



Hidden in Plain Sight

A thought-provoking puzzle

CACHÉ (Hidden): Written and directed by Michael Haneke. Produced by Margaret Menegoz, Veit Heiduschka. Cinematography, Christian Berger. Editors, Michael Hudecek and Nadine Muse. Production design, Emmanuel de Chauvigny and Christoph Kanter. Costumes, Lisy Christl. Starring Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche with Maurice Benichou, Lester Makedonsky, Walid Afkir. Sony Classics, 2005. R. 121 minutes. **Winner, Best Director, 2005 Cannes Film Festival.**

On the screen, there is a street. It is a street on which nothing seems to happen. All we hear is birdsong, distant footsteps, ambient noise. It is just an empty street until the last possible bearable moment, when a voice speaks.

The voice does not belong to a person on the street. The street is shown to be a scene on a tape, watched with rising worry by Georges (Daniel Auteuil) and Anne (Juliette Binoche).

The glass tables and blank-spined books in Georges and Anne's house are no accident. Nothing is truly hidden, yet nothing is clear.

This is their street, the house at the end their comfortable home. Anne, an editor, is rattled to the core. Georges, the host of a popular television show, is angry and frightened, anxious to hide this intrusion from friends, colleagues, even his son. But the secret becomes difficult to hide as more tapes arrive, some wrapped in ominous, childish drawings.

Who is turning moments from this family's seemingly unremarkable existence into strangely threatening images on tape? This simple premise is twisted to dizzying effect in the hands of writer-director Michael Haneke and his note-perfect cast. Both fascinating and frustrating, *Caché*, like the lives of its characters, unravels piece by piece but stops short of revelation, leaving unanswerable questions lingering in the air.

The tapes become clues in a mystery Georges explores doggedly, following the footsteps of the unknown person with the camera. One tape leads him to a stark hallway where a face from his past awaits: Majid (Maurice Benichou), the son of Algerian immigrants who worked for Georges' family. Majid, sweet-faced and guardedly welcoming, swears he knows nothing of the tapes, while Georges blusters threats and fear-driven anger. Their conversation appears on yet another tape, revealing to Anne an en-

counter her husband denied having.

Haneke's clever direction quickly establishes the camera as a spectator, hovering over the shoulders of dinner party guests, watching two friends converse in a café or lurking outside a school. In no time at all you're guessing whether a scene is a tape or a real encounter, and Haneke beats you to the answers, playing off your expectations. He plays the same game with the whos and whys of the story, nudging suspicions in first one direction and then the other, all the while toying with the meaning of his film's title. For everything hidden that comes to light — Georges' connection to Majid being a central matter — something else is tucked away. Is Anne hiding something from her husband? Where does their son, Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky), disappear to overnight? What does Majid's son have to do with anything?

Why is Georges so reluctant to explain any of his discoveries to Anne?

Within these questions lies the matter of what *Caché* is really about — and whether it's really about one thing. Some see it as a commentary on race in France, with a telling reference to October 17, 1961, the day on which demonstrating Algerians were attacked by French police (undoubtedly, the historical and cultural context will be more meaningful for French viewers than most of us in the U.S., no matter how many Wikipedia articles we might read). To others, it's a tale about a family that doesn't really look at each other until forced to. And to some of us, it's about all or none of these things in turns, and blissfully ambiguous in its close.

It's all in the details, how you choose to see *Caché* — what you see and what you miss. The glass tables and blank-spined books in Georges and Anne's house are no accident. Nothing is truly hidden, yet nothing is clear. Like the characters, you'll see what you're shown, without even a score to nudge your feelings in one direction or another. When the credits roll, what you make of it all is, surprisingly, mostly left up to you.

Caché opens at the Bijou on Friday, April 7.

GW

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