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The Game Analysis

How does the filmmaker create an enjoyable/not enjoyable experience for you by manipulating how information is delivered to you. Comment on what you know, how you know it, who told you and when you knew.

I first saw *The Game* years ago, with my sister, who had seen it before. She loved it, and at the end started the discussion with, "wasn't it *great?*" I said yes, but on some level I felt a bit betrayed — not because so much of the film wasn't honest with me, but because its perfectly tidy, happy ending kind of frustrated me. When I take in a work of dramatic high adventure, I know that I'm safe in the comfort of reality, while still being able to experience vicariously the danger and suspense felt by its characters. This is so effective because within the confines of the fictional world, the situation is completely real and serious. It's the same reason that a comedy is only funny to the audience when it's not funny to the characters. At the end of *The Game*, I learned that the fictional adventure that had been thrilling me for the past couple of hours had been a lie all along, *even to itself*. In a souring moment, my fun was spoiled. Shakespeare poked fun at such disappointment in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which an in-story actor risks the integrity of his production by directly addressing the audience and telling them not to be alarmed, it's just a story, I'm not really a lion.

I saw it again a few weeks ago, and I found myself enjoying it a lot more than the first time. I knew what was coming, so I was looking for other things than I was the first time: what clues are present? Which characters are in on it? Could I have been able to figure it all out if I had been in that situation? What would I have done differently? The biggest mystery was out of

the way, so I could focus on all the smaller ones. I still couldn't quite shake the empty feeling I got at the end, but this time I was able to forgive it. The first time around, I was primarily worried for the hero's life; seeing it again, I was more concerned for his social and professional well-being.

In terms of information delivery, *The Game* is as tight-lipped as possible. We almost never see anything that protagonist Nick Van Orton doesn't see, so we're left feeling helpless as his situation steadily worsens. Even when telling us about his past, the film takes its time and keeps us wondering. The story begins with Nick's 48th birthday, about which he seems none too thrilled. In a flashback of his childhood, Nick recalls seeing from afar a person standing on top of the roof of his house. The flashback ends here and we have no choice but to wonder what it meant and if we would get any further explanation. A later flashback picks up where the previous left off: the figure leaps off the roof to his death. We learn that this man was Nick's father, and it is later still that we learn that his suicide occurred on his own 48th birthday, further explaining Nick's anxiety even before his life is placed in (perceived) danger. After the whole charade is over, and it's time to pay the bill, we see Nick's reaction to it, but not the price itself.

When the film tells me something, how much of it can I trust? During my second viewing, armed with more knowledge about how thick the onion is, I felt even less inclined to believe some of the things I saw and heard. The police investigate CRS, the company responsible for Nick's "game," only to find their offices completely vacant; are the police actors? Nick's CRS contact Christine tells him that his lawyer is in on the whole thing; should I believe her? Just how far do the game's roots run? Nick's paranoia is mine, despite my foreknowledge. Even by the time the credits rolled, I wasn't quite sure what I really did know.