Mapping moving media: film and video

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The Reality Effect

Introduction: from Real to Reel in *Benny's Video*

> Did *you* film that?
> *Mm-hmm.*
> What was it like, with the pig? I mean, have you ever seen a corpse before, for real?
> *No. You?*
> No.
> *It was only a pig. I once saw a program on TV about the special effects they use in actions films. All ketchup and plastic. Looks real though.*[3]

Michael Haneke's narrative fiction film *Benny's Video* (1992) starts with moving video images. It is mainly because of their poor quality that the medium of these images can be discerned. Their texture is marked by the square grain which is typical of video images. The graininess of the surface is especially visible in dark areas of the images, where pixels have dropped out and have left small white squares and lines. Primary colors within the images, especially reds, look pale and unsaturated. Skin tones are covered with an unnatural faint blue shimmer.

Besides the fact that the image quality of the footage is low, it is recorded in a rather poor manner as well. Clearly taped with a handheld camera, the images shudder and shake. All camera movements in the unedited material are fast and abrupt, as are the zoom movements. The disorienting effect of these amateurish traits diminishes, however, when the camera zooms in on a pig that was first dragged out of a dark sty by a couple of people. Surrounded by a small crowd and a barking dog, the squealing animal

[3] This dialogue between Benny and a girlfriend in the film *Benny's Video* was translated from German to English by the author.

is pushed to the ground. First its large bluish pink body fills the image frame, then the camera zooms in on the pig's head, through which a bullet is shot with a gun for slaughtering cattle. Pale red blood starts the flow, while the pig starts to spasm.

These movements stop, however. The image of the dying pig is brought to a standstill, then partially rewound, and subsequently replayed in slow-motion. The scene ends with an abrupt change into "snow" – the noise of an untuned television. On the one hand, these actions affirm that the medium of the shown footage is video. They bring out typical formal features and technical possibilities of the medium, such as the possibility of pausing or rewinding a videotape on a VCR, and the characteristic horizontal flickering scan lines which cross the video image when those possibilities are used.

On the other hand, the operations of pausing, rewinding, and playing the videotape in slow motion indicate the fact that the videotape is actually embedded in another medium, namely film. The actions direct the spectator's attention to the diegesis of Haneke's narrative fiction film because they imply another spectator; someone who is looking at and controlling the movement of the video images at the same time. In other words, the manipulations and interruptions of the moving video point to a viewer who is using the remote control. This active spectator turns out to exist inside the world created by the narrative film which follows the video. The film's fourteen-year-old protagonist named Benny is shown to repeatedly scrutinize the images of the dying pig by operating the remote control.

Because Benny's actions with the remote control are both visible within the video scene and in the subsequent narrative film, they function as the most important link between the two parts – the video and the film. Moreover, as the pausing, rewinding, and slowing down of the moving video images already implicitly refer to a viewer/actor which the film will make explicit later on, they motivate and soften the abrupt transition between the shaky, coarse-grained, unedited video material and the filmed part which consists of steady shots and the smooth, well-edited images of a high quality film production. Another aspect which relates the video segment to the narrative film is the fact that two of the people in the small crowd around the suffering pig are introduced later on in the film as Benny's parents. What is more, Benny is not only shown to be the diegetic viewer of the video, he also turns out to be the producer of it. All in all, the bond between the video clip and the narrative film is tightened in many ways as the film proceeds. As it turns out, the moving images of the dying pig do not simply precede the cinematic narrative; they are embedded in the film's diegesis.

However, although the transition from video images to film images is rather smooth because the relationship between the shown video material and the film story soon becomes clear, the switch from video to film does not come about entirely without a hitch. The transition remains complicated because the video recording and the narrative film each produce a reality effect, yet in a different way. In other words, the video and the film both evoke the impression that what they represent is reality, but the characteristics or strategies by which this impression is evoked are dissimilar. Put briefly, the video

images produce the impression of showing reality through features which can best be characterized as flaws or imperfections, such as blurriness and color distortion. The reality effect of the film scenes, on the other hand, depends entirely on the flawlessness and seeming transparency of the material. What is more, the reality effects produced by the video and those of the film images give rise to a different sort and extent of belief. The viewer's belief in the world shown by the video is, for instance, likely to be more profound than the viewer's belief in the filmed world.

Even without being able to define them precisely as yet, the reality effects themselves as well as the way they are produced in Haneke's film look quite familiar. The reason for this is that the reality effects as created by film and video in *Benny's Video* can be recognized in many other film and video practices. These effects can, moreover, especially be discerned in works in which – like in *Benny's Video* – both media appear, because the differences and similarities between the reality effects of film and video become clearer when the two are combined. Therefore, in this chapter, I will further pinpoint the reality effects of film and video by looking into films and videos in which the two media are combined. Alongside *Benny's Video*, the main corpus of investigation includes the film *Family Viewing* (Atom Egoyan 1987) and *Battles of Troy* (2007), a video documentary by Krassimir Terziev. I will examine by which formal devices the effects are caused or produced in these works, and which exact forms of belief the produced effects invite.

The apparent recurrence of the same two reality effects of video and film in a large number of works makes it reasonable to assume that the effects are related to the specificity of video and film. But how can an effect such as the reality effect exactly relate to a medium's specificity, which I defined in the introduction as a layered structure which consists of a physical support and a number of conventions? How do the typical reality effects of film and video which recur in films and videos relate to specific technological possibilities and conventional applications of the two media? As will become clear below, answering this question will not only further delineate the specificity of film and video, but will also lead to a redefinition of the concept of medium specificity itself.

Another matter worth studying is the fact that, most often, film and video are of influence on each other's reality effect when the two media occur in one artwork. In *Benny's Video*, for instance, the videotaped part diminishes the reality effect of the film, because the smooth and steady film images look very artificial in comparison to the rough and authentic looking video material. The film in turn sustains instead of diminishes the reality effect of the video fragment when the truthfulness of the video representation is confirmed by the cinematic narrative. Such forms of interaction between media concerning the reality effect are exceptionally relevant with regard to the specificity of the two media. For, as the distinct reality effects are specific to video and film, interaction which influences the effects automatically relates to the specificity of film and video. Therefore, in this chapter, I will study the question of how the

interaction between the reality effects of film and video affects the specificity of the two media. As a start, it is necessary to address the main concept of this chapter more thoroughly. In order to further define and understand what a reality effect entails, we can first turn to the famous text in which it was coined.

1.1 Reality Effects: Literature, Film, and Video

In "The Reality Effect" (1982), Roland Barthes attempts to discover the significance of seemingly insignificant parts in realist novels; the useless details and superfluous descriptions to which structural analysis – "occupied as it is with separating out and systematizing the main articulations of narrative"(135) – can assign no functional value within the narrative. The detailed descriptions are insignificant in that they seem to be detached from the semiotic structure of the narrative. They do not, for instance, constitute an indication of characterization or atmosphere. Nor can they be said to have a classical rhetorical function, for the realist descriptions do not comply with the demands of plausibility and possibility which governed classical discourse.

To rush to the conclusion of Barthes' text before discussing the argument leading up to it; the detailed descriptions produce a reality effect. These "residues of functional analyses" seem to "denote what is commonly called 'concrete reality' (casual movements, transitory attitudes, insignificant objects, redundant words)"(138). Instead of depicting the plausible, possible and general (i.e. the *vraisemblable*), detailed descriptions in realist texts appear to give a naked account of what is or was. The apparent interest of realist narratives in referential reality – including all its particularities – seems to resist being given a meaning. Firstly, the detailed descriptions do not *mean* anything; they do not stand for anything other than themselves, they just *are*. Secondly, they seem to resist meaning because, as Barthes explains, reference to concrete reality is brandished as a weapon against meaning by the ideology of our time, "as if there were some indisputable law that what is truly alive could not signify – and vice versa" (139).

In order to further examine the seeming resistance of realist texts to meaning, Barthes turns to Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas on the sign. According to de Saussure, the category of the referent is not indispensable for the functioning of language; communication can occur through signifiers and signifieds alone. If language is to be studied effectively, de Saussure argues, the referents of signs can best be placed in brackets. With this idea in mind, Barthes notes that realist texts do not place such brackets at all. Instead, they seem to attempt to draw in the referent. As concrete details and descriptions in realist novels do not have a clear meaning or function within the structure of the narrative, they seem to be pure encounters between signifiers and referents. With that, the signified appears to be bypassed, or rather, to be expelled from the sign. *Seem*, that is, because such an encounter between signifier and referent at the expense of the signified would imply an impossible alteration of the sign. It is rather an

illusion which is evoked by realist texts – the referential illusion, as Barthes calls it. The fact is that the details do not really denote reality directly, they rather signify reality by connotation. As Barthes explains:

> The truth behind this illusion is this: eliminated from the realist utterance as a signified of denotation, the 'real' slips back in as a signified of connotation; at the very moment these details are supposed to denote reality directly, all they do, tacitly, is signify it. Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's little door, say, in the last analysis, only this: we are the real. It is this category of the real, and not its various contents, which is being signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent, standing alone, becomes the true signifier of realism. A reality effect is produced, which is the basis for that unavowed 'vraisemblance' which forms the aesthetic of all standard works of modernity. (1982: 16)

Precisely because the insignificant details in realist texts evoke the referential illusion – the illusion that the signified is expelled from the sign and that signifiers collide with their referent – they signify the category of the real: "the absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent […] becomes the true signifier of realism" (1982: 16). In other words, the insignificance of details becomes a signifier whose signified is the category of the real. This process is, however, marked by Barthes as the truth *behind* the referential illusion. The connotations "we are the real" or "this is reality" are not recognizable as signifieds, nor is the category of the real. Instead, realist text seems to have hauled in the referent; to refer to referential reality directly. Reality thus seems to be denoted directly by realist texts while it is in fact signified.

Expanding "The Reality Effect"

In "The Reality Effect," Roland Barthes focuses solely on literary texts. In order to gain understanding of the reality effects in – amongst others – Haneke's film *Benny's Video* with the help of Barthes' ideas, it is necessary to consider how these ideas would function and could be useful outside of the scope of literary texts alone. More specifically, how does Barthes' theory apply to the media of film and video?[4] Can the reality effect Barthes identifies in literary texts be produced in a similar fashion by film(s) and video(s)? Can the device of detailed descriptions, which Barthes points out as being responsible for the reality effect of literary texts, also function in films and videos?

The latter question cannot simply be answered in either the affirmative or the negative. On the one hand, it can be argued that the device of detailed descriptions can

[4] As will soon become clear, my attempt to apply a theory to the media of film and video doesn't rule out the fact that those two objects will, as it were, answer back when a straightforward application of Barthes' theory proves to be problematic and insufficient.

function in film and video images because these images are able to show things in great detail. On the other hand, the word "show" in the previous sentence indicates a substantial difference between the way details can be presented in literature and in films and videos. Although films and videos do not entirely lack the possibility for description, the visual character of film and video dictates that the media most of all depict rather describe.[5] Whereas literature describes details, film and video show them.

The differences between detailed representations by literature on the one hand and film on the other, have been explored within the field of film studies by theorists studying the adaptation from novel to film, such as Seymour Chatman and Robert Stam. The arguments they present on film (and its differences from literature) often apply to video as well. One of the lessons that can be drawn from these adaptation studies is that detailed depictions by the media of film and video cannot simply be regarded as the visual equivalent of detailed descriptions in literary texts.

The first reason for this is that, whereas many aspects can still remain undetermined in detailed literary descriptions, the details shown in film and video images are inevitably specific. In comparison to literary texts, films and videos possess an "excessive particularity, a plentitude of visual details aptly called [...] 'over-specification'" (Chatman 126). Stam illustrates the over-specification of film by comparing the following sentences from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* to John Ford's film adaptation of the novel: "She sat down and opened the box. Inside were letters, clippings, photographs, a pair of earrings, a little golden signet ring, and a watch chain braided of hair and tipped with golden swivels" (118). The cinematization of this passage, Stam writes, generates an inevitable supplement. For, "where Steinbeck wrote 'photographs,' Ford had to choose specific photographs" (55). Similarly, the phrase "a pair of earrings" leaves many characteristics of the earrings undetermined. In a film (or a video), such undetermined aspects are necessarily completed, the specific size and shape of the earrings will for instance be shown.

Moreover, whereas the selection among the number of details evoked is determined and limited in a literary text, the number of details in a film or video representation is indeterminate (Chatman 125).[6] When comparing Ford's film scene to the passage from Steinbeck's novel, for instance, the film shows many details that were not mentioned in the detailed literary description of the contents of the box, such as the color and size of the box itself and the firelight flickering over the face of the woman opening it. Thus, compared to literature, film and video images seem to overflow with detail. Comparative studies such as Chatman's therefore define film images as over-detailed, over-specified, and excessively particular.

Another reason for which the detailed depictions by film and video cannot be

[5] An internal narrator can for instance verbally provide detailed descriptions in a film or a video.
[6] Only film is mentioned by Chatman; I have added video here because Chatman's argument also applies to this medium.

regarded as the visual equivalent of detailed descriptions in literary texts is that the depictions are less likely to halt the narrative timeline of a film or video. The contents of the box in *The Grapes of Wrath* can, for example, be shown in the blink of an eye in one film shot. Whether the viewer will actually be able to pay attention to all details in a very short period of time – the letters, the photographs, the earrings, and so on – remains to be seen. For although film and video mostly possess a plenitude of visual details, the movement of the images does not always allow the viewer time to dwell on this plenitude, and to notice each and every detail.[7] Although films can place some emphasis on certain details through techniques such as framing, zooming or focusing – techniques which can signify that certain details are significant – a large measure of superfluous detail is an inevitable characteristic of film and video images. And although the details depicted by film and video do not hold the temporal progress of the narrative (if any), they have an important thing in common with the details in realist literature: they are largely insignificant.

In sum, film and video images are by definition more detailed than literary texts, and most of the depicted details are insignificant to boot. The two media clearly outshine literature in representing superfluous details. Yet, although this excess detail certainly contributes to the strong reality effects that film and video are able to produce, it is not the most important source of these effects. Rather, one of the most important sources of the reality effects of the two lens-based media lies in the source of the excess detail itself: the technological and chemical ways in which film and video images are produced.

Both film and video images are brought about by rays of light that pass through the lens of a camera. Rays of light, moreover, which are generated or reflected into the camera by objects that are present in front of the recording device. In film cameras, the light is projected onto the light sensitive celluloid filmstrip which passes by the shutter. The light beam imprints discrete, rectangular images onto the transparent filmstrip, which only become visible (and projectable) as positive images after a chemical development process. In video cameras, the visual information which the rays of light contain is transformed into an electronic signal by a light sensitive chip. This electronic signal can subsequently be sent through wires and be broadcast immediately by devices which are able to translate the electronic signal back into a luminous image (e.g. a cathode ray tube, or, often, the video camera itself). The electronic signal can however also be stored on magnetic videotape, on which magnetic particles can be magnetized

[7] According to Chatman (126), all visual media share the property of over-specification. For Chatman, the difference between, on the one hand, time-based media such as film and video, and, on the other hand, media producing still images such as painting and photography, lies in the amount of time they do (or do not) allow the spectator to dwell on the details they expose. I would say, though, that over-specification and fullness of detail are more specific to film, video and photography than for instance to painting or sculpture. When it comes to painting or sculpture, over-specification is an option. As I will further explain later on, over-specification is however almost inevitable to film, photography and video because of the large degree of automation which characterizes the recording technologies of these media.

by and in proportion to the electronic signal.[8] Unlike film stock, magnetic tape doesn't show discrete images; the visual information is stored continuously on the length of the tape.

As the processes of image production described above are to a large degree automatic, the registration of details can hardly be prevented. All objects which appear in front of the lens of a film or video camera will leave their imprint on the resulting images.[9] However, the reality effect of film and video does not so much depend on the detail itself. It rather lies in the fact that the images are caused by what they show; they are traces of objects which were once present in front of the lens. Both film and video images can be understood as indexes; signs which refer to something on the basis of contiguity or continuity. Film and video images in the first place work as an index by contiguity: they are physically caused by their referents, indicating physical proximity, even touch. Yet the temporal aspect of continuity is not entirely absent from this, for although the cause of the image (its referent) can lie in the past, image and object must once have been in the same moment. Roland Barthes argues that photographs (indexical images which come into being by the same photochemical process as film images) prove that something was once there, at that place, at that time, in front of the photo camera. Hence his famous claim that the essence of photographs, their *noeme,* is the "that has been" (2000: 77).

However, many theorists have noted that one of the remarkable things of indexical signs is not only that they testify to the past existence of their cause, but that they are able to provide the past objects of which they are a trace with physical presence. "The object is made present to the addressee," Mary-Ann Doane explains in one of her discussions of indexicality (2007: 133). In her "Notes on the Index," Krauss defines indexes as "marks or traces of a particular cause, and this cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify" (1986: 198). The intriguing effect of the index, Krauss explains, is caused by time, which provides the past (by definition transient and ungraspable) with an existential and physical presence.

In Krauss' account, the indexical sign appears to carry physical traces of its physically and temporally absent cause with itself in the present. This idea points to a remarkable similarity between the effect of superfluous literary descriptions and the index: the referent seems to be "hauled into" the sign. For although Krauss writes that the indexes signify objects, the objects she refers to are not so much the signifieds, but the referents of the index. The close alliance of the indexical sign with the physical world seems to bypass signification. Like descriptive realist texts, indexes seem to be pure encounters

[8] This magnetization, or electromagnetic charging, of the particles on video tape was mostly analogue in the first three decades of video's existence. Yet, when the DV format was introduced in 1995, it quickly became commonplace to charge the magnetic particles on video tape digitally (that is, only positively or negatively).

[9] Therefore, detailed representation by film and video is hardly a device that can be deployed at will, but rather an inevitable outcome of the technical nature of the two media.

between signifiers and referents. With that, the signified appears to be expelled from the sign. It is telling in this regard that Barthes has argued that a photograph "is never distinguished from its referent (from what is represents), or at least it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent. […] It is as if the photograph carries the referent with itself" (2000: 5, emphasis in original).

The ability of the index to make its past cause and referent present is sustained by the movement of film and video images. Although film images, like photographs, necessarily show something that actually was in front of the lens at the time of shooting, the pastness of their referent is overruled by the movement of the filmed images. Both photographs and film images signal "there it is" as well as "that has been" at the same time; yet, the "there it is" tends to dominate in film. Christian Metz has argued that the essence of film should indeed be defined as "there it is," because film literally presents objects and persons from the past in the present. For, Metz explains, movement cannot be represented, it is always real, happening now. The distinction between the material characteristics of an object and its representation – which is still more or less evident in photography – dissolves when it comes to movement, according to Metz. He therefore invokes the linguistic notion of an "index of actualization" to name this particular quality of film.

Although video images, like film images, have the capacity to reanimate past objects in the present through movement, the indexical contiguity between video footage and its referents is slightly less straightforward than the physical causal relationship between film images and the objects they show. As explained previously, whereas the images on a film strip are caused directly by rays of light, a video camera first transforms these rays of light into an electronic signal before they are stored on magnetic videotape. So, although analogue video images are certainly caused by objects in front of the lens, videotape is not touched by the rays of light which these objects directed into the camera. The physical spatial contact between video image and referent is therefore less direct than the contact between film and filmed object.

However, in a temporal respect, the video image can be much closer to its referent than the analogue film image. Precisely because of the fact that video cameras translate light into electricity, video images can be broadcast instantaneously at the moment of recording. This "electronic continuousness," as John Belton (65) calls it, ensures that – in spite of the chip between light and tape – video images are directly caused by referents in reality. For the temporal simultaneity of the object in front of the lens and its video image ensures the status of the image as a "pure," immediate trace of reality, there simply is no time for manipulations to the video signal in the split second between recording and broadcasting.

Thomas Y. Levin has aptly defined live video images as "temporal indexes." Unlike analogue film images, their indexicality is not predominantly based on spatial contiguity. It is rather motivated by temporal continuity as well as temporal presence; image and referent exist together, touch each other, in the now of both recording and broadcasting.

Therefore, video images might be said to be an even stronger "index of actualization" than film images. For, unlike film's actualization, the deictic "here it is" of live video images does not go hand in hand with a "that has been." Instead, they unequivocally proclaim: "here it is, now!"

The indexicality of analogue film and video – which is grounded in their technological, physical support – gives both lens-based images a documentary status, a veracity which can produce a reality effect. However, the reality effect of film and video images is not solely caused by the indexicality of the images. For although the status of film and video images as indexical traces might be understood as a technological fact, the rhetorical reality effect of this indexicality on the viewer can only arise when it is recognized by the viewer – when it is known, or seen, by the spectator. As I will explain, film and video images relate to their indexical status differently when producing a reality effect. Video images usually produce a reality effect by way of formal features which signify veracity, documentary, and authenticity. By way of formal devices, video images produce a reality effect by pointing out their indexical status. Therefore the sign, the index, first has to become signified in order for video's reality effect to come about.

Films, on the other hand, do not generally draw attention to their indexicality in order to produce a reality effect. Unlike video, films do not create an impression of reality through formal devices which signify authenticity, immediacy, or documentary. They rather create a reality effect through conventional forms of editing, as well as image features which produce a sense of visual access to the film world in the viewer. However, although the indexicality of films usually isn't signified or exposed by dominant applications of the medium, I agree with Thomas Y. Levin that cinema's effect of the real as produced by (among other things) classical continuity editing nevertheless depends on the referential surplus value of photochemical indexicality as its base, or its back-up (Levin 583). As I will explain later on, this is attested to by the fact that narrative fiction films have incorporated some new methods producing reality effects in the digital age. Before turning to this, let's first have a look at the most common devices by which video and film produce their reality effect.

1.2 Devices in Video

(Re)turning to (Benny's) Video

The opening video sequence in Haneke's *Benny's Video* can be of help in defining the formal devices by which videos generally create an impression of reality for their viewer. Benny's video fragment of the dying pig looks real because it has the appearance of an amateurish documentary. But why? Which characteristics cause this appearance which most viewers are likely to find authentic and realistic?

To begin with, important reasons for which the video recording in Haneke's film looks documentary and amateurish are the wobbliness of the images, as well as the brusque,

disorienting moves the camera makes. Those features indicate that the camera is hand held – which is common in documentary video. Moreover, they point out that the recording device is held by inexperienced and clumsy hands – which justifies the addition of the adjective "amateurish". Many more characteristics contribute to the non-professional character of the video. The filmed objects are, for example, not always brought into focus properly, and the zooms are too rapid. In addition, the tape is unedited and ends abruptly.

Next to the features signaling the inadequacy of the producer's skills, the video fragment in *Benny's Video* is marked as an amateurish documentary by characteristics which reveal the poor quality of the video equipment itself. In the introduction, I mentioned most of these characteristics: the grainy texture of the images, the "drop-out" of pixels in darker image parts, and the pale, unnatural colors of many of the depicted objects. Other features indicating the inferiority of the video material are, for instance, the flickering wavelike patterns which move upwards over the image surface and the seeming luminosity and translucency of many light areas within the images, including several human faces. The visible low contrast ratio and low image quality of the fragment enhances the video's amateurish appearance because cheap, low quality video equipment is mostly designed for, and used by, non-professionals.[10] However, the fact that we recognize certain features as amateurish is also a matter of convention; it is something we have learned.

All of these seemingly haphazard flaws and technical imperfections together produce a reality effect. This may seem slightly counterintuitive. For what this group of flaws and imperfections first of all draws attention to is the fact that the video images are precisely not transparent registrations of reality. Each camera wobble and blurry scan line points out that the images are produced by someone (with an unsteady hand) with a video camera. The materiality of the video medium is made visible by these imperfections, and the surface of the images is shown to be opaque by their low resolution. The pixel drop-out, flickering, graininess, luminous spots, wobbling and blurriness all show that the video does not refer to reality transparently, but that it instead distorts and shapes the reality it seems to depict because the tape is a limited material object which is moreover produced and influenced by a human subject. Nevertheless, the imperfections lend the video an air of truthfulness and credibility. They all function as what German art historian Tom Holert (2004) has called "signs of authenticity"; they are understood as indications (signifiers, one might say) of the reliability and veracity of the video recording they are part of.

Although the meaning of these formal flaws is based on convention, it is not entirely arbitrary. The exposure of the physicality of electronic video images might obliterate any sense of transparent visual access to the represented world, yet it does contribute

[10] In comparison to film, video has long had a low contrast ratio; video equipment couldn't record the high contrast between dark and light areas in one image. As a consequence, video images tend to look very dark or, more often, extremely light, when they are recorded in a situation where the contrast between light and dark shades is very high (think, for instance, of an open door at the back of a dark interior).

to their status (and effect) as an index. The video flaws ensure that the footage is physically linked to reality. For, by pointing out its materiality, the ephemeral medium of video, the perceptible images of which exist only in the transient form of projected light, is established as a material ground on which the natural world can leave a physical imprint. Some of the imperfections are in fact already such an imprint. The camera movements which are visible in Benny's images, for instance, refer indexically to the (hands of) the camera man. In short, these movements reveal that the images are man-made, but they also show that the video material functions as an index. As indexes, the camera wobbles suggest that the video footage might work as an index in its entirety. They are indexes of indexicality, so to speak.

What is more, the fact that the viewer's access to this world is limited by the seeming unprofessionalism and low quality of the video footage further enhances the status of the video footage as a veracious trace of reality. In line with Didi-Huberman, Mary Ann Doane has pointed out that the index resists iconicity (2007:135). The less iconic or mimetic a trace is, the greater its authenticity, and the more its indexical value is guaranteed. This can in part be explained by the fact that indexes, as traces, are caused by contact with their referent. In a discussion on the indexical value of a formless stain on the shroud of Turin, Didi-Huberman puts it as follows:

> The effacement of all figuration in this trace is in itself the guarantee of a link, of *authenticity*; if there is no figuration in it because contact has taken place. The noniconic, nonmimetic nature of the stain guarantees its indexical value. […] The absence of figuration therefore serves as proof of existence. Contact having occurred, figuration would appear false. And the signifying opaqueness itself reinforces the *it was* of an object […]. (Didi-Huberman in Doane 135).

Naturally, the video images in *Benny's Video* are not completely nonfigural or noniconic. In general, video images are hardly ever completely abstract or nonmimetic. Yet, Didi-Huberman's reasoning shows that insofar as the video signal does seem distorted with mimetic shortcomings, this doesn't necessarily obstruct the viewer's impression that the images present reality. It rather produces a reality effect by authenticating the video as a veracious trace of reality. The "signifying opaqueness" which Didi-Huberman mentions in this respect, also plays an important part in the effect of the amateurism which is signaled by the video flaws in the opening clip of *Benny's Video*.

The conventional association of many of the abovementioned video flaws (hand-held movements, absence of editing, poor lighting) with amateurism, further contributes to the establishment of video as index. As mentioned above, indexes are direct traces of physical objects. I have already explained that indexes seem to bypass signification. They refer to their referents in a deictic way, and as such, make their referents present in the here and now. But other than "there!," indexes do not assert anything (Peirce 226). They have no other meaning. For this reason, indexes have been defined as "uncoded

messages," or "hollowed-out signs" (Krauss 1986, Doane 2007, Didi-Huber-man 1984).[11] The idea of amateurism sustains the indexicality of the video material, because amateurism indicates that the producer of the work is unskilled. This unskilledness in turn suggests that the footage is probably uncoded, it is taped by someone who merely knew how to press the record button on the camera, loosely holding the device in his hands while it automatically recorded what appeared in front of the lens.

As most amateur videos, *Benny's Video* is not entirely uncoded or hollowed out in this respect, though. The framing and the zoom movements in the opening video can be understood as a form of signification; they indicate that the pig is somehow intriguing or important. However, the amateurish look of the footage still sufficiently guarantees that the recorded material isn't imperceptibly adapted, highly coded or thoroughly manipulated in an extremely competent, creative and/or professional way. Hence, the video flaws, imperfections, and anti-iconic distortion function as signifiers whose meaning is: "there is no meaning here." As signifiers, the flaws ensure that the video will be read as hollowed-out sign which refers directly to reality: "there!"

Intermezzo: Growing Conventions

The features I have pointed out as "reality-effect producing" in the video fragment that *Benny's Video* starts out with, are not unique to the clip in Haneke's film. The characteristics of imperfection in the video fragment are very common video features. However, although common to video, they are not inevitable or indispensable features of *every* video. Especially since the 1980s, the technique of video is sophisticated enough to avoid most of the discussed flaws and imperfections, or to at least greatly diminish their visibility. This means that those flaws and imperfections are not necessarily haphazard or unavoidable characteristics which happen to function as signifiers of authenticity. They are rather artifices which can deliberately be applied in order to achieve a desired effect. Rather than random imperfections, the formal features discussed above serve as rhetorical devices which produce a reality effect.

The reality effect of inferior image quality has, moreover, grown stronger over time. For the formal "flaws" of low quality video have not always functioned as a sign of amateurism – the suggestion of which can create a reality impression today. Video wasn't associated with amateurism in the first decade after the arrival of the first so-called Portapak video camera, as it was mainly used by artists in its initial period. Moreover, in this early period from 1960s up until the end of 1970s, all videos were of a relatively poor quality; features such as graininess, blurriness, or pale (if any) colors were the rule rather than the exception. After that, the technique of video improved so that variations in quality arose. The lower region became available to a large group of people as home video equipment, while artists and other professionals could have

[11] In "Notes on the Index" (1986), Krauss relates Barthes' definition of the photograph as "message without a code" to the index. As Barthes didn't mention the indexical sign in this respect, I do not cite him in the main text.

recourse to video of a higher standard. Only then, when low quality video became available to and widely used by non-professionals, did features of poor video quality become a sign of amateurism within video.

Previously, I briefly mentioned that the meaning of the video flaws which produce a reality effect is very much based on convention. This needs some expounding, though. Although the production of a reality effect is clearly tied to the technical evolution of the medium in the case of video, the fact that certain characteristics became producers of a reality impression while they didn't spark off such an impression before implies an alteration in cultural and social conventions as well. In order for a reality effect to be caused by formal features signaling amateurism, it first had to be common for the medium to be used by amateurs. Both the widespread non-professional usage of the medium and the public familiarity with this usage within culture and society had to develop before the association of video with amateurism could arise at all. Moreover, viewers had to learn to read certain features as signs of amateurism, a matter which is very much based on convention. To put it in Peircean terms; some imperfections function as symbols which mean "amateurism," and because of that, these symbols sustain the status of video as an authentic, direct and uncoded indexical trace of reality.

The conventional aspect of these formal features which function as symbols indicates that the production of the reality effect depends, in part, on the viewer.[12] Barthes' structuralist text on the reality effect doesn't explicitly focus on the position of the reader or viewer. In Barthes' account, it is the realist *text* which produces an effect, through its descriptions which signify "this is reality." Following poststructuralist views on meaning production, for instance of Culler (1981) and Casetti (1983), I would say, however, that in order for a reality effect to be created, the viewer of an image has to recognize, interpret, and understand certain features and characteristics as signifiers signifying "this is real" or "this is a veracious, authentic trace of reality" – if only by connotation or via a chain of other signifiers and associations. The latter meaning does not come into being without a – historically, culturally and socially situated – viewer/reader who activates or co-produces it together with the object on view by choosing and applying certain conventions in reading the image or text.[13,14] Thus, the reality effect is

[12] I use the terms viewer and reader interchangeably.

[13] Jonathan Culler has explored this idea of the reader's decisive influence on the production of meaning in his *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981). In the chapter "Semiotics as a Theory of Reading" he argues that the reader's choice of reading conventions determines the final interpretation of a text (47-79).

[14] For a more extensive definition of the concept of the viewer or reader in this study, see Chapter 2.

[15] The viewer is not necessarily aware of this activity on her part, though. She simply has the impression that reality is represented by a text or image. For although many of the devices producing a reality effect are on the one hand understood by the viewer as signifiers signifying "this is reality," they are on the other hand often not consciously recognized as such. This is why the truth behind the referential illusion remains hidden according to Barthes; the insignificant detailed descriptions in realist texts are not recognizable as signifiers the signified of which is the category of the real while they function as such. And, I would add, they do function as such because the reader does recognize and understand them as signifiers at some level.

at the same time an effect *on* the viewer produced by certain devices in a text or image, and an effect originating *in* the viewer which is partially produced by the viewer (on) herself.[15]

Mobile Video

In spite of the relativity, changeability, and conventionality of the reality effect, it is safe to assume that, when it comes to video, the formal features which I described above in relation to *Benny's Video* function as devices which produce a reality effect in (with) most Western viewers. That is, they have done so approximately from around the 1980s until today. However, for a while, low quality video image features such as graininess and color distortion were in danger of developing from indications of amateurish documentary into signs of obsolescence. The reason for this was that in the past decade, high quality video equipment became more and more available to the general public. Therefore, it became less common for amateur videos to look as qualitatively deficient as, for instance, in *Benny's Video*. Moreover, because of the improved user-friendliness of the equipment, many amateur flaws such as shaky or unfocused images were automatically resolved or diminished by the technique. Even though features of poor quality could (and can) still be deployed as devices, their reality effect started to diminish because the rapid technological development of non-professional home video equipment had started to weaken the link between imperfect video images and amateurish documentary.

The arrival of video cameras built into cellphones, however, strengthened this link again. The quality of videos resulting from this application of the medium is often lower than of amateur videos produced in the 1980s and 1990s. Like those, cellphone videos are marked by image features such as graininess, contrast and color distortion, unsteadiness, blurriness, and pixel drop-out. Moreover, video cameras on phones are clearly designed for non-professional use, they can be used by anyone who knows how to handle a cellphone. And since many cellphones currently produced have a built-in camera, video cameras are nowadays used by almost anyone who owns a GSM device. The ubiquity of the recognizable – usually rather short – cellphone video fragments on the Internet demonstrates this, and moreover shows how familiar we are today with shaky, relatively low quality video fragments which mostly show trivial or everyday events, recorded by ordinary people documenting pieces of their daily lives.

That these short and shaky cellphone videos produce a reality effect is well demonstrated by Krassimir Terziev's video documentary *Battles of Troy* (2007). In his documentary, the artist exposes how a large group of Bulgarian men were hired to act out the battles of the Trojan War in Wolfgang Petersen's Hollywood blockbuster *Troy* (2004), starring Brad Pitt as Achilles and Orlando Bloom as Paris. Unlike these star actors, however, the Bulgarian extras were grossly underpaid and had to work overtime in health-threatening circumstances. In order for the rather startling exposures this film production makes to come across, the video documentary has to convince us as viewers of its

own truthfulness. One of the most important ways in which this is achieved is the use of cellphone videos within the work.

Although the documentary is shot on video, most fragments cannot clearly be recognized as such because they are recorded with high standard equipment. This has created video images which approach – yet not quite reach – the quality of the film images from *Troy* which the piece sometimes shows. In these well-lit, professionally edited video fragments of a high resolution we mostly see the Bulgarian extras in Sofia as they are interviewed on their experiences in the Mexican desert where the battles of *Troy* were filmed. Alongside the stories of the extras themselves, additional information on the large film production and the undervalued role of the Bulgarian men in it is provided by some colored graphs, informational texts and quotes by the film producers appearing on screen, and an anonymous commentator. Besides providing information, all of these sources – from the interviewees' subjective eye witness reports to the more objective and scientific-looking graphs – have the rhetorical function of convincing the viewer of the documentary's truthfulness.

The information sources are ultimately able to successfully carry out this function, however, because they are authenticated by the GSM video fragments which appear throughout the documentary. These video images show the film-set of *Troy* on a vast beach adjoining the desert, usually with some of the Bulgarian extras in it, and sometimes with actor Brad Pitt standing in the distance. Apart from the famous actor and a pair of injured legs, nothing sensational is shown in the uneventful videos of the dusty sand plains. In fact, the recordings are too short, shaky and blurred to reveal much of the situation of the Bulgarians during the shooting of the Hollywood film without the additional verbal explanations of the extras. Yet, they do produce a reality effect which affects the credibility of the entire documentary.

The devices which create a reality effect in *Troy* are similar to the ones I pointed out in *Benny's Video*. When it comes to the production of the reality effect, the only substantial difference with the video in Haneke's film is that the videos in Terziev's work are noticeably recorded with cellphones. In the case of *Battles of Troy,* the recognition of the video recording device enforces the reality effect of the fragments. A few conclusions precede this enforcement, though. For a start, the discernible use of a cellphone as video camera confirms what can also already be suspected on the basis of the recorded images themselves, namely that the videos must have been filmed by the extras in-between their activities. Filmed, that is, with a piece of equipment they could have at hand on the set because it could be hidden from view in their large armor costumes: a cellphone.

The fact that the videos are recorded by the extras themselves, then, implies that the images present us with a direct, almost secret and exclusive inside view on the unglamorous and unspectacular sides of a blockbuster film set. This contributes to the reality effect of the cellphone fragments, because the idea that subjects who were really involved in the situation have somewhat stealthily documented what usually remains

unseen makes it easier to believe that the video images represent a past reality.

In addition, the fact that the videos were recorded on the spot from the Bulgarians' point of view as insiders not only fosters belief in the truthfulness of the cellphone recordings, it also proves that the Bulgarian extras were actually there, on that particular spot in the Mexican desert. The heightened impression that the cellphone video fragments show reality as it really was – and thus not some digitally manipulated version of it – sustains their function as evidence. This is important, because when conceived as evidence of the Bulgarian's presence on the film set of *Troy*, the truthfulness of the whole documentary is confirmed by the short and grainy video clips. All written information and graphs presented in the documentary on the role of the extras in the production of *Troy*, as well as the memories and experiences recounted by the Bulgarian men themselves, are much easier to believe because as viewers we seem to be provided with visual access to the film-production site by way of a pixelated peek through the eyes of the extras.

Family Viewing

Alongside the amateurish documentary video – recorded with either a conventional camera or with a cellphone – a couple of related genres have to be mentioned in which the devices of "flaws and deficiencies" are often deployed as well. In the preceding paragraphs, I mentioned "documentary" a few times in relation to the devices without "amateurish" as an adjective. The reason for this is that the discussed devices are often used by professional documentary producers. Unlike Terziev, who edited short amateur documentary videos, including their technical flaws, into his own smoothly recorded video material, many artists, journalists, and reporters use the devices in the material they produce themselves when creating a video documentary. Even though such documentaries can mostly be recognized as being more professional products than, for instance, the amateurish videotape of a teenage kid with morbid fascinations, the association with amateurism is still made by those works, with the known effect as a result.

Another genre in which the devices play an important part is the home video. In fact, home videos can be understood as a subcategory of amateur documentary video. They are produced by people who use their video camera (often solely) to document their family life.[16,17] Besides uneventful episodes from daily life, important highlights and milestones are captured on tape or memory card. As home videos are in general filmed with handheld, low quality video cameras, reality-effect producing features such as shaky images or color distortion are mostly abundant in these videos. In addition, the specific, limited subject matter of home videos can initiate the production of a reality

[16] Like the documentary in general, home video (or home movie) is a genre which video has for a large part taken over from film since the former medium's arrival. Because of this, the devices producing a reality effect within home movies became more typical to and therefore also more effective in video than in film.

[17] The social functions of home video will be more elaborately addressed in Chapter 3.

effect. For subjects such as birthday parties, marriages, or newly walking toddlers immediately make clear that a video is a home video. And like the general genre of documentary of which the home video is a specific sub-genre, an important connotation of the genre of the home video is "this is reality."

A common denominator of all the previously discussed video genres is that the producer or camera operator is apparent through the formal traces I call "clumsy" flaws, such as hand-held effects or rapid zoom movements. In home videos, the producer of the recording is often all the more apparent by the filmed people smiling, speaking or waving directly into the camera. Such responses are directed at the person behind the recording device – generally a family member who is a part of what is being recorded.

In Atom Egoyan's film *Family Viewing,* many home video clips are shown which refer to the camera man both by the clumsy flaws and by the overt responses of the filmed people. At first sight these video fragments mainly contrast with the filmed material in which they are embedded, for in the filmed parts no signs or traces of the material's production are overtly visible. As the film proceeds, however, it turns out that the home videos also contrast with several other video recordings which are shown throughout the film. The contrast is produced by the fact that, unlike the home movies and similar to the filmed parts in *Family Viewing*, these rather static video fragments seem to lack a producer. Previously, I explained how many of the features which expose the producer of a videotape produce a reality effect in video. In the static video fragments in Egoyan's film, though, a reality effect seems to be created precisely by the fact that no trace of a person handling the camera can be discerned. In order to understand why this is the case, and which formal devices contribute to this reality impression, it is necessary to further analyze the fragments in question.

Static Shots and Surveillance

In fact, two sorts of static images without a noticeable creator can be discerned in *Family Viewing*. First of all, there are images filmed from the corner of a bedroom with a double bed in it. On this bed, the video images show Stan and Sandra, the father and stepmother of the film's adolescent protagonist, Van. The couple remains in front of the lens, while the camera records both the sexual acts they perform together, as well as their failed approaches to each other. Although the images show that the camera clearly has an effect on the two people on view – an arousing effect on Stan and an embarrassing effect on Sandra – they in turn do not have any effect on the camera. The only influence the couple exerts on the recording equipment is that they turn the device on and off. Otherwise, the camera automatically and continually records, with no change in its position on a tripod in the corner of the room. In the shown images recorded by the camera, no changes in focus or zoom movements can be seen. The camera never turns, swerves or shakes, which is why the video images are static. In all, the video fragments seem to be cool and detached registrations of a camera that has objectively and disinterestedly captured whatever appeared in front of the lens, with no visible influence

of a human subject on the recording.

In these static video fragments in *Family Viewing,* the straightforwardness or truthfulness of the images is not guaranteed by the cameraman's lack of recording skills (as in *Benny's Video)*, nor by his or her unique insider's position (as in Terziev's documentary), but by his or her apparent absence. This absence of a human producer implies that the footage is produced entirely automatically by the video camera, seemingly ungoverned by any sort of intentional agency. The impression which is consequently raised is that "this is reality," automatically captured as it appeared in front of the lens, with no possible distorting or manipulative interference of a person pointing the camera, adjusting the focus, meddling with the lighting, and so on. Image features such as a continuously static image frame, the absence of editing, unchanging contrast, the absence of zoom movements and an unvarying focus and depth of field all function as indications of the absence of a camera operator. Therefore, they can be understood as devices which contribute to the production of a reality effect – especially when combined.

In addition to *Family Viewing,* Haneke's *Benny's Video* also shows how a reality effect can be produced by video in different ways. As I explained earlier, the film's opening video produces a reality effect because of its amateurish look. The fact that we can see Benny's amateurish hands in the footage creates a reality impression. However, Haneke's film also contains video footage which produces a reality effect precisely because Benny no longer holds the camera. Later on in the film, protagonist Benny no longer acts out his fascination with death from behind and with his video camera, but in front of it. Suddenly, he is physically visible in a video fragment. The static viewpoint of the camera and the unmoving image frame indicate that the recording camera is now placed on a tripod. Image features such as unchanging focus and the absence of close-ups confirm that Benny no longer has his hands on the camera. Instead, the video images show how he uses his hands to operate another device. With a cattle gun familiar from the opening video, he shoots the young female friend with whom he has first watched and discussed the fragment of the dying pig. The girl dies, but only after drawn-out minutes of agony in which Benny shoots her twice again. During these minutes, the static video camera films only parts of the shocking event. Parts, that is, because there is no camera operator. No one points the lens at Benny in order to keep the murder in full view. In general, video image features which suggest automatic recording on a tripod sustain the indexical character of the footage because, like features of amateurism, they declare that the images are uncoded. When suspenseful or shocking events such as murder are framed in a seemingly arbitrary way which obstructs the viewer's visual access to the place of action, the indexicality of the images is emphasized all the more. For, whereas Benny's framing of the dying pig slightly shaped the meaning of the images, the static footage of "half a murder" attaches no meaning at all to what it records. That is, it only signifies, like the aforementioned flaws, that the video-as-sign is void of meaning; that reality has imprinted itself directly onto or into the video.

Alongside the static video images in *Family Viewing* and *Benny's Video*, a second kind of video footage can be found in Egoyan's film in which the camera doesn't move and seemingly records without the guiding intervention of a camera operator. Like the static video images, these images are also characterized by a lack of zoom movement, contrast adjustment and variation in focus. There is, however, one important additional, distinguishing feature which characterizes this video footage: it is filmed from a high angle. Because of this, the fragments can immediately be understood as video surveillance footage, as it is typical for surveillance cameras to be placed in a high position in order to be out of view and out of reach as much as possible.

The association of the shown fragments with video surveillance produces a reality effect for two reasons. First, surveillance cameras are as a rule not held or operated by a human agent. If they do something besides recording, such as moving or focusing, this is usually the result of movement detectors within the device. An exception to the rule are surveillance cameras which can be controlled from a distance. Although this diminishes the status of the resulting video footage as recordings produced by an entirely automated device, it hardly undermines the association of surveillance video with the objective and disinterested registration of reality. The general purpose for which surveillance video is deployed is for the objective and truthful registration of reality, as well as the conventional expectation most Western people have of the genre. As Thomas Y. Levin puts it: "When one sees what one takes to be a surveillance image, one does not usually ask if it is 'real' (this is simply assumed) but instead attempts to establish whether 'the real' that is being captured by the camera is being recorded or is […] a closed-circuit 'real time' feed" (585). Moreover, when video images are "live," their indexicality becomes temporal.

Media theorist John Belton has argued that the possibility for instantaneous broadcast is so specific to the medium of video, that the medium is by convention strongly associated with a real time feed. As a result, Belton claims, the possibility that "it could be live" always infuses the way in which we look at video images (Belton 1996: 68). Their potential temporal indexicality is always at work for the viewer, so to speak. However, it goes without saying that some video genres are more commonly known to often rely on live broadcasting than others. Surveillance is of course one of these genres, another example is television news reportage. Whereas surveillance footage produces a reality effect through a combination of static, automatic recording and (the possibility) of instant feed, the documentary genre of the TV news reportage often produces a reality effect through a combination of live broadcast with devices such as hand-held effects and graininess.

1.3 Devices in Film

Although analogue film is unable to produce "live" images, many of the formal devices which I discussed in the previous section on video can technically be applied in film footage as well. In fact, they have been quite widely applied in the past, and are not completely absent from more contemporary cinematic practices either. However, whereas devices such as hand-held movements, graininess, color distortion, and the absence of editing are some of the most dominant reality-effect producing devices within the medium of video, they are marginal devices in film. In addition, they are less effective as reality-effect producing devices *when* they appear in film. I will turn to the marginality of these formal features in film later on. First, it is necessary to outline the most common ways in which film usually produces a reality effect. The most dominant cinematic devices for creating a reality effect are applied in the most dominant application of the medium: the production of narrative fiction film.

From Setting to Surface

The most obvious difference between video and film in producing reality effects is very much implicated in the mentioned difference between the genres in which a reality effect is produced by each medium. To put it very bluntly, the genres in which video produces a reality effect show something "real," while the genre in which film creates a reality effect shows things that are "not real." Nuancing this statement has to begin with the remark that apart from the actual "realness" of what is shown, all genres in question are able to produce a reality effect and hence convince the viewer that what they show is real. Yet, the video genres I mentioned, such as home movies, surveillance video and news reportage, all usually show something which is "real" in that the shown events are not staged and the filmed people are not acting.[18] The events shown in narrative fiction film, on the other hand, are as a rule staged, and the people appearing in them are usually acting.

Therefore, in order to produce a reality effect, narrative fiction films need devices which generally remain unused in the documentary genres of video. As a reality impression cannot easily be evoked when the staging and acting are visible within a film, the cinematic devices are in the first place aimed at hiding the fact that a narrative fiction film is staged and play acted. Some of the most important devices in hiding the staging and acting are almost too obvious to describe. Such as, for instance, the device of good play acting; acting which does not look like acting.[19] Good casting furthermore

[18] Of course "realness" is relative in this sense, even without treating it as a philosophical concept, simply because the presence of a camera is often already enough to direct events or influence the behavior of people. Similarly, the "not realness" of narrative fiction film can be put into perspective by the remark that the actors playing in these films are nevertheless real people of flesh and blood.

[19] As Verstraten aptly remarks, acting which was perceived as natural and true-to-life in the 1950s looks very artificial today (2006: 61). Thus, it is historically relative what good acting is, or which modes of acting are least recognized as acting.

contributes to hiding "staginess," for the performance of actors can only come across as natural behavior when they fit the role they are playing – if only physically.

Similar to the devices of good acting and good casting, good staging helps to hide the constructed nature of a film. Good staging, however, includes many facets: the setting for instance has to look natural and appropriate to the shown scenes, the right props have to be in the right places at the right time, as do the right actors. Moreover, costumes have be appropriate to the characters in their historical and social context, special effects must be convincing, extras have to be mobilized when their presence can enhance the credibility of a scene. In addition, all these factors and many more aspects which the mise-en-scène of a film involves, have to be geared to one another and to the overarching narrative of the film in order for the depicted scenes to look as real as possible.

It is striking that some of the most important devices by which a reality impression is generally created by video and film are almost complete opposites. In Haneke's *Benny's Video*, this oppositeness first surfaces through the stark contrast between the formal features of the opening video and the subsequent film fragments. Compared with Benny's video of the dying pig, the film fragments look remarkably smooth and transparent. No color distortion, graininess, pixelation, flickering or throbbing can be discerned in the film images. A similar contrast arises in *Family Viewing,* in which coarse-grained home videos alternate with filmed material of a much higher resolution.

The difference in image quality between video and film, which becomes visible in the two films, is not so much the fixed result of the media's technical supports. Like the features of low quality which produce a reality effect in video, the impeccability of film images is not technically inevitable. For the most part, it is a controllable and adaptable factor which can be deployed in order to produce (or evade) a certain effect. One of the effects which is produced by the seeming transparency of the film images in for instance *Benny's Video,* is a reality effect of a different kind.[20] This effect comes about because the transparency of the images seems to grant the spectator direct visual access to the depicted scenes. Through this illusion of unmediated visual access, the impression arises that what is seen is reality. After all, no signs of artificiality, materiality or mediation are apparent on the image surface. The perfect view hence provided seems to be similar to a glance through a clear window onto the outside world.

The reality effect as it is generally produced by the medium of film almost entirely coheres with – and depends on – the spectator's illusion of unmediated visual access to the world on view. The creation of the illusion of visual access simultaneously evokes a reality impression in the viewer. In order for the illusion of visual access to be produced

[20] Another effect of the seeming transparency of images on the viewer is that it invites a disembodied mode of observation. The ways in which video and film give rise to an embodied and a disembodied viewer will be the topic of Chapter 2. Strikingly, many of the devices which are used by film and video to cause a reality effect are also responsible for the ways in which the two media generally produce a (dis)embodied mode of observation.

and maintained, it is important that the film spectator is provided with a sense of a stable overview – even mastery – over the depicted world. Christian Metz (1976), Stephen Heath (1981) and Laura Marks (2002), among others, have noted in this respect that conventional narrative films aim to retain the illusion of stable overview which is created by the linear, monocular perspective which the cinematic medium automatically produces in its images. In addition to the fact that linear perspectival images are by convention considered realistic by Western viewers, they also create a single stable viewing position from which the illusionistic space is fully visible to the viewer. However, as the film camera moves, the vanishing point keeps shifting on the screen: there is no stable viewing position for the viewer to look from. Yet, as I will demonstrate with the help of *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing*, conventional narrative films solve this instability. Narrative fiction films deploy a range of devices which sustain and "repair" the illusion of visual access and overview in the film spectator.

Before pointing out these devices, however, it is interesting to note that the production of a reality effect by film hinges more strongly on the denial of the medium's materiality through devices such as a smooth image surface, than on the connotation that "this is reality" of the applied devices.[21] In video, on the other hand, the reality-effect producing devices do signify "this is reality" – or rather: "this is a veracious trace of reality." Moreover, in the case of video, the illusion of unmediated access is often undermined when a reality effect is produced, because many of the devices which create a reality effect within this medium expose rather than hide the physical character of the representation so as to define the video image as an index. Conventional narrative films, on the other hand, mostly work to make the viewer forget that she is watching a representation at all.

Conventionally Constructed Surveyability

In order to further define the reality-effect producing devices which function in film, the differences between video and film as noted in Haneke's and Egoyan's films serve as a suitable starting point. Besides the most obvious difference in image quality, another dissimilarity between the opening video and subsequent filmed sequences in *Benny's Video* lies in the visibility of the producer. Whereas the presence of a person handling the camera could be discerned in the opening video through, for instance, hand-held effects and brusque zoom movements, the film fragments do not show the hand of the camera operator in such an overt way. All images are filmed in a steady, stable way. Whenever the camera turns, pans, or zooms, these movements proceed slowly – unlike in the opening video – and therefore draw little attention to themselves.

However, although the interferences and actions of a camera operator aren't exactly emphasized in the filmed parts, they aren't completely absent either. After all, the

[21] The referential illusion that film hinges on, however, does not imply a direct denotation of referential reality, but rather the seemingly transparent reference to *a* reality. I will elaborate on this in section 1.4.

camera *does* turn, pan and zoom. Therefore, in *Family Viewing,* a contrast quickly becomes apparent between on the one hand the filmed parts which are abundant with camera swerves and cuts, and on the other hand the static, unedited surveillance video footage or the bedroom videos recorded on a tripod. A similar contrast arises in *Benny's Video* when we, as viewers, witness Benny's crime through the "staring" lens of his video camera. Compared to these video fragments, the film footage looks quite labored and constructed. Thus, the filmed parts in both *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* differ both from the video fragments which produce a reality effect by overtly drawing attention to the acts of their producer as well as from the video footage which creates this effect by looking entirely untouched by human hands.

Yet, the middle position those narrative film parts occupy between the two kinds of video recordings with regard to the visibility of a creative, interfering agent, sustains the creation of a reality effect because this position enables the film to evoke an illusion of overview in the observer – an illusion which goes hand in hand with a reality impression. Some acts which are visible within the filmed material – such as cuts and zoom movements – reveal that the film is a construction. Yet, this revelation is for an important part overruled by the fact that most of the interventions in the film material make the represented world visually accessible to the spectator of the film. Successive shots from different angles do for instance map out the spaces in which the characters exist. A sense of overview is also provided when the camera slowly scans a space. Together with possibilities offered by close-ups and establishing shots, these devices can give the spectator the best possible viewpoint at each moment of a scene, and are able to give an overview of one space in a more all-embracing way than one single, static image could ever provide.

In order to give the viewer an impression of a stable overview and visual access instead of the possible feeling of disorientation which can also be caused by these operations, some rules are generally followed in classical narrative films. Continuity cinema is another appropriate and widely applied term for this type of film, as the rules which are followed are aimed at creating and maintaining the illusion in the viewer that space and time each form a continuum in the film – in spite of the fact that only fragments of those illusionistic continuums are shown on screen. Although *Benny's Video* and *Family Viewing* aren't exactly classic examples of classical narrative film, they do follow many of the conventional rules deriving from this tradition. One rule which is, for instance, followed by the two films, is that camera movements, especially turns, mustn't proceed too quickly or be too abrupt. Other important rules which are never disobeyed in Haneke's or Egoyan's film are that the camera must not cross the 180-degree line, and that a so-called master shot of a space must be given when the space and the scene unfolding in it are also mapped out by medium or close-up shots from different angles. These formal strategies make sure that the represented space remains surveyable and understandable for the viewer. Another condition which has to be fulfilled in order to attain the impression of spatial overview is a clear relation between the different shots of a single space.

As Stephen Heath has pointed out, shots mapping out a space are usually related to each other in narrative cinema by character looks: "the role of the character look has been fundamental for the welding of spatial unity" (44). The look of characters can join or stitch different shots together when eyeline matches are created through the principle of shot/reverse shot: if one shot shows a character looking in a certain direction, and the next shot shows a certain object or space, the suggestion is evoked that the character is looking at whatever is present in the second shot. Sometimes, this second shot can even be understood as coinciding with the exact viewpoint of the character, or in other words, as a point-of-view shot. Such shots suggestively related by character looks create spatial continuity because the spatial position of the looking character and the spatial position of the things he or she looks at are connected by the direction of the look itself, which appears to cross the space between them rectilinearly. In addition, according to Heath, the voices of characters can function as an equivalent of their looks. For, like looks, utterances are aimed at something (or someone) which the next shot can bring into view.

Two other factors bind the shots together in narrative cinema, however. First, a narrative is needed in order to sustain and explain the relationship between shots, most of all because the looks and voices of the characters can only construct meaningful relationships between shots because those characters are related by and embedded in a narrative which clarifies their non-spatial relationships.[22] Secondly, the shots are related by the spectator, who is familiar with cinematic conventions and therefore knows how spaces are usually mapped out by narrative film by way of successive shots. In the end, the link between shots and the space they, so to speak, build together can only be seen by a viewer who understands how the relationship between these shots is established through character looks or voices.

Although the illusion of visual access and overview which classical narrative film instills in the viewer mostly concerns an impression of overview of the cinematic illusionistic space, the way time proceeds needs to be just as clear as the spatial lay-out of the world represented by a film in order for the viewer's illusion of overview to be maintained. This means that the fabula of the film's narrative has to be easily reconstructable.[23] In case of *Benny's Video,* in which all events are shown in chronological

[22] See also Heath 1981: 19-76. Interesting in this regard is Heath's remark that on the one hand, a narrative is needed in order to relate successive shots, while on the other hand, the successive shots enable a narrative to unfold in film to begin with.

[23] Besides the demand that the temporal relationship between represented events be clear, it is also a narrative convention in Hollywood to establish cause and effect relations between those events. So-called neorealistic filmmakers have argued, however, that it is much more natural and realistic when the course of events is directed by haphazard coincidences instead of by logical chains of cause and effect (Verstraten 2006: 66). Of the two films I am discussing here, Egoyan's film is more strongly composed of cause and effect relationships, while *Benny's Video* leans towards neorealism in this respect. Yet, both films produce reality effects. Thus, although I cannot establish which narrative composition produces a stronger reality effect, I would say that neither of them – a composition of cause and effect or one of coincidences – is truly a prerequisite to the creation of a reality effect by narrative film, while for instance the surveyable arrangement of time and space are needed if the viewer's illusion of overview which produces a reality effect in narrative film is to be upheld.

order without very long inexplicable time lapses between the different shots and scenes, such a reconstruction is fairly easy. At first sight, *Family Viewing* forms more of a challenge in this respect, as the story involves flash-backs and repetitions. However, in the end, the plot of the film makes those deviations from a chronologically ordered narration understandable, and the linearly progressing time of the fabula can relatively easily be reconstructed.

The progression of time in conventional narrative fiction films is just as much ordered and constructed by subsequent shots as the spatial lay-out is. Like the spatial relations between shots, the temporal ones are created by two factors: a consistent overarching narrative and a viewer who is familiar with the conventional ways in which different shots are used in narrative films to order – and mostly condense – the story. Because of the importance of the first factor in making the fragmented cinematic representation of both time and space cohesive, narrativity can be understood as a filmic reality-effect producing device in itself. The temporal and spatial cohesiveness and relatedness which a narrative can create between successive shots and scenes reinforces the viewer's illusion of visual access to and overview of the world on view, the illusion on which the most typical cinematic reality effect is primarily based.

That narrativity is an indispensable factor to the production of a reality effect by film is well demonstrated in Krassimir Terziev's video work *A Movie* (2004). Although *A Movie* is technically a video, it cannot immediately be recognized as such. At first sight, the video looks like a movie. Many devices by which film usually creates a reality effect are present in this "movie." Its images are of a high quality and therefore look smooth and transparent. The groups of people who appear in the streets of a small medieval looking village are dressed in historical costumes which, on the face of it, seem to match the ancient village. What is more, the streets and the characters in them are represented by stable shots which succeed each other at a steady pace. These shots, moreover, consist of both close-ups of the characters, medium close-ups in which small groups of people are shown, and establishing shots from a high angle which provide an overview of entire streets. However, no narrative unfolds. Except for people strolling and talking, nothing really happens in the streets, and no events can be discerned. Because a narrative is lacking, the spatial and temporal relationship between the successive shots remain unclear. As a result, the diegesis depicted on screen is not cohesive. Because it looks so fragmented and constructed, the viewer is not provided with an illusion of visual access and overview, and a reality effect fails to materialize.

Although narrativity is thus indispensable to the creation of a reality effect in film, the fact that a story is told is generally hidden by film which produces a reality effect. The reason for this is that the narrating character in the film would point out its constructed character, which needs to remain hidden in order for film to create its reality effect. The act of narration is covered up by the narrative of classical fiction films by keeping all signs of a narrating agency out of sight. So, although a story *is* told in narrative films, which implies both a (first person) narrating agency and an addressee (a

second person), the traces of enunciation – the structure of an "I" addressing a "you" – are usually obliterated in traditional narrative films. Film theorists who have studied film along the lines of Emile Benveniste's enunciation theory have therefore concluded that traditional films are as a rule presented as a *histoire*, not as a *discours*. In the latter, narration is exposed as an act that is carried out by a narrating agency, while in the former, the story seems to tell itself for no narrating "I" can be discerned in it. As films are generally told by an unseen, external narrator, they mostly seem to tell themselves.

As opposed to narrativity, the second "shot-binding factor" mentioned above – the viewer's familiarity with the conventions of narrative film – cannot be understood as a reality-effect producing device of film, as it is a characteristic that rather belongs to the viewer. However, the familiarity of the viewer with conventions is a prerequisite to the production of a reality effect by narrative fiction film, which again goes to show that the reality effect is just as much an effect *of* as *on* the viewer. Not only is the familiarity in question important for the connections between shots to arise, and for the reconstruction of space and time to be possible, it also makes the filmic reality-effect producing devices less visible as such, as artificial devices. Most viewers have become so used to the conventional manner in which classical narrative films represent and build a spatially and temporally coherent story world that it has become difficult to still notice the representational and constructed character of the object – the film – on view.

However, as I will explain in the next section, the viewer's belief in cinematically depicted scenes as real is usually still slightly restrained and reserved, especially compared to the belief which is generally put in the realness of video when this medium produces a reality effect.

1.4 Sliding Scales

Degrees of Belief

When the ways in which video and film create a reality effect are compared, it is not only striking that the two media produce the effect in question by entirely different means, but it is also remarkable that although both media are able to produce a reality effect, in the end they give rise to different degrees of belief in the representation. The overall impression that "this is reality" may be produced by both media, yet the extent to which we as viewers truly believe that what is shown is real differs.

In *Benny's Video* this difference, for instance, becomes perceptible when the opening video switches to film. Not only have the devices by which a reality effect is produced suddenly changed; the viewer's belief in the realness of the depicted scenes has changed too. It has, more particularly, diminished. The slaughtering of the pig in the video fragment, as well as the reactions of the people surrounding the suffering animal, were hard to conceive as staged or play acted. When the same people appearing in the opening video are shown in scenes of suffering in the following narrative film, however,

most viewers will now recognize the represented people as actors and the depicted events as staged – in spite of the fact that the acts and events look very convincing and real. For although the filmed part in *Benny's Video* on the one hand produces a reality effect through its seemingly unmediated, direct way of representation, this mode of representation – which includes many reality-effect producing devices – reveals that the film is a narrative *fiction* film as it is a mode of representation typical to this genre. Ironically, many of the devices which produce a reality effect in film at the same time diminish it. Not only because they can be recognized as artifice, revealing the constructed nature of the film, but also because they are characteristics by which the genre of narrative fiction film can be recognized.

Previously, I explained how the reality effect of video is often sustained by the connotation of the video genres in which this effect is usually produced. With narrative fiction film, the recognition of the genre works counterproductively when it comes to the creation of a reality effect. For, instead of signifying "this is reality" by connotation, the genre of narrative fiction film rather signifies "this is an imaginary, fictional story" and "this is a construction" by connotation. Those meanings clearly oppose the functioning of the reality-effect producing devices deployed in classical narrative films that hide this constructed nature, and work to conceal the fact that the scenes on view are staged and acted.

Therefore, when devices such as a smooth image surface, steady camera movements and clear transitions between shots are used in a film, they serve both as producers of a reality effect and as markers revealing the genre of the representation. The viewers to whom a reality impression is given by the devices will in all probability also recognize the genre of the film through the devices. Because of this recognition, they will always remain slightly aware of the fact that what the film shows is not real but constructed, that the story it tells is imaginary, that the shown events are staged, and that the shown people are actors playing their roles.

Narrative fiction films will therefore hardly ever be completely believed as a truthful representation of reality by viewers who are familiar with the genre. No matter how real and accessible the represented world looks, viewers will at some level still recognize its artificiality. As the familiarity is present in most contemporary viewers, narrative fiction films are usually not believed as truthful representations of reality. Compared with this, the belief in the veracity of videos tends to be much more profound. When videos produce a reality effect, the shown people, events and actions are believed to be much more real than the play-acting characters and staged happenings appearing in narrative fiction films. In order to examine the subtle differences of belief in film and video more closely, it is first necessary to further define the degrees of belief to which film usually gives rise.

When fiction films create a reality effect, the weakest form of belief they produce in the viewer can best be defined in a negative way, that is, by emphasizing not so much the presence of belief but the absence of disbelief in the spectator. As Samuel Coleridge has explained with regard to poems, some works do not so much invite to belief but

merely require the viewer to suspend her disbelief for the moment. For stronger forms of belief in the reality shown by fiction films, however, "pretending to believe" is a more appropriate characterization. The idea that spectators can pretend to believe in the truthfulness of a representation was introduced by Kendall L. Walton and further developed in relation to realist literature by Lilian Furst. For Walton, this stance of pretending to believe is part of the games of make-believe that have to be played in order to appreciate fiction. Readers of fiction, he argues, "do not believe in the existence of fictional characters. Appreciation involves playing games of make-believe, and as part of these games appreciators *pretend* to believe in characters" (2).

Both Walton and Furst consider the pretense of belief in the first place as an act carried out by the reader/spectator. As mentioned above, Walton describes it as an operation through which the reader/spectator plays games of make-believe. Furst in addition designates pretending to believe as "the recipient's performance" (37). An important observation made by both scholars, however, is that the viewer isn't an entirely independent agent when it comes to the pretense of belief. First of all, Furst points out how readers have been culturally conditioned to call on their imaginative capacities under certain circumstances (29). Walton's remark that we as readers have "a *habit* of playing along with fictions" (3, emphasis added) further sustains the idea that the act of pretending to believe is often ordained by convention.

Walton's remark contains a second reason for which the viewer isn't an entirely independent agent in the game of make-believe. For the idea that readers have a habit of playing *along* with fiction implies that the game of make believe is also played – and perhaps even prompted by the works in which the viewer pretends to believe. That the text also does something is recognized by Furst as well, who states that readers accede to an invitation made by the text when they (pretend to) believe in them: "the crucial transition into belief […] is made as we accede to the invitation to invest credence in the fiction through our readiness to pretend" (31).

Besides the fact that pretending to believe is not always an act which the viewer performs entirely voluntary or independently, she is not always completely aware of the fact that she is pretending to believe. Furst states that, on one level, readers can be so engrossed in the pretense of belief that they forget their belief is only pretended, while on another level maintaining awareness on that they are in fact engaging in a pretense. The two positions are not mutually exclusive, according to Furst (34). In order to explain this, she refers to an example Walton provides when he argues in line with Furst that readers both know and don't know that they are participants in a game of make-believe:

> In order to make his point, Walton introduces the figure of Charles, who goes to see a horror movie, and whose heart rate and blood pressure rise as he watches the green slime ooze out toward him, threatening to engulf him. Charles 'loses hold of reality' and *momentarily* takes the slime to be real and really fears it, even though he knows perfectly well that he is sitting in a movie theatre […]. (34)

It is striking that Furst and Walton use film as an example to illustrate their argument on the double position readers can simultaneously hold towards the veracity of a work, not only in light of my own previous remarks on the belief in film as always slightly reserved and restrained, but also because a similar argument has been developed specifically on film by adherents of the so-called apparatus theory, such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz. The latter has compared the film viewer with a dreamer who knows that he is dreaming. Although a dreamer does not so much pretend to believe, Metz' analogy corresponds to Furst's and Walton's ideas in that it implies the same double position of believing yet not believing completely, of being aware of the fact that something is not real, while at the same time experiencing and reacting to it as though it is real.

According to Metz (1982), film is the pre-eminent medium for inducing this double awareness in the spectator because, in the dominant application of the narrative fiction film, it is able to produce a reality impression unlike any other medium. Similar to dreams, films can present worlds which do not comply with the logic of everyday reality. Yet, because of the strong reality impression which the medium is able to create, the viewer is willing to invest belief in what she sees, even when knowing it isn't real and perhaps even couldn't be real. The fetishist formula which therefore applies specifically to the medium of film according to the French film theorist, somewhat resembles the "performance of pretense" Furst expounded: "I know very well that [...] (what I see isn't real), but all the same [...] (I believe in the film)."

Although the viewer's belief in videos which produce a reality effect is not entirely unrestrained or naïve, it isn't profoundly characterized by the double position of belief and non-belief which is generally produced by film. Belief in the truthfulness of videos usually does not have to be pretended, because the depicted scenes aren't understood as imaginary or staged to begin with. However, some disbelief is held by most video viewers, albeit a mild form. Whereas the initial disbelief of the film viewer can only be suspended or partially and momentarily suppressed by pretending to believe, mild disbelief usually holds just a small and secondary position toward the viewer's belief in the veracity of videos which produce a reality effect.

This mild disbelief can function as a critical tool by which a too naïve mode of looking is prevented, and it is often adopted automatically by contemporary viewers. For in this digital era in which images can be manipulated or created from scratch in a trice, most spectators have learned to hold some suspicion about the veracity of images. Moreover, as the electronic signal of analogue video images is more susceptible to manipulation and distortion than projected analogue film images are, the viewer's wariness of distortion might be stronger in the case of video images.[24] I would say that rather than pretending to believe, the viewer of videos usually pretends slight disbelief in order to remain on the alert for image manipulation and simulation. The formula Metz ascribed

[24] Of course, image manipulation has become an inevitable possibility with respect to both digital videos and digital films. This matter will be addressed later on in this chapter.

to film, then, can be redesigned for videos which produce a reality effect as follows: "I know that [...] (what I see is real), yet I pretend that [...] (I do not believe in the video entirely)."

As the suspicion about the veracity of images is a culturally conditioned attitude of most contemporary, "digitally literate" viewers, the pretense of disbelief in videos is as much a conventional act as the pretense of belief in fiction films, which is prompted by "our habit of playing along with fiction" – as Walton pointed out. However, besides the acquired character of a critical attitude towards images, videos themselves often invite to the pretense of mild disbelief. They do so, for instance, by showing that they are not entirely undistorted or objective representations of reality, and therefore should not be believed entirely or too eagerly as true and transparent. However, such urges towards mild disbelief not only lead to mild disbelief in the viewer, they can also conversely contribute to the viewer's belief in the representation. They lend a video an air of what can be called self-reflexive honesty. An air which only incites more instead of less belief in the viewer. Thus, video's invitations to disbelief can in the end result in belief.

As video usually looks more real than film when both media produce a reality effect in their own typical ways, and the viewer's belief in the truthfulness of videos is as a rule more profound than the belief in films, it is possible to conclude that the medium of video is able to produce a stronger or more intense reality effect than film. Without casting aside this idea of a subtle difference between the intensity of the reality effects of film and video, it is useful to consider whether the reality effects produced by the two media also differ in kind instead of only in strength and degree.

Kinds of Reality

Whereas the subtle difference in intensity of the media's reality effects concerns the intensity of the effect, a difference in kind – although not an absolute one – can be found by focusing on the reality part of the reality effect. A question to be asked when the impression that "this is reality" is raised by video or film is: "which reality?" When posing this question while watching *Benny's Video,* the answer would be that the reality which seems to be represented by the opening video is referential reality. The reality on view really is or was, or so we are inclined to believe as viewers. The film part of *Benny's Video,* however, does not give rise to the belief that what it shows is reality as it really is or was. Instead of producing the illusion that referential reality is denoted, the narrative film rather creates the impression that it depicts a certain reality. It seems to show a world which looks real but is nevertheless known to be a fictional and constructed reality in which imaginary events take place, not to be mistaken with the (daily, historical) reality.

The answers found in Haneke's film to the question "which reality?" are representative of the two answers that will come up when posing this question with regard to the reality effect of video and film. The kind of reality video mostly seems to represent is *referential* reality, while film as rule convincingly shows *a* reality when it produces a reality effect.

The latter reality is a constructed world which looks real in its own right, quite apart from the referential reality we as viewers (believe we) live in. The reality effects the two media produce can thus be said to differ in that the realities they seem to depict are different kinds of realities. My proposal is to call the reality effect produced by video a referential-reality effect, and the reality effect generally created by film a constructed-reality effect. The added adjectives, then, do not so much concern the effect but the reality.

The difference between the referential-reality effect and the constructed-reality effect should not be understood as an absolute difference for two reasons. First of all, the difference in kinds of reality implies a difference in the degree of the effect. This has to do with the fact that the referential reality we (believe we) live in is still likely to be conceived as more real than the imaginary, fictional realities constructed within a discourse.[25] Hence, when a representation produces an impression that "this is reality," this reality is conceived of as more real when it is understood as referential reality then when it is understood as a constructed reality. In the latter case, disbelief will have to be suspended, or belief will be pretended. When the represented reality is understood as referential reality, though, the viewer's belief in the represented reality will in all probability be plain or only slightly reserved.

Thus, the strength of the reality effect and of the belief it gives rise to are related to the kind of reality a representation seems to depict. The more a work produces the impression that the reality it represents is an imaginary, fictional and constructed one, the weaker the reality effect and the viewer's belief in the veracity of the representation are. Conversely, the reality effect of a representation is stronger when it convinces the viewer of the fact that it depicts "the" instead of "a" reality. Bearing in mind again that the adjectives "referential" and "constructed" concern the reality rather than the effect, it is possible to say that the referential-reality effect is more intense and stronger than the constructed-reality effect. The previously drawn conclusion that the medium of video is able to produce a stronger or more intense reality effect than film therefore still holds, as the former medium usually produces a referential-reality effect while the latter in general produces a constructed-reality effect.

Secondly, the difference between the two reality effects is not absolute because representations hardly ever create the impression that they only refer to referential reality, or show an entirely imaginary world. The referential-reality effect and the constructed-reality effect should rather be understood as opposite ends of a sliding scale. In between those ends, many subtle and comparative differences exist, because

[25] The distinction between "the" reality we believe we live in and the imaginary realities produced by discourse has been convincingly deconstructed by linguists and philosophers who argue that reality is always a product of discourse. What matters in light of my argument on the reality effect, however, is not so much the philosophical tenability of the distinction between the reality and constructed imaginary realities, but the fact that this distinction exist as an idea which governs the thoughts of viewers and readers when assessing and experiencing representations. As an idea, the distinction influences the viewer's belief in the truthfulness of the representation and the reality effect such a representation produces.

the status of the depicted reality is never entirely unambiguously referential or imaginary. The many possible combinations, mixtures and shades between the two ends are as varied and complex as the degrees, calibers, and combinations of belief in the veracity of a representation.

Although I stated previously that video usually produces a referential-reality effect while film generally creates a constructed-reality effect, the reality effects produced by the two media are hardly ever purely referential or constructed. Video rather produces a reality effect which is predominantly (yet almost never completely) referential, and film generally creates a reality effect which is mainly (but not entirely) constructed. The reality effect produced by single works is hardly ever entirely referential or constructed either. Not the reality effect of the filmed parts in *Benny's Video*, nor the reality effect created by the home video footage in *Family Viewing,* nor the one produced by the realist novels Barthes discusses – none occupies the far ends of the "reality effect scale." They are all positioned somewhere in between.

The filmed parts of Haneke's work show particularly well how an intermediary position can be occupied on the scale in question. For although those filmed parts predominantly create a constructed-reality effect, not many of the film's characteristics truly obstruct a referential illusion. Alongside the fact that, as mentioned previously, visual access to the world on view seems direct and transparent, a referential-reality effect is not impossible because the world Benny and his parents inhabit could be real. For although some events in the lives of these seemingly ordinary bourgeois family members are quite extraordinary, the film does not transgress the boundaries of what is possible within reality according to general West-European views.[26] The ontology represented by the film does not greatly differ from the one most of the film's viewers believe they live in. In addition, some of the towns and places shown and named in the film really exist; for instance Austria's capital Vienna and its Stephansplatz, the Egyptian town Hurghada and the nearby pyramids.[27]

So, although the narrative film part of *Benny's Video* creates a story world which looks real in its own right but which can also be recognized as imaginary, referential reality does sometimes seem to slip in. In other words, a referential-reality effect is not completely absent from the film, but the constructed-reality effect predominates. The latter reality effect can, however, predominate more strongly than it does in *Benny's Video*. Think, for instance, of fairy tales or horror movies in which creatures or events are depicted which do not exist or could not have occurred in reality as the viewer understands it. In these cases, the words or images do not have (or could not have)

[26] The fact that viewer's understanding of reality, which is historically, culturally, and socially relative, influences the reality effect proves again that the reality effect is not only an effect *on* the viewer, but also an effect *of* the viewer.

[27] In "Let's Pretend," Furst stresses the vital role of existing geographical places as primary crossovers from the actual to the fictional. I would rephrase the actual and the fictional as referential and constructed reality.

referents outside of the (visual) text. They rather compose an enclosed world which is clearly separated from referential reality. As the represented enclosed world is an ontology which differs strongly from the ontology the reader resides in, it can easily be understood as constructed, fictional, and imaginary. If a reality effect is produced by such works depicting an ontology which strongly differs from the reader's, it is an effect which approaches the "constructed-reality end" of the reality effect scale. Conversely, the "referential-reality end" of the scale is approached by works which represent an ontology which seems similar to the reader's or viewer's world. The more the depicted ontology resembles the ontology of the reader, the more easily it can be understood as referential reality.

Strikingly, the realist narratives Barthes discusses in "The Reality Effect" do not necessarily occupy the referential reality pole of the reality effect scale. This is striking because the reality effect as Barthes defines it is a referential-reality effect; it concerns the impression that referential reality is denoted directly by the text. However, although the realist texts Barthes mentions create the impression that they refer to referential reality in some respects, the novels equally construct contained, fictional story worlds which seem real in their own right. Those worlds can nevertheless still be recognized as fictional and imaginary, especially when the stories appear in the form of a novel. Like the narrative fiction film, the genre of the novel is counterproductive to the construction of a referential-reality effect; it is by convention associated with imaginary and constructed worlds instead of with the documentary registration of reality.

However, the recognition of the worlds depicted by realist texts as constructed and fictional is historically relative, and with that, their reality effect is so too. When realist narratives first appeared, they were often published as serials in newspapers, and the typical realist mode of writing had not yet become a style common to narrative fiction. The constructed, fictional character of the realist stories was therefore often overlooked by nineteenth-century readers. Instead, the texts caused a predominantly referential-reality effect. This is well illustrated by an anecdote on Louis Couperus' *Eline Vere* (1887-1888), a novel which was first published as a serial in a local Dutch newspaper. When the episode in which the fictional character dies appeared in this newspaper, people riding the tram in the writer's home town whispered to each other: "Have you heard? Eline is dead."

1.5 Medium Specificity and the Reality Effect

The first section of this chapter ended with the assertion that the media of film and video do not only produce a reality effect automatically because of the chemical and technical ways they each record objects in front of the lens. For, as can be seen in recent films and videos such as *Benny's Video, Family Viewing* and *Battles of Troy,* the two media also produce a reality effect through other devices. My discussion of these

devices has shown that the devices which are generally used in videos in order to create the effect in question differ from the ones which are commonly applied in films.

The adjectives and adverbs used above, such as common, general, mostly, and usually, indicate that is customary for video and film to produce a reality effect by means of certain conventional devices, and to produce a reality effect of a certain degree and kind. Many of the reality-effect producing devices of video can however be applied in film, too. In fact, devices which point out the indexicality of the medium were once quite common in some applications of the cinematic medium. Many home movies shot on film, as well as films produced within famous cinematic documentary strands such as *direct cinema* and *cinéma verité,* were characterized by many of the formal devices which now typify video practices. However, when video arrived, it slowly took over the making of documentaries, home movies and other amateur productions. As the medium was cheaper and its camera easier to handle than film's, it simply became more attractive for many practitioners within these domains to use video instead of film. Hence, many formal cinematic devices which were applied within these genres to signal authenticity and indexicality, were adopted, adapted, and expanded within video practices. They became more typical to the latter medium over time.

However, the arrival of video not only changed the specificity of film by taking over some of its genres. The video-specific characteristic of instant broadcast very much altered the way in which film was specified. Previously, I explained that film images always refer to something that has been because, as opposed to video images, film images cannot be shown as soon as they are recorded. Interestingly, this characteristic of film was not discerned as a distinct quality of the medium before video was invented. For a long time, film's specificity was mostly determined in comparison to photography. And compared to photography, the most specific features of film seemed to be the liveliness and continuous movement of its images, both signaling presentness, not pastness. The deictic reference of film images was defined solely in the way which is now featured as a video-specific form of indexicality: saying "now!" Only when video arrived did film's reference to the past became more apparent. Compared to this new medium and its capability of instantaneous broadcast, film suddenly began to resemble the medium from which it was usually distinguished, and moreover in a respect on the basis of which it was usually distinguished from this medium: the "that has been" of photography.

Video's immediacy, its temporal indexicality, as well as the dominance of its typically referential reality effect have altered the identity of film in one more respect. Compared to the relatively strong, referential reality effect which video images are able to produce, the constructed-reality effect of narrative fiction film has become less strong. Compared to the raw and immediate indexicality of video, the smooth realism of narrative fiction films looks constructed. Although aimed at hiding the mediated and material character of the medium, film's reality-effect producing devices tend to appear slightly contrived in comparison with video. As Belton has put it well: video has subtly redefined film as

mediated reality (1996: 86). This redefinition cuts both ways, though: video is only able to establish itself as more real in relation to film.

In the digital age, the indexical nature of film and video is waning – to put it mildly. When we look at moving images today, they might be digital ones. In fact, they probably are just that. This obliterates any certainty concerning their relation to a profilmic reality. Not only are digital images very susceptible to image manipulation through computer software, they can be "painted" from scratch with computer software too. The pixels of computer generated images (CGI) are not in any way caused by rays of light reflecting into a camera. In sum, film and video images have lost their technological status as indexical traces. However, video has not lost its status as *temporal* index. The only images which can still (more or less) be trusted as authentic, veracious representations of reality are what we call "live" images. In the digital age, this temporal indexicality turns out to be important to the specification of the cinematic medium.

First of all, as Thomas Y. Levin has pointed out in his "Rhetoric of the Temporal Index" (2002), since the 1990s, many narrative films have incorporated video footage in their narrative structure. Among many other films, Levin mentions *Wag the Dog* (Levinson 1997), *The Truman Show* (Weir 1998), and *Sliver* (Noyce 1993). All of these films show video images: surveillance videos, video reportages on television, and web cam videos. What the video clips have in common is that they belong to genres which are associated with instantaneous feed. This live aspect is, moreover, affirmed by the narrative structure of the films which incorporate the clips. In addition, some films do not merely contain video clips – they are presented in video form alone, without an overarching film framework to embed them. Mike Figgis' remarkable narrative film *Time Code* (2000) is, for instance, told in its entirety through the quadruple split screens of a video surveillance monitor.

Levin explains this widespread use in light of cinema's digitalization. For although narrative fiction films generally never emphasized the indexical nature of their analogue medium, this indexicality was so widely known that it nevertheless had a rhetorical reality effect without being signified within films. The disappearance of the indexical, material link between film images and their referents must therefore be compensated in narrative fictions films. Levin argues that "by adopting the rhetorics of real-time broadcast, […] cinema has displaced an impoverished spatial rhetoric of photo-chemical indexicality with a thoroughly contemporary, and equally semiotically 'motivated' rhetoric of *temporal indexicality*" (2002: 592). The indexical rhetoric of cinema's pre-digital photo-chemical past thus survives in the digital age, albeit now re-cast in the form of the temporal indexicality of the real-time video image (Levin 592).

It is remarkable that influential contemporary theoretical specifications of the cinematic medium also redefine the cinematic in the digital age around a form of indexicality which comes close to video's temporal indexicality. In "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity" (2007), Mary Ann Doane argues that the digitalization of film doesn't mean that the specificity of the medium can no longer be structured

around the concept of indexicality. Although the idea of index as trace does no longer apply to digital film images, the definition of the index as deixis is very much applicable to film, Doane suggests. Pepita Hesselberth, who takes up Doane's suggestion to rethink cinematic indexicality as deixis rather than trace in her *Cinematic Chronotopes: Here, Now, Me*, puts it as follows: "The difference is temporal: trace connects to the past; deixis to the present" (9).

Adding the Field

My discussion of the ways in which video and film each produce their most dominant reality effect, as well as the overview of the manner in which the two media have specified each other in this respect, confirm Krauss' definition of medium specificity in several ways. Firstly, the fact that media produce their respective reality effects through formal devices demonstrates that their specificity is indeed not merely a technological matter. For although the devices in question spring from (and point back to) the material, technological base of film and video, they are nevertheless avoidable conventional artifices. Secondly, the fact that the specific identities of film and video in relation to their most typical reality effect have so thoroughly changed and developed over the years clearly supports Krauss' idea that the specificity of media is always changing. Moreover, in the case of film, the changes in question didn't come from "within": with no technical alteration to the cinematic support, the identity of film changed with the arrival of video. Certain abilities and formal features were no longer unique to film. In addition, the functions of the medium altered as video largely took over its application in certain genres. This influence of video on the specification of film is in line with Krauss' idea that the specificity of media is differential.

This notion of differentiality leaves us with some questions concerning the reality effects of film and video, however. Although Krauss has stated that the specific structure of media is an agglomerate one, consisting of many components, the idea of differentiality can still be understood as a suggestion that the specificity of media lies solely in those things by which it differs from all other media: in one or more unique characteristics or abilities.[28] And although she defines the structure of the medium as ever changing, her temporal model does not rule out the possibility that at some point, the unique abilities of the medium can temporality be pinpointed, and that the specificity of the medium is then fixed at that specific moment and those unique features. These implicit suggestions

[28] This search for the unique capabilities of a medium is, of course, prominent in Greenberg's essentialist discourse on medium specificity. Moreover, as Noël Carroll has convincingly pointed out in his writings on medium specificity (1998, 1996), this search can be traced back to ancient discussions on the word-image relationship. In addition, Carroll argues that descriptions of the specificity of media often tend to take the form of recommendations or requirements. He convincingly outlines how discourses on medium specificity are usually dominated by two closely related recommendations: the *excellence* requirement and the *differentiation* requirement. As Carroll explains, "The two can be combined in the imperative that each art form should explore only those avenues of development in which it exclusively excels above all the other arts" (1988: 83).

do not only imply a return to Greenberg's essentialist understanding of the medium – they do not apply to film and video when it comes to their reality effects.

Although it is surely possible to pin down some unique technological abilities of film or video at a certain point in time (think, for instance, of closed-circuit video), these unique features do not explain many of the other notable differences between the two media in light of the reality effect. For, as opposed to unique features, these differences mostly lie in what I would call typicalities and commonalities. It is, for instance, more typical for video than for film to signify the indexicality of its images. Film, on the other hand, more commonly produces a reality effect by hiding the materiality of its support. It is, moreover, specific to film that it more commonly produces a reality this way, just as it is specific to video to predominantly produce a reality effect in another way. Moreover, we can call the typical devices of film specific because, through their common appearance in film, we have come to recognize them as specifically cinematic aspects. This also goes for the videomatic devices I discussed. It is through the typicality of certain features that the two media are specified and differentiated from each other. However, none of this relies on unique, inevitable technological features. It is mostly a conventional distinction. For, as mentioned previously, film and video are very well able to imitate or adopt each other's reality-effect producing devices. Film and video do imitate and adopt each other's devices, yet they do so in the margins of their more dominant applications.

This brings me to another important aspect of medium specificity which Krauss' definition cannot account for. Media do not necessarily (or hardly ever) form a continuous, homogeneous unity. Most media can do one thing, as well as another. Their technological abilities as well as conventional layers can be contradictory and conflicting. And within all their different abilities, conventions and applications, some forms dominate. How can these matters of heterogeneity and dominance within the medium be reflected in a definition of medium specificity? Or, to put it differently, which concept can guide our analysis of the complexity of the aggregate condition of media? I propose to add a concept to Krauss' definition which she once coined in a discussion of sculpture, and which has been further defined in relation to medium specificity by art historian George Baker (a one-time student of Krauss). In "Photography's Expanded Field," Baker conceptualizes the medium as a field of possibilities, "consisting of multiple sets of oppositions and conjugations, rather than any singular operation" (124).

In some respects, Baker's ideas are clearly imbued by those of Krauss. Like Krauss, Baker insists on the fact that a medium's specificity is a culturally composed structure. The expressive and formal possibilities of a medium are not dependent on its sheer technological demise, Baker states. In fact, he almost completely rules out the importance of a medium's technical support to its specificity. Moreover, Baker surmises, a medium's field can change without losing its delineation as specific field. Yet, his argument differs from Krauss' in one crucial way. Although Krauss acknowledges the

composed, aggregative, changeable, and differing nature of a medium's specificity, she still speaks of media as singular entities. In her eyes, a medium is constructed out of one technical support plus one set of conventions. Baker's model of the medium takes into account that a medium consists of many opposing sets of possibilities at the same time.

In addition to the fact that the spatial notion of the field makes it easier to envisage the internal differentiation of a medium, it also provides us with a way to envisage the relationship between similar media such as film and video. When media share possibilities, their fields overlap. Such overlaps do not mean that the fields as such lose their specificity, however. Following Baker's idea of the field, the ever-changing specificity of media can be said not to lie in their unique capabilities, but in their unique composition of several – sometimes opposing – sets of possibilities.

Another important component of Baker's medium theory is the so-called field of operation. Being fields of expressive and formal possibilities themselves, media also have the possibility to operate within one or several particular fields, realms, or domains, according to Baker. Moreover, he designates such fields as *cultural* fields. The field of operation of a medium, then, could be understood as the cultural field(s) within which media can operate without losing or altering their specificity. However, the term "operation" can, in my eyes, also be conceived of as "application," in order to stress that media do not act on their own account, but are used within certain fields. The domains Baker names as cultural fields are varied; from art to documentary, from archive to science fiction. Apparently, quite disparate matters can be conceived of as cultural fields. Some of them, such as art, are institutionalized domains. Others, such as science fiction, are fields demarcated as genres.

In light of medium specificity, however, such disparity does not matter much. Baker's notion of field of operation is relevant because the operation of media is often restricted to certain domains, be they institutions, genres, modes of entertainment, or culturally delineated spaces. A medium's field of operation is part of a medium's specificity, because it is part of a medium's field of possibilities. Thus, it is a field within a field. A medium's field of operation designates a medium's possibilities with regard to the cultural places and domains within which it can operate. The specificity of television, for instance, is in part determined by its often-applied possibility to operate within the culturally delineated space of the living room. Another example is the specific possibility of painting to operate within the domain of art. Its application in the realm of documentary is however hardly imaginable. If the medium were to be used as documentary, its specificity would have to be reconsidered.

When it comes to the reality effects of film and video, it is possible to say that their respective reality effects are produced by a specific set of their possibilities within one or more of their fields of operation. In the case of film, that medium's most typical reality effect is produced within its most dominant field of operation: the genre of the narrative fiction film. Baker's notion of fields of operation is not only relevant with regard to the

reality effects of film and video, it is useful in mapping out the fields of film and video in general. The medium of video is characterized by a couple of very disparate fields of operation. One the one hand, it operates within documentary and amateur genres, and on the other hand, it is widely applied within the field of "high art." Although documentary and art are fields of operation for film too, the latter medium is mostly characterized by one very dominant field of operation/application: the genre of the narrative fiction film.

This dominant application of film can be said to overshadow that medium's entire field of possibilities. For, as for instance Roger Odin has argued, all non-dominant uses of a medium are linked to the dominant mode, just as "what is written in the margins of a text bears a relation […] to this text, to the large corpus to which it is linked, on which it depends, on which it is commenting or which it is refuting by means of notes and arguments" (221). Film's dominant application as a narrative medium not only shapes other applications of the medium; it is also a deciding factor in theoretical specifications of the medium. Christian Metz, for example, has designated narrative fiction film (or as he also calls it: diegetic film) as the positive pole of film to which the majority corresponds, and with respect to which the rest can be defined (1982: 39).

However, media can also be each other's field of operation. This brings me back to the reality effect. In the previous section, I discussed Levin's observation that many contemporary films adopt reality-effect producing video clips in their narrative structure. In doing so, narrative fiction films become a field of operation for video and its medium-specific, or medium-typical reality effect. In the following section, I will study how this affects the reality effects of both film and video. As will become clear, the rhetorical impact of video's reality effect on the reality effect of film is not as unidirectional as Levin leads us to suspect.

1.6 Interaction

In the works I have discussed so far, the combination of video and film within the single object of a video or film made differences visible between the reality effects of the two media. In that sense, the two are enabled to specify each other with regard to the reality effect within and by the films and videos in question. The relationship between the two media in the works discussed is, however, a lot more complicated than that. For in *Benny's Video*, *Family Viewing* and *Battles of Troy*, video and film do not remain separated units between which the only form of interaction – mutual specification – is caused by the fact that their neat juxtaposition exposes differences between their respective reality effects. In the works, as well as in a number of other films and videos that I will mention below, mutual specification occurs between film and video because they interfere with each other's reality effects in ways which go beyond exposing difference alone. The two media, for instance, sustain, enhance, question, or diminish each other's reality effect, become part of each other's reality-effect producing devices, alter the

reality effect of the other medium by way of their own devices, or use the reality effect of the other medium to sustain their own reality effect. These and other forms of intermedial interaction concerning the reality effect will be the topic of this section.

Any form of interaction between media which influences reality effects or which affects the reality-effect producing devices is automatically of influence on the specificity of the two media. On the one hand, when video fragments in a film enhance the constructed-reality effect specific of (the) film, the medium of video sustains the conventional specificity of film. When, on the other hand, video diminishes film's reality effect, or makes this effect more referential than constructed, the medium of film is re-specified by video because video shows that film can produce a reality effect which is usually not understood as specific to it.

I have argued before that video and film each have their specific reality effects, that their reality effects are produced through medium-specific devices, and that the specificity of these effects and devices comes into being through differences with the effects and devices of other media. All three of these assumptions are, however, more or less questioned by the works under discussion. The films and videos in question first of all show that although particular reality effects are specific to film and video, their specificity with regard to the reality effect can easily be altered or re-specified by the other medium. Secondly, the forms of interaction in the works demonstrate that the creation of a reality effect by film and video not only depends on their own specific devices. Finally, the specificity of their reality effects or of their devices is shown to not solely depend on *differences* with other media. The works in question reveal that the reality effects of film and video can depend very much on *interaction* (and not only in the sense of specification through difference) between the film and video.

Film's Video

The first object by which I will study forms of interaction between film, video, and their reality effects is the film which has reappeared as an object of study throughout this chapter: Haneke's *Benny's Video*. As the following analysis will show, the influence of film on the reality effect of video is equivocal, and so is the influence of video on the reality effect of film.

In *Benny's Video,* interaction between film and video first arises when the filmed material which follows the film's opening video is recognized as narrative fiction film. The filmed material can be recognized as narrative fiction film pretty quickly, because many of the genre's representational conventions are followed. The camera work is, for instance, carried out calmly and with steady precision, the 180 degree line is not crossed, spaces are mapped out by clearly related successive shots, and a sense of overview is further sustained by a number of establishing shots of the spaces in which the protagonists reside. Although a reality effect is created by these devices because they give rise to an illusion of overview and visual access to the depicted world, they also enable the recognition of the genre of the narrative fiction film. Through that, they

make clear that the world on view is a constructed and imaginary reality.

This recognition influences the reality effect of the opening video, albeit retroactively. As pointed out previously, the opening video of the dying pig produces a referential-reality effect; it invites the viewer to believe that it represents referential reality. This referential-reality effect is however diminished by the subsequent narrative fiction film once this film is recognized as a narrative fiction film, because important aspects of the reality depicted by the video return in the staged and acted out world shown by the film. The reality effect of the video weakens once the place it shows can be understood as a film set, and once the people surrounding the dying pig can in retrospect be recognized as actors. Their slightly shocked and awkward expressions when they witness the dying pig can in hindsight be read as play-acted emotions. Even the event of the pig's slaughter can now be assumed to be performed for the sake of the film. In sum, the (referential) reality effect of the video diminishes because the narrative fiction film makes clear that the reality depicted by the video is not referential reality but the imaginary reality constructed by the fiction film.

Video Proving Film

Although the narrative film diminishes the reality effect of the opening video, this video at first temporarily enhances the reality effect of the film. When the people shown in the opening video appear in the filmed material, it is impossible to immediately recognize them as actors. Nor can the dialogue and events which subsequently take place at once be understood as acted and staged. One of the reasons for this is that the filmed material has to be recognized as narrative fiction film before the world on view can be considered as a fictional and constructed one. A second reason is that the reality effect produced by the preceding video has invited the viewer to read the images referentially, and to believe in their truthfulness with little effort. Once the film sets in, these modes of reading and believing cannot be cast off straightaway. Because of that, the behavior of the characters, as well the setting and the shown events in which they play a part, initially look as real and unstaged as the people, places and events in the opening video. This impression only lasts until the film is recognized as a narrative fiction film. The referential-reality impression evoked by the video does, however, postpone the moment at which this recognition takes place.

Once the narrative of *Benny's Video* has started to unfold, video fragments keep appearing in the filmed material. Like the opening video, most of these fragments are recorded by protagonist Benny, who almost constantly uses the medium of video. If he is not watching, editing, borrowing, or discussing videos, he is producing them by filming the world around him with one of his video cameras. As the video recordings which succeed Benny's opening video are clearly embedded in the fiction film, they are not able to produce a referential-reality effect as strong as the one produced by the opening video before the narrative film had set in.

Yet, the video fragments do still produce a reality effect which is more referential and therefore stronger than the constructed-reality effect created by the narrative film. Because of specific video devices – such as graininess and color distortion, a wobbly image frame indicating amateurism or the opposite static "stare" typical of surveillance video – the video fragments give the impression that the reality they depict is referential reality, and hence not an imaginary world of make believe. Although, as viewers, we remain aware of the fact that the world shown by the video fragments is actually the imaginary world constructed by the film, the referential-reality effect produced by video cannot be entirely suppressed by this awareness. When the imaginary world constructed by the narrative film is shown using video images, it looks more real than when it is shown using film.

The referential-reality effect created by the video fragments enhances the reality effect of the entire film. The film's diegesis not only looks more real when it is shown by video, the film world looks more real throughout the entire film because parts of it are represented by video. The video representations seem to prove that the world shown by the film is not a constructed reality, but referential reality – even though some awareness of the constructed nature of the film world remains. In *Benny's Video,* video can be said to function as a medium which authenticates the reality shown by the fiction film.

This function is mostly noticeable when it comes to events and situations in the film which are in need of authentication. The rather ordinary holiday Benny and his mother spend in Egypt, for instance, does not have to be shown by video footage in order to be credible. The foregoing event of Benny shooting his young female friend to death with a cattle gun, in contrast, is in need of some validation by video in order to be believable. Immediately after Benny has shot the girl for the first time, the view of the murder scene is no longer presented by film. It is only through video images that the viewer can see how the injured girl collapses and drops on the floor, and how her dead body lies in a pool of blood after Benny has shot her twice more.

These horrific video images demonstrate that the scenes in which the murder is shown do not merely represent the fantasy of the death-obsessed protagonist. They also make it difficult to understand the crime as staged and acted. For, through reality-effect producing devices such as the absence of operations like zoom movements, cuts and camera swerves, and the presence of flaws such as color distortion and pixel drop-out, the video creates the illusion that it provides an objective, documentary view of reality – in this case the reality of a girl being murdered by a teenage boy. If Benny's cruel act and its bloody consequences were not shown by both film and video images, but by film images alone, the viewer's awareness of the scene being staged would probably have been stronger. Without the referential-reality impression evoked by the video material, the impression evoked in the viewer by the film images might then resemble the remark Benny's makes in conversation with his victim on special effects in films: "All ketchup and plastic. Looks real though."

The Contributing and Counteracting Narrator

Many of the scenes and events shown by video fragments in *Benny's Video* contribute to the film's narrative, not least because some are shown by video images alone. The video fragments which represent things not depicted by film images as well, are often indispensable to the cohesiveness and comprehensibility of the narrative. The plot of the film would for instance be incomplete without the video images which show how Benny's parents are arrested by the police. Because of the importance of video footage to the unfolding of the film story, it can be argued that the medium of video is an embedded narrator in the film. The strong referential-reality effect video produces through its specific devices, moreover, makes the medium a reliable narrator which is easily trusted. Through this air of reliability and trustworthiness video is not only able to contribute to the narrative told by the unseen, external narrator of the film, but also to confirm it. What is more, as a narrator, video contributes *to* and is embedded *in* one of the most important devices by which film usually creates its reality effect: narrativity. Thus, in *Benny's Video*, the medium of video – including many of its specific reality-effect producing devices – is a sustaining part of one of film's specific reality-effect producing devices. And because the device of narrativity is specific to film, video can even be said to become part of the specificity of film by contributing to the film's narrative.

However, although video contributes to one of film's reality-effect producing devices as a narrator, the medium of video in its capacity as internal narrator also frustrates an important way through which (the) film produces a reality effect. As explained previously, the reality effect of film is mostly caused by evoking an illusion in the viewer of overview and visual access to the depicted world. The video fragments in *Benny's Video* shatter this illusion. First of all, the video images do not look as transparent and smooth as the film images. Instead, the video material shows its opaqueness and materiality in many ways. Secondly, the video images do not always provide the viewer with a complete overview of scenes. Events which are important within the narrative of the film are often only partially visible when they are presented in video. This is the case, for instance, in the scene where Benny murders the girl. Although the falling body and corpse of the young woman are brought in to view, her prolonged suffering and death take place just outside of the video frame. When such charged events are kept from full view, video does not provide the viewer with the illusion of unmediated visual access to the film's diegesis, but rather bluntly withholds this access from the viewer.

Hence, the peculiar thing is that, in *Benny's Video,* the illusion of transparency and visual access which is specific and indispensable to the way film creates a reality effect is undermined by video through some of the specific devices by which video creates a reality effect. The coarse-grained, slightly flickering image surface of the video images undermines the impression of transparency which is important to the reality effect of film. Yet, the graininess and unsteadiness of the images are devices which produce a reality effect in video.

What is more, when important scenes are out of shot in the video parts of Haneke's film, the camera isn't deliberately turned away from the scene. The camera just doesn't move at all, it keeps "staring" in one direction without turning, zooming or focusing. These features of motionlessness and passivity reveal that the video camera is not operated by a human agent, but is left on a tripod or adjusted on the wall in order to record automatically. Within video, such features therefore function as reality-effect producing devices. In *Benny's Video,* however, they also counter the way in which the narrative film creates a reality effect. For because of those specific video devices, video is a trustworthy yet imprecise image narrator that keeps significant parts of the story world from view, thereby obstructing the viewer's illusion of visual access on which the reality effect of film relies.

Exposing Video

Besides being a narrator, video can also function as an actor within the narrative of the film. The video fragments in *Benny's Video* tell parts of the cinematic story, yet they also influence the course of events as it unfolds within this story. The video recording of Benny's crime, for instance, proves to his parents that he is really the murderer of the girl whose body is hidden in the family's apartment. This proof prompts the father and mother to cover up the crime. Video also functions as an actor when Benny has his parents arrested on the basis of a fragment of one of his videos. In the fragment, the two poised adults calmly make the shocking decision to dispose of the body by cutting it into pieces and flushing it down the toilet.

Previously, I stated that in Haneke's film, video often authenticates the constructed film world. Because of the referential-effect video creates, the medium seems to prove that the film world is real. However, video does not solely owe its function as evidence and authentication within the film to the strong reality effect it is able to create. The medium also functions as such because the narrative film designates video as a medium which shows the truth. The film does so by having video function as an actor that influences the course of events because it shows reality, reveals the truth or proves that things really happened. By assigning this function within the story to video, the narrative fiction film confirms and sustains the referential-reality effect which video also produces through its own devices.

It is worth noting that as in *Benny's Video,* video often has the function of the truth-revealing actor in contemporary narrative films. A good example is a more recent film by Michael Haneke, *Caché* (2005). In this film, anonymous videotapes sent to protagonist Georges subtly expose painful aspects of Georges' childhood that he has long kept hidden. Video also often has the function of an actor that exposes, reveals, and proves in narrative films more strongly related to mainstream Hollywood cinema than Haneke's European art-house films. In M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), for instance, a videotape found in the room of a recently deceased girl reveals that the child was poisoned by her own mother. Video surveillance recordings of robberies frequently

affect the course of events in fiction films, because as incriminating proof such recordings have to be kept out of the hands of the police by the wrongdoers – which leads to problems and conflict in, for instance, the Hughes brothers' *Menace II Society* (1993) – or because the recordings initiate a police chase, as in *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991). The frequent recurrence of video as a truth-bringing actor in narrative fiction films is important because, by repeatedly assigning this function to video, films specify video. Through repetition, the exposure of the truth by video is turned into an act which is conventional to the medium. And as a convention, it becomes part of video's structure of specificity.

Benny's Video, as well as many of the films discussed here, in part allot the function of truth-exposing actor to video by the way in which the film characters understand and use the medium. Benny's parents, for instance, only accept that Benny has murdered a girl when they witness the crime on video, because they believe that video shows the truth. In addition, the parents are arrested because the police believe that Benny's video of his parents discussing the disposal of the body proves they must have murdered the girl. Haneke's film in addition shows that video can be understood as a medium which shows reality by the way in which the film's protagonist uses the medium.

For Benny, video is an epistemological tool. This goes somewhat against the grain of specification of video as an indexical medium (including the self-reflexive ones in videos), for as discussed previously, the index is mostly defined as a sign which doesn't tell or show anything about its referent, but rather just points at it. Benny, however, videotapes whatever fascinates him, in order to be able to take a closer look at it later on. By playing videotaped fragments on a VCR, he scrutinizes events ranging from parties to death with the hope of learning more about it. The young boy seems to consider video as a medium by which more can be seen and discovered about reality than by eyesight alone.[29] The way in which reality is shown by video appeals so much to Benny that he even prefers to look through the window of his bedroom window using a video camera instead of his own eyes. One of Benny's video cameras constantly records the outside world through a thin gap between closed curtains, while the footage is shown in real time on a television screen. The medium truly serves the protagonist's desire to fathom certain aspects of reality by some of the options video offers its viewer when recorded material is played on a VCR. The options of pausing, rewinding, fast-forwarding, and playing moving video images in slow motion enable Benny to see events

[29] Another medium which was similarly specified in a narrative film by the protagonist's understanding of the medium is photography in Antonioni's famous film *Blow Up* (1966). In this film, protagonist Thomas blows up a photograph because he expects that something will become visible that cannot (or can no longer) be perceived in reality by eyesight alone. Besides the fact that the visual media of video and photography have thus been specified within film as media by which more can be perceived than by human eyesight alone, it is worth noting that film itself has often been specified as a medium which offers an unprecedented view on reality, a view which reveals, penetrates, and analyzes reality in ways the human eye cannot match. This specification of film was, however, provided not so much by other media, but by famous theorists and filmmakers such as Walter Benjamin and Dziga Vertov.

repeatedly, faster and longer than would be possible with his own eyes.[30]

Because Haneke's film integrates video as a truth-revealing actor within its narrative structure, and because *Benny's Video* moreover has its protagonist demonstrate how video can be used as a medium through which reality can be seen and known better than using human eyes alone, it can be argued that narrative film sustains the referential-reality effect of video. On the other hand, film can also be said to offer a warning against the reality effect of video. The reality effect of video is shown to be so strong that it easily entices its viewers into believing that the medium shows the truth about things and events (as accepted by the police) and that it can provide an insightful view on reality (as Benny believes).

However, in Haneke's film, video is shown to be inadequate when it comes to these assumptions. The film, moreover, shows how false assumptions raised by video's reality effect can have grave consequences. As mentioned, Benny's parents are arrested after the police have seen a video fragment in which the father and mother plan to get rid of the girl's dead body. Some videotaped parts of the conversation are however edited out of the video footage by Benny before he hands the tape over to the police. In these omitted parts, the parents provide each other with reasons for covering up their son's crime. Without these parts of the conversation, Benny's guilt remains undisclosed by the video. While in fact it only shows a part of the truth, the video now seems to reveal that the parents have committed the murder.

What is more, the falseness of the assumptions video gives rise to through its strong reality effect can even be said to lie at the basis of Benny's crime. The young boy expects that video can provide him with an insightful view on reality, and he constantly attempts to study the subject which fascinates him most by watching videos. After a while, however, Benny finds out that the high hopes which the medium of video had raised in him are vain. For in the end, he doesn't really get to know, experience, and especially not to see death by studying videos. In order "to see what it's like," he has to kill a girl and watch her die with his own eyes – which is also the explanation he gives when his parents ask him why he has committed the crime.

Features Casting Doubt

In Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing,* the medium of video appears first of all within filmed material in the form of surveillance video fragments. Sometimes, these fragments are of a young woman named Aline, who, for instance, is shown working as a telephone operator. A video image shows the entrance to her office from a high angle. After that, Aline ends a telephone conversation in a film shot. A few moments later, she leaves her office through the door which is kept under surveillance by video. In this sequence, film and video enhance each other's reality effect reciprocally; the order in which they

[30] In Chapter 3 I will explain why theorists have attached great social and political value to the functions of pausing, rewinding, and slowing down moving image material. In Chapter 4 I will discuss some of the negative consequences and premises of the application of lens-based media as epistemological tools.

influence each other cannot be determined. On the one hand, the film images sustain the belief that the surveillance video images are live, for there is no delay between the filmed actions of the character and her whereabouts on video. The possibility that the video images are live enhances their reality effect because, as explained previously, liveness precludes post-production through which images can be manipulated. On the other hand, the presumed liveness of the images enhances the reality effect of the film, because when the video images are broadcast in real time, the film images which show the same situation must be live as well. This in turn enhances the reality effect of the filmed pieces for the same reason that the idea of live broadcasting enhances the reality effect of the video images.

A second way in which video appears within the filmed material is in the form of clips of home video footage. The function of these pieces of footage within the narrative film will be discussed later. First, I will focus on a third way in which video is part of the narrative film. Besides the fragments of surveillance and home video footage, the video medium is embedded in the filmed material of *Family Viewing* in a form other than as a well-defined part with a beginning, an end and a certain length. Instead of video *fragments*, single video *features* sometimes "enter" the filmed material, without a clear-cut switch from film images to video images taking place.

In a filmed scene where protagonist Van is having breakfast with his father and stepmother, for instance, it becomes noticeable that they all have a weird bluish complexion. Upon closer inspection, all objects within the image look rather pale and blue. This color distortion can be recognized as typical of video. Another typical video feature which at times becomes temporarily visible within the film is the seeming luminosity of lighter parts within the images. When Van's stepmother Sandra is wearing a white outfit in a rather dim room, for instance, it seems as if she is somewhat glowing in the dark. What is more, on the surface of some film images the square grain which is typical of video can sometimes be detected. In addition, features such as pixel drop-out and flickering patterns which are common in low quality videos can be seen to briefly emerge in several film images of *Family Viewing*. Video suddenly appears in the film during a scene in which Van and Sandra move towards each on a couch, when their movements suddenly freeze. Within the image, a horizontal flickering line of black-and-white dots and stripes becomes visible – a line which can immediately be recognized as the scan line which usually crosses the screen when a videotape is paused.

Apart from this scan line, all features of video which appear within the filmed footage of *Family Viewing* are devices by which a reality effect is created in video. When they emerge separately and outside of a video context within the filmed material of Egoyan's movie, however, they do not produce this effect. The reason for this is that the fact that certain features function as reality-effect producing devices can be medium-specific. It is specific for video that features such as color distortion and pixel drop-out function as devices which produce a reality effect within the medium. The same features do not function in the same way when they appear in the other medium: film. What is more, the

features do not just lack the ability to create a reality effect when they invade the film images; they even diminish the reality effect as it is produced by the film images.

The reality of the narrative film fragments in *Family Viewing* is produced by devices specific to film – smooth images of a high resolution and a high quality, steady and composed camerawork, clearly related successive shots which map out space and organize time. The illusion of transparency, overview and direct visual access these devices produce, is however canceled out when the abovementioned features traverse the film footage as those features attract attention to the materiality of the images. When the smoothness of the film images is temporarily replaced by a granular video look, the image surface no longer seems transparent. The color distortion and pixel drop-out further point out the opaqueness and imperfection of the representation. The paused image with the scan line further reveals the constructed, recorded character of the moving images.

However, at certain points in the film, the abovementioned video features do create a reality effect. This is the case when the characteristics so strongly dominate the film material that they raise doubt as to the medium of the images on view. When the images on view look a little bluish, but still look like film in all other respects, the medium of the images isn't radically called into question. When the film images simultaneously look bluish, luminous, and grainy, they resemble video images in so many ways that one has to wonder if the film images still really are *film* images. What is more, the sudden video-like interventions in the moving film images, such pausing and rewinding with the appearance of typical video scan lines on the image surface, raise the question of whether the material which predominantly looks like film might not even be video. For how could a film reel be paused like a videotape?

When doubt as to the medium of the images on view is raised, the video features do start to function as devices which create a reality effect. The mere possibility that they are embedded in video instead of in film provides them with a referential-reality effect. Instead of undermining the illusion of visual access to the imaginary film world, and diminishing the constructed-reality effect of the film, they now seem to make this world look less imaginary – an impression which enhances the reality effect of the representation.

Nevertheless, the referential-reality effect of the features is not only caused by the medium in which they are or seem to be embedded, it also depends on the viewer. The idea that cinematic-seeming scenes in *Family Viewing* might not be depicted by film but by video gives rise to a different conventional mode of reading. When they appear in film, the video features are usually not interpreted by the viewer as signs which indicate that the representation is authentic, documentary, and truthful. Instead, they are by convention understood as such when they are part of video. Thus, the video features invading the filmed material in *Family Viewing* only turn into reality-effect producing devices once they have created the impression that the medium of the representation is probably video. For only then will the viewer read the features as signs indicating the

reliability and trustworthiness of the representation as a document of referential reality.

The Outstripping Narrator

As in *Benny's Video*, the medium of video functions as an internal narrator in *Family Viewing*. Many important events in the film's narrative are told only by video. The burial of Aline's mother, for instance, is only shown by video images, and as viewers we can only witness the sexual contact between Sandra and Van's father Stan through video recordings. An important difference between video's functioning as a narrator in Haneke's and Egoyan's films, however, is that in *Benny's Video,* video often denies the viewer visual access to important parts of the film scenes, whereas video in *Family Viewing* does evoke an impression of visual access in the viewer. Through this, the medium of video contributes to the reality effect of the narrative film in *Family Viewing*. In Egoyan's film, the medium of video evokes an impression of visual access in the viewer by revealing things which are secretive and/or shameful and which are therefore supposed to remain hidden from view – at least from public view. The videotaped sexual escapades of Sandra and Stan are, for instance, a rather private matter. They are also experienced as slightly shameful and humiliating by Sandra, who sometimes even casts an embarrassed look towards the automatically recording video camera in the couple's bedroom. When video images show the burial of Aline's mother it also shows a quite secretive event. Aline's mother is quietly and surreptitiously buried by Van, who has tricked the authorities into believing that the dead woman is his own grandmother. In doing so, he is able to release his real grandmother from the nursing home without getting in trouble with his father. Another secretive and shameful act which is shown by video is Aline's performance as an escort girl.

Because most of the hidden acts and situations which are shown by video in *Family Viewing* are shown by video alone, the medium does not merely contribute to the reality effect of film by sustaining the cinematic illusion of visual access. Video even seems to outstrip film when it comes to providing the viewer with (the illusion of) visual access to the depicted reality. For in Egoyan's film, video has access to scenes which film does not view. In classical narrative films, the film viewer is usually provided with an illusion of overview and access with the help of an external and unseen, yet omniscient narrator who shows everything in the best and clearest way possible and who has access to all relevant scenes and events. The external filmic narrator of *Family Viewing*, however, is by default compared to its embedded internal video narrator, who has more access to relevant scenes and events than the external narrator. Therefore, in *Family Viewing,* video surpasses the medium of film in creating a reality effect in a specifically cinematic way: by providing the viewer with an illusion of unlimited visual access.

Although video contributes to the reality effect of film as a narrator in *Family Viewing,* and even outstrips film in creating this effect in a specifically filmic way, the medium of video not only acts out an influence on film by contributing to or outstripping specific aspects of the cinematic medium; it has to be kept in mind that video as a narrator is

embedded in the narrative of the film's external narrator. It is film that allots the role of supreme narrator to video. By having video as a narrator surpassing the cinematic narrator in providing the viewer with visual access to the story world, the film portrays video as a medium which can provide visual access to reality like no other medium because it penetrates and exposes parts of reality which usually remain hidden from view.[31] Therefore, video not only contributes to the reality effect of film, film also sustains the reality effect of video in *Family Viewing*.

The Double Illusion of Visual Access

By allotting video the role of an internal narrator and focalizor whose abilities in showing and revealing reality are outstanding, the narrative film sustains both the reality effect of video and its own reality effect. By handing over the capacities of omniscience and visual access from the external filmic narrator to video as an embedded, internal narrator, the narrative film succeeds in providing the viewer with an even stronger illusion of visual access – an illusion which subsequently enhances the reality effect of the film. In order to explain this, it is necessary to add something to my previous remark that an unseen, external narrator contributes to the reality effect of a narrative fiction film. An internal narrator and/or focalizor is just as indispensable to a film's reality effect as an external one.

As Kaja Silverman has pointed out in her discussion of "suture" in cinema, the film viewer craves to know whose (literal) point of view is represented by certain images, in other words; to whose viewpoint shown images can be attributed. One of the reasons for this craving is that an observer whose view is represented by film images can serve as a stand-in for the viewer within the story. The viewer's impression of looking through the eyes of a character in the film can contribute just as much to the illusion of visual access to the world on view – an illusion which is so important to the reality effect of film – as the omniscient and objective survey provided by an external narrator. Images which are sutured to an internal and possibly confined and subjective point of view can thus contribute just as much to the reality effect of narrative film as unsutured shots which can be only be attributed to the presumably objective, externally focalized view of an external, unseen narrator/focalizor. The former have the ability to provide the viewer with the illusion of visual access to the film world because they can evoke the impression that the film world can be entered by the viewer. The latter provide the viewer with the illusion of visual access and overview because they usually present an omniscient survey on the story world which cannot be shared by any internal character.

By using video as an internal narrator, *Family Viewing* combines some of the reality effect enhancing characteristics of both an external, unseen narrator and an internal

[31] As in *Family Viewing*, video is also shown to be a medium which penetrates and exposes reality in *Benny's Video*, with the difference that the latter film stresses this ability of video by the way video functions as an actor and is understood by the characters in the film, whereas the former film mainly shows the revealing capacities of video through the way the medium functions as an internal narrator.

narrator/focalizor. Like the conventional external narrator of classical narrative film, video as a narrator seems to have access to all spaces and events in the narrative. The fact that video as an internal narrator does have access to all spaces and events in the film can be explained by the fact that it is common for video cameras to be positioned anywhere. Because of this, it makes sense that *video* images show Van's parents making love in their bedroom, Aline walking through a hotel corridor, or Van running through the garden as a little boy. In all cases, it is not unlikely for a video camera to be present at that moment, in that space within the film's diegesis. The presence of the video camera is sometimes even made explicit in Egoyan's film when images which are visibly produced *by* a video camera are followed by images *of* a video camera. Another important characteristic which video shares with the conventional external narrator is the seeming objectivity of its outlook. As the video images in *Family Viewing* can be attributed to the viewpoint of a technical device instead of the subjective perspective of a character, video's internal point of view is as objective as that of the external narrator usually is in conventional narrative fiction films.

The fact that the video images in *Family Viewing* can be attributed to the literal viewpoint of devices which are (often visibly) present within the film's diegesis, implies that the viewer's need for suture is satisfied when it comes to these images. For, the video images can be sutured to the intra-diegetic "look" of the video cameras. Although the viewer's identification with the devices might be complicated as the cameras are not human subjects, the film spectator is offered a physical standpoint within the film world in which she can imagine herself, and through whose "eyes" she seems to look. The advantage of this viewpoint over the viewpoint of characters is that it offers greater overview and has seemingly unlimited access to the film world. Therefore, *Family Viewing* offers the film viewer a double illusion of visual access to the depicted world: first of all with the illusion of being positioned within the film world as an eye (or actually, a lens), and secondly with the illusion of having visual access to every facet of this film world *as* this seemingly all-seeing and ubiquitous eye.

More Vision(s)

Two films worth briefly mentioning here are *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) and *Red Road* (Arnold 2006), because these films both resemble and differ from *Family Viewing* in interesting ways. Although the conventionally presumed objectivity of the external narrator is shared with the internal view provided by the video cameras in *Family Viewing*, the objectivity of the external narrator is not undermined in that film. Both the external and internal narrator/focalizor seem to show the reality of the film objectively, that is, unaffected by the subjective vision of the characters. In *Fight Club*, however, video as an internal narrator and focalizor exposes that the external cinematic narrator isn't as objective as is presumed by convention. In the film, protagonist Jack is often shown by the external narrator to be in the company of a second character, Tyler. However, when a fight between the two men is presented by way of internally focalized

surveillance video images instead of by the external narrator, Jack is shown to be beating up himself. Apparently, the external narrator is not as objective as expected, for it has conformed to Jack's distorted vision by depicting his imaginary friend (Verstraten 2006: 112-113). In *Fight Club*, video appears to function as the only narrator which shows the reality of the film as it really is.

As in *Family Viewing,* video is depicted as a medium which has seemingly unlimited access to reality in *Red Road*. However, in Arnold's film, this ability is not shown by the way video functions as an internal narrator, but by the possibilities the medium offers to the film's protagonist, Jacky. Through video, Jacky seems to have unlimited visual access to the world; "the world" in this case being the living environment of the female protagonist, who lives and works in Glasgow as a CCTV operator. It is Jacky's job to study live surveillance video footage all day long, in order to alert the police when anything suspicious is perceived on screen. One day, a man appears on one of Jacky's monitors who once destroyed her life. In the following weeks, she follows the moves he makes, in real time, through video. If the man leaves the area covered by Jackie's monitors, she turns to the monitors of a colleague. And if she misses any of his actions in real time, Jacky turns to the videotaped versions of the live footage. By the way in which Jacky uses the surveillance video footage, the film shows how video is a medium that can instantly provide visual access to all corners of a city, at any time.

Family Viewing through Video

Like *Benny's Video*, *Family Viewing* can be said to specify the capacity of video with regard to showing reality in part by the way in which the protagonist of the narrative film uses and understands the medium. Both films have a protagonist who makes abundant use of video equipment, yet there are slight differences between the ways in which Benny and Van understand the medium. Benny mainly uses video as a tool by which he can see and know reality. For him, it is important that video can show things in ways they cannot be perceived by human eyes. For Van, on the other hand, it is more important that video is able to show things exactly as they are or were in reality. He sometimes ignores the representational and material character of video recordings. Seeing things on video is the same for Van as seeing them in reality. Watching an event on video even equals "being there" for the adolescent boy. This becomes apparent when he gives Aline a video of her mother's funeral. Aline hasn't attended the funeral because Van secretly buried the old woman as his own grandmother while Aline was out of town, working as an escort. When Van gives her a tape of the event, she is understandably astonished. Van, however, acts as though seeing the funeral on tape is the same as as attending in person. The point for him is that Aline can witness the funeral. When she angrily remarks that she can only watch it on a television screen instead of in reality now, Van doesn't really seem to understand the problem: "You're just not in the mood right now, but when you are you can play it. Any time you want."

A similarity between the ways in which Benny and Van use video is that like Benny,

Van uses the medium to get to know reality. The reality Van tries to get to know by way of video recordings is the past reality of his childhood, of which he has few memories and which is moreover a subject Van cannot discuss with his father. As Van's mother left Van and his father a while ago, the past is too painful to talk about. For Van, it is however important to get to know his past. So when he finds out that his father is erasing videotapes of Van's childhood, he secretly secures and watches the tapes. These recordings seem to satisfy his desire to get in touch with his own past, and with his missing mother who appears on the tapes.

Whereas Benny's expectations with regard to the capabilities of video are shown to be too high by the narrative film, Van's idea that video can bring one in contact with a past reality is confirmed by the film on a formal level. It is, moreover, confirmed by the film through a specific cinematic form of representation, the shot/reverse shot pattern by which images are sutured to a character's looks. This form of representation usually contributes to the creation of a reality effect in narrative films, because it creates an overview of the depicted space. In *Family Viewing*, the shot/reverse shot pattern is applied so as to show that the past represented by video can be very real and present.

The final scene of the film shows how Van and his family members meet in the hall of an old people's home. Images of them now, in the hall, are alternated with video images of the past in which younger versions of all family members are visible. The video images and film images succeed each other in such a way that images from the past are sutured to the characters in the hall of the home, and vice versa. A video close up of little Van looking at something outside of the image frame is, for instance, followed by an establishing shot of the hall in which his mother and grandmother are sitting next to each other. When Van's mother explicitly turns her head to point outside the image frame, this film image is followed by a video image of Van's mother without the grey hair she has in preceding film image.

Through these shot/reverse shot sequences, the young Van seems to look at his mother and grandmother sitting in a space about fifteen years later. Likewise, it is suggested that Van's mother is looking directly at a younger version of herself. Besides these examples, a number of other shot/reverse shot sequences combine film images of "now" with video images of "then." Because of that, it seems as if all family members are looking at past and present versions of each other and themselves. Thus, the film suggests that the young videotaped versions and the older, present-time versions of the characters are close to each other in space, although we know that they are separated from each other in time. The family is viewing through time, through video. *And* through film, as the temporally remote characters are seemingly brought into (visual) contact and physical proximity by a typically cinematic mode of representation.