The scene of the crime: inventing the serial killer.

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This essay examines the meanings of the crime scene in serial killings, and the tensions between the real and the imagined in the circulation of those meanings. Starting with the Whitechapel Murders of 1888 it argues that they, as well as forming an origin for the construction of the identity of 'the serial killer', initiate certain ideas about the relationship of subjects to spaces and the existence of the self in the modern urban landscape. It suggests that these ideas come to play an integral part in the contemporary discourse of serial killing, both in the popular imagination and in professional analysis. Examining the Whitechapel Murders, more recent cases and modern profiling techniques, it argues that popular and professional representations of crime scenes reveal more of social anxieties about the nature of the public and the private than they do about serial killers. It suggests that 'the serial killer' is not a coherent type, but an invention produced from the confusions of persons and places.

Key Words: Whitechapel Murders; Serial Killers; Crime Scenes; Profiling.

Biographical Note

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At 7.30 every evening a guided tour sets off from Tower Hill tube station to walk around the streets of Whitechapel, visiting the sites where five women were murdered in the autumn of 1888. The women's names were Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Kelly, but their killer has only the name signed to a letter sent to the police and picked up by contemporary newspapers: Jack the Ripper. The murders seemed to stop abruptly in November 1888 and the murderer was neither caught nor identified, despite the efforts of police at the time and those of so-called 'Ripperologists' since. It isn't necessary to wait until 7.30 in the evening to see the sights, as Madame Tussaud's and the London Dungeon are open every day and prominently feature Jack the Ripper reconstructions. A century-old crime scene is re-animated every day, and the immediate question is obvious: what is the continued attraction of these sites and scenes?

I am not so much concerned here with the question of the nature of the pleasure derived from seeing images of violent death, nor with issues relating to the gender of victims and perpetrators, although debates in these areas are important and far from concluded. I also do not wish to deny that the real and terrible events of multiple murder have happened; instead I want to examine something of what is occurring in the production of the figure of the serial killer in contemporary culture, and the tensions between the factual and the fictional in that production. I am suggesting that the Whitechapel murders, as well as forming an origin for the construction of the identity of the serial killer, initiate certain ideas about the relationship of subjects to spaces and the existence of the self in the modern urban landscape that continue to underpin contemporary discourses.

The argument is formed by an idea of space that encompasses both the straightforward sense of physical place –geography, streets, houses— and the more abstract sense of location in concepts of the relationship of mind and body, the interior and exterior and the public and the private. This is a treatment of space that is partly derived from literary critical treatments of the Gothic, which emphasise the relations of relations of physical and mental geography to be found in such texts (see Sedgwick 1986). Philip Simpson identifies the Gothic tradition as the progenitor of fictional serial killer narratives (Simpson 2000: 26-36), and I would go further, to suggest that the influence of Gothic is not limited to the fictional, but extends to much of the discourse. Richard Tithecott asks: 'although the blurring of fiction and reality is not restricted to the discourse of serial murder, why should we *especially* want to represent serial killers in a manner which obscures the distinction between fact and fiction?' (Tithecott 1997: 122) The figure of the serial killer is being used in ways that go beyond entertainment and police work, having more to do with ways of understanding ourselves and modern society. Alison Young describes the scene of the crime as the scene of meaninglessness that is made intelligible (Young 1996: 86), and I want to use the expanded notion of space to examine what is at work in making the particular crime of serial killing intelligible.

The meaninglessness of the crime scene is that it represents a break in perceived order, where otherwise contained or repressed elements surface, casting doubt on the clear delineations of social and psychological structure, and collapsing the boundaries between the self and others, the public and private, and the interior and the exterior existence. The serial killer emerges from the crime scene of most extreme unintelligibility: the murder of a person for no apparent reason. What I want to suggest here is that despite its production as a coherent type, the figure of the serial killer reflects exactly the incoherences that it is constructed to overcome.

Invention

In some sense, the phenomenon of serial killing and the figure of the serial killer are inventions, in the way that Michel Foucault famously describes the 'invention' of the homosexual as part of 'a new specification of individuals':

> …sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was no more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form and a morphology with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology…The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault 1976/1990: 43)

It is clear that 'murder' and 'serial killer' can be substituted everywhere in this passage to detail the new specification that begins to take place at the same historical moment that Foucault pinpoints: the late-nineteenth century. It is not original to suggest that the figure of the serial killer is a social construction. Coleman and Norris, in their introductory textbook on criminology, caution that: 'such definitions and distinctions are produced by the commentator and are not "natural" categories' (Coleman and Norris 2000: 89) and as Deborah Cameron has said: '[serial killing] is not a natural kind but a discursive construct through which certain acts are made intelligible and meaningful to us.' (Cameron 1994: 151) A discursive construct is not a single deliberate act of invention, but a complex process of accumulation of ideas and representations. In this way, we can say that the Whitechapel murderer and Jack the Ripper are two distinct entities. The Whitechapel murderer is simply the person who committed the crimes, whereas Jack the Ripper is the title of a far more complicated accretion: the discursive construct arising from those killings. Although not deliberate inventions, it can be argued that particular constructs can often be seen to serve very particular interests. Philip Jenkins has forcefully asserted that, in the United States, the serial killer fulfilled a distinct purpose for government agencies, such as the FBI, seeking to expand their jurisdiction, and also for conservative politicians. 'It was' he says

'rhetorically and politically necessary during the early 1980s to posit the existence of uniquely dangerous predatory villains, against whom no counter-measures were too strong.' (Jenkins 2002: 1) While Britain does not have the same institutional structures of law and its enforcement as the United States, it is still the case that Britain has those such as professional profilers (and indeed, conservative politicians) who might be seen to share an investment in the figure of the serial killer.[1] It is also clear that large profits are to be made everywhere in the culture industry. There is considerable interchange between Britain and America, both in terms of popular culture and criminal profiling and much of the vocabulary of the serial killer discourse is shared between the two countries. Although the United States did develop a good deal of the theoretical framework of serial killing during the 1980s and 90s, the basic figure in this framework is Jack the Ripper, and the basic conceptual field is derived from the gothic geography from which he emerges.

Fact and Fiction

What is also at stake in this discussion is the distinction between the real and the imagined, and between the different fields in which the figure is represented. Serial killing, by any of the available definitions or statistical estimates, is a rare crime,[2] yet it achieves a disproportionate level of representation in both fictional and documentary media. Crime fiction is a mis-named genre, as it is concerned almost only with murder and, even within murder fiction, serial murder dominates. This is also the case for film and television drama. In 'true crime' writing, the disproportion is similar, but more significantly, this genre represents one of the major points of slippage between the fictional and the factual, including as it does a heterogeneous body of material produced by interested amateurs and law enforcement professionals.[3] The question here is of the influence of factual and fictional forms upon one another. Simpson argues about profiling that it 'fits within a long literary and cultural tradition of what Joel Black calls "the aesthetics of murder"... the ontology of the entire hyperrational profiling process as canonised by

the Federal Bureau of Investigation lies in detective fiction' (Simpson 2000: 79) He also notes their 'veneration' of nineteenth-century detective fiction, and indeed, books by British and American profilers are threaded with literary references. FBI profiler John Douglas, for example, writes: 'our antecedents actually do go back to crime fiction more than crime fact' and discusses his 'storytelling ability' (Douglas and Olshaker 1995: 32, 37). His British counterpart, David Canter, relies even more heavily on such references, with constant recourse to the characters of films and novels and his stated belief that 'there is something to be learned from fiction. That it is possible to set up a detective process that seeks to unfold the criminal's story… not driven solely by the need to establish what can be presented as fact in court' (Canter 1994: 371). His book, *Mapping Murder*, has an interesting set of epigraphs preceding each section, each set consisting of three quotations: one from Shakespeare, one from Canter's own work and one from Northrop Frye's important literary critical work, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). He shows throughout the book his confecting of literary fiction and reality. As well as repeating the idea of the 'narrative' of the killer, he writes of 'criminals' dramas', the 'roles he can play' (Canter: 12,4) and uses many other similar terms. More strange are his selections from Northrop Frye,[4] all of which are concerned with the place of the hero in narrative and which produce an impossible and disturbing confusion as to who the hero might be, killer or detective: in either case it is an unpleasant aggrandisement of the work of law enforcement to the status of heroic struggle. There is also a distinct continuity here with fictional forms in which the effort to catch killers is frequently represented as a personalised contest. A more sober British profiler, Paul Britton, opens his book with a quotation from *Macbeth* (Britton 1997: 9), and a textbook on behavioural evidence analysis has references to *Moby Dick*, Blake and Dante in its chapter on serial homicide (Turvey 2002), again evoking heroism of an ambiguous kind, alongside poetic treatments of hell. There is repeated recourse to fictional forms and figures, and this can be seen as part of the legacy of Jack the Ripper.

Even though it could be argued that these are just books, and that one might therefore expect literary influences, Douglas, Canter and Britton and others are also involved in the business of law enforcement, advising on cases and training the police to use their methods. Even if we regard their claims of involvement and success in the most sceptical light, it is still clear that they, and others, are consulted on many hundreds of cases, and that finance for their work is still forthcoming from government agencies. The boundary between the real and the imagined is not secure. As one writer has noted 'it is difficult to know whether the bureaucratic law enforcement attitudes toward serial murder preceded or followed changes in popular culture' (Jenkins 1994: 81) and 'the investigative priorities of bureaucratic agencies are formed by public and legislative expectations, which are derived from popular culture and the news media.' (Jenkins 1994: 223) There is a continuum of representation that is particularly close between fiction and true crime accounts of different kinds. Recent academic criminology is much less involved with the same kinds of representation, but there are still many examples, frequently (but not solely) American that repeat the same ideas (see for example Egger 1998, Holmes and de Burger 1985/1998, Holmes and Holmes 1988).

The level of repetition across the discourse of serial murder is striking, one aspect of which is seriality itself. Diana Fuss has said that 'tales of serial killers in our newspapers have become our new serial literature, with regular instalments, stock characters, behavioural profiles, and a fascinated loyal readership' (Fuss 1993: 199). I would suggest that such tales have not just recently become serial literature, but that this too is a legacy of the Whitechapel murders. Serialism was the dominant mode of publication for Victorian fiction, and the short story (particularly the detective story) was a popular element of the periodical. Newspaper production and circulation had risen sharply (see Curtis 2001: 56-60) and by the 1880s publishing conditions were such that the public comprehended easily the way in which the murders were being presented as a serial story. If the serial killer is recognised, defined (even self-defined) by the

action of repeating murders, then the writers and readers of true and fictional crime narratives are similarly serial. No writer in these genres writes only one book, and as there are actually very few serial killers true crime narratives repeat the same limited range of stories. Likewise, no reader reads only one account, they are serial consumers, a fact that is recognised in the number of part-work publications of true crime. It is also clear that serial killers read the biographies and other accounts of those preceding them, as well as fiction, academic psychology and criminology. One of many examples is the British murderer Colin Ireland, who wrote of his time in solitary confinement:

> I decided it would be fun to carry out something I labelled 'reinforcing the stereotype'. I had my radio with me…on hearing [the staff] I would leap up and change the station to a classical one. I would be on my bed before the door opened, my book or paper open, and as the door opened I would glance in a superior fashion around the edge of the reading material. 'Yes, officers?' I would enquire in my best Hannibal Lecter cold, distant, but polite tone. (Gekoski 1998: 9)

This kind of inter-relation is commented on by Mark Seltzer who observes that:

> The killer's experience of his own identity is directly absorbed in an identification with the personality type called 'the serial killer': absorbed in the case-likeness of his own case…One detects, that is, what has recently been called the 'looping effect' by which systems of knowledge about kinds of people interact with the people who are known about. (Seltzer 1998: 107)

The discourse is a circular set of citations, dominated by seriality and repetition, and participated in by killers and profilers, writers and readers. Holmes and Holmes make a fascinating statement in this respect:

Some works of fiction, such as Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* are often more realistic –and more accurate– than true-crime books. Many academics decry the themes in Harris' two books, but these are the same academics who have neither spoken to nor interviewed a murderer, much less a serial killer. (Holmes and Holmes 1988: vii)

Their assertion reveals the utter confusion about what constitutes authority on the subject. They reject true crime and unspecified 'academics' and appeal instead to fiction and their own interviews with serial killers. While the novels may well seem more realistic in relation to the interviews, they do not ask what that realism is. If models are derived from 'interviews with small, probably unrepresentative samples of some of the most devious research subjects' (Coleman and Norris 2000: 107) then those models are themselves suspect. They also fail to consider that murderers can, and do, read, and that the reflection of the novels in the interviews is not necessarily proof of the truth of either, but possibly the infinite reflection of fiction.

In 1888, even before the murders had stopped, the Whitechapel murderer was caught up in the processes of narrative creation and fictional invention. Newspapers, themselves transformed by the New Journalism of the 1890s, sought out different means of maintaining human interest, and made free reference to characters familiar from fiction, like the mad doctor or Sherlock Holmes. Immediate comparison was also made with Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885), a dramatised version of which was playing in the West End (Curtis 2001: 77, 118), and the image of Jekyll and Hyde is still regularly deployed to describe the serial killer. Richard Tithecott notes a number of examples, including killers using it to describe themselves (Tithecott 1997: 50-51), and in a 1988 essay an academic criminologist quotes from Stevenson's text as though it is in some way an adequate account of a real psychological state (Carlisle in Holmes and Holmes 1988).

What becomes clear from this is that there are deep historical connections with Gothic fictions of the late-nineteenth century. Gothic fiction itself is one of the forms from which the genre of detective fiction emerges in this period, and in relation to Jack the Ripper the entwining is most obvious in the manifold ways in which the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes and the Gothic monsters Mr Hyde and Dracula (who appeared in 1897) have been put together in novels and films since then. There is also a neat process of import/export of such images between Britain and the United States. The American adoption of the cultural forms of Romanticism and Gothic in the nineteenth century meant that this set of ideas became part of the American cultural imaginary, and the British Victorian detective and mystery stories found a large audience across the Atlantic. The structures and figures of these fictions therefore readily underpin the FBI profiling work of the 1980s, which is itself then re-imported to Britain through both the practice of British profilers and the consumption of American media.

Sexuality and Modernity

Unlike other forms of crime, serial killing seems to have an exactly identifiable moment of origin in the Whitechapel murders. That Jack the Ripper represents the first example of this particular criminal type is a given of most studies, both academic and less so. Despite the fact that he is certainly not the first to carry out a number of murders of strangers for no material or personal profit, he is 'the benchmark by which all sex killers are judged', who 'stands at the gateway of the modern age' (Cyriax 1993: 281). Cyriax's comments are typical: the Whitechapel murders are seen to usher in what Jane Caputi has called the 'age of sex crime' (Caputi 1988), and they are identified as representing a particular effect of and response to modernity. This is important because he is seen as 'ours' belonging to the kind of times and conditions that we recognise, and therefore motivated and influenced by conditions similar to those we experience, principally the

dangerous isolation of the individual in the faceless urban mass, where the anonymity of the modern subject is the condition for the production of both victims and perpetrators.

Cyriax and Caputi both indicate a further element: that the serial killer does not only murder strangers repeatedly, but that sexuality is somehow and often indefinably implicated in the killing. Sexuality as a defining element, even *the* defining element of identity is also part of 'our' modern experience. We can refer again to Foucault's assertion of the shift taking place at the end of the nineteenth century where sexual (and indeed violent) acts become more than simply actions carried out by a person, instead being regarded as fundamental aspects of personality. The linkage of sexuality and murder in the figure of Jack the Ripper has proved to be one of the most persistent and complex of the legacies of 1888. The Whitechapel murders were differentiated from other contemporary acts of violence in the attribution of a perverse sexual motive. Richard von Krafft Ebing had drawn attention to sexual murder (*Lustmord*) as a distinct type of crime arising from insatiable desire in his book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1885) and his description was picked up by medical commentators on the murders (Kiernan 1888, Spitzka 1888). Thomas Bond, the doctor who carried out the post-mortem on Mary Kelly also read the notes on the four other murders and wrote a report for Scotland Yard. In it he produces something like a profile of the murderer and suggests that 'he must in my opinion be a man subject to periodical attacks of Homicidal and erotic mania. The character of the mutilations indicate that the man may be in a condition sexually, that may be called Satyriasis' (Rumbelow 1975/2004:147). Krafft Ebing himself included Jack the Ripper as the clearest example of Lustmord in the second edition of his book. The association of perverted sexuality with the serial killer is one of the most problematic aspects of the definition, because it has, by extension, tended to define serial killers as male, easily correlated with the notion of aggressive male sexuality and passive female sexuality, and to that extent excluding from the image of the lone, predatory

aggressively violent and sexually dysfunctional man both non-violent killers, such as those in the medical profession, and women.

Jane Caputi has written about sex murder that it:

is lifted out of the historical tradition of gynocide and represented as a mysterious force of nature, an expression of deeply repressed 'human' urges, a fact of life, a supernatural evil, a monstrous aberration – anything but the logical and eminently functional product of the system of male domination. (Caputi 1988: 30)

At the time it was written, Caputi's was a sobering feminist intervention, published in the year of the murders' centenary, when much of the commemoration was of a kind that celebrated Jack the Ripper as something like a folk hero. Even outside popular culture, police work and criminology were then still informed by older assumptions of gender behaviour, a situation that Caputi and others argued was particularly stark and obstructive in the Yorkshire Ripper inquiry.[5] It is important not to dismiss the practical and theoretical work of feminists on questions of crime and the law, and there is now a very much greater professional and academic awareness of issues of gender in police work and in criminology. Here, however, Caputi, (albeit with very different intentions) repeats the hyberbolic circulation of the image of the lone, predatory, male killer constructed out of the figure of Jack the Ripper, perpetuating the gender typing she sets out to critique.

Whatever else may have changed since Caputi's 1988 book, she describes very accurately what is still the range of popular perceptions of the serial killer, all of which have their origin in Jack the Ripper. He is regarded as the inauguarator of this particular form of modern identity, even though he was certainly not the first. He was also not the only person killing women in the East End in 1888, which is one of the reasons why the number of his victims has ranged from the more usually accepted five to as many as twelve or even twenty. There were at

least six other murders of women in Whitechapel that year, some committed by partners of the women, but others unsolved.

One of the consequences of the notoriety of the Whitechapel murders is that there is a substantial historical record of responses to the events from all quarters.[6] Newspapers, driven by the human interest imperative of the New Journalism, interviewed a wide range of people, from local residents to police officers and medical experts. The inquest transcripts record the attitudes as well as the material information of witnesses, and autobiographical work as varied as the letters of Queen Victoria and memoirs of working class East Enders (such as M.V. Hughes, *A London Girl of the 1880s*) mention the case. The Public Record Office contains hundreds of the letters written at the time, not only by those claiming to be the murderer, but many others offering advice and opinions to the police. There is from the very first murder a deeply conflicted discourse that identifies him as 'other' and as 'same'. The 'other', unsurprisingly, depends upon perspective, for the West Enders it was obvious that the murderer came from among the mysterious poor, already regarded as being utterly different from themselves; for the people of Whitechapel he had to be a Jewish immigrant or a wealthy gentleman preying on their women. The perception of sameness resides in the anxiety of what is among them, with the murderer's ability to appear and disappear serving as the indication that he was one of their own. The ordinary/extraordinary tension continues in the contemporary popular imagination, with the divided but equal insistence that, on the one hand, Jack the Ripper must have been exceptional, covering up an exceptional circumstance (senior Freemasons commissioning the killings to disguise the existence of a child born from a secret marriage between Queen Victoria's grandson and a Catholic shopgirl) or, on the other, that he wasn't caught because he was so thoroughly part of the East End life, an ordinary working man. This switching between the positions of ordinary/extraordinary, and the language of the recognisable and unrecognisable deeply marks all later accounts of serial killing.

As with so much else about the serial killer, however, there are basic contradictions in this view, because as much as Jack the Ripper is seen as extraordinary, he is also regarded as in some way expected. On one hand he is seen, and by nineteenth-century commentators as well, as the inevitable product of urban anonymity, a figure of the brutalised working-class mass and as the technologised 'killing machine' that is a logical outcome of industrialisation. On the other, he has been lifted out of history and figured as an eternal principle of evil, as though he was the supernatural creature that some contemporaries speculated he was. He is simultaneously a distillation of an historical moment, and an absolutely ahistorical principle of evil. In this manifestation of evil are both his ordinariness and his extraordinariness, and the responses of both shock and recognition. In both formations, a notion of place is crucial. In the historically specific version, Jack the Ripper functions as a crystallisation of the particular conditions of Whitechapel in 1888: the poverty that made his victims vulnerable and provided the tightly packed streets that enabled his escape and apparent invisibility. In the principle of evil version, there is the sense that supernatural evil becomes manifest for a moment, giving a form and a location to what is otherwise a nebulous metaphysicality.

The Spaces of Crime

I want to turn now to look more specifically at the issues of space and place. As I indicated in the introduction, these are derived in some part from literary criticism of Gothic, although the question is by no means limited to that discipline. One of the most noticeable features of Gothic fiction is the radical collapse of distinction between subject and space, between architecture and landscape and their inhabitants, between villains and victims, between bodies and minds and between the sense of interiority and exteriority in characters.[7] These kinds of ideas are also clearly present in the figure of Jack the Ripper and in the twentieth-century serial killer, and they rest upon a fundamental confusion of the status, contents, and in fact the location, of the interior

and exterior, of the public and the private. In thinking about crime, and particularly in thinking about serial killers, this confusion becomes intensified.

In all the repetition of facts and information in factual and fictional texts, there are also conceptual repetitions, and the spatial ideas of absence and emptiness are significant examples. This begins with the reiterated description of the serial killer's actions as 'motiveless crimes': his action is distinguished from other types of crime because it 'reflects neither passion nor premeditation stemming from motives of personal gain' (Holmes and DeBurger 1985/1998: 6). The notion of motivelessness suggests that, in lacking a recognisable sequence of cause and effect in their actions, serial murderers lack internality, that they are without normal human qualities. The ideas of emptiness and absence are also frequently perpetuated by a link with deadness: of the perpetrator being dead inside; of having no reactions; of having cold dead eyes or a dead expression, (see also Tithecott 1997: 96) as though all that he contains is death and he simply transfers it to his victims. It is clear that this description of motivelessness does a great deal towards lifting the serial killer out of history into myth: his actions are portrayed as inscrutable, beyond the reasoning that otherwise explains the world. At the same time, it is also clear that the ascription of motive is one of the primary pursuits of crime narrative. As soon as the crimes have been described as motiveless, the murderer is then filled by the narrator with a variety of speculative motivation, and the narratives continue to be able to hold both positions of emptiness and fullness simultaneously.

A kind of logical sense is made of this by a characteristic switching between the ideas of excess and lack, of too much and not enough. The killer is excessive in his actions in every sense –the numbers he kills, the manner of the killing— and is therefore seen as being beyond human. This excess is accounted for by a matching lack: by investigating what is missing from the killer's childhood, from his life, from his psyche: he is rendered incomplete and unfinished, somehow less than human. This description produces the opposite effect to the 'inscrutable' version. Far

from their actions being beyond explanation, serial killers are offered as actually being the key to the understanding of the whole of the human condition: 'What makes them? The answer, undeniably, is that they are we. We are they.' (Turvey 2002: 513)) This is nothing less than 'an anatomy of the human psyche through the exemplary analysis of the dangerous individual' (Biressi 2001: 70), in fact a collapsing of the boundary between the normal and the abnormal while simultaneously offering absolute assurance of that boundary's real existence.

The collapsing of boundaries persists in other elements of the discourse too. The first of these is the place of the body, which Alison Young suggests is the central element of crime: 'in imagining crime, the body is continually being constituted, brought into crisis, and reconstituted. [It] may be the body of criminology, the community, the victim, the criminal' (Young 1996: 17). The confusion of the interior and exterior of the body has a long history, which is reflected in the shifts in the gaze of both early criminal anthropology and later true crime. In the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century the body of the criminal was the focus of attention. Before the passage of the Anatomy Act in 1832, the bodies of executed criminals provided the major source of material for the practice of human dissection, and sustained the traces of earlier ideas about the possibility of seeing evil inside the body. After the Act, the destitute dead from workhouses were the anatomists' property. With the criminal body's interior no longer accessible, during the nineteenth century it became the criminal's exterior that betrayed the signs of deviance. As Lombroso, Galton and others argued, the marks of criminality were legible on the face and body of the individual subject. Although Lombrosian taxonomies are now regarded as an historical curiosity, biological explanations are still sought.[8] More usually though, during the twentieth century the gaze increasingly turned inward, not now into the body, but into the mind of the killer. The psychology of the individual is not only the explanation of his crimes after arrest, but increasingly there is public and professional faith that through profiling it will provide the means of his arrest.

The actual body of the notorious murderer has become problematic. Since the abolition of capital punishment in Britain, the question of what to do with convicted serial killers is a difficult one. We can see this in many instances, most obviously perhaps in relation to Myra Hindley. Arrested only four weeks after the abolition of the death penalty in 1965, she had served the 30 years of her original tariff by 1996. It seemed impossible to release her but almost equally difficult to justify her continuing incarceration. Something of the same problem was visible in the media in the public reactions to Frederick West's and Harold Shipman's suicides in prison, where two types of response were evident; one that their deaths were a slightly belated justice, but the other, stronger view that it represented an evasion, that they had in some way cheated justice by their self-chosen deaths. The living body of the serial killer cannot be allowed to circulate in public, because it might become invisible in the mass, returning to the anonymity that facilitated the original crimes. In Hindley's case it was also suggested that if released she would not be able to become invisible, that she would be sought out and killed. Thus the living body must be maintained, present, but nevertheless invisible, in the prison cell, made differently anonymous by a number, but marked as monstrous by its containment. The marking as monstrous reveals another confusion of interiors and exteriors that is persistent in the discourse, and a legacy of the nineteenth-century belief in the betrayal of criminality by the body of the subject. Throughout the search for the Yorkshire Ripper in the late 1970s and early 80s police officers persistently asserted that they would know him as soon as they saw him, that his difference would be obvious. Peter Sutcliffe was interviewed nine times between 1977 and 1981, and only ultimately arrested for a minor vehicle offence (see Smith 1989, Bilton 2003).

If the bodies, the exteriors, of killers present a difficulty, their interiors, their minds, are however, of apparently endless interest, and are exposed in every detail to public scrutiny. Biography of serial murderers is a large sub-genre of true crime, revealed in the cursory examination of any bookshop, most frequently taking the form of a psychological case study and

many with variations on the sub-title 'inside the mind of the serial killer'. Parallel to this shift into the minds of killers, is the development of the gaze into the bodies of victims. In fact, the shift is such that victims are conceived of as almost purely 'body', and perpetrators as almost purely mind. These are mostly not real bodies however, being part of the mass of representations of forensic science in film and television. The real bodies of victims are not available to the public gaze, but there is a surfeit of representations, particularly on television, in programmes like *Silent Witness* or *CSI*, but arguably propelled to prominence by the success of the novels of Patricia Cornwell. Cornwell is also a fine example of the confusions of fact and fiction. In her book *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper Case Closed* she effectively becomes her own heroine as she undertakes an investigation into the Whitechapel murders, utilising the forensic methods represented in her novels. Forensic method reaches its apotheosis in *CSI*. Where more straightforward autopsy television is limited to the view of the dead body and its wounds, a few incisions and some weighing of excised organs, *CSI* animates the prosaic diagrams of true crime publications. It employs special effects to show the wounds actually being inflicted, the passage of the bullet through tissue, the rupturing of blood vessels in the brain: it shows the moment of death as it occurs inside the body. Biressi notes:

> the centrality of the (victim's) body and bodily fluids to the new true crime. These stories demonstrate the mastery of science over the body and its mechanisms; if murderers have the power to destroy the body…it is scientists who have the power to decode its remains and reconstruct its story. (Biressi 2001: 155)

The victim's body must be opened and its secret interior revealed in order for the hidden narrative of the killer and the manner of the killing to be exposed. The most private space is rendered public. There seems to be an equal balance on film and television screens between forensic psychology and forensic pathology: inside the body of the victim and inside the mind of the

murderer. What is happening here is a disintegration of the boundary between the interior of the victim's body and the interior of the murderer's mind. They overlap, they change places, one becomes the explanation of the other. The two apparently private spaces are opened into one another in a pathologised public sphere through a radical failure of distinction between subjects and spaces, insides and outsides.

The Places of Crime

The collapse of distinction and pathologising of space extends to a further location – the scene of the crime. This takes place both at the level of the real and the imagined. The victim becomes fused with the site; physically as blood, hair, fibres and other particles are transferred between them, and metaphysically as the place of the end of her life. The site also bears the physical traces of the killer, possibly and most crucially, DNA. DNA is a magical substance which works at a very high metaphoric level. In the popular imagination it is the key which unlocks the book of life, a complete plan, record and prediction of the body's existence. It is the substance of the most private interior, invisible to the eye, yet apparently revealing everything when exposed to public examination. But the crime site is seen as representing more than just a physical map of the interior of the victim's body; it is also a map of the interior of the killer's mind. It is effectively his mind laid out, his work displayed and signed, a text to be read. It is as though he has transferred the contents of his mind and body onto the ground of the murder and on to the bodies of the victims, rendering himself empty and the site full. The gothic failure of distinction between subject and space establishes a new and complex distribution of life and death across the components of the site of murder. In taking the victim's life the killer loses something of his own human existence, becoming more dead. At the same time he is seen (and sometimes seen by himself) as engaged in a process of self-creation, becoming more than was before. He leaves the victim's dead body in place of her living self: her living self is retroactively altered by a new

identity as a murder victim, and her dead body becomes a new medicalised object. The killer and the space of the crime are animated and marked with the production of these new identities. The crime scene thus becomes the site of the most intense encounter, the violently enforced exchange between subjects and spaces. It is for this reason that the locations of crime become so closely identified with the murderers that lived or killed in them. This association can be seen starkly in any number of cases, but most recently in that of Frederick and Rosemary West. David Canter's language in discussing the Wests reveals the slippage of place and person. He writes: 'the house is the main witness to their hidden depravity. Eventually it is this web they have constructed that reveals their guilt, giving up its secrets, when it is eventually questioned.' (Canter 2003: 63) In this passage the house shifts between being an inanimate construct (their 'web') and a sentient witness, even a guilty participant in having 'secrets'. Ultimately too, we can perhaps see a punishment for its guilt. The house where the Wests lived, as well as murdered and concealed some of their victims, was knocked down and all physical trace of it removed: a fantasy of the obliteration of them and their actions in its 'execution'. As so frequently occurs in gothic fictions, the home or castle is destroyed along with the evil protagonist.

Alongside the techniques of crime scene, psychological and offender profiling, a further area, geographical profiling, has developed. This extends the significance of the site even further, to encompass not just the limited space of the killing itself, but the whole area of all the killer's movements. David Canter is insistent that 'a serial killer's inner narrative is reflected in the geography of his crimes' (Canter 2003: 98). Canter's work represents geography as not just a snapshot of the murderer's mind, but a narrative that moves through time as well as space: '[t]he personal voyage is both a creation for the murderer and a journey of self-discovery. The map hints at the travels across this private landscape, if only we can fathom how to unravel those hints' (Canter 2003: 4) The collapse of distinction between subject and space is doubled here. The killer both discovers himself already mapped, while at the same time creating the map that

narrates him. In reading the map, the profiler locates the killer in space and understands the story being narrated, an example of what Mark Seltzer calls 'reciprocal topography'(Seltzer 1998: 34) This is an expansion of the house/person identification, in which the killer becomes both a product and a definition of an area. Again, this returns us to Jack the Ripper, the embodiment of Whitechapel, imagined to have been created by its conditions, yet in turn seen as mastering the area according to his own psychological map.

Conclusion

Seltzer also writes of what he calls the 'exorbitant analogism…that structures the experience of serial violence.' It is, he says, 'a *violent literalization* of the analogies between bodies, persons and landscapes, one identity and another, one body and another, one death and another'(Seltzer 1998: 33). It is thinking through just such violent literalizations that provides something of an answer to my question at the start, of the attraction of the scene of the crime of the Whitechapel murders. Jack the Ripper is the constant term in the analogies made, the figure to whom all are implicitly or explicitly compared. As the 'origin' of serial killing and killers, Jack the Ripper should provide an explanation, but here is, in his case, neither a mind nor a body to study, only the 'work', so the attention to that is obsessive, impelled by the desire to recover intelligibility. He also apparently provides a means of understanding a particular experience of modernity, of living in a densely populated, industrialised, urban space with its new and complex distributions of public and private existence. As Seltzer states: 'the spectacular public representation of violated bodies has come to function as a way of imagining and situating…the very idea of 'the public' and, more exactly, the relations of bodies and persons to public spaces.' (Seltzer 1998: 21)

The very first pathologized space is recorded on film, in the photograph of Mary Kelly's terribly mutilated body in the slum room where she died. Her body looks as though it has melted:

the poor quality of the black and white image makes it difficult to distinguish the remnants of her clothes from the bed linen, the fabric from her flesh. Both woman and murderer are gone, dissolved into the scene of the crime. The tropes of dissolution and disappearance are ones that dominate Jack the Ripper narratives. All accounts marvel at the murderer's apparent ability to materialise and de-materialise, and emphasise what they see as the matter of seconds that divided his present and absent body in the constant use of words and phrases like vanished, disappeared, melted away, faded into the background. There is an identical sense of dissolution repeated in the London Dungeon and Madame Tussaud's exhibitions, where the murderer is present only in moving shadows and faint sounds. He can be represented only by his victims, his work, and the site of the crime. In these scenes the public space of the street is made momentarily private by the unwitnessed intimacy of the murder. By re-staging the primal scene of serial killing the tableaux, in Alison Young's words, make intelligible the otherwise unintelligible by creating an originating historical moment for a contemporary monster. Significantly, the original monster is contained in the past, his threat to the integrity of the private body and the boundary of public space enclosed within the book or the tourist attraction.

Although Jack the Ripper can be contained in the past, other appalling murders continue to happen. Rather than allowing us better to understand serial killers, or enabling us more efficiently to stop them, the image is serving simultaneously to provoke and to assuage a range of fears, not all of them connected with crime. Over ten years ago, Keith Soothill argued that 'a serial killer industry is building up which gains much by growth in a fear of serial killers' (Soothill 1993: 341).Although there is no doubt that there is huge material profit in all the different areas of the industry, it is not driven solely by fear, but rather by an ambivalent motion that holds out the inexplicability of the crime at the same time as it offers to explain it. As well as contributing a framework for a newly-invented crime, the Whitechapel murders have contributed a mythical origin to a constructed identity –'the serial killer', and that identity goes forward,

supported by an increasing panoply of descriptive material. Through the processes of description the original type has been divided and sub-divided; killers are categorised as organised, disorganised, assertive, reassuring, commuters, marauders, missionaries, hunters, each with their particular features. Far from illuminating the common characteristics of the serial killer, the effort of classification and detail suggests that no such species actually exists. What appears instead is a highly variegated collection of very different crimes and perpetrators spilled across fiction and documentary. What holds them together is not coherence but confusion, the confusion of the inside and the outside, of person and place, that is enacted in all representations of serial murder, whether forensic, factual or fictional. The scene of the crime is the scene of the continuing invention of the serial killer, who is the necessary figure that is imagined to stabilise such confusion, even when confusion is very condition from which he is created.

1. In the public imagination the efficacy of profiling is reinforced through the constant successes of fictional profilers in television programmes like *Cracker* and *Wire in the Blood* and best-selling novels such as those by Jonathan Kellerman. The scale of professional belief is harder to assess, but in 2004 Scotland Yard established the Homicide Prevention Unit, headed by a behavioural psychologist, to re-examine past crimes in the hope of identifying other potentially dangerous individuals. As part of this, Commander Andy Baker, head of murder investigation in the Metropolitan police, has proposed carrying out new interviews of British serial killers presently in prison. (*Guardian* 5 July 2004)

2. It is part of the problem of the category itself that estimations of the scale of such killings are wildly various, see Coleman and Norris 2000: 92.

3. A number of successful crime novelists are, or have been professionally connected to law enforcement, for example Patricia Cornwell worked in the office of the Chief Medical Examiner

in Virginia and Kathy Reichs is a forensic anthropologist in the same office in North Carolina. Others, like Jonathan Kellerman, have practised as psychologists.

4. Among the many quotations Canter uses: 'tragic heroes do possess hybris, a proud, passionate, obsessed or soaring mind which brings about a morally intelligible downfall' and 'two main characters, a protagonist or hero, and an antagonist or enemy…everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy' and 'some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both must die; and the exaltation of the hero' (Canter 2003: 13, 111, 173).

5. See also Cameron and Frazer 1987, Smith 1989, Ward Jouve 1986. Compare also Jenkins 1994 who argues that the FBI image of the serial killer was appropriated by feminists to serve a rather different agenda.

6. See Curtis 2001 for nineteenth century reactions, and for contemporary views of serial killers see Fisher 1997.

7. For longer discussion of Gothic see Simpson 2000, and Seltzer 1998.

8. There is research in a number of different areas such as genetics, head injury, hypoglycaemia, serotonin levels and brain activity. See Coleman and Norris 2000: 100-101 for summary.

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