life (Foreman and Thatchenkery 1996). Film also plays a certain role in management education. Reading and critically interpreting films is seen as one possibility for developing a reflexive attitude towards specific images and ideas of management and organization (e.g. Bell 2008) or towards

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controversial questions within ethics and business ethics (e.g. Hosmer and Steneck 1989; Berger and Pratt 1998).

Critical studies of organization have focused mainly on the representation of management and organization in popular films (see, e.g. Hassard and Holliday 1998b; Rhodes and Parker 2008). From this perspective, films are not neutral representations of reality. Rather they are performative: they produce realities, convey certain moral values and create subjectifying effects in the audience. In particular 'realist films' are attributed the power to establish certain 'truths' and to seduce spectators to accept these truths (Hassard 1998). According to this approach, the critical function is 'to unpack, decode and interpret messages and ideologies in contemporary representations of organization, whether these are Hollywood Movies or ethnographic/documentary films' (Hassard and Holliday 1998a, 1). But critical students of organization have also developed an interest in the question of how films and other products of 'popular culture' exemplify alternative forms of critique of management and organization (Rhodes and Parker 2008). Further, Rhodes and Brown suggest that social and organizational scientists might 'learn from the art and craft of the novelist, dramatist, journalist, film-maker, soap opera creator' (2005, 470) in developing and articulating versions of critique and reflexivity (Steyaert, Marti, and Michels 2012).

In this paper, I want to discuss one specific film-maker who is exemplary in his attempt to instigate reflexive processes on how the social world is organized and the destructive patterns that may occur: the Austrian film-maker Michael Haneke, who 'has established himself as one of art cinema's most creative, controversial, and eloquent social commentators' (Grundmann 2010b, cover page). At least since the Oscar nomination for his film *Das Weiße Band* (*The White Ribbon*) in 2010 he has become known to a wider audience. Within the academic discipline of film studies, his work is now intensively discussed (e.g. Wessely, Grabner, and Larcher 2008; Grundmann 2010a; Ornella and Knauss 2010). Over the last four decades, Haneke has produced around 35 films. His oeuvre comprises television films, cinema and also theatre productions. His films are multifarious and cover heterogeneous subjects. One central topic, which reoccurs in almost all of his films, is violence, its representation and manifestation in manifold forms (see, e.g. Metelmann 2003). In Haneke's films, violence is always portrayed in the societal context from which it emerges, so that his showing of violence always implies a critique of the modes of social organization which brings it forth and a problematizing of the politics of representation of violence in the media (2010b; Speck 2010).

Haneke sees film and cinema as a powerful and inherently manipulative medium. He described his own films as 'polemical statements' (1992, 89) against a manipulative form of cinema, which patronizes the viewer and puts the audience under tutelage. In contrast to critical film-makers who seek to use film as a medium for mobilizing the audience and for revealing the 'truth' *behind* ideological phenomena or messages of mainstream cinema, Haneke seeks to instigate self-reflexive processes. As he puts it himself: 'What is sought after is not ideology, but quarrelling with one's own lie' (1994, 2). By this, he refers to his central concern: the viewer and his/her self-relations, his/her readiness to confront their own attitudes, perceptions and deceptions. Such a confrontation can be a painful experience. In fact, Haneke's films are well known for the irritation or even 'unpleasure' (Wheatley 2009) that they often cause to the spectator. For his admirers, Haneke's films are 'fascinatingly disturbing' (Ornella and Knauss 2010); many spectators, however, experience them as extremely violent and often hard to bear (Martig 2010). It is almost impossible to leave one, whether in the middle or not

until after the (often horrible) end, feeling indifferent. It is precisely this jolting of indifference that gives his work its critical quality and makes it, as I will argue, at the same time an ethical force.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I will introduce Haneke as an 'ethical' in contrast to a 'moral' or moralizing film-maker and will locate his approach in the tradition of an 'ethical parrhesia' (Foucault 2005, 2009). This tradition refers to various practices of a courageous and often dangerous 'truth-telling', which aims at the transformation of being. Next, I will discuss Haneke's film *The White Ribbon* as an example of an ethical–aesthetic critique of moral organization. This film, which is set in a small village in Northern Germany just before the outbreak of the First World War, depicts a series of violent events that took place in this Protestant village, called Eichwald. Eichwald could be seen as a metaphor for a morally rigorous organization, and the film as an exemplar of an ethical critique which uses aesthetic means. The analysis will focus on *what* is shown in the film (the level of content) and *how* it is shown (the level of form). These two analytically distinct levels are inseparably connected and form the distinctive quality of this kind of critique. Finally, I will discuss some implications, or at least inspirations, of this form of critique for an ethical–aesthetic critique of contemporary organization.

Morality and ethics

The term morality can be understood in various ways. According to Foucault (1986, 25), it refers to 'a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches and so forth'. These historically specific values and rules of action, which can be more or less systematic and more or less explicitly formulated, are also called the level of the 'moral code'. The term likewise refers to 'the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them' (Foucault 1986, 25). Finally, the term refers to the 'manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code' (Foucault 1986, 26). The prescriptive apparatus, which mediates values and normative images and orientations, is extremely complex. Film and cinema can be understood as part of this apparatus (e.g. Hassard and Holliday 1998b). Each film and the cinematic apparatus as a whole explicitly or implicitly mediate certain values, certain normative images, certain patterns of meaning and explanation. The discursive and visual *framing* of figures and events not only makes objects which appear in a certain light, it also organizes the experience and subjectivity of the spectators (Goffman 1974; Trinh 1992; Butler 2009).

The suggestive mediation of normative constructions as well as the tendency to confirm, reproduce or naturalize hegemonic values of US culture belongs to the standard critique of Hollywood cinema (e.g. Ryan and Kellner 1990; Brewis 1998; Holliday 1998). Hollywood films are of course by no means homogeneous and there is a problematizing potential in many of them. One can see this very clearly if one thinks of examples such as *Thelma and Louise* (1991) by Ridley Scott, *Natural Born Killers* (1994) by Oliver Stone, *Syriana* (2005) by Stephen Caghan or *The Messenger* (2009) by Oren Moverman. These films call dominant values into question and problematize the social order which brings them forth (see also Hassard and Buchanan 2008; Rhodes and Westwood 2008; Panayiotou 2011). The greater part of Hollywood films, however, explicit or implicit 'morality tales' (Hassard and Holliday 1998a, 7). On a

narrative level, they mediate certain moral values, they mediate how one ought to behave or not to behave, how one should conduct one's life. 'Moral films' or 'morality tales' usually explain the world and the course of events to the audience. They raise certain moral questions and ideally deliver the answers as well. Moral cinema provides a frame for explaining and judging events and pursues certain pedagogical aims. It not only constitutes the objects (events, characters, etc.), but also constitutes the spectator as a subject of a moral order (Hassard and Holliday 1998a, 3). From the point of view of critical film and organization studies, this form of mediating moral values often comes close to indoctrination, since its effectiveness is based on the suspension of the spectator's critical reflexivity. Critical analyses of such films have, therefore, concentrated on deciphering their 'deeply rooted ideological persuasions, ensuring that their audiences accept and conform to the values of organizational society' (Hassard and Holliday 1998a, 1).

Haneke's films too have sometimes been seen as 'contemporary morality tales' (Sharrett 2003, 24), and Haneke himself did not reject the label 'moralist' – on the contrary. In an interview he comments:

> And why not? Moralist is a swearword today. The question of morality is 'out' … [but] with the exception of some blockheads, everyone struggles with questions of morality in everyday life. There is no other way to interact in the societal space. (Haneke 2010a, 125)

Nevertheless, the labels 'moral' or 'moralistic' are problematic in his case. There is a danger of missing exactly what is at stake in Haneke's films: the *spectator* and his/her 'autonomy' (Metelmann 2010). In order to mark the difference from moralistic films, it is necessary to distinguish between morality and ethics.

Traditionally ethics is understood as a reflection of morality, whereby the reflection and foundation of morality is seen as the task of experts of moral philosophy. Following Foucault this relation can be seen differently. For Foucault ethics concerns the subject's relation to him/herself and *vis à vis* moral codes. The reflection of morality, which constitutes ethics, is not reserved for experts. It is rather part of everyday practices by which and in which subjects give form to their lives (O'Leary 2002, 11). This concept of ethics presupposes that subjects are always positioned and embedded in a historical field, which 'sets the stage for the subject's self-crafting, which always takes place in relation to a set of imposed norms' (Butler 2005, 19). The prescriptive elements which make up this (moral) field set limits and enable what we can be and how we ought to conduct our lives; however, they can never fully determine subjects. According to Foucault, freedom is 'the ontological condition of ethics. Ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when informed by reflection' (1997, 284). Ethics thus presupposes a *distance* from moral precepts and normative models of action and being. Such a distance creates what Iedema and Rhodes (2010, 201) following Bevir (1999) call an 'undecided space of ethics'.

Haneke's films employ artistic means for creating such a distance and widening the undecided space of ethics in which the subject/spectator can engage in conscious practice as the basis of ethical conduct. They neither give answers as to how to live well, nor do they seek to restore 'lost values'. The mediation of moral values is substituted by a 'more open-ended reflection on the spectator's part about moral questions' (Wheatley 2009, 5). The spectator is addressed as an ethical subject who is credited with a certain autonomy and carries a considerable burden of responsibility (see also Metelmann 2003, 2008; Faber 2010; Mittl 2010). In this sense, I would call Haneke's films

'ethical' rather than 'moral' or 'moralizing' films. They are not to be seen as part of a 'moral pedagogy', which is concerned with conveying certain values, but rather as part of an ethical 'psychagogy' (Foucault 2005), which is concerned with the transformation of being (of the spectator). They dispense with persuasion, instruction or indoctrination and content themselves with confronting the spectator with a 'truth' that demands a reaction or response and forces him/her to reflect on his/her self-relations. Haneke's film-making can thus be related to the practices of an *ethical parrhesia* (Foucault 2005, 2009, 2010), which concerns the telling and showing of truth without any reservations.

Parrhesia: the ethical attitude of Haneke's film(making)s

The term *parrhesia* refers to the ancient practice of courageous and often dangerous or risky truth-telling. Foucault analysed this practice – or rather the problematization of this practice – in Greek antiquity. There, the term *parrhesia* referred to

> a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relationship to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. (Foucault 2001, 19)

Foucault traces the roots of parrhesia first in the political sphere, where parrhesia referred to the citizen's speaking out or speaking the truth in public (2010). In the sphere of ethics, parrhesia referred to the practices of truth-telling which relate to the individual form of life or the *ethos* (of individuals) (Foucault 2009). The truth-telling of the master, the teacher, the philosopher, the friend – the truth-telling of the other in its various forms – was seen as a fundamental condition of self-knowledge, which allowed the subject to transform him/herself and to reach an ethical mode of being. Like political parrhesia, ethical parrhesia was seen as a risky and dangerous practice, but also as a moral duty. In the case of ethical parrhesia, the 'parrhesiast' (the truth-teller) tells an often painful or displeasing truth, knowing there is a risk that the interlocutor might terminate their relationship. In the social context, the parrhesiast risks ostracism, or in the extreme even death. Modern art is among the manifold descendants of parrhesia. In the realm of modern art, Foucault saw a concentration of the 'most intensive forms of truth-telling, which had the courage to risk infringement' (2009, 174, my translation). There is an infringement on *common sense*, an infringement on good conscience, and an infringement on established and well-rehearsed modes of seeing and perceiving, which circumscribe the comfortable zone of the familiar; there is an infringement on the desire for harmony, which is to be fulfilled with reassuring answers. This constitutes art as a practice of 'exposure and a return to the fundamentals of existence' (Foucault 2009, 173, my translation).

Parrhesia as a practice of truth-telling is distinguished from two basic forms to which it has traditionally been opposed: rhetoric and flattery (see Foucault 2005, 2009, 2010). *Rhetoric* is an art of 'persuading those to whom one is speaking, whether one wishes to convince them of a truth or a lie, a nontruth' (Foucault 2005, 381). With reference to truth, rhetoric is indifferent. This does not mean that rhetoric is to be equated with untruth or with lies. It rather means that rhetoric is 'an art capable of lying' (Foucault 2005, 382). Considered as a rhetorical art, film is a

technique which follows specific rules in order to tell a convincing story. The success of a rhetorical film is measured by how effectively the predefined message is communicated and transported to the spectator. Rhetoric or rhetorical film, then, is about preparing this message in a way that allows the spectator to understand it, follow it, and accept it. Such films, therefore, rely on a narrative structure, which connects characters and events in a specific form. Equally important are characters with which the viewer can identify (see, e.g. Seeßlen 2010).

Flattery is the second adversary of parrhesia. Flattery is not about truth, nor is it about conveying a truth to the listener or confronting the listener – in the case of cinema, the spectator – with a specific truth. Flattery is more about confirming the listener's own truth. It thereby prevents the person to whom it is addressed from developing an adequate self-knowledge and renders him/her 'impotent or blind' (Foucault 2005, 376). The flattering film confirms the spectator's view of the world; it confirms his/her judgements and prejudices and his/her expectations and habits of viewing. In this way, it settles the spectator in the comfortable position of the knower, the just and fair-minded. It is the task of the flatterer-director to deliver feel-good entertainment. The flatterer and the flattery film are merchants of illusions. Haneke (2010b, 576) has expressed it in a similar way:

> The salesman who defines and produces films as a commodity knows that violence is only – and particularly so – a good sell when it is deprived of that which is the true measure of its existence in reality: deeply disconcerting fears of pain and suffering. Except for the individual case of the pathologically sadistic voyeur, those fears remain non-consumable and are bad for business.

This statement reminds us that films are not only an aesthetic medium or an artistic form. It is also an industrial product and 'capital intensive business', and as such perhaps one of the most expensive forms of artistic production (see Bell 2008, 41–63). This implies that a film also has to be sold, and that is one of the reasons why it is difficult for a film to question or challenge common sense. The commercial dimension exerts a strong pressure to flatter the spectator-consumers and to represent violence in a consumable form. As Haneke (2010c, 17) puts it in an interview:

> Bad conscience doesn't sell. We all sit in the helicopter of *Apocalypse Now* and are firing the guns at the ant-like Vietnamese to the 'Ride of the Valkyries'; firing at what is alien, unfathomable, fear-inspiring, to be extinguished, and we feel as relaxed as having visited a sauna, because we do not have any responsibility for the massacre, because what is responsible for this is communism, the impenetrable political sleaze in Washington, or if needs be the American president, who isn't even a good friend of us. We all gladly pay seven Euros for that, don't we?

In contrast, Haneke's films seek to challenge common sense by rendering the 'existential truth of violence' – which in his view is the pain and suffering of the victim – visible or rather palpable. Haneke not only seeks to make pain and suffering visible, but also to confront the spectator with his/her own ways of perceiving (or not perceiving) violence. In this way, he seeks to provoke and produce 'productive restlessness in a viewer' (Haneke 2010c). Haneke (2010a, 105) quotes the words of the writer Ingeborg Bachman: 'It is reasonable to tell people the truth'. This expresses the attitude which underlies his work. This attitude constitutes cinema or cinematic work as a kind of Socratic dialogue between the director and the

spectator. Instead of rhetoric and flattery the films make 'an appeal for a cinema of *insistent questioning* instead of false (because too quick) answers, for *clarifying distance* in place of violating closeness, for *provocation and dialogue* instead of consumption and consensus' (Haneke 1992, 89).

The White Ribbon: an ethical–aesthetic critique of moral organization

Like all of Haneke's previous films, *The White Ribbon* is a film about violence, its modes of operation and forms of representation. It is open to polyvalent interpretations and in fact has been interpreted in manifold ways. Haneke himself was – as in his other films – wary of giving a key for or pattern of interpretation. This is in accordance with the critical aesthetics that he realizes in his films. The film is situated in a Protestant village in Northern Germany in the early twentieth century. It depicts a series of events that took place in a little village called Eichwald. As the film opens, the narrator explains that he 'must narrate these events, since they might shed light on what happened in this country'. The story begins with a mysterious accident: the village doctor's horse trips over an almost invisible wire, which had been strung between two trees. It ends on the eve of the First World War, with the arrival of the news of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, the Austro-Hungarian heir apparent, on 28 June 1914. In between, there is a sequence of other events: a farmer's wife dies in an accident on the baron's estate; a barn on the estate bursts into flames; the baron's son is found badly beaten; and the midwife's disabled son is found tied to a tree with his eyes horribly mutilated. All these brutal and apparently unrelated incidents remain unexplained. Nobody takes responsibility for them although it seems likely that the guilty are to be found among the villagers. The narrator voices strong suspicions that the children of the village are behind the acts of cruelty. This film is a 'German children's story' (as the subtitle – *Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* – suggests) situated in the framework of quasi-feudal structures and the suffocating moral climate of Protestantism.

At first sight, the film's setting seems to be remote from the world of modern organizations and the relevance of this specific film for the study of organization is not immediately clear. *The White Ribbon* has often been seen as a historical film. A number of critics have interpreted it as the presentation of the developmental history of fascism or as an analysis of the emergence of fascism 'out of the spirit of a perverted Protestant morality' (Assheuer 2010, 159; also see Stewart 2010). This interpretation is suggested by the historical and geographical context in which the story is situated, but also by the name of the village, Eichwald, which inevitably leads to associations with Adolf Eichmann – SS Lieutenant and chief of the Gestapo's 'Jewish Office' – and the concentration camp Buchenwald.

It is also possible to see the film – as Haneke himself did – as a 'model in historical clothing' (2010a, 159) rather than a historical film. In this view, the film is an 'exemplary' (Haneke 2010a, 165) analysis and presentation of a specific mode of organizing social relations and the violence that is associated with it or emerges from it. As an exemplary case, the film has a double relevance for the study of the organization. On one level, it is the specific *content* of the film, on the second – methodological level – it is the specific way in which the critique of this very content is translated into a specific aesthetic *form*.

With respect to *content*, we can understand *The White Ribbon* as an exemplary case of (filmic) questioning and problematizing of the emergence of forms of violence under

conditions of 'moral rigorism' (Assheuer 2010, 157). On this level, the film problematizes the working of a 'code-oriented morality' (Foucault 1986, 30) where 'the important thing is to focus on the instances of authority that enforce the code, that require it to be learned and observed, that penalize infractions' (Foucault 1986, 29). Eichwald is in this sense an exemplary case of a more or less closed moral community, in which a specific regime of truth is established, maintained, and imposed on the inhabitants/subjects. In this sense, Eichwald can be seen as an exemplar of a (so-called) strong culture organization and *The White Ribbon* a critique of 'culture management' (Willmott 1993, 2012). As such, the film supplements critical studies which draw attention to the exclusionary power of strong (moral) communities that tend to close themselves off (see, e.g. Barley and Kunda 1992; Casey 1999; Jackall 2010). By revealing pain and suffering that is generated by imposing (moral) order in the name of the good it also supplements studies of 'ethical violence' (Butler 2005, 41) associated with the intensification of accountability in modern organizations (Messner 2010).

The relevance of this example becomes clear when we accept that the object of organizational analysis is not exclusively the bounded entity which is commonsensically called 'an organization'. Instead we need to understand organizational analysis as being concerned with 'the principles and processes of organizing *wherever it occurs*' (Knights 2002, 577, emphasis added). It is then immediately clear that 'moral domination' (Bardon and Josserand 2010), that is the imposing of specific normative values and the establishment of specific normative matrices of behaviour and thinking, is of great interest for critical organization studies, whether it occurs in 'normal organizations', in explicitly 'ethical organizations', where 'the exclusions are milder and the pain more subtle' (Kenny 2010, 870) or in extreme organizations of the type that Erving Goffman studied in his book *Asylums*. In fact, one could also say that Eichwald, as it is presented in the film, has some similarities to 'total organizations' (Goffman 1961). The relevance of studying such extreme forms of organization is that they allow us to highlight critical aspects of 'normal' organizations, which may go unnoticed (see also Clegg 2006; Pina e Cunha, Rego, and Clegg 2010). Insofar, as any organization, not just a 'total organization', implies specific normative conceptions of being, any organization exerts a forming influence on its members. The drama of the production of the 'appropriate individual', as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) have called this process, is what is reflected in *The White Ribbon*.

With respect to the *form* of critique, this specific film is an illustration of an ethical critique of (moral) organization by means of (filmic) aesthetics. In the sense of ethical parrhesia, it seeks to initiate processes of self-reflection and self-transformation on the side of the spectator. In the following sections, I will show and illustrate – with reference to exemplary scenes – how this critique operates on two levels. On the first level, which I call 'ethical showing', the critique focuses on the social mechanisms and procedures which generate a specific form of violence. On the second level, the critique employs specific aesthetic strategies which seek to address the reader/viewer as a critical subject.

Showing mechanisms that generate (moral) violence

Haneke's form of critique eschews psychologization (i.e. focusing on the intentions, motives, and mental states of perpetrators or victims of violence) and instead directs attention to the social mechanisms and practices which generate (moral) violence. I call this 'ethical showing' (cf. Chan 2000) since it attempts to present these mechanisms in a way that renders the 'existential truth' of violence, which is the suffering of the victim,

visible (Sørensen 2010b). The 'truth' that is rendered visible is not the capital t 'Truth' of representationalism. It is a *perspectival truth* (of the victim) that calls the working and legitimacy of these mechanisms into question (see also Speck 2010).

Punishment as a (sad) moral duty

The emergence of 'moral violence' in organizations is often associated with an ideology or rationalization that explains and legitimizes the meting out of reward and punishment (Foucault 1977). In fact, the reward–punishment ideology is so much taken for granted that it does not even appear as problematic *per se*. It would be hard to find any textbook on HRM which is not centrally concerned with 'motivating employees' or which questions the ethical or moral justification of rewarding/punishing *per se*. This is what *The White Ribbon* does. In an exemplary scene, two of the pastor's children come home late in the evening. The pastor and the rest of the family are waiting for them, sitting around the table in stifling silence. The father tells the two children that he does not know what is sadder: that they were gone or that they returned. The children have not only caused the pastor and his wife great sorrow; they have now also forced him to punish them. For the pastor, punishing his children is a (sad) duty, but one that he has to fulfil in order to make the children decent and respectable persons. It is not only or even primarily the pain the pastor will have to inflict on his children that is being lamented. It is rather the pain that the children have inflicted on their parents: 'Your mother and I will have a very bad night tonight, because we know that I will have to hurt you tomorrow, and that causes us more pain than the beating you will receive.'

This exemplary scene shows how the pressure of punishment is intensified by a kind of moral doubling. The punishment that the children receive is a double one: in addition to their physical punishment, they also have to take the burden of responsibility for the pain and suffering they have caused their parents. They will not only feel the sting of the switch but also the 'pangs of bad conscience' (Nietzsche 1996, 62) The ideology at work here was described and sharply criticized by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: 'Punishment is supposed to have a value of awakening the *sense of guilt* in the culprit' (Nietzsche 1996, 62).

The pastor, who appears as a punishing authority here, is not simply a sadist. He does not enjoy meting out punishment. On the contrary: for him it is a moral duty, which causes him pain. The children's introduction to the machinery of punishment is seen from the point of view of pedagogical efficiency, just as in modern management a reward–punishment psychology is widely accepted as a tool for 'motivating' employees and creating a stock of valuable 'human resources'. Punishment is administered in the name of a morality, which guarantees order. The value of punishment is seen in its capacity to produce upstanding citizens who are pleasing in the eyes of God or productive subjects who are pleasing in the eyes of worldly authorities. In rendering the pain and suffering of those on the receiving end visible, Haneke not only problematizes the moral technology of reward/punishment but rather incites a reflection of/on the frame, in which reward/punishment appears as natural, self-evident, or unquestionable duty.

Internalization of violence: rituals of punishment and humiliation

Moral domination works most effectively when the moral imperative is internalized by those who are subjected to it. In this case, goodness is associated or equated with conformity to values privileged by authorities and other dominant regimes of truth. According to

Nietzsche, the internalization of the moral imperative implies that 'the "I" turns against itself, unleashing its morally condemning aggression against itself' (Butler 2005, 9). (Bad) conscience is thus a specific mechanism of regulation of the psyche (Butler 1997). According to Nietzsche, punishment operates as a 'technique for remembering things' (1996, 42). It creates a memory and inscribes the moral imperative in the body and the mind. 'Something is branded in, so that it stays in memory: only that which *hurts* incessantly is remembered' (Nietzsche 1996, 42). Horrifying sacrifices, the most disgusting mutilations, and the cruellest religious rituals, according to Nietzsche, originate from the belief in pain as the most powerful aid to memory. Both physical punishment and mental cruelty can in this sense work as 'aids to memory'. Haneke has stressed the destructive force of the latter: 'pressure and humiliation create mental damage. You may forget bodily pain at some point. But you never forget humiliations. You may perhaps forget them consciously, but the hatred remains' (2010b, 164).

Nietzsche (1996, 64, 67) described bad conscience as a 'deep sickness' or a 'cruel illness' that emerges as an effect of a 'blocking' (*Hemmung*), which prevents a force from being discharged and turns it inwards. In this way, an 'active force' turns into a 'reactive force' which manifests itself in the form of 'sad passions'. Punishment, says Nietzsche, does not make humans better; rather it tames and domesticates them. On a large scale, its effects are 'increased fear, greater prudence, [and] the mastering of desires' (Nietzsche 1996, 64). According to Nietzsche, 'bad conscience', 'ressentiment', and the dominance of the 'ascetic ideal' are the main manifestations of the 'sad passions'. These 'sad passions' result from a repressive moral milieu and become a destructive force that turns against life and the living. The film portrays a social fabric steeped in the sad passions. There is little laughter in the film, but much sadness and many sad faces. In one of the rare scenes where there is laughter, it is contradicted in a strange way. We see the body of the widowed farmer hanging from a rope in the barn, while in the background the children are laughing and playing, oblivious to the dangling corpse. The message might be that there is laughter only when evil is invisible or not seen.

The reactive affects (hatred, envy, malevolence, distrust, vengeance) are all expressions of resentiment. They turn the self against others and make others responsible for the suffering inflicted. Eventually, resentiment turns against life itself. It demands a self-renunciation and '*involuntary* temperance' (Nietzsche 1996, 125). In the last instance, it demands a self-annihilation in the name of a higher goal. *The White Ribbon* portrays how the cumulative effect of all this results in what Foucault calls 'micro-fascism', 'the fascism in our head and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us' (2000, xiii). In many scenes, the working of this micro-fascism is both illustrated and put into question by leading the spectator to confront the perspectival truth of the victim. When, for example, Gustav, the pastor's youngest son asks his austere father for the permission to take care of an injured bird, the strange love for authority of those 'who grew up in captivity', as the pastor puts it, is revealed. In the scene where the doctor misuses his daughter and explains to the younger brother who enters the scene asking why his sister was weeping 'beauty must suffer!', one is confronted with the pain that is inflicted and disguised. When the baron's son is kidnapped and severely beaten by other children who are jealous of the whistle he owns, the spirit of revenge is revealed as a supplement to exploitative relations. In the scene where the doctor humiliates the midwife after joyless sexual intercourse and ends the conversation with 'By god, why don't you just die?!' the (self)hatred on which their relationship is based is exposed. In the scene where the peasant farmer reminds his son, who

demands justice for his mother's death from the baron (who is suspected of having some responsibility), that they cannot survive without the baron's patronage, it is revealed how the 'very thing that dominates and exploits us' becomes accepted, generating even more resentment. Many other examples could be added – all of them are examples of ethical showing.

Conscience and the knowledge of the conscience

One of the main practices of moral subjection is the confession (see Foucault 1981). The principles of this technology have been incorporated into modern (HR) management technologies (Townley 1998) that encourage or force employees to tell the truth about themselves (e.g. in appraisals, assessments, self-assessments, etc.). Such technologies bind the individual 'by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault 1982, 212) to normatively defined identities. When one is forced to confess, one is compelled to pronounce a truth, which is inside the self. Confession as a ritual of discourse has two effects: the one who is forced to confess reveals a truth to an authority figure and also changes and transforms him/herself. By confessing, s/he constitutes him or herself as an errant and non-righteous being (Foucault 1981, 57–64). A subtle form of subjection works through repeated submission under this ritual, the 'formidable injunction to tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, what one is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking' (Foucault 1981, 60). As one repeatedly confesses or is repeatedly forced to confess, one is called to reflect on oneself against the background of the discursive frame which constitutes our views of good and evil. This ritual also creates and necessitates a specific self-relation. It requires that the penitent objectifies himself and develops a specific attitude towards him/herself (an evaluative, judging, or condemning attitude).

Figure 1. *The White Ribbon* – Confession. *The White Ribbon* © 2009 X Filme Creative Pool, Wega Film, Les Films du Losange, Lucky Red, ARD Degeto, Bayrischer Rundfunk, Österreichischer Rundfunk Fernsehen, France 3 Cinéma. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.), reproduced with permission of X Film Berlin.

In another memorable scene from the film, we see the pastor with his eldest son Martin. The son looks sickly, pale, and joyless; he has dark rings under his eyes (see Figure 1). The father, interrogating him, does not recognize his son's appearance as a result of the treatment he receives in this regime. For the pastor/father, the swelling and the black rings are signs indicating moral impurity (masturbation). This, at least, is what he impresses on his son as he relates a horrible story about another young boy he once knew in the neighbouring village who showed the same signs, deteriorated more and more, fell ill, and eventually died. The boy was guilty of 'touching himself at night' and thereby 'overexciting his nerves'. His miserable condition, lingering illness, and ultimate death were his punishment for the moral misconduct of masturbation. Following this, the pastor forces his son to confess, to regret his actions, and to avow and acknowledge his sins. In order to protect and cure him, the son's hands will be tied to the bed during the night from now on. Again, this humiliation is a moral duty, which the father executes for the sake of the son's moral purity (another form of bondage which serves as self-protection).

Confession is not only a practice in the service of a regulatory power that produces a subject who is obliged to tell the truth about his or her desires. In the verbal act of confessing, the subject 'publishes himself (sic!)' (Butler 2005, 112) and constitutes him/herself within a specific socially constituted relation. 'Thus a certain performative production of the subject within established public conventions is required of the subject' (Butler 2005, 113). It is interesting to note that it is exactly at this point, where Martin is forced to confess, that resistance emerges. 'Be honest!' the father insists. 'Why did you have tears in your eyes when I told you the story about the boy?!' 'I don't know – because I somehow felt sorry for him', the son replies, refusing to show and manifest himself as a sinner. Instead, he shows himself as a compassionate person who cares about others.

Other rituals likewise subjugate the subjects of the moral order and impose an identity on them. As a punishment, the pastor's daughter has a white ribbon woven into her hair. The white ribbon works as a stigmatizing visual symbol (see Goffman 1970), which not only marks her as a sinner but also reminds her of her impurity and her duty of self-purification. It stigmatizes her and puts her in a virtual pillory; it makes her appear impure in the eyes of others and reminds her of the (never-ending) duty of purifying her soul. After a period of catharsis, the white ribbon is again ritually removed from her hair as a sign of forgiveness and renewed trust. In the celebratory context of Christmas Eve, she is welcomed back into the family circle, only to lose this privilege after a later incident where she breaks the moral rules of the community, which the pastor embodies. She is publicly humiliated in the classroom. 'I am sad', says the pastor, while his errant daughter stands with her face to the wall and eventually collapses.

Hierarchical divisions

Moral violence is often associated with a hierarchical order, which literally means 'the holy order' (the Ancient Greek word for hierarchy ἱεραρχία translates as rule of a high priest). The values of dominance and submission are immanent to this mode of organizing social relations. In fact it has been argued that 'the presence of moral violence within the workplace is shaped by a combination of dominance and submission and narcissistic executives, who are supported by compliant and idealising subordinates' (Diamond and Allcorn 2004, 23). Such hierarchical ordering and divisions characterize

Eichwald as well. In addition to the pastor, who is one of the film's main characters, there are three other figures of authority that represent the assemblage of power in the village: the doctor, the baron, and the teacher. These characters – all of them male – are embedded in a stable arrangement in which their power is institutionally secured, protected, and legitimized by a moral system which demands respect for authority. A clear hierarchical structure defines their positions and spheres of influence.

All of these authority figures initially appear as perpetrators of violence. They are portrayed as ruthless and emotionless characters that exercise their rights and duties with few qualms and little compassion. They appear as depersonalized, almost dehumanized executors (in particular the pastor) of strict order. In this respect, they are reminiscent of Adolf Eichmann, who famously defended himself in the Nuremberg Trials with the argument that he had 'only fulfilled his duties' and was 'just following orders' (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 400).[1] In the film, this depersonalization is underlined by the fact that the authority figures have no names. They rather appear as holders of social or institutional positions; they are addressed as 'Herr Lehrer', 'Herr Vater', 'Herr Baron', and 'Herr Doktor'.

The clear structure of sub/superordination implies a specific pattern for the transmission of violence, which is actualized when the subordinates internalize the ideals of the dominant order and make them absolute. Punishment and humiliation 'from above' are not returned to those 'above': rather, they are substitutionally transmitted to those below, to the weaker, until the weakest link in the chain is reached. In this way, violence operates top-down, but ultimately circulates vertically and horizontally. Victims become perpetrators. In *The White Ribbon*, says Haneke, the children see themselves as 'God's right hand, and they pass on violence from the top down' (2010a, 161). They become servants of an abstract moral law, which manifests itself in the form of commandments and prohibitions.

Figure 2. *The White Ribbon* – Ritual Sacrifice. *The White Ribbon* © 2009 X Filme Creative Pool, Wega Film, Les Films du Losange, Lucky Red, ARD Degeto, Bayrischer Rundfunk, Österreichischer Rundfunk Fernsehen, France 3 Cinéma. DVD: Artificial Eye (U.K.), reproduced with permission of X Film Berlin.

Those who are weaker are punished, humiliated, tortured, or sacrificed in lieu of others. A striking example in the film is the ritual killing of the pastor's pet bird, supposedly by his daughter. One day the pastor finds his budgerigar dead on his desk, impaled on scissors (see Figure 2). The image and position of the bird is strongly reminiscent of a crucifixion. The bird has been ritually sacrificed in order to hurt the father in retribution for the hurt he inflicted on his daughter. Ultimately, the image of the crucified bird seems to suggest that it is the (violent) enforcement of a moral code that produces evil, rather than protects from it. Evil in such cases is produced behind the smoke screen of the good. Ethics, which 'must begin with a concern of and care for others' (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 402), is substituted by rule-following, which 'merely displaces ethics from the subject to an organizational or other culture' (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 402). Compassion, which would allow the characters to sense the suffering of others, is deafened or even annihilated. There are very few moments in which compassion works as a trigger of moral impulse.

Significantly, in the film the 'moral impulse' (Bauman 1991) arises in one of the children, who are not yet fully socialized. After the death of the pastor's beloved pet bird, Gustav, his youngest son, presents his father with the gift of a new bird. He wants to console his father, because 'Herr Vater is so sad'. In another scene, Gustav unties his older brother Martin and releases him from the bonds that were meant to safeguard him from his own desire in the night. Facing the danger of a nearby fire, he hesitates but ultimately breaks the rule his father made. Within the repressive moral culture, the space of ethics seems to shrink to such little acts of resistance and not following the rule. Such micro-acts of disobedience, which may take many different forms, can be interpreted as the struggle to find and express one's own voice within the silencing repression (Williams 2010, 55).

At no point is there an open or public questioning or critique of this moral order. There are very few paths of escape to the world outside the village. It is nearly impossible to flee the 'malevolence, envy, stupidity, and brutality' of village life, as the baron's wife expresses it. The micro-fascism 'that constitute(s) the tyrannical bitterness of … everyday lives' (Foucault 2000, xiv) makes the announcement of war at the end of the film seem like a gleam of hope that is welcomed. The destruction of the old order appears as a release that promises salvation and a better life in another world. 'There was a sense of expectation and departure in the air. Everything was going to change' says the narrator – a 'deeply ironical' statement as Haneke (2010c, 28) explains.

Aesthetic strategies for involving the spectator

Haneke also uses various aesthetic techniques and strategies in order to irritate and stimulate the moral and aesthetic judgements of the spectator (Metelmann 2010) and to involve the spectator in a 'parrhesiastic game' in which he or she is forced to reflect on his/her relation to what is shown and eventually on his or her own life. In the following paragraphs, I present some of Haneke's aesthetic strategies with reference to *The White Ribbon*.

Omissions: not showing

Haneke himself mentions 'omissions' and 'not showing' as possibilities for involving the spectator and addressing him/her as a responsible self, since '…freedom always arises at those points where the director leaves things open' (2010a,

170). This strategy not only seeks to grant the spectator freedom of interpretation, but also seeks to instigate moral reflection. Even though Haneke's films are often perceived as very violent, it is almost a principle for him to avoid open presentations of violence or violent acts. This is not only because Haneke perceives the open presentation of acts of violence as 'obscene' (2010a, 181), but also because *not showing* such acts directly allows images and fantasies to form in the mind of the spectator. '(O)ur own fantasies of horror are more abysmal than any orgy of blood in Kodacolor' says Haneke (1993, 37).

In *The White Ribbon*, the pastor/father has to carry out the ritual of punishing the two children who returned home late. In this key scene, the actual physical punishment – the act of whipping the son – is *not* shown on the screen. We only see Martin walking down the hall, retrieving the switch from another room, and then walking back to the room where the ritual is to take place. We see him walking towards the door, entering the room, and closing the door behind him. The ritual of punishment takes place *behind the closed door* and is not shown in the film. We *hear* the whipping and the boy's cries of pain, but we do not *see* them. Nevertheless, or perhaps even because of that, we can almost feel the cruelty and pain that takes place behind closed doors. As Williams (2010, 51) has observed, '[a]t this point of Haneke's project, sound, rather than image, insists on the essential reality of violence: pain inflicted upon another'.

In this scene, like in many others in Haneke's films, what is actually happening is shifted to the sound track. In contrast to the eye, the ear is 'structured event-like' (*ereignishaft strukturiert*) (Ossenagg 2008, 67, my translation). Auditory input, in other words, is less filtered by cultural patterns, so it intensifies the spectator's concern and challenges it in a much stronger, more direct way. It forces spectators to create their own images and denies them the option of being disengaged or observing images 'out there' from afar. As the viewer is suddenly confronted with images that he or she has created by him/herself he or she is no longer a distanced observer or innocent bystander. Moral sentiments (like guilt, shame, compassion, disgust) are mobilized, and a space of reflexivity is created in which the viewer is confronted with his/her own experience of violence and the images of horror and suffering that emerge from history.

But there is more to Haneke's strategy of omission. In *The White Ribbon* this strategy is also employed to create an awareness of the game of seeing and not seeing, of looking and not looking, of foreground and background. What we see *on screen* is not the whole reality. What happens *off screen* or behind closed doors is equally, or even more important: in fact, the real tragedies are often hidden behind walls. These may be physical walls, symbolic walls, or the imagined walls that separate and split the individual from others (e.g. Diamond and Allcorn 2004). In *The White Ribbon*, the sound track works like a sort of alarm system that produces sounds of everyday violence and reminds us to be sensitive to what is not seen. As Williams (2010, 52) put it

> [w]ith the image increasingly reduced to a hollow surface, it records even more starkly, like an echo chamber, not only the rustling wind and hum of flies … and the noises of everyday suffering like a baby crying, but also the piercing tones of persecution, the nuances of cruelty and hypocrisy, the intimations of potential violence taking place just off-screen, and the deafening silence of repression.

Further, in many scenes in *The White Ribbon*, Haneke shows actors looking away, and thereby silently accepting and perpetuating violence. The camera shows what lies outside the actor's field of vision, it shows what the actors do not see, do not look

at, or do not react to or against (see also Bell 2010). It is this *looking away* which may perpetuate forms of violence and inhibits truth-telling that might interrupt or at least problematize the circle of violence.

Subverting well-established explanation schemes

The White Ribbon starts like a classic historical film and frames the events in a realistic manner. An 'accepted and well-established explanation scheme' (Haneke 2010a, 169) thus creates the expectation that the events will be reported in chronological order, which eventually leads to a specific result or point of culmination. *The White Ribbon*, however, does not fulfil this expectation. It does not explain the events or the relationship between them. There are no characters who can report what 'really' happened. Even the narrator contents himself with adumbrations, suggestions, and guesswork. 'I am not sure', he admits,

> if all the details of the story I am about to tell you are true. Much of it I only know from hearsay, and even after so many years, I am not able to unravel some of it, and there are no answers to so many questions.

This is an example of how conventional techniques – voice-over narration being conventionally a filmic device to establish some authority that organizes meaning (Grundmann 2010b, 600) – are subverted in a way that destabilizes the authorial framing and seeks to address viewers as mature selves who are

> not accepting as true … what an authority tells you is true, or at least not accepting it because an authority tells you that it is true, but rather accepting it only if one considers valid the reasons for doing so. (Foucault 2003, 266)

This becomes clearer when we take a closer look at the figure of the narrator: he is the village teacher in old age. In the beginning, he establishes himself as a trustworthy authority; at least his admission that what he is telling might not be the full truth can be read as an attempt 'to persuade us of his honourable intentions' (Williams 2010, 48). However, Haneke's concern is not to establish a figure of authority, but rather to create awareness that 'we never know exactly what really happened' (2010b, 153) and to suspend judgement. In other words, if we see the narrator as a 'sensemaker' in Weick's terms, than Haneke's aesthetics seeks to remind us that '(t)o engage in sensemaking is to construct, filter, frame, create facticity' (1995, 14). On reflection, it becomes clear that the narrator *constructs* reality (e.g. many things that he reports he could not possibly have seen), that he *filters* (e.g. he selects those events that seem important to him), he *frames* (e.g. he frames his own actions in a favourable light). In other words, he is not representing the (historical) Truth, but he is creating a perspectival truth in retrospect.

The teacher – the narrator's alter ego in the film – is generally presented in a rather positive light, even though a reflexive spectator might ask him/herself how it was possible for the teacher not to be entangled in the village's atrocities or how he could survive what would follow the events in Eichwald (First World War and Second World War) undamaged. In one scene, the teacher acts like a parrhesiastic figure. He confronts the pastor, the main symbol of the established regime of truth, with the suspicion that his own children were involved in the atrocities that took place in the village. The

teacher is – this is important to note – somehow different from the other villagers. He is well educated and was not born and raised in the village. This is perhaps one of the reasons that allows him to see the 'truth' and also pronounce it. This truth-telling *vis-à-vis* an authority (pastor) challenges not only the self-identity of the pastor, but shakes him to the core and unsettles his whole worldview. Of course, this truth-telling comes at a price. The teacher is threatened with a ban from his profession and must leave the village. Under the conditions of Eichwald, Haneke seems to suggest, truth-telling is not an option, if one wants to survive. The truth-teller in Eichwald is thus in a situation which is comparable to the organizational whistleblower, who is sacrificed for the sake of maintaining order (Perry 1998; Alford 2001). He or she is excluded, or excludes him/herself. Such 'victimizing treatment' (Karfakis and Kokkinidis 2011, 338) seems to be a common experience of many whistleblowers (see Rothschild and Miethe 1994; Mansbach 2009).

Refusal to provide unambiguousness

If it is true that moral violence in organizations 'characteristically involves emotional and cognitive processes of defensive splitting of the self and other into good or bad, all or nothing, black or white categories' (Diamond and Allcorn 2004, 24–5) then we can say that Haneke's aesthetics seeks to undermine exactly this condition by refusing to present clear-cut oppositions of good and evil. Here is an example. On the one hand, *The White Ribbon* contrasts and juxtaposes two worlds: the world of adults and the world of children. The one, says Haneke, 'embodies power; the other [is about] enduring power' (2010a, 162). Despite this initial opposition, the film avoids portraying the characters that represent the respective worlds as unambiguously good or evil. All the characters appear to be both perpetrators and victims. At no point does a good or ideal world of the children stand in opposition to a bad or corrupted world of the adults. Clearly, the children are presented as victims. They are victims of a violent education, they are victims of fathers who abuse them, and they are victims of mothers who silently accept this. They are victims of parents who produce horror and panic by beating and withdrawal of affection. On the other hand, they are not innocent. They are also perpetrators of crimes and violent acts.

The representatives of 'the world of the adults' – the world of power – are themselves not only perpetrators, but also victims. Even the least likeable figures in the film, the pastor, for example, are not only perpetrators, but also victims. This ambiguity leaves moral judgement open and creates a tension that needs to be filled with answers, but Haneke does not supply them. Questions of responsibility, guilt, etc. demand an engagement with the other, rather than a definitive statement given by an authority. Haneke seeks to 'force the spectator to "think with" and "feel with" the film' (1993, 37) in order to reach his/her own conclusions and experience the questionability of societal modes of organizing relationships.

Openness with no final explanation

Indeed the ending of *The White Ribbon* is inconclusive, and no final answers are given. We never find out who is guilty of the mysterious crimes in the village. The spectator is left with a series of open questions (e.g. who really committed the crimes? Why does the midwife, who says 'I now know who is guilty of the crimes' leave the village? Why does the doctor disappear in the end? Is there any truth to the rumours in the village that

the doctor and the midwife are guilty? Is the narrator, who strongly suspects the children, to be trusted?). Many explanations are possible and plausible here, but in fact answers to these questions on the (superficial) level of content are of secondary importance. These questions rather serve to engage the spectator in a process of questioning and reflecting on a deeper level, one which concerns the spectator's own relationship to what is shown. How is it possible that violence is produced and reproduced in this way? How is it possible that a regime of the good breeds evil? What are the mechanisms that exclude moral sensibility? And, finally, how do these mechanisms also work in and through me? The absence of reassuring answers is in a certain sense also an approximation of the complexity of (moral) experience, which in 'the real world' involves us in aporetic situations and undecidable questions.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have tied into the interest of scholars of organization in developing alternative forms of cultural and aesthetic critique and reflexivity. I have focused on the work of the film-maker Michael Haneke as an exemplar of an ethical critique by aesthetic means. As such it represents a special form of critique, which seeks to widen the reflexive space in and from which specific modes of social organization can be questioned. To make this point, I have first reconstructed Haneke's practice of film-making as an *ethical critique* which seeks to instigate moral reflection on the part of the spectator rather than to provide normative judgements. More specifically, I have located Haneke's work in the tradition of 'ethical parrhesia'. In comparison to the (historically elder) political parrhesia, 'the target of this . . . *parrhesia* is not to persuade the Assembly, but to convince someone that he must take care of himself and of others; and this means that he *must change his life*' (Foucault 2001, 106 emphasis in original). Such a form of critique is – to paraphrase Butler (2005, 136) – concerned with questioning and problematizing how we are formed in social and organizational life, and at what cost. By rendering the human costs (suffering) of this formation visible (Sørensen 2010b) such a form of critique seeks to create a reflexive space in which such questions become urgent.

I have then taken Haneke's most recent film *The White Ribbon* as an exemplary case of a critique of moral organization. I have argued that the relevance of this specific film for the critique of organization can be derived both from the *content* of the film and from the *form* in which it problematizes this content. In terms of *content,* I have focused on pastoral power and forms of violence which are associated with a 'code-oriented morality'. It might be argued that this problematic is limited to a specific historical context and that the analysis and critique of this form of power and the associated forms of violence are less important today. This, however, should be questioned. Worldly aims such as welfare, security, and sufficiently high standards of living have replaced the goals of the traditional pastorate (Foucault 1982, 215). The various mechanisms of pastoral power – above all the confessional – have been integrated into the technologies of management (e.g. Townley 1998; Bell and Taylor 2003) which serve to make us 'good organizational (wo)men'. In connection with a taken for granted psychology of reward–punishment as the route to 'motivation' and an intense pressure (e.g. to compete with others) that reduces the space of reflection, these new forms of a 'prescribed organizational asceticism' (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 510) may result in forms of 'moral violence' which Diamond and Allcorn (2004, 22) have characterized as 'emotionally and psychologically abusive and harmful workplace cultures.

The narcissistic . . . organizational cultures . . . are . . . hierarchically . . . governed by the arbitrary use of power and authority, sadistic-masochistic, relational patterns of dominance and submission, and an absence of potential space for dialogue and play'. This might be seen as the organizational manifestation of the 'sad passions' and the 'micro-fascism' in Eichwald as portrayed in *The White Ribbon*.

In terms of *form* I have shown, how Haneke's approach employs various aesthetic strategies that create a reflexive and emotional distance from practices that generate forms of violence by rendering the suffering associated with these practices visible and by addressing the spectator/viewer as a critical/responsible self. In this respect, the analysis can contribute to the interest of scholars in organizational aesthetics in the development of methods and 'new possibilities for expressing organizational life' (Warren 2008, 576). Even though it is certainly not possible to derive a method for doing organizational aesthetics research from Haneke's work, the analysis of Haneke's aesthetic strategies of ethical showing and involving the 'spectator' can provide some inspiration for developing methods for 'blending image, sound and narrative' (Warren 2008, 576) in a way that problematizes 'organizational hegemony and the regimes of work that constantly threaten to reproduce its habitual distinctions, that is, produce appropriate (if often displaced, alienated and bored) individuals' (Sørensen 2010a, 310).

Whereas other approaches to organizational aesthetics seek to provide criteria and frames for judging organizational practices in ethical (good/bad) and/or aesthetic (beautiful/ugly) terms (see Taylor and Hansen 2005), organizational research inspired by Haneke's work could perform the critical role of visual and auditory culture, which according to Butler (2009, 100) is 'precisely to thematize the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanizing norm, that restricts what is perceivable and, indeed, what can be'. To paraphrase Haneke, one could say that such critical research would be a research of 'insistent questioning' that might use visual images (cf. Cohen, Hancock, and Tyler 2006), sound (Corbett 2003), or narrative fictions (Rhodes and Brown 2005) to question the 'exclusionary matrix of organization' (Cohen, Hancock, and Tyler 2006, 122). By rendering the human costs visible, it can perhaps provoke reflexive questioning around how we are formed in organizational life, and at what cost. The commitment of such organizational aesthetics research is thus not 'to make organizations more beautiful' (Taylor and Hansen 2005, 1216) but rather pointing at the '"not seeing" in the midst of seeing' (Butler 2009, 100). In Strati's terms, this kind of research is concerned with working against the 'anaestheticization . . . which dulls, even if temporarily, the sensory faculties' (1999, 81). Such a perspective is not critical in the sense of providing judgements but rather in the sense of expanding our perception of the world, which forecloses that 'we judge a world we refuse to know, and [that] our judgment becomes one means of refusing to know that world' (Butler 2009, 156). In creating room for reflection, it seeks to create a space in which spectators of the 'organizational spectacle' can be(come) participants and creators of their own modes of organizing and take responsibility for their own part in making the world.

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Note

1. In fact, the documentary on Eichmann's defence in the Nuremberg Trial was one of the main inspirations for *The White Ribbon* (Haneke 2010a, 157).

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