

“And What Are All These People Watching?”: The American Celebrity Industry, Genre, and Film Adaptations of School Shootings

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Trends in School Shootings

In April of 1999 an episode of the teen programme *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was pulled from broadcast because its plot regarding an averted school shooting painfully resonated with those at Columbine High School, which had been struck the week before. Perhaps in alignment with the contagion warnings championed by the World Health Organisation regarding representations and news coverage of suicide, the WB network chose not to air the episode until later that year. Certainly, the WB’s decision was not unique, as many programmers redesigned their schedules with mindful attention to the recent Columbine massacre.

At one point in the episode the main characters discuss the threat of a school shooting, with Xander admitting he struggles with the thought that another teenager would gun people down without a reason. With trademark sarcasm, his classmate Cordelia replies, “Yeah, because that never happens in American high schools.” Another character chimes in, “It’s bordering on trendy at this point.”

This exchange, in the typically irreverent tone of the series, provides evidence that even prior to the Columbine shootings, when this episode was filmed, school shootings were already perceived to be on the rise in the US. In framing high school shootings as ‘trendy,’ the series also taps into one of the leading discourses about American school shooters: the entanglement between celebrity as cultural background and as a perpetrator motivation. This chapter is an investigation of the way the school shootings are fictionalized in the context of the American celebrity industries. I argue that that in fictional television and, in particular, film, the notoriety of the school shooter is filtered through the lens of popular genres and mapped onto a mythologized space of the American high school, relying on celebrity as a structuring narrative force, thematic concern, and industrial reality. This *Buffy* episode folds threats of school shootings into the language of the fantasy and teen genres and wraps up with the perpetrator contained, mass shooting and suicide averted, and a humorous kinship deepened between its ensemble cast. This resolution and the episode’s last-minute removal from broadcasting schedules is illustrative of narrative media’s somewhat paradoxical attempts to sensitively tell stories of mass shootings even as they sensationalize and commodify them.

This article focuses on three American narrative films released after Columbine that dramatize school shootings in different ways: *Zero Day* (Coccio, 2002), *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Ramsay, 2011), and *Run Hide Fight* (Rankin, 2020). Each of these films constructs their stories out of a complex combination of fact and (genre) fiction and encourages a kind of archetypal or imaginatively metonymic reading. My analysis builds on Jason Silva’s (2019) thought-provoking analysis of films about mass shootings and his proposal that cinematic fiction and news media work with the same ‘image bank’ in their visualizations. My main avenue of investigation is the ways stories of school shootings are framed using the language of genre filmmaking and rely on celebrity to shape their narratives, characters, and moral systems.

Serial and Mass Shooter Celebrity

Films about mass shootings are relatively rare although, as Silva proves, the fame-seeking perpetrator is the most commonly represented (2019, p.248). The rarity of these types of cinematic killers is striking when compared with the similar mediated figure of the serial killer. There are a tremendous number of stories about serial murder appearing across mainstream popular culture from television shows such as *Criminal Minds* (CBS, 2005-2020) and *Mindhunter* (Netflix, 2017-2019) to films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991) and *Seven* (Fincher, 1995), just to name a few. In the true crime genre, in particular, the serial killer achieves a level of notoriety that few mass shooters are able to attain. I would argue that this is due, in part, to the sexualized nature of serial murder and the way stories about serial killers, and the experts who hunt them, has so successfully mobilized popular psychology and psychoanalysis (with its evocative vocabulary). The mass shooter inspires less narrative flourish.

The nature of the infamy of the serial murderer and the mass shooter is also different. Arie Croitoru *et al* (2020) argue that school shootings often receive a glut of media attention at the moment of the crime and often focused on their local community. Building on this I would argue that the terms “mass” and “serial” might be useful to understanding the types of celebrity that the hypermediation of these divergent crimes produce. Infamous mass shooters usually attack in a single incident, so they have a brief and intense rise to public visibility, followed by a relatively quick drop off in interest and cultural currency in a similar manner as the microcelebrity or ‘celetoid’ of social media. Conversely, the celebrity serial killer is distinguished by recurring spikes in recognisability and cultural fascination. These spikes are contingent on the mystery associated with serial murder, which by its very definition must remain unsolved for some time. The compelling nature of the unsolved puzzle should not be underestimated as it raises both the stakes and the drama of the crime. Mass shootings are typically over after a matter of minutes, with the perpetrator identified, but a serial killer’s crimes can continue unpunished for years. Serial killers are thus perfectly suited to the logic of the sequel or long form serial television, like the many fictions featuring Hannibal Lector. It is worth briefly pointing out that the etymology of the term ‘serial killer’ is tied to film serials and “indirectly belongs to cinema” (Jarvis, 2007, p.328). This connection is generally attributed to celebrity profiler Robert Ressler, who claims he coined the term based on childhood memories of film serials (Steenberg, 2013). The celebrity of the mass shooter is marked by an urgent intensity that diffuses quickly and resolves with finality that is difficult to expand into cinematic storytelling. Alternatively, the serial killer’s embodiment of a recurring and nuanced formulation of celebrity is ideally suited to media exploitation.

The ‘media effects’ debate, which attempts to answer the fundamental question of whether watching violent media makes people more likely to engage in violence, is one of the most contentious debates in media studies. This broader debate is still raging and can be set aside here. In the case of school shooters, there are explicit links between the violent act of mass shooting and the fame-seeking motivation of many perpetrators, and the mass media that both covers and contributes to the problem (Lankford, 2016). Likewise, there is firm evidence of copycat crimes, particularly with Columbine as a key reference point (Larkin, 2009). Fame or infamy is a proven motivation for mass shootings, and many of the perpetrators themselves have openly admitted that they seek it. Mass shootings are thus built out of and into celebrity culture and the celebrity industries and films that dramatize school shootings bear a heavy representational burden. Several social scientists and criminologists have flagged the intertwined nature of celebrity and the fame-seeking mass shooter. However, the way that this fits into the wider American media landscape, including fictional adaptations and the networked celebrity industry remains under-examined. Similarly, scholarly studies on celebrity have tended to avoid discussions on notoriety, with a few

notable exceptions (e.g. Penfold-Mounce, 2009). This chapter represents one small step to fill this gap, making some initial interdisciplinary connections about how the language of film genres is mobilized in stories of American school shootings, which might provide insights into the specific mechanisms of celebrity that underpin mass shootings or at least the cultural mythologies circulating around them.

In this I must be clear: I am a film and television scholar whose expertise lies in interrogating representation and how it fits into (and is built out of) culture and creative production. Whilst many of the contributors to this volume have expertise in real crimes and criminals, mine lies with the cultural mythology that surrounds such crimes. They are not interchangeable, of course, but they are interdependent in complex ways. I would argue that the spaces in which films reference an event such as Columbine are perfect sites for examining those interdependencies in order to understand some part of the relationship between the violent quest for notoriety and the stories we tell ourselves about it.

Double Framing and Cinematic School Shootings

Stories about these crimes unfold in mediated public places just as the crimes themselves require public spaces and audiences (Silva 2019). In adaptations of events like the Columbine shooting, the publicly facing nature is doubled, as the violence unfolds in the mass media (or the public movie theatre) as well as the fictional high school on screen. Each of my key case study films is self-aware about this double framing, as they firmly implicate the cinema viewer in the process of constructing violent celebrity.

While I argue that the nature and sharpness of the critique varies depending on the film's genre and mode of address, the three films I use as illustrative case studies all feature a defining moment in which the perpetrators address the audience both on screen and in the cinema. This jarring direct address does not quite break the fourth wall, as it is doubly framed and mediated through onscreen TV broadcast, home video, or livestream. These moments showcase the perpetrator as the embodiment of the film's message, and sometimes even its core lesson, on the entanglement of fame and violence.

***We Need to Talk About Kevin* and the Art Cinema Mode**

The titular character in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (hereafter, *Kevin*) appears on television after he has been captured for shooting his classmates, sister, and father with a bow and arrow. He broadcasts a chilling message about the complex feedback loop between violence, celebrity and the media, "...it's got so bad that half the time the people on TV, inside the TV, they're watching TV. And what are all these people watching? Huh? People like me. I mean what are all you doing right now but watching me? You don't think you would have changed the channel right now if all I did was get an A in Geometry."

Lynne Ramsay's *Kevin* is based on the best-selling novel by Lionel Shriver and tells the story of a school shooting by following the troubling and troubled childhood of the eponymous character through the point of view of his struggling mother. The film uses many of the techniques associated with the art cinema, as outlined by David Bordwell's (1979) seminal work, including a loosened non-linear narrative, which makes it unclear when events are taking place. Eva Khatchadourian, played with off-putting nuance by Tilda Swinton, is an unlikeable protagonist who lacks direction and exists in a traumatized present that is interrupted by disorienting flashbacks.

Ramsay's strategy for dramatizing the school shooting is to accuse her audience of complicity in the sensationalism that might produce such an act (via Kevin's monologue) but

also to employ the ambiguity and distancing techniques of the art cinema to force those spectators to sit with their guilt and discomfort, offering them no heroic or investigative characters to orient them, or frame the story. This is an effective tactic and the film is difficult to view. Gus Van Sant's Columbine-inspired *Elephant* is similarly unsettling in its use of art cinema conventions, such as the long tracking shot following students through the doomed high school making spectators part of the space and the violence that they know will inevitably erupt. Both films take advantage of the ability of the art cinema mode to confront their spectators with the act of school shooting intellectually and ethically, rather than exclusively emotionally or melodramatically.

Zero Day and the Found Footage Mockumentary

As with the *cinéma vérité* associations of *Elephant*, the mockumentary *Zero Day* plays with documentary modes and their associations of realism. And like *Kevin*, the film features the perpetrators' direct address to an onscreen camera: in this case Andre and Cal are filming themselves in the lead up to a planned school shooting, which is framed through CCTV footage at the film's climax. In one sequence, they are burning books and CDs, including William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, which I would suggest functions here as a kind of cultural shorthand, signalling the atavistic and violent nature of boyhood as well as a unifying curriculum-led object for Americans who also studied the book in high school. In fact, Cal admits that he "thought it kicked ass actually." As the books burn in the background, the boys address the camera: "We didn't get this from any videogames, books, movies or CDs. This was *our* idea and nobody else's ... fuck the reasons. There are none."

However, Andre then goes on to explain how he was bullied and called gay by classmates, thereby negating the video's insistence on a lack of reasons for the shootings. Through several moments where homosexuality is used as an insult or suggested between the two young men (as an 'army of two') there are resonances to the way that the Columbine shooters were framed and to homophobic insults reported by school shooters (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Van Sant's *Elephant* suggests a queer disruption in its formulation of the intense partnership between the school shooters that defies clear categorization.

Peter Turner's study of found footage horror films argues that the 'mockumentary' aesthetic of *Zero Day*, and its use of the perpetrators' direct address to the camera, promotes an intimacy with the characters made all the more terrifying by the 'found footage' device's association with realism (2019 p.172). Released after the unprecedented success of *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez 1999), *Zero Day* plays with this notion of realism and intimacy through the shaky hand held camera, double framing (using CCTV), and presenting a series of confessional videos that recall the 'basement tapes' that were left by the Columbine shooters. Here the cinema viewer can rest easier in their role as forensic viewer or archaeologist rather than voyeur. The format of the found footage mockumentary is able to offer this reassurance even as it heightens feelings of horror by a combination of banal scenarios (prom, dentist, family birthday) and the countdown to inevitable brutality.

Run Hide Fight and the Action Film

Kyle Rankin's 2020 *Run Hide Fight* is the most recent film, distributed by the conservative *The Daily Wire* and telling the story of a school shooting through the point of view of Zoe Hull, a troubled young female student who violently fights back against the perpetrators. Like both my previous examples, the film features its perpetrator directly addressing an onscreen camera. Zoe interrupts the livestream to speak directly to both perpetrator and viewers, insisting that she will be hijacking his notoriety by re-writing it as

her own celebrity heroism: “Isn’t it ironic that after all your goddam hard work, people aren’t going to remember you... No. They’re going to remember me.”

This is the perpetrator’s ultimate punishment, perhaps more than his slow death at Zoe’s hands: not a dismantling of the system of celebrity attached to the school shooting, but a generic adaptation from a killer’s violent manifesto into a hero-led action narrative. If *Zero Day* gives us uncanny access to the killers’ minds and points of view, *Run Hide Fight* comprehensively villainizes its central fame hungry perpetrator by juxtaposing him against an empowered teenaged action heroine, recalling archetypal characters such as Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* (Cameron, 1991).

I would argue *Kevin*’s speech is the more unsettling as it leaves the audience not with a hero to suture their point of view and live out a kind of fantasy of resistance, nor even with the project of forensic recovery of the ‘found footage’ tapes. Rather, it suggests that the audiences (at home and in the film) are perpetuating the celebrity system that prompted such violence, simply by looking; by paying attention; by ‘buying into’ this as a pathway to celebrity they are making such a pathway possible. Furthermore, where *Run Hide Fight* offers us the point of view of a young girl desperate to protect her friend and recover from the pain of her mother’s death, *Kevin* leaves us only with Kevin’s mother Eva -- unlikeable, doomed and just as frightened and confused as we are over Kevin’s pathology.

Each film represents a different way of working through the cultural trauma of the school shooting through fiction. Moreover, each film uses the well-worn pathways of a different cinematic genre -- and this is an under-theorized aspect of school shooters’ stories. Ramsay’s *Kevin* uses the disjointed non-linear narrative and ambiguous oneiric plotting of the art cinema to disorient and alienate its viewers. *Zero Day*, similarly, uses conventions of so-called “Indie” or Independent Cinema, including the inventive use of ‘found footage’ and the casting of non-professional actors who were encouraged to improvise. The realism associated with the video format and their largely quotidian content heightens the horror of the violence while developing the forensic gaze of the spectator, at a time when there was a boom in interest in forensic science stemming from the success of television shows like *CSI* (CBS, 2000-2015).

Run, Hide, Fight relies on the pacing, spectacles and iconography of the action cinema (particularly in its vengeance seeking mode, recalling such big budget hits as *Taken* or the earlier *Death Wish* series). In the action scenario, violence is not the issue, as it can be either criminal *or* heroic and remains the main spectacle on offer in a genre that glamorizes firearms in particular. The action hero enacts legitimized violence and, indeed, embodies *legitimized* celebrity that comes with the spectacular performance of such violence. This is further reinforced by Zoe’s journey from female victim to empowered action heroine who fights back (as evident in the film’s title).

News reports of school shootings often use the language of the action cinema to frame heroic victims, as in the case of Kendrick Castillo, Brendan Bialy and Joshua Jones who fought the shooters in the Highlands Ranch suburb of Denver in 2019 (Sky News, 2019) and the framing of Columbine High School teacher and coach William David Sanders as heroically protecting students (Leavy & Maloney, 2009). The action hero scenario provides compelling evidence that conventions of genre films about school shooters have a deep investment in, and influence on, how these events are reported. This conflation has become hyperreal, a term used to describe an indistinguishable combination between real and simulation that is accepted as even more authentic than reality. The hyperreal school shooting can be attributed to specific social problems (such as gun-control, homophobia, bullying)

even as it can be sewn into the universalising conventions of several genres, providing evidence of its both its power and its flexibility. Examples include: *Run Hide Fight*'s action hero narrative, *Zero Day*'s found footage based authenticity, and *Kevin*'s bewildering non-linear narrative.

The Structuring Absences of Notoriety

These ways of exploiting or resisting the celebrity-seeking pathways of the school shooter resonate with the 'No Notoriety' or 'Don't Name Them' campaigns suggested by scholars such as Lankford and Madfis (2018) and Meindl and Ivy (2017) as ways the media might prevent fame-seeking shooter attacks. Erasing the identity of the school shooters like those at Columbine is a logical and promising tactic to frustrate the desire of those perpetrators and their potential imitators. However, they remain as structuring absences in all stories about their crimes. Even without their names as labels, the footprint of their celebrity grows, but manifests with different orientations.

Ramsay's strategy in *Kevin* is to re-focus the school shooter's story through the lens of the perpetrator's grieving and alienated mother -- his notoriety becomes hers. The film uses alienation and blankness as an antidote to the glamour of celebrity or fanatical adolescent zeal that marks the personalities of Cal and Andre, who record seemingly endless hours of themselves on video. Kevin keeps notebooks that are disturbingly blank - reflecting and commenting on the structuring absence of the unnamed school shooter and the network of victimization that ripples outward from their acts and the echo effect of notoriety that can be projected from a blank source or an absent presence.

Celebrity Crime Scenes

As "No Notoriety" campaigns work towards subverting the fame-seeking shooter and potential copycats, many school shootings tend to achieve visibility and celebrity not by the perpetrators' names, but by the geographical location of the crime. I would argue that 'Columbine' holds more public recognition and cultural currency than the names of the shooters themselves. While the substitution of place for perpetrator is not universal, particularly for shootings that happen in large urban centres such as Atlanta, it does represent a pattern of celebrity, as in Sandy Hook or Virginia Tech, which provides a productive site for investigating what underpins such celebrity.

Elsewhere, I have examined the intersection between celebrity and crime (2017) and the ways this has been studied. I have proposed a serviceable taxonomy to categorize the types of crimes, criminals, and victims most frequently framed in the media and adapted into fictional narratives, including the celebrity crime (e.g. Jack the Ripper Murders), celebrity criminal (e.g. Ted Bundy), celebrity victim (e.g. Elizabeth Short aka the Black Dahlia), victimized celebrity (e.g. John Lennon) and celebrity expert (e.g. Sherlock Holmes or Patricia Cornwell). To describe and analyse the particular formulation of celebrity motivated by the school shooter, I propose another, geographically dependent, category: the celebrity crime scene. Here the celebrity crime scene is the American high school, a near mythic space in globalized popular culture and determinate of its own genre (the teen film). The American high school as a potent and hyperreal combination of hierarchical, angst-ridden adolescent hell and nostalgic paradise is a celebrity space in itself. This is layered when the space becomes the site of intense violence.

In many ways, this article is not only a brief investigation of films about school shootings, but a map of the interconnections between mediation, school shooters, and a form of celebrity that is rooted in place as much as in the body of the attacker. The celebrity crime

scene is a heterotopic map that resists clear stratification or excavation. It encourages, even requires, a forensic gaze that looks to answer the ritual question asked around school killings, ‘how could this happen here?’ The forensic gaze activated here throws into relief issues around the politics of class, race, and gender in a constant desire to suture social issues (such as gun control, bullying, patriarchal misogyny, eroding influences of celebrity culture) to the celebrity crime scene. Columbine is particularly relevant here as a nationalized and illustrative event or a “landmark incident” (Silva 2019, p.239), rather than representations for example of the contrasting case of the West Nickle Mines school shooting, which occurred in an Amish community (see Birkland and Lawrence 2009).

Michael Moore’s documentary *Bowling for Columbine* is one of the most vocal manifestations of the geographically contingent forensic gaze, whose purpose is to contextualize the Columbine shootings (here by discussing them as a part of a wider culture of gun violence in America). His film highlights place as central to his search for answers about Columbine, as he spends considerable time talking about Littleton as a typical white middle class suburb and making connections to his home state of Michigan and the small town of Oscoda where one of the Columbine shooters lived for some years. In his mission to answer the question of ‘how could this happen here?’, Moore considers several angles, rejecting, for instance, that the shooters were influenced by the music of Marilyn Manson, who is framed as articulate and insightful particularly when contrasted against the bombast of NRA champion Charlton Heston. The film is deftly constructed through insider or confrontational interviews and cross cut scenes that are used as evidence for the cause and effect relationship between school shootings like Columbine and the lack of gun control in the US.

Moore’s cognitive map or geographic profile of the Columbine event sees Littleton as typical, even axiomatic, because his film addresses viewers who live in similar places and belong to similar demographics (white, middle class, educated) as those families who sent their children to Columbine High School. I would argue that such an orientation marks the mode of address of many films and reports of school shootings, which elides readings that might connect race and class tensions or toxic masculinity to the shootings. This under examined connection is discussed in several chapters in this volume (e.g. Bridges, Tober, & Brazzell, 2022; Gascón, 2022) with regards to incidents of US mass shootings.

In his desire to map the literal and motivational geography of Columbine and the fame-seeking shooters that would follow in other places, Michael Moore has, ironically perhaps, made himself famous -- as forensic investigator, crusader, and cartographer of social problems. I would suggest that Michael Moore fits the category of ‘celebrity expert’ that I proposed as part of the taxonomy of celebrity and crime mentioned earlier. Such an expert becomes a safety net or ‘alibi’ for audiences that might feel uncomfortable with their desire to watch the spectacle of a school shooting in a manner similar to *Zero Day’s* tactic of showing the shooting only on CCTV, thus both insisting on immediacy and (hyper)realism. By viewing Moore’s cinematic map of the celebrity crime scene, viewers are offered a forensic framing device that is ostensibly educational and diffuses the charges of prurience levelled by Ramsay’s film and its title character. The celebrity crime scene map is disorienting when it lacks an expert, reliable narrator or tour guide figure, such as Michael Moore.

Dark Tourism and Dark Fandom

Because mediations of school shootings are fixed in place, they can become the focal point of the practice of dark tourism and related practices of dark fandom, which proliferate

with ease and anonymity online. Philip L. Stone (2013) defines dark tourism as the practice of visiting places associated with death and violence, which exist on a spectrum of darkness from the death camps at Auschwitz Dachau to ghost tours of New York. Columbine High School has become a site of dark tourism or, in some cases, a kind of uncanny pilgrimage. The differences in these labels may well be academic, as the line that divides the dark tourist from the grieving pilgrim may be difficult to locate and may be contingent on the tourist/pilgrim's relationship to the victims of the violence -- this is exemplified in the epilogue to *Zero Day* where unnamed teenagers burn the memorial crosses dedicated to Cal and Andre.

The shootings at Columbine happened just as digital technologies were expanding to provide new ephemeral and diffuse spaces for dark tourism and for the related communities of 'dark fandom,' which Ryan Broll defines as those "who identify with or otherwise celebrate those who have committed heinous acts, such as mass or serial murders" (2020 p.795). Broll investigates the notoriety-fuelled dark fandom circulating around the Columbine shooting and its perpetrators on spaces such as Reddit where some self-identify as 'Columbiners' (see also Daggett, 2015 and Oksanen et al., 2014). These studies suggest that the digital communities forming around notorious criminals are similar to other online celebrity-based groups.

I would suggest that the celebrity sought and granted to school shooters via dark tourism and fandom relies on an industry that spans many mediated spaces. Graeme Turner suggests that "America...has the most developed version of the celebrity industry" (2013 p.199). He insists that we think in terms of a 'celebrity industry' rather than an entertainment or film industry that depends upon celebrity. Turner defines the 'celebrity industry' as a hyper-commercialized space that feeds the symbiotic needs of contributors, be they publicists, journalists, or the celebrities themselves, who represent both the product and contributing producers. He suggests that "[t]hese interdependencies are, in my view, deliberately mystified" (2013, p.202).

There is a symbiotic economic and ideological relationship between the celebrity industry (and its many sub-industries, such as film or news media) and the spaces and practices of dark tourism and fandom. In my analytical descriptions of filmmakers such as Michael Moore and Lynne Ramsay, I am arguing that their works on school shootings can, and do, simultaneously critique and contribute to the celebrity industries and the notoriety they produce, albeit on genre-contingent registers. I have, furthermore, suggested that 'independent' or art cinema's mode of address presents the most compelling and unsettling tactics to dismantle or bypass the celebrity industries.

Film as an Active Shooter Drill in a Risk Attuned Culture

In his analysis of media coverage of the Columbine shooting, Benjamin Frymer argues,

[the shooters] were transformed from complex teenagers into concrete identifiable objects for the public to fear, to hate, and to consume. These hyper real objects disguised the fact that, in significant ways, there was no ultimate Reality or Truth underneath the crime or their alienation—it largely mirrored the media world itself as [they] turned their crime and themselves into a spectacle (2009, p. 1390).

Films based on school shootings since Columbine have re-circulated these hyperreal celebrity objects, which does more than merely bolster the violent celebrity apparatus or

encourage future fame-seeking mass killers. They can be more nuanced in their framing, interpretations, and adaptations. They can be ways to publicly work through the horror of the act of mass killing. To push this further, they may function as mediated active shooter drills, allowing spectators to grieve (if only vicariously) by prompting them to revisit their media memories or work through how such violence might be avoided or, in the case of some stories, combated or punished in the future. The act of viewing these films permits a graphic, but safely framed, spectacle of violence and near incomprehensible motivations in the context of a culture deeply attuned to risk.

Where *Run Hide Fight* can offer the fantasy of an active shooter drill that resolves itself through violent resistance and the conventions of the action genre, the art cinema inflected *Kevin* and *Elephant* suggest that our efforts of working through grief in such cinematic active shooter drills is superficial if not impossible. They present non-linear, illogical, dream-like reflections of anguish and alienation. *Zero Day* promises a countdown but offers a crime scene -- its format mimics the evidence locker as its edited hours of 'found footage' video testimony and CCTV footage formulates a type of simulated 'true crime' for armchair detectives. It allows the viewer privileged and troubling access to the subjectivities and POV of the perpetrators. Where the viewer may have an appetite for the action narrative (and box office figures and franchise production confirm that this is true), the tactic of refusing resolution may be more in keeping with the mandate of No Notoriety and may, through a lingering sense of unease, actively resist the celebrity or notoriety industry. *Zero Day* and, in particular, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* are films that do not allow their perpetrators a clearly defined story arc. They are fragmentary, ambiguous, and use provocative framing devices (video tapes; CCTV; a mother's traumatized flashbacks). Through these mechanisms Kevin, Cal, and Andre are denied the spotlight they are so desperately seeking. They are always at one remove, relegated to ghostly traces rather than celebrity criminals. Conversely, the teenaged shooters of *Run, Hide, Fight* are painted as iconic and one-dimensional villains, much like Hans Gruber in *Die Hard*. This genre-based route towards infamy makes the shooters more recognisable, if less complex. It is clear that feature films contribute to our shared vocabulary of crime and celebrity. Building on this assumption, I would argue that Lynn Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is a film of such unsettling ambiguity and victim-centred nuance that it can intervene and refuse the pathways of notoriety craved by mass shooters.

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