Facing the Gaze: The Cinematic Romanticisation of the Serial Killer in *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*

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Abstract

A dominant trend in theories on serial killer cinema has been the notion of the serial killer celebrity. However, it may be argued that cinema in fact goes further than merely creating celebrity killers. More disturbingly cinema has created a platform in which a normalised and romanticised figure is constructed whom the spectator can form an allegiance with and even have empathy towards. The film *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019) deals with the serial killer Ted Bundy and can be described as somewhat unique in the serial killer film genre because it presents itself not as a serial killer film, but as a romantic drama with the protagonist poised as a romantic hero. The shift from a serial killer film towards a romance film is precisely why this film necessitates further investigation.

This thesis argues that *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* creates a romanticised serial killer through the use of the cinematic gaze and the engagement with the face and the close-up. The gaze is used to interpellate the spectator into the filmic universe and creates a fantasmatic scenario in which the serial killer is not seen as a brutal killer but as a romantic hero. Added to this, the face and the close-up are employed to construct an empathetic character out of the serial killer. Examining the way in which *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* uses its employment of the gaze and engagement with the face may serve to illuminate how the film romanticises the notorious figure of Ted Bundy. This may then in turn expose the problematic relationship between the cinematic medium's portrayal of serial killers as well as the responsibility that cinema has in its representation of these killers.

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Introduction

Cinema crafts a space where spectators can place themselves in the shoes of any given character, even that of a brutal murderer.[1] This thesis argues that the film *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019), through the use of the cinematic gaze and the engagement with the face, creates a romanticised serial killer whose shoes the spectator can step into with ease.[2] The concept of romanticising something (such as the serial killer in this instance) refers to the idea that it is spoken or talked about in a manner that "is not at all realistic and which makes them seem better than they really are" ("Romanticize" 1444). Consequently, the cinematic romanticisation of the serial killer refers to the way these killers are represented within cinema as more appealing than they are in reality. This does not necessarily have to entail their glorification as a glorified or iconised serial killer may still seem removed from humanity – an outside source of fame and notoriety. Instead, by romanticising these killers they are painted as being better than they actually are, and this could even have the effect of normalising their behaviour. The thesis will explore the way the gaze interpellates the spectator into the filmic world and how the gaze manages to create a fantasmatic scenario in which a serial killer is not painted as a brutal murderer but is romanticised and even constructed as a romantic hero. The thesis will also consider the role of the face in cinema in general and in *Extremely Wicked* in particular and how it is positioned at the centre not only of spectator-character connections but also of the spectator's affective responses.

Extremely Wicked deals with the serial killer Ted Bundy and although that is the subject matter of the film it does not read as a serial killer film at all but rather as a romantic drama. The strong emphasis on romance within *Extremely Wicked*'s narrative is precisely why the film necessitates further investigation. Films such as *Psycho* (1960), *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *American Psycho* (2000) and *Hannibal* (2001) all deal with serial killers and although they each have their own narratives, they all shape these narratives around the cruel nature of these killers' actions. One can, however, mention that most of the killers who populate these violent films are sensationalised and made iconic despite their brutal actions. In contrast *Extremely Wicked* not only panders to this notion of the sensationalised serial killer but goes a step further as it romanticises and almost normalises the killer's behaviour and constructs a character who is not veiled in notoriety and disturbing

[1] The concept 'spectator' is used throughout in order to refer to the viewer or audience of a film.
[2] *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* will be referred to as *Extremely Wicked* for the rest of the thesis.

intrigue but rather one with whom a spectator can connect. *Extremely Wicked* manages to do this in large part by obscuring Ted's horrific actions and shying away from showing anything remotely violent or gruesome. Instead, the narrative is shaped around the love story between Ted and his girlfriend Liz. *Extremely Wicked* leans towards a character-centred romantic drama with hardly any scenes of violence and, as will be argued in this thesis, even the few violent moments in the film are framed and filmed in a way that separates them completely from Ted.

The film *Extremely Wicked* is based on the book by Ted Bundy's former girlfriend, Elizabeth Kloepfer (written under the pseudonym Elizabeth Kendall), titled *The Phantom Prince: My Life with Ted Bundy* (1981). The fact that the film is based on Elizabeth's (Liz) experiences of her life with Ted positions the film as a story told from her perspective thereby framing Ted through her eyes which greatly adds to his romanticisation. The film's conscious decision to focus on Ted's relationship with Liz and not on his crimes lays the foundation for the romanticisation of this killer and the creation of an idealised version of his story that obscures the reality of his monstrous behaviour. The film chooses to explore who Ted the man was, and not Ted the murderer. It is largely because of this focus that the film manages to paint Ted Bundy as a heroic boyfriend to Liz and father figure to Liz's daughter Molly while shying away from his atrocious crimes.

Society has long used storytelling to deal with monsters, and this is certainly the case with the serial killer. Perhaps this is done in an attempt to understand their behaviour or in some strange way to make deviant behaviour less terrifying and more digestible – if you can give a face and identity to the killer and create someone a spectator can connect with, perhaps the 'monster' loses its power. Tales of monsters have been around for as long as humanity has but the way they have been framed and constructed has undoubtedly changed. In the book *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* (1995), John E. Douglas and Mark Olshaker contend that the serial killer is a figure who has been part of the world for much longer than is realised. They suggest that perhaps the legends about witches and vampires may all have been a way to explain the atrocious acts of murder that have become so commonplace in contemporary society, but that "small and close-knit towns" in Europe or America may have found difficult to comprehend (Douglas & Olshaker 19). It was unthinkable that these acts could have been perpetrated by humans and therefore non-human monsters were blamed (Douglas & Olshaker 19). This stance has changed somewhat. Not only has society accepted the human hand in serial murders but they have also come to create an idolised legend and celebrity out of these killers. It could be argued that romanticising serial killers is part of contemporary society's way of dealing with them. Instead of creating vampire myths as they

did centuries ago, conceivably society has refigured the serial killer into an unthreatening entity to try and ease their fears.

The interest in serial killers may also be seen in the fact that serial killers excite many people and stir up a sense of morbid curiosity because the majority of people have not been exposed to something as brutal as serial murder (Bonn 234). The serial killer has undeniably become one with whom there is a great sense of fascination and intrigue, with several films, television shows, podcasts and books all dealing with the serial killer and their actions. David Schmid, in the introduction of his book *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (2005), argues that the serial killer has become not only a celebrity figure but the catalyst for an entire "serial killer industry". This industry is driven by the continued production of books, movies, websites, magazines, t-shirts and the wonderfully coined “murderabilia” which refers to items related to serial killer murders, for example one of the bricks from Jeffrey Dahmer's apartment building (Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities* 1). The monetary value of anything to do with the serial killer is clear and consequently producing works of fiction that deal with these figures can be seen as somewhat of a twisted investment.

The rise of the commercialised serial killer continues to grow, and cinema has played a foundational role in the serial killer's celebrity status. The criminologist Scott Bonn argues that box office returns show that "Hollywood and the public love stories about serial killers" and society's fascination with these killers is reflected in the number of Hollywood films on serial killers that are produced and consumed by the public (281). Serial killers have become a commodity and one that is celebrated and elevated to celebrity status. Schmid states that because of cinema’s role in developing the so-called "modern celebrity system", a system with unparalleled influence and profitability, it has also created the perfect platform for developing serial killer celebrities (*Natural Born Celebrities* 107). The Hollywood star is at the centre of this celebrity within cinema as John Ellis points out that the star persona is a phenomenon unique to cinema (105). Therefore, analysing the cinematic depiction of the serial killer will provide some insights into the role of Hollywood stars and how their faces are used in the connection that is forged between spectator and character.

With Hollywood being a billion-dollar marketplace, it is no wonder that films, and indeed serial killer films, are such a driving force within mainstream popular culture, with these films also playing an intricate role in society's understanding of the serial killer. Iconic films such as *Psycho*, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and *The Silence of the Lambs* have created a seemingly unstoppable film genre in which serial killers and their actions are explored at length – and not just from the view of the detective but from the view of the often redeemable killer.

These films are only a few of many that have created a platform for the serial killer's rise to dominance and fame. Cinema plays a key role in this rise of the serial killer celebrity and this will be highlighted throughout this thesis. However, it may further be argued that cinema not only constructs a larger-than-life monster but rather, more disturbingly so, creates a normalised and romanticised figure whom the spectator can form an allegiance with and have empathy towards. While theorists such as David Schmid highlight the serial killer's celebrity status there are few who focus on their romanticisation or the way that it occurs in cinema. It is precisely this question that this thesis seeks to answer, as a critical component of this research is not only the fact that cinema romanticises serial killers but how it manages to do so. It is the *how* that is worth exploring and that may offer unique insights into cinema's functioning.

A dominant line of thought regarding theories on the serial killer and issues in serial killer fiction is that these figures are aligned with notions of violence – a clear conclusion to reach. Any discussion on the serial killer would be incomplete without reference to this intrinsic relationship. Mark Seltzer argues that serial killers have their place within a "public culture in which addictive violence has become not merely a collective spectacle" but a site in which private desires meet in the public space (3). Seltzer describes this assembling "around scenes of violence" as "*wound culture*" – there is a deep and macabre intrigue with torn and broken bodies (3, emphasis in original). Society seems to not only be interested in serial killers but also in the aftermath of their destruction. Scott Bonn affirms this fascination with violence as he states that the serial killer creates an outlet for society "to experience the darker side of the human condition" – this is central to the morbid fascination society has with serial killers (279). Society is enthralled by the violent nature of these figures and the cathartic power attached to violence is clear. Violent depictions on screen are an added way for the spectator to have an outlet for their feelings and fears. Schmid contends that violence and especially violence perpetrated by well-known stars on screen can have a cathartic effect on spectators and can be a way for them to resolve anxieties (*Natural Born Celebrities* 19). While one cannot fault this natural conclusion, in reality these killers are violent and brutal to the extreme, one should be extra vigilant when it comes to portrayals that veer far away from connecting the serial killer to any form of violence. It is within these nonviolent portrayals that the danger lies for the killers and their actions to become normalised.

Connecting the serial killer to violent acts is an expected association and certainly addresses the desire that spectators have to see violence in films. However, the question about where the spectator is positioned in relation to nonviolent serial killer depictions remains mostly unanswered. It is this lacuna that this thesis hopes to address. The thesis will look at the

way a distinctly nonviolent depiction of a serial killer, as is seen in *Extremely Wicked*, may impact the spectator's experience of and connection to the serial killer. Furthermore, these nonviolent depictions of serial killers often also romanticise them by focusing not on what sets them apart from society but what makes them decidedly human. This creates a space for a guilt-free connection to a killer, the spectators need not disavow these killers' actions because they are not confronted with such actions.

Within the context of these narratives surrounding the serial killer in society and culture, this thesis aims to evaluate the romanticisation of the serial killer in *Extremely Wicked* with its fictional portrayal of Ted Bundy. Two key objectives will be considered in order to achieve this: firstly, the role of cinema's reimagined gaze in creating a connection between spectator and character and how this relates to issues of power and identification within cinema will be explored. This will be done in order to understand how the spectator is brought into the world of the serial killer and how the spectator is positioned to experience the serial killer in this world. Secondly, the power of the face in creating an allegiance between spectator and character and therewith eliciting empathy for the characters seen on screen will be evaluated to determine the way the film uses this empathetic response in the spectator to romanticise the serial killer. Considering these objectives will serve to elucidate the manner in which *Extremely Wicked*, as a key example of Hollywood cinema, works to construct a romanticised figure out of a brutal and notorious serial killer.

The first key element that will be examined to ascertain how *Extremely Wicked* romanticises the serial killer is the notion of the gaze. The gaze is a central element within Lacanian film theory and is one of the key ways in which power is disseminated in cinema. However, it has been suggested that the gaze has largely been misunderstood and therefore in certain instances incorrectly theorised (and by extension then incorrectly used within film analysis). The argument has been made that traditional Lacanian film theorists, such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, have not fully considered Lacan's notion of the gaze when applying it to film theory (McGowan, "Looking" 28). Therefore, one could argue that much of the power and value of the gaze has been absent from their work. Instead, a new wave of Lacanian film theorists has emerged in the likes of Todd McGowan and Joan Copjec, who conceive of Lacan's notion of the gaze as an objective gaze that the spectator meets in the film when the spectator's look is returned to them. It is through this objective gaze that the spectator is drawn into the filmic world and immersed into the events (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 5, 8). Conceiving of the gaze as objective and not subjective shifts the notions of power in cinema and it also gives a new view of the spectator's role in cinema. It also changes the understanding

of the spectator's interpellation into cinema. The gaze and its ability to draw the spectator into the filmic world as well as create a fantasmatic scenario in which the reality of a serial killer's crimes are obscured is a central component of how cinema is able to facilitate a connection between spectator and character and therewith construct a romanticised serial killer.

Furthermore, this new understanding of the gaze also creates a space for the affective power of cinema, which seems to have hardly been touched on by traditional Lacanian film theorists. As this thesis argues, the way the spectator is interpellated into the onscreen world and the affective power of cinema are vital to the way spectators connect to characters. More problematically, this is fundamental to the way cinema is able to construct a romanticised serial killer whom the spectator not only feels *for* but feels *with*. Understanding the reconceived gaze's power and place in cinema during an analysis of *Extremely Wicked* may strengthen the argument that the film is able to place the spectator into the action of the filmic universe, which in turn is vital for the allegiance forged between spectator and character.

The second element that the thesis will explore is the role of the face within cinema and its link to cinema's affective power. Examining the affective capacity of cinema illuminates the value of fiction as a force that can influence society. Alex Neill argues that engaging empathetically with others "may play an important role in the education of emotion" because people's empathetic responses towards others are not something that is already in them; instead they respond in a way that mirrors "the feelings and responses of others whose outlooks and experiences" are different from their own (180). The value of film is grounded in the fact that it gives its spectators practice "in a mode of engagement and response that is" essential when it comes to understanding other human beings (Neill 188-189). By feeling what another is feeling, perhaps their decisions and actions may be better understood.

Furthering on from this and relating it to the affective response elicited in serial killer cinema, it is clear that the affective power of cinema is central to what allows the spectator to engage with and understand these killers and this 'understanding' certainly lays the foundation for their romanticisation. Bonn argues that the fascination with serial killers is often rooted in the desire to understand how and why someone could do such atrocious things to another human being (235). This is unquestionably a somewhat macabre fascination but driven by the desire to comprehend why people act the way they do. Cinema creates a platform for this to occur – through its power to elicit an affective response, and, more specifically, its ability to elicit an *empathetic* response. By feeling what someone else is feeling the spectator might start understanding the other person better. It is through the act of empathising with another person that the situation is truly imagined from that person’s perspective and this includes

"imaginatively representing" these people's or characters' "beliefs, desires, hopes, fears as though they were one's own" (Neill 191). In serial killer cinema, this connection and empathetic response place the spectator in the shoes and skin of the serial killer – believing what the killer does and desiring what the killer desires. This is undoubtedly problematic and central to the way these serial killers are often portrayed on screen. Perhaps, on the one hand, to try and understand them and make them less terrifying, and, on the other, to create a sense of disavowal in the spectator so that their guilt is assuaged – if the killer is not represented as being truly bad, which is seen in *Extremely Wicked*, then there need not be any guilt involved for the spectators' affinity towards the serial killer.

Through the exploration of the romanticised serial killer in *Extremely Wicked*, this thesis brings together the notion of the gaze (an element traditionally conceived of in the realm of psychoanalytic film theory) and the affective power of cinema. This could open up the field of film analysis and create a space for greater depths of enquiry. In addition, considering how connections between spectators and characters are forged through both the gaze and the affective experience of a spectator, can create a new understanding of the spectator's role in cinema and in turn cinema's role in society. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to address the arguments about celebrity serial killers, by discussing how they are not only idolised but how their celebrity status has created a space wherein serial killers are normalised. Examining the way *Extremely Wicked* romanticises Ted Bundy and creates a character that spectators connect to and feel with may also expose the problematic relationship between the cinematic medium and serial killers.

This examination will comprise of three parts. Firstly, Chapter 1 will contextualise serial killer cinema by considering some key issues pertaining to serial killers and their presence in cinema, including an examination of how cinema has contributed to creating a celebrity icon out of these killers as well as the role of the connection forged between spectator and character in serial killer cinema. Secondly, in Chapter 2, the thesis will examine the notion of the cinematic gaze, focusing on the way it creates the onscreen world; the way it interpellates the spectator into the onscreen world; and the power dynamics that it brings about. Thirdly, in Chapter 3, the thesis will evaluate the manner in which cinema is able to elicit an empathetic response in the spectator by looking at the power of the face and the close-up in cinema as well as the way an allegiance is formed between spectator and character. *Extremely Wicked* will be referred to throughout these discussions but Chapter 4 will take a closer look at key moments in the film that exemplify the role of the gaze and the face in creating a romanticised serial killer.

Chapter 1: Introducing and Contextualising Serial Killer Cinema

The figure of the serial killer has been marked by increased fascination over the past few decades. From articles on the front pages of newspapers to fictional and real characters etched onto the big screen, serial killers have come to occupy a central and often vivid position within everyday culture. The notion of the serial killer has been discussed and theorised for decades with particular focus on this figure's representation in fiction. Some of the key theorists in the realm of the serial killer include David Schmid, Scott Bonn, Richard Tithecott and Alison Young. Two common issues come to the fore across these scholars' writing: the relationship between serial killers and their media representations, and the importance of the relationship between spectator and serial killer within serial killer cinema. These key ideas will be examined in order to create a contextualising view of the serial killer's place in contemporary cinema and the potential implications of the connection between the spectator and these killers. Examining the intricate link between media portrayals (specifically entertainment media in the form of film) and the creation of serial killers and their subsequent rise to celebrity status may serve to illuminate the way in which these figures are romanticised within cinema and what implications this may have for the spectators of such films.

1.1. **Serial Killers and the Media: An Interdependent Relationship**

Serial killers and their portrayal within media seem to have an interdependent relationship with the serial killer thriving on media attention and the media making money from serial killer coverage. The more stories about serial killers within news media, the bigger the news media outlets' audiences become (Bonn 224). Considering the vast amount of films and books featuring serial killers, the same assertion can certainly be made of entertainment media. The link between media and the serial killer is not limited to news broadcasts as the notion of *media* includes various forms of entertainment media, such as television, books and film. Films have also been fundamental in the creation of celebrity culture and through this it has prepared a platform for the serial killer celebrity to emerge (Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities* 107). Storytelling is central to the way people interact with the world and this is definitely the case with the romanticisation of the serial killer. This is logical: it is through characters that parts of the human psyche may be illuminated. J Hillis Miller posits that the human's ability to tell

stories is an important way in which an orderly world can be collectively built as stories have an important role in the making of a culture and aid in policing that culture (69). It is with fictions that the "meaning of human life" is investigated or perhaps even invented according to Miller (69). Furthermore, Carl Plantinga argues that screen stories have the ability to create "what can be called 'habits of the heart,' or ways of seeing and responding to the world" (*Screen Stories* 70). Stories have the capacity to influence people's behaviour or their attitudes towards others and therefore, storytelling carries a certain responsibility.

Considering the way 'monsters' are represented as likeable and 'normal' in film raises the question about where this places contemporary fiction in terms of the 'policing-function' that Miller refers to? Perhaps these representations also reveal more about contemporary society than one would like to admit. Additionally, it can be argued that cinema has an uncanny ability to create an allegiance and sense of connection between spectator and character in a fairly short space of time. It is certainly conceivable that a television series may do the same. However, in the case of television series time is spent with the characters for days and weeks on end. In cinema, the connection has no choice but to be created within more or less two hours and therein lies the power of cinema. It is precisely this ability that needs investigation, namely how cinema is able to create a deep affective response in the spectator in a short span of time. It can be argued that it is here that the gaze (as interpellating device) and the face (as stirrer of emotion) play a vital role in this cinematic power. Considering the growing prevalence of the serial killer and its links to media, three important points need consideration, namely the role of media in 'creating' serial killers; the blurring lines between fact and fiction when it comes to the depiction of the serial killer; and the rise of the serial killer celebrity. These three elements serve to elucidate the manner in which society and representations of these figures are connected.

1.1.1. *Media as Creator of the Serial Killer*

It may be argued that society, through its various forms of media, is a 'creator' of the serial killer. The role of the news and entertainment media in the construction of the serial killer figure and the effect this has on society is dealt with expansively by Scott Bonn in his book, *Why We Love Serial Killers: The Curious Appeal of the World's Most Savage Murderers* (2014). Bonn contends that the manner in which serial killers are portrayed within news and entertainment media does not reflect the reality of their actions as they are often stylised and

sensationalised (33). Bonn further posits that it is precisely these stylised and sensationalised representations of serial killers that obscure the disturbing reality of serial homicide and instead elevate these figures to the role of "popular culture icon" (33). The consumers of both news and entertainment media are given a certain picture and 'ideal' of what the serial killer is or should be and by buying into this image the reality of these figures' heinous crimes is blurred. In other words, instead of depicting them as brutal murderers, these serial killers are often depicted as mysterious, intelligent and in some cases even charming.

Bonn's argument is certainly valid and these stylised depictions may be found within various forms of media. However, one could argue that even within entertainment media, specifically cinema, the serial killer has undergone a further and more alarming trend – these figures are not necessarily only stylised or exaggerated, but their negative elements are almost completely stripped away. By focusing solely on the redeemable qualities of the serial killer, or by outweighing any negative qualities they may have, a figure is constructed that the spectator can connect to and sympathise with and thereby feelings of guilt are avoided. The result of this is a romanticised killer who is not only admired but even trusted or rooted for, such as the portrayal of Ted Bundy in *Extremely Wicked*.

Adding to Bonn's assertion that media fuels the large prevalence of the serial killer, one can contend that while it is true that these serial killers are painted as larger-than-life characters by the media, there is also a sense of the normalcy in the representation of these figures. It is this normalcy as well as the construction of them as romanticised figures that may be even more central to the problem around serial killer representations and it undoubtedly has an influence on society's understanding of them. This is particularly pertinent given the thin line between fact and fiction, especially in relation to serial murders. Moreover, the romanticised portrayal of the serial killer may be seen as problematic because it results in desensitising the public towards the actions of these killers. Bonn states that “[t]he social construction of celebrity monsters desensitizes the public to the actual horrors endured by the victims of serial killers and their loved ones” (274). The more these figures are painted as charming and revered, the more society seems to get comfortable with their existence.

One might argue that the construction of these figures, whether through news media or fiction, pacifies the public about the horror of serial killers. Even more curiously, the way serial killers are constructed in the news media seems to empower serial killers more than vilify them. Bonn emphasises that “exaggerated journalistic rhetoric may be good for the financial bottom line of the media, but it desensitizes society to the terrible reality of serial murder" (225). In other words, it is clear that the focus is more on selling newspapers or making money than it is

on the brutality of the crime. The way serial killers are constructed is aimed at enticing and not necessarily presenting the atrocities for what they are. This is a vital point related not only to the problematic way these real-world serial killers are figured in the news but also related to the way they are presented in fiction. Here one can argue that this desensitising effect is not only evident in real-life depictions but occurs even more critically so within fiction and especially cinema. Films that deal with serial killers often paint these figures as mysterious, attractive or charming. As the existence of an entire serial killer 'industry' has illustrated, there seems to be great monetary value attached to the glorification of these figures.

1.1.2. *Fiction and Reality in Serial Killer Depictions*

The separation between what is real and what is fiction seems to be obscured in discussions about serial killers. The blurring line between fact and fiction is a central part of Scott Bonn's argument in *Why We Love Serial Killers: The Curious Appeal of the World's Most Savage Murderers* (2014). Bonn states that media has had a hand in turning serial killers into "larger-than-life celebrity monsters" and he contends that these exaggerated portrayals of serial killers blur the line between fact and fiction and is the reason why the public has come to consider Jeffrey Dahmer (real-life serial killer) and Hannibal Lecter (a fictional character from *Silence of the Lambs*) to be interchangeable (14). According to Bonn the distinction between what is real and what is fiction is distorted by news media and the truth about serial murder is obscured when the media turns "killers into stylized and cartoonish super predators" and thereby real criminals are turned into "cartoonish ghouls" (274). In a sense one may then argue that this pacifies the threat and reality of the serial killer and it certainly makes it more difficult to recognise the true criminals from the fantasy created around them.

Recognising that the lines between fact and fiction are often unclear in the case of the serial killer speaks to the interdependent relationship between media depictions and cinema and the influence they both have on creating idolised figures. The media influences cinema's depictions of the serial killer and vice versa, and the more these figures are romanticised in media or in cinema the more this will continue to happen and the more 'normal' it will become. Additionally, Bonn states that his research reveals that people not only "blur the line between real and fictional serial killers" but they also seem to identify with both serial killers and Hollywood's representations of them (280). Cinema does, however, play a more intricate role in romanticising these killers as it could be argued that cinema is seen as a 'safe space' because

cinematic depictions are fictional (even those based on real-life killers). There is a sense that cinema offers a platform for this kind of exploration and therefore it is easier for spectators to find themselves in the shoes of the serial killer because they are not 'real'. The spectator's connection to the serial killer figure is a central issue as it relates to the problematic way in which serial killers are constructed and figured within news and fiction and it also speaks to the potential societal implications that these representations have.

The blurring lines between fact and fiction and the role of media and fictional depictions in the creation of the serial killer is also a strong theme in the work of Marcel Danesi in *The 'Dexter Syndrome': The Serial Killer in Popular Culture* (2016). Forwarding on from Bonn, Danesi explores the intricate link between the creation of serial killers and their representations in media or in fiction. However, it seems as if Danesi takes the interconnected relationship between media and serial killers and the blurring lines between fact and fiction and its real-world implications a step further. Danesi argues that media may have the effect of inviting others to copy and repeat the actions of the depicted killers, resulting in copycat killings. According to Danesi, copycat killings would not exist "without media coverage" (104). Media coverage sensationalises and raises "the serial killer to the status of a mythic individual, larger than life, to be emulated by those who are inclined to be followers" (Danesi 104). Danesi further states that he believes that the moment both serial murder and serial killers "are no longer glorified on screen, on the printed page, and in other media, the allure of this nefarious dark figure will recede" (118). This clearly emphasises the role of the media in creating the exaggerated or so-called mythic figure of the serial killer and these killers' representations may even awaken the desire in some to imitate their behaviour.

More importantly, these representations and their real-world implications are surely not limited to media coverage and news but also infiltrate the realm of fiction in novels and films. Danesi highlights that the serial killer exists in reality as well as in one's imagination where they can be fantasised about (100). Following from this, it is conceivable that there may be a connection between the portrayal of serial killers in fiction and the effects this may have in the real world (here referring to the examples of real-life killers mimicking what they are presented with on screen or in literature). These issues become increasingly complicated when serial killers are not painted as abhorrent but are romanticised into figures that are appealing and in need of sympathy, which is why the romanticised serial killer demands attention.

The potential copying of serial killers' behaviour seen on screen is a critical point as it refers to the way in which literary or cinematic representations have come to influence the world around them in a way that reaches far beyond the page or screen. It also then raises

crucial issues when considering the way the serial killer is romanticised on screen. If such figures are painted as redeemable and admirable it would invariably pave the way to even greater identification with them and would excuse the idea of mimetic behaviour even more. In light of the very real issue of copycat killing and its relation to not only the real world but also to fictions, an examination of these onscreen serial killers is clearly necessary.

The way serial killers are represented on screen not only as redeemable but also in a way that interpellates the spectator into the fictional world is a clear sign of the dangers that come with blurring the line between fact and fiction. It necessarily warrants consideration of the manner in which the serial murder is represented and may in fact even result in imitations. Danesi affirms that the sensationalistic publication of serial murder "becomes embedded in cultural lore and can produce the copycat effect many years later" (102). If serial murder is painted as sensation in media or set up as acts that afford people celebrity and recognition, these may result in others trying to imitate this type of behaviour later on. These representations can clearly have direct implications, whether in the realm of fact or fiction, since it is evident from this discussion that the two cannot necessarily be separated easily. Therefore, the responsibility of portraying these figures in fiction is not one to be taken lightly.

Linked to the thin line between fact and fiction and the notion of copycat killings that may ensue, one can consider the work done by Richard Tithecott. In the chapter "The Monstrous Self" from his book *Of Men and Monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Construction of the Serial Killer* (1997), Tithecott raises the complex and certainly thought-provoking question of what would happen if reality and fiction are confused in a discourse on serial killing and "if we experience/create a seamless entity of fantasy merged with reality, of dreams instantaneously realized"? (123). His answer to this is the suggestion that society may then be in danger of "inadvertently 'dreaming up' real-life killers" (Tithecott 123). In other words, Tithecott seems to warn of the dangers of blurring fiction and the reality of the serial killer's actions. As Bonn mentioned, media's portrayals of these figures do not reflect their true nature at all. Therefore, it may be seen as somewhat dubious that the inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy may lead to "dreaming up" real-world serial killers.

Added to this, the notion that cinema creates a romanticised serial killer strengthens the argument that what is found in fiction may be drawn into the real world – if these figures are not depicted as dark or terrifying but almost hero-esque, what harm could they do? This connects to an additional issue raised by Tithecott concerning the collision of the real and fantasy – which is the question of what would happen to the notion of perversion in such a world (127)? If the notion of what is fact and what is fantasy loses its meaning perhaps so does

the distinction between the self and the other, as well as the civilised and the perverse (Tithecott 127). Not only does the line between reality and fiction get blurred but so does the line between what is right and what is wrong. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to locate the 'enemy' when one is unsure whether what is being seen is real or not or whether the 'enemy' is wearing a mask or not (Tithecott 127). This plays into the problematics involved in the process of cinema romanticising these killers. It is unclear whether they are in fact heroes or deadly killers and therefore the spectator is positioned to form an allegiance with them.

1.1.3. *Serial Killer Celebrity*

There can be no doubt of the continuing strong presence of the serial killer within the public consciousness. This brings us to the third issue to be discussed in relation to the link between media and serial killers: the growing celebrity status of the serial killer. A key scholar in research on serial killer celebrity is David Schmid. In the introduction of his book *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (2005), Schmid argues that not only have serial killers become celebrities but they have also sparked an entire "serial killer industry" fuelled by the increased production of books, movies, websites, magazines, t-shirts and “murderabilia” (1). One might argue that this, in turn, is a key factor in the elevation of serial killers to their celebrity status and results in the air of fame surrounding them. This celebrity status is not only true of these real-life serial killers but is also related to the way serial killers are portrayed in fiction – this can be seen as key to Schmid's argument.

An important element in the creation of a celebrity serial killer is the role played by cinema. Schmid states that film has contributed "to the development of the modern celebrity system, a system unparalleled in both its reach and profitability" and this is one of the key ways the medium has helped to create a platform for serial killer celebrities to emerge (*Natural Born Celebrities* 107). Hollywood cinema, specifically, is characterised by the presence of stars and these stars are fundamental to Hollywood's creation of celebrities. Another way cinema has influenced the creation of a celebrity culture (that then paves the way for serial killer celebrity as well) is through "the complex network of associations between the medium of film and seriality" (Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities* 108). Schmid, while referring to the work done by John Ellis on the role of the star (actor) in cinema, argues that film seems to promise to complete an image or concept that would have otherwise remained incoherent – film creates a platform where spectators get to see more of the stars and that the star image might be

completed in the next movie (*Natural Born Celebrities* 107). This desire to see the stars and to 'get to know them' is central to what drives spectators to the cinema. Furthermore, this can also be linked to the desire to know more about serial killers. People consume serial killer fiction in an attempt to satisfy their curiosity and to get to know what makes these killers tick.

The emergence and subsequent prominence of cinema created a space in which fame and celebrity may both be explored and heightened. The power of cinema's role in creating a sense of fame may also be found in the use of the star persona as well as the way cinema has come to emphasise the recognisable face in film. The star persona in Hollywood cinema is a central part of film as is the way a film uses its cinematographic elements in order to display these stars. Schmid argues that "the establishment of the star as the organizing principle and of the close-up as the defining technique of the burgeoning film industry represents the apex of the idea that fame is a visible, rather than a meritorious, phenomenon" (Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities* 12). Visibility, and not necessarily laudable actions or esteem, is central to fame and its power; and the serial killer, more so than the perpetrator of any other crime, is given abundant visibility. This notion of the visibility of the star, and the importance of the face and the close-up in cinema, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, along with the notion that these faces may in fact elicit affective responses of empathy towards the serial killer on screen.

Cinema's power to create celebrity actors can also be seen in its power to create romanticised serial killers. Serial killers' portrayals are not always what one might expect, and they are not necessarily seen as condemned figures hidden in the shadows but rather as figures who are revered. Furthermore, one could argue that it also highlights the importance and the responsibility of the filmmaker when creating such portrayals. Regarding the serial killer, fact and fiction are too often intertwined and therefore these portrayals cannot and should not be taken lightly. The notion of celebrity, especially the link to the cinematic medium, is also crucial as it has a bearing on the way these onscreen characters are constructed for the spectator.

Ultimately this argument for the existence of serial killer celebrity creates a space in which these figures and specifically their cinematic representations may become romanticised as serial killers are shown as appealing and charming instead of as disturbing killers capable of causing immense harm. To take Schmid's point further, it is argued in Chapter 3 of this study that not only is the serial killer celebrity portrayed on screen, but the use of the attraction to celebrity and celebrities' star personae to do this complicates matters even further. This is no more evident than in the use of the famous actor Zac Efron in *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*. As will be argued, the employment of Zac Efron to portray the infamous and

illustrious Ted Bundy creates an even more problematic serial killer construction and one which highlights and exasperates the celebrity status of such serial killers even further.

The collapsing line between 'good' or 'bad' fame and the simultaneous emphasis on fame as a predominately "visible phenomenon" has been accelerated through media technologies such as photography and film (Schmid, *Natural Born Celebritie*s 12). The blurring line between notoriety and fame is one that can be viewed as extremely problematic and it is here that the notion of the romanticised serial killer may be inserted. It is precisely because of this collapsing boundary that room is created for a romanticised serial killer and perhaps then also how this could be exploited. Schmid further asserts that "technologies of mechanical reproduction such as photography and film not only demonstrate the increasingly visible nature of celebrity, but also guarantee that the aura of celebrity becomes more powerful" (*Natural Born Celebrities* 12). The visibility of celebrities and therewith serial killers populate all forms of media and thus the faces of these celebrities become unavoidable. Celebrity status, especially when garnered by appearances in cinema, clearly has an element of power attached to it and when this power stretches to serial killers, the problems with these killers' representations become all the more evident. Schmid points out that not many theorists have touched on the serial killer's fame and this could perhaps be because fame is largely seen as positive and therefore there is a reluctance to connect it to a serial killer, a figure who seems to belong more to the realm of notoriety or infamy (*Natural Born Celebrities* 8-9). However, it can be noted that fame and notoriety may not necessarily be as distinguishable as was once thought and according to Schmid it is precisely the iconic status attributed to serial killers that serves as evidence that the clear line between fame and notoriety has collapsed (*Natural Born Celebrities* 9). One may argue that it is precisely this collapsing line that creates the space for an admirable and heroic serial killer to be constructed on screen.

The rise and continued prominence of celebrity can be connected to the evolving forms that media takes on as Schmid posits that every new media technology brings with it a shift in the types of fame or the way that fame is disseminated (*Natural Born Celebrities* 12). However, despite the continued advancements of new technologies and new platforms for entertainment, it can still be noted that cinema maintains a key position in the creation and dissemination of fame. Cinema still has a certain sense of power when it comes to the creation and distribution especially of somewhat 'sinister' content. While newer media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok may certainly create a sense of celebrity (even the celebrity of a serial killer), it may be argued that cinema has a somewhat unique stance in the creation of the serial killer celebrity since cinema remains an element separate from its consumers. Ellis argues that films exist "as

a separate entity" (25). Cinema "is the relative privacy and anonymity of a darkened public space in which various kinds of activities can take place" (Ellis 26). In cinema one can watch under the darkness of the movie theatre and live vicariously through what is presented on screen. As far as the consumption of serial killer narratives is concerned, cinema remains a key 'safe space' in which to do that. Certain elements of social media such as Instagram are less anonymous as people are able to track who views their 'stories' and privacy settings may also be adjusted to prevent access. This is not the case in cinema, apart from age restrictions of course. Additionally, cinema creates a space for longer narratives to play out and thus more time is spent 'in close proximity' to the serial killer depicted on screen, paving the way for an empathetic response. Therefore, cinema, along with its stars, have the unique ability to create not only a celebrity out of serial killers but also stir up empathetic responses towards them.

Following from this discussion the intricate relationship between media and the 'creation' of the serial killer is clear and therewith a connection between cinematic portrayals of the serial killers and their celebrity status. Serial killers and their portrayals in media seem to have raised them to the status of a famed celebrity. It is clear from this discussion that these figures have come to occupy a central position in society and the media that fills the world. However, following from this, it may be argued that it is no longer a simple case of stylising these figures to occupy the position of icon (so that their actions are blurred) but perhaps even more problematically, these serial killers are romanticised. By constructing serial killers in cinema in this manner and by turning them into romanticised heroes, any guilt on the part of the spectator is lessened and, therefore, these representations may be indulged in even further. Cinema's romanticisation of the serial killer desensitises the spectator and indeed society as a whole who often turn to fiction for prompts on how to engage with the world.

1.2. **Connecting with the Serial Killer**[3]

Within cinema, the spectator is often interpellated into the onscreen world and a connection is forged between spectator and character. When films feature serial killers, this connection is especially pertinent to the spectator's filmic experience. It is this connection that positions the

[3] This section refers to the notion of identification. Identification has become the common expression for the connection between spectators and characters. However, this concept has been reconsidered by theorists such as Carl Plantinga and Murray Smith in favour of terms such as engagement or allegiance. Here the notion of identification is used in so far as it refers to the connection between the spectator and characters as it is the concept employed by the scholars being discussed. However, the reconsideration of the notion of identification and its subsequent implications are pursued in more detail in Chapter 3.

spectator as complicit in the actions of the serial killer. One could argue that it is precisely because of this that cinema employs certain elements in order to disavow the horrific acts of these killers and thereby assuage any guilt on the part of the spectator. Following from this, one could say that this connection also paves the way for the spectator's empathetic response towards the serial killer. This empathetic response is vital to the way cinema constructs a romanticised serial killer whom spectators find themselves rooting for.

Schmid makes a direct connection between serial killer celebrity and serial killer identification in discussing the prevalence of celebrity culture and such issues of identification (or that one may refer to as connection or allegiance). This is crucial. As Schmid argues, "the existence of celebrity serial killers is indeed partly a result of the way in which consumers 'identify' with these killers in the sense of wanting to be or think like them" (*Natural Born Celebrities* 112). It is clear, therefore, that these two concepts are inherently interdependent and this connection plays a central role in the argument for the seemingly unrelenting celebrity status of serial killers. While Schmid rightly highlights the connection between these two points, the reasons for this celebrity status and the underlying reasons why spectators identify with this figure requires further investigation. It may be argued that it is here where the issue of romanticisation becomes all the more pertinent as spectators may end up rooting for these serial killers precisely because they have been romanticised on screen – their representation in cinema has taken on the role of a hero to some degree. If the serial killer is positioned as appealing and redeemable, it is easier for the spectator to align with this figure.

For Schmid identification in serial killer films lies with the serial killer and not with the victim, as might be expected (and as theorists such as Carol Clover and Steven Shaviro have suggested) (*Natural Born Celebrities* 111). Schmid contends that "identification with the victim is more likely to be a feature of slasher movies than serial killer movies" (*Natural Born Celebrities* 111). In other words, for Schmid identification lies with the victim only in films that do not actually feature the serial killer in a more developed role. However, as soon as the serial killer becomes a recognised character in a film, identification shifts to the serial killer and the serial killer becomes the one the spectator connects with. This underlines the way spectators connect to serial killer films and it speaks to the way they get immersed into the world of the serial killer and it often influences whom they end up rooting for.

The issue of identification is central to understanding the complexities involved in the continued romanticisation of the serial killer. Put simply, because of this identification the spectator is drawn into the serial killer's world and perhaps this is why it might be so easy to ignore their transgressions. It could be argued that it is precisely because these figures are

constructed as appealing and seductive that spectators may identify with them. Furthering on from this, if one considers the affective responses that a film may elicit one might speculate that this can generate something even greater than simple identification in the spectator and result in compassion and empathy for this romanticised serial killer and their actions underpinned by a sense of allegiance between spectator and character. The manner in which the spectator is drawn into the filmic world and positioned to identify with the serial killer will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 and the affective responses elicited in the spectator will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The issue of spectator-serial killer identification seems to generate an element of conflict within the spectator. David Schmid, in his essay entitled "The Devil You Know: *Dexter* and the 'Goodness' of American Serial Killing" (2010), explores the question that has baffled "serial killer-related popular culture", namely, how to achieve spectator identification with a serial killer in an unconflicted way ("Devil" 132)? It may be argued that the desire to create an unconflicted identification with the serial killer in cinema is precisely where the notion of the romanticised serial killer enters the argument. By creating a connection between serial killer and spectator and therewith the potential for an empathetic response on the part of the spectator, any form of guilt or complicity is mitigated. Furthermore, Schmid argues that the key to "most successful forms of serial killer-related popular culture" lies in the ability of the spectator to disavow the actions of the serial killer ("Devil" 135). Thomas M. Leitch (as referred to by Schmid) argues that disavowing violence is an "increasingly influential feature of American film, especially as those films have become more and more violent" (“Devil” 135). Leitch summarises the techniques of disavowal as used in American cinema in the following way: "Violence can be rendered acceptable to a sensitive audience by being ascribed to an evil Other, or by being justified in rational terms, or by being limited in its effects, or by being stylized through narrative conventions or rituals that deny its consequences, or by being rendered pleasurable through appeals to aestheticism or masochism or eroticism" (qtd. in Schmid, “Devil” 136). These techniques are employed in cinema in order for the spectator to safely reject any sense of guilt about the involvement of the spectator in the serial killer's actions.

Schmid furthers on from Leitch's argument by contending that disavowal, in varying degrees, is an essential feature of all forms of popular culture that deal with serial killers (“Devil” 135). While Leitch and Schmid both speak about the way disavowal takes place within more violent films, the argument could be made that this does not happen exclusively in overtly violent films. The notion of disavowal may also manifest in films devoid of violence – perhaps even more explicitly so. Perhaps it is exactly the *absence* of violence that contributes

to the spectator's guilt being appeased. By taking this issue even further, the argument can be made that by creating a scenario in which the spectator comes to empathise with the serial killer that a romanticised serial killer is constructed and therefore the spectator is able to disavow the horrific acts this figure perpetrates, especially if a film does not even reveal them.

The relationship forged between spectator and onscreen serial killers may have a more pertinent role than merely connecting with a character and buying into the filmic universe. In addition to the focus on the role of the media in constructing the serial killer and the impact it may have on society, Bonn makes a key, albeit slightly controversial, argument that serial killers serve a specific function in society, namely that "the public can learn something about itself and the dark side of the human condition" from serial killers' portrayal on screen on screen (263). Bonn explores this further by suggesting that serial killers are needed in society because they act as "emotional lightning rods" protecting society from its "own violent tendencies" (279). Additionally, Bonn contends that "[t]he socially constructed serial killer identity gives society an outlet to experience the darker side of the human condition that otherwise it cannot or will not consider" (279). Taking Bonn's points into consideration, one might say that the serial killer creates a figure through which the public can live out their dark fantasies by proxy. Such films create a channel through which they can engage with these dark ideas within a controlled space. Bonn continues this line of thought by stating that the figure of the serial killer and its representation provide an outlet "for the public's pent-up anger and frustration as people observe the carnage perpetrated by the serial killer and participate vicariously in his crimes" (280). From this it is clear that the figure of the serial killer offers somewhat of an escape route for society to indulge its own fantasies of violence and terror. This can be seen as problematic when considering the blurring line between fact and fiction as the notion of living vicariously through a serial killer certainly treads on murky water and the danger exists for the line that separates fact and fiction to be obliterated entirely.

Through devices such as the cinematic gaze and the framing of characters, cinema creates a space where spectators can identify with and step into the shoes of the serial killer. One has to then wonder whether this is still such a safe lightning rod as Bonn suggests (279). Perhaps more responsibility needs to be taken with the representation of these figures. It is clear that these representations of serial killers relate to issues prevalent in society and therefore it is perhaps precisely because of these challenging and intricate ties between society and the serial killer that popular fictional depictions of these figures (such as can be found in cinema) necessitate interrogation. The romanticised serial killer needs even more urgent considerations as a greater danger may lie in the idea that spectators (and by extension society) identify with

a romanticised serial killer whose actions are condoned, thereby removing any sense of guilt this identification may provoke. Showing serial killers as forgivable, redeemable figures may very well appease any lingering feelings of guilt over society's fascination with them. The way these killers are constructed in media may have a great influence on the way the public engages, understands and identifies with both real life serial killers and their fictional counterparts.

A scholar who considers the key issue of identification in serial killer cinema, as well as the power of a film's cinematic elements to affect this connection, is Alison Young. Young's book, *The Screen of the Crime: Judging the Affect of Cinematic Violence* (2009), contains two key chapters related to crime cinema and serial killer cinema: "The crime-image" and "The serial killer's accomplice". A key argument in these chapters is the involvement of the spectator in the serial killer's onscreen world. Young makes two key points to highlight this, namely that the spectator of a serial killer film may be interpellated into the serial killer's onscreen world (103); and the importance of considering the cinematic elements of film (such as framing, sound and colour) in analysis and the role that the camera plays in cinema and how this connects to the gaze and spectator identification (2, 7).

Young argues that the spectator of a serial killer film may be interpellated through the camera and become an accomplice of the serial killer. According to Young, the "spectator is … incorporated into the film as a subject who shares, even momentarily, the gaze of the killer, and who looks at images of the dead" (103). Young is suggesting provocatively that the spectator of a film, through the camera and the gaze, actually becomes complicit in the acts of the murderer as they identify with the serial killer. The gaze manages to place the spectator into the filmic world and there they may find themselves aligning with figures such as the serial killer. While it may indeed be true that the spectator is interpellated into the onscreen world, this does not, however, necessarily happen solely through the camera. The way in which the gaze operates within cinema opens up various possibilities for the spectator's interpellation into the onscreen world and for the connection between character and spectator to be forged. The notion of the gaze and the way the spectator is interpellated into the filmic world and the implications this may have in serial killer cinema, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

This complicity of the spectator in the actions of the serial killer is crucial because in this way the spectator is no longer a passive bystander watching a film, but rather an active participant who is directly involved in the serial killer's actions and decision-making processes. This active involvement of the spectator in serial killer cinema is undoubtedly problematic and even more so if the serial killer is constructed as one that invites an empathetic response. The notion of empathising with the serial killer is central to the idea of the romanticised serial killer

as these figures are not always portrayed as violent and ruthless but rather as figures that elicit sympathy from spectators. Empathetic responses could make the relationship between the spectator and the serial killer even more problematic as it is easier to connect with these figures when they are not shown as 'monsters'. This implies that it could lead to normalising and romanticising the behaviour of serial killers and, in doing so, create figures to be excused and pardoned. This portrayal of the figure may eliminate any guilt or involvement spectators feel as they are not confronted with the brutal reality of what these killers have done but are shown as redeemable and charismatic figures instead.

The connection between serial killer and spectator may be revealed even further by considering the cinematic nature of the film, as Young argues that this may illuminate the way in which film affects spectators (2). Young emphasises "the *cinematic* nature of cinema and its effects both on our interpretation of each cinematic representation and on the ways in which the spectator engages with this particular kind of image" (2 emphasis in original). In other words, Young argues that the way the cinematic medium uses its elements (such as framing, image and colour) affects the reading of onscreen representations and the way spectators engage with these images. This is a key point for any cinematic investigation as it is important to consider the way the cinematic elements work together to convey meaning and message. Moreover, the cinematic elements also relate to the affective response a spectator may have when watching a film. According to Young it is through the cinematographic "dimension that cinema is able to elaborate the affective relation between spectator and crime-image which is crucial for the spectator’s incorporation into the scene of violence and identification in and through the crime-image" (7). If one considers this further, Young is suggesting, quite persuasively, that the cinematic medium itself influences the affective response in the spectator and it is this response that ties them to the images seen on screen. A key cinematic element that needs to be highlighted here is the framing and shot sizes used in film. The use of close-ups may be seen as a defining factor in the way spectators connect to characters on screen. As Chapter 3 of this thesis will argue, the close-up plays a key role in romanticising the serial killer and creating a bond between spectator and killer.

Furthermore, while Young emphasises the link between violence and the spectator's affective response, one could argue that this response does not have to be limited to scenes of violence. One could say that it is also present in scenes that may elicit empathy or compassion and that these very cinematic elements work together to create a romanticised serial killer and generate an affective response in the spectator. Therefore, using these tools, as Young points out, may give greater insight into representations on screen and spectators’ response to what

they see. The highlighted chapters from Young's book underline the urgency of focusing on the medium of film to examine representations of the serial killer in contemporary art. An analysis of cinematic constructions of the serial killer points to the essential discussion of the connection between spectators and characters and the role a romanticised serial killer plays in the complexities of this connection with the serial killer figure. Moreover, this might even lead to a necessary consideration of the spectator as the serial killer's accomplice, as this relates directly to notions of the gaze and the role it plays in the construction of the serial killer on screen and the spectator's empathetic response towards this figure.

From this discussion on the role of identification with serial killer cinema, it is clear that the connection between spectator and serial killer plays a key role in the experience of these films. This identification may, however, be seen as somewhat problematic when it takes the shape of a vicarious experience through the actions of a serial killer and especially if the serial killer is set up in a way that removes any sense of guilt for the complicity experienced by the spectator. It is through the gaze that the spectator is interpellated into the filmic universe and poised to experience a connection with the serial killer on screen. This connection paves the way for an empathetic response towards a spectator which may result in the romanticisation of this figure. It may also be argued that it is central to the way serial killer cinema is able to assuage guilt and effect a sense of disavowal of these killers' abhorrent actions.

1.3. **Chapter Conclusion**

Media and cinema specifically have a direct hand in the creation of the serial killer and furthering the prominence of the serial killers' celebrity – especially given the role played by Hollywood stars in the representation of these figures. In addition, cinema creates a space where the spectator can step into the shoes of these killers and experience a sense of identification and connection. Spectators desire to understand the serial killer and because of this the entire 'serial killer industry' is growing and cinema offers spectators some insights into the workings of these killers' minds. However, perhaps more care should be taken in the fictional constructions of these figures. The prevalence of copycat killing speaks directly to the responsibility that lies in the representations of these figures. The representations of serial killers have veered into the domain of romanticised serial killers that may have the effect of not only normalising serial murder but at the very least desensitising spectators to it.

Chapter 2: Serial Killers and the Cinematic Gaze

The gaze is central to any filmic experience and it plays an essential role in the construction of a romanticised serial killer within Hollywood cinema. This chapter serves to discuss the important elements of the gaze and the look as they pertain to the construction of and connection to these serial killer figures. The chapter will start by contextualising the notion of the gaze after which three key issues regarding the gaze and how they may facilitate in creating a romanticised serial killer on screen will be explored, namely the role of the gaze in constructing the filmic universe; the gaze as a means of drawing (or in certain instances interpellating) the spectator into the filmic image; and the link between the gaze and power.

2.1. **Contextualising the Gaze**

In order to fully appreciate the working of the gaze, it may be useful to start by contextualising this concept and considering the way in which the understanding of the gaze has changed and evolved over the past decades. The work done by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan lies at the core of psychoanalytic film theory and its conception of the gaze. Lacan's influence on film theory is far reaching and could perhaps even be regarded as having the most profound impact on psychoanalytic film theory, which is why this branch of film theory is often referred to as Lacanian film theory. Over the past couple of decades this theory has, however, undergone certain changes specifically in how the gaze is understood and functions within cinema. The discussion will briefly look at the history of the gaze from the earlier Lacanian film theorists (such as Jean-Louis Baudry, and Christian Metz) in contrast to the arguments of theorists such as Todd McGowan and Joan Copjec who posit that the gaze has largely been misunderstood by the earlier Lacanian film theorists. These so-called new Lacanian film theorists aim to rectify this misunderstanding in their reconsideration of Lacan's work. Acknowledging their contrasting views is essential in recognising the potential of the gaze in cinema as well as identifying the different roles the gaze may play in connecting the spectator to the filmic universe and in revealing dynamics and relationships within that world.

2.1.1. *Imaginary, Symbolic and Real*

Before considering the crucial changes the notion of the gaze has undergone, some Lacanian terms need clarification, specifically as they relate to the gaze. Lacan classifies the experience of the subject by using three categories, namely the imaginary, the symbolic and the real (McGowan, *Psychoanalytic* 29). These categories play a key role when recognising the gaze and its place in cinema as well as the way in which the gaze may affect spectators' engagement with the onscreen world. This is because these categories deal with the way subjects experience the world around them and this has become extended to the way cinematic subjects experience and interact with the film that unfolds on screen.

The first category is the *imaginary* order. Lacan conceived the idea of the imaginary order as one that creates "an illusion of completeness in both ourselves and in what we perceive" and in order to achieve this, the imaginary tricks the subject into not seeing that which is missing – not only in the person, but also in the world around them (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 2-3). The imaginary order creates a sense of wholeness and dupes one into believing that the symbolic order – the second category – has no cracks (these cracks and flaws are what the real exposes) and therefore this sense of wholeness is illusory (McGowan, *Psychoanalytic* 39-41). The imaginary order aims to create a sense of completeness by hiding the gaps that may lie underneath as there will always be gaps in the self and the world. This is central to understanding the way the conception of the gaze has changed within film theory. Initially it was thought that the gaze belonged to the order of the imaginary – showing the spectator a sense of unification in the self and creating a false sense of completeness. However, it later came to be understood as belonging to the realm of another Lacanian category, that of the real, showing the shortcomings in the spectators and exposing to them that which they desire.

The second category that Lacan sets out as part of the subject is the *symbolic* order. The symbolic order may be described as the frame the world around us is built on. As McGowan argues, the symbolic order is the order of language, but not merely language, it is "the structure that informs and gives a form to the reality that we experience" (*Psychoanalytic* 31). Furthermore, the symbolic order helps to create meaning in the world and helps to shape one's identity (*Psychoanalytic* 31). Although the symbolic order shapes the world and gives the background necessary for interactions, there are always gaps that language is unable to signify and it is in these gaps that the order of the real can be found (*Psychoanalytic* 31-34).

This brings us to the third category, that of the *real*. The Lacanian real reveals the "incompleteness of the symbolic order" and this is the point at which signification breaks down

revealing a gap in the social structure (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 3). The order of the real is that which the subject cannot comprehend or perceive and that cannot be represented within the symbolic order (as it refers to the instance where the symbolic order breaks down) but the real still inflicts "its traces on the subject" (Pisters 19). Slavoj Žižek conceives of this trace of the real as the *objet petit a*, a key concept in the work of Lacan that denotes the object cause of desire (Pisters 183). Žižek posits that the *objet petit a* "is not what we desire, what we are after, but, rather, that which sets our desire in motion" (*Plague* 53). Desire, as has already been stated, plays a fundamental role in cinema and the gaze, as the *object petit a* of the scopic field, is what triggers desire (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 6). The notion of the *objet petit a*, and its link to the gaze and desire in cinema, will be discussed in more detail later. When these gaps in the symbolic order are exposed, the vulnerability of ideologies are revealed and therefore affirming "the real is to affirm that the work of ideology never comes off without a hitch" (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 3). The real exposes the flaws in ideology and consequently opens up a space where ideology may be questioned and perhaps even destabilised. It is precisely through this encounter with the real that opportunity is created for film to subvert ideology and create a space for the spectator to question ideological structures. However, it should be noted that not all films aim to question or subvert ideology and especially film in the classical Hollywood tradition still uphold strong underlying ideological structures. It is the order of the real that new Lacanian film theorists emphasise whereas traditional Lacanian film theory places the emphasis on the imaginary and the symbolic. As will become clear during the following discussion, this is a crucial difference and it opens up a new way of considering the role of the gaze in the spectator's experience of a film.

2.1.2. *Traditional Lacanian Film Theory*

Following on from the discussion of the three categories that classify the experience of the subject, attention needs to be given to the shift in how the gaze was understood over the past few decades. This shift goes hand in hand with the categories as they have been discussed above and therefore creates a change in the way in which the gaze may be experienced within cinema. The modes of thinking about the gaze may be divided into two categories: early Lacanian film theory and the so-called new Lacanian film theory, both of which rely on the work of Jacques Lacan but engage with Lacan in vastly different ways.

The early psychoanalytic film theorists of the 1970s relied heavily on Lacan's essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949) (often referred to simply as the mirror stage essay). In this essay Lacan argues that it is during the mirror stage that children attain their "first sense of self-identity" when they look in a mirror and relate what they see to their own bodies (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 1-2). Children see themselves in the mirror and in this moment may experience a sense of mastery over their own body; this mastery is, however, illusory (McGowan, *"*Looking*"* 28). This connects to the way a spectator may have a moment of recognition (or misrecognition) of the self when watching a film. The spectator assumes the child's position as the child looks into the mirror and, similar to the child, these spectators derive "a sense of mastery based on the position" they occupy in relation to what unfolds on screen (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 2).

Early Lacanian film theorists consider the mirror stage as corresponding "to the relationship between film spectators" and the filmic image experienced on screen because the way the subject comes to identify themselves as an 'I' serves to illuminate the way film spectators may identify with the images they see on screen (Homer 2, 27). They see a clear link between the formation of the human subject and the formation of the cinematic subject. The notion of identification often plays an important role in the works of the earlier Lacanian film theorists as does the element of mastery the spectator is said to possess. However, this sense of mastery in cinema is false, much like that of the child, as there is an imaginary deception that creates a sense in spectators that they are in control of what they see when in reality, according to the early Lacanian theorists, this deception blinds them to the ideological structures underlying the film (McGowan, *"*Looking*"* 29). In this instance, the gaze is a function of the imaginary, which creates a false sense of wholeness. Conceiving of the gaze in terms of the mirror stage creates the opportunity for spectators to identify and align with the onscreen world and this affords them a false sense of control over the onscreen world.

One of the first key theorists to employ Lacan's mirror stage in his work was Jean-Louis Baudry in his essay "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (1974). Here Baudry argues that the meaning of cinema may not be found in the story or content but rather in the "set-up of cinematic spectatorship" (Homer 27). Baudry posits that "the spectator identifies less with what is represented" (the content of the film), than it does with that which stages the film (the cinematic apparatus– the camera) (45). It is clear that, for Baudry, the medium itself (the camera and the construction of the film) is fundamental to the way meaning is created in cinema and the way spectators may identify with what is seen on screen. According to Baudry the cinematic elements of the projector, the darkened auditorium and the screen

reconstruct the necessary conditions that may resemble the "mirror stage" as Lacan conceived of it (45). By creating a specific space and atmosphere it is almost as if film can take the place of the mirror – the spectators see themselves in this screen and identify themselves in what they see, though this identification may still be understood as an illusory identification. Baudry sees the cinematic image as one that acts out an imaginary deception that blinds the spectator to the underlying symbolic structure (ideology) of the film (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 3). It is by conceiving of the gaze as a function of the imaginary that it becomes clear how it may mask the underlying symbolic structures at play in cinema. It is precisely this emphasis on cinema's potential as ideological apparatus that early Lacanian film theory has been critiqued for.

Christian Metz, another main early Lacanian film theorist, stands in agreement with Baudry about the fundamental idea that the spectator's identification may be linked to the camera and not only to what is seen on screen, however, Metz's view of identification differs fundamentally from Lacan's mirror stage (Homer 29). In Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage, when the child gazes at the mirror the child sees themself reflected back, but, according to Metz, this is not the case in cinema where the spectator is absent from the screen (48). Metz argues that spectators do not find themselves staring back but instead are there to perceive the character as the spectator is "*all-perceiving*" (48, emphasis in original). It could be said that spectators seem removed from what is experienced on screen. If they remain only in the position of the perceiver then there is a barrier between the spectator and what unfolds on screen. According to McGowan, by being positioned as perceiver and absent as perceived, the spectator is given a sense of mastery over the filmic experience and in this way "the filmic experience provides a wholly imaginary pleasure, repeating the experience that Lacan sees occurring in the mirror stage" ("Looking" 28). There is no sense of engagement as the spectator remains at a safe distance merely watching what unfolds on screen with a sense of power over what is being viewed. Being placed on the outside looking in reinforces the false sense of mastery and power created through an understanding of the gaze as imaginary. For these early theorists cinema could create the space in which the imaginary hides the shortcomings of the world around us. In this way cinema could be used to perpetuate a certain ideology.

To conclude, the key argument in early Lacanian film theory is clearly that film takes up the position of an enforcer of ideology that submits underlying messages to the unsuspecting spectator. While this may be true, and countless films certainly seem to enforce the dominant ideologies of their time, this view also seems to miss the transformative power film may have in questioning hegemonic structures. It is precisely film's transformative power that the new Lacanian theorists focus on.

2.1.3. *Critique of Traditional Lacanian Film Theory Moving to a New Lacanian Film Theory*

There are four main areas in the shift from the traditional Lacanian film theory to the so-called new Lacanian film theory that need to be examined, namely the shift from the imaginary to the real; the position of the spectator; the shift to a more interpretative understanding of film; and the role of the *objet petit a*.

The shift in considering the gaze as belonging to the category of the real rather than placing it within the category of the imaginary is a central element in the critique of Lacanian film theory. The early Lacanian film theorists (such as Metz and Baudry) conceived of Lacan's gaze only in terms of the imaginary and the symbolic and did not account for the third order: the real (Pisters 18). By not considering the category of the real, the full extent of Lacan's work was not taken into account by early Lacanian film theorists and as Todd McGowan argues, the earlier Lacanian film theorists were not Lacanian enough and therein lies their failure ("Looking" 28). They were not concerned with the category of the real as Lacan conceived of it in his later work and this can be seen as a pivotal change to a revised Lacanian film theory. Understanding the gaze in terms of the real changes the way the gaze is seen to operate within cinema. The real order is the order that may expose flaws in symbolic structures that surround us and therefore a shift to the order of the real may also create a shift in cinema's power.

For the advocates of new Lacanian film theory, the category of the real deserves more attention when examining the gaze in cinema. Joan Copjec, perhaps one of the most underrated contributors to new Lacanian film theory, reconsiders Lacan's later work in which he revised the mirror phase essay and emphasises the gaze as belonging to the order of the real in her essay "The Orthopsychic Subject" (1989). Copjec's work introduced the "category of the real into psychoanalytic film theory" which had up to then been focused solely on the order of the imaginary and the symbolic (McGowan, *Psychoanalytic* 64). This shifts the way the gaze is seen to function in cinema and this change has sparked a resurgence of psychoanalytic film theory with perhaps a better grasp of Lacan's work. Conceiving of the gaze in terms of the real opens up the ways film may become critical of dominant narratives. Furthermore, it changes the way spectators connect to what is seen on screen and by viewing the gaze as positioned within the real, it creates an opportunity to examine film not only in terms of mastery and power but also in relation to notions of desire and the role that a lack of mastery may play.

Added to the misappropriation of Lacan's theory and the emphasis on the reception of the film, the position of the spectator in relation to the film has also undergone a shift from earlier film theory to emerging Lacanian film theory. In contrast to the idea of the spectator as

an all-perceiving outside force in cinema (as discussed by Metz), the gaze may be understood in a different manner when Lacan's own view as developed later in his work, is taken into account. The gaze is not simply the spectator's external view of a film; instead, film creates a space (through its use of the gaze) in which spectators can insert themselves in the onscreen world (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 8). The spectator is, therefore, not only an all perceiving outside entity but is immersed within the filmic world. Furthermore, by creating a space in which the spectator is part of the onscreen world, their mastery and control may be seen to disappear and the issues of power (and who may or may not be the holder thereof) also seem to shift.

This revised conceptualisation of the spectator, from an outside perceiver to one drawn into the world of the film, can be linked to the idea that the gaze may no longer be understood simply as a subjective gaze but rather as an objective gaze. In Jacques Lacan's discussion of the gaze he recounts a story from his youth when he went out on a boat with some fishermen and spotted a sardine can floating on the water (*Four* 95). A companion on the boat stated that the sardine can cannot see him, but Lacan mused that the sardine can was in fact still *looking* at him (*Four* 95). It is through the reflection of the light that the sardine can returned his gaze (*Four* 95). It is clear that Lacan, in his later work, came "to conceive of the gaze as something that the subject (or spectator) encounters in the object (or the film itself)" and therefore the gaze can be seen not as subjective but rather as an objective gaze (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 5). The gaze is found in the moment that the look (of the subject) is returned just as the sardine can in Lacan's story – thereby resulting in an objective gaze. Seeing the gaze not as a subjective gaze but as an objective gaze, completely changes the way it functions or is seen to function within cinema. If one considers the gaze as objective, it removes the notion that the spectator holds all the power over what is being seen and changes the power dynamic between viewer and viewed. The power of the gaze seems to shift and the mirror stage is perhaps not the authoritative element in psychoanalytic film theory it once may have been.

The spectator's role is not the only one that has undergone alteration. A central shift, which affects how film theorists work with film, is found in the thought that early Lacanian film theorists placed an emphasis on the reception of a film rather than on the filmic text itself. In this way this earlier film theory was not interpretive and a move back towards interpretation is required for the new Lacanian film theory to return to the turf of psychoanalysis (McGowan & Kunkle xix-xxii). The latter point is crucial in any study of film, which, under the new Lacanian film theory, opens up the possibilities of interpretation to filmic texts that were largely restricted by the earlier film theory. Acknowledging the role of interpretation in understanding the true essence of a film opens up vast possibilities for the film theorist when

it comes to uncovering certain truths that may lie within a film. Hilary Neroni emphasises that the problem with the early Lacanian film theorists is that they were too prescriptive and that they were not investigative (211). The former may be seen as constraining while the latter opens up the possibilities of interpretation and the possibility for the gaze and the look both to be used and manifested in different ways (Neroni 211). Recognising the difference between the look and the gaze and the different ways they operate may pave the way towards a more in-depth interpretation of their respective roles in cinema. This may also reveal a lot about the underlying structures of the film and the way these are presented or revealed to the spectator.

The look and the gaze are two vastly different concepts though they are both in some way or another employed in film and they both play a significant role in the construction of the romanticised serial killer. Lacan wrote in French and therefore he used only *le regard* in order to denote both the look and the gaze; however, advocates of the new Lacanian film theory such as Copjec and McGowan argue for a clear distinction to be made between these two concepts as the look may be described as the subjective act of seeing whereas the gaze is the *objet petit a* in the visual field that the look cannot see (McGowan, *Psychoanalytic 64*). The look could therefore perhaps more easily be equated with the look of power as it is the subjective look at the object that creates the sense of mastery over what is being seen. This thought is also more in line with the traditional Lacanian film theorists' original conception of the gaze as belonging to the category of the imaginary as they conceived of the gaze as a subjective gaze that blinded spectators to ideological structures that were being inscribed on them (McGowan, "Looking" 28). For Lacan "the gaze belongs to the object" whereas the look belongs to the subject and despite the fact that the spectator may think that they are in control of the look and therefore the object too, feelings of "voyeuristic and scopophilic power" are weakened because the real, "transcends and breaks the meaning and significance that emerge in the symbolic order" (Elsaesser & Hagener 103). In other words, the real collapses the frame the world is built around and reveals its cracks and consequently the idea that the spectator has power over what is being seen on the screen is broken down as well. This can only truly be understood by distinguishing between the look and the gaze and it is through recognising this difference that the true power of the gaze in cinema can be explored. Comprehending the difference between the two also illuminates the notions of power that are often (perhaps incorrectly) attributed to the gaze. Perhaps power should rather be attributed to the holder of the look. A clear understanding of these polarised views may serve as the foundation to comprehending the objective gaze and the subjective look as well as the way they could potentially coexist within cinema.

Finally, the last element of the shift between early Lacanian film theory and new Lacanian film theory to be explored may be found in the role of the *objet petit a* and its connection to the gaze. The relationship between the *objet petit a* and the gaze forces a reconsideration of the link between mastery and desire. The traditional Lacanian film theorists see the desire for mastery as the primary desire that governs human behaviour (McGowan, "Looking" 30). This thought has been taken up in film studies as a way of relating the gaze, and the holder thereof, to power. Now that the difference between the subjective look and the objective gaze has been explored, one could rather argue that the notion of mastery lies with the subjective look and not with the objective gaze. The gaze should rather be conceived of in terms of the *objet petit a*. Acknowledging the shift from the subjective to the objective gaze is critical because, "as an object, the gaze acts to trigger our desire visually, and as such it is what Lacan calls an *objet petit a* or object-cause of desire" (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 5-6). In cinema the object cause of desire (*objet petit a*) manifests as the gaze. From this it is clear that as a spectator watches a film, the gaze triggers their desire (the *objet petit a* being that force that causes/triggers desire). This element of desire is vital to cinema and how spectators interact with the onscreen world.

Moreover, desire is always connected to something that the subject does not have (Homer 87). Therefore, the *objet petit a*, which is the object cause of desire, is related to something that is missing, something that drives the subject's search to reach fulfilment. However, this sense of fulfilment is something the subject will never attain because as soon as the object cause of desire (goal) is achieved, there will be something else that the subject desires and this then again creates a gap (Homer 87). In cinema it is through the gaze that spectators' lack is revealed to them (and therefore the gaze acts to trigger their desire). Filmmakers craft their images in such a way as to peak the desire of the spectators. This is often done by obscuring certain elements from the spectator and through the film's employment of the objective gaze, or in the way the subjective look is directed.

From this overview, there are evidently polarizing positions regarding the gaze: early Lacanian film theory considers the gaze as subjective and conflated with mastery and power, while newer approaches to psychoanalytic film theory position the gaze as objective. One could perhaps conceive of the idea, then, that the gaze need not be wholly subjective or wholly objective. Perhaps these two could coexist within cinema – as the look and the gaze. There are surely instances when films employ the look as a holder of power. One can also argue that many films have been produced with the ideas of traditional Lacanian film theorists in mind: that the holder of the look is the holder of power. There are, however, undoubtedly instances

in which the spectator is drawn in and looked at and therefore becomes the object and not the subject. What does emerge from this conception of the gaze and how it has come to be understood is the power it seems to place back in the hands of cinema. Film has the power to subvert ideology and question dominant structures. Moreover, there is a greater understanding for the role of desire in cinema – it is not necessarily the desire for control or mastery but the desire for that which the subject lacks, which then in turn may never be satisfied.

2.2. **The Gaze as Creator**

Now that the notion of the gaze and the tension between the early Lacanian film theorists and the so-called new Lacanian film theorists have been explored, attention needs to be given to the way the gaze (or in certain instances the look) operates within film. It may be argued that both the look and the gaze play a role in the creation or construction of the filmic universe. There are two key elements that require attention in this regard, namely the direction of the spectator's look; and the way the gaze could be seen to manifest within film through fantasy.

The first element to be discussed is the role of the look in constructing the filmic universe for the spectator. The look places the holder in the position of the subject looking at an object and this is often accompanied by a sense of power over what is being viewed. However, the feeling of control that a spectator may have in the moment of the subjective look is illusory. It may be argued that there is no real control for the spectator when it comes to cinema as they are merely shown what the film has chosen to reveal to them. The way the characters are constructed and even the way connections are established between characters and spectators may all boil down to the way in which the look constructs the onscreen world. This is either done through what the film shows the spectator or by what it omits.

The look of the spectator is directed in a certain way because of the manner in which it has been employed by the filmmaker. Therefore, the way the narrative is revealed to the spectator or the way the characters are shown largely play a role in the spectator's experience of a film. Susan Speidel argues that a spectator's response to a film is produced as a result of the way the plot is manipulated (82). This is affirmed by Alison Young's argument that the cinematic elements employed in a film work together to affect the spectators' reading of filmic representations (2). This is central in the construction of the romanticised serial killer, as it is in the way the spectator's look is directed that this figure becomes one the spectator can connect

to and feel an allegiance with. For instance, it may be argued that *Extremely Wicked* encourages a look at Ted Bundy that frames him as an innocent romantic hero. In the film, the spectator's look is directed towards moments that show him as a character deserving of empathy. Ted is constructed as a character who loves and not as one who destroys. In *Extremely Wicked*, it is evident that these cinematic elements work together to create a romantic hero and furthermore, the film seems to resemble a film belonging to the romance genre and not one that deals with a vicious killer. In addition, the fact that the film chooses to obscure Ted's murderous actions helps strengthen a possible allegiance with Ted. The way the film constructs a romance and directs the look of the spectator towards Ted, the romantic hero, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The second element to be examined here is the way the gaze is used in fantasy scenarios in cinema and the role this may play in constructing the filmic image. The role the gaze plays within cinema may be dictated by the way it is used within a film. McGowan argues that some films seek to obscure the gaze, others sustain it, and some try to domesticate the trauma associated with the gaze (*Real Gaze* 17-25). A key way in which a film may position its relationship to the gaze is by making the gaze visible through fantasy (which implies an illusory presence of the gaze) (*Real Gaze* 25). This is not the fantasy of fairies and elves, but rather the fantasy of psychoanalysis, which is the imaginary scenario that aims to cover the holes in ideology – it distorts the social reality of the subject and it does so by domesticating the gaze (*Real Gaze* 23-24). This social reality that one constructs through fantasy is done as an answer to "the intractability of the real" (Homer 70). In other words, films may use fantasy to domesticate the gaze and try and cover up the gaps in the symbolic order that keep the characters' world in place and so doing these films then also avoid experiencing the trauma of the real gaze. This is central to the way serial killer cinema is able to connect with spectators and create a romanticised killer. Using the notions of fantasy to cover up the reality of what serial killers do and their reasons for doing so may firmly position a spectator on the side of the serial killer. Fantasmatic scenarios may be sketched where the focus is on the serial killer's charm and intelligence, as is seen in *The Silence of the Lambs*, while merely skimming over their capacity to brutally kill people. Employing these fantasmatic scenarios in serial killer films may even create a space where it becomes increasingly easy for spectators to disavow the horrific deeds of these killers.

Furthermore, the domesticated gaze occurs when instead of presenting the gaze as an absence, the film presents the "fantasy of the presence of the object of desire" (*Real Gaze* 81). Films use fantasy in order to create the illusory idea that the object of desire is present and

achievable. However, desire is connected to that which is unseen, and this is how it compels the spectator's look (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 6). Desire within cinema usually concerns that which the spectator does not or cannot see. In other words, the spectator's desire is triggered by that which the narrative of a film does not reveal and it is by producing gaps within the narrative of a film that a spectator's desire may be stimulated (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 69-72). The spectator's look may be purposefully misdirected or certain elements in a frame may be obscured and these moments are critical in film as it is in precisely what is not revealed and that is hidden from the spectator that desire may be found.

Additionally, films may also use a domestic gaze to create a fantasy scenario which obscures or hides the real. McGowan contends that cinema and its fantasmatic nature allow for the staging of the impossible *objet petit a* (object cause of desire) in the form of the gaze (*Real Gaze* 24). This is something that cannot be done in the 'real world'. Fantasy, however, cannot help the subject to obtain the object of their desire but may create a scenario where the subject can imagine obtaining their desire (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 17-25). Žižek emphasises this link between desire and fantasy positing that fantasy acts as a "screen for the projection of desire" (*Looking Awry* 8). However, the way desire is presented through fantasy is illusory because as has already been mentioned desire is intrinsically related to lack – that which is not there.

In serial killer cinema, desire plays a fundamental role. The spectator's desire may be found in the fact that often spectators of serial killer films want to understand the behaviour of these figures. Scott Bonn argues that spectators want to know what makes serial killers tick and why they behave the way they do (235). Furthering on from this it can be argued that the same desire and fascination that draw people to real-world serial killers, are what lures them to watch the cinematic depictions of serial killers. Desire may also play an important role in the manner in which cinema is able to create a romanticised serial killer – especially when the spectator's desire matches those of a killer. In *Extremely Wicked*, neither Ted nor Liz seem to be able to obtain the object of their desire through the fantasy elements of the film, the illusion is created that they will eventually obtain it. However, as has been made clear, desire only operates in relation to lack and therefore the object of desire can never truly be obtained. Ted's desire is constructed as the desire to be reunited with Liz. However, their reunion still leaves Ted lacking. Liz's desire presumably was that he would be found innocent and when that was not the case it shifted to knowing the truth. Still learning the truth about Ted, did not satisfy her desire and instead opened many more questions. It is clear that desire is that which cannot be obtained and it is this desire that fuels serial killers and much of the romanticisation of these killers in cinema – by not knowing everything the desire to know more and the appeal to be

close to them are fuelled. The manifestation of fantasy and the domestic gaze will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

Though a more active look plays an important role in the manner in which the filmic world is created for the spectator, the gaze plays a central role in connecting the spectator with the filmic image. The look and the gaze both have a strong role in the way the filmic world is constructed and at the centre of them both lies the issue of desire. Desire is also an important issue in serial killer cinema and it not only influences spectators' experience of a film but can also be seen as the force that drives them to the cinema.

2.3. **The Gaze, Ideology and Identification**

The gaze is at the centre of the spectator's insertion into the filmic image. This section aims to examine the way the spectator may be drawn into the cinematic world and the potential implications thereof. There are two main issues that will be explored in this regard, namely the role of interpellation and whether or not spectators are included in the filmic image through this process as well as how this may occur; and the role of identification not only within cinema but also within serial killer cinema specifically.

First, one can start by considering the view that the spectator is drawn into the filmic image. It may be argued that one of the key ways the spectator is drawn into the onscreen world is through the process of interpellation. In order to fully appreciate the way the gaze may interpellate spectators into the filmic image and the role this may play in character engagement, one should start by discussing what the concept of interpellation entails. Interpellation, a concept coined by the theorist Louis Althusser in his essay entitled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), describes the process through which ideology recruits individuals as subjects (264). Within film interpellation may entail the process of setting the spectator up as the filmic subject. This idea is mostly associated with early Lacanian film theorists who thought of film primarily as a vehicle for promulgating the dominant ideology. While it is true that film may have a subverting power and may be positioned to question ideology, as new Lacanian film theory has suggested, care should be taken not to assume that all films do this. Many films still fall into the same trap as mainstream Hollywood cinema (of which *Extremely Wicked* is certainly an example) which seems to support the dominant structures in society. McGowan, a central proponent of new Lacanian film theory, affirms this notion that many

Hollywood mainstream films perpetuate ideology ("Looking" 36). However, he argues that this is not done through a mastering gaze but rather in the way films use fantasy "to domesticate the object-gaze", as was discussed in the previous section (McGowan, "Looking" 36). It is precisely this use of fantasy that is seen in *Extremely Wicked* to obscure the reality of Ted Bundy's actions.

If one looks at the way Althusser's thoughts have been taken up by popular culture one can note that within the realm of popular culture (of which Hollywood produced films are undoubtedly a part), interpellation refers to the way cultural products address consumers and hail them into specific ideological positions (Sturken & Cartwright, 438-439). Film has the power to do this; it is able to address the spectator and get them to ascribe to the ideological message or position the film takes on and tries to convey – even if it is only the ideological position of said film and not necessarily the hegemonic structures governing society.

A key element of interpellation is acknowledging and knowing that you are the individual being addressed and that the hailing is intended for you (Althusser, 264). Relating this to visual images, Sturken and Cartwright affirm that being interpellated by an image implies that you recognise that the image is meant for you (53). There is a sense of acknowledgment that must take place and in film this means buying into the idea that the images are meant just for you. Furthermore, in cinema this implies that the spectator cannot be a passive bystander, by continuing to watch a film they wholly and completely buy into the narrative that is being shared as well as their part in it. The spectator is drawn into the filmic world and a connection is formed between character and spectator.

Considering the manner in which cinema operates to affect this interpellation and connection with the spectator may also be illuminating. One of the ways film is thought to interpellate spectators is through understanding the position of the camera as an apparatus that draws in the spectator. Jean-Louis Baudry places great importance on the role of the camera in cinema, emphasising that the ideological mechanisms that operate within cinema seem to be focused on "the relationship between the camera and the [viewing] subject" (46). Baudry's views have been critiqued as he saw the content of a film as having secondary importance over the position of the camera (Homer 28). Although the notion that the camera plays a central role cannot be disputed, the content of a film (including the characters and the narrative) must take on at least equal importance. It is through the camera that a spectator experiences the film and it is through the camera that the filmmaker constructs the onscreen world. It may, however, be argued that it is because of the narrative and the characters that the spectator relates to that onscreen world. It may further be contended that the objective gaze is that which interpellates

the spectator and not solely the camera. As has already been mentioned, the subject encounters the gaze "in the object" and through this gaze the spectator inserts themselves into the onscreen world (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 5,8). The objective gaze is found in the moment that the object looks back at the spectator and it through this action that the spectator is placed into the world of the film – the look therefore, acting as a form of hailing in this instance. Through the objective gaze the spectator can be inserted into the shoes of a serial killer, buying into the decisions that they make and fuelling their desire to know these figures better. In addition, the interpellation of the spectators may also be especially significant in films that emphasise fantasy and thereby domesticate the gaze. Perhaps the fantasmatic scenarios in these films create an onscreen world that the spectator may wholly and completely buy into. By conceiving of serial killer cinema as belonging to the group of films that aim to use fantasy to create an illusory sense of the gaze, one can recognise the role interpellation may play when it comes to connecting the spectator with the characters seen on the screen. Furthermore, exploring the interpellating effect of the gaze opens up the discussions on the ideological underpinnings of crime cinema in general.

Crime cinema remains rooted within ideology and may often be seen as a mirror to society. Nicol, Pulham and McNully argue that politics and society become shaped by criminality and it has therefore become impossible to divorce them from one another (9). Cultural representations, such as may be found in film or literature, do not merely reflect or respond to what is happening in the world but culture may actually intervene in our daily reality and could even play a role in shaping it (Nicol et al. 3). Therefore, the connection that is made between the spectator and the representation of figures such as the serial killer needs consideration, as does the ideologies that may underpin these connections. Films have a certain power over the spectator and consequently the potential ideological message they try to convey (or accidentally convey) is something that needs to be interrogated.

There are two ideological conclusions that need highlighting regarding cinema in general and *Extremely Wicked* in particular. First there is the ideological fantasy of romance and the thought that love may conquer all. According to McGowan the most widespread "ideological fantasy that Hollywood films proffer is the romantic union" (*Psychoanalytic* 148). These films tend to end with the couple uniting after experiencing some trials (*Psychoanalytic* 148). These stories of romance have an ideological function because they show that it is possible to achieve harmony and overcome antagonism (*Psychoanalytic* 149). From this it is clear that the ideological fantasy of romance can be found in nearly every film produced in Hollywood and it may often be at the centre of what draws spectators to the cinema. The film

Bonnie and Clyde (1967) serves as prime example of how the ideological fantasy of their romance is endured until the very last moment before they are brutally gunned down. By doing so the legend of Bonnie and Clyde is more focused on the star-crossed lovers than on criminals running from the law. It may be argued that the ideological fantasy of romance might not be something that is pivotal in all serial killer films. However, it is precisely here that *Extremely Wicked* steps in and presents a serial killer film that goes against the ordinary. *Extremely Wicked* is constructed as a romance far more than a serial killer whodunit film.

The second ideological position that is revealed through the gaze (and primarily the absence of what it does not show) is that of the tension between good and evil. Philip Simpson argues that one of the key ideological conclusions that may be drawn from films that deal with serial killers is the tension that exists between good and evil and the thought that there is a saint and a sinner caught up in one body (19). Serial killer films often tend to show both these sides to the spectator. Hannibal Lecter, in *Silence of the Lambs*, is on the one hand a murdering cannibal and on the other he is helping the FBI track down another serial killer; Arthur Fleck, in *Joker* (2019), is both a brazen murderer and also a man who just wants people to be good to one another. While it is clear that the dichotomy of good and evil may be found within serial killer films, it could be argued that as of late the 'good' seems to be getting a stronger foothold. The film *Extremely Wicked* explores the tensions between good and evil that may be bound up in one character but with a clear emphasis on the good side of the murderer. The film constructs Ted Bundy as a man who is truly capable of love, who feels sad and vulnerable and who is merely trying to be free. The way in which *Extremely Wicked* plays into the ideological fantasy of romance as well as the tension between good and evil (as manifested in the film's use of fantasmatic scenarios to cover up reality) will be interrogated more expansively in Chapter 4.

The second key point to be considered in this section is the role of identification. The connection between spectators and characters in a film occupies a central position within the filmic experience. Characters are not only vehicles for the narrative but may play a part in the way spectators react to that narrative and therefore identification makes up a large part of the way films operate. According to David Schmid identification occupies an essential place within serial killer films, even more so than other forms of serial killer pop culture (*Natural Born Killers* 112). This is echoed by Young who argues that it is through the narrative of many serial killer films that the spectator is positioned to identify with the goal of law enforcement, while also being "cinematographically incorporated into the crime-image" in a way that invites a sense of "identification with the killer" through incorporating the look of the spectator with that of the camera (97). It is through the cinematic elements and the gaze that spectators may be

interpellated into the image seen on screen and in that way, they become connected and placed in a position to identify with characters on screen. Young's argument with regard to the empathetic reaction of the spectator with the police or detectives may not be seen as problematic. What is problematic is when this identification and empathy are geared solely towards a murderer. In more recent films the empathy seems to align more with that of the serial killer. The way the spectator's gaze is directed in more recent films such as *Joker* or *Extremely Wicked* seems to indicate a shift in allegiance. The narrative and characters are constructed in a certain way and they are revealed to the spectator in a manner that invites a connection with questionable characters.

The identification with the serial killer works through an exchange between the killer's gaze and that of the spectator (Young 103). Through this exchange, serial killer cinema "participates in the scene of violence, accepting its invitation to look either at acts of extreme violence or the crime scene photographs that record their effects" (Young 103). While Young makes a valid point, the interpellation of the spectator into the crime-image does, however, not need to be confined only to scenes of violence. *Extremely Wicked*, a film that deals with a notorious serial killer, hardly shows any violence.

The concept of identification with an onscreen character is, however, not as straightforward as it may seem. The use of the term ‘identification’ within cinema has come under fire as of late, with film theorists such as Murray Smith and Carl Plantinga suggesting a move away from the notion of identification. Plantinga argues that the term "identification", while popular, often implies that spectators become the character, thereby resulting in the loss of the self (*Moving Viewers*, 104). For Plantinga identification may be misleading as it implies that the spectator shares the characters’ goals while diminishing their own (*Moving Viewers* 106). A better way of engaging with the connection between the spectator and the character is by using the notion of character engagement, which can be seen as broader and more equipped to encompass a variety of experiences, and indeed emotions and it also allows for an experience of empathy within the spectator (Plantinga, “Scene” 244). The thought that emotions may figure in the connection between character and spectator is crucial and especially so within serial killer cinema. By using notions such as engagement it also seems to imply a more active process of connection. Constructing serial killers that elicit empathy and engagement may result in spectators resonating with these killers.

A further critique of the notion of identification may be found in the way new Lacanian film theory conceives of the gaze not as a subjective but as an objective gaze. By conceiving of the gaze as a purely mastering gaze, the focus for early Lacanian film theorists was on the

spectator's relationship to that gaze and in this way it missed out on the relationship between the gaze and the *objet petit a* which is one rooted in desire (McGowan, "Looking" 30). The gaze is the object's cause of desire within film and therefore plays a role in the spectator's relationship with the characters on screen. In serial killer cinema, or indeed stories of monsters, the notion of desire and connection seem even more intertwined.

The importance of connection between spectator and character is undeniable and plays a central role within cinema. However, the understanding of identification in relation to the gaze has not truly encompassed all the intricacies involved in the connections between spectators and characters. The issue of spectator connection and character engagement, especially as it pertains to the construction of a romanticised serial killer, will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

2.4. **The Gaze and Power**

The final issue to be discussed in relation to the role of the gaze (and certainly the look) in creating a romanticised serial killer is the link between the gaze, the look and their respective links to power. Notions of power have long been associated with the gaze and it could be argued that that association may have been misplaced. This section aims to rectify this misunderstanding of the link between power and the gaze and consider the role that this may have within cinema and the spectator's connection to what is seen on the screen if it becomes refigured in terms of the 'look'. Specific attention will be given to exploring on the one hand the mastering look and, on the other, the gaze as a moment of failed mastery.

The distinction between the look and the gaze connects to the notion of power and who the holder of power may be. Here there are two contrasting views. It could be argued that the one who holds the 'look' is also the one who holds the power as it is a subjective look. According to Sturken and Cartwright the one who holds the look is often seen as the one who holds the power with the act of looking generally bestowing more power to the one who is looking than the one who is positioned as the object of that look (435). This seems to be in line with the thought of another early Lacanian film theorists, Laura Mulvey who conceived of the male spectator who looks at the female 'object' as the one who holds the power (20). On the other hand, the gaze, conceived by Lacan and the interpretation of his later work by new Lacanian film theorists, is objective, and this objective gaze is found in the object looking back

at the subject. According to Lacan the gaze involves "seeing oneself being seen" (qtd in Ragland 122). The gaze is about the look returned and it is in that sense that the spectator is drawn into a film and therefore the objective gaze may also be more strongly associated with desire and enjoyment rather than with mastery and power. By realising that you are being seen and acknowledging this, the sense of mastery over the object is lost.

The failure of mastery is illustrated in the fact that films may even be compared to a dream state when it comes to the way a spectator is drawn into this world. Similar to the way in which dreams operate, films may lure subjects into accepting the illusion that they offer (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 12). Lacan states that the subject in a dream is one who cannot see but who can only follow (*Four* 75). In film the spectator can merely follow where the camera leads them. It is by not seeing that the spectator cannot see the traumatic encounter with the real approaching, and therefore they cannot turn away from this encounter. This illustrates the fact that mastery in cinema cannot be real and in fact its absence is just as important to the functioning of film (McGowan, *Real Gaze 12*). Spectators must give themselves over to the reality of the film they are watching in order to access desire and enjoyment.

Perhaps distinguishing between the subjective look and the objective gaze creates a space where both views of power could coexist in cinema. Though Lacan does not see the gaze as a solely mastering gaze, it does not mean that there is no place for the look of mastery or power within cinema. Cinema, and serial killer cinema specifically, often employ the look of mastery in their narratives. It is undeniable that the look of Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* holds a certain sway over the object of his look. Even Norman Bates' look is magnetic in *Psycho* and his voyeuristic look at Marion is central to the plot of the entire film. Serial killer cinema is often preoccupied with notions of mastery and control as well as the tensions between seeing and being seen. Films such as *Psycho*, for instance, rely heavily on the power of the look and its intrinsic link to desire. Norman Bates is awarded an element of power through his actions as a voyeur with his unsuspecting victim being quite unaware that she is being looked at. However, this dynamic changes as soon as there is an awareness of the look or the gaze. The moment the object becomes aware that they are looked at, dynamics seem to shift. Instead of completely discounting the subjective look, a different approach needs to be taken, namely that of understanding that the eye or the look may direct the subject in a manner that may afford them power. In this way a cinema exists which may feed into both issues of mastery and desire.

Under the right circumstances the look may serve as a tool of power. However, the Lacanian gaze is not strictly understood in terms of its link to power. The gaze, as Lacan conceived of it and as the new Lacanian film theorists use it, is precisely the point where

mastery fails – it is the point where the object 'looks' back at the subject thereby negating any sense of mastery the subject may have had. It is through the object looking back at the subject, that the gaze involves the spectator in the filmic image, and this may play a key role in why spectators desire to see films (McGowan, "Looking" 28-29). This moment when the object looks back at the spectator may be a moment that reveals something of the self to the spectator as in that moment the spectator is no longer confronted with fantasy but with the traumatic real.

The link between seeing and being seen is perhaps most notably discussed in the work of Michel Foucault. In the chapter 'Panopticism,' from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault deals with dynamics of seeing and being seen and the sense of power that it may involve. Foucault draws on the design of the Panopticon in his discussion. The Panopticon is an architectural plan designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1971, featuring a number of cells with a single watchtower in the centre, the result being that every inmate/occupant of the cell will be under surveillance by the solitary watchtower in the middle – the occupants of the watchtower are, however, not visible to those being watched. The key point that needs highlighting in Foucault's discussion of the power dynamics in the Panopticon, is his equation of "permanent visibility" with the assurance of the "automatic functioning of power" with the thought that the inmates in this structure would "be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers" (201). Being seen implies being under someone's control as it is the mere awareness of being watched that creates a sense of power. However, it is not the physical act of seeing someone look at you but the mere presence or illusory presence and threat that someone is watching that seems to exert this notion of control

While film is a distinctly visual medium, and the gaze and the look play a great role in affecting spectators and luring them into the filmic image, the role of the power dynamics of the look within the narrative of a film also needs consideration. This will undoubtedly also affect a spectator who is placed in a position to connect with the characters and story seen on screen. The way characters engage with one another through the subjective look – the power holding look – reveals a lot about them and also serves to guide the spectator as to their allegiances. There are instances where the look clearly affords the holder a sense of power and then there are instances where the power dissipates and there are even instances in which the look is avoided altogether. The dynamics of seeing and being seen play a great role within cinema in general. Spectators can easily hide in the dark cover of a cinema theatre or the comfort of their own homes and this gives them a somewhat false sense of power over what is being viewed. This may also play a role in the popularity of serial killer cinema in which a spectator is able to live vicariously through what is being seen on screen.

It is clear that both mastery and a lack thereof is central to understanding the gaze and its function in serial killer cinema. By using both views (that of the look and the gaze), options are opened up to a much richer interpretation of the functioning of power within cinema. The look and the gaze both occupy a central role within cinema, and they need not be seen as mutually exclusive. In fact, when considered together, they may offer greater insights into spectator-character connections. These connections are vital to cinema and expose much about the underlying messages a film may convey (even if those are unintentional). Both the look and the gaze play a fundamental role in the underlying ideological structures that may be revealed to spectators through these connections and character engagements. Character engagement and ideology may be seen as firmly associated with serial killer cinema and the thought of the serial killer celebrity that populates media today. Perhaps an interrogation of these issues may serve as a platform to deconstruct and even destabilise these notions.

2.5. **Chapter Conclusion**

The understanding of the notion of the gaze within film theory has undergone a decisive change in the past few decades and while it is a central component in film theory it has not truly been utilised to its full potential. A key way the understanding of the gaze has changed is found in the distinction between what is deemed a 'look' and what is a 'gaze'. This links directly to the shift in understanding the gaze not as subjective (which might better be described as the look) but rather as objective (which is accurately described as the gaze). It is in understanding this distinction that issues of power in relation to the gaze may also be better understood. While it has always been considered that the gaze affords power, it should rather be seen as the moment where power and mastery fail and instead the subjective look is that which affords the holder a sense of power. Additionally, the objective gaze creates the capacity for spectators to be inserted into the filmic world and placed into the middle of the action. The way the spectator is drawn into the filmic world also creates a deeper connection between spectator and character and it is precisely this connection that is fundamental to the experience of serial killer cinema as well as the way in which the spectator develops an empathetic response to these figures.

Chapter 3: Facing the Serial Killer

The gaze, as understood by the new Lacanian film theorists such as McGowan and Copjec, draws spectators into the filmic world and places them within the action. However, little room is given to explore what happens once the connection between spectator and character has been established and, indeed, how this connection may pave the way for an affective response in the spectator. Perhaps this lacuna can be addressed by considering the affective possibilities of cinema and, more specifically, exploring the role of the face or the close-up and how this can be linked to the spectator's affective responses. Evaluating the importance of the face within cinema may illuminate the possible connection between the reconceived gaze and the occurrence of spectators' affective responses. Both the gaze and the face can be seen as pivotal in the way Hollywood cinema romanticises the figure of the serial killer. This chapter will focus on the role of the face in constructing a romanticised serial killer in film, as is evident in *Extremely Wicked*. Three key elements warrant investigation in order to illuminate *how* cinema creates a romanticised killer with which spectators empathise, namely the role of the face and the close-up in cinema; the link between the face and the affective response on the part of the spectator; and the face of the serial killer.

3.1. **The Role of the Face in Cinema**

The face in cinema can be seen as a powerful entity that is able to establish a connection between spectator and character and this connection plays an essential role in triggering an affective response in the spectator. Within serial killer cinema in general, and the film *Extremely Wicked* in particular, the presence and power of the face is engaged with in a particular way in order to construct a romanticised serial killer. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the way this occurs it may be important to start by considering the significance of the face and the close-up within cinema. The important elements related to the face in cinema that require specific attention when discussing the role of the face in creating a redeeming serial killer are: the communicative and transformative powers of the face; the presence of the star persona (by extension of course then the star's face) in the portrayal of the serial killer; the link between the face and the close-up; and, ultimately, the connection between the gaze and the face.

3.1.1. *The Communicating Face*

The first element to consider is the role of the face as a tool for communication and how this is central to the spectator's connection with the serial killer in cinema. One might argue that the expressions of the face tell a story beyond what the exchange of words can. This is especially true within cinema, where the visual is the strongest element and there is often a call to show rather than tell the spectator what is happening. This gives an essential power to the face and its visual communicative abilities. Emmanuel Levinas directly ties the face to discourse, arguing that "[t]he face speaks" and it is through the fact that the face speaks that "it renders possible and begins all discourse" (87). This discursive ability of the face may hold the potential to deepen relationships and forge alliances between spectators and characters.

It could therefore be argued that within serial killer cinema the result of positioning the face as central is that the spectator is involved in direct discourse with the killer. This paves the way for a sense of understanding and empathy for this figure. The significance of the face as communicative tool is also emphasised by Noa Steimatsky who argues that cinema uses the face to communicate and "to link persons with objects and vistas, to make narrative and discursive worlds cohere," and to join images and thoughts together (9). This reaffirms the face as the setting for connection, communication and meaning and therefore a key setting for analysis within cinema. When analysing film, the face may reveal much of the thematic and symbolic meaning of a film and it is also through the face that certain ideological or societal structures are carried. It is the face in film that provides direction to spectators and may even affect the way they respond emotionally to a film.

The communicative power of the face can be linked to where it is placed within a specific film. The way in which a film places the face as central in a scene may heighten the meaning of a scene and could even add to the dramatic narrative of the film as a whole. Béla Balázs points out that artistic films often show the dramatic climax through a "dialogue of facial expressions in close-up" (37). When a face is spread over the scene in a close-up frame, "this face becomes 'the whole thing' that contains the entire drama for minutes on end" (Balázs 37). Balázs is not the only one to view the face as central to the drama and climax of a film. Epstein also posits that "[t]he close-up is drama in high gear" (13). This cements the face in key scenes of a film and places it as front and centre to the action. By placing the face as the locus of attention, it may also afford it a greater discursive ability.

Placing the face of the serial killer as the focus of a film and by setting it up as a communicative tool, the spectator is driven to connect with the figure behind that face. This

could be seen as the central tool in creating a connection between the spectator and the serial killer as a romanticised figure. By using the face of the serial killer as a communicative tool, the impression is created that the true nature and identity of the serial killer are exposed. Balázs argues that the face may reveal much more about characters than any words they may utter. He argues that a verbal statement could be taken back, or it could be reinterpreted, whereas there is no statement that is as "revealing as a facial expression" (37). If this face is revealed in a close-up, it may be even more meaningful because the close-up of a face can be seen as one that holds certain power. Balázs asserts that using a close-up shot of someone's eyes may illuminate more of the soul than seeing the entire character in a long shot (44). If one translates this to the way the face is used within serial killer cinema, the face of the serial killer is clearly afforded a sense of power. It is as if the serial killer's soul is revealed to the spectator and therewith a greater affinity for this character may be established. As such, it is clear that film has the power to change the way spectators view serial killers. Furthermore, according to De Gelder the face is also central to how a person's trustworthiness is evaluated (3476). This may play a definitive role in how cinema romanticises serial killers – if they are set up as kind and charming, and their faces appear to reveal this, it positions the spectator to trust these killer characters. In *Extremely Wicked* Ted Bundy's face is for the most part of the film portrayed as a kind and loving face. This creates a sense of trust in his character as the film uses the domesticated gaze in order to cover up the reality of Ted's crimes by only showing the 'good' face of this killer.

Through its communicative element, the face may also possess a transformative power and in this way may have the power to transform even the way spectators think about serial killers. Steimatsky argues that "[t]he face is a power: it is compelling, and it confronts; it imposes and orients the gaze; it alters the world within its purview" (Steimatsky 8). What is important here is the capacity of the face to effect change – "it alters". Consequently, it is all the more important to consider the way the serial killer's face is constructed on screen. If the serial killer's face has the power to generate sympathy it may further desensitize spectators to the horror of the crimes committed. Furthermore, the face has the power and capacity to reshape the world and this results in a new way of thinking and feeling about the world (Rushton 234). The face therefore clearly has the power to transform even the way spectators conceive of serial killers – it may transform the face of a monster to that of a romantic hero.

3.1.2. *The Star Persona and the Serial Killer*

The face of the serial killer has come to occupy a very specific position within society and cinema seems to have capitalised on this sensational image. It may be argued that the face of the serial killer has become somewhat of a commodity, with the murderabilia industry booming. David Schmid affirms that the countless films, television series, books, websites and so on have all "given the figure of the serial murderer an unparalleled degree of visibility in the contemporary American public sphere"– citing the idea that our contemporary culture is one defined by celebrity which gives way to the possibility of elevating even the serial killer to that status (*Natural Born Celebrities* 1). The notion of celebrity and star status is central to Hollywood cinema as the studio-era in Hollywood relied on the so-called star-system.

Much of the importance of the face in cinema could be connected to the star-system. In a sense Hollywood has been built on the face of its most prominent (and indeed bankable) actors. The star-system occupied a central position in the economics of filmmaking in America during the so-called studio era (Holmes 98). During this era, stars were fundamental to maintaining the control of major studios over the American film industry, and control over the film industry required, by extension, a control of its stars (McDonald 40). It may be suggested that to a certain degree the Hollywood star-system is still alive and well today, albeit in a more informal sense (as the stars are not contracted to specific studios who control their star personae). Several actors make money purely because their face would be attached to a film and moviegoers choose films based on the film stars performing in them, as McDonald asserts, the film industry uses stars in order to sell films (5). In his book *Screening the Face* (2012) Paul Coates highlights the role of the star-system when it comes to the increased use of the close-up within cinema. Coates states that many films initially started using successive close-ups after the star-system was established (24). The use of close-ups increased in order to create "a spectatorial at-homeness in the story-world" as there was (and still is) a need to humanise the filmic experience which up until then could be quite alienating for the spectators (Coates 24-25). Furthering on from this it may then also be argued that framing the face of a serial killer in several close-ups to show the figure's vulnerability and placing the spectator in close relation to this figure, humanises the killer and forges a deeper attachment, especially when a charming and attractive actor has been cast in the role.

As actors gained prominence, one might argue that the way they were filmed and framed on screen also changed. As film styles changed, close-ups were used more often and such shots were used in order to emphasise the face of an actor as "a source of meaning"

(McDonald 28). In other words, seeing the face in a close-up reinforces the idea of connection and reveals vulnerabilities in the characters. When the close-up is seen as central to the film, it may also be due to the belief that closeness can be connected to the truth, whereas distance may obscure the truth (Coates 51). The use of recognisable faces may also play a significant role in why spectators connect to characters. Seeing the actor's face fill up the screen seems to show the inner workings of a character's life to the spectator and this paves the way for a greater understanding of the characters, their motives and even emotions. Furthermore, when people see familiar faces on screen and especially for lengthy shots at a time, they might have a sense of 'knowing' them. This is also largely why society may feel that film stars are a commodity that belong to them. This is of course encouraged by the rising amount of reality shows and pop culture publications dealing only with the intimate lives of actors.

A thought-provoking point made by Murray Smith is that the presence of stars plays a crucial role "in the legitimation of certain imagined desires and their resultant emotions," emotions that the spectator may disapprove of outside the realm of fiction ("Gangsters" 227). There are two elements Smith highlights in this regard: firstly, by watching a well-known star portray a character the character's fictional status is heightened; and secondly, the wealth of positive associations with a certain star may dilute the character's 'evil' elements ("Gangsters" 227, quotations in original). Therefore, considering the casting of Ted Bundy in *Extremely Wicked*, the star persona of Zac Efron strengthens the film's engagement with the complex idea of Ted Bundy as a romantic hero. This is exemplified by the fact that Efron's face has been primarily known as the face of innocent Disney films such as *High School Musical* (2008) or as the hero in romantic dramas, such as *17 Again* (2009) or *The Lucky One* (2012). Choosing a star with this persona attached to him feeds into the narrative of the idol or hero status that serial killers are often afforded in media or fiction, and, by doing so, strengthens the complex role that *Extremely Wicked* plays in the romanticisation of these killers. Moreover, the fact that Efron is a well-known actor feeds into the idea that the spectator may connect with him because of his familiarity and this connection is vital to affective responses experienced in cinema.

3.1.3. *The Close-Up as the Face; the Face as the Close-Up*

Both the face and the close-up bring the proximity of the serial killer's world closer to that of the spectator. By understanding the connection between the face and the close-up, and how

these operate in film, the way the serial killer is romanticised is illuminated. Close-ups may have the power to create an even deeper connection between the spectators and what they are viewing on screen as the close-up lies at the heart of film and the way it communicates with the spectator. Epstein describes this feature as "the soul of the cinema" (9). The close-up is not simply a magnified image but has the ability to limit or direct the attention of the spectator (Epstein 13). The spectator is only able to engage with the image that is shown and in the close-up this image is even more direct and specific. In a sense it could be argued that the use of the close-up is central to the rhetoric of film. The film reveals only what it wishes to reveal in that moment. Therefore, spectators are only privy to that which is shown to them and it is through the direction of their look through the close-up that serial killers and their worlds are created and presented in a specific manner. By using the close-up and the look, the spectator is placed within a close relationship with the killer and this creates a space for the romanticising of these figures in cinema.

Moreover, the 'face' does not strictly refer to the human face and indeed the face's power in cinema stretches far beyond a set of human features. Steimatsky posits that the role of the face in cinema is much more significant than merely a vehicle for communicating. Steimatsky argues that cinema not only uses the face, but cinema is also used "*by* the face", (9, emphasis in original). It may be argued that cinema is used by the face because the face can have power and meaning over and above just a mere image of human eyes, nose and mouth. The face may connote much more than what is seen on a surface level and it can even give meaning to objects or elements that are decidedly non-human. Steimatsky further argues that if cinema propagates and stages any "anthropomorphic and animistic desires" of its spectators, it does so because it is inspired by the promise of the human face to reveal the interior world of others (Steimatsky 9). Therefore, if cinema plays into the desires of these spectators to see human characteristics and life breathed into every element they see on screen, it does so because of the belief that giving faces to what they see can reveal the inner workings of that person/object in a unique way. In this way it gives meaning to a face far and beyond a simple set of biological features. Perhaps it even creates a greater sense of 'knowing' the faces seen on screen. Furthering on from this, it could be argued that the way the face and the close-up are employed within serial killer cinema is done in an endeavour to try to understand and humanise the serial killer. This may also serve as a way to reinforce a connection between spectator and serial killer.

The idea of attributing human characteristics to objects may also speak to the connection between the close-up and the face. Gilles Deleuze argues that the face and the close-up are synonymous (88). According to him the face can be seen as a close-up and in turn the

close-up can be seen as the face and they can both be described as an "affection-image" (Deleuze 88). Therefore, both the face and the close-up have the power to be images that convey affect and that reveal affective states to the spectator. It is not simply the human face that has the power to reveal affective states (Deleuze 87,88). An object may also be seen as having facial qualities and can be seen to have a face when this image holds a "reflecting surface and intensive micro-movements" (Deleuze 88). An example of this may be found in the face of a clock (a clock offers a reflecting surface and also exhibits movements) and then in these instances the objects are treated as faces and thus the object has been facified (Deleuze 87,88). Furthermore, it is through the process of being facified that the object looks back at the onlooker (Deleuze 88). Here one may argue that this returned look is a manifestation of the objective gaze. The object has been given a face and therefore the face and the close-up may be considered as synonymous in certain situations. These facified objects, as often seen in close-ups, are given power and communicative abilities beyond just the surface image.

Another element that is essential to understanding the way serial killer cinema is able to separate the heinous acts of a murderer from the face of a hero is through conceiving of the close-up as something that exists as an entity in its own right, beyond space and time. Through the close-up the face of a character can be described as being removed from its context and consequently placed into another dimension (Balázs 100). Balázs argues that if spectators see the isolated face (even when they have just seen it in a long shot surrounded by people or other elements), they find themselves alone with the face and then do not merely see "a *single* expression" but rather emotions and thoughts (101, emphasis in original). According to Balázs this is an element unique to the close-up of the face as he argues that parts of a human body or objects still exist within time and it is only the close-up of the human face that may exist beyond it (100). However, conceiving of an object as a facified object, may give power to parts or objects to exist beyond space and time. Contra to Balázs' argument, Deleuze states that all close-ups have this power and he further suggests that "the close-up retains the same power to tear the image away from spatio-temporal coordinates in order to call forth the pure affect as the expressed" (96). Therefore, the close-up of objects or body parts may have the same affective power as a close-up of the face. It could further be argued that the affect stirred up by these close-ups are seen as separate entities from the human who 'possesses' those body parts or the context within which the objects are found.

In serial killer cinema examining the close-ups of facified objects may give certain elements in a scene an 'identity' in their own right. By considering the close-up of hands or objects as something that possesses its own 'face', one could argue that this is a way of removing

these objects from the bigger picture or context. One could say that the close-up of a murder weapon, for instance, may have the effect of separating it from the murderer (in the right instances of course). By removing the actions from the killer who commits them, a sense of guilt on the part of the spectator is eliminated and therefore it is clear that the close-up plays a key role in the way film is able to create an empathetic connection between the spectator and the serial killer.

The separation of the man from the criminal is central to the way *Extremely Wicked* manages to romanticise the serial killer. Ted's deeds are not shown with him in the same frame, rather the film employs crime scene photographs to present the crimes. A further example is seen during the prison scene in which handcuffs are shown in a close-up, which again separates Ted from the crime in such scenes. Ted, the man, is therefore set up as a construct, separate from the criminal. In this manner Ted is removed from his actions a few times throughout the film as will be highlighted in Chapter 4.

A further result of recognising that the face and the close-up may be seen as one and the same thing is that it may also set the scene for a more direct relationship between the gaze and the face. This connection also extends to the possible ambiguity when considering the look and the face. The face may either be "the object of others' looks or as the subject of one's own looking" (Shaffer 4). This can of course be linked to the notion of the objective gaze where the gaze is returned to the spectator (who is doing the looking). It is precisely this objective gaze that draws the spectator into the filmic world. There is therefore a strong link between the close-up and the gaze, at least as it has been reconsidered by the new Lacanian film theorists.

3.1.4. *Connecting the Face to the Gaze*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the gaze plays a key role in creating a connection between the spectator and the serial killer in film. However, what needs to be considered is the link between the gaze and spectators' affective responses. The traditional conception of the gaze could perhaps be described as too narrow to allow for the possibility of this link. Previously, the notion of the gaze was largely placed within Lacan's notion of the imaginary with the imaginary blinding spectators to underlying ideological structures of a film (McGowan, *"*Looking*"* 29). However, understanding how the gaze actually comes to operate within cinema as the gaze of the real and as an objective gaze, reveals that the gaze inserts the spectator into

the filmic world. This creates the opportunity for a stronger connection between spectators and the characters they see on screen. This then also creates the argument that it is indeed the face looking back at the spectator that can be seen as a manifestation of the objective gaze. This face need not only be that of a human face but could be conceived of any object's face that is reflected to the spectator within a close-up. If understood in Deleuzian terms, the face is the close-up and that is the image of affection – the image that reveals emotion. This clearly paints a link between the gaze and affective responses. Shaffer points out that the face is a reflecting surface – it reflects thoughts or feelings, and, in this way, it becomes a key device for communication (3). Although Shaffer seems to emphasise the reflective power of the human face and considers the fact that inanimate objects such as walls do not have the same power, this could perhaps be a short-sighted argument that misses much of the power of cinema. By considering the affective power of close-ups of objects, the affective power of cinema as a whole is revealed.

As has already been mentioned, Jacques Lacan himself uses a sardine can in order to illustrate his argument about the gaze and how it operates (*Four* 95). This makes it clear that neither the face nor the gaze is solely tied to the human face or look, conceiving of the face and the gaze in this manner, opens up greater analytic possibilities within cinema. Moreover, this reinforces the idea that the gaze and the look can indeed be connected – as the face is but a reflecting surface which may then return the gaze of the onlooker. In her book *The Face on Film* (2017), Steimatsky refers to the link between the face and Lacan's work. She states that "even a sardine can floating on the ocean waves on a sunny day can *face* us, can become the point of the gaze, can anchor and return a human look" (Steimatsky 59, emphasis in original). The connection made between the face and the gaze could perhaps even close an important gap in psychoanalytic film theory as the role of emotion and affective responses have largely been absent in this branch of film theory. In fact, by reimagining the understanding of the gaze and by conceiving of the face as more than just a nose and eyes, the potential is created for more theoretical depth to be added to film analysis.

Additionally, it may be argued that the face is what directs the look of the spectator, but it could also be said that the face can be seen as the setting for the objective gaze to take shape. The face, or the close-up then, has the capacity to direct the attention of the spectator (Epstein 13). Balázs affirms the idea that the director of a film may use the close-up to guide the spectator's gaze (38). However, while it may be true that the director guides the view of the spectator, it is perhaps more accurate to point out that filmmakers guide the look of the spectator. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the gaze is that which meets the eye

of the spectator and returns the look. This is intrinsically connected to Deleuze's thought that the close-up need not only refer to the face of a human but that an object may also occupy this position – much like Lacan's sardine can. This then affords a power to the close-up within cinema and it forms a central part of the way in which the spectator connects to the onscreen world. The notion that spectators may find themselves reflected in what they see on screen – through the close-up or the face – is precisely what lures them into the onscreen world and what situates them in the filmic space. This lays the foundation for the connection between the spectator and the serial killer and the resulting affective response the spectator may have.

3.2. **The Face and Affective Responses**

From the above discussion it is clear that the significance of the face in cinema is undisputed. The power of the face and the close-up may also be connected to affective responses in cinema. The idea that the face can prompt an affective response lies at the heart of Hollywood's romanticisation of the serial killer. This then brings about the second point that warrants interrogation in this chapter, namely the link between the face and affective responses.

The face has traditionally been seen as an "access route to the thoughts and feelings" of others (De Gelder 3476). The face has come to be understood as a key feature that reveals the affective states of a person. The importance of the face in conveying information can also be found within fiction, notably within the visual medium of film. It is through the face of a character that spectators connect to the filmic universe and it is often the face of the characters that give them clues as to how to respond to what they see on screen.

According to Deleuze, what expresses affect "is a face, or a facial equivalent (a facified object)" (97). It is through the face (or the facified object) that images of affect are created. In other words, these images may reveal the inner emotional workings of the film. These in turn then influence the spectator's affective response to these images. For Deleuze, the face is the image of affection (88). Therefore, the notions of affect, the face and the close-up cannot be separated. It is clear that the face and the close-up carry a certain power, and this can be seen as central when considering the affective response spectators experience.

The link between the close-up (and perhaps then by extension the face) and affective responses has been theorised for decades with Sergei Eisenstein arguing that the close-up is not just a type of shot simply used "to *show* or to *present*" but instead the primary function of

the close-up is "to *signify*, to *give meaning*, to *designate*" (238, emphasis in original). When considering the way film creates an affective response it is therefore essential to take the role of the face or close-up in creating this affective response into account. Balázs argues that it is through the camera and the camera's magnifying abilities, revealed through the close up, that spectators are "brought closer to the individual cells of life" and it allows the spectator "to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail" (38). By getting close to the subject the spectator may feel they are privy to the details of the character's life, thereby enforcing any connection between the two. By knowing the detail of another person, one may perhaps understand that person better. This can be seen as somewhat problematic when it is related to the use of the face in serial killer cinema. Using the face to encourage understanding for the serial killer may also result in creating an affective connection between spectator and serial killer. It is this connection that can be seen as a tool that drives much of the narrative.

It is through the face that spectators are able to mimic or internalise much of the same feelings the characters themselves are feeling. Noël Carroll suggests that the human face may provide comprehensive and reliable information about the emotional state others are experiencing (*Theorizing* 131). It is certainly true that the face may give clues and insights into what others are feeling, but the power of the face may be seen as more far reaching than that. The face does not merely communicate the emotional state of people and Béla Balázs argues that "[i]f we look at and understand each other's faces and gestures, we not only understand, we also learn to feel each other's emotions" (44). It could then be said that when characters' faces are seen on screen it places the spectators in a position where they might even start to feel the same way the characters do. What makes this idea even more intriguing is that a simple close-up of a facified object, may have the same effect and power.

In cinema the face is used in a specific way in order to create the emotional world of a film. Plantinga considered Balázs' arguments about the face and developed the idea that the human face plays a key role in the "scene of empathy" used by filmmakers who wish to elicit emotions from their spectators ("Scene" 240). Plantinga posits that "facial expressions in film not only communicate emotion, but also elicit, clarify, and strengthen affective response – especially empathetic response" ("Scene" 240). This affective response is driven by the connection between spectators and characters as it is only through establishing this link that the face may have a certain power. When the link between the face and affective responses is under discussion two issues warrant consideration, namely the notion of allegiance (as an alternative to identification) and its role in eliciting affective responses; and following from

this sense of allegiance, the role of the face within what Plantinga terms "the scene of empathy" (this of course extends to the way it evokes empathy for the serial killer specifically).

3.2.1. *Allegiance*

A sense of allegiance towards a character is fundamental to the occurrence of an affective response of empathy within cinema and it plays a central role in romanticising the serial killer. The connection between the spectator and characters seen on screen paves the way for allegiance to occur. A connection between spectators and characters has traditionally been defined within the parameters of *identification*. However, here one can take the opportunity to reconsider this notion of identification as it does not necessarily allow for a clear understanding of the function of the connections created in cinema.

Moving away from the traditional conception of identification towards a more engrossing concept such as engagement or allegiance a space is created where the interaction between character and spectator may be explored and where the true impact of such a connection can be examined. Murray Smith argues that identification is perhaps too broad and that the use of the term identification confuses two terms that should be understood separately (*Engaging Characters* 6). Smith refers to these two concepts as *alignment* and *allegiance* and considers them both as part of what he terms the *structures of sympathy*, which entail different and distinct levels of engagement (*Engaging Characters* 5-6). Alignment refers to the manner in which films provide access to the actions or feelings of the character whereas allegiance is concerned with the manner in which film tries to gear the spectator's sympathies either for or against the characters depicted (*Engaging Characters* 6). Understanding the way allegiance occurs in cinema, and especially the manner in which it creates a platform for the spectators to experience an affective response of empathy for the serial killer needs attention. A better understanding of the relationship between spectator and character illuminates the effect this relationship may have and helps to interpret the spectator's responses. The allegiance that is formed between the spectator and the killer depicted on screen is vital to the way film manages to construct a romanticised serial killer.

This sense of allegiance can be seen as directly influenced by the characters (through both their actions and their faces). The character plays an integral role in establishing spectators' moral perspectives on actions that are taking place (Carroll, *Theorizing* 105). In turn, Smith argues that in order for spectators to become allied with characters, the character

must be evaluated as one that represents a set of traits that are deemed "morally desirable" (*Engaging Characters* 188). It is through this evaluation that spectators adopt attitudes of sympathy (or perhaps antipathy depending on the nature of the evaluation) towards characters and it is through this that they respond emotionally to the situations the characters are in (*Engaging Characters* 188). By seeing the face magnified on screen, it is almost as if the spectator is presented with a window into the inner workings of a character and it is precisely this that sets the scene for an emotional response on the part of the spectator. Being able to see every line on the character's face creates the sense that the spectator knows them, and this paves the way for an affective connection.

Another important factor relating to the reason why spectators form an allegiance with characters is the character's behaviour towards and treatment of others. A character's actions towards other characters may play a central role in whether they are perceived as 'good' and whether an allegiance may be formed between the character and the spectator (Carroll, *Theorizing* 105; Smith, *Engaging Characters* 190). If characters are seen as kind and friendly towards others, it paves the way for the spectator to consider them as good and as someone to root for. The behaviour of serial killers towards those around them are central to what establishes them as romanticised figures. By behaving in a courteous and charming manner that makes their horrific actions and crimes seem unbelievable the stage is set for allegiance to take root.

It is not only the characters' actions or the way they are filmed that have a role in creating allegiance; the actors that are chosen also have a part to play. The notion of the Hollywood star-system may be fundamental when establishing a sense of allegiance as the star persona of the actors adds to a sense of familiarity that spectators may feel when watching characters. The actors' faces are recognisable and therefore also trustworthy. According to Smith the evaluations of actors' star personae often inform the process through which characters are evaluated are responded to emotionally (*Engaging Characters* 193). He argues that the use of the star personae is another way that the spectator is "brought to entertain sympathetically actions, characters, and domains of experience that they might otherwise reject" (Smith, *Engaging Characters* 194). This is central to the way Hollywood constructs serial killers that are either revered, romanticised or made to seem impossibly intelligent and charming. This is seen in the example of Zac Efron who is cast as Ted Bundy in *Extremely Wicked*. Efron is primarily known to play the romantic lead yet here he is found in the role of a serial killer, one who is kind and charming at that. Efron's star personae undoubtedly plays a role in the spectators' empathetic response towards this killer.

The manner in which the film constructs the figure of the serial killer and the way in which close-ups and the face of the serial killer are used all work together to enforce the bond of allegiance. As has already been noted, the close-up has the power to exist beyond the constraints of time and space and, in this way, compels spectators to focus only on what is seen in front of them. This then may result in the spectator forgetting the context and the background of what has occurred (in this case a brutal string of murders) and instead focusing only on that specific moment. It could perhaps be argued that by using these prolonged close-ups, a further sense of allegiance is embedded within the spectator. The spectators are 'forced' to engage with the face for such a long period of time that it becomes familiar and recognisable to them and consequently they are able to have an affective response towards these characters. More often than not this affective response may entail a response of empathy.

3.2.2. *Empathy and the Face*

Following from the sense of allegiance constructed by film, one can delve into the more specific affective responses that this allegiance creates a platform for, particularly within serial killer cinema. Films certainly generate a variety of affective responses, such as fear, anger and joy and these emotions that a spectator may experience can be tied to the concept of empathy. Understanding the meaning behind the word 'empathy' is essential to this discussion. According to Plantinga, empathy comprises of the "capacity or disposition to know, to feel, and to respond congruently to what another is feeling" (“Scene” 245). Furthermore, in order to experience empathy, one must have emotions that correspond to what the other person (or character) is feeling (Plantinga, “Scene” 245). Responding congruently means that one responds in a way that reveals a sense of "commonality or solidarity with the person's goals or desires" (Plantinga, “Scene” 245). Sharing goals and desires is vital to the bond forged between spectators and characters they see on screen.

One can therefore clearly see the problems that arise if the goals and desires of the spectator align with those of a notorious serial killer. Empathy facilitates the experience of various emotions within the spectator. It is through this experience of empathy that any connection to a character can be reinforced. Eliciting a response of empathy is also central to what causes the construction of a romanticised serial killer on screen. By experiencing a response of empathy for the figure of the serial killer depicted on screen, and by feeling *with*

these figures, spectators may feel a greater affinity towards them and through this much of their actions are blurred. Once again, the idea that the close-up exists outside of time and space may add to this affective response. Spectators are positioned in such a way that they are made to forget the context of what has happened and in this way the close-up may have a direct effect on their affective response. Epstein affirms that "the magnification acts on one's feelings more to transform them than to confirm them" (13). The goal of the close-up is not to affirm to spectators what they are feeling but instead to change and to elicit a specific response.

Within the context of serial killer cinema, an important question to consider may be why one would care about a fictional character to the extent that empathy for them is generated? Alex Neill raises this important question and although he confirms that it is not possible to answer this definitively, he does state that people empathise with others (both in the real world or in fiction) because by seeing the world through their eyes and sharing their feelings these feelings are better understood and consequently their reactions (192). By engaging with fictional characters and by experiencing empathy towards them, spectators come to understand them and this in turn may provide the platform for the spectator's own "emotional education" and growth (Neill 192). While this may sound noble and it may be seen as a great quest for personal enrichment, lines become blurred when these levels of understanding are geared towards the serial killer. It may be argued that this is precisely what spectators desire when they engage with these films – a desire to understand why these people have behaved in the way they have. As Scott Bonn suggests, the intrigue with serial killers is often rooted in the desire to understand how and why they could commit such horrifying actions (235). It does perhaps still not truly explain the way in which these figures have been glamourized – it is one thing to try and understand this type of behaviour but entirely another to try and glorify it on a cinema screen.

Considering the visual nature of cinema and the way the face is used in certain scenes may further highlight the link between the face and a spectator's affective response. Plantinga argues that a key way in which "the *visual* aspect of film is significant is in the use of the human face" in what he refers to as "the *scene of empathy*" ("Scene" 239, emphasis in original). A scene of empathy can be defined as a scene in which the tempo of the narrative slows down and the emotional experience of a character becomes the centre of attention (Plantinga, "Scene" 239). In scenes of empathy, the face is placed at the centre with the aim of eliciting empathy (Plantinga, "Scene" 239). The face of a character plays a crucial role not only in communicating the story but also in hinting at spectators how they themselves should be feeling and reacting. The visual of a character's face may have a much stronger message and meaning than just the

words that they utter. It is the face that the spectator connects to and forms an allegiance with and then ultimately has an empathetic response towards.

In scenes in which the character's face is positioned as fundamental to the scene of empathy, the face of the character is the centre of attention. These scenes not only want to convey the character's emotions but also strive to "elicit empathetic emotions in the spectator" (Plantinga, "Scene" 239). These scenes are pivotal to the way films construct a romanticised serial killer for whom a spectator has empathetic emotions. Central to this, it is important to consider the way in which responses may be elicited when viewing the human face. These responses often occur through emotional contagion which refers to the 'catching' of the emotions or the affective states of others and this sense of emotional contagion could be seen as a result of affective mimicry and facial feedback (Plantinga, "Scene" 242-243). Affective mimicry entails the mimicking of the facial expressions of others or even those of film characters (Plantinga, "Scene" 244). This is argument is continued by Carroll who suggests that the moment the face of the character is revealed in a close-up, the spectator has the "automatic tendency to imitate" the character's expressions (*Philosophy* 189). This mimicking in turn may result in facial feedback, which is the theory that the mimicking of facial expressions may influence our emotional experiences and may even create an emotional experience (Plantinga, "Scene" 243-244). Therefore, a spectator may start to feel the same way as the person being viewed on screen. If spectators smile along with the characters, they may start to feel joy themselves, for example. It is clear that these three concepts are closely linked and may in fact work together in order to elicit an emotional response and are especially pertinent in scenes of empathy.

Regarding the scene of empathy within film, Plantinga suggests that filmmakers employ five key strategies in order to effect an affective response in the spectator – specifically an empathetic response. The five strategies he highlights are attention, duration, allegiance, narrative context and affective congruence (Plantinga, "Scene" 249-253). The first strategy, attention, refers to the idea that in order to elicit emotional contagion attention has to be focused on the facial expressions of the character and this can be done through the use of close-ups, shallow focus and "point-of-view structures" (Plantinga, "Scene" 249). The spectator's look is guided to see only the face of the character with whom the empathic experience is with. The second strategy is the duration of these scenes of empathy. Shots in scenes of empathy are often longer than the average shots in a film as the duration of these shots needs to be sufficient in order to elicit the intended response (Plantinga, "Scene" 249). Time must be spent in the presence of these characters. This is also fundamental in getting to know the minute details of

a character's face. An emotional bond of sorts forms between the character and the spectator and this is linked to the idea that the more familiar someone's face is (and the more time is spent with someone) the stronger one's affinity for that person may be. Balázs posits that it is that which one truly loves that one also knows well, and the minutest details of them are gazed upon "with fond attentiveness" (Balázs 39). This is central to the way film engages and elicits affective responses. More alarming, however, is that this is what lies at the centre of the bond between the spectator and the romanticised serial killer. The third strategy that Plantinga discusses is that of allegiance. According to him, there needs to be a sense of relatedness between character and spectator (“Scene” 250). As has already been discussed, allegiance is paramount to creating the connection between characters and spectators. It is also this sense of allegiance that comes into play in scenes of empathy – an allegiance must be forged with the character who is the centre of the scene of empathy in order for an empathetic response to be elicited. The fourth strategy film employs in order to create an affective response in the spectator is narrative context. As Plantinga argues, the narrative lays the foundation for empathy to occur (“Scene” 251). The narrative needs to set up the character in a certain way in order for spectators to have an empathetic response towards them. If one considers this in the context of serial killer cinema, this means creating an entire narrative focused in its smallest details on how the spectator will come to be positioned on the side of the serial killer. Finally, a sense of affective congruence is also crucial in considering the role of the face in the scene of empathy. As Plantinga offers, there needs to be “affective congruence” between the narrative context, character engagement, film style and/or technique, and the responses that these elements come together to generate (“Scene” 253). Therefore, different elements such as the colour, framing, music, editing patterns and so on, work together to elicit certain emotions. This echoes the work done by Alison Young who suggests that film uses these different elements to influence the spectator's reading of a film and then in turn this influences how a spectator may engage with these representations (2). These strategies work together to create the possibility for an empathetic response.

It is important to note that it may or may not have been the filmmaker's intent to elicit empathy, but regardless of the intention, the spectator's reaction and the final empathetic response remains paramount. Therefore, an analysis of these strategies remains useful as they may result in the spectator's empathetic response. As is argued later, in *Extremely Wicked*, the judgement scene, one of the scenes that features as central in this analysis, can strongly be described as a scene of empathy and a closer analysis according to the strategies put forth by Plantinga will be undertaken in the close reading of the film in Chapter 4. Such an examination

may be illuminating as these strategies reveal the manner in which the spectator is poised to react emotionally to what is being seen on screen and how this empathetic response may play a role in the construction of the romanticised serial killer.

3.3. **The Face of the Serial Killer**

The effect of using the face to establish an allegiance and create an empathetic response in the spectator is that it results in romanticising the serial killer. It is the face of the serial killer that lies at the centre of the preoccupation with serial killers and it could be argued that the faces of these figures are what drives much of the intrigue around them. This therefore brings about the third key issue of the chapter, the face of the serial killer.

It could be argued that the face of the serial killer may offer different readings. On the one hand, it is the face of a brutal monster; but, on the other hand, it is seen as that of a famed celebrity or an idol. This is further complicated by Marcel Danesi's claim that cinema shows the serial killer as a figure "with changing faces" (68). Serial killers are able to change their faces and adapt to the circumstances they are in. This is clear from Ted Bundy's ability to charm as many people as he did. This ability of the serial killer lays the foundation for a romanticised killer in cinema. By focusing purely on the killer's 'good' face, the horrors of his actions are easily subdued.

Cinema capitalises on the phenomenon that serial killers often lead a double life by functioning as a member of a loving family and turning into a stalker and killer at other times. It is clear that cinema can be described as "a maker of the serial killer celebrity because it presents the visual image (the face) of the serial killer in all its diverse and contrasting manifestations" (Danesi 67). Due to the celebrity status that has been afforded to serial killers, it is therefore made more difficult to separate the representation of serial killers in fiction films and the true-life serial killers that fill the media. These two are inextricably linked and therefore considering the serial killer celebrity culture that has risen may shed light on the manner in which these figures are portrayed within fiction. Schmid argues that "[t]he rise of the serial killer is a product of the media's attempts to give a face to the faceless predator criminal" (*Natural Born Celebrities*, 15). Perhaps society wants to understand the behaviour of these killers and as part of that process there is the need to humanise the serial killer in the hope that this may provide some answers or hints as to how to control these figures. There is a deep

ingrained fascination with serial killer culture and an obsession with the crimes they commit – this is evident from the vast array of books, films, television series and podcasts that are available on the topic. This fascination has led to the serial killer achieving the status of an icon (Bonn 33).

The icon status of the serial killer may be directly linked to the face of the serial killer – the identity they have been given and certainly the visual identity that society seems to crave. This is heightened by the serial killer's portrayal in cinema in which the illustrious presence of these figures is amplified. The serial killer, according to Simpson, has achieved a legendary status through "clever textual strategies that relocate the monstrous face behind the human one" (Simpson 3). This affirms Bonn's argument that the media (and by extension film and literature) have sensationalised these figures and have hidden the face of their monstrous actions behind a human (and often attractive) face. As such, serial killers are afforded this legendary status through the manner in which they are treated by the media or within fiction. By placing the emphasis on the human face – or then the element of humanity within the serial killer – this figure is raised to iconic status. Cinema plays no small part in this and it is precisely by placing the emphasis on the human face that films construct romanticised serial killers.

Cinema adds greatly to the prevalence of the serial killer as icon, with films giving "the serial killer a face – a visual identity" (Danesi 52). Society wants to give a face or a name to that which does not have one. In fact, Danesi argues that society often becomes obsessed with hunting down those serial killers who have no face (52). One intriguing example is Jack the Ripper. To this day, Jack the Ripper is the centre of fascination with countless books having been written as well as television series or even documentaries modelled on his crimes. This speaks to the intrigue that the faceless criminal may have. Perhaps there is an element of society that wishes to put a face to the killer as if that may somehow make them understand their behaviour more. Regardless of the reasoning behind this, care should be taken not to make the killer's face too amicable and friendly. This then starts veering towards the exact type of representation that Plato warned about. According to Plato, representation should be banished as these representations have the potential to represent "bad persons and actions, encouraging imitation of evil" (Mitchell 12). This connects directly to Marcel Danesi's arguments about copycat killing, which according to him would not exist if it were not for media coverage (104). The serial killer's representations should therefore perhaps be treated with more care. The assumption need not necessarily be that spectators of violent or murderous content will automatically become violent themselves. The problem rather lies in the fact that spectators and consumers of these cinematic representations become desensitised and the more society is

exposed to brutality the more it becomes the norm. Cinema (and society in general) seems to consider the serial killer as somewhat different from other criminals and by painting the face of the serial killer as one to be trusted and one who is esteemed, it opens up a desensitisation for the behaviour of these figures.

According to Simpson a killer has two distinct faces, an evil one that is used to terrify and intimidate victims, and another "pleasant or at least nonthreatening face" that they use or 'put on' for the public; (4). There is a sense of duality in the face of the serial killer. However, in certain instances the media, as well as film, seem to favour just one. For example, in *Psycho* Norman Bates appears to wear the sheepish grin of an innocent boy for most of the film. Bates's true identity is only revealed in the final flickers of the film where the image of the skull is briefly seen behind his features (Simpson 3). *Extremely Wicked*, moreover, focuses almost exclusively on the pleasant face of the romantic hero and there is hardly any focus on the face of evil. By prioritising the one over the other, the view of the serial killer becomes skewed. Certainly, this is placed in line with the culture of idolising the serial killer that has become dominant within Hollywood cinema as well as media in general. Perhaps one can say that by creating the face of a romantic hero instead of the face of evil, the film panders to the culture that has placed these figures in the position of an idol or hero of some sorts.

Simpson outlines the various faces that the serial killer can assume within cinema, noting that the faces they can portray are that of the outlaw artist, the visionary, the hyper-intelligent game player, the masculine hero, or the demonic punisher (23). Interestingly, four of the five faces of the serial killer are described in a positive way by using words such as 'intelligent', 'visionary', 'artist' or 'hero'. Even the language used to describe them stacks in their favour. By using words with positive and affirmative connotations, it becomes clear that the serial killer is a figure that is revered and admired. The face of the 'visionary' or the 'artist' is hardly one to be feared or cautioned against. Instead, just the way they are spoken about already paves the way for a romanticised killer that spectators can align themselves with.

One of the faces that Simpson highlights is that of the masculine hero and this is precisely what happens in *Extremely Wicked.* Here a masculine hero is embroiled in a love story. In his discussion of the face of the masculine hero that the serial killer often wears, Simpson refers to Richard Tithecott's notion of the warrior knight (23). Tithecott posits that it is perhaps "to be expected that a culture which celebrates the beauty and nobility of violence should have among its popular heroes those who satisfy a nostalgia for a particular version of the warrior knight" who is motivated by a higher goal, who is "courteous yet unconstrained by the court" (150). Contemporary society has become enthralled by violence and violent acts and

it is therefore not surprising that society looks for a 'hero' to occupy this violent world, especially if this hero is constructed as a suave and polite figure.

The hero of violent depictions and stories may be found in the figure of the serial killer who has come to occupy the role of a charming and almost enchanting figure who is painted as someone to admire, with their true crimes brushed over or in certain cases completely obscured. Simpson highlights the arguments of other critics of this specific subgenre (masculine hero) of serial killer films, such as Jane Caputi, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Fraser, whose arguments he summarises as follows:

> . . . the serial killer is a logical embodiment of masculine values of conquest and rapine, both explicitly expressed and implicitly encoded, within a patriarchal culture built on a foundation of "chivalry." The chivalric knight, at least as the popular culture has defined him, illustrates the self-delusional nature of the conquering/seducing hero. He fancies himself to be a gallant and courteous protector of the weak and courtier of damsels, but in actuality is a paternalist at best and a murdering rapist at worst. (23)

From this discussion and critique, it is clear that serial killers see themselves as much more important and appealing than they truly are – they set themselves on somewhat of a pedestal while the reality is that they are simply brutal murderers. Serial killers fancy themselves as gallant and brave, they are either only doing what they are doing for the good of society or doing it because they truly cannot help themselves (and therefore cannot be held responsible). In a sense, serial killers romanticise themselves and their actions. The disturbing trend, however, is that this romanticisation seems to be extended to the way in which they are portrayed in fiction. It is clear that it is no longer simply the serial killers who find themselves alluring but so does popular culture.

Extremely Wicked plays directly into the intrigue that surrounds the serial killer as it tells the story of one of the most notorious serial killers but undoubtedly also one of the most charismatic ones. Furthermore, using the face of the actor Zac Efron, whose star persona is firmly attached to the romantic comedy genre to represent the face of Ted Bundy, creates an almost predesignated image of the serial killer. The film is set up as a romantic drama populated by a gallant hero. The entire narrative of *Extremely Wicked* paints Ted Bundy as a man fighting for love. Moreover, even though Ted is hardly ever painted as guilty and his 'evil' face does not make an appearance, just the thought that he might be guilty is twisted in a way that makes it

more suitable to a romance. This is evident from the fact that he would never hurt Liz, being the bad boy changed by love is another theme more fitting to the romance genre.

Society, whether that is media, fiction or popular culture in general, has a role to play in the construction of larger-than-life serial killers who have achieved almost legendary status. As Tithecott contends, if the serial killers view "themselves as crusading warriors, it is an image we help to construct" (150-151). This is precisely why an interrogation of the romanticised serial killer in cinema is necessary. These figures do not exist in isolation and are largely given their status because of such incidents where they are portrayed as people to be revered. Cinema creates this platform for the construction of serial killer heroes or iconic figures that a spectator may form an allegiance with. In film the serial killer is given a face and by extension a palpable identity. While it may be true that society desires to put a face to the senseless crimes that this figure perpetrates, cinema veers more towards not only giving a face to these crimes but to constructing a face that invites empathy. By constructing a face that invites allegiance and elicits empathy that film manages to create a more appealing character out of the serial killer.

3.4. **Chapter Conclusion**

The face and close-up may be seen as powerful tools of communication and from this discussion it is clear that the face and the close-up, as key role-players in a spectator's affective experience in cinema, are fundamental to the way cinema is able to construct a romanticised serial killer. The face is paramount in the connection established between the spectator and the character and it is through the face that the spectator is privy to the inner workings of a character. The ability to feel congruently with another aids a spectator's emotional education, which is central to the value of cinema according to Alex Neill (179). However, it may then also be here that the idea of responsible storytelling needs to be emphasised. While emotional education is vital, one has to wonder what world is being created when these emotional reactions are solely geared towards empathy with heartless murderers.

Chapter 4: The Romanticised Serial Killer in *Extremely Wicked*

In *Extremely Wicked*, fantasmatic scenarios are created to favour the human face of the serial killer while obscuring the face of evil. The face of Ted Bundy as the doting boyfriend and loving father figure takes centre stage. From start to finish, *Extremely Wicked* positions Ted Bundy as a romantic hero with a distinctly nonthreatening face and one that invites an allegiance with spectators. The film manages to do so through using fantasy to domesticate the gaze in order to cover up the reality of Ted's actions. In addition, the way the film frames the face, and the manner in which it uses close-ups to separate the man from his deeds, affirms the fantasy that has been created that ultimately results in a romanticised serial killer. Examining the way in which the face and the close-up are used in *Extremely Wicked* may elucidate the way in which the film is able to generate an empathetic response towards the brutal murderer Ted Bundy. In order to illuminate the way the film creates a romanticised killer that the spectator has a connection to and has empathy with, five elements will be examined, namely the engagement with the face in various textual forms; the commodification of Ted Bundy's face; the imaginary romance that the film creates; the judgment scene, where the face takes centre stage in what Carl Plantinga would term a "scene of empathy"; and finally the bookend scenes where the face and the gaze culminate, resulting in both an empathetic response as well as a traumatic encounter with the real.

4.1. **Encounters with the Face and the Gaze in Different Textual Forms**

The power and presence of both the gaze and the face in *Extremely Wicked* is engaged with using different textual forms. What is significant about the way the face is used in the film is how it manages to separate the man from his vicious actions and how it also manages to place a face onto the serial killer that is not only nonthreatening but even inviting. This is central to how the film romanticises the serial killer Ted Bundy. Three key instances highlight the manner in which the film engages with different textual forms of the face as well as the importance of the face and the gaze to the narrative of the film. These are Ted's composite sketch (*sketched face*); Ted's identification with the help of a photograph (*photographed face*); and Ted's face in the media (*filmed face*). Moreover, Ted's composite sketch as well as Ted's face in the media can be defined as important moments in the film where the gaze in the film interpellates the

spectator into the filmic world. Each of these moments will be considered in turn in order to ascertain how the film is able to use these moments and these textual forms to romanticise Ted Bundy.

The film's engagement with the face in different textual forms can be described as moving from sketch to photograph to film. With each new form, the nature of the engagement with the face also changes and brings another element to the fore – all of which work together to create an empathetic response. The use of the face in these different forms seems to move through different phases in technology making the representation of the face all the more real. The first face takes on the form of a composite sketch – a flat and two-dimensional image that might be difficult for the spectator to connect with. The second face is a photograph (the term 'picture' is used in the film) and though the spectator is not shown this photograph the narrative makes it clear that much of Ted's court case (and therefore guilt) is reliant on a simple photograph of his face. The third form that the film then takes on towards the end is that of the face on the television screen through the form of a recorded interview. The latter is of course also much easier to connect with and root for, as Alex Neill points out, in film, "sight and hearing play a crucial role in our engagement" (188). This engagement is fundamental to the way the film not only creates a romanticised serial killer but one that the spectator empathises with.

The first face to be considered is that of the one seen in the composite sketch. In *Extremely Wicked* much of what sets Ted's downfall in motion is this sketch of him. The sketch is published in newspapers and Ted's girlfriend Liz sees it. She then decides to call the police and gives them Ted's name. This affirms the link between the face and the identity it inscribes on someone. The fact that Liz is the one who recognises the face and contacts the police is, however, only revealed later in the film and for most of the film she is shown to believe in his innocence. She even states that "that sketch looked like everybody". This contributes to the doubt that is stirred up in the spectator about whether Ted is actually the one the police is looking for. Liz remains uncertain about the resemblance throughout most of the film, even when she is reporting it to the police. She states that there is "a minor resemblance, but it's very minor" and afterwards continues to use phrases such as it looked "something like him". If Liz, the one person who spent a lot of time with Ted, doubts his guilt then that allows the spectator to start feeling the same way. The fact that it is a flat, two-dimensional sketch may also make it difficult to reconcile it with the true character of Ted. Furthermore, the manner in which this sketch is revealed seems to create an entity separate from Ted and is also a defining moment where the spectator's gaze is returned and they are placed into the action early on. Ted is shown

in the home videos with his family, happy as can be – these home video moments create a voyeuristic experience for the spectator who is looking in on the private familial moments. These scenes are interspersed with news snippets about Ted's crimes, but nothing makes it seem as if he is the perpetrator. Then finally, one of the images that the news reports reveal is Ted's composite sketch, right after an image of him in a happy family moment.

It could further be argued that this image manifests as the objective gaze that returns the look of the spectator, thereby weakening the spectator's voyeuristic power as Elsaesser and Hagener describe it (103). The spectator's look has been returned and therewith their control over the image is lost and they become absorbed in what it is that they are witnessing on screen. However, what is problematic in this instance is that something that could have been used to show Ted's true nature and the reality of what he has done, is shown in an image that only lasts for a few seconds and is shown after a beautiful family moment between Ted, Liz and Molly. Seeing the stark black and white sketch for the first time directly after seeing a montage of happy family moments creates a rift between Ted's face and the face of the sketch. This is especially significant if one considers Balázs's argument that the close-up of a character's face removes the character from its context (100). The composite sketch (which is essentially a sketched close-up of someone's face) is removed from Ted the person. The impression is created that it cannot possibly be him.

The second moment to be considered involves the face taking on a different textual form, namely that of a photograph. Before Ted's first trial it is revealed that a photograph of Ted was shown to a witness before she identified him in a line-up, thereby creating the impression that he is being set up to take the fall for the crime. Though the photograph is not revealed to the spectator, it is a key moment in the diegetic world of the film. A photograph can by all accounts be considered a truer reflection of someone's face than a mere sketch. Conceivably, the spectator may regard the photograph as a reflection of Ted's face more than that of the composite sketch. The fact that this photograph was then seemingly used in order to pursue a witness to testify against Ted sows clear doubt about his guilt – if she was shown the photograph of his face that must be the only reason why she recognises him. Ted's face was already given to her and this gives her the sense of 'knowing' him and the certainty that he was the one who attacked her. However, from a spectator's point of view, the idea is created that the witness only 'knows' him because she was fed the photo beforehand. This is significant as it is the first trial the spectator sees and the one upon which the others seem to be built.

By sowing doubt about Ted's guilt, the way is paved for the spectator to form an allegiance with him. By creating this moment in the plot, uncertainty about Ted's guilt is shaped

early on and remains throughout much of the film (as there are some other instances that show a somewhat flawed prosecution). The spectator is led to believe that what was happening during the investigation has disadvantaged him and that he may in fact not be guilty after all. The narrative, therefore, constructs Ted as an innocent man who has been wrongfully pursued by the police. In a sense the police have used Ted's own face against him and by doing so they have sown doubts about his guilt in the minds of the spectator. Laying a foundation of doubt in the spectator throughout the film brings the human face to the fore instead of the evil one responsible for countless murders. As Simpsons states the serial killer has both a nonthreatening as well as an evil face (4). The film seems to have chosen to emphasise the nonthreatening characteristics of this particular killer.

This moment and the 'unseen' photograph are also strongly connected to the issue of desire in cinema. Desire is often associated with that which the spectator cannot see, and it is in what a film does *not* reveal that a spectator's desire is triggered (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 69-72). The fact that the photograph is not seen, and the spectator is not privy to it, stirs up a desire in the spectator – a desire to see the photograph, but also a desire to know what really happened between Ted and the woman he is accused of assaulting. The questions are raised whether Ted was actually guilty or whether he is being set up. Since the spectator is not privy to all the details the desire to have more knowledge about this killer is triggered. Perhaps it can even be argued that this desire is a desire for his innocence. The spectators themselves have been set up to connect to Ted and therefore his innocence would 'suit' them – they can easily disavow any of the deeds he is being accused of because the film presents the evidence as circumstantial and therefore a reasonable doubt in his innocence can exist. If Ted were to be innocent any notion of complicity in his murderous actions is subdued.

The third central instance of the different textual forms the face takes on in the film is in the appearance of Ted's face through a televised broadcast. These manifestations of the face move from the flat sketch to a more believable photograph and then culminate in a video broadcast. With each new textual form, the connection between spectator and character becomes stronger. Extra information is conveyed to the spectator when a face is seen in motion, information which is generally absent in a still image (such as a sketch or photograph) (Lander & Bruce 131-132). Therefore, as the film develops, the presence of the face from the sketch to the photograph finally culminating in the moving video reveals more and more information. It is as if the spectator gains greater insight into Ted's world. There are two key instances where Ted's face is shown through televised video clips. The first instance occurs as Ted is awaiting trial for murder and he does a televised interview in which he states his innocence. The second

instance is during his trial that is broadcast on national television. The former will be considered here while the latter will form part of the discussion on the commodification of Ted Bundy's face in the next section.

The sequence of Ted being interviewed before his trial reveals both the 'behind the scenes' moments where Ted is shown with the interviewer and camera as well as moments of him on a television screen. The fact that Ted is being interviewed and filmed by the media highlights the celebrity status afforded to these figures and affirms Scott Bonn's argument that serial killers may generate curiosity in people (27). People want more of these killers and in the process they indulge in interviews, books and films about these killers. This interview is in fact based on an interview with the real Ted Bundy, which is shown later on during the credits of the film. The interview and the interest of the press in Ted's story clearly affirm the interdependent relationship between serial killers and the media and the idea that media plays a part in these figures' 'creation'. This sequence and the interview that is screened on television for all to see speaks directly to Marcel Danesi's argument that cinema adds to the prevalence of the serial killer as icon with films giving a face to this killer and along with that "a visual identity" (52). These representations all serve to commodify the serial killer and the following section will give a more in-depth discussion on the way *Extremely Wicked*, specifically, is able to create a commodity out of Ted Bundy's face.

A vital moment in this sequence reveals Ted looking straight into the camera and therewith straight at the spectator. In this moment the spectator's gaze is returned, and this moment can be described as a manifestation of the objective gaze, which draws the spectator into the filmic world of *Extremely Wicked*. This is a pivotal moment if the context of this sequence is considered. The interview sequence is interspersed with shots of Ted planning his escape, and this is undoubtedly part of the reason he has grown a beard for the interview. By doing this he camouflages his face to aid the escape. The way this escape is framed is not as a hardened criminal wanting to run from the law but rather as a desperate man trying to be reunited with his lover who undoubtedly then appears as a man the spectator can form a connection with. While this interview and the moment that Ted looks into the camera could have been used to show a menacing and threatening man, this does not happen. This could have been the opportunity for an encounter with the *real*, however, through the connection with the star persona of Efron, the use of the close-ups as well as the narrative context, the gaze remains domesticated and reveals only a fantasmatic scenario. The way the gaze incorporates the spectator into the onscreen world does not lead to someone fighting against Ted but rather to someone fighting alongside him and rooting for his freedom. Furthermore, the way the gaze is

engaged with in this sequence stimulates the spectator's desire – the desire for Ted to be reunited with Liz, underpinning the ideological fantasy of romance that is such a strong feature in the film. Importantly, there is a moment where a close-up of his face during the interview is seen on Liz's television screen with her watching him intently and in this way the connection between them and consequently also the connection between Ted and the spectator are reinforced. Moreover, this moment foreshadows Ted's trial during which Liz is constantly watching him on television – laughing at his jokes and smiling at his witty comments – revealing that he still has a certain power over her.

Engaging with the face and the objective gaze in these various textual forms speaks directly to its communicative ability and to Levinas' argument that "[t]he face speaks" and that it is the face that can start a discourse. Throughout the film Ted's face tells the story of a wronged hero and through the gaze it is almost as if the spectator has joined Ted on this journey and has gotten to know him with each new engagement with the face. Through this a platform is created that urges the spectator to fight alongside him. Moreover, the spectator has come to know even the minutest details of Ted's face, due to the large number of close-up shots that linger on his face, creating a sense of intimacy between character and spectator. Engaging with the face in these different ways also emphasises the importance of the face in cinema as well as the importance that it has in connecting the spectator to the character. Furthermore, by using the face to manifest as the objective gaze, the spectator is drawn directly into the filmic universe and in this filmic universe the spectator is asked to form an allegiance with the serial killer, Ted Bundy. It is in this way that the film romanticises this figure and creates a platform where he is valued and not feared.

4.2. **Commodifying Ted Bundy's Face**

The media plays a central role in the 'creation' of the serial killer. Scott Bonn argues that it is through the sensationalised representations of these serial killers that the reality of their disturbing crimes is obscured, and, in this way, they are raised to the level of an icon (33). The idea that the media has a hand in the creation of the serial killer is an element that features strongly in *Extremely Wicked*. In the film Ted, and more specifically Ted's face, is treated as a commodity and the film depicts the intense fascination society has with him through the televised broadcasts and interviews with his 'supporters'. This exemplifies David Schmid's argument about the serial killer celebrity that has become a marker of contemporary society.

Schmid points out that the iconic status given to the serial killer proves that there seems to be a breakdown in distinguishing "between fame and notoriety" (*Natural Born Celebrities* 11). Showing the women fawning all over Ted during his trial directly emphasises his status as icon rather than as brutal killer. Furthermore, the fact that *Extremely Wicked* chooses to show these moments and the comments made by the women seems to suggest that it plays into the idea of romanticising Ted.

On the one hand, it could be argued that the film is critiquing this sense of celebrity. However, on the other hand, a stronger argument could be made that the film merely enforces the existing stereotype of the idolised serial killer. Using the face to create a commodity and choosing to reveal Ted's celebrity to the spectator instead of his brutal actions reveals that the film is more focused on the romantic aspect of the narrative than on the truth of what has happened. This then affirms Bonn's argument that the media uses sensational depictions to hide what these killers have done (33). This is certainly the case in *Extremely Wicked*'s construction of Ted Bundy which plays into this sensationalised depiction.

Extremely Wicked manages to commodify the face of Ted, not only in the creative choices of this serial killer film (that is framed more as a romance), but also by placing the emphasis on the commodification of Ted's face within the films' diegesis. Considering the film's creation there is one element that clearly stands out and that is the casting of the Hollywood star Zac Efron as well as the way that he is then framed and filmed throughout *Extremely Wicked*. Efron is set up as an attractive male lead with several shots focused in on his toned and masculine body. This is a key way the film not only creates a commodity out of the character Efron is portraying but also how the film manages to romanticise Ted Bundy and create a connection between Ted and the spectator. As Murray Smith points out, through watching a well-known star portray a character, the character's fictional status is heightened and furthermore, the positive associations with these stars may negate wicked elements in the character being portrayed ("Gangsters" 227). From this it is clear that in *Extremely Wicked* the spectator is not truly forced to reconcile the reality of what Ted Bundy did with the representation they are seeing on the screen as the fictional nature of this particular representation of Ted is heightened and along with this, his negative characteristics are negated. This is facilitated by the star persona of Efron who plays perfectly into the role of the masculine hero. The masculine hero being one of the faces of the serial killer as highlighted by Philip Simpson (23).

Within the diegetic world of the film the face of Ted Bundy is commodified through his interaction with the media and the instances where he is seen to look directly into the

camera, connecting with the spectators. The film uses the presence of televised interactions with Ted to accentuate his celebrity status and even uses this as a part of the narrative. There are a few specific instances when this happens, namely in an interview he has with the media before his trial. Then there is a press conference where Ted's indictment is delivered. Here Ted makes a bit of a spectacle of the whole matter and interacts with and panders to the press. Finally, his televised trial is broadcast on national television giving all the viewers who are watching this trial the sense that they know him. This scene will be the focus of the discussion here as it is within this instance that Ted Bundy's face is not only used to commodify the serial killer but is also positioned in such a way as to invite a connection between spectator and character. This scene also reveals a moment that manifests as the objective gaze, one which draws the spectators into the onscreen world and positions them as part of the action right alongside Ted.

A show is put on for the spectator through the televised trial of Ted and the film shows that this event plays a great role in creating the legend of Ted Bundy. This is reinforced by the actions of the female characters who attend his court proceedings. They cheer with him at his success in the courtroom and *Extremely Wicked* shows interviews with these women where they speak about the fact that he is "dreamy" or that "he just doesn't seem like the type to kill somebody" and one woman even goes as far as to say "I guess I love him". His face has clearly beguiled them – triggering their desire – and they seem to simply ignore what he has been accused of despite being present at the hearing. The interviews with the women outside the courtroom are based on what actually happened during his trial and some of these words are exactly what the woman attending his trial uttered ("Ted Bundy Groupies"). While the interviews with these women actually happened during Ted Bundy's court proceedings, it is rather telling that the film chose to include them. While it is one thing to create an awareness of the charm of the serial killer it is another to play into the stereotype of romanticising and normalising their behaviour and showcasing it to the spectator through a cinema screen.

The shots of these women at Ted's trial mirror the reality of the events and link up with the way the film blurs the lines between fact and fiction. This scene underscores the very delicate line between reality and fantasy when it comes to serial killer representations. As Danesi posits, serial killers exist in reality as well as in people's imagination where they can be fantasised about in different ways (100). It may then be argued that perhaps cinema creates the perfect outlet for these fantasies as it emphasises the intricate issues that are at play in cinematic depictions of these killers and their romanticisation as can be seen in *Extremely Wicked*. The film even opens up with a quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that states "[f]ew people

have the imagination for reality" (qtd. in *Extremely Wicked Shockingly Evil and Vile*), accentuating the delicate boundary between what is real and what is fantasy when the representation of serial killers are at play. The use of this quote to introduce the film reveals the film's position regarding its representation of Ted Bundy and therewith the film seems to acknowledge the complex relationship between reality and fantasy when representing serial killers.

Both the blurring lines between reality and fiction as well as Ted's elevation to legendary status are further exemplified with the shots during the credits of the real Ted Bundy during press interviews. These scenes place the power firmly in his hands, showing the human face to the spectator rather than the face of evil. This strengthens Tithecott's argument that these serial killer heroes are society's creation (150-151). It is also clear that serial killers cannot truly be separated from media as media plays right into the hype around the serial killer celebrity. Furthermore, creating a romanticised serial killer in a space where the celebrity killer is already lauded is surely problematic and a societal issue in which trap Hollywood has fallen into. This makes Tithecott's query of what happens to the distinction between self and other or indeed civilised and perverse in this space where fact and fantasy lose their sense of meaning all the more pertinent (127). It also emphasises the responsibility fiction has when dealing with these representations.

Initially the courtroom sequence might have been a vehicle to remove Ted's power – his trial is being broadcast and because of this he is placed in a vulnerable state. Moreover, he is also being watched by scores of people through this television broadcast, reaffirming Foucault's argument on power dynamics as he asserts that being permanently visible (as Ted certainly might be in this live broadcast in court) assures the "automatic functioning of power" (201). Ted is being watched and it is by virtue of knowing that he is being looked at through the television cameras that he loses his power for a moment. In this moment the spectator may even feel as if they are in the power position as the one who holds the subjective look towards Ted.

However, Ted is presented as swiftly taking the power back when he turns to directly face the camera and returns the spectator's look. It is in this moment that the objective gaze is manifested. In this instance Ted's eyes look directly into the camera and such a shot operates as an interpellative device through which the spectator is hailed. In other words, this look gives the spectator the sense that it is meant for them specifically. In this moment the spectator's look is met and the spectator is now positioned as the one being looked at. This moment fixes the film's characterisation of Ted with important power – it is no longer the spectator who holds a

sense of mastery over what is being looked at. Moreover, in this moment, it is also revealed that Liz has been watching him on television and therefore it is not only the spectator's look that is returned but also Liz's look. By returning the look of both the spectator and Liz, Ted takes back his power over them – Liz remains under Ted's spell in the film and the spectator remains enthralled by the man who they desire to know more about. A connection is forged between Ted and the spectator and as Alison Young posits, identifying [or then engaging] with the serial killer works through an exchange between the killer's gaze and that of the spectator (Young 103). The manner in which the scene uses the gaze invites the spectators and incorporates them into the filmic world. This moment also creates a platform for an affective response towards Ted. By connecting through the gaze there is a space for allegiance with him and this allegiance is central to the spectator's empathetic response towards the character. The fact that his look meets that of the spectator creates an even deeper sense of personal connection, thereby paving the way for the romanticisation of the serial killer figure. The combination of the face and the returned look in this moment is precisely what paves the way for this romanticisation to occur. There is a clear opportunity to connect to the face of Ted Bundy and to feel what he is feeling and the returned look also seems to make it personal as if the spectators themselves are being directly addressed and invited to form an allegiance with him. Furthermore, unlike the concluding shot in *Psycho* where Norman Bates looks directly into the camera, the look into the camera in *Extremely Wicked* cannot be described as alienating or unnerving but rather as enchanting and inviting.

The moment where Ted looks into the camera is a pivotal moment in the film as it is in this moment where the gaze meets the face and the *objet petit a*. The *objet petit a* refers to the object-cause of desire, which manifests as the gaze in the scopic field. In this moment the close-up of Ted looking into the camera acts as this object-cause of desire. The desire of both Liz and the spectator is triggered. When watching Ted's hearing on television she smiles whenever he is remotely clever or witty. She still buys into this fantasy version of him and through Liz's projections of these fantasies, the spectator also buys into the fantasy of Ted as a romantic hero. These moments reveal Liz's desire for Ted to be good. Liz wishes for his innocence and perhaps then even wishes for them to be reunited. The spectator's desire may certainly match that of Liz but for the spectator desire is undoubtedly also linked to the intrigue of the workings of a serial killer's mind. Catching a glimpse of the serial killer staring back may create the impression that the spectator can truly get to know him.

Another important moment that needs to be mentioned is the one following Ted's look into the camera. In this moment Liz is shown looking at the television, thereby returning Ted's

gaze. This creates the impression that he is not only looking at the spectator but at Liz specifically and with the reverse shot of her looking at the screen it could be conceived that the spectator takes up Ted's position. The spectator assumes Ted's gaze in that moment. This is a key way in which the spectator is positioned on the side of an infamous serial killer and this can of course be seen as somewhat problematic. This echoes Young's assertion that the spectator is "incorporated into the film as a subject who shares, even momentarily the gaze of the killer" (103). However, here the spectator does not look at the "images of the dead" that Young refers to (103). Instead the spectator is looking at Liz, thereby affirming the film's position that Ted is not a brutal killer but simply a man in love.

From this discussion, it is evident that this scene is not only pivotal to the way the film commodifies and plays into the stereotype of the serial killer celebrity, but it is also the scene that facilitates a strong connection between the spectator and Ted. The spectator is drawn into the serial killer's world and shares his gaze creating the opportunity for an allegiance to be formed. This is also the moment that sparks the spectator's desire, a desire that helps to keep the fantasy of Ted as a romantic hero in place.

4.3. **An Imaginary Romance**

One could easily make the mistake of believing that *Extremely Wicked* is a romantic drama instead of a film dealing with one of the most notorious serial killers of the past century, Ted Bundy. Through its construction of Ted and through the manner in which it uses its cinematic elements, *Extremely Wicked* plays into the ideological fantasy of romance. Through the direction of the look and the gaze a world is created on screen that is populated by romantic heroes and that is fraught with the power dynamics one may typically find more in line with a romance film. Furthermore, the film seems to place its focus on the non-threating face of the serial killer, not the evil one, thereby making it easier for the spectator to buy into this ideological fantasy of romance. By constructing the film in this manner, it becomes easy to see how Ted is painted as a charming and appealing man and it is in this way that the serial killer is romanticised and idealised. Three points will be considered in order to illuminate the way in which *Extremely Wicked* not only creates a romanticised killer but a romantic hero. Firstly, the way certain events in the film are obscured or revealed in order to enforce the representation of Ted Bundy as a romantic hero; secondly the manner in which fantasy is employed to cover

the reality of Ted Bundy and his crimes and construct a romantic hero narrative instead; and thirdly the relationship dynamics in the film as is highlighted in Liz's daydream sequence.

The first element to be considered is the way the narrative events are revealed to the spectator in order to create a romance film driven by Ted as the romantic hero. In the film, the spectator's look is directed towards moments that show him as a character in need of sympathy. Ted is constructed as someone who loves and not as one who destroys. The images that are shown to the spectator do not happen by accident and the spectator's look is directed in a very specific way and certain events are foregrounded while others are obscured. Susan Speidel argues that a film's plot can "emphasise or de-emphasise moments of the story through other types of temporal manipulation" (82). In other words, the film may place a focus on certain elements and obscure others by what it chooses to emphasise or reveal. It may be argued that *Extremely Wicked* manipulates the plot in a way to enforce the romance elements within the film. This is done largely through what the film does not show, namely violence as well as in the way it positions and juxtaposes scenes to create the impression that Ted's entire life revolves around Liz.

The presence of violence may be seen as an integral part of serial killer cinema with David Schmid contending that violence, especially when perpetrated by well-known stars, may have a cathartic effect (*Natural Born Celebrities* 19). This reinforces the link between violence and the serial killer and is certainly an element most spectators expect when watching a serial killer film. However, *Extremely Wicked* chooses not to employ overtly violent scenes and instead obscures these events. The only actual violence the spectator sees for most of the film is through crime scene photographs. The absence of violence makes it easier for the spectator to disavow the allegations of violence lodged against Ted. Leitch argues that violence can be seen as acceptable to spectators if it is "limited in its effects" (Schmid, "Devil" 136). Consequently, by obscuring the images of violence, the few instances of violent photographs that are shown are disavowed and not taken into account in the formation of the perception regarding Ted's character. Indeed, it may be argued that the film is so devoid of violent images (especially moving images of violence) that the single instances in which it occurs becomes almost unbelievable. This is a central way that the film constructs a romanticised killer – by obscuring the reality of what he has done.

Furthermore, it is through that which the film obscures that desire is elicited. As Todd McGowan argues, desire is connected to what is unseen, and, in this way, it compels the spectator's look (*Real* 6). On the one hand, by not revealing Ted's violent actions, the spectator's desire for Ted's innocence is stimulated – if it cannot be seen it cannot be true. The spectators

can dupe themselves into believing that Ted's only motive is to be free in order to be reunited with Liz. On the other hand, it may be argued that denying the spectator access to these violent scenes creates a desire precisely for these violent images. The spectator is, albeit only in a few moments, confronted with exactly what the film does not show – the murders. These occur in the moments where he escapes from prison, but it is not explicitly revealed what he is doing and it is left up to the spectator to fill in the gaps. This is especially worrying if those murderous gaps are left to the spectator's imagination. Perhaps one could even argue that if the spectator is the one desiring violent images, it positions the distinctly nonviolent Ted that is represented in the film as 'better' than they are. Thereby excusing his behaviour and making the connection to him all the more easy.

It is not only in what the film chooses to obscure that enforces the representation of Ted as a romantic hero, but also in the way it reveals and connects the moments that it does show. A central sequence, which affirms the argument that *Extremely Wicked* romanticises the figure of Ted Bundy, occurs when Ted tries to escape from prison (which he successfully does twice). During this sequence Ted's reason for escaping prison is constructed as if it is done in order to be reunited with Liz. It is revealed that Liz is not answering Ted's calls and the idea is created that his plan to escape is born out of his frustration of not being able to get a hold of Liz. Consequently, the only thing Ted can think of doing is escaping and getting back to her. Ted even affirms this in a later scene when he sees her again and tells her: "running was foolish but you weren't answering my calls. I didn't know what to do. I thought I was going to lose you". Therefore, instead of using Ted's escape and his time running from the law to reveal his true nature, *Extremely Wicked* places the focus on the love story. In this way it creates a connection to Ted and elicits empathy with what he is going through and consequently accentuates Ted's position as a romantic hero.

A key scene in this narrative sequence occurs when Liz visits Ted in prison and he gives her a copy of the book *Papillon* (1970) written by Henri Charrière – a book about a man who is wrongfully accused of a crime and who manages to escape from prison. This scene is constructed as a meeting between two lovers who have been kept apart for too long – especially considering Ted's actions and behaviour towards Liz. Ted is excited to see her and speaks to her kindly and lovingly. This is an important way in which the film manages to create a sense of allegiance between the spectator and Ted, as a character's actions towards other characters influence whether they are seen as 'good' and whether the spectator may form an allegiance with them (Carroll, *Theorizing* 105; Smith, *Engaging Characters* 190). Furthermore, the way the shots of the characters are framed also gives the spectators insight into the emotional world

of the characters as the scene employs several close-ups that concentrate on the characters' faces. These close-ups create a sense of intimacy and the way Ted looks at Liz seems to reveal much about his character and his character's intentions. In these moments Ted's face reveals heart wrenching emotions that the spectator can buy into and additionally these moments may generate feelings of empathy in the spectator. In this scene Ted's excitement at seeing Liz is visible and coupled with the vulnerabilities and tears at the end of the scene when Liz leaves, positions Ted not as a heartless murderer but as a distraught young man losing the love of his life. This scene also includes a shot taken through a window of sorts, creating the impression for the spectators that they are intruding on something – the spectators are placed in the position of the voyeur encroaching on the lives of these characters through their subjective look. This adds to the intimacy of the scene and evokes a feeling in the spectator that they are privy to one of Ted's most vulnerable moments, a moment that shows him almost breaking down as Liz leaves. This creates a false sense in the spectator that they are getting a glimpse of who Ted 'really' is when he thinks nobody else is around to see him. In this moment they see a man filled with emotions and clearly heartbroken, quite far from the psychopath painted in the media.

The subsequent scenes within this specific sequence seem to cement the romantic aspirations surrounding Ted's character. He goes from being distraught after Liz leaves him to coming up with a plan to get back to her (at least this is the manner in which the film frames it). After phone calls and letters to Liz seem to fail, Ted formulates a plan to get out of prison once again. These scenes of Ted plotting his escape are then juxtaposed with that of Liz talking to a new male character, Jerry. Liz and Jerry are laughing together and having a seemingly easy conversation. However, the juxtaposition of this scene with Ted's escape creates a sense of urgency and the spectators find themselves rooting for Ted's escape so that he can get back to Liz before it is too late. The way in which this narrative sequence plays out may affect the allegiance of the spectator. The film constructs Ted in a way that makes it easier for a spectator to resonate with him. The spectator's responses to a story are produced by the way the plot is manipulated (Speidel 82). The film 'manipulates' the plot in the way it presents Ted's escape as an escape to return to Liz, thereby shaping the fact that the film is viewed as a romance.

The second element to consider is the way in which fantasy and the domesticated gaze in *Extremely Wicked* cover up reality in order to create what more closely resembles a love story rather than one about a brutal murderer. Fantasy refers to an imaginary scenario that aims to cover up holes within ideology and social structures of the subject (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 23-24). The film employs fantasy to hide the gaps and makes the spectators believe in the wholeness of the image they are presented with. The use of fantasy plays a role in cinema in

general, but specifically also within serial killer cinema. Serial killer cinema, in varying ways, tries to patch up the holes that structures in society may have, such as the simple thought that good will always triumph over evil. *Extremely Wicked* does this by domesticating the gaze and using fantasy to paint Ted as a good man, which was Liz's desire all along. This presence of the gaze, however, is not the real gaze that exposes the gaps, instead it simply creates a false sense of the presence of the object of desire (in this case Ted's innocence).

The way the film is presented as a romance is central to how the film *Extremely Wicked* is able to construct a romanticised serial killer. As Alison Young argues, the manner in which a film employs its different elements may influence the spectator's reading of a given film and this in turn influences the way the spectator engages with these representations (2). In *Extremely Wicked* the film employs its elements in order to create a fantasmatic scenario. In other words, the visual look of the film and the manner in which the scenes are put together all work together in order to create the false sense that Ted is a romantic hero and not a violent killer. The key way the film is able to do this is through its employment of the domesticated gaze. McGowan argues that the way the film uses fantasy to domesticate the gaze is central to how cinema is able to perpetuate ideology ("Looking" 36). In this case this can be seen in the ideology of the fantasy of romance. Understanding the function of the domesticated gaze and how it is linked to fantasy within cinema, as well as the clash that may occur between the domesticated gaze and an encounter with the traumatic real within *Extremely Wicked*, reveals the role of the gaze in the construction of a romanticised serial killer. By constructing fantasmatic scenarios Liz is able to hide the gaps that may appear in her world, gaps which would otherwise reveal that the romance she has with Ted is not all it appears to be. In this way the gaps are also hidden and covered for the spectator and the spectator buys into Ted's portrayal as a romantic hero.

Only a few single moments seem to hint at Ted's true nature and threaten to reveal the gaps in the symbolic order that constructs Ted as a romantic hero. These moments could have created an opportunity for the spectator to be confronted with the reality of who he was but even these are glossed over in the film. The manner in which the film deals with these moments seems to be an attempt to reinforce the romantic ideology while still obscuring the truth. One of these key instances can be seen when Liz and Ted visit the pet shelter looking for a dog to adopt. In this scene Ted stares intently at a dog and uses the power of his look to leave the dog whimpering. This is surely a moment that could have raised some alarm bells. However, the scene that is cut to right after this moment takes place is a light-hearted one between Ted and Liz – where they giggle together and he barks playfully at her just like the dogs in the shelter

had. By juxtaposing these scenes, the film manages to take a serious moment that could have revealed the true nature of this serial killer and convert it into a playful happy encounter between two lovers thereby negating any negative feelings that the interaction at the dog shelter might have created.

It could be argued that these scenes are clouded with fantasy as they are mostly from Liz's perspective. The film manages to construct Ted's story, not from the perspective of one of his potential victims or even wholly from his perspective, but by constructing it around the perspective of his dotting girlfriend Liz. One could argue that most of Ted's solitary scenes, especially at the start of the film, may not truly be his perspective but that of Liz's desire. She wants him to miss her and she wants his focus to be his return to her. This also generates the spectator's desire – it could be the desire to believe in his innocence or there may exist a darker possibility that Ted Bundy was in fact guilty, but that Liz was so special to him that she was always safe and this creates a disturbing yet thrilling experience for the spectator.

By focusing on Liz's perspective, the element of fantasy is enhanced for most of the film because of *her* desire to cover up the truth – a desire that then also becomes the spectator's desire. It is much easier for Liz, and perhaps by extension the spectator as well, to believe in Ted's innocence. Until the end the way Liz thinks of Ted is clouded in positive thoughts, hardly ever recognising the reality of what he has done. This also affects the spectator's allegiance with Ted because the spectator often sees Ted as Liz sees Ted. The spectator is given the perfect platform to form an allegiance with him and through this connection the spectator is not inserted into a thriller surrounding a serial murderer but rather into a love story in which they identify with both Liz and Ted's fight to get back to her (as this is how it is framed within the film).

There are, however, some instances in the film where fantasy and reality collide and where the dichotomy of good and evil is explored. However, it is in the treatment of these moments that the film reveals its penchant for the romanticised killer as opposed to the reality. One such moment where fantasy and reality clash is the opening moments of the film where Ted and Liz are seen talking in prison and the film uses flashbacks to show the night they met at a bar. These images of Ted and Liz at the bar are constructed in such a way that the spectator buys into the ideological fantasy of romance right from the start, forgetting for a moment that the film started out at a prison. The scene at the bar uses warm and soft oranges, yellows and reds, which may be described as warm earthy colours. Often spectators "respond positively to" earthy colours (Bellantoni 113). One could therefore infer that the spectator may respond positively to Ted and Liz and the romance that is set to unfold between them. It is especially

the orange and amber undertones to the scene that is central to what gives the scene its romantic feel as Bellantoni argues that orange light used in an interior scene may "read as romantic" (112). This is precisely what occurs in the bar scene between Ted and Liz. The power of the colours in the bar scene is especially strong in contrast to the stark cold blues seen in the prison scene with which it is juxtaposed. This speaks directly to the collision of fantasy (the romance in the bar) and reality (the meeting at the prison) as well as the dichotomy of good and evil, which is a strong ideological position taken up within serial killer cinema. However, what this scene does is create a fantasmatic scenario which domesticates the gaze and places the emphasis on the 'good' and romantic side of the coin instead of showcasing the reality of the brutal killer Ted Bundy was.

Furthermore, the scene of Ted and Liz at the bar is also filled with close-ups of their faces and the slow and paced rhythm all seem to align more strongly with a romance film. The shots of the faces in the bar scene moments between Ted and Liz communicate only a love story. The manner in which the film frames the characters' faces, especially in these 'romance' scenes, underscores the face's communicative ability. Even in the scenes at the prison which the bar scene is juxtaposed with, Ted's face only communicates love and kindness towards Liz thereby hiding any of the 'evil' elements of his character. Steimatsky points out that the face has a discursive power and the face communicates and joins images and thoughts together (9). Considering Ted's face and the way he looks at Liz throughout the entire film communicates a feeling of love towards her and in this way even in the moments where fantasy and reality collide, such as the juxtaposition of the bar and prison scenes, it is this look of love that stands out and that facilitates a connection between the spectator and the character of Ted Bundy. Furthermore, it may be argued that this look of love towards Liz that is written all over Ted's face seems to bind the film together and it is central to what constructs the film as a romance for the spectator. As Steimatsky argues, faces "make narrative and discursive worlds cohere" (9). Throughout the juxtaposed scenes in the film, where fantasy meets reality and where the good is placed in direct opposition to the bad, Ted's face and the look it carries towards Liz, remains steadfast. It is in this way that a character is created that the spectator forms an allegiance with and experiences empathy towards and it is ultimately this adoration that Ted shows towards Liz that romanticises him.

Another instance where fantasy and reality collide and where the dichotomy between good and evil is explored can be seen in the scenes where home videos of Ted, Liz and Molly are juxtaposed with news excerpts – the home videos show a strong element of the fantasy that is constructed (especially by Liz) in order to hide the truth of the reality that lies underneath,

which is revealed through the news inserts. However, it is ultimately the family unit that leaves a more lasting impression for the spectator as many of the scenes in the film centre on the ideal of the family and Ted's relationship with Liz. There are several moments between Ted, Liz and her daughter Molly that seems to set up the story for the spectator to buy into Ted as a family man – he is seen cooking, looking after Molly and even shown in home videos celebrating her birthdays and making snow angels. It is clear that trying to insert the reality into fantasmatic scenarios through the news inserts does little to convince the spectator of the reality and horrors of Ted's crimes.

Romance underpins not only Ted and Liz's relationship but also the dynamic in each of their subsequent relationships. The film is constructed as a love story: Liz pining for Ted, Ted pining for Liz and the evil structures of society keeping them apart. This is of course far from the reality, but this is not what the film reveals to the spectator. The film constructs a doomed romance that a spectator cannot help but root for. The spectator's desire for them to be reunited is triggered by the fact that they are kept apart. The very narrative of the film is constructed in such a way that it seems as if all Ted's choices are driven by the romantic narrative that he may be reunited with Liz. Liz, on the other hand, is set up as someone whose entire existence rests upon this one man. Even though him being in prison seems to wear her down, she cannot escape him and keeps on watching him on television and waits for his phone calls. The film even throws in some more romance for the spectator once it seems as if the narrative of Liz and Ted's love story is bound to fail. Ted finds 'happiness' with Carole Ann and Liz with Jerry (or at least some stability in Liz's case). These relationships are significant as they resonate with the promise of fulfilment that the ideology of romance has and also affirm McGowan's argument that the most widespread "ideological fantasy" offered by Hollywood films is "the romantic union" (*Psychoanalytic* 148). However, here it can be noted that if one examines Ted's new romance it is clear that Carole Ann is merely a replacement for Liz (keeping the hope alive that the true couple may be reunited). The domesticated gaze sets up the romantic fantasy in the film covering up the cracks that lie beneath. The reality is that most of the romantic liaisons in this film are doomed to fail (and they do). The single onscreen romance that seems to survive is the one between Liz and Jerry, although potentially they could just be friends but that seems doubtful given his continued presence and the enormous engagement ring on her finger at the end of the film. Therefore, it is the relationship between Liz and Jerry that plays right into this fantasy of "the romantic union" that McGowan refers to (*Psychoanalytic* 148).

One can also highlight that the importance of Liz and Jerry's relationship is further reinforced by the fact that Jerry was not a real figure in Liz's life at the time, but it is seemingly inconceivable for a Hollywood film not to end with a happy love story, even within a film dealing with a serial killer. Jerry's character was created for the film as a composite of several figures in Liz's life at the time (Sederstrom). It seems as if creating the potential for another love story plays right into dominant ideological structures. McGowan affirms that "contemporary ideology is first and foremost an ideology of romance" with "the image of the romantic partner" promising to fulfil the lack the subject feels in a manner that society cannot do (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 266). Certainly one may also note that another key romance that seems to remain in place is the romance that is created between the spectator and the characterisation of Ted in the film. Casting Zac Efron, an attractive star known for playing the romantic lead and focusing on the love story between Liz and Ted and Ted's drive to be united with her cements his character as a romantic hero for the spectator. This again can be linked to Smith's argument that the abundance of positive associations with a certain star may dilute the character's wicked elements ("Gangsters" 227). The spectator has come to recognise the star persona of Efron as one who populates romance films, and this therefore aids in negating any of the evil characteristics he may possess.

The argument held by new Lacanian film theorists that cinema has a clear power to subvert or destabilise dominant ideology does not seem to come to fruition in this specific film with the film using fantasmatic scenarios to domesticate the gaze instead. Perhaps it may be argued that it misses much of its potential by indulging in the romance element of the film instead of critiquing Ted's romanticised representation. The film clearly panders to the ideology of the fantasy of romance as it positions Jerry as a fundamental element for Liz piecing her life back together. Carole Ann's presence in Ted's life similarly covers the lack he feels and, in this way, constructs him not as a manipulative psychopath but as a wounded man who had to find comfort elsewhere after the love of his life deserts him. In constructing a film that plays into these romantic ideologies, certain tensions may arise regarding the relationship dynamics between the characters, especially when there is a love triangle present. It is in the power dynamics between the two couples (Ted and Liz, and Ted and Carole Ann) that much is revealed about the characters. Furthermore, this also emphasises the idea that the film has constructed the tale of a notorious serial killer as a romantic drama instead.

This brings about the final element to be considered in evaluating *Extremely Wicked*'s construction as a film fuelled by romance, namely the issue of the romantic power dynamics in the relationships between the characters as is revealed in Liz's daydream sequence. This

daydream sequence is juxtaposed with the scene of Ted and Carole Ann having sex in the prison. Considering the scene between Ted and Carole Ann in contrast to the sequence of Ted and Liz may serve to accentuate the manner in which the film is set up as a romance.

In the first scene of the sequence Liz experiences a flashback of happier times she spent with Ted. In these flashback moments several close-ups are used, and the spectator is drawn away from the plot of the film and the fact that Ted is standing trial for murder. As Béla Balázs argues close-ups of the face leave spectators alone with the face and the spectators are able to see the emotions and thoughts of the character (101). As this is a dream sequence of Liz it is truly as if the spectator steps into her mind and sees her thoughts and feels them with her, sharing the affective state that Liz has towards Ted. This connects to Lacan's thoughts that the subject in a dream cannot see but can only follow (*Four* 75). In this scene the spectators can only follow what the film chooses to reveal to them. Furthermore, the scene uses several close-ups and lingering shots, creating a sense of intimacy in this sequence. This intimacy also has the result of placing the spectator in the position of a voyeur and these voyeuristic moments draw the spectator into the setting of the film and they are placed in the position where they feel they are privy to the inside workings of these characters' lives and relationships. In doing so, the film manages to create a rapport between spectator and character. A connection is forged between the spectator and both Ted and Liz, which makes the spectator not only to root for them as individuals but also for them as a couple.

The sequence then moves to a moment where the spectator sees Ted putting his hands up in the air as one would when taking a picture, it is then revealed that he is putting his hands in the air to frame Liz as she is lying on the bed. In the shot of Ted his subjective look at her is sustained in this position as he inadvertently frames his own face as well. In certain instances in this sequence Ted is seen from a low angle while Liz is shown from a high angle. A low-angle shot (where the camera is placed below the character) makes characters seem powerful; whereas a high-angle shot (where the camera is placed above the character) makes characters seem powerless (Giannetti 14-18). Therefore, this sequence seems to give Ted power over Liz, as he is the one holding an active look, assisted by the fact that the camera is looking up at him thereby giving the character a sense of superiority. In this moment Liz seems somewhat powerless. However, though the scene may have been shot with the intention to show a glimpse of Ted's true nature as he clenches his fists together, the result of the scene within the context of the film is quite the opposite. It merely appears as if he is relishing in her beauty and nothing more. This is also strengthened in the moment when the shot shifts to Liz who is lying on the bed – the way she looks at him and the emotions on her face reveal nothing but happiness and

love. Perhaps the intention of the scene was to exhibit his power and reveal that she might have been one of his victims but if this were the intention, it certainly does not play out that way. Furthermore, the fact that this scene resembles a daydream can relate to the fantasmatic scenario the film creates. This is not only fantasy in relation to how Liz thinks back to her memories of Ted but there is also a fantasy element in how this is represented to the spectator. This is revealed through considering the blatant differences in the daydream sequence and the scene of Ted and Carole Ann that follows directly afterwards.

When it comes to the differences in the scenes between Ted and Liz and Ted and Carole Ann, one can start by considering the stark difference in the colour palette within these two scenes. In the scene that takes place between Liz and Ted, the colours are soft and warm and can be described as amber. Amber may be defined as "a cross between yellow and orange" and depending on how an amber light is used within a film it might even be considered "quintessentially romantic" (Bellantoni 115). For instance, Bellantoni suggests that this may happen when amber light is used in films otherwise dominated by darker colours (115). Following from this, it may certainly be argued that the way the amber light is used in *Extremely Wicked*, in direct contrast with scenes filled with colder or almost lifeless colours, may then also render it "quintessentially romantic". These moments are seen as especially romantic in their contrast to the scene between Ted and Carole Ann that follows. The colour palette when Ted is with Carole Ann is cold and less vibrant than the scene between Ted and Liz and evokes no sense of romance. The juxtaposition of these scenes then seems to highlight the strong relationship between Ted and Liz and also helps to turn Ted into a romantic hero and Liz into a romantic heroine. The spectators find themselves rooting for Ted and Liz in the age-old trope of the love triangle.

Another strong difference between these scenes is seen in the framing of the character's faces. During the daydream sequence, most of the characters are seen in lingering close-ups. This creates a further sense of intimacy and also has a greater affective power. The close-up and the face as discussed by Deleuze are both affection-images (88). The close-ups in this scene serve to heighten the affective response of the spectator towards Ted and Liz. Therefore, the spectator becomes invested in Ted and Liz as a couple, feeling sorry for Liz that they are not together and hopeful that they may be reunited. If this is contrasted with the scene between Ted and Carole Ann, it is clear that they are shown in longer shots and their faces are only revealed in profile – in this scene there are no moments where the spectator can truly connect to the emotions as exhibited on their faces. The dissonance between the close-ups and long shots in this sequence links to Paul Coates' argument that there exists a belief that closeness can be

connected to truth whereas distance may obscure it (51). The close -up shots in the scene between Ted and Liz therefore seem to designate the idea of truth whereas the long-shots and the distance seen in the interaction between Carole Ann and Ted might then hint at a truth that is obscured (perhaps the truth that he does still love Liz after all). In a sense this sense of distance alienates the spectator from Carole Ann, once again aligning the spectator to root for Ted and Liz's reconciliation. The sequence between Ted and Liz is constructed as one of endearing romance and love, whereas the scene between Ted and Carole Ann is constructed as one that is merely about sex. In this sense, Carole Ann becomes the 'other woman'. Ted's look at the women in these two scenes is also of great significance. The way Ted looks at Liz is directly contrasted in the following scene by how he looks at Carole Ann, or in fact does not look at her. He avoids her eyes completely and seems quite disinterested. This is a further example of the way his 'devotion' to Liz is revealed – by setting up the way he looks at each one of them side-by-side. The implication is that the spectator buys into the idea that his feelings for Liz must have been real and once again positioning him further and further away from the figure of a psychopath.

This scene also speaks to the idea of an 'evading' look by revealing the dynamics of both power and desire that may be found in the look that is not met. Ted's inability to look at Carole Ann after they have sex, immediately leads her to think that he must still be in love with Liz. This scene reinforces the ideological fantasy of romance that underpins the entire film. In this moment between Ted and Carole Ann, Ted seems hurt and angry because the love of his life (Liz) left him – he is a wounded man. This scene exposes Ted's emotions revealing a sense of normalcy to the spectator, and certainly not of psychopathy. In addition, this scene is contrasted with the fact that in every single scene involving Ted and Liz he remains transfixed on her. This seems to perpetuate the love story until the very end. This also has a strong impact on the allegiance that is created between Ted and the spectator and in these moments the spectator comes to have empathy with him over the fact that he has lost his love.

From this discussion it is clear that *Extremely Wicked* relies on the fantasy scenario that it creates to domesticate the gaze and obscure the reality of Ted Bundy's crimes. This certainly highlights the ideological fantasy of romance the film seems to offer. McGowan argues that "the ideological dimension" of Hollywood films may be found precisely in the way it uses fantasy in order "to domesticate the object-gaze" ("Looking" 36). Furthermore, these fantasy scenarios are heightened by the way the cinematic elements work together in order to construct Ted as a romantic hero. This ties directly into Young's notion that the way a film uses its elements affects the spectator's interpretation of and engagement with the film (2). *Extremely*

Wicked uses colour and cinematography to push the notion of the romantic drama to the centre. By choosing to emphasise certain moments and obscure others, the film directs the look of the spectator towards a romance film with Ted as the romantic hero and uses Ted's face in these romance scenes in order to enforce a connection between spectator and character. The film greatly plays into the notion of the ideological fantasy of romance and the construction of the film as a romance through the use of the domesticated gaze is at the heart of what enables the film to construct a romanticised serial killer.

4.4. **Facing Judgment**

The next moment that warrants examination to illustrate the role of the gaze and the face in the film and the way the face creates a platform for an affective response, is the scene in which Ted's final judgment is passed down. This climactic scene may be described as, what Carl Plantinga terms a ‘scene of empathy’. One could argue that scenes of empathy are especially important as it relates to the connection that is created between spectators and characters. Plantinga defines a scene of empathy as one where the pace of the film slows down and the character's emotional state takes centre stage, and this is often revealed through a close-up of the character's face (“Scene” 239). It is in these scenes where the characters' emotions come through and that spectators can get the sense that they 'know' the character. This reiterates Neill's argument that it is through the engagement with characters (in this instance the serial killer Ted Bundy) that the spectator comes to experience empathy towards them and understands them (189). This is seen as somewhat problematic when the scene of empathy is geared around a serial killer and this certainly creates the perfect platform for the romanticisation of the character.

Additionally, this scene speaks to the power the objective gaze may have in creating a connection between the spectator and Ted. In this scene, there is a prolonged shot of Ted looking at the judge (and the spectator) that may be described as a manifestation of the objective gaze which then inserts the spectator into the filmic world. Furthermore, this moment creates a space for the spectator to empathise with Ted. The prolonged shot helps the spectator to align with Ted and the spectator is drawn into Ted's world. Ted's face in this scene also does not seem to resemble a callous killer, but rather a scared and broken man. Furthermore, the shot almost seems to be positioned as if Ted is addressing the spectators directly, pleading with them one last time for his innocence. It is in this precise moment that the spectator is drawn

into the onscreen world and when the spectator feels empathy as the tears fill his eyes. The way the gaze manages to draw in the spectator, and the affective response of the spectators in this moment speaks to the lack of power that the spectator may have if the gaze is understood as objective. Instead it is through the objective gaze that the spectator becomes fully immersed into the filmic world, enthralled by the face and the way it creates an empathetic response in this scene.

The judgment scene in *Extremely Wicked* pauses the drama of the courtroom for a moment as the prolonged close-up of Ted's face manages to remove him from his spatial context. Therefore, this scene clearly functions as an example of Plantinga's scene of empathy in the film. Furthermore, this scene and the focus on Ted's face can be linked to Bela Balázs's thought that by seeing the isolated face, the spectator is alone with that face and it creates a space to see the emotions and thoughts of the character (101). This scene clearly creates an opportunity for an affective response on the part of the spectator. This is a critical element showing the way the film manages to romanticise Bundy as it brings the human face to the fore instead of the face of evil. An analysis of the scene, according to Plantinga's theory that the face is central in scenes of empathy, illuminates the manner in which Ted Bundy's face evokes empathy and allegiance. A significant way the film romanticises the serial killer is precisely through the careful use of the face in emotional scenes as this results in the elicitation of empathy towards the killer. The strong emphasis on the face in this scene along with the intense emotions that are exhibited by the character and the affective response elicited from the spectator, reveals the power of the face. This scene can be described as one that elicits empathy as it creates the perfect platform for the spectator to feel congruently with the character. Through the use of prolonged close-ups of, especially, Ted's face the spectator is drawn into Ted's world and experiences. The platform is created for the spectator to experience a sense of emotional contagion, which refers to 'catching' the emotions of others (Plantinga, "Scene" 243). In this scene extended time is spent on Ted's face in close proximity. This may prompt the spectator to start mimicking what they see on screen thus resulting in facial feedback. Facial feedback is the theory that copying facial expressions may influence and even create an emotional experience (Plantinga, “Scene” 243-244). The spectator's feelings towards Ted may be influenced and set the spectator up to feel congruently with Ted in that moment. This does of course also not occur in isolation and the film sets up an allegiance between the spectator and Ted, creating the perfect platform for this emotional response.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, Plantinga suggests five strategies that are often used within scenes of empathy in order to elicit empathy in the spectator and, in the

judgment scene, as a clear example of a scene of empathy, all of these strategies come together. This is a key emotional scene in the film and by considering these five strategies as they are employed in *Extremely Wicked*, the way the film creates a romanticised serial killer that the spectator empathises with is made clear. The first strategy to consider is that of *attention*, which refers to the idea that the attention must be focused on the facial expression of the character to elicit emotional contagion (Plantinga, "Scene" 249). Looking at the judgement scene from the film, it is clear that the camera tracks closer and closer to his face until eventually his tearstained eyes fill the entire screen. The spectator's look is directed solely towards Ted. The important thing to note is that the closer the camera tracks to Ted's face, the more empathy is elicited. As the camera's focus is narrowed onto Ted's face, so too is the focus of the spectator. As this camera tracks towards Ted's face, it embodies Balázs argument that the face becomes an entity in its own right, existing outside of a specific space or context (101). The spectator is drawn in and, using the close-up, their look and attention has been guided. As Young suggests, the spectator becomes incorporated into the filmic universe through the camera and in that moment shares the gaze of the serial killer (103). In this moment, the killer is positioned with Ted, experiencing what he is experiencing. If the spectator considers only this moment, it is easy to become enthralled by the tear-filled eyes they see in front of them, forgetting for a moment the harsh realities surrounding them.

The second strategy to examine is the *duration* of these scenes of empathy. The duration of the shots in the scene of empathy need to be sufficient to cause the intended response (Plantinga, "Scene" 249). If one analyses the scene from *Extremely Wicked*, one establishes that the shots of Ted's face are certainly longer than the average shots of the film. In fact, these scenes last 60 seconds, 30 seconds and 11 seconds respectively. The entire duration of the point-of-view structure between Ted and the judge exceeds two minutes in length. These point-of-view structures are also crucial when eliciting empathy in the spectator as it is through these shots that the spectator can understand the context behind what the character is experiencing (Plantinga, "Scene" 241). It is also through these longer shots that the spectator can truly study the face of the character. They can become familiar with the lines and nuances and thereby form a stronger connection. The familiarity of this face may indeed play a role in an affective response. By seeing the close-up of Ted's face for a prolonged period, the film gives the opportunity for emotional contagion to take place. By seeing the face in such close proximity and for such a long duration, spectators may start to feel the same sorrow and frustration as the face they are looking at is feeling. Furthermore, by looking at a crying and sad face for an extended period also creates the opportunity for affective mimicry, which in turn may result in

facial feedback as the spectator starts feeling what Ted is feeling. This of course is only achievable because of the connection the film has created between the spectator and Ted throughout the film's duration.

This brings about the third strategy that Plantinga discusses, which is that of *allegiance*. As has already been mentioned, a sense of allegiance may play an important role in the connection between spectators and characters as well as spectators' affective responses towards these characters. Murray Smith further highlights that a sense of allegiance with a character in a film should be considered in relation to the elements spectators wished they possessed – allegiance is felt with a character based not on traits the spectator possesses but what they desire to possess (*Engaging Characters* 2). The film shows a charming, attractive man with people constantly fawning all over him – traits that many spectators may desire for themselves. Desire, as has already been noted, is a key element in serial killer cinema and it is this desire that may fuel a sense of allegiance between spectator and character in this moment. The notion of allegiance is paramount to the spectator's affective experience when watching a film and it is clear that building up to this scene and these prolonged close-ups all contribute to this sense of allegiance. This scene also reveals much about Ted's character and the reason why the spectator feels an allegiance with him in the first place. This scene sees him sad, crying and even scared. These reactions are not necessarily the type of reaction associated with a brutal serial killer. Ted is not constructed as a ruthless murderer in this scene and by painting him as scared and vulnerable the spectator may even start sharing those emotions. Furthermore, it is through the way his character is revealed in this scene and in the way he looks intently at the judge and the spectators that spectators may see their reflection in him. This occurs because the moment where Ted returns the look of the spectator may be seen as a manifestation of the objective gaze, which draws the spectators both into the scene as well as into Ted's onscreen world. Not only are the spectators being looked at, but they may even recognise themselves in the emotions that they see reflected in Ted's face.

The fourth strategy this scene employs in order to create an affective response in the spectator is *narrative context*. The narrative is vital in creating the foundation for empathy to occur (Plantinga, "Scene" 251). The way the serial killer is constructed throughout the narrative plays a fundamental role in the way the serial killer is romanticised in the film and the way the spectator comes to empathise with the serial killer. The strong presence of the face in the narrative of the film, and its connection to an affective experience, have already been discussed. However, here one can highlight that *Extremely Wicked*'s focus is away from Ted Bundy's wicked deeds, instead choosing to concentrate on presenting the narrative of the serial killer

Ted Bundy as a love story. Throughout the narrative the spectators are shown a side of Ted that seems to underline the virtue in Ted's character. Until the very end he seems to be completely in love with Liz. There are moments in prison when he seems scared and worried. He also has moments in which he is shown as genuinely happy. All of these affective states are not usually associated with a psychopathic murderer. Therefore, it is clear that the narrative the film has chosen to follow is one that sets Ted up as the hero to root for. As Simpson has stated, one of the key faces of the serial killer is the masculine hero (23). The narrative of *Extremely Wicked* plays right into this and it is exemplified in this scene. This scene shows Ted pleading for his innocence in a heart wrenching way – thereby continuing with the narrative that he cannot possibly be guilty of the crimes he is accused of.

Finally, a sense of *affective congruence* is also crucial in considering the role of the face in the scene of empathy as there needs to be a sense of congruence between the narrative context, character engagement, film style and/or technique, and the responses that these elements come together to generate (Plantinga, "Scene" 253). This echoes Youngs's argument that the manner in which cinema uses the elements unique to this genre affects the reading of representations as well as the way a spectator engages with those representations (2). The judgment scene and Ted's speech specifically can be seen as the culmination of all the elements of the film that have worked together to create a strong scene of empathy. For instance, in *Extremely Wicked*, as has already been mentioned, the colour palette used especially in the scenes between Ted and Liz creates feelings of warmth, cosiness, romance and consequently sets Ted up as a romantic hero. This is especially seen in scenes where Ted is with Liz and Molly and they create the picture of a perfect family unit. In addition, shots of Ted escaping prison are juxtaposed with Liz talking to a new man, which in turn show Ted is fighting to get back with Liz. These moments have worked together to create an allegiance between the spectator and Ted, which creates the space for an empathetic response. If one then considers the way the different elements, such as the sound and the framing come together in this scene, one element that stands out is the stark contrast between the dialogue heard by the judge and the deeply emotional face of Ted. The dialogue that is heard during the judgment scene seems rather blunt and could have been an opportunity to show the reality of Ted's crimes. However, the way in which it is constructed with Ted's distraught face as the focus seems to align the spectator with Ted all over again. The result of this is a sense of shock and disbelief in the spectator, similar to what the character's face reveals. One can also point out that the manner in which the film uses close-ups could be linked to a sense of affective congruence, especially given the fact that Deleuze argues that the close-up is the affection-image (88). The film uses

a large proportion of close-ups (therefore images of affect) and through this continues to create a sense of intimacy throughout the film. These close-ups evoke a feeling of empathy towards Ted for most of the film and this is undoubtedly exemplified in this scene.

It is clear that the different elements all work together to create an empathetic response in the spectator viewing the film and this response happens through the prevalence of the face. The close-up, the face, and the way the face is placed in the scene of empathy, may be described as useful tools when it comes to establishing a connection between spectators and characters. Moreover, the manifestation of the objective gaze in this scene of empathy further emphasises the spectators' position in the film as well as their allegiance towards Ted. However, it may also be seen as problematic when this connection is formed with a serial killer and not with the victim of his crimes. This is one of the key ways in which film manages to construct a romanticised serial killer on screen, having the effect that a spectator connects, roots for and resonates with this figure.

4.5. **Facing an Encounter with the Real**

One of the most crucial moments in *Extremely Wicked* where the gaze and the face are engaged with in order to affirm the serial killer as a romanticised figure occurs in the scene where Liz visits Ted in prison in the hopes of getting to the truth. This scene takes place both at the start and end of the film and therefore acts almost as a 'bookend' to the film. In this way this encounter with Ted and Liz forms both the first and last impressions that a spectator has of the film and its characters. Through its use of close-ups and the focus on the face, the scene romanticises the serial killer Ted Bundy and it reveals the key dynamics between Liz and Ted. This scene also sets the stage for the allegiance that forms between Ted and the spectator and the spectator's empathetic response towards him. Moreover, it is through the manifestation of the objective gaze in the final moments of the scene and film that forces the spectator into an encounter with the traumatic real.

The first part of the scene takes place at the start of the film and establishes the tone for what is to come as it sets up Ted's face and the use of close-ups as central to the film's narrative. It could also be argued that this scene sets up the spectators' allegiance from the start. The opening image of the film reveals the setting for this first scene – a prison. Furthermore, the first meeting with Ted is in a scene in which he is in a prison jumpsuit and handcuffs. On the surface this should push the spectator away from an allegiance with him as Smith contends that

moral conduct plays a central role in the allegiance spectators form with characters (*Engaging Characters* 188). However, it is the expressions revealed in his face that actually enforces a sense of allegiance. Ted's face reveals his feelings of tenderness and love towards Liz and this is further echoed in how he looks at and speaks to her. As has been discussed, the characters' behaviour towards the other characters that share the filmic world helps to pave the way towards allegiance. The manner in which Ted treats Liz plays an important part when it comes to the reasons that spectators connect to him. In this first interaction Ted is kind towards Liz and his entire face seems to light up when he sees her. This moment again connecting to the idea that the behaviour of a character towards others plays a role in whether the spectator forms an allegiance with this character and whether they deem them as 'good' (Carroll, *Theorizing* 105; Smith, *Engaging Characters* 190). His behaviour towards Liz creates doubt about whether he ever could have done the things he has been accused of – someone so kind and so nice could surely not be capable of these actions? It is through his gentleness towards Liz that Ted is painted as a good guy, thereby, in turn, creating the "morally desirable" element that Smith argues is important for a sense of allegiance to be established (*Engaging Characters* 188). It is significant that this happens at the beginning of the film. The way he is painted in those first few minutes is important when considering the connection between the spectator and the character. In these first moments Ted's face reveals a kind man who is hopelessly in love with Liz. This is a far cry from the predatory serial killer that he really is and the way his character is revealed and constructed in these first few minutes seems to be the way he is constructed throughout most of the film.

The affective power of the images in this scene can be found in its abundant use of close-ups. As Deleuze argues, close-ups can be seen as synonymous with, what he terms, affection-images (88). These affection-images are seen from the spectator's first engagement with Ted, which is through an image of him gently smiling in a close-up. This image sets the scene for Ted's unthreatening persona. In addition, the first moment that Ted speaks, his face is framed in a close-up. He is soft spoken and complimentary towards Liz and he seems completely enthralled by her. The first time Liz speaks, she seems to be looking up at the camera, again framed in a close-up. Here one may again highlight that a high angle shot makes characters seem powerless (Giannetti 15,17). Consequently, the fact that Liz looks up at Ted creates a sense that he still has power over her.

These initial moments between Ted and Liz set up the power dynamics between them that will remain in place for the duration of the film. The way power dynamics are constructed between characters often happens through the way the look or the gaze is used within cinema.

In the first moments of the scene, Liz seems to withhold her look by looking down. Liz's look is only revealed in the moment of Ted's arrival and, with him looking back at her, from a high angle, the power relationship is already established in this first moment. There is hardly any dialogue in the first part of this scene; instead the spectator is made to draw conclusions about the dynamic between them only through the looks they give each other. Furthermore, Ted does not want to break away from Liz's look but for a moment he must, and it is here, in the broken look, that the focus is shifted to his handcuffs and the reality of the situation sets in. This scene also sets the stage for the spectator's first encounter with Ted and it is through the way he looks at Liz that it becomes clear to the spectator that this film is set up as a love story – the romance narrative is also further emphasised by immediately cutting the scene to Ted and Liz's first meeting. Ted's look is tender and kind and not what one would expect from a notorious serial killer. The look reveals intricacies about character relations and it also hints at the spectators where their allegiance should lie. By setting up Ted as the nice sweet man in the first moments his role has already been set out for them. For most of the film Ted remains in the box of the 'romantic hero' and this is also revealed in the way he looks at Liz every time he sees her – with love and adoration.

In addition, the shots of both Ted and Liz's faces tend to linger and spectators get the opportunity to connect and invest in the characters from the start of the film. Moreover, the scene is interspersed with flashbacks to the night they met, which creates a crucial context for their relationship – narrative context is fundamental to what stirs up empathy in the spectator (Plantinga 251). These flashbacks are also full of close-up shots, which emphasises the intimacy that exists between the characters and that the spectator has now become privy to. It is almost as if the spectator is intruding on their private moments and this voyeuristic element rears its head a few times during the film thereby creating a sense in the spectator that they are not only part of the private moments of these characters but also of the inner workings of the characters' minds.

The second part of this scene takes place at the end of the film after the allegiance between the spectator and Ted has been firmly established. This scene reveals the truth behind Ted's actions. However, despite the truth of what he has done, his face still reveals someone filled with remorse and not the face of a merciless killer. What could have and should have been a scene that brings the truth to light instead becomes almost sentimental in the use of the close-ups and thereby images of affection. Therefore, this scene, especially acting as a bookend to the film, leaves the impression of a killer who should be empathised with and in this way it also validates the spectator's feeling of allegiance towards him. The spectator is absolved of

any guilt over connecting with this killer because he has been painted as significantly better than he truly is – the film has romanticised him and placed him on a pedestal. This romanticised serial killer and the disavowal of the spectator's guilt is linked to Schmid's argument that achieving spectator identification (or then engagement or allegiance) with a serial killer, has been a question that has baffled serial killer popular culture ("Devil" 132). It may be argued that it is precisely through these figures' romanticisation that films achieve this – if the reality of their crimes are hidden and the focus is solely on their redeeming qualities there could surely be no conflict in connecting with them. However, it is perhaps then precisely where the responsibility of filmmaking enters. Simply because a film achieves identification with serial killer in an unconflicted way does not necessarily mean it should pander to this romanticised figure.

As the scene builds up to the climax, the use of close-ups accentuates the intensity and emotionality of the scene. As Balázs argues, faces are present within scenes of drama and carry more meaning than seeing these characters in a full body close-up would have (37). Every look and every twitch of the face in this scene is loaded with meaning and it is also the prolonged close-ups of the characters' faces that create meaning and that hint at the spectator how they should be feeling. By being confronted with the faces of these characters a sense of gravity is added to the scene. Ted's stance towards Liz also generates the spectator's desire – it could be the desire to believe in his innocence or there may exist a darker possibility that Ted Bundy was in fact guilty, but that Liz was so special to him that she was always safe. His use of the words "anyone but you" leaves the spectator with a feeling of sympathy and not horror. The desire for the spectator is to be that close to danger while keeping it at a safe distance, much like Liz experiences.

This scene between Ted and Liz carries more tension and certainly drama than the rest of the film put together (apart from the judgment scene as has already been discussed) and indeed this entire scene of drama is centred around the faces of these two characters and the affective states that those faces reveal. This results in the spectator spending even more time in the presence of the close-ups revealing the emotional states of the characters. Plantinga points out that duration can often be a key strategy employed by filmmakers in order to get the spectator to connect to a character ("Scene" 249). This is clearly seen in the shots that linger on the faces of both Ted and Liz and the slower tempo that these scenes have. Spending time with these characters reinforces an allegiance with them. This allegiance (primarily with Ted) is what leads the spectator into the climactic moment, which then makes the revelation of Ted's

crimes even more unbelievable and abrupt to the extent that the spectator may not buy into the fact that these horrific actions even took place.

From beginning to end this scene is shot almost entirely through close-ups, thereby revealing the inner lives of the characters and setting up images of affection. Through these close-ups the spectators are made to feel as if they are an intimate part of this scene. By experiencing the faces of the characters in such close proximity, a powerful effect arises to elicit an affective response from the spectators. By extending the duration on the faces of these characters, opportunity is created for emotional contagion to occur – the spectator looks at these faces and might even start experiencing affective mimicry and therewith facial feedback. Plantinga suggests that "the frequent and consistent use" of protracted close-ups on emoting faces within cinema provides "evidence for the feedback hypothesis" ("Scene" 244). From this one can say that the extended use of close-ups within cinema emphasises the power of film to elicit an affective response and facial feedback is a key way this is achieved. These emotive faces are often shown for longer than is required if one is merely trying to communicate or inform the spectator. Instead Plantinga suggests that the purpose of these types of shots is to promote an empathetic response in the spectator "through facial feedback and emotional contagion" ("Scene" 244). The longer spectators spend with the face of Ted the more they start mimicking his expression and then start to feel what he is feeling in that moment. These close-ups are not mere images but are vehicles of communication and meaning. In this scene the faces of the characters reveal much more about their relationship and their own individual states of mind than their words do.

However, apart from framing the characters in a way that invites the spectator's empathy, this scene is also the setting for the traumatic encounter with the real. The real here refers to Lacan's order of the real that reveals the "incompleteness of the symbolic order" (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 3). Therefore, this scene briefly exposes the gaps in the symbolic order which the fantasmatic scenario has tried to hide for most of *Extremely Wicked* and instead reveals a glimpse of what lies underneath. In the instances where films employ fantasy but also reveal the limit which "fantasy comes up against" it creates the opportunity for "an encounter with the traumatic real" (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 168). It must be noted, however, that in *Extremely Wicked* there are only a few brief moments in which this encounter with the traumatic real occurs and the use of fantasy in the film remains dominant. A key moment in this scene and one that exposes the gaps in the fantasmatic scenario is the revelation of the contents of an envelope that Liz has kept for many years and refused to look at. It may be argued that the envelope acts as the *objet petit a* in the film – the envelope is the object cause

of desire for the spectator. By obscuring the crime scene photograph the desire in the spectator is evoked. However, once the contents of the envelope are revealed to the spectator at the end of the film, it is clear that their desire is not fulfilled. As Homer argues, the subject will not attain fulfilment because as soon as the object cause of desire is achieved, there will be something else that the subject desires and this again creates a gap (87). By knowing the contents of the envelope, the spectators do not experience a sense of satisfaction. Instead they may rather experience guilt as it is in this moment that the objective gaze returns their look and they are involved and perhaps even held complicit because they were rooting for Ted along the way. For most of the film the spectator has been 'blinded' by fantasy only to have an encounter with the traumatic real in the final moments of the film.

It is also within these final moments that the spectator's mastery fails, and the subject is forced into an encounter with the real gaze as it is also in this moment where Ted (finally) confesses what he has done. What makes the moment so significant is that the images that follow seem so out of place with what has been experienced up until that point – these are the images that have been left out or obscured during the film as they reveal the reality of Ted's crimes. These are the first true images of violence and the first time that the real Ted is exposed. Even this violent moment the spectator can disavow, as Leitch argues that one of the ways that violence is made acceptable to spectators is "by being limited in its effects, or by being stylized through narrative conventions or rituals that deny its consequences" (qtd. in Schmid “Devil” 136). The violence in this scene, and throughout the film, is limited and the true consequences of Ted's action (the assault and murder of his victims) is only shown briefly and mostly only through a few crime scene photographs. It could, however, also be argued that this moment feeds into the spectator's morbid (and potentially disturbing) preoccupation with violence and therefore creates a thrilling experience rather than a fearful one. As Mark Seltzer contends, there is a deep and macabre intrigue with torn and broken bodies (3). This scene is one of only a handful of scenes that reveal these 'torn bodies'. This then adds to the idea that even when violence is shown in the film it is not met with disgust but rather with fascination. Moreover, it may then also be argued that this moment of violence and of reality plays into the idea that the representations of serial killers often provides and outlet for society's frustrations and they consequently vicariously take part in the serial killers' crimes (Bonn 279). It may be argued that it is easier for the spectator to indulge in this scene of violence as Ted has been romanticised and constructed as a hero throughout and therefore there need hardly be any guilt in the spectator's intrigue with this violent moment.

Furthermore, it is a riveting scene because it relies solely on the look and the gaze, on the plain of the visual to reveal itself. Ted never speaks the words of what he has done, but rather spells out the word 'hacksaw' on the glass pane that separates him from Liz. This glass pane with the word 'hacksaw' may also be seen as symbolic of the thing that has stood between them since the very beginning – the truth. This is a significant moment not only for Liz but also for the spectator as it is in this moment that the spectator is drawn into the filmic world. Showing the word 'hacksaw' from an oblique angle and then shifting to show us the horrifying word from a direct front angle lures the spectator in. The spectator is positioned as if being the one directly confronted with what has happened – it is as if the reality stares right back at the spectator. In that moment there seems to be no escape from the realisation that all the moments of Ted's sadness and vulnerability may have been false.

What is vital here is that this image of the word 'hacksaw' may be described as a manifestation of the objective gaze. This objective gaze has positioned the spectator in the filmic world and returned the spectator's look. However, in this moment, where the spectator along with Liz is confronted with the real, it seems so out of place and almost unbelievable. This is helped by the fact that the close-up of the word and Ted's face are not seen in the same frame. Ted writes out the word 'hacksaw' on the pane of glass in front of him. By using a close-up in this instance, and not hearing Ted's voice or seeing the full view of him writing in a long shot, it becomes almost unbelievable. The images that are shown in flashback of how he killed someone seem out of place and almost dreamlike as if they truly do not belong. The close-up of the word 'hacksaw' seems to epitomise what Deleuze suggests – even objects can be free from their spatio-temporal surroundings (96). Deleuze further posits that when an object has a "reflecting surface" and moves the object is *facified*, in other words, the object is treated as a face (88). This image of the word 'hacksaw' can therefore be seen as a facified object and consequently it could be argued that this image of the word 'hacksaw' is entirely separate from Ted.

The image of the word 'hacksaw' is given its own face and its own identity thereby affirming Balázs's argument that the use of the close-up removes the face from its context and consequently places it into another dimension whilst simultaneously tying it to Deleuze's argument that objects themselves can have the same power as a face (Balázs 100; Deleuze 96). By using a close-up here, the image is removed from its context and therefore the horror of Ted's crimes remains separate from him and the spectator is not asked to reconcile them. This is further reinforced by the tears he subsequently wipes away. As Ted wipes away his tears, he also wipes away the word 'hacksaw' that is written on the glass thereby symbolically erasing

and removing one of the only moments in the film that connect Ted to the crimes he is accused of. Ted's true actions are not seen as central in these affection-images and his face simply becomes a strong setting for connection and empathy.

The encounter with the traumatic real in this moment reveals the gaps in the symbolic structure that organised Liz's world. It reveals at that moment the truth that she was trying so hard to patch up and avoid and it reveals the moment in which all the power that she had, or thought she had, is lost. McGowan argues that the encounter with the real represents the prospect of freedom because it manages to free the spectator from symbolic constraints. The underlying ideological agendas that the film may have had seem to be shattered and this encounter may be both horrifying as well as liberating (*Real Gaze* 20). This is manifested within Liz's reaction. She may feel a great sense of freedom at finally knowing the truth. In fact, she begs him to "release [her]." However, the instance Ted does this and Liz is confronted with that which she has tried to hide, she breaks down and relives all the 'gaps' she used to cover up. Although they were always there in front of her, she could never quite grasp them. There were several instances where she should have been able to see through his facade – when he is arrested, convicted and so forth, yet, she looks at him and it is as if all her power is revoked. It is only towards the end of the film when she seemingly looks back at everything that she has seen, that the reality of all this sinks in. Disturbingly, however, the images that follow this scene reveal flashbacks to the very moments that might have given Liz a hint about Ted's true nature. Instead of revealing this to the spectator these events play out as a montage of moments during Liz and Ted's happier times together. Perhaps the idea was that these scenes connect the dots and show his evil, but that is not the case. Instead, without the context these scenes simply look like memories she has of a loving family life.

Ultimately, this prison scene carries images of affection and reinforces the allegiance spectators may have with Ted. Even though this scene reveals Ted's actions, the manner in which it has been presented to the spectator does not leave the spectator with a sense of horror because of what he has done. Instead, as the tears are wiped off Ted's face and the close-up montage of the love story he had with Liz is presented on screen, a sense of sorrow appears to emerge. By presenting this montage the final images the spectators are left with may reinforce the serial killer as romantic hero.

Extremely Wicked creates a fantasmatic scenario that contains the domesticated gaze only for it to be disrupted by a traumatic encounter with the real in the final moments of the film. However, it may be argued that this encounter with the real is not enough to dissuade the spectator from believing in him and empathising with him. In this way the film constructs the

serial killer Ted Bundy, for the greater part of the film, within the imaginary category that creates a false sense of wholeness in his character. Ted is revealed as the doting father and loving boyfriend for most of the film. This is done to such an extreme extent that the encounter with the true version of him at the end of the film is not enough to counter the spectator's connection with him up until that point. In a sense the fantasmatic scenario of the film is manifested in Ted's 'goodness' with the scenes, which reveal his loving look and vulnerability, serving to cover up the reality of what he did.

4.6. **Chapter Conclusion**

Both the gaze and the face are used within *Extremely Wicked* in very specific ways in order to construct a romanticised serial killer. The gaze is used to draw the spectator into the filmic world and to construct for them a fantasy space where Ted Bundy is not a callous murderer but a romantic hero with whom Liz was always safe, thereby triggering the desire in the spectator for him to be set free and be reunited with Liz. The face and close-up form the connection point within the filmic world – it is through the face that the spectator comes to believe in the fantasy that has been created for them and it is through the connection with the face that the spectator's empathetic responses towards the serial killer occur. Furthermore, it is also through the close-up that the traumatic encounter with the real takes place, however brief that moment might be. The power of the close-up and the gaze is clear, but it remains in the hands of the film whether or not it will use that to reveal the cracks in the symbolic order or cover up the flaws with the fantasy of the imaginary.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the way in which the serial killer is portrayed as romanticised figure in cinema with specific reference to the way *Extremely Wicked* turns the notorious killer Ted Bundy into a hero that a spectator not only feels for but feels *with*. The research examined the way the gaze and the face operate within cinema and how they work to create a romanticised serial killer in Ted.

Certain topical issues within serial killer cinema were considered, such as the serial killer celebrity and the intricate notion of identification (or what one may call allegiance or engagement) with the serial killer. Cinema is foundational in creating serial killer celebrities and cinema's power to create these killer celebrities can be linked to the presence of Hollywood stars. *Extremely Wicked* adds to this elevation of the serial killer celebrity with Zac Efron starring as Ted Bundy. It is as if the serial killer and Ted Bundy exist in separate realms in the film with the film largely placing the focus more on the representation of Ted's 'good' side. However, the more disturbing element that emerges from the representation of Ted Bundy in the film is the way he is romanticised and his horrific murders almost completely removed.

It has been argued that while the idolisation of serial killers is undoubtedly problematic, it is in romanticising and normalising these figures that the true danger lies, and it is this that contributes to society becoming desensitised to the brutal acts of these individuals. Furthermore, the connection between the spectator and the serial killer is especially pertinent in serial killer films. Stepping into the serial killer's shoes has a direct impact on the spectator's experience of a film and this is what lays the foundation for empathetic responses to occur. The way Ted Bundy is portrayed in *Extremely Wicked* not only invites the spectator to step into his shoes but does it in such a way that makes it easy for the spectator to denounce any part in his horrific deeds. By shying away from any violence the spectator is more easily able to disavow the reality of who he was, instead focusing on the gallant hero being portrayed on screen.

The first objective of this thesis was to examine the manifestation of the gaze within cinema, as an element that plays a role in creating the filmic world as well as the spectator's insertion into that world. A study of the gaze illuminated the dynamic between the spectator and the onscreen world. The gaze has long been seen as a tool in cinema that is often equated with power and more specifically the holder of the gaze is traditionally seen as the one who holds the power. However, this has certainly changed in view of the reconceived gaze by new Lacanian film theorists. An interesting element in working with the cinematic gaze is how the

notion has been transformed over the past few decades in a way that is truer to Lacan's work. By considering the work of new Lacanian film theorists, this thesis endeavoured to reconsider the concept of the gaze and how it operates within cinema. Whereas the gaze was traditionally seen as belonging to the realm of the imaginary, which attempts to hide the cracks in society, it should rather be seen as belonging to the real, which highlights the gaps that the imaginary order seeks to cover (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 2-3). This also shifts the gaze from a subjective gaze to an objective gaze – in reality the gaze is found in the moment that the spectator's look is returned as the subject finds the gaze in the object (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 5). Therefore, it is in this moment that spectators realise they are also being looked at and being drawn into the filmic universe.

Reconceiving the gaze as an objective gaze and one that returns the look of the spectator has opened up new ways of understanding its operations within cinema. In a sense it places greater emphasis on the spectator by creating a bigger platform for their insertion into the cinematic world. The gaze draws spectators into the filmic universe and through this the spectators become part of the action and consequently part of the decision-making process of the characters they see on screen. Within the context of serial killer cinema, this is a crucial development as it is exactly this that makes the spectator complicit in the actions of the killers they are watching on screen. The way this reconsidered gaze operates in cinema also creates a greater potential for the connection between spectator and character. The reimagined gaze creates a space where the spectator can be included into the onscreen world and placed firmly within the action. This occurs through the understanding of the gaze as objective and not subjective. The objective gaze returns the look of the spectator, thereby drawing them into the filmic world. They can no longer merely sit watching from the outside. In *Extremely Wicked* it is through the manifestation of the objective gaze and the interpellation of the spectator into the onscreen world that the spectator's presence and complicity in the action as well as their role in Ted's romanticisation is acknowledged.

Understanding the gaze as objective also cements it as the object cause of desire or the *objet petit a* (McGowan, *Real Gaze* 5-6). The gaze works to trigger the spectator's desire (the *objet petit a* is that which causes desire). A driving force behind serial killer cinema, and a potential reason for its popularity, is the desire to understand the behaviour of these figures – to try and make sense of why they behave in the way they do. *Extremely Wicked* delves into the life of serial killer Ted Bundy but offers no clues as to why he would have committed these brutal crimes. Instead, the film offers a look into his world that paints him as a good and endearing romantic. In *Extremely Wicked*, the spectator's desire is triggered in different ways.

On the one hand, the desire that the gaze triggers may be a desire to believe in Ted's innocence. On the other hand, it may lie in the realisation that he is in fact guilty but that the spectator is at a safe distance. This fuels the morbid intrigue with the serial killer while at the same time diminishing the truth of what this killer is capable of.

A thought-provoking and essential element that this thesis tried to bring to light is the distinction between the look and the gaze. In the past these have been considered somewhat interchangeably when in reality they operate in completely different ways. Understanding and recognising the demarcation between the look and the gaze have created a greater tool for the analysis of the way in which the film can guide the look of the spectator while at the same time returning that look through the objective gaze. This also has an influence on dynamics of power within cinema and perhaps one can conclude that the traditional view of the gaze (as one that affords power to the holder) is more easily equated with the 'look' and in this way these concepts can coexist.

The second objective the research undertook was to examine the role of the face and the close-up in creating a sense of allegiance between the spectator and serial killer and further also eliciting an empathetic response towards the killer on screen. This objective sought to answer the question of *how* cinema is able to create a romanticised killer that a spectator experiences empathy with. The argument was made that this happens because the killer is constructed in a way that invites allegiance and that shows off the killer's best side – the good and human face – to the spectator. By forging a sense of allegiance with the serial killer, *Extremely Wicked* is able to create a platform for the spectator to experience an empathetic response. Carl Plantinga's notion of the 'scene of empathy' was fundamental to the discussion and also shed light on the way in which empathy is generated in the film.

The affective power and value of cinema stretch beyond the time spent watching a film and as Alex Neill argues, it plays a role in the education of emotion (179). The way in which spectators engage with films can influence their general dealings in everyday life or with other human beings. This was a significant element that came to the fore as it speaks directly to the power of serial killer cinema and the problematic issue that is created when the spectators are 'educated' to feel with a serial killer.

A further enlightening element in the research has been the discussion on the face and the close-up as synonymous entities. Deleuze's argument that these are the same and that they are both affection-images enhances the power not only of the face but of the entire cinematic medium. The link between these types of images and the concept of the objective gaze has also paved the way for a more fruitful platform for film analysis. Psychoanalytic film theory has

afforded little room for the examination of the role of affective responses in cinema and one could argue that bringing the gaze and the face together aims to bridge that gap. It has been made clear that the face (in its varying forms) has an affective power and by understanding the possibilities of the face and the close-up, new levels of meaning develop and along with it a greater possibility for analysis.

Certainly, the affective power of cinema may stretch well beyond the impact on serial killer cinema and further research into the significance and depth of spectators' affective responses may prove invaluable in order to further this particular field of research. In addition, desire as a driving force behind serial killer cinema is deserving of its own in-depth consideration as it will provide more insight into why this particular genre, despite its problematic representations, remains a source of intrigue and fascination.

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