

Serial Killers (II): The Pathological Public Sphere

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The Scene of the Crime

In 1932 Sylvestre Matushka went on trial for engineering a series of train crashes that had killed more than thirty railway passengers. He stated his profession in these terms: "train wrecker, before that, businessman." At the time of his arrest police discovered in his possession train schedules and a map with sites marked out that were planned for future wrecks at the regular rate of one a month. Matushka, it turned out, was something of a train fiend, albeit of a markedly singular style. He explained at his trial that he could only achieve sexual release when witnessing a train crashing and, consequently, made a career of staging these spectacular accidents. Sentenced to life imprisonment, Matushka escaped confinement. He reappeared in 1953, during the Korean War—as the head of a military unit for blowing up trains.¹

I am not interested in this case merely because repetitive murder appears in the form of a distinctly modern choice of occupation. Nor is my interest merely in the conjunction of compulsive sexualized violence, on the one side, and technological system, schedule, and routine, on the other, that defines these crimes. These components in instances of serial violence are perhaps familiar enough.² Clearly, the murderous railway accident (as Wolfgang Schivelbusch has argued) dramatically concretizes

1. Colin Wilson and Patricia Pitman, *Encyclopedia of Murder* (New York, 1962), p. 383. See also Wilson, *A Criminal History of Mankind* (New York, 1984), p. 608.

2. See my "Serial Killers (I)," *Differences* 5 (Spring 1993): 92-128.

the "migration" between the orders of physiology and technology that make up what I have called the body-machine complex, and it concretizes as well the forms of violence the body-machine complex solicits. The railway accident, moreover, provided the takeoff point for the psychoanalytic theorization of shock and trauma—the intricate connections among accident, crisis, and psychopathology—as the characteristically modern form of life.⁸ For the moment, however, I am interested in such cases on somewhat different grounds.

What are we to make of such *planned* accidents and the dangerous individuals who execute them? The very concept of the dangerous individual seems inseparable from a general reconceptualization of the category of the accident. For one thing, the concept of the dangerous individual, as Foucault traces it, involves a shift in focus from the criminal act to the character of the actor, that is, it involves the elaboration of a technical knowledge-system "capable of characterizing a criminal individual in himself and in a sense beneath his acts."⁴ But this characterization depends in turn on a new understanding of the individuality of the individual, a new understanding that involves something more than the "psychologization" of crime on which Foucault, among others, focuses.

The singling out of the dangerous individual, in himself and beneath his acts, brought forward a radically different account of both individual and act. It brought forward, that is, the notion of the potential risks posed by types of individuals and the causal probabilities of certain types of acts being committed. And if that technical knowledge-system referred such risks back to the intrinsically dangerous personality of the criminal, it also referred that danger to a social calculus of probability: the social calculation of risk and the calculable accident. As the pioneer statistician Adolphe Quetelet noted, "nothing would seem more to escape foreknowledge than murder." Yet he went on to observe "the terrifying exact-

3. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 128-33; Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953-74), 18:12-13; Freud, *A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York, 1935), p. 285; and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), pp. 238-42.

4. Michel Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, trans. Alan Sheridan et al., ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York, 1988), p. 144; see also Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Sheridan (New York, 1977), pp. 304-8.

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ness with which crimes reproduce themselves": "We know in advance how many men will bloody their hands with violent murders, how many will be counterfeiters, how many poisoners, just as one can enumerate in advance the births and deaths that will occur in a given year." One can construct in advance, therefore, a kind of "budget of the scaffold."⁵

One effect of this shift in the social understanding of risk is to draw the "accident" away from an association with sheer contingency and into relation to the law of large numbers. This has generally been seen in terms of the elaboration of a social prophylaxis by which accident or crisis may be "tamed" by statistical regularities or crisis management.⁶ The large question that predictably arises, at this point, is whether this way of counting persons and acts, from the outside, is not also a way of accounting for them, from within. That is, another and more radical effect of this shift in understanding is to make visible *an experience of typicality at the level of the subject*. The serial killer, I will be arguing in what follows, is in part defined by such a radicalized experience of typicality within. Simply put, murder by numbers (as serial murder has been called) is the form of violence proper to statistical persons. That such a generalized experience of a generality within is insupportable may go some way in explaining the explosive violence through which it becomes visible, and its localization, and patholog'ization, in the figure of the serial killer. That such an experience of a generality within is at the same time alluring or compelling may go some way in explaining why that figure has come to exercise such an extraordinary fascination, a fascination at once social, erotic, and aesthetic. "There is," as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari observe, "always something statistical in our loves, and something belonging to the laws of large numbers."⁷

But this, of course, is still not quite to locate the forms of that violence and its typical scenes. Matushka's planned accidents, for example, eroticize the shock of contact between bodies and technologies. More precisely, they disclose an erotics at the crossing point of private fantasy and public space. These "atrocities exhibitions" disclose, in the form of a spectacular corporeal/machinal violence, a drive to make mass technology and public space a vehicle of private desire and, collaterally, to identify, or better, to realize private desire in public spectacle: the spectacles of public sex and public violence. These intrications of the collective and the individual provide one version of what might be described as the pathological public sphere.

5. Adolphe Quetelet, quoted in Ian Hacking, "Nineteenth-Century Cracks in the Concept of Determinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (July-Sept. 1983): 469; see also Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 105.

6. See Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, esp. chaps. 12, 13, and 14.

7. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, 1983), p. 294.

The coupling of bodies and machines is thus also, at least in these cases, a coupling of private and public spaces. It is not surprising then that these linkages are most powerfully literalized in the machinal systems of public transport that speed the movement, or commuting, of bodies between these spaces: the railway system and the highway system. The Matushka case might be framed, on one side, by Zola's mapping of the "psychotopography" of machine culture in his 1890 novel *La Bête humaine*, a novel in which the railway accident and eroticized violence indicate each other at every point. Public and private spaces "tear away" at each other ("nowadays nobody could stay at home," "so many men and women were rushing past in the thunder of trains shaking the house, and then tearing away at full speed"); intimacy is inseparable from the shock of contact with the public in ceaseless motion, with faceless crowds of strangers. ("Yet this idea of the tide of people that up and down trains bore along past her every day in the deep silence of her solitude left her pensive," "she thought she recognized faces," "she tried to count them roughly," but "all the faces got blurred and merged one into another, indistinguishable." "Behind this non-stop movement . . . the breathless crowd had no idea she was there, in danger of death.")⁸ The Matushka case might be framed, on the other side, by a more recent representation of the landscapes, or cityscapes, of corporeality in machine culture. I am referring to the film *Speed*, a thriller that provides a virtual inventory of the public vehicles of what might be called stranger-intimacy (the elevator, the bus, the plane, the subway system); in which the only private space represented is the scene of an eerily immaculate and empty home converted into a lethal weapon, exploding when entered; and in which the only erotic coupling takes place in public at the close, in the wrecked subway car that has burst through the Los Angeles streets— as if it were the logical outcome of the demolition, one by one by one, of the transport networks crisscrossing the city scene; in effect, demolition as foreplay.

These small examples bring us a bit closer to defining, in a very preliminary fashion, the links between repetitive or machinal violence and the pathological public sphere. Another instance, this time drawn from the burgeoning writing explicitly focused on the scenes of serial murder, can take things a step further. Here is the opening of one recent and relatively unsensationalizing representation of the landscape of serial murder: the California case of the "freeway killer" Randy Kraft (believed to have committed sixty-seven murders from 1972 until his arrest in 1983). This account of the scene of the crime makes conspicuous what might be called a lurid sociobiology. The account centers on the distribution of bodies across constructed landscapes:

8. Emile Zola, *La Bête humaine*, trans. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth, 1977), pp. 55, 56.

Looking down on southern California from above, the strands of freeway seem to pump from the heart of Los Angeles like contorted veins that twist and knot and stretch out to Santa Barbara in the north, San Bernardino in the east, and as far south as the Mexican border. Only to the west are the freeways missing, sutured off at the coastline so that automobiles don't spill into the brooding Pacific Ocean like so much lost blood.

At daybreak, the freeways brim with slow-moving vehicles, clotting into traffic jams from one end of the megalopolis to the other. At night, the strands glow red and white with the head-and-taillights of a million cars oozing homeward.

The rest of the time the freeway system is an open road—an invitation to move unfettered through this dense, smoggy wonderland of subdivision after subdivision.... Strange things happen on southern California freeways. Things that happen elsewhere while people are usually stationary.⁹

On this view, the conceptual psychotopography of serial violence, its living spaces, intertwines corporeal and technological systems of circulation, such that blood flows around every axle. Bodies, technologies, and landscapes are thus immediately assimilated to each other.

There is, of course, a century-long history to such descriptions.¹⁰ The incorporations of the technological process and the life process have become by now a thoroughly naturalized component of machine culture. One rediscovers here the familiar intersections of natural bodies and technologies, somatic and machinal systems of circulation: the miscegenations of the body and the machine that make up the prosthetic environment of American nervousness from the later nineteenth century on. One rediscovers, beyond that, a precise coordination of bodies and spaces. This involves not merely the spectacle of stilled bodies in moving machines, in the relentless and endless commuting "homeward." The strange permeability of bodies and landscapes is mapped onto the strange permeability of homelike and "open" or public spaces. For if things happen on the open road that are normally confined to "stationary places," this means that the home site has here become the anonymously

9. Dennis McDougal, *Angel of Darkness* (New York, 1991), p. xi.

10. Consider, for example, Walter Rathenau's description of the modern metropolis:

In their structure and mechanics, all larger cities of the white world are identical. Situated at the midpoint of a web of rails, they shoot their petrified street-threads over the countryside. Visible and invisible networks of rolling traffic crisscross and undermine the vehicular ravines and twice daily pump human bodies from the limbs to the heart. A second, third, fourth network distributes water, heat, and power, an electrical bundle of nerves carries the resonances of the spirit. [Walter Rathenau, *On the Critique of the Times* (1912); quoted in Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis, 1987), p. 436]

mass-produced "homelike" (a "dense . . . wonderland of subdivision after subdivision"). The nominal division between public and private has in effect given way to the unfettered movements that ceaselessly mingle bodies and places: the stationary and homelike become strange and the free-way system as intimately personated as the violated and opened natural body.

The wild analogism that structures accounts such as this one is not merely a transparency to be read through. For it is precisely such an exorbitant analogism, it will be seen, that structures the inner experience of serial violence. Serial killing, that is, devolves in part on a violent *literalization* of the analogies between bodies and technologies, persons and landscapes, one identity and another, one body and another, one death and another.

The two large questions that arise at this point concern, then, the *subject* of repetitive violence and the typical *scene* of his crimes. I have argued, in the first part of this study, that serial killing is inseparable from the problem of the body in machine culture: an intimacy with technology that I set out in terms of the intersecting logics of seriality, prosthesis, and primary mediation." Yet such a "situating" or "contextualizing" of the

11. See my "Serial Killers (I)." In that piece I take up more directly than I will here the complex relays between accounts of serial murder and the more general questions of shock and trauma, mass-mediated violence, and the repetition-automatisms at work in "addictive" murder. There too I take up in detail the assumptions about gender and sexual difference that become visible in these cases and in popular and professional accounts of serial killing. Suffice it to note here that one of the governing popular misconceptions about serial killing is the assumption that serial killers are almost invariably white males, despite the fact that the percentage of known black male serial killers is closely comparable to their proportion in the U.S. population as a whole (the estimates run from 13 to 16 percent) and despite the fact that perhaps 10 to 15 percent of known American serial killers are women. The construction of serial killing as "femicide" and as a Hannibal Lecter-style crime of awry intellection goes some way in accounting for these reverse biases. For a compelling account of a black male serial killer, the Seattle area murderer George Russell Jr., see Jack Olsen, *Charmers: A Ladies' Man and His Victims* (New York, 1994). There is an extensive range of work on serial killing as male femicide; see, for instance, Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1987); Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (New York, 1987) and "Cultural Difference and the Lust to Kill," in *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience*, ed. Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (New York, 1994), pp. 156-71; Cameron, "St-i-i-11 Going... the Quest for Jack the Ripper," *Soda/Tex*, no. 40 (Fall 1994): 147-54; *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, ed. Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell (New York, 1992); Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton, N.J., 1994); and *Moving Targets: Women, Murder, and Representation*, ed. Helen Birch (Berkeley, 1994). See also Robert R. Hazelwood and John E. Douglas, "The Lust Murderer," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 49 (Apr. 1980): 18-27, and Belea T. Keeney and Kathleen M. Heide, "Gender Differences in Serial Murderers: A Preliminary Analysis," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 9 (Sept. 1994): 383-98. For an astute and generally reliable reassessment of the institutional, governmental, and media "constructions" of serial murder along these racial and gender lines (and for an account of the

serial killer, I have suggested, makes for some basic difficulties, not least because a sort of "*hyperidentification*" with *place, or context, or situation* seems typical in cases of serial violence. What seems typical in such cases, that is, is the subject's feeling of a radical determination from the outside in. In the most general terms, this amounts to an utter failure of distance or distinction between subject and scene. Which is to say that typical in these cases is the experience of a deep absorption in typicality itself: the serial killer, I further suggested, typifies typicality, the becoming abstract and general of the individuality of the individual.¹² It is in part the empty circularity this form of personation contains that concerns me here. Such an absorption in typicality is inseparable from an absorption in place, situation, or context. Hence it is not merely that the serial killer is seen as utterly typical: "abnormally normal" or "too normal" or "alarmingly normal," as three recent accounts of the serial killer formulate it.¹³ Beyond that, such "hypertypicality" appears as a function of an utter transparency to context—as a function of the killer's compulsive way of "fading into the background" (SK, p. 83).¹⁴

In the pages that follow I want to take up, more centrally, these relays between serial violence and such a pathologized experience of public spaces. What becomes visible in these cases is an extraordinary absorption in place and place-making, an absorption in place and place-construction that becomes indistinguishable from programs of self-making and self-construction. That is, what becomes visible are (as we will see) the *reciprocal topographies* of subject and context. The effects of violence and horror precipitated by the radical failure of distinction between subject and place are absolutely crucial in understanding cases of repetitive violence. "Situating" or "contextualizing" the subject of violence is thus one of the components in these cases, and not merely a way of explicating them. It is therefore necessary to test out, and to pressure, the intimacies between subject and position (the inner logic of what is loosely called subject-position) that surface in serial killing. Such intimacies between the subject and the scene of the crime inflect, at the least, the "new historicist" conviction, or assumption, of the context-made subject. For this reason, I want to proceed somewhat circuitously, mapping out, first, the constitution of the pathological public sphere and tracing,

statistics cited earlier in this paragraph), see Philip Jenkins, *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide* (New York, 1994).

12. See my "Serial Killers (I)" and *Bodies and Machines* (New York, 1992), esp. pt. 3, "Statistical Persons," pp. 91-118.

13. McDougal, *Angel of Darkness*, p. xiii; Joel Norris, *Serial Killers: The Growing Menace* (New York, 1988), p. 80, hereafter abbreviated SK; and Brian Masters, *Killing for Company: The Story of a Man Addicted to Murder* (New York, 1993), p. 254.

14. See also Norris/Jeffrey Dahmer (New York, 1992), pp. 186, 291.

ultimately, a composite picture of what such lethal persons and what such lethal spaces have come to look like.

Atrocity Exhibitions

"As you and I know," the novelist J. G. Ballard writes in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, "the act of intercourse is now always a model for something else."¹⁵ The body, one might say, always becomes visible as a model for something else. The something else for which the body increasingly appears as a model is the public sphere, and not merely because the proliferating histories of bodies and sexualities amount to the thrilled exhibition of private bodies and private desires in public. The spectacular public representation of violated bodies has come to function as a way of imagining and situating, albeit in violently pathologized form, the very idea of "the public" and, more exactly, the relations of bodies and persons to public spaces.

Paradoxically enough, public corporeal violence has come to provide one of the most powerful ways of keeping visible the possibility of the shared social spaces of the public sphere itself, albeit a way of conserving that possibility in markedly negative or aversive form. Along these lines, public violence has come to provide one of the most powerful registers of the generalized intimacies with technology (technologies of reproduction, information, and mediation) in machine culture. But it has thus, conversely, become a way of pathologizing the promise of a "democratizing" or spreading of technology throughout the social body. Such a pathologized relation to technology encodes, in short, a "general fear of mass formation" in the general fear of technology.¹⁶ This has characteristically amounted to the representation of a deepening opposition between humanity and machinery at the very moment of their deepest intimacy. Rendering pleasure in technology—or at least its shared intimacies and mediations—relentlessly in terms of the public display of destruction and rendering mass formation relentlessly in terms of the pathological public sphere in effect conserves the opposition between the individual and the mass (between private and public) as the opposition between humanity and machinery."

These are, at the least, some of the ways in which mass spectacle and mass violence have come to indicate each other in machine culture; the private and natural body has, in unprecedented ways, become publicly rele-

15. J. G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (San Francisco, 1990), p. 77.

16. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, vol. 2 of *Male Fantasies*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis, 1989), p. 201.

17. On technology and mass formation I am here drawing on Theweleit. See *ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

vant. More specifically, the body has insistently become relevant as spectacle or representation—and, most insistently, as spectacle or representation of crisis, disaster, or atrocity. It has by now become commonplace to observe that crisis, catastrophe, accident, and collective destruction center mass-media accounts and, further, that these accounts center on mass corporeal violence: "bodies strewn everywhere." "Catastrophe," as one commentator on the mass media, Mary Ann Doane, has recently expressed it, "is at some level always about the body, about the encounter with death."¹⁸ But centrally, then, the encounters with the body and with death are also encounters with *exhibitions* of catastrophe.

Such encounters have generally been understood in terms of the *loss* of body to spectacle, or (as Doane, among others, has it) in terms of the "removal" or "conceal[ment]" of bodies and death "through representation."¹⁹ What this involves, the story goes, is the "containment" or parrying of death by representation: the distancing of bodily violence by visual technologies. From this perspective, the spectator of media-spectacular violence is in effect transformed into a sort of "noncorporeal mass witness," relatively disembodied in witnessing spectacles of deep and violent embodiment.²⁰ Clearly, the conferring of a privilege of relative disembodiment makes for part of the fascination with such spectacles. But the relations between bodies and representations in these cases are in fact more complicated. What these cases bring into view is less an opposition between bodies and representations than their radical involution: a basic entanglement of bodily processes and technologies of reproduction and visualization, reproduction and mimesis, that is not simply reducible to, or contained by, the order of representation.

The containment thesis, as a condition of the representation of death, was incisively set out some time ago by Walter Benjamin. As Benjamin expresses it,

in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one.... In the course of modern times dying has been

18. Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, Ind., 1990), p. 233.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis, 1993), p. 250. Along these lines, see Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/National Body: *Imitation of Life*," in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. Hortense J. Spillers (New York, 1991), pp. 110-40.

pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living.²¹

Or, as Philippe Aries has recently summarized it, "the denial of death is openly acknowledged as a significant trait of our culture." Society is determined "to repress the real image of death."²²

But, as with most logics of repression, a certain ambivalence surfaces in the public processing of death. For one thing, there is a somewhat paradoxical character to such *open* acknowledgments of repression, openly acknowledged secrets that have therefore more the double character of disavowal than of simple denial. Hence as Aries, somewhat contradictorily, observes, "It is as if one whole part of the culture were pushing America to erase every vestige of death, while another part is holding on to it and keeping death in a place that is still quite visible."²³ One version of this double movement of erasure and visibility appears, of course, in the tableaux vivants of the American funeral parlor image of death: living images of death that figure centrally in some cases of serial murder.²⁴

But this double movement might be understood a bit differently. That is, if the avoidance of death takes the form of an avoidance of "the sight of dying," or the "real image of death," it might be argued that sights of dying and images of death have in fact flooded the perceptual fields of the living, from the later nineteenth century on. It might be argued further that if the avoidance of death equals the avoidance of the *sight* of dying, then it is scarcely possible to arrange death and representation, the matter of the body and its images or mediations, simply in the form of an opposition, such that each holds the other at bay. What is intimated here instead is a rapport between death and representation, between the body and mechanisms of reproduction and reduplication, that has itself seemed insupportable and necessary to hold at bay.

What is intimated here, that is, is one version of the volatile forms of embodiment and disembodiment in machine culture that I have de-

21. Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Illuminations*, pp. 93-94.

22. Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1991), pp. 580, 593.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 596.

24. For instance, in the stylized *nature morte* exhibitions—torn between enshrinement and desecration—constructed by the English serial killer Dennis Nilsen (see Masters, *Killing for Company*, esp. pp. 105-38) and by the American serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer (see Norris, *Jeffrey Dahmer*). There is, as I have argued in "Serial Killers (I)," a drive in a number of cases of serial murder to reproduce living images, often in taxidermic form, that makes up what is called the killer's "signature."

scribed in terms of the double logic of prosthesis.²⁵ What this logic entails is the inseparability of identity in machine culture from a rapport with technologies—particularly technologies of writing, reproduction, and information (primary mediation). The containment thesis, in effect, reduces mimesis or simulation or mediation to a distancing or loss of the real, and reduces the *contagious* relations between bodies and technologies of representation to distanced or voyeuristic representation. It reduces, in short, disorders of identification to a simple ratification of identity. (This tendency is only the most visible in the range of film theory that programmatically reduces modes of seeing to a form of panoptic or voyeuristic objectification.)²⁶ The containment thesis thus conserves the familiar, and axiomatic, oppositions between the natural and the artificial, matter and representation, the real and its substitutes. It conserves, that is, a basic opposition between the life process and the machine process: between bodies and technologies.

This is the case even where the prosthetic or "constructed" character of persons and bodies is avowed or endorsed. The avowals of a radical constructionism (the standard formula is "the social construction of x") tend nevertheless to understand the constructedness of persons, bodies, and desires in terms of repression, limitation, or violation. The critique of the naturalness of the natural body, in theory, has tended to mean, in practice, the natural history of its violations.²⁷ Hence it is necessary to take up both the imperative of construction and the *regressive* appeals to the body that pressure it. It is necessary to turn from the largely metaphoric and abstracting understanding of construction toward the material constructions and materialized self-constructions that become obtrusive in cases of addictive male violence.²⁸ These processes

25. On "the double logic of prosthesis," see my *Bodies and Machines*, esp. "Introduction: Case Studies and Cultural Logistics," pp. 1-21 and pt. 5, "The Love-Master," pp. 147-72. The more general implications of the logic of prosthesis are further developed in my "Writing Technologies," *New German Critique* 57 (Fall 1992): 170-81 and "Serial Killers (I)."

26. For a similar critique of this by now semiautomatic, and implausibly reductive, account of the spectatorial position, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London, 1994), pp. 73-75.

27. On the vicissitudes of constructionism, see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, 1993), p. 6. Through a circular detour, the constructionist argument in effect renaturalizes the body. That is, if the large metaphor of "construction" continues to ground, and serves to ratify, a wide range of accounts of the history of the body, the afterlife of the body continues to "ghost" these accounts.

28. I am referring not merely to those prominent cases of serial killers who are also building contractors—for instance, the Chicago case of John Wayne Gacy or the 1994 English case of Frederick West—but, more generally, to cases in which the imperatives of self-construction or self-invention and material construction or material invention dramatically ratify each other—for example, in the extraordinary career of 1890s serial killer H. H. Holmes. On Holmes, see my *Serial Killers III III* (forthcoming).

of materialization "carry" the passion for construction, and male self-construction, in machine culture and in these forms of making and construction. The passion for construction, I will be arguing, takes the form of an assimilation to the machine or the machinelike. (Or, in Ernst Jtinger's terms, "we must transfer what is inside us onto the machine.")²⁰ This takes the form, centrally, of an assimilation to machines for living in.³⁰

On one level, this is merely to observe that forms of self-making make explicit a basic disorder in subject-formation. As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen argues, identity formation can be understood in terms of the transformations of passionate identifications into claims of identity, such that identification precedes identity and not the other way around.⁵¹ Hence the turning round of identifications into claims of identity might be turned round again: the passion for assimilation may take the form of an assimilation or melting of the subject back into its identificatory sites. In the cases under consideration here, this amounts to an identification with machinal constructs or " housings " for the subject, a process of identification that takes the form, above all, of a melting or fading or vanishing into place. What then governs these relays between place and "place-identity," between popular violence and "the little tactics of the habitat"?⁵²

Stranger-Killing

Another factor that is almost indispensable to this kind of behavior is the mobility of contemporary American life.

Living in a large center of population and living with lots of people, you can get used to dealing with strangers. It's the anonymity factor.

—TED BUNDY⁵⁵

29. Ernst Jiinger, *Feuer und Blul: Ein kleiner Ausschnitt aus einer grossen Schlacht* (Stuttgart, 1960), p. 84.

30. That is, an assimilation to the habitats of machine culture, not in the sense of a modernist functionalism but, rather, in the undersense of a compulsive and violent identification.

31. See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, Calif., 1988), and Catherine Clement, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 1983).

32. The quoted phrases are from, respectively, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1989), p. 302, and Foucault, "The Eye of Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon et al., ed. Gordon (New York, 1980), p. 149.

33. Ted Bundy, quoted in Stephen G. Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth, *The Only Living Witness* (New York, 1983), p. 324.

Dress him in a suit and he looks like 10 other men.

—ANN BURGESS, psychiatric consultant on the
Jeffrey Dahmer case, on Dahmer

A day will come when, by means of similitude relayed indefinitely along the length of a series, the image itself, along with the name it bears, will lose its identity. Campbell, Campbell, Campbell, Campbell.

—MICHEL FOUCAULT, on Andy Warhol³⁴

The burgeoning popular writing on serial murder provides a remarkably transparent register of these disturbances, and excitations, of identification and assimilation, and the wild analogisrri that marks them. One of the governing premises of the popular representation of serial killing is the obsessive analogteing, even identification, of writing and corporeal violence: their identification as twin forms of compulsion or addiction. As a lead article in the "Living Arts" section of the *New York Times* has it, "In the annals of crime, there are serial murderers, and then there are the serial authors. . . . 'Stop me before I write again.'"³⁵ Such an equation has become familiar enough. But what makes such equations plausible or compelling is perhaps less evident.

The commutability of the scene of writing and the scene of the crime operates on several levels. It operates, most obviously, in the "fit" between criminality and bureaucracies of information processing, in the ways in which crime and information processing have solicited and ratified each other, from the mid-nineteenth century on.³⁶ As one study of "crime and information theory" summarizes it, the criminal is "an emitter of signals during the commission of a crime."³⁷ Yet the blurring of the frontier between word counts and body counts extends beyond the "containment" or "coverage" of death and violence by mass-media information technologies. This blurring of frontiers is a bit less "functional" and a bit more "gothic" than the containment model tends to suggest.

Consider, for example, a recent piece on serial murder in the pages of *Vanity Fair*—which I take to be an exemplary article on a number of counts, and not least in its display of that peculiar mixture of moral and feral intentions that seems to animate the media fascination with serial murder. The story is about the work of the FBI agent and serial killer "hunter" Paul Lindsay. But the article, characteristically, tells two stories at once: not only the agent's investigations of several cases of serial mur-

34. Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley, 1983), p. 54.

35. Alessandra Stanley, "For Joe McGinniss, Another Grisly Killing Means Another Book," *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 1991, p. C1 1, city ed.

36. See Marie-Christine Leps, *Apprehending the Criminal: The Production of Deviance in Nineteenth-Century Discourse* (Durham, N.C., 1992).

37. Robert K. Ressler, Ann W. Burgess, and John E. Douglas, *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives* (Lexington, Mass., 1988), p. 9. See M. Willmer, *Crime and Information Theory* (Edinburgh, 1970).

der in the Detroit area but also the FBI's investigation of the agent himself—"His crime: committing fiction. One count of aggravated novel writing."³⁸ The crime of writing involves something more than the writing of an "insider" book critical of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) and serial killer task force. One of its targets is the "sort of popular misconceptions of serial-killer investigation" propagated by the work of ex-BSU agent Robert K. Ressler, himself a model for the agent-savant of Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs*. These popular misconceptions are, for Lindsay, "'totally fiction'" ("FAR" p. 126). And it is just this conflation of "real police work" and fiction—just such uncanny simulations and failures of distinction—that Lindsay wants to expose ("FAR" p. 124).³¹

Hence, for Lindsay, the basic antagonism is between "real cops" and "paper-pushing 'suits,'" between real work and its simulation by "the suits, the bureaucrats, the paper-pushers" ("FAR" p. 124). The simple opposition between "real police work" and "paperwork" or "going by the book" is of course one, quasi-automatic, version of the practice/theory, bodies/representations, production/simulation, chain of oppositions: the metonymic series of oppositions that, characteristically again, turns on the basic opposition between "real work" and mere writing or mere simulation. The policing of these oppositions works on at least two closely related levels. The popular representation of serial violence tends to turn on a fundamental disavowal: a fundamental disavowal of the radical link between technologies of writing and the work process—the linkage that may be said to define machine culture and the Second Industrial Revolution (the information-control revolution) generally, from the turn of the century on.⁴⁰ But it turns also, then, on a disavowal of the mechanisms of simulation or reduplication—the primary mediations—that everywhere traverse cases of serial violence.

The effects of the basic rewriting of the work process—the convergence of information and production in the machine process (production as information processing)—can scarcely be overestimated. Its most basic effect is the convergence of the life process and the machine process as collateral forms of information processing. Such failures of distinction with respect to simulation, reproduction, and substitution appear again and again in cases of addictive or repetitive violence. What surfaces in

38. Ron Rosenbaum, "The F.B.I.'s Agent Provocateur," *Vanity Fair* 56 (Apr. 1993): 124; hereafter abbreviated TAP."

39. Conveniently enough, Ressler's account (with Tom Shachtman) of the creation of the BSU carries as its frontispiece a reproduction of Blake's *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun* and this dedication: "For Bob Ressler with best wishes, Francis Dolarhyde and Thomas Harris" (Ressler and Tom Shachtman, *Whoever Fights Monsters* [New York, 1992], p. [ii]). Dolarhyde is the serial killer self-identified with Blake's Red Dragon in Harris's novel. See Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon* (New York, 1981).

40. See my *Bodies and Machines* and "Writing Technologies"; on the Second Industrial Revolution, see James R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

these cases is the anxiety-producing erosion of the distinction between living and machinal processes, their mutual absorption into the flows of information. The commutability of word counts and body counts provides one register of the way in which the life process and the technological process have come to indicate each other in machine culture: one meaning passes over to the other and feeds on it. Hence the representation of serial violence as a fascinating, albeit insupportable and insistently disavowed, version of what work comes to look like in machine culture.

Popular and professional accounts of serial killing instance again and again the absolute proximities between bodies and representations, implicitly understanding serial murder as a kind of machine-work and even a pathologized work ethic. It is not merely that the *Vanity Fair* piece, for example, consistently collates stories of writing and stories of multiple murder. The account is saturated, line by line, with numbers, statistics, calculations. It is the thick multiplication of instances such as these that becomes significant here:

Word spread fast that a serial killer was *at work*. By June the body count had climbed to 10. . . Two factors made the Highland Park Strangler disturbingly different from all other serial killers in U.S. history. One was his bloodthirsty pace: F.B.I. statisticians would later calculate he was among the "*fastest-working serial killers*" on record, killing at *apace* (ultimately 11 in nine months) that surpassed even that of Ted Bundy. ["FAP," p. 122; emphasis added]

The avalanche of numbers and data that textures such accounts involves, it becomes clear, less the conveying than the signifying of "information."⁴¹

But it involves something more than the parrying or managing of death and violence through the control-technologies of informatics and bureaucratization. What surfaces is the intimacy between the life process and the information process—and the gothicization, or rendering uncanny, of both. This gothic "contagion" appears, for example, in the series of analogies and likenesses that structure such accounts, in the relays between the debris of data "gathering dust in creaky file cabinets" and

41. On the "avalanche of numbers" in statistical communities, see Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Numbers," *Humanities and Society* 5 (Summer/Fall 1983): 279-95. The normative connections between numbers and body counts and information processing are evident enough in the criminology of serial murder. For example: "It must be recognized that the very nature of serial murder tends to pose difficulties when we try to do systematic counting and tabulation." In the Green River case "the task force included 46 full-time police officers in a search involving 200 suspects. About 2000 pages of paperwork were being generated daily and the operational costs were running \$2 million per year" (Ronald M. Holmes and James De Burger, *Serial Murder* [Newbury Park, Calif., 1988], p. 20; hereafter abbreviated SM). Not surprisingly, the CNN 1993 prime-time series on serial murder was called *Murder by Numbers*, the title lifted from Grierson Dickson, *Murder by Numbers* (London, 1958).

the debris of bodies, that is, in the notion that the "real killer might still be buried there in that mountain of tips" ("FAP," pp. 134, 126). It reappears in the equivalences drawn between the subject and the dossier, in the "profiler's" understanding of a person's life in terms of "a file that... never close[s]."⁴² As Lindsay puts it: "When they started fucking with my cases—which was my life—I thought that was enough" ("FAP," p. 128).

The type-profiling system devised in serial-murder investigations posits the serial killer as one of the ideal-typical inhabitants of machine culture: the statistical person. But it is the intimate experience of self-generalization—again, the at once alluring and insupportable experience of a sort of hypergeneralization in typicality—that seems to define the case-likeness of these cases. As one of the most influential popular surveyors of the serial murder scene expresses it, the serial killer is a simulated person, "a type of nonperson" (SK, p. 124). As the serial killer Henry Lee Lucas put it, "a person was a blank" (quoted in SK, p. 124).⁴³ Or, as the serial killer Ted Bundy experienced such a statistical identity in typicality, "Personalized stationery is one of the small but truly necessary luxuries of life."⁴⁴

The sociologist Georg Simmel approached a description of this strange form of intimacy in his account of "the stranger" in modern urban society. The strangeness of the stranger, as Simmel traces it, is not his otherness, but rather his close "spatial relations" that yet are marked by "remoteness": he is a neighbor but yet without particularized "human relations."⁴⁵ An embodiment of an uncanny spatial relation, the stranger's "strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near" ("S," p. 402). That is, the stranger's "connecting forces" are "*general* qualities in common," such that "this feeling of uniqueness vanishes from the relationship" and is assimilated to an estranging similarity or generalization ("S," pp. 405, 406). Strangeness, for Simmel, is thus

caused by the fact that similarity, harmony, and nearness are accompanied by the feeling that they are not really the unique property of this particular relationship: they are something more general, something which potentially prevails between the partners and an indeterminate number of others, and therefore gives the relation ... no inner and exclusive necessity. ["S," p. 407]

The stranger, if not (quite) yet the statistical person, begins to make visible the uncanny stranger-intimacy that defines the serial killer: the "deliber-

42. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 227.

43. See also Mike Cox, *The Confessions of Henry Lee Lucas* (New York, 1991).

44. Bundy, quoted in Ann Rule, *The Stranger Beside Me* (New York, 1980), p. 221.

45. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill., 1950), p. 402; hereafter abbreviated "S."

ate stranger" or "the stranger beside me."⁴⁰ On this view, the fascination generated by the serial killer is bound up through and through with the uncertain and rival determinations of the individuality of the individual. At one extreme, the "abnormal normality" of the serial killer, utterly absorbed in psychotic fantasies, appears as a sort of reservoir of the psychic order itself—"the psycho," or something like the drive in person. At the other, the "too normal" character of the serial killer appears as nothing but the social determination of the individual from the outside in—something like the mass in person.⁴⁷

Now the genre-term *serial killing* has, of course, generally replaced the earlier designation *stranger-killing*. The replacement in terms is in itself telling. The shift in terms registers a progressive migration or inflection in the understanding of "impersonal" violence: a shift in the understanding of the conditions of personation and impersonality. The brutality of serial violence is consistently linked to its impersonality, as if its brutality consisted above all in the feeling of sheer typicality, in the substitutability of one for "an indeterminate number of others." As a recent criminological study of serial murder summarizes it, "One of the most brutal facts of serial murder is that it usually involves the killing of one person by another who is a stranger. There need be no motives of hatred, rage, fear, jealousy, or greed at work; the victim need not have taunted, threatened, or abused the killer" (*SM*, p. 24).

The accretion of negatives in such accounts (no motives, no relations) makes the case for the notion of serial killing as "motiveless" crime. What this involves is a transfer of motive from psychology to typicality *tout court*: the "serial killer typically has a conscious goal of eliminating a particular group or category of people" (*SM*, p. 57). The classification of "the types

46. These are the titles of two best-selling books on the case of Ted Bundy, the case that has tended to define the popular sense of the serial killer. See Richard W. Larsen, *Bundy: The Deliberate Stranger* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1980), and Rule, *The Stranger Beside Me*.

47. On the serial killer as the mass in person, see *Serial Killers III III*, pt. 1; on the difference between the psycho killer and what might be called the psychic killer, see pt. 3. For the moment it is not possible to do more than indicate the form these shifting determinations (sociological and psychological) of the dangerous individual have tended to take. See also n. 50, below. The Lacanian Slavoj Žižek summarizes what has come to be the default cultural-psychoanalytic position thus: "we *are* murderers in the unconscious of our desire," that is, we are *all* killers in the unconscious (Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* [Cambridge, Mass., 1991], p. 59). Such an account not merely elides the difference between the psycho killer and the psychic killer. It effectively elides the difference between individual and group psychology—albeit not, as we might expect (in the familiar charge made against psychoanalysis), by way of the understanding of the group on the model of the individual and individual psychology. For what Freud refers to as "the unconscious foundations, which are similar in everyone," that is, the "average character" of the unconscious foundations of the subject, in effect folds individual psychology into group psychology (Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *Standard Edition*, 18:74). Hence the individual appears as a sort of group of one: the composite embodiment of the average, the mass within, or (as we will see in a moment) the "just similar."

of serial murder in modern society" (characteristically: the "visionary type," the "mission-oriented type," the "hedonistic type," the "power/control oriented type") often appears in terms of an achievement in the possibilities of coding and typology as such (*SM*, pp. 56, 57, 58, 59).⁴⁸

This exorbitant typicality seems inseparable from two forms of identification or overidentification: the subject's overidentification with others and the subject's overidentification with place. For one thing, stranger-killing depends on an intimacy with others that depends in turn on the proximities of statistical persons in statistical communities, on the logics of equivalence and phantasmagorias of equality generated in the mass-mediated consumer public sphere.⁴⁹ The phantasmagorias of equivalence in the statistical agora induce (as Simmel's account suggests) forms of stranger-intimacy. Or, better, they induce an anxious renegotiation of interior distances and proximities.⁵⁰ To the elementary forms of statistical life, then, "one response was a growing sense of unity among people formerly isolated by distance and lack of communication. This was not, however, unambiguous, because proximity also generated anxiety—apprehension that the neighbours were seen as getting a bit too close."⁵¹ The strange resemblance among strangers makes self-identity indistinguishable from identification with others, and inseparable from media-facilitated processes of imitation, simulation, and identity contagion. This is the psychic process of subject-formation that Borch-Jacobsen (following Lacan) describes in terms of *a primary identification* and that I have, focusing on the transference relation to technologies in these cases, described in terms of a *primary mediation*.

For this reason, it is not a matter of "choosing" between psychic and social determinants of the subject: the uncertain translation of processes of (other) identification into claims of (self) identity foregrounds the ri-

48. "Independent coding of types for the 110 cases showed slightly over 93% agreement between two coders. We consider this typology to be an initial working step toward a better understanding of many puzzling factors at work in serial homicide" (*SM*, p. 60).

49. On the market's phantasmagorias of equality, see Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; for a lucid summary of some of its effects, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 10-12.

50. In sociological terms, this renegotiation has been seen as a radical "other-directedness"—the central diagnosis of modern society in, for example, David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, Conn., 1961). In psychological terms, it may be seen as a primary form of *extimacy*: "extimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other" (Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimite," trans. Francoise Massardier-Kenney, *Prose Studies* 11 [Dec. 1988]: 123). The tensions between these sociological and psychological accountings of the subject—these rival, but coupled, accounts of the subject's formation from the outside in—are what I mean to pressure here.

51. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 88.

valorous claims of the internal and external, psychic and social. What must be emphasized then is the manner in which the experience of this incoherence—the subject's radically uncertain formation from the inside out or from the outside in—lends itself to forms of agonistic violence. What becomes visible is the excruciated crossing of the subject's social interest in *having* a social interest and the subject's self-interest in *protecting* its nonsociality or autonomy: "I am not myself and ... my most proper being is over there, in that double who enrages me." "No doubt the double is loved, since I love myself in him; but that is also why he provokes hatred and hostility, precisely inasmuch as he is close to me, too close." In the community of strangers the apprehension of the "too-closeness" of neighbors provokes stranger-violence: "to 'love one's neighbor as oneself is no doubt the shortest route to cutting his throat."⁵²

The overidentification with others induces, in the statistical communities of machine culture, its typical forms of violence. Or, rather, the forms of typicality that are facilitated, or exacerbated, by machine culture make for the translation of the general problematic of overidentification into particular programs of type-violence. From the later nineteenth century on, the overidentification of the subject has been understood in terms of the "social determination of the self": an identification of identities with "the social." The becoming-normative of the notion of cultural or social determination is clear enough. But its normalization has perhaps made the assumption of social determination a bit too self-evident.

Overidentification, that is, is experienced in terms of a feeling of *oversocialization*. In a recent study of the Victorian serial killer Dr. Thomas Neill Cream, for instance, the historian Angus McLaren argues against the notion that such killers are rebels or outlaws. McLaren argues instead that their actions "were determined largely by the society that produced them." Hence the serial murderer is "likely best understood not so much as an 'outlaw' as an 'oversocialized' individual who saw himself simply carrying out sentences that society at large levelled" (in this case, among others, levelled against "rebellious females").⁵³ But it is possible to understand the notion of oversocialization somewhat differently, as something more complicated than the subject's internalization of social "roles." That is, it is possible to understand the notion of the *determination* or *production* of the individual by "society" as involving a more complex relation of the subject to his situation or *being-in-context*. As another social historian observes, in commenting on the case of the presidential assassin Charles Jules Guiteau, "It has frequently been noted that the delusional systems of the mentally ill have a chameleon-like quality, an ability to find themes,

52. Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, pp. 93, 89.

53. Angus McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder: The Victorian Serial Killings of Dr. Thomas Neill Cream* (Chicago, 1993), pp. xiv, xiii; see also Elliott Leyton, *Hunting Humans: Inside the Minds of Mass Murderers* (New York, 1986), pp. 279-324.

tunes, specific menaces in the atmosphere and events of their times."⁵¹ Or, as Joel Norris describes "the chameleon-like demeanor of a traditional serial killer," their "chameleon-like ability to blend in with their background": "*Like a Bundy or a Long*, he could blend into any group quickly... . He could *actually become* the significant other of any person he met.... [and] he was constantly changing from second to second, becoming anybody he wanted to be" (SK, pp. 165, 229, 165; emphasis added). It is this chameleonlike quality that can perhaps help to define the pathogenic aspect in these cases of overidentification: an overidentification with respect to others that folds into an overidentification with respect to place or context itself. These likeness or similarity effects (persons as indefinite articles or nonpersons—"like a Bundy or a Long"—or the redundancy of the chameleon/itself) perhaps provide evidence of something more than a tendency toward dissimulation. They make visible the disorders of similarity and identification, and the latent violences, of what might be called *the mimetic compulsion*.

Melting into Place

He's the kind of guy ... who probably goes to work every day. Maybe he does something with statistics. An accountant or a clerk. He just kind of melts into the city scene.

—NYPD COMMISSIONER TIM DOWD. Son of Sam profile⁵⁵

The mimetic or "imitative" character of serial criminals has frequently been noted. Frequently noted as well is the "redundant" character of serial violence, that is, a redundant violence that has routinely been described as a tendency toward "overkill" (see SM, p. 46, and SK, pp. * 216-19). What becomes apparent is a hypertelic violence, exceeding its function or purpose—or, at least, exceeding the end of ending life. The chameleonlike character of these crimes takes the form of such an exorbitant, or extrafunctional, drive: a drive toward likeness itself. It enacts a hypertelic imitation not merely of an indeterminate number of others but of the determining conditions of place. That is, it enacts, chameleonlike, the subject's assimilation to ground: his melting into or fading into or being devoured by space.

The descriptions of the recent case of the Detroit serial murderer and his investigators provide a way of further specifying these imbricated relations of subject and space. The tabloid account, we have seen, is typically structured by a ramifying series of analogies such that by the logic of a sympathetic magic—"like produces like"—analogy or likeness oper-

54. Charles Rosenberg, quoted in McLaren, *A Prescription for Murder*, p. 62.

55. Quoted in Leyton, *Hunting Humans*, p. 174.

ates as productive cause. This appears as a sort of imitative contagion; these accounts proceed by way of a species of magical thinking by which bodies and imitations or likenesses reciprocally indicate each other. One detects throughout such stories of serial violence, for example, a series of promiscuous substitutions between bodies and representations (for example, the book that "will cause . . . bodily harm to the image of the FBI"); between the serial consumption of visual spectacles and repetitive acts of violence (for example, "serial viewing of these death scenes has a powerful... effect"); between, most literally, ink and blood (for example, the desire to capture in cold print the real work of detection); between, most excessively, the processing of information and the life process itself (for example, the FBI as a kind of vampire, "as a relic . . . living off past successes") ("FAP," pp. 124, 132, 124).

This promiscuous analogism operates by way of the logic of substitution and simulation that everywhere inhabits the milieu of addictive violence.⁵⁶ Such a logic of simulation—conflating bodies and writing, the subject and the ground of representation—issues in an excessive literalization. It issues, that is, in the materialization of writing itself, such that writing and bodies and places stand in for each other. For one thing, the incantation of resemblance makes for an uncannily "graphic" representation of landscape or place. In the Detroit case, for example, the scene of the crime under investigation is a "strange little place" (one of the few places given a name in the piece), "a little urban hamlet called Inkster" ("FAP," pp. 126, 124). The magical equivalence of writing, bodies, and scenes could not be literalized, incarnated, in more graphic fashion than in a murder site named Inkster.

The merger of bodies and scenes could not be realized in more gothic fashion than in the astonishing account of the physical situation of the bodies discovered in abandoned motel rooms. In each case, "the body had been so thoroughly transformed by the damp, fetid air that nothing was left but an efflorescence of mold, 'a kind of white shape where the body had been,'" "the spectral efflorescence that once had been a body" ("FAP," pp. 126, 132).⁵⁷ The manias of simulation and assimilation that occupy the imaginary of serial murder are perfected in this substitution and assimilation of body to place. The devouring force of the scene of the crime makes visible, in the spectral outline of the white shape, the sheer transparency of body to scene. It figures the violent becoming-transparent of the subject (criminal or victim) to his or her milieu. It figures the subject of violence melting into the city scene, absorbed, or eaten up by, space.

The lethal absorption in place is nowhere clearer than in the repre-

56. See my "Serial Killers (I)."

57. The tendency toward disembodiment in such cases is marked here not merely by the assimilation of body to space but by the racialized transformations of the more deeply embodied black bodies of the victims into white, that is, disembodied and spectral, shapes.

sensation of such quasi-domestic environments: these *homelike* motel and hotel spaces. This is the description of the larger scene of one of the Detroit serial killings we have been looking at:

Highland Park, an urban enclave just north of the Detroit city line, had once been home to auto moguls who built stately mansions there and housed the overflow of weekend guests in the then elegant Monterey on Woodward Avenue [where the corpses were found]. But by the time the 90s dawned, the avenue had turned into a hellish corridor of crack-addicted hookers trading their ravaged bodies for rocks to smoke, drifting in and out of refuse-choked abandoned buildings like the Monterey, which the city was too poor to tear down.

And now someone was checking another kind of guest into the Monterey. ["FAP," p. 122]

Detroit is, of course, the prototypical site of postindustrial violence: motor city transformed into murder city. If the Matushka case of railway-system violence realizes something like the modernization of murder and its typical scenes in machine culture, this "bombed-out," postindustrial and post-Fordist cityscape realizes something like its postmodernization. This registers, above all, in the dissolution of private and public "lines" of demarcation, in the "hellish corridors" traversing places neither private nor public, in the abject homelessness of "ravaged bodies" drifting through the corridors of abandoned urban spaces. The hotel district initially "housed the overflow" of what had "once been home" to the auto producers. But the domestic "enclave" itself has become outmoded, and these homes away from home have given way to the consumption-and-addiction economies of the pathological public sphere.⁵⁸

This breach of boundaries is experienced as the deep horror of these crime scenes: "the *real* horror is this: the reeking, bombed-out skeletons

On the racialized drive toward disembodiment/whiteness that surfaces in some of these cases, see also Olsen, *Charmer*.

58. Compare also a recent report by Mireya Navarro, "Prostitutes Defy Killer by Working," *New York Times*, 28 Dec. 1994, p. A8, city ed., concerning the serial killing of five prostitutes in Dade County, Florida. As the report indicates from the title on, the prostitutes are here represented as the victims of a certain work ethic and as the repository of family values (for example, "'I have to pay the bills. I have four kids____My bills are paid. My kids are always clean'")—even as they inhabit the city's transit corridors, lethal spaces neither public nor private (for example, they now "would work only in parked cars within screaming distance of the others"). The dislocated familialism of the report is underlined by the single identifying feature of the killer provided: he drives "a red Toyota with a 'child-restraint seat behind the driver's seat.'" The report, it is perhaps worth noting, also includes two "overview" maps of the crime corridor, maps that are useless and illegible to readers unfamiliar with the area but that signify, graphically locate and secure, the intimacy, or identification, of violence and public space.

of housing the victims *died* in were, for the most part, the same places they had *lived* in" ("FAP," p. 132). The breaking of these boundaries utterly collapses the feeling of distinction between subject and surroundings—a collapse concisely registered, for instance, in the prosthetic architecture of "the skeletons of housing." Most fundamentally, it dissolves identities into place, leaving, ultimately, only "the spectral efflorescence that once had been a body."

There is, in the experience of serial killing, a compulsive location of the scene of the crime in such homes away from home—hotel and motel spaces as murdering places. This is one indication of the radical redefinition of the homelike on the American scene: not exactly no place like home, but rather only places "like" home. If stranger-killing is premised on a fundamental typicality, then the making of what came to be called, at the turn of the century, American "hotel-civilization"⁵⁹ is premised on the mass replication of ideal-typical domestic spaces (a "smoggy wonderland of subdivision after subdivision"). It is premised, that is, on the uncanniness (unhomelikeness) of the domestic as such (an uncanniness perhaps inseparable from the psychic shocks of the machine culture of mass reproducibility). Hence the repeated location of American serial violence in hotel and motel hells: for example, the murder motel in Robert Bloch's novel *Psycho* (the novel on which the 1960 Hitchcock film is based), or the even more lethal tourist hotel in his subsequent novel, *American Gothic*.⁶⁰ But, for the moment, I want to conclude by setting out one final, and basic, constituent of the compulsive and violent lure of place that recurs in episodes of serial murder.

The Mimetic Compulsion

Consider these two very different, but ultimately complementary, ways of constructing and representing scenes of serial violence. First: The *scenes* of the crime make up the premises of the serial killer task force's vaunted (albeit generally ineffective) profiling system. These scenes provide the basis for drawing, or, more properly, codifying, the typical and composite outline or "profile" of the killer. Scene and profile thus are seen exactly to image each other. From the bodily outline drawn on the surface of the scene of the crime, a kind of white shape on the ground

59. See, for instance, Henry James, *The American Scene*, ed. Leon Edel (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), p. 438.

60. The latter is a novelization of the career of H. H. Holmes and the one-hundred-room hotel/murder factory that came to be called the Holmes Castle. See Robert Bloch, *Psycho* (New York, 1959) and *American Gothic* (New York, 1974).

where the body had been, what progressively emerges is the outlined shape of the killer, his composite portrait or statistical picture.⁶¹

Second: The Jack the Ripper exhibition in Madame Tussaud's London wax museum is an installation in the Chamber of Horrors that opened only in April 1980. The exhibit includes no effigy of Jack the Ripper himself, masked or otherwise. This centering absence has to do, of course, with his storied anonymity (from the start a projective surface for all sorts of stories). But it has perhaps more to do with the pathogenic style of that anonymity. As tabloid coverage of the exhibit reported, the Ripper was "nowhere to be seen." Or, rather, he is seen only spectrally, as an obscure shadow or dark shape, minimally but therefore dispersively on the scene. What makes up the exhibit then—in addition to the bodies of his victims, who *are* represented—is the *locale* of the crime: the exhibit is called "the Jack the Ripper Street."⁶²

Foregrounded in both these representations of serial killing, the BSU profile and the mimetic house of horrors, is thus an emergence from, and a merging back into, milieu or ground. This intimates that, if the agent of violence is imagined as the oversocialized individual, one way of imagining this oversocialization is in terms of a radical failure to achieve distance from context. Such a failure is realized in the subject's absorption into "background." Most generally, the formation of the modernist self through the "impact" of external conditions (the determination of the individual by the social context that produces him) posits the subject determined from the outside in (in effect, the subject in a state of shock). Locally, the profile of the killer emerging from the scene of the crime, the merging of the killer back into context or locale—we might describe these transferences between persons and scenes as the subject's emergency conditions. These transferences devolve onto a minimalist distinction between the subject and dark space—the minimalist representation of the killer that defines, for instance, the cinematographic formula and the terrible and deadly places of the film noir.⁶³

What comes into view in such cases is a "gothic" rapport between persons and places. That rapport consists in an affinity between person and habitat such that degrees of aliveness are distributed across living,

61. See Wilson and Donald Seaman, *The Serial Killers: A Study in the Psychology of Violence* (London, 1992), pp. 81-136; SK, pp. 210-42; Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas, *Sexual Homicide*, pp. 135-52; SM, pp. 82-96; and Jenkins, *Using Murder*, pp. 70-78. A former high school classmate of Jeffrey Dahmer reports that Dahmer, in his senior year, "traced bodies on the [schoolroom] floor in chalk ____ It was an eerie sight to see the outline of a body on the floor" (quoted in Norris, *Jeffrey Dahmer*, p. 75).

62. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), p. 1.

63. On film noir, see *Shades of Noir: A Reader*, ed. Joan Copjec (London, 1993), csp. Copjec, "The Phenomenal Nonphenomenal: Private Space in *Film Noir*," pp. 167-97; Zii.eV., "'The Thing That Thinks': The Kantian Background of the *Noir* Subject," pp. 199-226; and Dean MacCannell, "Democracy's Turn: On Homeless A'oi," pp. 279-97.

or semialive, spaces. One discovers in such semianimate environments, however, something more than a gothic "homology thus established between subject and space."⁶⁴ The tendency toward identification, that is, involves something more than a homology, or structural similarity, between distinct identities associated by likeness. One detects in the tendency toward resemblance a basic nondistinction. What marks these cases, above all, is the "reciprocal topography" of persons and places: a reciprocal provocation to identity such that self-construction or self-realization becomes indistinguishable from habitat construction. What must be analyzed, then, is a generalized failure of distinction between subject and space, a failure of distinction that means that forms of personation (self-making) are scarcely separable from a radical depersonation (self-absorption in space). This is, in brief, the assimilation of the subject to dark spaces: a chameleonlike melting or fading into place that is experienced at once as the lure of anonymity (disguise or impersonation) and as the threat of anonymity (impersonation as impersonality: the serial killer as "nonperson").

Emerging here is something like a mimetic drive or compulsion. The gift of "seeing resemblances," Benjamin observed, in a very brief essay of 1933, is "nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else."⁶⁵ The logic of this compulsive identification is further defined in a 1938 essay: the surrealist-sociologist Roger Caillois's extraordinary speculations on imitation as a form of automatism and as a form of pathology. Caillois theorizes the imitative drive as a sort of primary mimesis on the level of the life process. This is a mimetic drive anterior to the order of the subject (Caillois's examples are drawn primarily from the species of the insect order). Caillois, in brief, locates this drive in terms of a hyperidentification with others (being "like" everyone else). But this takes the form, above all, of a hyperidentification with physical ground or context. What this involves is "the *generalization of space* at the expense of the individual": that is, the failure of distinction "between the organism and its surroundings."⁶⁶ The imitative mechanism, a sort of likeness machine, undermines the subject's feeling of singularity.⁶⁷ The tendency toward imitation, on this account, extends beyond the protective mimicries of camouflage to a tendency

64. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 178.

65. Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York, 1978), p. 333.

66. Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley, *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): 31, 17; hereafter abbreviated "MLP."

67. "The feeling of personality," as Caillois puts it,

considered as the organism's feeling of distinction from its surroundings, of the connection between consciousness and a particular point in space, cannot fail under these conditions [of the "imitating mechanism"] to be seriously undermined; one then enters into the psychology of psychasthenia, and more specifically of *legendary psychasthenia*, if

toward simulation as such. The tendency toward similarity exceeds its life function (the function of preserving life); more exactly, the automatistic (tropic) character of the *attraction by milieu* means that *life takes a step backwards*" ("MLP," p. 30). This amounts to a sort of corporeal mimesis: a "photography on the level of the object." In Caillouis's astonishing formulation: "He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*" ("MLP," pp. 23, 30).⁶⁸

Such a centering on the attraction to milieu makes possible a reconsideration of the individual's attraction to context and "social context" as such. For our purposes, there is, at the least, a compelling relation between the assimilation to space in the condition of psychasthenia and the conditions of place-identity solicited by what I have described as the pathological public sphere. There is a good deal more to be said about these convergences of the radical experience of contextualization and the experience of devivification. But for the moment it is possible merely to indicate some of the lines of that convergence. Caillouis's account of the decline in the feeling of personality programmatically focuses on an order of life and an order of mimesis and identification anterior to the formation of the subject (the insect order). But his social entomology posits something a bit different. It posits, from the different point of view, not merely the psychasthenic *vanishing* of the subject in identification but also the *emergence* of a different order of the subject through identification.

This new order of the subject of violence is perhaps most provocatively delineated by Klaus Theweleit, in his investigations of the "fascist" male or "soldier male" and his logic of killing for pleasure. The formation of the ego has generally been understood (reprising Lacan) in terms of

we agree to use this name for the disturbance in the ... relations between personality and space. ["MLP," p. 28]

68. On Caillouis's account of mimesis (and its incorporations into Lacanian accounts of the subject), see Denis Hollier, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): 3-15 and "The Word of God: 'I Am Dead,'" *October*, no. 44 (Spring 1988): 75-87; Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," *October*, no. 33 (Summer 1985): 31-72; and Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 342-43. It's not difficult to detect the links (tentatively broached at the close of Caillouis's essay) between this account of the "mimetic assimilations of the animate to the inanimate" by way of mechanisms of imitation—imitative mechanisms that make for "a decline in the feeling of personality and life"—and Freud's positing, a decade or so earlier, of the repetition-compulsions, or repetition-automatizations, of the death drive—the instinctual tendency of the organism to the inorganic ("MLP," pp. 31, 30). One advantage of Caillouis's reformulation is the foregrounding of a pathological relation to milieu in such cases: if "life seems to lose ground" in its mechanical attraction to the inanimate, *it seems to lose ground to ground or context itself* ("MLP," p. 32). One of the most powerful contemporary figurations, virtually illustrations, of these relations is to be found in the subject- and body-devouring landscapes of Cindy Sherman's photographs. For a related account, along more "properly" psychoanalytic lines, see Krauss, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral," *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): 49-68.

the consolidation of the boundaries of the subject through the fantasy of the secured and "armored body."⁶⁹ But this "psychic" model of subject formation might be shifted in the direction of the radicalized experience of "social" organization in the subject of violence. Here is Theweleit's summary of what he calls the "social ego":

The "ego" these processes seem to produce is admittedly a particularly peculiar formation: it can certainly not be conceived as a psychic agency pertaining to the person. It has, rather, to be understood as a social ego, a muscle-armor that is merely borrowed, painfully drilled into and fused onto the individual. An ego of the kind described seems likely to be incapable of escaping the danger of immediate fragmentation on contact with living life, unless it is inserted into some larger social formation that guarantees and maintains its boundaries. Any social organization, from the family to the army, might fulfill this function, as long as it functions as ... a "totality." ... The "ego" described here is unremittingly dependent on external support; if it breaks down, the ego in turn disintegrates.⁷⁰

This is then not exactly the psychic armored ego but, instead, the social ego, formed from the outside in, its social substitute skin forming its insectlike exoskeleton. And this is exactly the ego of the kind one finds described, again and again, in accounts of the serial killer. If the serial killer, as we have seen, "fades back," chameleonlike, "into society," he seems to depend utterly on the support of this social exoskeleton. As Norris, among others, expresses it, the serial killers have "no internal structure to their lives, the killers amalgamate the rules system of the institution as a form of external skeleton" (*SK*, p. 37). The serial killer's abnormal normality, his "uncanny knack for becoming invisible and fading into the background," thus seems inseparable from this peculiar style of oversocialization (*SK*, p. 83). The serial killers, that is, are seen to require "a kind of behavioral skeleton—much like an insect—to provide an architecture for their fantasies and a structure to the violence that informs their conscious existence" (*SK*, p. 216). This is, in short, the formation of the killer with a machinelike or devivified periphery: the man whose interior has lost its meaning in its utter dependence on the mechanical drills relentlessly binding him to external and social forms.

The Dutch novel *Het Gonden Ei* (*The Golden Egg*) provides one of the most astonishing contemporary analyses of sexual serial killing: its landscapes, its fascinations, and its motivations. Its *landscapes* are the anonymous crowd scenes of tourist and mass culture: its autoroutes and fuel stops and post offices and public homes away from home, a "Milky Way

69. See Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, pp. 461-64, and Hal Foster, "Armour Fou," *October*, no. 56 (Spring 1991): 65-97.

70. Theweleit, *Male Bodies*, pp. 222, 223.

of wrappings and empty cigarette packs stretching all the way to the pumps."⁷¹ The *fascinations* of stranger-intimacy it incites are mediated by endless enumeration, counting, quotation, and copying: picture albums, maps, photographs, news clippings, mass-produced "identification" bracelets. The *motivation* of stranger-killing becomes inseparable from the possibility of absolute "ownership." But this is an ownership that, in turn, becomes inseparable from the terrifying pleasures of an endless replication:

Another time he had needed a quote from a book that he couldn't find right away but knew she also owned. As he dialed her number he suddenly remembered where his own copy was, but later he had called her anyway. And as she dictated the passage to him, and he read along in his own copy, he experienced a frightening pleasure. Wp. 12]

Finally, these mediated intimacies devolve onto a drive toward absolute identification, a drive that emerges as the logic of stranger-killing: not merely the singling out of one from an indeterminate number of others, but the drive "to be one with her" (V, p. 26). Hence we rediscover the compulsion to extend "likeness" or similarity into identity: "Saskia was the only one with whom he had really wanted to be *one*" (V, p. 12). And thus the "rare moments" of primary identification induce at the same time the excitations of a primary mimesis: "only the exciting awareness remained that he was imitating something" {V, p. 99).

If this novel of stranger-killing thus foregrounds the pleasures and horrors of sheer identification, the devouring by space and the devouring by others, the prolonged opening and closing shots of the first film version of the novel, the Dutch film *The Vanishing*, provide an incisive (and extraordinarily Cailloisian) way of figuring these pleasures and horrors. The opening shot gradually brings into view a barely visible stick insect, "playing dead" in its vanishing into its background; the closing shot brings into view the surreal insect figure of "sex-death," the praying mantis. It is the uncanny logic of this way of framing the inner experience of serial killing that I have been tracing.

71. Tim Krabbe, *Het Gouden Ei* (Amsterdam, 1984); trans. Claire Nicolas White, under the title *The Vanishing* (New York, 1993), p. 10; hereafter abbreviated V.

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