‘Graze culture’ and Serial Murder: Brushing Up Against 'familiar monsters' in the Wake of 9/11

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‘Be blind, Alana. Don't be brave’

Hannibal Lecter[1]

This chapter seeks to provide a fresh theoretical perspective on society’s perpetual fascination with and consumption of serial murder fiction within the domains of cinema and television. Films and television series centred on the subject of serial killing have resulted in a multi-million-dollar/pound entertainment industry, an interest in the topic that far exceeds the reality of such offending. So, too, the topic has generated many academic articles and “true crime” books that promise the reader a “deep dive” into the mind of individuals capable of extreme acts of violence and cruelty.[2] It is important to note here that much of the general public’s awareness and understanding of serial murder comes from fictional accounts and “true crime” materials where storylines are produced to heighten the interest of audiences, rather than to depict real-life serial murder in a factually accurate manner.[3] By focusing on the violence inflicted on victims by “disturbed” and “unhinged” individuals, the public have become captivated by these unique criminals and their offences. Through exposure in the media, many serial murderers have, in many ways, now become immortalised and, as a result, dehumanised to the point in which we, as viewers, no longer recognise them. They have become ‘travellers from another time and space’.[4] This fascination with, and ultimate detachment from, these individuals as offenders, has meant that potential factors which may result in a better and more holistic understanding of serial murder have been long overlooked until recently. For instance, discussions that utilise wider methodologies to illustrate the

impact of consumer capitalism on societal structures, both economically and physically which, in turn, paved new ways and new opportunity for the hunter (serial killer) to hunt suitable prey (victim).[5] . There is perhaps no better illustration of this impractical fascination than, arguably, the most famous fictitious serial murderer to have been created: Hannibal 'the cannibal' Lecter, created by Thomas Harris in a series of novels published between 1998-2006 which were adapted for both the big and small screen.[6] Lecter, with his genius level IQ, taste for fine dining and even finer attire, presents the focal point of both the public's interest in and lack of understanding regarding serial murder – a focal point that transmits and permeates across most, if not all, other media representations of such offenders. As Brian Jarvis notes, Hannibal Lecter has 'established [Thomas] Harris as a brand market leader in the commodification of serial killing'.[7]

Despite these points, it is Hannibal's words that have partially inspired the new theoretical approach that this chapter takes on the subject of serial murder on screen. In the season two finale of the HBO television series, *Hannibal*, the antagonist warns his once friend, student and lover, Alana Bloom, to 'be blind, Alana. Don't be brave' as she attempts to stop him from murdering offender profiler, Will Graham, and his boss, Jack Crawford.[8] In the context of the series, Hannibal says these words in order to indicate that he will let her go if she chooses to leave, but also to warn her that he will kill her if she chooses to stay. For the authors of this chapter, though, such words are, in fact, indicative of the public's consumption of serial murder-related media at the expense of confronting and understanding the realities of violence including the harms, crises, injustices, and inequality created within the era of late capitalism. As Slavoj Žižek denotes, the way in which violence is evaluated is routinely misunderstood on an ontological level.[9] Such misguided perspectives focus too thoroughly upon the subjective (physical) violence before us and fails to grasp the realities of the objective violence that not only causes harm but also underpins the physical actions of direct

forms of violence. It is from this perspective, therefore, that we offer the notion of 'graze culture' to offer a more holistic understanding of Mark Seltzer's renowned concept of 'wound culture' that does not negate objective violence. [10]Before providing an in-depth breakdown of 'graze culture', however, it is first important to present the prevailing orthodoxies and theoretical approaches often utilised when attempting to make sense of why society has such a fixation with serial murder entertainment.

According to Seltzer, the rare crime of serial murder and society's supposed fascination with such a phenomenon is best understood and conceptualised through the notion of 'wound culture'[11]. Seltzer suggests that wound culture describes a collective that is addicted to violence, 'not merely [as] a collective spectacle but one of the crucial sites where private desire and public space cross'.[12] In exploring the mass addiction to the spectacle of violence, Seltzer argues that:

> The convening of the public around scenes of violence — the rushing to the scene of the accident, the milling around the point of impact — has come to make up a *'wound culture'*: the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound.[13]

Taking the above quote into consideration, Seltzer suggests that society consists of a pathological public sphere, which is underpinned by a fusion of the public space and an individual's private fantasy, ultimately blurring the line between what is public and what is private. Seltzer states that "serial killing has its place in a culture in which addictive violence has become a collective spectacle, one of the crucial sites where private desire and public fantasy cross". Consequently, the public has become obsessive in its sympathising and gathering around the spectacle of others' suffering. Furthermore, according to Seltzer, the

pathological public sphere is everywhere and crossed by the vague and shifting 'lines between the singularity or privacy of the subject, on the one side, and collective forms of representation, exhibition, and witnessing, on the other'.[14] Seltzer's primary aim is to define and articulate contemporary culture as an immense and multifaceted system, designed by philosophies and concepts that often splinter into intolerable antagonisms and exasperating obscurities. In attempting to illustrate and contextualise this argument, Seltzer refers to his perceived personification of society's 'wound culture': the serial killer. Whilst serial killers are central figures in the illustration of Seltzer's theoretical framework, they are, in actuality, a side effect and result of society's wide-ranging fascination with violence and its trauma. Seltzer suggests that the serial killer constructs their own self through the endlessly repeated violent enactment of what makes the culture, according to the serial killer, so toxic in the first place.

In his work, Seltzer brings together both autobiographical accounts of serial killing and fictional representations. The primary ambition of this synthesis is that, according to Seltzer, the two are indivisible, for as Seltzer notes, 'the serial killer internalizes popular and journalistic and expert (criminological and psychological) definitions of this kind of person'.[15] To summarise, then, there is an established and recognised cultural conception of serial killing that informs both serial killers' and the public's understandings alike, and one that unifies real-life serial killers and adaptation. In the figure of the serial killer, we see cultural forces converge and cultural boundaries created, obliterated, and redrawn: public and private, individual and collective, self and other, and bodies and machines all fuse into what Seltzer calls 'the pathological public sphere'.[16]

When interviewed by the *Cornell Chronicle* in 1998, Seltzer elaborated on the idea of a 'pathological public sphere', stating that:

> When people rubberneck we're not only rubbernecking out of prurient interest, but we're coming together as a people. You hear phrases like, 'A nation mourns,' or people ask where you were when JFK was shot. In some sense this is how we understand and identify ourselves: as a nation, we gather round violence, trauma and the wound.[17]

One of the 'celebrities' of 'wound culture' is, as Seltzer states, the serial killer. He elaborates this point, noting that 'serial murder and its representation have by now largely replaced the Western as the most popular genre-fiction of the body and of bodily violence in our culture'.[18] With this in mind, serial killers have become, for lack of a better word, "A-list celebrities" in a culture fascinated not only by torn and open bodies but by the spectacle of torn and open psyches.[19]

Initially, Seltzer's assertions appear accurate. The serial killer is evidently a major subject that has been explored to varying degrees in novels, biographies, television, and film, along with a multitude of more contemporary media platforms, such as online blogs and forums. So too, is it evident that the serial murderer, as understood today, has been fictionalised in multiple works across history As Phillip Simpson explains, such novels as Charles Brown's *Ormond* (1799), Robert Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1835), William Simms's *The Partisan: A Tale of the Revolution* (1835), and George Lippard's *The Quaker City: or, The Monks of Monk Hall* (1845), all 'present multiple body counts and Shadow villains in which one can see the literary prototypes of the contemporary American serial murderer'. [20] As media has evolved and transformed in the early twenty first century, it is evident that the figure of the serial murderer continues to captivate audiences who are now able to generate their own content. For instance, the way we engage with media has shifted consumerism to prosumerism, a form of consumption in which we increasingly engage, mould, and interact

with forms of media. As Yar observes, individuals now have the ability to produce their own content in the form of self-authored blogs and webpages and self-produced video, thus the content we digest is increasingly shaped by the world it exists within.[21] Therefore, Kotler states, as we entered the digital age media is no longer consumer based, but rather prosumer oriented.[22] This seemingly entrenched fascination, demonstrated by such user-generated content centred on serial murder, appears to be further cemented as a societal consequence of Seltzer's 'wound culture'.

In addition to an abundance of consumer and prosumer media content, the seemingly rapid rise in society's interest in serial murder appears, at least on the surface, to coalesce with the rise in the actual criminal practice of serial murder. Eric Hickey, for instance, has argued that there was a significant increase in the prevalence of serial killers in the 1960s, which was only further exacerbated by the rise of neo-liberal ideology at the hands of the Conservatives in the UK and the Republicans in the US.[23] According to David Wilson, such a dramatic increase can be attributed to the philosophy that fuels this form of political economy – a philosophy that encourages rampant individualistic pursuits of profit whilst important social welfare initiatives are privatised and sold to the highest bidder.[24] As a result of such an economic approach, certain groups are marginalised and neglected due to a general lack of moral or economic interest or perceived value, thus becoming easy and susceptible prey for serial murderers. Whilst it is not debatable that there was a marked increase in the rate of serial murder from the 1960s to the early 2000s, the reasons behind this increase are hotly contested. This dispute tends to centre on the many trappings and pitfalls of attempts to conceptualise and define serial murder with respect to, for example, the number of victims required to constitute seriality, which ranges from as little as two to as many as four or even five victims.[25] Understandably, such contentions and variations between definitions paint starkly different interpretations regarding how rare or common serial murder is. This is

further exacerbated when we consider that bodies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and well-known authors on serial murder, including Vernon J. Geberth, Brent E. Turvey, Pierce R. Brooks, Eric Hickey, Steven A. Egger, Stephen J. Giannangelo, and Ronald M. Holmes and Stephen T. Holmes, have generated their own interpretations of how serial murder should be classified.

Moving these predominantly academic debates aside, it is evident that the serial murderer has also become a more prominent figure of interest in the public imagination of criminal investigations In the words of John Stratton, 'the idea of the serial killer' has become widespread, permeating modern culture, and thus intrinsically shaping the way that crime is consumed and ultimately understood. [26] Since the 1960s, as Seltzer suggests, the serial killer has attained a new cultural status and has become recognised as the focus of public attention and understanding in a way that was not the case in the first half of the twentieth century. This is best illustrated by a rather rudimentary quantitative exercise. For example, in May 2019, typing the search term "serial murder" into Google produced 120,000,000 results (of note: the most common image that resulted from the search, and is therefore used to encapsulate serial murder, is the American serial killer, Ted Bundy). So, too, there are approximately over a thousand serial killer films along with hundreds of others that fall into other genres, such as the "slasher" films, in which the often unknown and masked villain dispatches multiple victims in a variety of gory and macabre ways.[27] With the advent of the Internet and the subsequent rise of the prosumer, then, there are now a multitude of user-generated content centred on listings concerning top ten (or more) serial killer films. In a 2020 article in *Esquire*, Finlay Renwick and Tom Nicholson published what they considered the "best" serial killer movies of all time.[28] In no particular order, these were: *Zodiac (2007)*, *Monster (2003)*, *Se7en* (1995), *M (1931)*, *Silence of the Lambs (1991)*, *Psycho (1960)*, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986)*, *American Psycho (200)*, *Snowtown (2011)*,

Badlands (1973), Halloween (1978), Frenzy (1972), 10 Rillington Place (1971), and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974).*[29] From this one list alone, it is apparent that the fascination with serial murder indeed bleeds into the world of fiction, with roughly half of these films centring on fictitious serial murder. A cursory glance over the aforementioned list also demonstrates that there was indeed a market for serial murder consumption through the medium of film, though this market appears to have only grown in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks in the United States. For example, post 9/11 films such as *The House that Jack Built (2018),* the *Saw* series (2003 – present), *Death Proof (2007), Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (2006), Mr Brooks (2007), Disturbia (2007),* and *The Snowman (2017)* [30] present just a sliver of movies that were released after 2001. Of note is that the *Saw* series[31], a franchise defined by its graphic and gory content, has grossed more than £560,000,000 (the equivalent $1 billion) from box office and retail sales in the US between 2003 and 2009.[32] So too, we have witnessed the rise of the serial killer in television's so-called "golden age" [33], with series such as *Dexter (2006-2013), The Following (2013-2015), True Detective (2014 – present) , Mindhunter (2017-present), Hannibal (2013-2015)l, The Fall (2013-2016), Bates Motel (2013-2017), The Alienist (2018),* and *Ripper Street (2012-2018)*[34]. This clearly points to the fact that the serial killer is front and centre in both film and television formats.

Most recently, we have seen an emphasis on high-budget and highly stylised true crime documentaries aimed at providing seemingly more in-depth examinations into the life, mind, and crimes of well-known real-life cases of serial murder. For instance, HBO produced the critically acclaimed *Tales of the Grim Sleeper (2014),* along with the acclaimed *The Jinx (2015).* Similarly, the streaming service Netflix released *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes (2019)* and *The Ripper (2020).* Likewise, Amazon Prime Video released *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer (2020).*[35]. As discussed, serial killing was indeed, according to Seltzer, "big business" prior to 9/11, though in the last two decades such a market has seen

exponential growth, which is showing no signs of slowing down. This interests in serial killing was not a fad, evidenced by a *Esquire* magazine article published almost 20 years after 9/11.The article stated that the entertainment industry would continue to be dominated by serial murder narratives, with films such as *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile (2019)* starring Zac Efron as Ted Bundy and legendary director Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time In Hollywood (2019)* being the ""highlights"" of the year.[36]

From the information put forth so far, it is arguable that such a reliance on serial killer related media by streaming services only compounds and reaffirms Seltzer's notion of a 'wound culture'. The appetite for visceral displays of subjective violence has continued, if not arguably grown. It is here, however, that we wish to depart from Seltzer's theory, for while we do not disagree that society is eager to consume mediated representations of serial murder, we argue that the original premise of wound culture is fundamentally flawed. As the reason for this fascination, we propose, comes from a far different place – a place that will be highlighted and examined throughout the remainder of this chapter. To demonstrate our perspective, however, there are two important concepts we must introduce, namely "objective violence" and "fetishistic disavow".

To define "objective violence", it is important to define, on an ontological level, what we mean by "violence". One of the central issues when attempting to define violence is the general trend amongst academics to neglect a consideration of the philosophy of violence. As noted by Larry Ray, the social context for 'both the performance and understanding of violence is of central importance'.[37] According to Vittorio Bufacchi, there are two ways of conceptualising violence. [38] First, there is the often narrow 'minimalist conception' of violence that focuses upon bodily harm through physical force.[39] Stanko's often-cited definition of violence, for instance, consists of any form of behaviour by an individual that intentionally threatens to or does cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to others or

themselves. However, Ray argues that such a definition offers restrictive conceptualisation of harm.[40] The second approach offers what Ray observes as a 'comprehensive conception', which attempts to capture forms of violence and subsequent harms *not* recognised by former definitions focused exclusively on physicality. [41] This latter approach, as noted by Richard Felson, attempts to capture those behaviours that are not necessarily physical but can also include social harm or a deprivation of resources. [42]

Before examining such other forms of violence, it is important to provide a brief conceptual canvas of violence that will assist in providing context for this re-orientation. While there have been those critics, such as Steven Pinker[43], who argue that society has become more civilised and therefore less violent. Steve Hall criticises this belief, noting that the changing nature of violence can be observed via the 'pseudo-pacification process'.[44] Hall argues that 'as we became less violent and blood thirsty, we became richer and more pacified', whereby 'violence looks to have been sublimated into symbolic and toned-down practical forms'.[45] In other words, violence has been harnessed by the capitalist market to promote and produce economic gain. Consequently, individuals in society are more concerned with their own interests, placing their needs above the rest of society, which can be witnessed, for instance, in the continual harm caused to the environment. This can be attributed to crimes committed by those in positions of power, which remain largely concealed and are often 'produced, sustained, and given momentum by states', but continue to interweave between the boundaries of the illicit and licit markets for personal gain. [46] Therefore, it can be argued that capitalism is a key underlying reason why the nature of violence has changed. This analysis of the changing nature of violence over time highlights that although rates of subjective violence may have declined, society has not become less violent; instead, it has merely changed forms.

Such an approach broadens the notion of an individual agent inflicting physical harm onto a subject, and invokes Johan Galtung's concept of 'structural violence', whereby factors such as job insecurity, unemployment, cuts in public spending and the dismantling of social welfare (to name but a few) cause social harm and can be considered violent in nature.[47] This brings us to the work of Žižek, who suggests that when individual thresholds of sensibility to violence rise, objective violence in the form of dispossession and poverty also increase. [48] Žižek states:

> We should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. We need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts. A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and promote tolerance.

Here Žižek refers to the work of Martin Heidegger, who argues that the essence of violence has nothing to do with ontic violence, suffering, war, destruction etc. [49] Essential violence, according to Heidegger, is something that grounds or at least opens up the space for the explosions of ontic or physical violence itself. Thus, whenever people are denied access to resources, physical and psychological violence results. This definition, in essence, removes the necessity for any intent to harm for an outcome to be considered violent.

It is also important to consider the significance of symbolic violence, which signifies the implicit, unacknowledged violence of capitalist intersubjective domination. For Lacan, from whom Žižek draws heavily, the symbolic is a generally unconscious order of laws, regulations, internalised forms of oppression, and the immersion into language.[50] Žižek utilises Lacan's conception of the symbolic to illustrate an implicit order of power and oppression that is beyond subjective (direct) forms of violence. As stated by Raquel Recuero,

while objective violence is easily perceived against a background of 'normality', 'it is precisely in this background that symbolic violence stands, sustaining, through language, the current status quo'.[51] Subjective violence is directly experienced intersubjectively, in relationships of dominance (e.g. being a victim to a physical assault). This is what we experience most overtly; therefore, we have an inherent assumption that all violence is subjective in nature. Consequently, according to Žižek, we subjectivise forms of violence by attributing it to one person or one group, when really this person or group is being motivated by a much larger structure of violence. With reference to work of Lacan and more specifically Žižek, it is suggested that we are unable to see beyond these rather myopic perceptions of violence committed by identifiable agents.

Moving forward with this re-orientation of violence, it is important to consider the words of Jacques Derrida, who states that 'Critique does not simply mean negative evaluation, legitimate rejection or condemnation of violence, but judgment, evaluation, examination that provides itself with the means to judge violence'.[52] This Žižekian perspective on violence is one of the central underpinnings of 'graze culture'. By utilising various mediated forms of serial murder, it allows us to explore how society is unable to move away from the rigid 'subjective' forms of violence, and consequently unable to grasp nor understand the realities of violence in the post 9/11 contemporary world. The media, by presenting and cultivating the serial killer as a celebrity (both real and fictional), have subsequently obscured the gaze of the public away from the objective violence perpetrated throughout both the developed and developing world. This has been achieved by drawing attention to the subjective violence in the mysterious and chaotic, yet seemingly exciting and sometimes sexy, lives of serial killers. This first concept, subjective violence, refers to violence that is inflicted by a clearly identifiable agent of action, as in the case of serial murder. Objective violence, on the other hand, has no identifiable perpetrator and is routinely

disregarded in the background of subjective (direct) violence that dominates television screens and news headlines. For instance, the objective violence of global poverty cannot be blamed on any one entity and even if financial elites were to be identified as responsible, they could (and have been) exonerated by their subjugation to a system of capitalist finance that makes the rise of an elite financial class unavoidable. The core difference illustrated here reflects Žižek's interest in establishing the way certain forms of violence are represented and perceived, while others slip away into the background into the general social consciousness.

Another central theoretical underpinning of 'graze culture' is Žižek's notion of 'disavowal'. More specifically, the fetishistic disavowal, which he summarises as, 'I know, but I don't want to know that I know, so I don't know'.[53] This, in essence, is a process of denial, the denial of one's position in the world relative to others. He argues that life functions on the basis of such denials. In his seminal book *Violence*, Žižek discusses the treatment of animals so that large swathes of the population can eat meat, and how people are aware of this fact, but do not want to ponder or consider the actualities of such conditions that the animals find themselves in before being cut up, packaged, and bought for our convenience.[54] Žižek expands on this concept of denial, stating that 'The question here is: does every ethics have to rely on such a gesture of fetishist disavowal? Is even the most universal ethics not obliged to draw a line and ignore some sort of suffering?'.[55] The compound terms fetishistic disavowal originate from an excessive adherence to certain beliefs and practices and a simultaneous denial of any genuine belief. Taking this concept further, not only do we know that other people or (as demonstrated in the previous example) animals are treated badly but that our entire system of life is founded upon such moral and ethical concessions. For instance, we buy clothing, electronics, and arguably one of the most iconic symbols of status, iPhones, which are made in China despite knowing the horrendous conditions suffered by the workers that make them.[56] Alas, this is only one part of the picture.

According to Žižek, the true disavowal involves forgetting that we know that our quality of life is based on these compromises. The reason for this forgetting, as Žižek explains, is the feeling of hopelessness – a hopelessness brought on and exacerbated when we attempt to contextualise our existence and place it within a global system made up of over seven billion inhabitants. For instance, when we look at the collective behaviour of the society in which we live, our own agency can appear as almost worthless and futile. The first example of this is the onus on the individual to endeavour to minimise their carbon footprint to combat climate change despite its futility when we consider that the most catastrophic environmental impact is that created by large corporations. This is before we consider our own lackadaisical neighbours or even family members. Alongside this feeling of hopelessness, an additional reason as to why our own agency matters so little needs to be considered. This feeling of hopelessness is compounded by the idea that individual agency is inconsequential and, thus, according to Žižek, this assumption (falsely) exempts us from having to cede our ethical responsibilities. As demonstrated in the previous examples, if our own agency is meaningless compared to the collective agency of society, then the unethical decisions we make do not seem to matter.

Seltzer posited his notion of 'wound culture' less than half a decade before the tragic attacks of 11 September with no way of knowing the events that were to unfold.[57] It cannot be denied that these events were to change the very culture of America forever, evidenced by the political response the White House and International Security Assistance Force had which incited them to spearhead international wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan in response to the attacks. It is here we can begin to see the flaw in Seltzer's discussion of wound culture, the wider War on Terror and society's perceptions of serial murder. From this, we argue that the original premise of 'wound culture' was fundamentally flawed. As Žižek notes, the way in which violence is evaluated is routinely misunderstood on an ontological level. [58] Such

misguided perspectives focus too thoroughly upon the subjective violence before us and neglect to grasp the realities of the objective violence that underpins the physical actions.

The actions of Al-Qaeda were undeniably repugnant and the following argument is in no way intended to disrespect those who were murdered in the attacks, nor the thousands of troops and civilians who were injured or lost their lives in the ensuing conflicts. However, the wider context of the attacks and the "justification" of such actions from the perpetrators must be held to account within this discussion. As Noam Chomsky explains, the War on Terror launched by the George W Bush administration as a response to 9/11 was not new, but a continuation of the Reagan administration's earlier efforts to combat 'the evil scourge of terrorism' in the eighties. [59] Of course, the original incursions by the American government referred to here were during the Cold War, in which guerrilla groups were often utilised by the American government to oust Soviet forces. It is important to note here that both Afghanistan and Iraq saw support from America in these instances, though there was also much ado in South American states. Such actions, whilst arguably a necessity, are symptomatic of wider trends in the United States' quest for global hegemony.[60] Wright notes, however, how Sayyid Qutb perceived such proxy wars within the Middle East not as a battle between communism and capitalism, but between Islam and capitalism. [61] This perspective was underpinned by the perceived problematic nature of consumerism, which was fundamentally opposed by Qutb's perspective of Islam. Sayyid Qutb went on to write the founding papers, which underpinned the brand of militant Islam that birthed Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. From this we argue that the original premise of 'wound culture' was fundamentally flawed. The American government's accountability for 9/11 is rarely discussed within the mainstream media. For their own gain, the United States routinely decimated smaller nations in their bid for hegemony within the context of the Cold War and beyond. And rarely did the American public or those of other Western nations display a

consciousness of the reality of those within such states subjected to the earlier 'War on Terror' or the 'War on Drugs' alike. This is symptomatic of the fetishist disavowal observed by Žižek.

It is critical to note that the original rise in popularity for 'slasher' films, such as *Friday the 13th (1980), Halloween (1978), Prom Night (1980)* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)*[62] came about in the 1980s at the height of the Cold War. Coinciding with this, many of these films were re-booted post 9/11 by Hollywood, such as *Friday the 13th (2009), The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (2003), Halloween (2007), Freddy Vs. Jason (2003)* and *Halloween Resurrection (2002)*[63]. We propose that this is not a mere coincidence. Around the same time as both of the "wars on terror" were being waged by Western governments, there were also recessions worldwide. Such financial crises were not prevented or solved utilising the previously relied upon Keynesian approach of increasing industrial productivity and state spending for economic recovery.[64] Instead, such recessions relied upon the neo-liberal approach of privatisation, and the movements of modes of productivity abroad (for example moving factories abroad to access cheaper labour and less legislative restrictions) to create an economic base underpinned by a service economy rather than a productive one. Amid this transition was an economic inequality increase within both the United Kingdom and the United States, leading to mass social exclusion for much of the population.[65] However, technological advancements, such as the increased prevalence of social media, fostered the inclusion of the population the world over, in some respects, allowing for virtual inclusivity within the global community. Young proposes the notion of "social bulimia" as an apt description of society's positionality within this period. [66] An increased alienation, alongside the perpetual fetishistic disavowal of the ontic violence increasingly impinging upon the populace, has sought to create a collective focus upon the virtual dystopia of the "serial murderer" in an effort to negate the truth of living in an increasingly dystopian reality. The

ever-increasing popularity of mainstream media accounts of serial murder and associated violence within popular culture following the 9/11 attacks serve as a distraction from the objective violence that has proliferated and eventually culminated in the incessant stream of violent reactions within contemporary society. This tendency to brush up against familiar monsters as a form of comfort and a channel through which to disavow objective forms of violence can be somewhat quantified within the UK, with television shows such as *Luther (2010-2019)* reaching 5 million viewers, *Marcella (2016-present)* 4.9 million viewers, *Happy Valley (2014-present)* 6.5 million viewers, and *The Fall (2013-2016)* with 2.5 million viewers[67]. Alongside this, the streaming service Netflix revealed that over 40 million people watched the first season of *You (2018-present)*, a show in which the central character is a stalker and murderer. [68] Some reported reactions to Netflix's *Conversations with a Killer: the Ted Bundy Tapes (2019)*, also caused the company to respond via Twitter:

> The streaming giant took to Twitter this week to express concern over users' discussions about the serial killer's looks. 'I've seen a lot of talk about Ted Bundy's alleged hotness and would like to gently remind everyone that there are literally THOUSANDS of hot men on the service — almost all of whom are not convicted serial murderers,' Netflix tweeted from its official account Monday, garnering more than 20,000 retweets and 115,000 likes.[69]

According to Scott Bonn, author of *Why We Love Serial Killers* (2014), the public—via their engagement with serial killer related media—try to humanise the serial killer to 'make him less scary but also [to] try to dehumanise him to create a moral boundary between good and evil'.[70] Bonn continues, stating that:

> From a sociological perspective, he offers a safe and secure outlet for our darkest thoughts, feelings, and urges. He excites and tantalizes us. He also reminds us that despite all of our faults, the rest of us are just fine. Why are we fascinated with serial killers? Because, oddly enough, we need them.[71]

Bonn's assertion towards the public's need to generate a moral boundary between good and evil via representations of serial murder touches upon important elements of 'graze culture'. Namely, Bonn is accurate in relation to the public's tendency to subjectivise understandings of violence, and our consumption and thus understanding of good and evil stems from conscious actors and identifiable agents. Returning to Žižek, subjective violence is defined as subjective because it is intentional (and thus also deriving from a state of mind), and also because it is directed at another individual who is also a specific subject. Representations of serial killing present a focal point in which generalised notions of good and evil are firmly located within individual and dependent upon individual agency. Therefore, acts of violence and thus evil, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, are contained within this inter-subjective dialectic. So, in essence, Bonn is correct in the sense that we need serial killers, though not entirely due to reasons such as titillation or an outlet for our darkest feelings and urges. [72] Instead, representations of serial murder serve an important function, which is to disavow that violence can exist beyond an individual agent, and that harm resulting from such forms of violence stems beyond such narrow definitions of evil.

While the consumer gazes at the screen reliving dulcet accounts of 'familiar monsters', such as Kemper and Bundy (and fictional manifestations in the form of Hannibal Lecter and Dexter), there has been a fundamental shift in what Seltzer perceived as 'wound culture'. No longer are these familiar monsters the existential threat they were once perceived to be, nor were they ever. In the increasingly destabilised West, they offer a comfort zone for the

viewer to access familiar violence whilst disavowing the realities of subjective violence. Such "evil" caricatures of the most extreme and unconscionable human actions presented within a space the viewer perceives as tangible allow for a retreat from the realities of both symbolic and ontic violence. In a post 9/11 world, mass shootings are commonplace. The so called Islamic State has spawned as a by-product of the invasion of Iraq and African Americans are routinely murdered during routine policing duties. [73] With this in mind, the subjective violence has perhaps never been greater within a nation that has the tragic events of 2001 still imprinted into its cultural fabric. Meanwhile, objective violence is routinely displayed within the nation, most notably in recent years through the Flint Water Crisis, the response to the covid-19 pandemic and the detainment of minors deemed to be within the country illegally[74]. This is only further compounded when we account for the catastrophic effects of climate change yet to come, which loom over every nation and society on the planet. If we combine the onset of developed technologies as previously mentioned with the prevalence of websites such as WorldStarHipHop or the notorious "Bum Fights", we can see that the Western world does not have a fascination with torn and open bodies per se. Instead, there is a need to acknowledge violence as part of a lived reality and to digest this in a safe and palpable manner. Such forms of content enables the fetishist disavow of the wider harms consumers experience through society's current structures.

Aside from those focusing on serial murder, other forms of violent media can be used to demonstrate this. Since 9/11 we have seen an increase in "palatable violence" within consumer culture, for instance, the exponential rise in popularity of mixed martial arts in recent years.[75] The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is a prime example within this particular modicum, with a meteoric rise over the previous decade which has resulted in some fights being as high grossing as top-level boxing. So too, especially in the United Kingdom, we have seen a rise in bare knuckle boxing in recent years. Such sports, which were

previously marginalised, are now regularly televised, demonstrating the marketability of violence in the starkest modicum.

In other areas of mass entertainment, such demonstrations could be perceived as even starker displays of 'graze culture'. In the series finale of *Game of Thrones*, a show notable for its numerous characters that would fit the usual definition of serial murder, including Ramsay Bolton, Sandor, and Gregor Clegane, and even fan favourite, Arya Stark.[76] Such examples are most prominent in two areas of the overall series. Despite the fact that the first six seasons placed emphasis on the white walkers (an ancient and magical army that lived 'beyond the wall' and threatened to invade) being the most pressing of issues facing civilisation as a whole, the plot focussed upon the politics of the various Houses and associated warring factions. It is possible to draw comparisons between the contemporary western world and political issues. Whilst the United States was governed by a President who denies climate change and the realised and potential harms associated with it, the majority of attention is actually paid to possible wars with states such as Iran. [77]

So too, this is echoed within the United Kingdom, a country captivated by the turmoil of Brexit. Scant attention was paid to the flagrant human rights abuses perpetrated via the government of the United Kingdom post 2010 through austerity measures with what official reports term extreme poverty.[78] Such comparisons with *Game of Thrones* may seem far-fetched until we see the wall in the north collapse in season seven. Until this point in the series, we propose that the phrase 'winter is coming' was a euphemism for climate change. However, the foreboding enemy, the leader of the white walkers, was soon dispatched with relatively small consequences for the central story arc. An important side note to this point is that the writers decided that it would be protagonist and serial murderer Arya Stark who would deal the fatal blow to the white walkers and thus end this existential threat with unexpected ease. This, we propose, was an attempt by the writers to draw upon an analogy of

wider society but falling short of confronting such apocalyptic visions in the relative simplicity in which it was addressed and prevented. Again, within the final stages of the story, we see more overt inter-personal violence including genocide, as a central character slaughters thousands of civilians. While the seemingly fundamental story arc of the existential threat of the white walkers and the so called long night (akin to an ice age) that accompanies them is resolved, the true catastrophe comes in the form of Daenerys Targaryen burning thousands of innocent civilians as a reaction to hearing the bells of surrender. The episode's director, Miguel Sapochnik, says she did it because the relatively bloodless coup was not 'enough' for her and she felt 'empty' in that moment.[79] Whilst the series writers touched upon the notion of structural violence being the underlying threat to humanity, they chose to retract to the simplistic, overt violence during the closing stages of the saga, thus disavowing on behalf of the millions of viewers. In essence, rather than illuminating the structural violence suggested, the show has offered a somewhat more tangible ending. An ending with an impact akin to that of the representations of overt violence offered through the serial murder adaptations we see in media today, as explained in this chapter thus far. Therefore, offering further evidence of 'Graze Culture'.

Here we can draw historical comparisons to situate the use of violence to aide a populace in disavowing wider issues. Indeed, it was commonplace within the Roman Empire for emperors to utilise the amphitheatre and associated interpersonal violence as a public spectacle to distract the population from the reality of the politics of the time.[80] Moving away from historical comparisons and contemporary media, however, and back to the study of serial murder, the notion of 'graze culture' is also prevalent in Criminology and academic study more widely. Within this we draw upon the work of Sparks and Loader who observed the corruption of the term 'public criminology'.[81] A quick flick through television on any given night will demonstrate what is meant by this, especially within the remit of post 9/11

and the representation of serial murder. For instance, there are channels dedicated to the true crime genre including Crime and Investigation (formerly Sky Crime), which launched in 2019. A spokesman for Sky said the channel will include

> …emotionally charged accounts of true crimes, many of which remain unsolved, including I Love You, Now Die and The Disappearance of Susan Cox Powell…[It] will show documentaries covering famous headline cases from the US and UK, such as Kemper on Kemper and Britain's Most Evil Killers. As well as the In Defence of series, which will bring new insight into some of the most notorious killers of modern times.[82]

Within such programmes, it is common for criminologists to appear on the small screen and give educated perspectives on the realities of serial murder. Despite this specialist attention towards the phenomenon of serial murder from both true crime producers and academics, viewers will be hard pressed to find a qualified academic who moves beyond such sensationalised forms of crime to elucidate the lived reality of crime (e.g. fraud and burglaries) and violence beyond its physical manifestations. Viewers will be unlikely to struggle, however, to find a show where a criminologist gives their professional perspective on a case study of serial murder or another extreme form of homicide. This fundamentally disavows the fact that such crimes are, in reality, uncommon. This is where we again see 'graze culture' exhibited on various levels. Not only does the public consume real crime television with the most shocking of cases, or as Seltzer would term it, in the pursuit of the torn and open bodies, but we also see qualified academics perpetuating false perceptions of the realities of crime. Thus, the disavow situated at the crux of 'graze culture' is perpetuated by those who should be otherwise aware of the problematic nature of this.

It is the authors' opinions that after the cataclysmic events of 11 September 2001, America, and indeed the rest of the Western world, utilised the representation of interpersonal violence, most prominently the serial murderer as a way to seek comfort. With respect to his concept of 'wound culture', Seltzer is correct in his assertion that the 'torn and open bodies' are what the nation is drawn to, though they do not exist within a 'wound culture' but a 'graze culture'.[83] The torn and open wound (i.e. the serial murderer) is a familiar monster whom audiences can brush up against. This offers the opportunity to recognise that society is increasingly violent, despite the arguments put forth by academics, such as Pinker who fail to acknowledge violence beyond physical manifestations, yet simultaneously to fetishistically disavow the realities of objective violence which proliferate in contemporary society. Much of that violence is not tangible, either physical or visual, in the way that the public ascertains and makes sense of it. Violence is much more than just a physical act of interpersonal devastation. After the fall of the towers, the ability to grasp the notion that violence is as simplistic as the "psychopath" who wreaks destruction on a community before being apprehended is somewhat comforting. The confrontation between the individual and the actuality that violence is perhaps infinite and out of their control is at best uncomfortable. Just as we see in Game of Thrones, the abandonment of the existential threat of the long night mirrors the approach of Criminology, the wider media, and the public. Whilst it is comforting to seek solace in rare spectacles of overt, deprived, and graphic violence such as the scenes of devastation left by the rare phenomenon of serial murder, cataclysmic acts of terror or even dramatic battles in the fantasy genre. This does very little to confront the actualities of the end times[84] i.e., the climate disaster. As we as a civilisation continue our incessant march towards near certain extinction beyond the control of the average person, we fundamentally fetishtically disavow the inevitable. Instead, we consume with evermore insatiable appetites, forms of media that focus upon subjective violence as a coping mechanism. We focus on the

open wound as the graze becomes ever more infected. Therefore, we do not live in a 'wound culture'. We exist within a 'graze culture', as the open wound is treatable, but it is the infection and eventually rot from the inside that is deadly.

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