

Žižek and Cinema - Vol 1.3.

Hurt—Agony—Pain—Love It!: The Duty of Dissatisfaction in the Profiler Film

Jason Landrum – Southeastern Louisiana University,
Hammond, Louisiana, United States

Slavoj Žižek's analyses of popular culture, specifically popular cinema, have demonstrated the ways in which it exposes its own mechanisms. Sarah Kay explains that Žižek's work shows how "cultural artefacts make visible, in anamorphosis, the relation of our symbolic and imaginary reality to the real," resulting in an "overriding interest in how cultural products reflect back to us the way we construe reality" (Kay, 2003: 72, 51). Žižek's exhilarating exposition of cinema's ideological underpinnings reveals the varying degrees to which films balance the relationship of "reality" to Jacques Lacan's conception of the Real, focusing primarily on the surplus-enjoyment that emerges from our engagement with cinema.¹ Film, for Žižek, has provided a consistent, fertile crop that has yielded multiple examples of how subjects enjoy their culture.

In one such example from *A Few Good Men* (Reiner, 1992), Žižek demonstrates how the Superego functions as a remedy to the failure of the public law. According to Žižek, the Superego is a remainder left over from the subject's castration² and exists as a voice that stains the subject's reality, compelling it to enjoy the Law (Kay, 2003: 171). He argues that the Superego operates as the obscene underside of the public Law and that it emerges where the Law fails; at this point of failure, the public Law is compelled to search for support in an *illegal* enjoyment (Žižek, 1994: 54). The Superego—which Žižek describes as “the obscene nightly law that necessarily redoubles and accompanies, as its shadow, the ‘public’ Law”—is the extra-legal manner in which the Marines in *A Few Good Men* go about disciplining one of their own—known in the film as a Code Red—which results in the murder of an unfit recruit. Žižek surmises that the “function of the ‘Code Red’ is extremely interesting: it condones an act of transgression [...] yet at the same time it reaffirms the cohesion of the group [...] Such a code must remain under cover of night, unacknowledged, unutterable—in public everybody pretends to know nothing about it, or even actively denies its existence” (Žižek, 1994: 54). Žižek's description of the Code Red is his single-most compelling articulation of how the Superego goes about filling in the gaps in the public Law and how the process of traditional authority is represented in popular culture. Žižek, however, does not offer any further ramifications of how the Superego informs cinematic representation in general.

The focus of this essay, therefore, is to expand upon Žižek's description of the Superego as the underside of the public Law, demonstrating specifically its

representation in the criminal profiler cycle of films (1986-present)³ and speculating more generally about the emergence of Superego entertainment in the early twenty-first century. Ultimately, this essay demonstrates that the criminal profiler film represents a shift in how the Superego is depicted in popular culture. Whereas the Superego's corrective role to the public law's failure remains "under cover of night, unacknowledged, unutterable" in a film like *A Few Good Men*, criminal profiler entertainment transforms its brand of illegal justice into the only possible solution for successful law enforcement.

The Profiler's Anxiety

The title of this essay is taken from a sign seen in the opening credits of *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991). The sign becomes briefly visible while Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) runs through an FBI training course, and we watch as she struggles to navigate a series of imposing obstacles. At the end of Starling's workout, we can see a sign nailed to tree that reads from top-to-bottom "Hurt—Agony—Pain—Love It," signifying the sacrifice that Starling, in her quest to advance from trainee to special agent, has made to the FBI. Director Jonathan Demme ensures that we see the sign, thus connecting its message to Starling's devotion to her training, rendering visible the thematic crux of every profiler film, and identifying the source of the profiler's enjoyment: namely, his/her own pain. To put it simply, the Hollywood profiler demonstrates an unyielding devotion to his/her own dissatisfaction. Moreover, this unusual devotion is also the primary way in which profilers solve crimes. Devoted to the understanding

and apprehension of serial killers, criminal profilers interpret crime by turning their investigative eye inward, asking themselves to explore their own psychology for the motivation of serial murder. This inward, investigative turn renders the mechanics of the law-enforcement procedural in a completely different way from typical suspense films. Rather than depicting the investigation of the serial killer as a who-done-it, the profiler film reveals the killer and his murderous actions early in the film, eliminating the suspenseful revelation of the killer's identity. The removal of the hermeneutic of suspense typical of mysteries and thrillers reorients the audience's focus away from lack and toward the profiler's devotion to his/her job and the psychological torment that accompanies it. The shift from suspenseful lack to the main character's devotion to his/her job diverts our interest away from the killer's motivation and toward an investigation into why profilers enjoy their job at the expense of all other aspects of their lives. Typically, devotion to one's job is portrayed as a hindrance to one's ability to properly enjoy life, but profiler films reverse this tendency and demonstrate that devotion to one's job is the ultimate enjoyment.

Before launching into a discussion of the profiler's devotion to duty, I want to address how the subject typically orients itself toward authority. Jacques Lacan divides authority into two categories related to the Oedipus complex: the first, the Name-of-the-Father, or the Symbolic father of the ego and pleasure principle, and the second, the obscene, primal Imaginary father of the Superego and enjoyment. The Name-of-the-Father for Lacan is a complex Symbolic structure that arises out of the subject's Oedipal process and eventually emerges

as the injunction “No!” that establishes the incest prohibition. According to Lacan, the “father, the Name-of-the-father, sustains the structure of desire with the structure of the law” (Lacan, 1998a: 34). Because of this foundational authority and the impact it has on the subject’s desire from its earliest age, the Name-of-the-Father acts as the fundamental signifier and permits signification to proceed normally, naming the subject, positioning it within the Symbolic order, and, as equally important, acting as a barrier to enjoyment (Evans, 1996: 119). As Todd McGowan argues, the Symbolic Name-of-the-Father bars the subject from achieving its desired enjoyment, thus keeping society free of open displays of enjoyment and making existence under the prohibition tolerable (McGowan, 2004: 41). A properly functioning Symbolic order depends on the Name-of-the-Father policing the subject’s interaction with enjoyment, which is to say that it does not do away with enjoyment altogether, but it, instead, constantly gets in the way of the subject achieving the goals of its desire. Whereas the Symbolic father disrupts, distracts, and disappoints the subject’s path toward enjoyment, the primal father of the Superego works to undercut the prohibitions established by the Symbolic.

Lacan explains that the primal father of the Superego forces the subject to subvert the admonitions of the Name-of-the-Father, instructing the subject to enjoy: “Nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance—Enjoy!” (Lacan, 1998b: 3). Drawn largely from the subject’s cultural imperatives, the Superego controls the subject primarily by punishing transgressive behavior with an overwhelming sense of guilt. Renata

Salcel, moreover, explains that “the Superego functions as the voice that commands the subject to enjoy yet at the same time mockingly predicts that he or she will fail in this pursuit of enjoyment” (Salecl, 2004: 51). The Superego demands that the subject achieve enjoyment, convincing the subject that it deserves whatever the Symbolic father may be blocking, while at the same time punishing the subject for these same feelings. Profiler entertainment translates the Superego’s demands into an excessive sense of devotion to the investigation of the methods and motives of serial killers. The profiler’s devotion to investigative work goes so far as to leave him/her unable to carry on “normal” relationships or family lives.

In profiler entertainment, devotion to duty is often depicted through the protagonist’s reluctant heroism. In the majority of profiler texts, the main character is depicted as having retired after having been largely successful at his/her job. This retirement, however, is never the profiler’s choice. They are typically shown to have moved into seclusion, with or without family, in order to protect themselves from the psychologically debilitating aspects of their job. Quite often the profiler encounters a particularly troubling case that leaves him/her near death, unable to apprehend the suspect, or both. Most profiler films and television shows begin this way, and the first act or pilot episode revolves around convincing the profiler of the merits of returning to a specific investigation that has completely befuddled the local, state, and federal police investigative agencies. While the retirement motif helps propel profiler narratives toward the first dramatic turning point of the story, it also underscores the unavoidable

devotion the super-detective feels toward his/her job. Even though their jobs are fraught with near-death experiences and tormenting psychological disturbances, profilers feel an unyielding allegiance to their job. Furthermore, the Hollywood profiler's retirement, after proving hugely successful in a field not known for high success rates, provides little solace from the voice of duty. The retirement motif asks us to equate enjoyment with the happiness of isolation, but the Hollywood depiction of the profiler turns on the profiler's inability to resist the voice of the Superego, which compels the profiler toward duty and away from the happiness of retirement, no matter how disruptive and dissatisfying his/her return to work may be. Characters such as Will Graham (William Peterson) in *Manhunter* and Helen Hudson (Sigourney Weaver) in *Copycat* are examples of the how the voice of the Superego is felt as a command to enjoy the duty of their job.

Even though Will Graham is the FBI agent responsible for stopping Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter's murderous reign, he is unable to fully enjoy the satisfaction of having done so. As a result of studying the psyche of Lecter and seeing what the world looks like through his eyes, Graham and his family have moved to Florida in order to escape Washington D.C. and the rigors of his job. Their isolation, however, is disrupted by Jack Crawford (Dennis Farina), Graham's former boss and director of the Bureau's Behavioral Sciences Unit. Crawford comes to Graham's home to convince him to join a case that the Bureau and other police agencies cannot solve—the Tooth Fairy murders. Crawford knows that Graham cannot resist the call of duty.⁴ Offering him what amounts to a forced choice, Crawford shows him photos of the two families

murdered by the Tooth Fairy—both photos are idealized portraits of suburban American family life—telling Graham that he will understand if “he cannot look anymore.” The choice here is to look again at a world he has left behind or to ignore it in favor of his family’s happiness and isolation. Graham, however, knows he has no choice at all—all because his family’s continued existence depends, like all families, upon his duty to continue tracking serial killers. The scene is composed of Graham and Crawford sitting on a beached log: Graham’s back turned away from the ocean and Crawford toward it. The composition is striking because it signals Graham’s lack of interest in the signifiers of his happiness, namely the limitless happiness represented by the wide-open ocean and horizon. Crawford slides the photographs of the two families across the log and toward Graham, and director Michael Mann chooses to shoot this crucial exchange in close-up to underscore the deep level of duty Graham feels at the moment he turns over the photos. As her husband looks at the pictures of the ideal, suburban families, Molly, walks toward the two men. As she gets closer, Crawford says hello, but Molly ignores his greeting. Her blatant snub of Crawford’s friendly hello further emphasizes how much his presence is disruptive to Graham’s familial happiness. She knows that her husband will be unable to turn his back on duty. The remainder of the film takes Graham on a journey toward a near-death experience and the execution of the Francis Dolarhyde (Tom Noonan), the Tooth Fairy killer.

Manhunter’s position as the first profiler film establishes the motif of devotion to duty found in most of the subsequent profiler films.⁵ McGowan

argues that “Mann’s heroes act for duty itself...they follow their duty regardless of how it might profit or harm them (or others)” (McGowan, 2007: 58). What McGowan notices about Mann’s heroes also applies to profiler entertainment in general; the profiler responds only to duty itself without regard to the physical or mental harm that it brings to his/her life. In fact, the harm seems to be the desired goal. The pursuit of personal harm becomes even more evident in the profiler films of the mid-to-late 1990s. Dr. Helen Hudson, the self-proclaimed “pin-up girl of serial killers” and protagonist of *Copycat*, refuses to leave her home after years of working as a profiler and narrowly escaping death at the hands of Daryl Lee Cullum (Harry Connick, Jr.). Her retirement consists of living in a fortress-like apartment that allows her to exist outside the fray of public encounters. Not only does she have a fear of open spaces, but she also drinks excessively and pops pills throughout the day. Rather than reading Hudson’s predicament as a retreat into the pure isolation of private enjoyment, the opposite, in fact, is the case. The depiction of Hudson’s devotion to the anxiety that she feels/felt as a profiler reverses our tendency to see her isolation, drinking, pill-popping, and phobias as escapes from the pressure of the Symbolic order. In the profiler film, these restraints are transformed into a reinstatement of a felt sense of dissatisfaction that signals the profiler’s desire for her return to the Symbolic’s deadlocks, lacks, and failures.

Jon Amiel, the director, introduces the audience to *Copycat*’s version of the profiler’s retirement through a series of shots that show Hudson waking up in her apartment—thirteen months after almost being killed—in a cold sweat from a

nightmare. She is disoriented and afraid. Amiel underscores this with an unsettling series of oblique camera angles. Her dreams have been overtaken by her traumatic experience with Cullum, and so to calm down, she attempts to recite in order the last names of the presidents of the United States, which she never finishes, rarely getting past Madison without losing the order and jumping to the twentieth century. While Hudson attempts to remember these names, she searches frantically for her anti-anxiety pills. She finds her pills at her computer desk and takes them with a large snifter of brandy, chugging an almost full glass. According to this depiction, Hudson's predicament at this point in the film is that of a troubled person who is trying to overcome her anxiety; she uses the presidential name chant and anti-anxiety pills to restore balance to her life. However, it is possible to read this behavior in a completely opposite manner. Given profiler entertainment's elevation of duty to the job above all, Hudson's retreat into her prison of an apartment and her self-medication through pills and alcohol should not be understood as escapes from reality but as things she uses to unconsciously dissatisfy herself. Without the duty and dissatisfaction of her job, she must turn to the dissatisfactions of isolation, alcohol, and pills to create problems for herself. Finally, she, like Graham, cannot resist returning to work and injects herself into the San Francisco Police Department's investigation into a series of unsolved murders, going so far as to willingly interact with Cullum, her tormentor, in order to gain information.⁶ Hudson's identification of the serial killer's method of staging crime scenes in the exact manner of famous murders

leads to the capture of serial killer Peter Foley (William McNamara), who almost kills her in the process.

While the retirement motif is often a narrative device used to demonstrate the profiler's level of expertise and necessity, it also signals a shift in the depiction of subjectivity. Initially portrayed as a kind of reluctant heroism, the profiler's devotion to duty—and specifically duty as compelled by the voice of the Superego—is depicted as the defining feature of subjectivity. Such devotion allows the hero of profiler entertainment to be portrayed as elevated above the Symbolic constraints of his/her social and historical context, giving the profiler a mission to achieve his/her goal without artificial restraints imposed by the public, the legal system, or his/her family. In showing subjectivity as a devotion to dissatisfaction regardless of the costs, profiler entertainment reorients traditional notions of sacrifice and eliminates its necessity. Whereas sacrifice of private enjoyment is the subject's price for admission to the social order, the profiler cycle's depiction of subjectivity as a devotion to duty argues that sacrifice is a messy distraction that impedes the super-detective from identifying and removing the serial killer threat from society.

The Rules vs. The Right Results

Instead of acting as agents of the FBI's official desire, profilers are portrayed as marginal figures who are brought into cases that the FBI cannot solve on its own. Profilers operate at the very limit of the FBI's legitimacy because they "see through" its Symbolic authority. Traditional Symbolic authority

is typically organized along the lines of a Symbolic public face and its shadowy supplement, the Superego. As explained earlier, Žižek argues that the Superego emerges where the public Law fails, giving rise to an illegal enjoyment in its place (Žižek, 1994: 54). Let me clarify Žižek's point with an example from the sport of baseball. In Major League Baseball, it is illegal for a pitcher to intentionally hit a batter with a pitch [known as *beaning*] — the punishment for this transgressive act typically being ejection from the game and a monetary fine from the League. While this behavior violates the public rules of the game, the fans, players, and coaches share in the knowledge of the “unwritten rules” of baseball that articulate a variety of reasons for deliberately throwing at a batter. Primarily used as retaliation for something the public rules fail to address, the “unwritten rules” of baseball fill in those gaps missed by the written rules. Everyone knows that hitting a batter is illegal; nonetheless, the spirit of the game demands that the players provide this self-corrective measure while pretending to act as if the illegal action is never intentional.

Žižek explains that this type of private, unwritten supplement to the existing public rules represents the “spirit of community at its purest, exerting the strongest pressure on the individual to comply with its mandate of group identification” (Žižek, 1994: 54). The pitcher does not want the ejection and fine —he would rather continue playing in the game—but living up to the obscene demand to enjoy his illegal act (for his team) and pretend as if he does not enjoy it (for traditional authority) actually proves his willingness to be a “team player.” This relationship between the public Law and its unwritten supplement, as

explained in the baseball example, is not designed to underscore the public Law's weakness. Instead, this example demonstrates how traditional power works, proving that the supplement strengthens rather than weakens Symbolic public Law. Without its shadowy underside, the public Law's appeals to prohibition cannot clearly define itself as necessary and better for the common good.

However, in a culture where the Superego has supplanted the authority of the Symbolic, the power of Symbolic institutions to regulate and enforce certain behaviors comes under question. In other words, everyone knows that Major League Baseball's ban on beaming is just a "rule" while at same time fully supporting the pitcher's right to retaliate. The rule has become hollow, and the individual's right has become the authority. Akin to Žižek's example from *A Few Good Men*, the actions of the murderous Marines become the "rules" because they produce the "right results" of eliminating a weak soldier. The shift away from Symbolic authority and toward Superego authority correlates to a culture where enjoyment is always a threat to one structured on its scarcity, and, in *The End of Dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*, McGowan argues that the emerging society of enjoyment affects a shift in the way the subject relates to the Other:

Historically, the social order has always provided some degree of respite from enjoyment. Though the prohibition of enjoyment does, in some sense, deprive the subject of her/his enjoyment, it also frees the subject from the suffocating presence of the Other and the Other's enjoyment. In other words, the Name of the Father is, in the first instance, liberatory, precisely because it brings distance. (McGowan, 2004: 35)

The fragmenting of the Symbolic authority at the end of the twentieth century allows those shadowy, unspeakable supports to overflow the growing gaps in the social order. Rather than being able to keep the Other's enjoyment at a safe distance—the key ingredient necessary for the structure of desire—the subject is surrounded by the constant presence of enjoyment. McGowan, ultimately, surmises that the culture of the Superego no longer requires “the old ‘entry fee’ into the social order that Lévi-Strauss emphasized [...] the social order no longer explicitly demands a sacrifice of enjoyment, but instead demands enjoyment itself as a kind of social duty” (McGowan, 2004: 35). Consequently, the profiler cycle, I suggest, fits squarely within this shift in authority. The profiler and those characters aligned with his/her goals allegorically depict a world of ascendant Superego authority.

First and foremost, the significance of profiler entertainment's turn toward Superego authority in order to resolve its cinematic clashes between detective and serial killer needs to be clarified by what it is not. While the profiler exceeds the FBI's authority and often executes the serial killer at the end of the film without arrest or recourse to the legal system, the criminal profiler is not a vigilante. To be precise, vigilante justice does exist outside of the public Law, and Hollywood has a successful tradition of vigilante and rogue cop films. However, the Hollywood vigilante never turns toward his/her brand of illegal justice with the blessing of the public Law. Vigilante justice happens because of a perceived failing of the public Law to take care of violations against it. For example, in *Dirty Harry* (Siegel, 1971), Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) steps

outside of the specific rules of the police procedural to capture and kill the serial killer Scorpio (Andrew Robinson). In the new era of Miranda rights, Callahan represents someone still devoted to old ways of doing things and forgoes paying attention to the new rules, so he can exact his own brand of justice. In one scene, a district attorney demands to know why Callahan continues to violate the rights of suspects, and Callahan flippantly responds that he's "all broken up over that man's rights." Without the blessing of the public Law, Callahan operates as pure Superego supplement, and his methods are never acknowledged and always challenged by Symbolic authority.

The profiler cycle of films reverses traditional vigilante justice by allowing the profiler to employ methods that exist outside of the public Law while, at the same time, giving him/her the full endorsement of the FBI. In other words, the Hollywood profiler achieves the "right results" while working from inside the "rules." The profiler film's tendency toward extra-legal justice is made clear in a trio of scenes from *Copycat*. At the beginning of the film, San Francisco detective C.J. Monahan (Holly Hunter) represents the "rules." During a training session with her male partner Reuben Goetz (Dermot Mulroney), both cops approach, according to police procedure, through a dilapidated hallway and towards an apartment door. They take their positions, listen, burst through the door, and subdue the fake targets. This scene is short but important in establishing Monahan's suspicious attitude toward her male partner's desire to achieve the "right results." After storming through the door, Monahan holds her

fire while Goetz unloads his clip on the target, going overboard in shooting the cardboard perpetrator. She reviews his procedure in a mocking tone:

Monahan: The good news is you're still alive.

Goetz: You see a downside I take it.

Monahan: This is pretty remedial stuff, Reuben.

Goetz: Remedial? Let's review the situation.

Monahan: Didn't anyone at the academy teach you to shoot conservatively? (Pointing to the target) Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. You shredded him.

Goetz: What can I say? I'm an intuitive cop with poor impulse control.

Monahan, by contrast, is the very picture of impulse control. She responds positively to the restrictions of procedure and wholeheartedly believes in the rules regardless of how much they might get in the way of exacting justice to its fullest extent.

Goetz's "Dirty Harry style" of shooting first and asking questions later borders on, as Monahan puts it, the psychopathic. To show Goetz how to properly subdue a perpetrator, Monahan shoots three precise shots into the shoulder of another target holding a hostage and says, "The shoulder of the gun hand is exposed. You hit the brachial nerve. He drops the gun. You read him his Mirandas." While instructing him on proper procedure, she also carries on a flirtatious relationship with Goetz, which she never consummates, choosing to abide by the regulations that prevent her from dating a co-worker. She has learned the lesson of illicit love, revealed in her backstory, after dating another policeman in the past. Amiel depicts Goetz as a type of Don Juan who has more women than he can handle. At the end of the training sequence, his cell phone rings, and he pretends to be uninterested in answering it. Monahan derisively

asks him, “don’t you want to know which one it is?” Goetz answers the call from one of his many girlfriends, and Monahan relieves her flirtatious anxiety by shooting three shots into the target, holding the gun sideways, “gangsta” style, showing the audience the small transgressions against procedure that she uses when she gets too close to enjoying herself. The difference between Monahan and Goetz is crucial, because, in films from the pre-profiler era of police procedural, Goetz would eventually learn the lesson of the “rules” by the end of the film, but it is Monahan who learns to shed the “rules” in favor of achieving the “right results.”

The establishment of Monahan’s positive response toward the rules and regulations of the job is to unmask their ineffectiveness in apprehending serial killers. The unmasking of the ineffective “rules” develops into a command to transgress them for the sake of dealing with criminals such as serial killers who are so far beyond the law that they require extreme measures. Monahan’s role in the film is to depict the lesson of the failed limits of Symbolic authority. She learns this lesson in two subsequent scenes that are similar to the training scene with Goetz. Having been reassigned to Chinatown, Goetz is brought back into the investigation of Peter Foley by Monahan after they contact imprisoned serial killer Darryl Lee Cullum for his advice on the case. While Monahan returns to the precinct, Goetz finishes up some business with his Chinatown detail. The precinct is crowded with a large number of perpetrators, and one young man, who is handcuffed to a chair, notices that another detective has unholstered his handgun and placed it in his desk drawer. Taking advantage of the crowded

circumstances and the strain on the detective's attention, the young man pushes his chair back behind the desk and removes the gun from the drawer. When Goetz arrives to uncuff him, the young man pulls the gun, puts it against Goetz's head, and takes him hostage in an effort to escape from police custody. Backing up through a series of doors that lead out to the foyer of the precinct, the young man continues to use Goetz as a human shield, but he does not notice that at the same time, Monahan has entered the building from his side. She recognizes the situation and sneaks up on the two men with her gun drawn. She yells "Hey!" and the young man turns to look at her. Monahan, as she did in the training exercise, expertly fires a single shot into his shoulder, missing Goetz, thus subduing the would-be escapee. Her devotion to the "rules" *appears* to have paid off in this situation. She has saved her partner, restored order to situation, and kept the perpetrator alive, and, more than anything, she has demonstrated the impulse control that marks the *difference* between cops and criminals. However, Goetz fails to secure the gun, and the still alive young man picks it up and shoots him through the heart, killing the young detective instantly. Monahan learns, as her captain explains, that she made the right decision, but she got the wrong result. By the end of the film, the cumulative effect of Monahan's progress demonstrates the inability of the rules to create the "right results." The scene suggests that, for the police to effectively suppress crime, the difference between cop and criminal should be erased because the "rules" fail to fully eradicate the criminal threat.

The profiler cycle consistently suggests that the rule of law has failed and that it needs to be relinquished in favor of excessive, extra-legal uses of violence. The climax of *Copycat* establishes a model found for this type of Superego supplemental violence in every profiler film. Profiler films continually champion an excessively violent death for the serial killer because capture, trial, and detention would undoubtedly fail to force the killers to fully pay for their transgressions. The climax of *Copycat* demonstrates this point. Monahan arrives at the climax just in time to shoot Foley before he can stab the profiler Helen Hudson to death. Shooting according to procedure, again, Monahan fires her revolver at the killer's shoulder, forcing him to drop his weapon, but this time she does not stop short of "finishing the job." In a parallel of the police station shooting, Foley believes Monahan will not go beyond the "rules" of police procedure to stop him. The serial killer turns to draw his gun on her, but because Monahan no longer believes in the restraint that underpins Symbolic authority, she fires five more shots into Foley's chest, moving in to kill him for sure with a final shot to the head. She goes beyond what is necessary to subdue him, showing poor "impulse control" and acting out the Superego's command to create the "right results." Monahan refuses the desire to satisfy Symbolic authority and gives into the Superego imperative to go beyond its failure. Her path toward this climactic moment reveals the profiler cycle's investment in exposing the anxiety that accompanies following the rules, transgressing them in favor of fulfilling her duty toward her inner enjoyment.

Traditional Symbolic authority is routinely unmasked as being impotent in profiler entertainment. In *Manhunter* and *The Silence of the Lambs*, both profilers, Graham and Starling, are forced to do battle with the serial killers, Francis Dolarhyde and Jame Gumb, because the FBI has failed to be in the right place at the right time. In *Manhunter*, Graham's devotion to duty compels him to forgo the command of Crawford to wait for backup, running through a window to stop the killer before he can murder his blind girlfriend. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the FBI storms the wrong house while Starling finds herself locked in Gumb's underground dungeon. In both instances, the profilers must deal with the killers by themselves, and the lack of the FBI reduces its significance, leaving only the profiler's devotion to duty as the only thing standing in the way of the killer and society. While both films expose the failures of the FBI as a representative of Symbolic authority in the climax of each film, *The Bone Collector* (Noyce, 1999) openly denounces traditional authority from the beginning of the film, thus providing further legitimacy to the extra, shadowy supplement as the primary authoritative voice. In other words, whereas the Name-of-the-Father is proven to be impotent in the first two films, it is a *de facto* state of affairs by the time of *The Bone Collector*.⁷

The Symbolic authoritative structure is represented by the institutional bureaucracy of the New York Police Department and Captain Howard Cheney (Michael Rooker), and the Superego support is represented by quadriplegic profiler Lincoln Rhyme (Denzel Washington). Amelia Donaghy (Angelina Jolie), a rookie beat cop, is caught in the middle of these competing voices as each

authority figure tries to control her access to an unfolding case of spree murders. Cheney does not want her on the case because it violates procedure, believing that Donaghy lacks the necessary experience for such a complicated series of crimes. Rhyme, however, believes she represents something different from the traditional police officer and offers her the opportunity to do, what he calls, “real police work.” Since he is paralyzed, Rhyme works from his bed, and, using a radio and camera attached to Donaghy, commands her through the various crime scenes. In contrast to Rhyme’s “real police work,” Cheney appears suspicious, overbearing, and incompetent; at one point, he marshals the entire police force’s arsenal to arrest the wrong man, and at another, the police captain is briefly suspected to also be the killer. Cheney’s depiction results in a diminution of traditional authority, leaving Rhyme’s devotion to “real police work” that exists outside of the bounds of the “rules” as the primary voice of authority in the film.

Profilers entertainment’s employment of the voice of the Superego effectively demonstrates the weakening of the Name-of-the-Father as the primary voice of authority. Profiler films exploit the Superego imperative by identifying the Symbolic authority’s inability to fully protect society from dangerous criminals and by convincing audiences that extreme crime fighting measures are an absolute *must* regardless of their potential for going beyond the law. The cycle of films started by *Manhunter* heralds a police procedure that, on the one hand, is celebrated as an innovative crime fighting technique, and, on the other hand, is allowed to go beyond traditional prescriptions of the public Law. The films

depicting this combination effectively illustrate the profiler's intensely felt sense of duty to his/her inner voice. This voice compels him/her to do whatever is necessary to stop crime from happening. The representation of subjectivity found in profiler entertainment revolves around an isolated figure with little connection to Symbolic reality, seeking out anything to reconstitute lack within their lives and finding less and less real enjoyment in society.

Conclusion

Slavoj Žižek's description of the Superego as a structure that supplements Symbolic reality and fills in the gaps that the Symbolic fails to cover offers film and cultural theorists a valuable tool for thinking about the ways in which subjects respond to authority in contemporary culture. Two theorists specifically, Renata Salecl and Todd McGowan, have expanded upon Žižek's description and speculated about the Superego's rise to prominence in the early twenty-first century. Salecl argues that the Superego imperative to enjoy has helped foster a "Just Do It!" ideology that compels the subject to believe in itself as "free in the sense of being a non-believer in authority and a person capable of changing his/her identity at will" (Salecl, 2004: 50). McGowan goes even further to suggest that the social order is undergoing a transformation, explaining, "Whereas formerly society has required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, today the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible. The fundamental duty in contemporary American society lies in committing oneself to enjoyment" (McGowan, 2004: 2). Salecl's contention

that the subject believes itself to be free of authority and McGowan's description of the social duty to enjoy are both predicated on the subject's preference for responding to the authority of the Superego rather than Symbolic authority, and this preference, consequently, has had a profound effect on the ways in which enjoyment is depicted in popular culture.

To suggest that enjoyment is more easily accessible in Superego culture, however, is false. Instead, both Salecl and McGowan agree that the rise of the transgressive command to enjoy comes with decreasing instances of actual enjoyment (Salecl, 2004: 52 and McGowan, 2004: 40). Enjoyment, then, is best understood in today's popular culture through the depiction of extreme dissatisfaction. I have argued in this essay that the profiler cycle of films explores this dissatisfaction by articulating two key features of the Superego, showing its role in commanding duty for duty's sake and its role in usurping traditional authority in favor of more satisfying results. But profiler entertainment is not the only instance of Superego entertainment in today's culture. One can find the subject's duty to enjoy represented as extreme dissatisfaction in many instances, ranging from the willful self-torture in films like *Jackass: The Movie* and the *Saw* series to the duty toward painful self-confession in reality television and the daytime talk show.

The significance of the profiler cycle of films resides in its reflection of the culture's shifting attitude towards authority. The profiler film operates as an uncanny homology to the rise of Superego authority, helping to dismantle the society of prohibition and ushering in the reign of enjoyment as the primary force

in our culture. The shift to enjoyment forces subjects to focus inward and away from the public good, making our desire for private enjoyment a social duty rather than something we are required to keep hidden. Thus, the profiler film has evolved at the end of the millennium into a precise example of a key reversal as dissatisfaction has changed from something subjects desperately attempt to repress into something subjects actively pursue.

1 There is no single unified text by Žižek on film. However, he discusses film, and other aspects of popular culture, in almost every one of his books. For the sake of this discussion, the books *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, and *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* form the basis of most of Žižek's theory of film. Moreover, Žižek's theory is featured in the film *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, which features excellent presentations of Žižek's contribution to Lacanian film theory.

2 Editor's note - an explanation of the Lacanian notion of *castration* can be found here: <http://nosubject.com/Castration>

3 The profiler cycle of films begins with *Manhunter* (Mann, 1986) and continues to evolve over the next twenty years. The cycle includes *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), *Copycat* (Amiel, 1995), *Kiss the Girls* (Fleder, 1997), *The Bone Collector* (Noyce, 1998), *The Watcher* (Charbanic, 2000), *Taking Lives* (Caruso, 2004), *Mindhunters* (Harlin, 2005), and *Suspect Zero* (Merhige, 2004). The cycle also includes the television shows *Millennium* (Fox, 1996-99), *The Profiler* (NBC, 1996-2000), and *Criminal Minds* (CBS, 2005-present).

4 McGowan recognizes the duty motif as the central preoccupation of Michael Mann's body of work. He explains that the "excess that exists at the heart of Mann's films is...the ability of the subject to attach itself excessively to its duty. The feature that defines subjectivity is its ability to value duty over all concerns, and Mann's films call us to value duty in precisely this way" (McGowan, 2007: 58).

5 *The Silence of the Lambs* is the one profiler film that focuses on a trainee rather than a retired agent. While it does not conform to the cycle's conventions, much can be said about Starling's duty toward her training and her willingness to please Jack Crawford, Hannibal Lecter, and her dead father. That it stands out as the most remarkable achievement in profiler entertainment also attests to its variations on the thematic consistencies in the cycle.

6 There are numerous examples in the profiler cycle of retirement and self-imposed isolation. For example, in *The Watcher* Joel Campbell (James Spader) leaves the FBI after a serial killer has killed his mistress and Campbell fails to capture him. Moreover, Campbell returns to the FBI to help find the killer after he has killed again. Despite having developed an increasing dependence on alcohol and drugs, Campbell is able to successfully end the killer's murderous spree.

In *The Bone Collector* Lincoln Rhyme (Denzel Washington) lives in the prison of his own body after having been injured on the job and rendered a quadriplegic. He has retired because of his injury and wishes only to die. However, he is lured back into an investigation, to which he contributes successfully by guiding NYPD police officer Amanda Donaghy (Angelina Jolie) through the procedures of collecting evidence. *The Bone Collector's* ending oddly echoes *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1941), and a comparison of the two reveal how the voice of the Superego has come to replace the Name-of-the-Father. Both films end at Christmas with the protagonist surrounded by family and friends having made a choice to sacrifice something in order to appreciate his "wonderful life." George Bailey and Lincoln Rhyme, however, have made decidedly different sacrifices. Bailey sacrifices his private enjoyment in favor of the social order of his family and the town of Bedford Falls, and the film alerts audiences to the satisfying nature of his sacrifice.

Rhyme sacrifices his need to die in order to make do with the dissatisfying prohibitions of his paralysis and a shared life with Donaghy, performing his dissatisfaction for the public eye at the dénouement of the film.

⁷ This is also the case in the films that follow *Copycat*. *Kiss the Girls*, specifically, employs bracketing opening/closing scenes that teach the same lesson that Monahan learns. In the opening scene, Alex Cross (Morgan Freeman) patiently, and by the book, talks a desperate woman, who has murdered her abusive husband, out of killing herself. Cross shows sympathy for her situation and explains that the justice system provides an exception for cases like hers, allowing her to feel briefly as if her situation is not completely lost upon the uncaring rules of the patriarchal law. The opening scene is replicated in the film's climax, but, this time Cross tries to give the serial killing cop, Nick Ruskin (Cary Elwes), the chance to explain his reasons for collecting and killing young women. In a room slowly filling with leaking gas, Cross puts down his drawn revolver in an attempt to calm Ruskin, patiently telling the killer that if he blows himself up, no one will ever understand his grand vision. Cross, however, has placed his gun cleverly behind a carton of milk, which the killer does not see, demonstrating that the serial killer's dual role in this film—as an agent of the law and its enemy—makes him doubly blind. Ruskin taunts Cross with comments about kidnapping and raping Cross's niece, to which Cross responds by shooting Ruskin through the carton of milk, thus containing the muzzle flash and eliminating the killer/cop. Cross's decision is the same as Monahan's; each mimics the structure of the Superego filling in where the Symbolic fails.

References:

- Evans, Dylan. (1996). *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Kay, Sarah. (2003). *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. (1998a). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Lacan, Jacques. (1998b). *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973, Book XX*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- McGowan, Todd. (2004). *The End of Dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- McGowan, Todd. (2007). *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Salecl, Renata. (2004). *On Anxiety*. London: Routledge.
- Žižek, Slavoj. (1991). *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj, ed. (1992). *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*. New York: Verso.

Žižek, Slavoj. (1994). *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*. New York: Verso.

Žižek, Slavoj. (2001). *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory*. London: BFI.