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The social construction of apparently motiveless murder:
Conceptual foundations and interpretive perspectives. (Volumes
I and II)

Smalldon, Jeffrey Lewis, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1989

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THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF
APPARENTLY MOTIVELESS MURDER:
CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVES
VOLUME I
DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

Jeffrey Lewis Smalldon, B.A., M.A., M.H.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

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INTRODUCTION

Many psychologists believe that scholarly contributions to their field should be as objective as possible, replicable, and based on a foundation of quantitative data. These criteria no doubt provide useful guidelines for many avenues of research. However, an increasing number of psychologists are proposing that the criteria reflect an unnecessarily limiting conceptualization of scholarly inquiry in a discipline the boundaries and frontiers of which are the subjects of ongoing debate no one expects will end soon. I share their concern.

In fact, my sympathy with the broad position argued by these critics of the orthodoxy - psychologists like Theodore Sarbin, Kenneth Gergen, and Donald Polkinghorne - was an important factor underlying my choice to undertake a dissertation best described with adjectives like "interpretive" and "exploratory." In the introductory discussion which follows, I will provide a personal perspective on the subject I propose to explore: the social project of deriving the "sense" in acts of apparently motiveless murder.

The fundamental question I wish to explore is this: How do members of the social audience think about killers whose acts seem to fall outside the traditional categories of motive (eg., revenge, jealousy, rage, profit, passion)? The first time I can recall reading about a cast of such killers, the text was Ed Sanders' (1971) account of the
Manson "family" murders. Two aspects of the reading experience I found especially jarring. First, on the cover of the English paperback edition of Sanders' book was a picture of Manson. His wild eyes, his equally wild mane of hair, and the bony contours of his face gave him a maniacal appearance; he looked alien and obviously menacing, like no one I knew. Second, Sanders concluded his account by observing that a number of Manson's closest associates were free, never having been convicted of any crime. On one hand was the representation of Manson as a killer-fiend; on the other was the disturbing news that Manson's followers were moving about (unnoticed?) among "normal" people for whom acts such as those attributed to the Manson group would be unthinkable.

I recall that at the time, I wondered how one might identify a potential killer in a crowd, or even among one's acquaintances. I wondered, too, how inclusive the term "potential killer" might be.

These are perhaps naive questions, but they strike me as no less provocative today than they did then. In this post-phrenological age, we might be inclined to smile indulgently at a nineteenth century contemporary's comment on multiple murderer Pierre Riviere:

"[Riviere's] aspect was such that there could be no doubt that he would have been capable of committing the murder" (Foucault, 1975, p. 13). We might react similarly to a more recent commentator's expression of surprise over the fact that nothing in existing photographs of suspected mass murderess Madame Steinheil indicates "a propensity to kill other people" (Brophy, 1966, pp. 174-175). At the same time, however, we may find it difficult to dismiss as merely superstitious the question posed by the former landlady of Randy Woodfield, who was
eventually convicted of multiple murder: "But...if he was a killer, I would have known it, wouldn’t I?" (Stack, 1984, p. 140). And we may find it surprisingly easy to identify with the young assistant district attorney in Robert Daley’s police novel, Hands of a Stranger (1985), who finds it necessary to remind herself during a pre-trial hearing that appearances are often deceiving: "If a man is a rapist,...it ought to be obvious. You ought to be able to tell by looking at him. But nothing shows. Rapists look no different from anybody else. Same with murderers" (p. 16). Like my questions, these real-life and fictional contemplations achieve their resonance because of the tension that results when there is a blurring of the distinctions customarily maintained between those things we think of as familiar and those things we consider foreign. Perhaps most disquieting about my early attempts to comprehend the significance of the Manson family crimes was my recognition that among those who had followed Manson, even allegedly killed at his command, were people from backgrounds not so unlike my own. In many cases, they looked in photographs not like the disturbing (though in a sense reassuringly strange) images of Manson that had dominated media coverage of the case, but like me, and like my friends.

I had not read Pamela Hanford Johnson’s (1967) essay on another well-known multiple murder case, so I had not yet encountered her words of caution, "We must not pose...as comprehenders of cruelty, violence, and sadism if we have never come into real, as opposed to intellectual contact with any of these things" (p. 138). However, Sanders’ book had aroused my curiosity. Encouraged by an undergraduate psychology
professor who shared my interest in the Manson case, I attempted to establish real contact, if only by mail, with Manson and many of his former associates. I wondered to what extent hearing them speak for themselves might erode my tendency to envision multiple killers as alien types, and challenge my understanding of such ideas as "normality" and "insanity" and "evil."

As though sensing my primary motivation for writing, Manson responded to my second letter, in part, "That beast was not me — But its [sic] what everyone wants me to be so they make me up to be a reflection of their fears, lies, and bullshit" (personal communication, April 9, 1975). By characterizing his public image as a construction best understood in terms of the social audience's fears and misconceptions, Manson was of course shifting responsibility. At the same time, however, he was suggesting a line of inquiry that intrigued me. Rather than the person who commits murder, it would have as its focus the social audience which seeks to understand him. It would insist that members of the observing public must engage in "a steady contemplation of themselves as audience," and of the "subterranean echoes" activated by apparently senseless acts of killing (Masters, 1985, p. 26). Rather than the criminal act itself, it would take as its primary subject matter the products - theoretical, empirical, imaginative - of attempts to construe the act in terms that seem to make sense.

Another personal experience further stimulated my interest in constructive processes underlying the social interpretation of murders which seem to fall outside the explanatory power of traditional
interpretive frameworks. For the past twenty-five years, a staple of sociology and social psychology textbooks has been the case of Kitty Genovese. In 1964, thirty-eight residents of New York City listened to Genovese's screams and watched without intervening while a man named Winston Moseley attacked her not once but several times during a twenty-five minute period. The young woman died. The case, of course, is usually presented as the textbook example of "bystander apathy," and it was as such that it first came to my attention. The most obvious questions raised by the case concerned the failure of witnesses to intervene. It was not until years later, after I had encountered Winston Moseley in person, that I felt compelled to consider an additional question: What features characterized my imaginative construction of the person who would be capable of committing, without provocation of any sort and in the absence of an identifiable motive, such a brutal crime?

The barometer of the degree to which my construction had drawn on popular notions of the killer-as-fiend is the surprise I experienced when, in 1976, as one member of a "citizens' awareness group" at Attica prison in New York, I met with a panel of four inmates, including Moseley, to discuss conditions at the prison. Appearing totally unlike the monster I had conjured up in my imagination, Moseley was short and slight, and very articulate, almost professorial, as he spoke about prison conditions since the well-publicized riots several years before and shuffled through the tall stack of legal briefs he balanced on his lap. Without a hint of calculated irony, he concluded his remarks by emphasizing the need for society to better educate its children about
the importance of responsible citizenship. This was the infamous murderer of Kitty Genovese? The man whose name had reappeared in the news for several days in 1968 when, after escaping from Attica guards, he had badly beaten a man, raped the man's wife, and terrorized a woman and her baby at gunpoint before finally surrendering to FBI agents?

Of course, social psychologists who research attitude formation and factors affecting person perception probably could have predicted my surprise. Many studies in the psychological (eg., Berscheid and Walster, 1972; and Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972) and sociological (eg., Jones, Hansson, and Phillips, 1978; Reed and Reed, 1974; and Simmons, 1965) literature confirm the widespread tendency to equate beauty with "goodness," ugliness with "badness"; and to make faulty attributions about people based on their appearance and limited samples of their behavior. The popular press has disseminated these findings and, like most people, I recognized intellectually (while maintaining a largely subconscious distrust of) the wisdom enshrined in cliches like "You can't tell a book by its cover" and "Beauty is only skin deep."

This folk wisdom notwithstanding, I had constructed a mental image of Moseley which suggested that at some subconscious level, I still clung to the assumption that the "mark of Cain" was more than a myth; his appearance and presentation should betray the person capable of committing "motiveless murder." At the very least, I apparently needed reminding that such an assumption was not true. Highly-regarded psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton (1986) relates an anecdote which suggests that at times, he, too, needs reminding. Lifton describes the
mild disorientation he experienced on first meeting a German physician who had served the Nazi regime at Auschwitz: "I found [Dr. B.] to be a neatly groomed man in his mid-sixties, short and slight, pleasant in manner, generally likable. So pleasant in fact that it made me a bit uneasy, and I reminded myself silently that, whatever his virtues, he had been one of them: a Nazi doctor in Auschwitz" (p. 303).

Even more disquieting than the difficulty of trying to connect the physical image of Moseley with his crimes is the interpretive challenge posed by his behavior. One chronicler of the Genovese murder characterized it as "cold butchery," remarking in his account that after stalking Genovese and stabbing her repeatedly, Moseley "had walked away leisurely...still surrounded [by the thirty-eight witnesses], still in control, what he set out to do finished" (Welch and Marston, 1984, pp. 130-131). The nine murders attributed to members of the Manson family have often been described as equally callous, almost casual acts; and the argument advanced by Manson’s prosecutor that the murders could be explained by Manson’s desire to trigger a global race war ("helter skelter") have done little, I would argue, to dissuade most people from regarding the crimes, at least for all practical purposes, as "motiveless." One commentator refers to the prosecutor’s literal acceptance of the "helter skelter" explanation as a "self justifying" tactic meant to convince jury members that the murders made a kind of "sense" (Scharff, 1974, p. 20).

What can we make of Moseley, Manson, and other individuals who commit the kinds of violent crimes which Lindsay (1958) describes as "seemingly meaningless," and which former President Nixon, referring
specifically to Manson, described as "without reason"? Furthermore, and this is the question at the center of Pamela Hanford Johnson's (1967) oft-cited essay on "iniquity," what sense can we make of the confused emotions we feel toward them? Particularly when the murderer violates our stereotypes of what such people look and act like, we are reminded of the need to probe deeply in our attempts to explore these and related questions.

Stated in terms as simple and inclusive as possible, my intent in this study is to explore the ways we think about a certain kind of murder, the act as well as its perpetrator. Although I am aware that the term is technically inaccurate and potentially misleading, I have chosen "motiveless murder" to describe the type of murder in question. Other writers whose interests at least partly overlap with mine have employed a variety of other labels: for example, Reinhardt (1962) writes of "strange killers," Lindsay (1958) of murderers who kill out of a "conviction or desire," C. Wilson (1972c) of "assassins," Leyton (1986) of "compulsive killers," Levin and Fox (1985) of "mass murderers," Holmes and DeBurger (1987) of "serial murderers," Cartel (1985) of "serial mass murderers," and Katz (1988) of individuals who engage in "cold-blooded, senseless" killing. Because I have not wanted to limit my investigation using criteria such as number of victims, or temporal delay between murders, I have deliberately opted for an imprecise term that expresses perhaps better than any other the interpretive (that is, social) challenge posed by murders that fall outside the traditional categories of motive. I have, for example, wanted to include for consideration acts of murder as different in
design and execution as those committed by Lee Harvey Oswald (assassination), the Charles Manson "family" (mass murder), Ted Bundy (serial murder), and selected agents of various organized programs of genocide.

I have conducted my exploratory investigation in a way that seems consistent with the social constructionist orientation as described by Gergen (1985). Chapter One takes up in some detail what the term social constructionism has come to imply. Like any approach to studying a problem, this one has strengths and drawbacks. Primary among its strengths is the possibility it allows for breadth and disciplined play of the imagination. An example might serve to illustrate the fundamental way in which it differs from more traditional approaches to investigating psychological topics.

One student of that sample of Shakespeare's behavior called *Hamlet* might choose to investigate Shakespeare's concern with the Oedipal theme by operationalizing the theme in terms of words thought to express it, and then counting the frequency with which those words occur in the play. A second student with the same interest might eschew the apparent objectivity of such an approach and choose instead to explore more subtle manifestations of the Oedipal theme. In either case, the student will need to assemble evidence — word counts in the first case; in the second case, perhaps a combination of textual citations, references to others of Shakespeare's plays, biographical information, and corroborating critical perspectives — which readers of his study will find compelling enough to accord at least provisional acceptance.
For the present study, I have adopted an approach more like that chosen by student two. Of course an investigator approaching his subject matter in this way would be foolish to claim that his findings are "objective." He cannot produce a set of data and contend that another investigator following prescribed methodological procedures will replicate his findings exactly. He can, however, go about his interpretive work aware that he has certain biases, and conscious of the need to keep them in check as best he can. Of course similar caution is required of any investigator, even if, as in the case of student one above, his task is to interpret the significance of quantitative data collected using procedures developed to minimize experimenter bias.

As already noted, these and related issues are taken up in greater detail in Chapter One, and again in the discussion included as Appendix A. In Chapter Two I will propose a set of working parameters for the highly elastic category of "motiveless murder." The study as a whole can perhaps best be viewed as an attempt to use rhetorical and conceptual analysis to illuminate selected social practices which play an important role in efforts to render the seemingly incomprehensible acts of many killers intelligible. In their recent examination of the "lust killer," Cameron and Frazer (1987) employ a number of phrases which capture the focus of my interest quite well. They speak of "our culture's ways of thinking about murder" (p. x), of a society's "ways of talking [about] and conceptualizing" various types of murder (p. 22), and of the "controlling discourses" (p. 22) which in any given
culture partially determine the parameters for understanding what murder means.

Finally, I would like to sound a note of caution. Readers should not assume that the chapters comprising this project all develop some part of a single thesis. That is not to say that the chapters are unrelated, only that frequently there will be no smooth transition between one chapter and the next. My intent has been to approach from a number of different angles the interpretive challenge posed by acts of apparently motiveless murder.

A Note on Style

On several occasions I have heard doctoral candidates in psychology say, first, "I’ve nearly completed my dissertation," then, almost as an afterthought, "All I have to do is write it up." From the start of this project, I have hoped that one criterion for judging its success or failure would be the skill with which I have assembled my material and, a major rather than minor component of the overall undertaking, "written it up." That difference in emphasis points up one fundamental distinction between my study and more traditional, empirical approaches to satisfying the dissertation requirement. And it suggests the need to comment on the style I have chosen for presenting my material.

I have always been taught to write for a specific audience. To whom does one address one’s dissertation in a field as diverse and marked by factionalism as modern psychology? For my part, I have chosen to imagine an audience composed of individuals at least open to the
social constructionist orientation to inquiry (see Chapter One). In all likelihood, many of the readers comprising such an audience would share Kenneth Gergen's dissatisfaction with the dry, impersonal quality of much of the writing that fills most psychology journals. In his 1988 presidential address to the American Psychological Association's Division 10, "Psychology and the Arts," Gergen included this scathing commentary:

As literature, scientific writing in psychology is little short of catastrophe. We perpetuate a clumsy, insensitive, and rudely constraining set of language forms from the preceding century. We require our graduate students to master these cloddish and archaic forms, and we charge our journal editors with ensuring their maintenance....The majority reader is either bored or repulsed....Concerted effort is required at this juncture to break the stranglehold of traditional writing conventions, and to develop a range of new and compelling modes of expression. (Gergen, 1988, p. 23)

Other writers from the social and behavioral sciences have expressed a similar position, only in more measured terms. Sass (1988) clearly numbers himself among the "hermeneuticists" in the psychology camp, scholars and practitioners who, he says, "would make a place for a mode of writing very different from what is standard in our field: for a literary, essayistic discourse that seeks not objectivism and neutrality but the kind of illumination that can come from image, metaphor, and other figures of speech" (p. 263). Sounding a similar theme in the introduction to his informally written, illuminating study of multiple murder, cultural anthropologist Elliott Leyton (1986) writes: "[My study] is not written in a style that will be familiar to many social scientists. I make no apology for this, for if I admire the
insights of the social sciences I am able to keep my passion for their style of exposition well under control" (p. 13).

I am sympathetic with these views, and I hope that my writing style reflects that fact. If not the message, the medium at least deserves recognition as one important facet of making one's case.
PART ONE: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS
CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST ORIENTATION:
BACKGROUND AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY
OF MOTIVELESS MURDER

Introduction

Voices calling for a radical departure from methodological
orthodoxy in the social and behavioral sciences have emanated from a
variety of quarters, among them ethnomethodology (e.g., Garfinkle, 1967;
Leiter, 1980; Psathas, 1979), phenomenology (Giorgi, 1970),
anthropology (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Leyton, 1986), hermeneutics (e.g.,
Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979; Ricoeur, 1970; Taylor, 1979), and
psychology (e.g., Gergen, 1988; Gergen and Davis, 1985; Koch, 1981;
Polkinghorne, 1984). In Appendix A, I have tried to provide a context
for understanding this widespread dissatisfaction with research
strategies derived from the logical positivist intellectual tradition.
Also in Appendix A, I have attempted to show how this climate of unrest
has contributed to a trend toward interpretive and interdisciplinary
scholarship.

The social constructionist orientation (Gergen, 1985) has
developed out of this same climate. In the present chapter I will first
describe the "shared consciousness" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266) which has
united like-minded investigators from a variety of fields in the social
constructionist enterprise. Once I have established some broad parameters for the constructionist position, I will consider its relevance for the study of motiveless murder.

The Social Constructionist Orientation

Background

Ebbinghaus (1910) remarked that psychology has "a long past but only a short history" (p. 9). The same might be said about the social constructionist movement. An alternative orientation to psychological inquiry first formally articulated in the early-1980’s, the movement has roots which extend back to the time of Plato and Aristotle (Gergen, 1985). In the necessarily brief overview which follows, I will attempt to place social constructionism in broad historical perspective.

Social constructionism is neither a methodology nor a monolithic movement. Like hermeneutics, it is perhaps best represented as an "outlook" or an "attitude" (Woolfold, Sass, and Messer, 1988). As an attitude toward the investigation of human experience, its hallmarks are flexibility, diversity, a willingness to accommodate ambiguity, and an openness to competing versions of the same subject matter. It begins, according to Gergen (1985), with "radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world" (p. 267). One might add, with radical doubt in the taken-for-granted constructs, whether about the world or about the ways in which knowledge of it can be legitimately obtained, which in psychology and any other discipline constitute the conventional wisdom. "Truth" is not regarded as a pre-existing given, discoverable through
carefully controlled research strategies. Instead, it is viewed as a linguistic convention used to describe the working map fashioned by a community of interpreters. Investigators who approach their subject matter with a constructionist orientation seek to discover and describe "common forms of understanding" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Their overriding concern is with dissembling those forms so that they can be revealed as the negotiated products of people in relationship, as historical artifacts. Not surprising in light of its aims, social constructionism's closest affinities are with other interpretive disciplines, for instance ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and literary criticism. Each of these systems of inquiry is concerned with discovering and describing personal and social meaning systems.

Gergen (1985) has provided a broad historical context for understanding social constructionism's recent emergence. In part, the constructionist position developed in response to unresolved tension between two competing intellectual traditions, the exogenic tradition and the endogenic tradition (Gergen, 1985). The exogenic perspective assumes that it is possible for human beings to acquire knowledge in the form of mental representations which to a greater or lesser extent reflect a world presumed to be "real." This, of course, is the view usually associated with thinkers like Locke, Hume, and John Stuart Mill. Often, it leads to the assumption that an organism's successful adaptation will depend on its ability to obtain and use accurate knowledge of external reality. In contrast to this focus on the external world, the endogenic perspective emphasizes experienced
realism. Human beings are viewed first and foremost as makers of
meaning, imaginative rather than literal cartographers. They make
their way by constructing for themselves, and negotiating in community
with others, maps which permit them to render their experience of the
world in terms which make "sense," and which allow for the possibility
of successful social living. This endogenic perspective is associated
most prominently with Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche, then somewhat later with
the phenomenologists and Gestalt psychologists of the early twentieth
century, and of course with Wittgenstein. The continuing influence of
the exogenic position is most clearly embodied in certain of the core
assumptions underlying radical behaviorism; the endogenic position, on
the other hand, flourishes in the form of modern cognitive psychology.

Where can one locate social constructionism in relation to these
two competing intellectual traditions? Although its closer tie is
clearly to the endogenic perspective, with its emphasis on the primary
importance of constructed meaning systems, Gergen (1985) contends that
in the exogenic-endogenic antinomy resides a trap which social
constructionism must try to avoid. In their reliance on traditional
empirical methodologies to search for what is "true," many researchers
ostensibly embracing the endogenic perspective have obscured the
importance of the very constructive processes they seek to elucidate.
There is, then, this paradox: "The exogenic basis of the scientific
activity [and Gergen contends that contemporary psychological science
is largely a construction based on empiricist or exogenic assumptions]
dermines the validity of the endogenic theories under examination"
(Gergen, 1985, pp. 269-270). According to Gergen, the challenge for
social constructionism is to search outside the parameters of the
traditional debate for "a new framework of analysis based on an
alternative (nonempiricist) theory of the functioning and potentials of
science" (p. 270).

Assumptions

I have remarked previously that social constructionism is neither
a monolithic movement nor the label for a well-defined set of
methodological strategies. Rather, it is a general orientation to the
study of social phenomena. What features distinguish this orientation?
Gergen (1985) describes four assumptions which figure prominently in
most social constructionist investigations.

First, it is false to assume that unimpeachable knowledge can be
derived from a supposed level of "raw" or "pure" experiencing of
reality. As Wittgenstein (1963) has argued, linguistic convention
provides the terms for understanding that realm which we customarily,
and misleadingly, call "direct" experience. Of course skepticism about
the primacy of sense data had been expressed before Wittgenstein
arrived on the scene, perhaps most prominently in Hegel's critique of
empiricist epistemology (Woolfold, Sass, and Messer, 1988). More
recently, psychiatrist and social critic Thomas Szasz has joined this
tradition of dissent in a series of publications attacking the mental
health establishment. His indebtedness to Wittgenstein is clearly
apparent. Consider, for example, this passage from a recent critical
study summarizing Szasz's views on ideology and the social construction
of mental illness: "The battlefield upon which [the struggle to
determine each individual's essence and priorities] is fought is
largely linguistic and the ultimate meaning of behavior and events is established by the victors in the battle of words" (Vatz and Weinberg, 1983, p. 13).

What are some implications of this viewpoint? What follows if we accept the basic premise that often, our "knowledge" is not a pure product of induction, but rather the result of identifying in our experience one or more of the attributes known to characterize an already-existing cognitive category? One consequence of accepting this premise is that it becomes necessary to challenge the very idea of objectivity which is so central to research strategies derived from the logical positivist paradigm.

In order to suggest the flavor of work conducted by investigators sympathetic to Wittgenstein's basic line of reasoning, Gergen cites studies which have delved beneath the "taken-for-granted character" of such concepts as mind (Ryle, 1949), motivation (Mills, 1940; Peters, 1958), emotion (Averill, 1982; Sarbin, 1984), gender (Kessler and McKenna, 1978), and schizophrenia (Sarbin and Mancuso, 1980). Many other examples come to mind. For example, Patton and Pepinsky (1971) discuss the "psychological experiment" as an instance of negotiated and socially-managed "informative display." Hampson (1988) and Greenberg (1988) have examined the social construction of "personality" and "homosexuality," respectively. Punch (1985) has employed a social constructionist approach to examine the notion of policemen as agents of "social control." An entire volume of essays has recently been devoted to the social construction of various emotions (Harre, 1986). The authors of all these studies eschew a focus on what a given concept
is, thus avoiding the a priori assumption that the concept embodies meaning derived from "real"-world referents. Instead, with due consideration for the conditioning power of linguistic and cultural variables they examine critically what is meant by "schizophrenia," by "emotion," by "motivation," by "the psychological experiment," by "social control," by "personality," and so forth.

A second assumption of the social constructionist orientation is closely related to the one just discussed. It states that the terms through which we make "sense" of the world are social artifacts. As social artifacts, they are subject to historical variation. The social constructionist orientation invites consideration of the ways in which historical and cultural influences may be reflected in our understanding of ideas we often take for granted, ideas like childhood, romantic love, self, memory, personality, and mental illness.

A third assumption states that the degree to which a particular form of understanding is accepted and stable over time is often less dependent on processes of empirical validation than on social processes such as communication, negotiation, conflict, and rhetoric. Consider, for example, the famous case of Clever Hans ("Der klug Hans"). Hans was the horse whose apparent ability to solve mathematical problems gained him international attention during the first decade of the twentieth century. Even after Oskar Pfungst had demonstrated using a series of carefully controlled empirical trials that Hans was attending to his questioner's body posture and not actually solving mathematical problems, a large proportion of the German citizenry persisted in believing that Hans had provided compelling evidence for the then
popular belief (influenced especially by the publication in 1871 of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*) that some animals were capable of higher mental functions such as reasoning and thought. The point, obvious perhaps, is that the socially-negotiated understanding of the Clever Hans phenomenon was a complex product of multiple influences; for a time at least, the contrary evidence of empirical research notwithstanding, Hans continued to play a central role in sustaining one important current of social thinking.

A fourth assumption states that it is important to examine forms of social understanding because, quite aside from the question of whether or not they are "true," people act on them. In defense of her interest in "pulp" romance fiction, Thurston (1987) argues that many artifacts of popular culture, mirroring prevalent forms of understanding, can serve through their "power to legitimize" as potent agents of social change. Buie (1987), too, emphasizes that even inaccurate forms of understanding often serve a powerful legitimizing function. He cites recent research which suggests that much of the thinking behind American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union reflects inaccurate but long-established ideological assumptions, as well as "outdated, incomplete or incorrect theories and images" (p. 33). Gergen (1985) furnishes another example, pointing out the forceful implications for interpersonal action of constructing human beings as inherently sinful. Arguing for the necessity of studying the origins and development of cultural stereotypes, Gilman (1985) provides a succinct rationale that might be invoked by each of these investigators. It is impossible, he argues, to untangle image and
action: "We view our own images, our own mirages, our own stereotypes as embodying qualities that exist in the world. And we act on them" (p. 242).

These, then, are four fundamental assumptions frequently manifest in studies which go by the name of social constructionist analysis. It remains to consider the issues of validity and reliability as they pertain to studies of this sort, studies which clearly belong to the "interpretive social sciences" (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979a) rather than to the empiricist research tradition.

Validity and Reliability

Since critics of interpretive scholarship often argue that such work is weakened by its "subjective" character, I would like to again comment briefly on the whole notion of "objectivity." Paralleling the social constructionists' rejection of the exogenic-endogenic antinomy, many advocates of an interpretive or hermeneutic approach to studying the human realm reject any claim that there is a fundamental opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. For better or worse, they say, we are what Wittgenstein claimed, the prisoners of our linguistic and cultural forms. They take as their subject matter "the shared world of meaning within which [emphasis added] the subjects of human discourse constitute themselves," and they regard their work as "a return to the objective world." Unlike investigators operating in the empiricist tradition, they view that "objective world" as "the circle of meaning within which we find ourselves and which we can never fully surpass" (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979b, p. 5). In the human realm, shared meaning systems and socially-negotiated patterns of action are the
"baseline realities." Even those are designated according to linguistic convention. To regard attempts at describing and untangling those baseline realities as "subjective" in a pejorative sense is to overlook the social, necessarily open and ambiguous character of human experience. Rabinow and Sullivan (1979b) argue that often implicit in disagreements over whether certain knowledge claims are "objective" or "subjective" is a failure to appreciate the fundamental context of human science inquiry. They write:

These baseline practices are intersubjective and form the most general level of shared meaning. They are the basis of community, argument, and discourse. They are not subjective opinions....These meanings are intersubjective; they are not reducible to individual subjective psychological states, beliefs, or propositions. They are neither subjective nor objective but what lies behind both. (p. 6)

A caveat is perhaps in order. Endorsing Rabinow and Sullivan's position is not equivalent to arguing that any interpretation is as good as any other. As these authors contend, "The text [any interrelated system of 'signifiers'] is plurivocal, open to several readings and to several constructions. But it is not infinite" (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979b, p. 12). Neither social constructionism nor the interpretive disciplines in general advocate solipsism. They do, however, contend that there are practical limits to the reliability of social-psychological and cultural analysis. Furthermore, they argue that the utility of any given interpretation is determinable only through social negotiation among persons constituting a knowledge community.

When the social processes through which "factuality" is determined are themselves regarded as fit subjects for historical
analysis; when, for instance, even avenues to the "real" so foundational for empirical science as "experience" and "sense data" are regarded as social constructions, negotiated conventions; then by what criteria can "truth" be established? To pose the question another way, what becomes of the notion of "validity"?

Gergen (1985) allows that although constructionism makes a strong case against the idea that absolute knowledge claims can be objectively warranted, it offers no alternative criteria for establishing truth. Constructionism's approach to the issue of validity is as pragmatic as its primary goal, which is to render intelligible that which "passes for knowledge in human affairs" (Gergen, 1985, p. 270). On this issue, Gergen's perspective is worth quoting at some length:

Accounts of social construction cannot themselves be warranted empirically....However, the success of such accounts depends primarily on the analyst's capacity to invite, compel, stimulate, or delight the audience, and not on criteria of veracity. Required, then, are alternative criteria for evaluating knowledge claims -- criteria that might reasonably take into account existing needs for systems of intelligibility, limitations inherent in existing constructions, along with a range of political, moral, aesthetic, and practical considerations.

By the same token, social constructionism offers no "truth through method."...Whether rendering the conduct of organisms intelligible or demystifying existing forms of understanding, research methods can be used to produce "objectifications" or illustrations useful in advancing the pragmatic consequences of one's work. In this sense it would seem that virtually any methodology can be employed so long as it enables the analyst to develop a more compelling case. Although some methods may hold the allure of large samples, others can attract because of their purity, their sensitivity to nuance, or their ability to probe in depth. Such assets do not thereby increase the "objective validity" of the resulting constructions. However, like vivid photographs or startling vignettes drawn from daily life, when well wrought they may add vital power to the pen. (pp. 272-273)

Although he does not explicitly identify his perspective as constructionist, Strong (1984) obviously concurs with Gergen's notion
of "truth." Truth, he writes, is a working construction "arbitrated in
the collectivity of the scientific community" (p. 472). When scholarly
inquiry is viewed in this way, what matters most is whether an
investigator's interpretation of the evidence he assembles strikes
others as convincing. Validation takes place as a process of social
negotiation. Granting "the necessarily contestable nature of all
cultural material" and acknowledging that ambiguity is inherent in all
interpretation, Rabinow and Sullivan (1979b, p. 19) join Gergen and
Strong in conceptualizing validity as an imprecise, by definition
pragmatic, social construction.

Of course closely related to validity is the issue of reliability,
or intersubjective agreement. In fact, if one adopts the construction-
ist perspective it becomes nearly impossible to uncouple the notions of
validity and reliability. Whether or not a researcher's observation or
proposition is accorded the status of provisional "truth" by members of
a knowledge community will depend in large part on whether those
members agree with, accept the validity of, the researcher's findings
and interpretations. Strong (1984) describes scientific inquiry as a
"cooperative enterprise in which ideas vie for acceptance among the
players," and "observations of reality are tendered as attempts to
influence others about the validity of ideas" (p. 472). One can hear
echoes in Spence's (1988) reference to the "dialogic nature of truth-
seeking," in Bernstein's (1988) description of a "choreography of
critique" that defines a middle epistemological ground between
objectivism and relativism, and in Geuss' (1981) commentary on the
consensual nature of "objective truth." Validity and reliability are
inextricably linked in this process of social negotiation:

"Understandings of the nature of phenomena gain force through intersubjective agreement about what are valid observations and what are valid construances of their meaning" (Strong, 1984, p. 472). From this perspective, it is no longer tenable to treat reliability, as advocates of the empiricist orientation traditionally have, as though it were nearly synonymous with "replicability." Instead, the findings and interpretations offered by a researcher are "reliable" to the extent that members of the knowledge community can achieve some consensus regarding their usefulness.

The Constructionist Approach to Motiveless Murder

Introduction

About the "meaning" of most murders there is a fair degree of social consensus. A man having an affair with a woman is murdered by the woman's husband. A burglar caught in the act panics and kills his assailant. One drug dealer kills another drug dealer who is competing with him for control of the same lucrative market. About such cases of murder it need only be said that the killer acted as he did because of some commonly-ascribed motive - for example, greed, jealousy, self-preservation, the desire for revenge. Of course such capsule descriptions never tell the entire story, but as conventions of social discourse, terms comprising a widely-accepted "vocabulary of motives" (Mill, 1940; Scully and Marolla, 1984), they provide convenient handles. When they are employed to describe certain acts of murder, few members of the social audience protest their inadequacy.
Other murders are less well served by the conventional vocabulary of motives. Youths loyal to Charles Manson murder seven strangers in two nights. A small-time crook named Paul John Knowles kills eighteen people over a period of four months. Building contractor John Wayne Gacy murders thirty-three young men. Ian Brady and Myra Hindley murder children. The social project of coming to terms with crimes like these warrants our close attention. I have grouped them together as "motiveless" murders, not to imply the literal absence of a motive, nor to suggest a common, if elusive, motivational dynamic; but rather, to emphasize the social dimension of the interpretive challenge they represent. They are the murders which members of the social audience find particularly puzzling and disturbing. (For an elaboration on my use of the term "motiveless murder," see Chapter 2.) In the discussion which follows, I will consider the relevance of a constructionist orientation for examining the processes through which observers attempt to render these acts intelligible.

**Constructionism and the Possibilities of Meaning in Motiveless Murder**

Constructionist analyses generally begin with an implied question that might be posed in this form: "In what ways do various images, meaning constructions, ideological premises, research findings, and attributional biases enter into our understanding of...?" Sarbin and Mancuso (1980) pose the question with reference to schizophrenia, Murray (1962) with reference to Satan, Kessler and McKenna (1985) with reference to gender, and Rennie (1978) with reference to "criminal man," to name just a few examples. In each case, evidence is assembled from a wide range of sources — literature, historical documents,
popular texts, empirical research — and a critical perspective is presented on "the ways we think about" the phenomenon in question.

The present study adopts a similar approach, only here the subject of interest is motiveless murder. The first reality one confronts in attempting such a study is the dearth of empirical research. This lack of "hard" data cannot legitimately be termed an "obstacle" since the study's aim is not to formulate an understanding of who the motiveless murderer is but, rather, to survey the range of explanatory ideas, discourses, and images that have developed in response to the interpretive challenge he represents.

There are several reasons why motiveless murder has seldom been the focus of carefully controlled, systematic research. One reason is that murders judged "motiveless" are relatively rare. As already noted, most murders can be understood, with a fair degree of consensus, as having been instrumental in some way, committed out of greed, a desire for revenge, or jealousy, for example. A second reason is that even if the perpetrator of an apparently motiveless murder is apprehended, investigators interested in studying the murderer's personality dynamics are unlikely to meet with much cooperation. A third reason, one often cited by investigators working in this area of study, is that it is difficult to obtain access to the murderer. This latter problem is encountered so frequently because of the fact that among murders designated "motiveless" are many multiple-victim, high publicity cases involving years of appeals and, frequently, attorney-mandated gag orders that prevent offenders from communicating with investigators.
(Holmes and De Burger, 1988; Lunde, 1975; Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas, 1988).

Perhaps partly as a result of this widely recognized difficulty in conducting controlled research with perpetrators of these crimes, one often (not always) encounters in the related literature a frank capitulation before the challenge of formulating an answer to the question "Why was the murder committed?" Writing of Scottish multiple murderer Dennis Nilsen, Masters (1985) comments that "Men like Nilsen elude classification, their unfathomable depravity resists conclusive analysis" (p. 293); and it should be noted that Masters reaches this conclusion despite having been afforded perhaps unprecedented access, both by prison authorities and by Nilsen himself, to the subject of his study. Other analysts have had much less material to work with. One psychiatrist offering a retrospective interpretation of John Reginald Christie, who was responsible in the early 1950's for the deaths of at least six women, concludes his analysis by observing that with the limited information available to him, he has, in effect, constructed Christie: "All this is of course, purely speculative. Experience shows that often one is wrong in assessing a patient's motives, only intimate acquaintance revealing the real truth. But an intimate acquaintance with Christie is obviously out of the question and speculation is all that is possible" (Neustatter, 1957, p. 34).

Of what possible interest is speculation about the dynamics behind a dead murderer's decision to kill? Often, in such speculation it is possible to discern evidence of prevalent historical and cultural themes, including, for example, evolving conceptualizations of
"difference and pathology" (Gilman, 1985). Simply to illustrate the range of interpretive frameworks which may comprise the speculation about cases of apparently motiveless murder, I will consider two examples: the cases of John Christie and Lizzie Borden.

As noted above, Christie murdered at least six women. Why did he do it? What variety of human being would be capable of the crimes Christie is alleged to have committed? One psychiatrist who examined him offered the tentative diagnosis of hysteria so severe that it amounted to a form of insanity, but then qualified that conclusion by allowing that Christie's "hysterical" symptoms may have resulted from elaborate self-deception. Another psychiatrist thought Christie an "inadequate personality" and a habitual liar. To a third examining psychiatrist, Christie was a psychopath with hysterical features (Neustatter, 1957, pp. 30-31). Neustatter, who offers the somewhat surprising observation that "None [of the psychiatrists' reports] threw any light on why Christie committed these murders," (p. 32) concludes that Christie was a hysteric with a deeply ingrained sense of sexual inadequacy. Kennedy (1961) concurs with Neustatter, while C. Wilson and Pitman (1961) favor the diagnosis of psychopathic personality. Lustgarten (1968) emphasizes Christie's necrophilia. Through Green's (1980) eyes, Christie appears "the classic 'shy killer' whose repressed desire for the mythical perfect sexual consummation is realized through rape and murder" (p. 269). Moreland (1966) adds that despite the "abnormality" one can infer from his behavior, "there was nothing to indicate that [Christie] was a sadist, medically insane or mentally defective" (p. 108).
The Borden case provides perhaps a more dramatic example of widely divergent interpretations offered to account for the same crime. Speculation about the motivation behind the 1892 murders of Lizzie Borden's parents continues to this day. Though Lizzie was eventually acquitted, most commentators since have concluded that she was guilty. Assuming for the moment that she was, why did she kill her parents? Jones (1980) quotes this assessment offered two days after the murders by an attorney who later participated in Lizzie's defense: "A most outrageous, brutal crime...and absolutely motiveless — absolutely motiveless" (p. 219).

Attempts to construct a plausible motive for the Borden murders have involved commentators in a kind of projective exercise: to some extent at least, what they have seen in the crime has reflected their socially and historically situated, but also very personal, perspectives. The challenge has been to develop an interpretation which is in fact a construction of the multi-faceted "corpus delicti." That the response to such a challenge must inevitably extend beyond the immediate "facts" of the case is the point of this description of the term "corpus delicti" offered by Rule (1987):

[The constructed "corpus delicti"] includes everything that has gone into the commission of a particular crime, everything that has resulted, the complete faceting of an almost physical entity — not unlike the mirrored balls that revolve continuously over dance floors, casting floating circlets of reflected light....The body of the crime of murder is as complex as these glittering globes of mirror tiles; different angles produce different shadows of light, different clues produce different theories. (p. 77)

Theories concerning Lizzie's motivation abound. In surveying them, Jones (1980) argues that many have had more to say about cultural values, in particular discriminatory attitudes toward women, than about
Lizzie Borden. Some commentators have speculated that Lizzie killed her parents out of frustrated passion for a man she could not obtain. Others imagine that she punished her parents for refusing to sanction a love affair. One commentator pursues a Freudian line of analysis, arguing that it was forbidden longing for her father that triggered Lizzie’s outburst. Another constructs a motive based on feverish guilt and passion resulting from a secret lesbian relationship. Still another speculates that Lizzie killed during an epileptic seizure.

Jones stops short of pronouncing Lizzie guilty or innocent, preferring to see in the forever-unsolvable case an indictment of the male-dominated society that tried Lizzie at a time when for her as for many other women, life "consisted mainly in things...that didn’t happen" (Jones, 1980, p. 237; quotation originally from DeMille, 1968, p. 134).

I offer the examples of the Christie and Borden cases simply to emphasize the degree to which understandings of motivation can vary, particularly when limited concrete information is available to buttress an "official" version. McConnell (1974) underlines the interpretive challenge represented by such cases. With reference to the unsolved "Thames murders" committed in London during the 1960’s, he writes, "There is no official version of what really happened....The public is left, therefore, with what has been said, what has been put about, not what is necessarily true, but what is believable [emphasis added]" (p. 166). Of course the cases of Jack the Ripper, Leopold and Loeb, and the Manson family could illustrate the point as well. The constructionist approach provides a framework for probing beneath forms of
understanding for the assumptions and patterns of social discourse which they reflect. In the constructionist context, the relative accuracy of different forms of understanding is of only secondary importance.

A caveat: I am not suggesting that "motiveless murder" is a homogeneous classification. The shades of meaning often implied by the label will be discussed in some detail in the chapter which follows. It would be foolish to say, for instance, that since no clear motivation can be discerned in the crimes committed by Lizzie Borden, John Reginald Christie, John Wayne Gacy, and Ted Bundy, the four must be cut from the same psychological mold. In all likelihood, they killed for very different reasons. However, even if it exists the information required to specify those reasons with greater precision is often unavailable. When this is the case, the interpretive challenge becomes necessarily blunt: On what foundation can we achieve even a provisional understanding of why "sane" people kill other people when the act does not appear to benefit the murderer in any way? In the present study, an attempt will be made to shed some light on the foundations, as well as the forms, of social constructions of the motiveless murderer.

I alluded previously to Rennie's (1978) critical survey of the constructions and images and legal definitions produced as part of the "search for criminal man." Her intent is not to try and account for any individual "criminal," but to explore evolving conceptions of the generic type designated by that linguistic convention. Similarly, in the present study I will not attempt to provide a definitive motivational analysis of any particular murderer. Instead, I will attempt a
critical analysis of attempts by the social audience to construct possibilities of meaning in acts of apparently senseless violence committed by "sane" human beings.

Constructionism's Rejection of Reductionistic Explanation

The very phrase "possibilities of meaning" implies social constructionism's eschewal of all varieties of reductionistic explanation. Indeed, an appeal of the constructionist approach is that it avoids the reductionism that can result from one discipline's attempt to account for a complex phenomenon using its constructs and vocabulary to the exclusion of others. Dissatisfaction with reductionistic explanations is, in fact, a recurring theme in the literature on motiveless murder. Novelist Robert Musil's (1930) portrait of the murderer Moosbrugger seems at times like a deliberate attempt to confound those who would seek to "explain" the elusive phenomenological state of being which culminates in one man's decision to mutilate a prostitute he finds bothersome: "For the judge Moosbrugger was a special case; for [Moosbrugger] himself he was a world, and it is difficult to say something convincing about a world" (Vol 1, p. 84). To the critics Karl and Hamalian (1963), Musil's novel serves as a reminder that "There are obviously forces in [Moosbrugger] that no amount of analysis will ever reveal" (p. 20).

Lifton (1986), too, warns against the fallacy of reductionism. With specific reference to his study of Nazi physicians, he points out that "every discipline courts illusions of understanding that which is not understood" (p. 12). He contends that in order to preserve the integrity of our efforts at comprehending human beings, and to avoid
lulling ourselves into a state of false security, we need to reject the allure of "single, all-embracing explanations...that sweep away rather than illuminate the interlocking structures and motivations" of behavior (p. 13). Masters (1985) borrows from novelist Iris Murdoch the phrase "rough contingent rubble" to describe that which remains, important yet unaccounted for, when an instance of human behavior is "explained" using a single framework of the sort Lifton warns against.

His recognition of that elusive "rubble" is what caused Norman Mailer to see in convicted murderer Gary Gilmore such a challenging subject for interpretation. The longer Mailer looked at Gilmore, and the more he learned about the seemingly incongruent aspects and puzzling nuances of this "psychopath's" personality, the greater became his realization that "every concept [he had about Gilmore] proved inadequate" (Lennon, 1982, p. 167). Like Mailer, Progoff (1967) seems wary of applying to all murders the limited set of explanatory concepts traditionally used to account for instances of one person killing another. Proposing that we accept an almost mystical, Jungian framework for understanding the motivation behind Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination of President Kennedy, he argues that Oswald's act "cannot be understood merely as an act of arbitrary personal decision; nor can it be understood as an event that was psychologically determined" (p. 110).

Social constructionism provides a vehicle for surveying and examining selected implications of the ways in which motiveless murder has been understood. Masters (1985) shares with constructionist investigators a general distrust of reductionistic explanation, and
also the recognition that what Maslow might have termed "reconnaissance" work is an essential step for any discipline undertaking the study of complex social phenomena:

We may scurry around looking for answers [to why a person like Dennis Nilsen embarks on a career of multiple murder] but we'll not find a single one which closes all the questions....[For now] we can look only to theory and experience for an explanation. Psychiatry offers one answer, fragmented into a dozen smaller answers, philosophy offers another, the theory of sexuality a third, and diabolism a fourth. None has the translucent clarity of unassailable truth, and...they contradict one another often on essentials. The untutored intuition of a novelist might do as well as any of them. (pp. 293-94)

Social constructionism, of course, regards as misguided the search for anything having "the translucent clarity of unassailable truth." It does, however, aspire to a fuller appreciation for the social processes through which versions of "truth" are negotiated; and that is a goal consistent with Masters' emphasis on the need to juxtapose, and tease out thematic cross-currents among, various competing perspectives.

The Projective Hypothesis as a Justification for Constructionist Analysis

I would like to elaborate briefly on the link, suggested earlier, between the "projective hypothesis" (Frank, 1939) and social constructionism's emphasis on the interpretive situation. The projective hypothesis posits that a person's "reading" of an ambiguous situation reveals salient aspects of his personality structure, "projections." Writing of the Rorschach test, and guided by Henry Murray's earlier description of the projective process, Exner (1986) refers to "the tendency of people to be influenced by their needs, interests, and overall psychological organization in the cognitive
translation or interpretation of perceptual inputs whenever the stimulus field [includes] some ambiguity [emphasis added]" (p. 15).

According to the constructionist perspective, it is never possible to obtain certain knowledge about anything; therefore, there is a projective element in our every act of interpretation. Gaylin (1982) writes:

Actual events are Rorschach blots ready for our interpretations. We do not perceive that we are constructing images and stories that are uniquely ours; we will not see them as mere foci of our elaboration. We will define the truth in terms of our reality, not the actuality. We will, therefore, "see" different things without lying or any attempt at distortion; we will build from the same raw ingredients different structures. (p. 112)

Like other members of the larger class Gaylin describes as "actual events," motiveless murder is subject to a variety of interpretations. The difference is that in the case of motiveless murder, the ambiguity which to some extent characterizes every act of perception is amplified considerably. Often, it is the product of apparent incongruities. A number of his acquaintances described John Wayne Gacy, convicted killer of thirty-three boys, as hard-working, concerned about civic affairs, and a helpful neighbor. Most people who knew Ted Bundy thought of him as a resourceful, self-assured young man with a bright future in politics. Multiple murderer Stephen Nash impressed those people who worked with him for years as a good-natured, harmless buffoon. When the "stimulus" requiring interpretation consists of men like this and their crimes, we are likely to experience a measure of the anxiety experienced by many individuals in a projective testing situation when they are asked to stare at a blank white card and relate what they see.
The stimulus before us, while not blank, is not easily slotted into an existing cognitive category. Marguerite Duras (1986) describes the situation with typical understatement: "Outside the accepted categories of crime our minds feel uneasy" (p. 90).

Consider the variety of ways in which observers have responded to the interpretive challenge represented by the unknown Victorian killer known as Jack the Ripper. Kelly (1984) makes explicit the relevance of the projective process for understanding why different observers have seen in the vague and ambiguous circumstances of the Ripper’s crimes very different possibilities: "[The ambiguity of] an otherwise normal individual who in moments of cruelty wrings sadistic delight from his unfortunate victims, seems a perfect screen on which to project fantasies" (p. 25). On to that screen observers have projected an amazingly diverse collection of images. Of course some are more closely linked than others to what little is known about the Ripper’s identity. A partial listing of the images includes an escaped animal, a midwife, an agent of the Russian secret service, a physician, a lawyer-turned-social revolutionary, and a member of the British royal family. These images of the Ripper have little in common except that at some point, while rummaging among bits of known information in search of an intelligible pattern, someone imagined that each might allow us to view the Ripper’s crimes as making some kind of "sense."

Up to this point, my emphasis has been on missing information, and on the sense of coherence which motiveless crimes conspicuously lack. But it is inaccurate to carry the analogy of the "blank screen" too far. About most "senseless" crimes we know something, and our knowledge
generally includes the horrible physical facts of the crimes themselves. How does this partial knowledge of Rule's (1987) multi-faceted "corpus delecti" impact upon the projective process? How does it affect our attempts to construct a plausible story that includes not only how the crime was committed, but also the identity and motivation of the individual who committed it?

Many commentators have remarked on the special terror evoked by the spectacle of people murdered for no apparent reason. Observers of such a spectacle often feel a sense of personal vulnerability that inevitably intrudes upon their efforts to make sense of what they see. Brophy (1966) notes that when there is a series of murders committed for no discernible reason, "terror spreads and a communal, as well as individual attention is given to the unknown future, to the victim-to-be next on the list." This diffuse sense of dread, he says, "is the basic, forward-looking situation created by the serial murder" (p. 166). In a similar vein, Willeford (1980) comments that "Unmotivated killings are frightening because of their illogicality. When anyone can be...killed or maimed for no reason whatsoever, the life of every person is in danger" (pp. 272-73). Sounding the same theme, Damio (1974) alludes to the anxiety - "a sense of danger to the race itself" - with which people often react to news of a "materially profitless homicide" (p. 215).

This unfocused sense of terror in the face of an unknown, seemingly incomprehensible threat to personal and communal safety is obviously an important factor to keep in mind when we consider, as we will in Chapter Five, the images which observers construct as
representations of that threat. In accordance with the projective hypothesis, one would expect that those images would differ from images standing for other threats - say murderers who kill for revenge or profit - which can be rendered in more concrete, comprehensible terms.

There is one additional point which relates to our knowledge of the physical facts of the crime. Consider this scenario. Over a period of months, police discover multiple corpses, each one horribly mutilated. Members of the social audience watch with mounting horror, and puzzle over the kind of human being who would be capable of committing such acts. Finally, a handsome and articulate young man is identified by police as the prime suspect. The man's acquaintances appear on the evening news expressing their disbelief. He couldn't have committed such terrible acts, they say; he was "one of us" (a phrase used by one of his social acquaintances to describe serial killer Ted Bundy).

The point I wish to emphasize is that from the moment the young man is linked with the crimes, every attempt to understand "who he is" will be indelibly marked by the association. He must be - what? - the kind of man who mutilates other human beings. If he is that, what else can he be? A circle of interpretation is established from which it is impossible to fully extricate ourselves. It is important in such cases that we keep in mind the extent to which our construction of the individual-suspect is colored by our knowledge of the end result of the acts he allegedly committed. Making sense of the person and his behavior remains the challenge. The difference is that now the person is irrevocably associated with an act or series of acts which, even if
he denies culpability, in large part comes to define him. Even though we may wish to begin at ground zero in constructing from information about his life an unbiased and plausible narrative about who the individual is, our knowledge of his association with the crime is bound to influence the story we tell. Gaylin (1982) makes the point with reference to Richard Herrin, the young man mentioned previously who admitted hammering his former fiancee, Bonnie Garland, to death: "We approach [Herrin's] past and personality differently after [emphasis added] the fact of his killing Bonnie from the moment before the killing - even though it is an identical past and personality" (p. 284).

James Baldwin (1985) makes a similar point in discussing the public's attempt to make sense of Wayne Williams, the man alleged to have killed twenty-eight black children in Atlanta. Once Williams was named as the primary suspect in the case, he in effect became the killer, quite aside from the question of his ultimate culpability. Baldwin's contention that the entire case against Williams was a debacle, "compromised by emotional, moral, and legal confusion" (p. 10), is reflected in his further remarks about the difficulty people had in viewing Williams as anything other than a depraved person who killed children: "Beneath the microscope of the inquisition, everything this creature does - smiling or not smiling, calm or panic-stricken, belching or not belching, sweating or not sweating, smoking or not smoking, shouting or not shouting - is suspect. This is because he is suspect" (pp. 9-10).
To summarize, then, my point is that the construction of meaning in cases of apparently motiveless murder involves the observer in a projective exercise of a special kind. To understand the yield of that projective process, it is necessary that we attend both to the stimulus situation - especially the ambiguous features of the murder, which allow for a number of interpretations - as well as to the mental set with which the observer confronts the interpretive challenge. The social constructionist orientation provides an appropriately flexible framework for doing both.

Constructionism's Emphasis on the Social/Cultural Context of Interpretation

The constructionist approach emphasizes the cultural and historical boundedness of meaning. Ideas such as self, personality, adolescence, and motiveless murder are regarded as the unstable products of people in relationship. The meaning of these ideas changes along with prevailing forms of social discourse. In order to grasp what is implied by the term "motiveless murder," we need to attend closely to the social/cultural context in which both the act to which the term refers, and the act's subsequent interpretation, occur. There is a reciprocal shaping process. Murderers draw on conventional interpretive frameworks and vocabularies in formulating their responses when members of the social audience demand to know why they did what they did. As each murderer adds his own elaborating details to prevailing forms of discourse which furnish accepted possibilities for meaning, the forms of discourse undergo a subtle process of transformation.
Leyton (1986), a cultural anthropologist with an interest in the social project of assigning significance to multiple murder, emphasizes the degree to which the process is determined by prevailing forms of discourse. Killers, he says, tend to "explain themselves in conventional ideas borrowed from the wider culture" (p. 260). As an example Leyton cites the case of Henry Lee Lucas. For several years Lucas has teased law enforcement officers with conflicting confessions, some implicating him in as many as 360 murders. It is uncertain at this time exactly how many people Lucas might have killed. What is clear, says Leyton, is that when pressed to supply a reason why he killed at all, Lucas has consistently couched his account in "intellectual constructs borrowed from his culture" (p. 17), more specifically in terms of the disastrous emotional consequences of being the son of an abusive and openly promiscuous mother.

In their constructionist account of "sexual murder," Cameron and Frazer (1987) argue the same point. When a killer tells us (as Richard Ramirez, Los Angeles' "Night Stalker" did), "I was influenced to kill by the lyrics of rock group AC/DC"; or (as Ted Bundy did), "I became a killer because of my exposure to pornography"; or (as Peter Sutcliffe, England's "Yorkshire Ripper," did), "I was cleaning up the streets," what are we to make of the proffered explanation? Cameron and Frazer would contend that each one of these killers "is using a formula, a generic convention which he learned in society and which both he and others recognize as 'the sort of account someone might give of that sort of event'" (p. xii). They apply this perspective to the case of nineteenth century multiple murderer Pierre Riviere as well. Riviere
was familiar with broadsheets and other forms of popular literature which conveyed contemporary understandings of why and under what circumstances people killed one another. Say Cameron and Frazer, "[Riviere's] reading gave him a context for his acts, a tradition to place himself in, even conventions for writing his confession later on...The representations available to [him] shaped the form of his killing and the way he understood it" (p. xiii).

Many other commentators echo this emphasis on the extent to which prevailing forms of discourse, and prevailing social attitudes, furnish the criminal with scripts to use in accounting for his acts. Rennie (1978), for example, writes of the frequency with which criminals "follow popular fashion in explaining their misdeeds" (p. 159). Lindsay (1958) recounts the case of a young man who, when pressed to explain why he had killed his mother, replied as though convinced that everyone would know exactly what he meant, "I had an Oedipus complex" (p. 146). And Duras (1986), describing the testimony of the defendant in one particularly puzzling criminal case, writes, "Her attitude was purely functional...[She] had nothing to say, because the court forces her to say it in its language. Hence she speaks of the 'atrocities' of her crime" (p. 94).

Of course the point is not whether the criminal's borrowing from available discourses is "voluntary" or the result of social pressure. The point, rather, is that any attempt to determine what a given act of murder "means" must consider the cultural embeddedness not only of the act itself, but of the accounts which follow it. This is a primary tenet of the constructionist position. If such an approach does not
promise anything resembling a definitive clinical portrait of an individual murderer, or of the class loosely designated "motiveless murderers," at least it acknowledges the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the interpretive task.

**Concluding Remarks**

I have attempted to show the relevance of a constructionist orientation for exploring the social interpretation of murders committed without apparent motive. Although psychologists guided by various theoretical perspectives have described, then operationalized and attempted to measure, a wide assortment of motives; it is arguable that establishment of the motive reflected in any instance of behavior is more a matter of social interpretation than empirical validation (see Mills, 1940; Scully and Marolla, 1984). In a book examining the "meaning of murder," Brophy (1966) writes that "Motive...appears not as a specific fact but as an abstract idea, a describing and interpreting idea, which is deduced from behavior" (pp. 54-55). In fact, when it is offered to explain why an individual did something in the past, motive can only be that, nothing more. As Gaylin (1982) points out in his study of the killing of Bonnie Garland, "There is no way to adequately examine the mental state of an individual in the past" (pp. 278-79). All that can be reasonably expected is extrapolation, an attempt at constructing the past from the vantage point of the present.

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) recognize, too, that often what a crime "means" is largely a construction based on extrapolation from limited information. In their discussion of psychological "profiling" as a technique widely employed by law enforcement investigators and their
consultants from the behavioral sciences, Holmes and De Burger note that investigators need to conduct careful crime scene analyses to discern clues that might assist them in "formulating appropriate [emphasis added] motives" (p. 93). The use of "appropriate" here is revealing. It suggests the important role played by social convention when certain acts are interpreted as manifestations of certain motives. Consistent with Brophy's position, the notion is of motive as a "describing and interpreting idea"; in other words, as a social construction.

Of course labelling something a social construction does not necessarily mean questioning its reality or its importance. It should, however, suggest the fruitfulness of exploring the phenomenon's status rather than its "validity." Granted, the yield of a constructionist approach may not satisfy readers whose interests lie more in precision, control, and prediction than in the examination of elusive forms of social understanding. Undeniably, the latter pursuit requires a greater tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.

Nietzsche felt that an individual could live with any "how" so long as he could grasp "why." Psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton (1986) writes that "we live on images of meaning" (p. 459). And journalist Joan Didion (1979) begins one of her books, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live" (p. 11). Constructionist analysis focuses at the level where stories are composed, images of meaning are created, and people propose provisional answers to the question "Why?" It regards as important in their own right those stories, images, and constructions of meaning which Didion, Lifton, and Nietzsche place at the center of
human existence. Like the ethnomethodologist, the constructionist researcher strives to "locate and describe sense-making practices and to render them observable as a topic" (Leiter, 1980, p. 240).

Throughout my work on this project, I have often recalled several statements contained in the introduction to another study, written by a historian, exploring a subject at least as elusive as "the motiveless murderer": the "dangerous offender." Rennie (1978) declares as one of the preconceptions informing her analysis the belief that "dangerous offender" is a "protean concept, changing its color and shape to suit the fears, interests, needs, and prejudices of a society. It is an idea, not a person" (p. xvii). With reference to the dangerous offender and a related concept, "criminal man," Rennie asks, "What do these ideas mean? Where did they come from? How have they affected the way we deal with the flesh-and-blood malefactors crowding our courts and jails" (p. xviii)? It is at the multiple points where such conceptual and pragmatic concerns intersect that the social constructionist analyst goes about his work of interpretation. Indeed, it is to explore some tentative responses to questions of the sort Rennie poses that I have undertaken this investigation into the social meaning of motiveless murder.
CHAPTER II

MOTIVELESS MURDER: SOME WORKING PARAMETERS OF THE TERM AND THE IDEA

"If we find the motive, we find the killer."
Investigator in the movie version of Truman Capote's (1965), In Cold Blood

"Supposing the evil action - the crime - is gratuitous, it will be impossible to impute it to its perpetrator and impossible, therefore, to convict him....For the motive of the crime is the handle by which we lay hold of the criminal." (p. 173)
Julius, a character in Andre Gide's (1925), L'Archange des Monstres

"Writers and readers and lawyers and juries usually think of 'motive' as a clear-cut, rational, almost tangible thing, demonstrable by 'cui bono?' and 'quid pro quo' and other classic tags all adding up to the modern 'What's in it for me?' But the motive for murder can be nonexistent logically" (Boucher, The Quality of Murder, 1962, p. 167)

Introduction

Few people, psychologists least of all, would accept the argument that some behavior is unmotivated. Of course there is widespread agreement that human action is often set in motion, at least influenced, by factors apparent neither to the actor nor to observers. Even so, it is generally assumed that what an individual does is in some sense "motivated," that is, performed in the service of the
person's "interests," however those interests might be defined (e.g.,
unconscious wishes, physiologically-based need states).

It should be apparent, then, that strictly speaking, the term
"motiveless murder" is a misnomer. Murder does not occur in a
motivational vacuum. Nonetheless, as an idea and as a rubric for
organizing certain acts, "motiveless murder" has become a convention of
social discourse, an example of what one sociologist calls a "rough
conventional or folk [category]" (Katz, 1988, p. 9). It is with its use
as such a category that this chapter is concerned.

One hundred years ago a defense lawyer for Lizzie Borden
described the murder of Lizzie's parents as "absolutely motiveless."
More recently an investigator told reporters covering a case of triple
murder, "I'm not sure there was a motive for [the first] murder. But
the other two were to keep from leaving witnesses" ("Town Wary," 1988).
Such accounts are not uncommon. What they reveal is the currency of an
idea, the idea that perhaps some murders cannot be plausibly accounted
for. The status of that idea is central to our consideration of
questions like these: In what ways do members of the social audience
think about acts of murder for which there is no apparent explanation?
What possibilities of meaning are implied in the images, rhetoric, and
theoretical vocabularies used to talk about such crimes?

On the first page of their constructionist study of schizophrenia,
Sarbin and Mancuso (1980) ask, "Within what context does a person enter
the category labeled schizophrenia" (p. 1)? The present discussion is
prompted by a similar question: In what circumstances, and with what
implications, are acts of murder described as "motiveless"? By
exploring the contexts in which "motiveless murder" is used, we can begin to establish the term's range of reference, and to illuminate some of it's "implicit meanings" (Barrell et al., 1987). The process is not unlike the process involved in compiling a descriptive dictionary. In each case, at issue are the parameters of usage. My intent here, similar to that satisfied by the "multi-dimensional significance" first step of the hermeneutic process, is to develop "a multilevel, multidimensional understanding" (Barrell et al., 1987, p. 435) of what, in ordinary discourse, the term "motiveless murder" signifies.

Implicit Meanings of "Motiveless Murder"

Some Variations on "The Principle of Unfathomability"

The speaker who describes a murder as motiveless or senseless or meaningless is often saying, in effect, that available explanatory frameworks seem inadequate to the interpretive challenge. If applied, they would not produce a plausible account of why the murder occurred. In most cases of this sort, observers find themselves experiencing a form of vertigo. Events have caused them to doubt their capacity for making accurate judgments about the most fundamental aspects of social reality. The case of serial killer Ted Bundy provides an illustration.

Until his arrest and identification as a suspect in more than thirty murders, Bundy impressed many friends and acquaintances as a bright, handsome young man with a promising future in law or politics. Following Bundy's arrest, a former friend expressed his sense of disorientation in this terse remark to an investigative reporter: "Ted was one of us" (Michaud and Aynesworth, 1983, p. 16). With rare
exceptions, and those few aided considerably by hindsight, his former acquaintances recalled nothing that would have pointed to Ted as a serial killer.

One chronicler offers a succinct description of why the case has struck observers as particularly puzzling, and disturbing: "Bundy did not fit the shape that the public requires of its multiple murderers" (Leyton, 1986, p. 90). Neither did he conform to the (admittedly elastic) psychological profile of a person likely to commit more than thirty murders over a period of several years. One psychologist who interviewed him and administered a standard battery of psychological tests concluded that Bundy was a "normal person..., an extremely intelligent young man who is intact psychologically." The examiner went even further, suggesting that in addition to having had what would appear a "normal psychosexual development," Ted brought to his relations with other people "good social presence," a "positive self-identity," and "ego strength and good self-concept" (Leyton, pp. 83-84).

To the disturbing paradox embodied in a person like Bundy people often respond with a second paradox: that the "sense" of such a case is that there is no sense. The search for a reason or a motive that would provide the "why" behind such puzzling and discrepant behavior is futile, they say; it will produce no answers. In making such a claim, they concede a point to Albert DeSalvo, the Boston Strangler, who said of his own behavior, "It was so senseless that it makes sense, you know?" (Frank, 1966, p. 316).
Writing of serial murder, in particular the case of H.H. Holmes, whose murders during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair may have numbered in the hundreds, Eckert (1985) speculates that whatever lies behind this "least understood of mankind's maladies" (p. 499) may ultimately defy all attempts at explanation. In a conversation with psychiatrist Willard Gaylin, Richard Herrin expressed a similar perspective about his own use of a hammer to bludgeon the woman he had only shortly before planned to marry: "I still don't know. I'll never be able to answer why. I know it happened. I can tell how it happened. I'll never be able to say why it happened, because there's no explanation for it" (Gaylin, 1982, p. 93).

Although perhaps out of step with the scientific temper of the times, this emphasis on unknowability is a recurring theme in literature describing particularly puzzling murder cases. Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton (1986) describes it as "the principle of unfathomability" (p. 374). The principle is articulated clearly in the remarks of a physician who Lifton interviewed for his study of "medical killing" in Nazi Germany: "The professor [Lifton] would like to understand what is not understandable. We ourselves who were there and who have always asked ourselves the question and will ask it until the end of our lives, we will never understand it, because it cannot be understood [emphasis added]" (p. 13). Echoing the same perspective, psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey ("The horror," 1986) cautions that readers who approach Lifton's study expecting to learn the "why" behind murderous behavior like that engaged in by the Nazis "may be asking the impossible" (p. 79).
Along similar lines, psychiatrist Donald Lunde (1975) suggests that while perhaps most murders are committed for reasons that can be readily understood, mass murder is different. If an apparently gratuitous case strikes observers as "inexplicable," he says, that is because "in many respects it is" (p. 47). Lunde's remark brings to mind the conclusion reached by another psychiatrist, who for years tried to understand why Franz Wagner killed fourteen people in a small German village in 1913: "There remains a part [of the Wagner case] that is beyond human comprehension" (Bruch, 1967, p. 698). The serial killer in a recent popular novel is described in terms which now begin to sound familiar: "not measurable by any means known to man" (Harris, 1988, p. 183).

Conrad (1977), a criminologist, repeats this emphasis on the theme of unknowability. He describes the perplexing case of a former inmate at Soledad Prison named Stephen Nash. During the prison term he was serving for a variety of relatively minor offenses, Nash developed a reputation as a non-violent "sadly amiable clown" (p. 2). Released after ten years, he committed and then blithely admitted to seventeen murders. Recalling his acquaintance with Nash while employed as an administrative officer at Soledad, Conrad speculates that festering beneath the surface of the likeable prison buffoon must have been a "hidden malignancy" (p. 2) undetected, in fact undetectable, by anyone. In retrospect, Conrad admits, Nash was probably more dangerous than any man he had ever known. Still, "In spite of speculations by hindsight, no one can identify the forces that accounted for Stephen Nash's... succession of meaningless homicides" (p. 5). No commentator, according
to Conrad's position, and no explanatory framework, can satisfactorily account for such behavior; it is, at least for practical purposes, meaningless.

Nor, according to Godwin (1978), can anyone ever know (although there has been much speculation) what in 1966 prompted Charles Whitman first to kill his wife and mother, then to ascend a tower at the University of Texas and shoot eighteen people. Godwin contends that despite the satisfaction in imagining ourselves able to still Whitman's world long enough to analyze it, the view Whitman had when he looked down from the tower is forever inaccessible to us. Psychiatrist Robert Coles (1966) writes of the Whitman case from a similar perspective:

"We were left...with nothing substantial to 'explain' a terrible crime...With each of his friends, acquaintances or teachers questioned, Whitman became steadily more ordinary....We can throw psychiatric labels around here and there....In doing so we only appease our own craving for answers and explanations....These are yet riddles. (pp. 16-17)

Of course it must be acknowledged that the imputed motive behind any behavior is at best an imperfect construction of meaning. Grappling with the question of what motivated Dick Loeb's participation with him in the 1924 murder of 14-year old Bobby Franks, Nathan Leopold (1958) asks, "How can anyone hope to enumerate the components in human motivation in real life? Isn't it only in fiction that jealousy, or revenge, or hatred, or greed is found, simple and unadulterated, as the wellspring of human action?" (p. 50). To the latter question we can certainly answer yes. Generally speaking, however, it is in those cases where no explanation seems plausible enough (to accept provisionally,
as an imperfect but adequate construction of meaning) that murder is sometimes constructed as a "motiveless" act.

An Emphasis on the Perils of Understanding

Slightly different is the attitude of commentators who argue that while it may be possible to discover why such murders occur, the pursuit of understanding is too dangerous to undertake. There are some murders, such commentators seem to suggest, that are best dismissed as incomprehensible, categorized under the heading "motiveless" and left alone. (See the related discussion in Chapter Five of the killer as pathogen, or dangerous "text.")

Thomas Hardy contended that "If way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst." Perhaps representative of those who dispute Hardy's position is psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1986). Bettelheim argues that by contemplating what is worst about human nature, we might be lead farther away from, rather than closer to, what is best. He concludes his review of Lifton's The Nazi Doctors by noting "the ever-present danger that understanding fully may come close to forgiving." Some acts, he says, are so reprehensible that "our task is to reject...them, not to try to understand them empathically as Dr. Lifton did" (p. 62).

Discounting the "Official" Account of Why a Murder Occurred

Thus far we have considered two implicit meanings of the term "motiveless murder." One is that some murders cannot be understood; our interpretive encounters with them must be governed by the "principle of unfathomability." A second implicit meaning is that there are certain
acts we should not even try to understand. The fear is that understanding will result in moral contamination.

"Motiveless murder" also sometimes implies a speaker’s dissatisfaction with the "official" account of why a murder occurred. The speaker may in fact regard the official account as a red herring, damaging because it provides an illusion of comprehensibility and thus tends to stifle further inquiry. With reference to the avalanche of psychological and sociological analysis which followed the Manson murders in the United States, and the "Moors murders" of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley in England, Wilson (1972) observes, "There was a feeling that nothing that had been said explained what had actually been done. There were strange justifications, arguments about the sick society derived from Sade or Marcuse; but nothing that could be identified as a sufficient motive" (p. 28). About crimes of the same sort another student of multiple murder writes, "The ostensible motive [is] commonly little more than an excuse to explain what even to the murderer is often an inexplicable act" (Lindsay, 1958, p. 39).

Consider one commentator’s response to the social project of trying to decide the sense in the acts attributed to multiple murderer Dean Corll. In the early 1970’s, Corll and several teenage accomplices were responsible for the murders of twenty-seven youths in Houston, Texas. Since he himself was shot and killed by one of his accomplices, Corll’s side of the story was never told. However, since Corll was known to have been homosexual, and because the victims were teenage boys, it was widely assumed that some variety of sexual sadism was the motive behind the crimes. In discussing the Corll case, Godwin (1978)
laments the willingness of many people to embrace this "official" version. He asks, does such an account really provide a plausible explanation of why, with all of the alternative courses of action open to him, Corll decided to organize the murders of twenty-seven youths? The crime, according to Godwin, was the sort that leaves even people whose work brings them into daily contact with violence "feeling oddly helpless in the face of something that none could quite conceive" (p. 164). Godwin suggests that when we are faced with this feeling of helplessness, we often seize upon an "obvious" explanation that functions to divert attention away from the much more complex, and more disturbing, reality (p. 303). When it is applied to crimes like Corll's, "motiveless" serves as an alternative description, vague and inconclusive perhaps, but at least preserving the idea that no existing explanation provides a plausible answer to the question "Why?"

Of course even if Corll had lived to provide a firsthand account of why he did what he did, some observers might still have regarded his acts as "motiveless." Again, the key factor would have been the plausibility of Corll's account. The case of Mark David Chapman, who killed John Lennon, comes to mind. Many commentators have described Chapman's crime using words like "senseless," "meaningless," and "motiveless," but not because Chapman refused to provide an explanation. On the contrary, Chapman explained that by shooting Lennon he hoped to promote J.D. Salinger's novel The Catcher in the Rye. A court of law declared that Chapman had been "sane" at the time of his crime, but to most people his account made little sense. It seemed implausible.
The 1987 case of nurse’s aide Donald Harvey, although very
different, still provides some parallels. Few members of the social
audience were willing to accept as plausible Harvey’s initial
contention that he killed as many as thirty-five acquaintances and
hospital patients for humanitarian reasons. However, after an extensive
psychiatric examination Harvey, like Chapman, was declared "sane,"
capable of comprehending the nature and legal repercussions of his acts
("Harvey is sane," 1987). Perhaps these cases are examples of what
Lifton (1986) describes as "a universal proclivity toward constructing
good motives while participating in evil behavior" (p. 458). Regardless
of whether Harvey and Chapman are demonstrating such a "universal
proclivity" or engaging in more idiosyncratic forms of
rationalization, their accounts fall far short of meeting the
plausibility criterion. Hence, their crimes are often described as
being "motiveless."

Sometimes, of course, the question of an explanation’s
plausibility is not at all clear-cut. In cases where it is difficult to
decide whether a given explanation is plausible enough, at least to be
accorded provisional acceptance, one can often detect a hint of the
ambivalence most people feel about assigning certain aspects of human
nature to the category of "unknowable." The tension which results from
wanting a definitive answer yet at the same time realizing that certain
things cannot ultimately be known often plays an important role in the
process of assigning (or not assigning) a motive to a murder. A police
officer in a novel about American multiple murderer Earle Nelson tries
to come up with an explanation that might satisfy his desire for
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closure. After first proposing a tidy description of Nelson as a "goddamned sex nut," the officer continues, "Those guys are hard to get a hold of. No motivation..." (Nash, 1982, p. 61). There is the crux of the interpretive dilemma: an "answer" is identified, but still the question of "why" persists.

Finally, there are instances when in attempting to account for his own acts, a killer himself embraces a motive only to subsequently acknowledge its inadequacy. Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov is perhaps the best known fictional representation of a man struggling with the problems of discerning the motive behind murder, in this case his own murder of an elderly woman. At first Raskolnikov tries to convince himself that he killed the woman so that he could redistribute her wealth for the betterment of society at large. Before long, however, he is forced to confront his self-deception when he realizes that he has discarded the old woman's purse without having examined its contents. Again, as with the other cases discussed in this section, the ostensible motive fails to adequately answer the question "Why?"

The Dissatisfaction with Attempts at Value Analysis

Obviously related to the preceding discussion, "motiveless" is sometimes used to convey the sense of a striking lack of proportion between the motive which ostensibly prompted a murder, and the murder itself. Colin Wilson describes crimes where such a lack of proportion exists as "murder for insufficient reason" (Wilson, 1961, p. 26) and "murder in which the motive seems wholly inadequate" (Wilson, 1969a, p. 247). He cites the example of John Haigh, the "acid bath murderer" who during the 1940's disposed of his multiple victims by dissolving their
bodies and belongings in a huge vat filled with sulfuric acid. Granted, Haigh profited from his crimes. Even so, observes Wilson, "The means seem out of all proportion to the end" (Wilson, 1984, p. 89).

Leyton (1986) provides a related perspective. Interpreting under the rubric "compulsive killings" a number of the recent murders which elsewhere have been designated "motiveless," he speculates that perhaps these crimes are distinctive because they defy value analysis. They violate the cherished economic assumption that in most transactions, investment will be calculated based on some reasonable estimation of return. How, Leyton asks, can one explain the crimes of people like Ted Bundy or the Boston Strangler in terms of a return on investment that for the perpetrators would have amounted to the killings' "worth"?

This problem is an implicit theme occurring frequently throughout the literature on motiveless murder. For example, in Capote’s (1965) In Cold Blood a law enforcement officer investigating the Clutter family murders finds it "ludicrously inconsistent" (p. 190) that someone planning a robbery would kill a whole family for what turns out to be a net yield of forty-two dollars. Rule (1987) struggles with the same sense of inconsistency in her book about Diane Downs, a young mother who shot her three young children, killing one, the only apparent motive Downs’ desire to win the affection of a man who had declared himself uninterested in raising children.

Reflected when members of the social audience describe such crimes as "senseless" or "motiveless" is not the absence of any account to explain why the crimes occurred, but rather a recognition of the dramatic lack of proportion between what the killers apparently wanted
to accomplish, and what they did. Godwin contends that this lack of proportion - "the staggering quantity of death dealt out for minimal gains" (p. 303) - is the signature characteristic of much modern violence. It is presumably the same characteristic which Holmes and DeBurger (1987) intend to highlight with their reference to the "redundant" quality of many modern cases of serial murder.

Murder Committed "For Its Own Sake"

Stack (1984) describes the recent emergence of a "new breed" of killers whose acts appear "senseless," at least to members of the majority audience. In most such cases, she says, the killers fit no existing definition of "insanity." Apparently sane but at the same time engaged in a pattern of behavior that seems nonsensical, these men murder "for reasons no rational mind [can] understand" (p. 38).

In 1986, after six people had been murdered in Oakland, a police investigator informed news reporters, "The motive would appear to be so senseless and trivial that most of us couldn't even understand it" ("Six are slain," 1986).

Several years ago a newspaper headline pronounced the twenty-six murders committed by Bogotan Campo Elias Delgado a "study in senselessness" (Gugliotta, 1986). A Vietnam combat veteran, the 52-year old Delgado had lived quietly with his mother. Most people took little notice, but apparently no one considered Delgado "crazy" or even strange. They thought him if not exactly pleasant or friendly, "normal, polite." One evening Delgado shot his mother and set her on fire. Then he shot six neighbors "with absolutely no change of expression."

Finally, after dining alone at a fashionable restaurant he shot and
killed nineteen of the restaurant's other patrons. Before starting to
eat Delgado had calmly told his waiter that he "had something very
personal to celebrate." After the massacre was over, police shot
Delgado, and members of the social audience were left to puzzle over
how reality might have looked to the man responsible for the "biggest
purposeless mass murder in Columbian history."

The emphasis in these descriptions on the killer's strange way of
perceiving the world points to an additional implication of the term
"motiveless murder." Often, a speaker's use of the term is an index of
his inability to fathom the killer's phenomenological perspective. "We
call a crime motiveless," writes Colin Wilson, "if it seems to do no
one any good" [emphasis added]" (Wilson, 1983, p. ix). In such cases we
are left wondering, How would the killer need to perceive the world in
order for his murders to strike him as acts worth performing?

Many commentators caution against assuming that the decision to
commit multiple murder is prima facie evidence of insanity or mental
"disease." Restak (1988), for example, contends that most serial
killers "do not fit any of the definitions of insanity employed
anywhere in the world" (p. 309). Leyton (1986) argues the same
position. And psychiatrist Thomas Szasz insists that it is indefensible
to call anomalous behavior "sick" and then assume that we have
successfully met the challenge of explanation: "By codifying acts of
violence as expressions of mental illness, we neatly rid ourselves of
the task of dealing with criminal offenses as more or less rational
goal-directed acts, no different in principle from other forms of
conduct" (quoted in Clark, 1982, p. 3).
If it is true that a large number of multiple murderers cannot legitimately be said to suffer from mental "illness," then what sense can we make of their decision to kill? Is it conceivable that for some perfectly "sane" people, killing itself is a source of satisfaction? Are there people like those in whom the cultural anthropologist Leyton (1986) claims a primary interest, people "who...kill for its own sake,...for whom killing alone is the apparent goal" (pp. 24-25)? Murders described as "motiveless" are often acts which force members of the social audience to contemplate these difficult questions.

The notion of murder "for its own sake" is often implied in the literature on multiple murder. The disturbing possibility is the same one suggested in Anthony Burgess' novel Earthly Powers (1980):

"Violence needs no pretext. It is good in itself like the taste of an apple: it is built into the human complex" (p. 689). Killing people, according to this current of thought, need not net for the killer any sort of material advantage. He may simply like killing, find in it a source of intrinsic satisfaction. Consider several examples of texts which advance some variation on this idea.

Levin and Fox (1985) recount the case of a New York City youth who explained to a judge that he had murdered six people because doing so made him feel "happy." Green (1980) titles one chapter in his survey of infamous criminals "The pleasure principle: killing for kicks." Stack (1983) suggests that serial killer Jerry Brudos murdered young women because he found it "fulfilling" (p. 17). And Schwartz-Nobel (1987) writes that many observers at the trial of Jay Smith, the Pennsylvania high school principal convicted of murdering a woman and her two
children, rejected the conventional idea of "motive," believing instead that Smith "simply enjoyed killing and would murder without a motive" (p. 288).

The idea appears in fictionalized accounts of murder as well. The serial killer in a recent popular film is described as unlikely to stop killing since "he's got a genuine taste for it" (Mann, 1985). Investigators in Weissman's (1979) fictional account of San Francisco's still unsolved "Zodiac" murders conclude that the murderer's primary motivation is "the sheer thrill of killing" (p. 94). And in his novel about multiple murderer H.H. Holmes, Bloch (1974) has the woman who has been Holmes' confidante and accomplice say to him, "It's almost as if you like [killing] for its own sake" (p. 183).

In summary, then, "motiveless" murders are often those committed by sane, apparently rational individuals who seem to gain nothing, at least nothing material, from their acts. Revitch and Schlesinger (1981) hypothesize a "purely endogenous" (internal) motivational locus for such acts, often completely inaccessible to observers. Holmes and DeBurger (1986) convey a similar idea when they contend that certain murders must be understood as "expressive" rather than instrumental.

In a sense, of course, all acts of killing are expressive of something, for example patriotism, greed, jealousy, hatred, or low self-esteem. "Expressive of what?" is a question which observers generally feel able to answer with a fair degree of confidence when they are challenged to decide the meaning in an act of murder. When the answer seems especially elusive, when there seems to be a strikingly wide chasm dividing the phenomenological perspectives of the killer and
the community of interpreters, then the killer's acts might be described as "motiveless."

The Apparent Lack of Design or Pattern

In a recent study described by its author as "an inquiry into narrative," Polkinghorne (1988) suggests a way of interpreting what we mean when we describe a human event as "senseless." "The difficulty stems...," he writes, "from a person's inability to integrate the event into a plot whereby it becomes understandable in the context of what has happened" (p. 21). This perspective is clearly relevant to our consideration of contexts in which certain murders are constructed by interpreters as "motiveless" or "senseless" acts. Often those descriptions occur for precisely the reason Polkinghorne states. Observers are unable to fit the acts in question into a comprehensible narrative structure. Like the eight murders committed by Scotsman Peter Manuel, the acts appear to have "no theme, no pattern" (Lustgarten, 1968, p. 153).

An example of a crime which seems divorced from a coherent narrative structure is the multiple murder recounted in Capote's (1965) In Cold Blood. Even after Dick Hickock and Perry Smith have confessed to killing the Clutter family, an investigator assigned to the case realizes that he still cannot comprehend "exactly what happened." The confessions, "though they answered questions of how and why, failed to satisfy his sense of meaningful design [emphasis added]." To the investigator the crime seems "a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act." It is almost, he thinks, as though the victims had been struck by lightning (p. 245).
Several years ago there appeared in *Time* magazine an article on multiple murder headlined "The Random Killers" (Starr, 1984). Indeed in the literature on multiple murder one often senses a tacit acceptance of what the young attorney in Daley's (1985) *Hands of a Stranger* embraces as an article of faith: "the random nature of violence" (p. 170). Obviously related to the link Polkinghorne suggests between narrative incoherence and constructions of "senselessness," the notion of randomness often accompanies the description of murder as a "motiveless" or "senseless" act. Stack (1984), for example, describes a type of killer who began to appear with increasing frequency during the 1970's as the "random, senseless murderer" (p. 37).

Particularly when an act of murder strikes observers as completely divorced from any interpersonal relationship between the killer and the person he kills, the act may seem random, as though any victim might have served the killer's obscure purposes as well as any other. Brophy's (1966) description of the Victorian poisoner Neill Cream suggests the orientation often ascribed to the individuals who commit such acts. Cream, writes Brophy, "had the desire and intention to kill but it was not directed against any particular person or persons" (p. 62). It is this apparent lack of any discernable pattern or focused intent that observers sometimes try to capture with the term "motiveless murder."

"Compulsivity" and Constructions of Motivelessness

It is widely believed that certain killers are unable to exercise conscious control over their urge to kill. For example, a psychiatrist testifying in the murder trial of John Wayne Gacy stated her conviction
that Gacy could not have refrained from murdering his last victim (there were thirty-three altogether) even if there had been a policeman standing in the same room with him (Sullivan, 1983). A number of commentators (for example Egger, 1985; Graysmith, 1986; Norris, 1988; Revitch and Schlesinger, 1981) have suggested that many individuals who commit multiple murder are under the sway of a "compulsion." These killers, they say, feel driven to kill, even though they may not understand the reasons why. The term "motiveless murder" sometimes reflects the notion that certain killers, including some who may not strike observers as the least bit odd, can no more be considered voluntary agents than can a "watermelon seed" (Norris, 1988). It is pointless to speak of a motive, at least a conscious motive, for the acts of murder these killers are "compelled" to commit.

It should be noted in passing that not all commentators grant that there is any such thing as a "compulsive" murder. Wertham (1949), for example, whose several studies of violence are justifiably famous, argues that "compulsions play no role in criminal acts" since compulsions are always "unimportant and harmless acts." Always, he says, it is "bad psychopathology to speak of a compulsive murder" (pp. 13-14).

This dispute is probably as much about semantics as about substance. At any rate its resolution is beyond the scope of this discussion. The point deserving emphasis is that frequently in the literature of murder, the idea of "compulsivity" appears related to constructions of "motivelessness."
Political and Pragmatic Considerations

Finally, describing a murder as motiveless has political and pragmatic implications. Why is it that the term "motiveless murder" has achieved greater currency during the past three decades than ever before? It seems likely that the term's increased popularity reflects more than a simple change in the statistical frequency of certain crimes. It is at least possible that parties with something to gain from promulgating the idea that a motive cannot be identified for certain crimes have been gaining an advantage over parties with a stake in demonstrating that those same crimes can be tied to a specifiable motive.

The most obvious representatives of the former group are law enforcement officers who, like the investigator in the movie version of *In Cold Blood*, have traditionally linked the discovery of a motive with the capture of a culprit: "If we find the motive, we find the killer." According to a recent article which describes a motivational model for conceptualizing sexual homicide, "motiveless murder" is a descriptive term often used to express the frustration law enforcement officers experience when they are confronted with the challenge of solving a particular kind of crime, the kind where they possess "virtually no clues about the murderer's motive or identity" (Burgess et al., 1986, p. 251). It may be that for law enforcement officers, the description of some crimes as "motiveless" has been an attempt to account for the fact that between 1960 and 1980, the percentage of solved homicide cases in the United States declined from ninety to seventy-six percent (Holmes and DeBurger, 1985). Officers whose identification of a suspect
depends on the availability of a motive can hardly be expected to perform as well when part of their caseload consists of "motiveless" homicides.

Representing the latter group, individuals with a stake in identifying a motive even in those cases where there seems not to be one, are criminal prosecutors. Their job is to link the defendant and the crime with which he is charged in such a way that members of a jury will feel that a conviction is justified. The prosecutor's challenge is described clearly in one account of an older case, that of Leopold and Loeb, the so-called "thrill killers" who murdered Bobby Franks in 1924. Recalling in his autobiography the difficult problem faced by prosecutors trying to establish that he and Dick Loeb were guilty as well as sane, Nathan Leopold (1958) writes:

> The prosecution saw its airtight case beginning to crumble — to crumble in the face of one missing element: an understandable motive for the slaying. There just wasn't any. They tried money as a motive; it didn't stand up. But if there wasn't any motive — any reasonable, intelligible motive — wasn't that prima-facie evidence that Dick and I couldn't be mentally and emotionally sound? They had to find one somehow.... (p. 77)

The prosecutor in a more recent multiple murder case describes his recognition of that same practical necessity: "Whoever prosecuted [multiple murder suspect Ronald DeFeo, Jr.] needed a concrete motive to show the jury. In effect, he had to be able to say, 'Look, there it is —that's the reason Ronald DeFeo, Jr., murdered his family'" (Sullivan and Aronson, 1981, p. 64).

Sometimes, practical necessity notwithstanding, prosecutors are forced to capitulate; they simply are not able to identify a plausible
motive. This was the case in the trial of Juan Corona, accused in 1971 (and eventually convicted) of having murdered twenty-five vagrants and migrant workers in Yuba City, California. The attorney prosecuting Corona reluctantly conceded the defense's claim that no believable motive had been identified. He added, however, that ten psychiatrists could work for years questioning someone suspected of committing twenty-five murders "and still not come up with an answer" (Kidder, 1974, p. 239). But the Corona case is an exception. The point I wish to emphasize is that on some occasions, the identified motive behind a puzzling murder might need to be understood as a construction resulting from pragmatic or political pressure to fit apparently unconnected characters and events into a coherent narrative.

Overview and Summary

Use of the term "motiveless murder" may imply one or some combination of the questions and implied meanings discussed in this chapter. Is it possible that certain human acts, particularly certain murders, cannot be understood? Are there some murders that we should not even attempt to understand? Can the phenomenological world of a person who strikes others as unremarkable be in fact so strange and idiosyncratic that points of entry to it are all but unavailable? Is it meaningful to speak of random behavior? Of random acts of murder? If a killer's acts can be accurately described as "compulsive," of what, if anything, are they the result? Are they then "motivated" in the same sense that voluntary behavior is motivated? And finally, to what extent do our frameworks for understanding the motivational dynamics of
violent crime reflect political and practical aspects of law enforcement? Regardless of which implied meaning is intended, to call a murder "motiveless" is to challenge our ability to understand, explain, and otherwise "solve" it. Perhaps the increased references to "motiveless murder" over the past three decades have signalled a recognition that our previous "vocabulary of motives" (Mill, 1940) for discussing homicidal behavior has not been, or at least is no longer, adequate. In that sense, the term's currency may be a harbinger of progress. Perhaps, to borrow a conceptual tool from Piaget, "motiveless murder" represents an intermediate stage in a process of cognitive accommodation, a new if imprecise category for organizing information which cannot be assimilated into the old categories. Or, to state roughly the same point another way, "motiveless murder" may be what Leiter (1980), an ethnomethodologist, terms a "residual category." Such categories are used for phenomena not adequately specified by established theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

A Prototype: The Case of Dennis Nilsen

In his recent study of the ways in which cognitive categories reflect the efforts of individuals and entire cultures to structure information about nature and about human action, Lakoff (1987) argues that in order to organize the richly variegated instances of a phenomenon, the mind calibrates the relative distance of each from an "idealized cognitive model" or a "prototype effect." The result, according to Lakoff, is that multiple instances which resemble the "ideal" to a greater or lesser extent go under the same name: house,
for example, or salad, or motiveless murder. Each instance can be understood as fitting more or less neatly into the prototype category, depending on its relative distance from the ideal.

To conclude this exploration of what nuances of meaning attach to the term "motiveless murder," I will present in summary what Lakoff might regard as a prototype of the category. In the case of Scottish multiple murderer Dennis Nilsen are represented all of the challenges and questions alluded to in the preceding discussion. For the following synopsis, I have relied heavily on accounts of the Nilsen case provided by Wilson (1983) and Masters (1985).

To fellow civil servants at the Jobcentre where he had worked for eight years in central London, thirty-seven-year-old Dennis Nilsen seemed ordinary enough: an efficient worker, a committed activist for left wing political causes, talkative but protective of his privacy, at times a little arrogant, given to occasional displays of sentimentality. Nilsen’s co-workers were understandably shocked when, in early 1983, following a complaint from one of Nilsen’s neighbors that toilets in their building wouldn’t flush, police discovered human flesh clogging the pipes and detained Nilsen as a suspect in fifteen murders.

A hypersensitive boy who grew up in the home of his maternal grandparents before joining his mother and her second husband when he was nine, the young Nilsen struck those who came in contact with him as somewhat withdrawn and brooding, perhaps having the temperament of a budding artist. His central emotional attachment during early childhood was to his grandfather, a stern puritanical fisherman whose sudden
death when Dennis was five seems to have triggered in the boy an obsession with physical transformation, and also an almost pantheistic longing for self-disintegration and merger with some impersonal natural force.

Later, Nilsen would write in his prison journals, "[My grandfather] took the real me with him under the ground and I now rest with him out there under the salt spray and the wind in Inverallochy Cemetery" (Masters, p. 47). In other prison notes describing his emotional experience in the aftermath of his grandfather’s death (which, perhaps significantly, was initially described to him by relatives as temporary), Nilsen writes of a deep pain beneath the placid exterior he presented to surviving members of his family:

On the rocks I stood gazing at the all-powerful restless sea. I felt very akin to that great force, we reciprocated in a spiritual affinity of great love and great fear. I would stand for some time with a tear-filled face looking out there for [my grandfather] to come and comfort me....I am always drowning in the sea...down amongst the dead men, deep down. There is peace in the sea back to our origins....When the last man has taken his last breath the sea will still be remaining. It washes everything clean. (Masters, 1985, p. 49)

At age fifteen, Nilsen began a twelve-year stint in the army. In 1972, following his discharge, he returned to London where he worked briefly, first as a policeman and then as a security guard, before assuming in 1975 the position at the Jobcentre he held until his arrest eight years later. He committed the first of his fifteen murders in December, 1978.

Nilsen’s crimes are among the most horrifying on record. Most of his victims were young men, some but not all of them homosexual like
Nilsen himself; and before being murdered most of them willingly accompanied Nilsen to his flat and apparently spent hours of congenial time with their host. Almost always, there was heavy drinking involved. After killing his companions (and in his book, *Killing for Company*, Masters [1985] proposes that companionship was what Nilsen desired more than anything else), Nilsen frequently engaged in ritualistic bathing of the corpses, sometimes cut them into pieces and boiled bodily parts on the stove, at least once propped up a corpse in a chair and continued his evening as though still in the company of an acquaintance, and occasionally even slept with the body of a deceased victim.

Even among cases which have earned the designation "motiveless," Nilsen’s stands out as one of the most perplexing. This handsome, articulate man whose private conduct was so aberrant impressed co-workers as not the slightest bit "crazy." Up to and including the day of his arrest, which came as no surprise to him, Nilsen struck others as conscientious, politically committed if socially aloof, reliable, kind, and in total control of himself. As Masters points out, it would never have occurred to anyone who knew him to describe Nilsen as a "psychopath" (ie., without conscience, exploitative, emotionally shallow), and he showed absolutely no signs of being psychotic.

I recognize that for purposes of this synopsis I have painted Nilsen’s story with a very broad brush. However, that rough portrait may be sufficient since for now, I wish only to consider, in very general terms, the challenge involved in attempting to understand the crimes Nilsen committed. And it is important not to overlook the fact
that even as the collection of bodies under his floor, in his cupboard, and buried in his backyard continued to grow, Nilsen worked, entertained casually at his apartment, and generally functioned as effectively as do many people for whom the thought of murdering anyone is incomprehensible. Masters poses the core questions:

Does this ability [to carry on despite his murderous activity] display callousness and indifference, or merely a practical grasp of what had to be done? Most murderers are ordinary, banal people faced with the consequences of an extraordinary event. Is Dennis Nilsen one of them, or does his story set him apart as an unfeeling creature of scarcely human dimensions? (Masters, 1985, p. 134)

For my brief consideration of these and several related questions, I will quote extensively from the detailed and highly personal prison writings which Nilsen made available to journalist Brian Masters. They provide perhaps the most detailed record in existence of a multiple murderer’s effort to come to terms with who he is and what he has done.

Although the details Nilsen provides suggest that the murders themselves were repetitious and ritualistic, almost mechanical; when viewed in the larger context of his life, they do not seem part of a predictable pattern of events. Some victims were homosexual; some were not. Some were people Nilsen liked very much; others were casual pickups for whom he cared little if at all. Few (Nilsen contends none) of the murders were premeditated, though the intelligent, alert Nilsen surely realized after a time that in many instances when he picked up someone at a bar, that person ended up dead. Often, however, the outcome was very different. On one occasion when he realized that a companion he thought he had killed was still alive, Nilsen worked for hours to revive him, eventually accompanied him to a bus stop, and
parted expressing his hope that perhaps they could remain friends. On another occasion, he apparently made some move to strangle an acquaintance who was sleeping in his apartment. The victim, for whom red marks around his throat were the sole clues that while he had been in a drunken sleep any such thing had happened, later remarked of Nilsen in court, "He seemed a fairly reasonable man and in no way strange" (Masters, 1985, pp. 163-4). Masters’ conclusion after studying the crimes? "There is no unifying thread of behavior either during the murders or after them; similarities occur between some of them, and are not repeated in others" (p. 115).

In his journals, Nilsen seems determined to arrive at some explanation which might render his behavior coherent, meaningful in some way. Cameron and Frazer (1987) note that one after another, Nilsen considers "all our culture’s categories" (p. 151) as he tries to come up with a narrative that makes sense. Since the yield of a multiple murderer’s engagement in this sort of introspection is rarely available, I will quote at some length from Nilsen’s writings:

I wish there was a clear view on motive, conventionally speaking, then I could come to grips with the problem. Sex maniac? (I suppose I could lie and say they refused to have sex and I killed them.) No, that’s not true. Robbery? No, impossible. Sadism? No, the thought of receiving or inflicting pain is abhorrent to me. Necrophiliac? The thought of sex within the sacredness of a dead body turns me right off. Hate or vengeance? No, I can’t remember any hateful feeling to any one of them. Insanity? No, I don’t feel insane.
(Masters, 1985, p. 142)

I would never plan to kill anyone....The only similarity was a need not to be alone. It was to have someone to talk to and be with....I sometimes imagine that I may have felt that I applied a relieving pressure on a life as a benevolent
act, in that the subjects were ultimately free from life's pain. (Masters, 1985, pp. 141-2)

There is no disputing the fact that I am a violent killer under certain circumstances....It would be better if my reason for killing could be clinically defined, ie, robbery, jealousy, hate, revenge, sex, blood-lust, or sadism. But it's none of these....Am I a wicked person, constantly under pressure, who just cannot cope with it, who escapes to reap revenge against society through the haze of a bottle of spirits? Maybe it's because I was just born an evil man. (Masters, 1985, p. 215)

I can't think of any slot to place myself in!
I can't begin to grasp it. (Masters, 1985, p. 141)

Nilsen’s case is representative of those murder cases which most confound members of the social audience. The lack of discernible pattern that frustrated police trying to piece together the puzzle of Nilsen’s crimes has already been noted. The other shades of meaning often implied in the descriptor "motiveless" are present here, too. There is likely to be a sense among many observers that an explanation so implausible as "killing for company" is no explanation at all; and even if one is willing to accept Masters’ argument, there remains a sense of the striking lack of proportion between Nilsen’s aim and his actions. Of course, there are those like Bruno Bettelheim who might see in Nilsen, as in Hitler, a grotesque realization of an extreme human possibility the prolonged contemplation of which can never provide insight sufficient to offset the possibility that the beholder might become spiritually or emotionally stunted by the experience. Others will argue that in spite of Nilsen’s apparent willingness to cooperate actively in attempts to uncover the motivational dynamics underlying his conduct, no explanation will satisfactorily answer the question
"Why?" And finally, although Nilsen resembled those around him in so many ways, and not just physically, there is the extreme difficulty, even if one elects to try hard, of entering into his phenomenological world. The distance to the vantage point from which it might be possible to share Nilsen's perspective seems incalculable.

I have outlined the Nilsen case because it seems to me paradigmatic — an "idealized cognitive model," to use Lakoff's term — of those murder cases which pose the most profound challenges to our available explanatory frameworks. Since the term "motiveless murder" has no precise referent, readers may find it helpful to keep the case in mind throughout the remaining chapters of this study.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE:
SELECTED FRAMES FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF MOTIVELESS MURDER

Introduction

An interpreter’s formulation of what an apparently unmotivated murder means will reflect the interpreter’s working resolution of certain foundational problems. For example: Are human beings essentially good? Evil? Engaged moment-to-moment in the process of improvising moral values? To what degree does human behavior result from the exercise of free will? From what source springs one human being’s desire to help other human beings? And, the flip side, from what source springs the impulse to do harm?

Of course these are exceedingly complex issues. In our efforts to arrive at working resolutions of them, belief mingles freely with "fact." The perspectives of religion and science are sometimes compatible, sometimes not. However, despite the striking absence of consensus about how to answer the questions, the questions themselves remain an absolutely central concern whenever we attempt constructions of what is "true" about the behavior of human beings.

It is obviously beyond the scope of the present discussion to examine any of these issues in detail. However, I have selected human aggression as a topic for further exploration. My reasoning is that the
problem of understanding aggression is more proximate to the problem of interpreting motiveless murder than is, say, the challenge of fathoming human nature, or of defining the limits of free will. Ultimately, however, all of these issues are inextricably linked. For example, one’s understanding of aggression reflects one’s understanding of human nature. And similarly, one’s understanding of human nature reflects one’s understanding of God. And so on.

The movement backward through antecedent meaning constructions can render the attempt to dissemble any form of social understanding infinitely regressive. My decision to focus on one intermediate stage in a complex meaning-making process is perhaps best regarded as a concession to practical considerations such as limited time and limited space. The principle purpose of this discussion of aggression is to underscore how important our working resolutions of foundational questions are when we set out to interpret the significance of complex human events—like motiveless murder.

Siann (1985) points out that to some extent, a person is revealed by his perspective on the roots of aggression and violence. She points out, too, that different perspectives on aggression can prompt very different interpretations of a wide range of human activity. Underlying the discussion which follows is my assumption that the different perspectives from which people approach the interpretive problem of human aggression are at least partially responsible for the richly variegated patterns of rhetoric and representation that one finds in the literature on motiveless murder. The story one constructs in accounting for the thirty-three murders attributed to John Wayne Gacy,
the image one fashions to represent the unknown killer known as Jack the Ripper, the answer with which one responds to questions about criminal responsibility, the social policies one advocates for responding to the problem of serial murder: all of these activities are likely to be approached somewhat differently depending on whether one regards aggression and violence as, for example, instinctive in man, and so inevitable (a view shared by Freidians and ethological analysts like Ardrey [1961]; Fox [1982]; and Lorenz [1966]); or, at the other extreme, as forms of self-expression chosen more or less freely from among various alternatives (a view more consonant with the existential/phenomenological perspective endorsed by commentators like Frankl [1959]; May [1976]; Szasz [1963]; and Wilson [1984]).

In his careful study of one murder case, Gaylin (1982) underscores the degree to which an individual's interpretation of such an event reflects his understanding of foundational questions like those raised above. Gaylin's subject is the crime which became widely known as the "Yale murder." Richard Herrin, a Yale undergraduate, bludgeoned his former girlfriend, Bonnie Garland, to death. It was decided after a period of extensive psychiatric evaluation that Herrin had been "sane" when he committed the crime. To those individuals who would attempt to construct the significance of Herrin's act Gaylin addresses these words of caution: "The same facts are available to all, except that the facts are almost unlimited, and different viewers will preselect those that are consonant with what their training and experience have told them to be crucial factors in shaping personality" (p. 315).
I want to make explicit what I will and will not attempt to accomplish in the following discussion. I will not attempt to survey the vast literature on aggression. However, for direction in making my way through a portion of the material that comprises it, I am particularly indebted to Fromm (1973), Kutash et al. (1978), and Siann (1985). Nor will I advocate one perspective on aggression over the others. Instead, I will describe five broadly-defined perspectives, each with relevance for illuminating some dimension/s of the social response to apparently motiveless violence. The discussion of each viewpoint will consist of two parts: first, a very brief overview of the perspective; then, a consideration of how selected approaches to and conclusions about motiveless murder might reflect the assumptions of that perspective.

To these qualifications about content I should perhaps add one about organization. Any effort to fit various viewpoints about aggression under broad headings — the "biological" perspective, for instance, or the "social" or "existential" perspective — is bound to be somewhat arbitrary. In most cases, a given viewpoint is distinguishable because of its emphasis on one level of explanation to the relative exclusion of others. Seldom, except when, as here, the primary intent is to present differing perspectives in some reasonably systematic way, is it productive to speak in terms of discrete categories.

A psychoanalyst himself, Gaylin (1982) describes an approach to thinking about the various perspectives that is perhaps typical of many commentators. The decision to emphasize one level of explanation is
regarded as largely pragmatic: "I take a dynamic approach to behavior. While I do not reject the chemical causes or the physiological base of emotions, at this stage in our understanding I tend to feel it is *more profitable* [emphasis added] to discuss behavior in dynamic terms" (p. 282). Throughout the discussion which follows it will be wise to keep this perspective in mind. Rather than the specific points which divide advocates of the various perspectives, of primary interest in the present context are the ways in which each general approach to aggression is reflected in the social project of interpreting apparently motiveless murder.

Finally, there is the matter of settling on a working definition of "aggression." In the interests of providing a stable frame of reference, I propose as a working definition the one adopted by Goldstein (1975): Aggression is "behavior whose intent is the physical or psychological injury of another person" (p. x).

**The Biological Perspective**

**Overview**

Generally speaking, the biological approach to aggression emphasizes the possible contribution of physiological processes and genetic factors to explaining why people behave in ways that are injurious to other people. Among the physiological substrates which have received most attention from researchers are the limbic system, epileptic seizures associated with the temporal lobe, cerebral trauma resulting from head injuries, various components of the autonomic nervous system (especially skin conductance level), assorted
biochemical processes, and a genetically-determined predisposition to behave aggressively or violently. (Perhaps deserving mention in this context, the sociobiological "synthesis" advocated by E. O. Wilson [1975, 1978], Dawkins [1976] and others holds that all forms of human behavior can be explained as a function of genetic makeup.)

No longer do most biological researchers imagine it possible to use physiological markers to identify "atavistic" or "congenital" criminals like those which early proponents of eugenics expected would emerge from families like the Jukes and the Kallikaks. However, among many advocates of the biological paradigm there remains a hardy belief that advances in our knowledge of how bodily processes work can profoundly affect the course of human history. For example, Moyer (1976) writes:

Man has always recognized that behavior can be changed by altering an individual's environment or his experience. It must now be recognized that behavior can be changed, sometimes drastically, by altering his internal milieu. That conclusion is now inescapable. The implications of this view of man are profound, and it will change history. (p. 284)

Of course not everyone shares Moyer's optimism. His point of departure biology's contribution to understanding those individuals in our society who commit multiple murder, Leyton (1986) offers a sharply differing perspective. Referring not only to Lombroso and the early eugenicists, but also to more contemporary biological researchers into the roots of criminality, he contends that the "pseudo-biological [original italics] school ...has long ago been revealed as ideology masquerading as science" (p. 264). Perhaps Leyton's verdict is unnecessarily harsh. He may be correct in implying that the biological
perspective is predicated on some often-unspecified ideological assumptions. He may also be justified in feeling that its findings are sometimes co-opted to lend tenuous support for an invidious ideological position. However, in neither sense is the biological paradigm a special case. Similar charges might be brought against any one of the widely-advocated approaches to understanding violence and aggression.

For purposes of the present discussion, of primary interest are the biological perspective's assumptions, stature, and influence, not its validity. Goldman (1977) may have been right over a decade ago when he wrote that "the scientific ledger in the biological study of violence consists mostly of now rejected hypotheses" (p. 44). And more recently, Cameron and Frazer (1987) have repeated a variation on the same claim: "Attempts to find biologically-based characteristics common to all, or even a significant number of those who commit...‘motiveless' crimes have proven notably unfruitful" (p. 76). However, regardless of whether or not their work has produced "fruitful" scientific conclusions, it is indisputable that researchers in this area have introduced into the public forum a number of provocative and highly influential ideas. The dissemination of many of these ideas has been facilitated considerably by a mass media "bedazzled" (Klama, 1988, p. 14) by the notion that even complex dimensions of human experience might one day be explainable in biological terms. There can be no doubt that the idea of a reliable relationship between biology and aggressive behavior continues to exercise a powerful influence on the public imagination. I will now consider several ways in which that influence
might extend to the interpretation of apparently motiveless acts of violence.

Implications

In a later chapter, I will examine the inconsistent use of proximate and distanc ing images in depictions of the motiveless murderer. The vacillation between these two kinds of images is most likely indicative of a widespread and profound uncertainty about the nature of the threat the murderer represents. In various forms, and with varying degrees of subtlety, the same basic question is posed over and over again: How is the motiveless murderer — say Dennis Nilsen, or Charles Manson, or Ted Bundy — best represented? In terms of the Other? As, for example, a personification of evil, an atavistic throwback to our animal past, an alien presence on the human stage, a freak of some sort? Or, in contrast, as the highly amplified expression of a distinctly human possibility, one that can be accounted for in terms of our "nature"?

Although not without irony, and I will return to the irony shortly, perhaps the primary effect of biological perspectives on aggression has been to encourage the "comforting tendency" to render violent individuals in terms of the Other, as creatures "at a remove from other human beings" (Siann, 1985, pp. 18-19). Unlike ethology, which in spite of its close kinship with biology I will discuss under a separate heading, and unlike psychodynamic formulations; the biological perspective on aggression has tended to promote the idea of a fundamental difference between violent and non-violent individuals.
Biology's tendency to render violent behavior in distancing terms has been manifest in a variety of ways. Because a large proportion of the evidence used to argue for various biological correlates of aggression has been obtained from research with animals, biological investigators (ethologists and many learning theorists, too) have made extensive use of analogies between animal and human behavior. If one assumes, as many biological researchers do, that humans are best understood as a more highly evolved form of animal life, the tendency to explain "inhuman" behavior as a vestige of an earlier more primitive stage of development is understandable. Of course whether the "animal" one imagines represented in such behavior resides outside the normal individual, in the form of the anomalous Other, or inside, in accordance with the "myth of the beast within" (Klama, 1988), is a further refinement of the question. I will suggest in subsequent sections of this chapter that both the ethological and psychoanalytic perspectives differ from the biological perspective in their common tendency to understand the threat as located inside even the "normal" individual.

The biological perspective has also provided support for the idea that even when casual inspection yields the conclusion that they are "sane," the Ted Bundy's and the John Gacy's of the world, people who commit apparently motiveless murder, must be "sick." According to this line of reasoning, even if we are unable to discover it, the key to the killer's deviant behavior resides in his body somewhere. The behavior is an outgrowth of "disease." As Keen (1986) points out in his illuminating study of how individuals and entire cultures employ
distinctive patterns of imagery in order to objectify and attenuate their feelings of vulnerability, images of "disease" often serve a distancing function. Keen writes: "Disease is largely considered something that strikes...from outside. The germ, like the enemy, is an outside aggressor that will overwhelm us [only] if we allow our defenses to wane....Evil comes from without" (p. 64). If the killer is constructed as "sick," it is possible to view him as someone whose body has been "taken over." The continued health of our own bodies is a goal over which we imagine that we can exercise at least a modicum of control.

Subsumed under this broadly-defined biological approach to aggression is the search for a genetic link to violent behavior. The notion implied by such a search is that certain violent individuals might best be understood as "mutants." Ever since its initial identification in 1961, the XYY chromosomal configuration has been at the center of this search. Of course the idea that the genes hold the key to a variety of antisocial behaviors did not begin in the 1960's. The idea, if not the terminology, is ancient. Its apotheosis before the modern popular audience came, however, during the late 1950's in the film adaptation of William March's novel, The Bad Seed. Viewers of this film realize before long that despite her charming facade, the story's 10-year-old protagonist is a calculating killer. And it is eventually revealed that the girl's biological mother is the unwitting carrier of a malignant genetic strain inherited from her own mother who, as it turns out, was a multiple murderer.
Of course the idea conveyed in the film has been conveyed many times since. Doris Lessing, for example, makes symbolic use of a variation on it in her recent novel *The Fifth Child* (1988). Members of the ordinary if somewhat insular Lovatt family are forced to confront evil as a tangible presence in their lives after the birth of Ben, the "fifth child." From the moment of his birth, Ben, presumably the product of a "bad seed," is described as repulsive looking, brutish, animal-like, impetuous, and violent. A parallel point of view is expressed in a recent novel about serial murder. An investigator best known for his uncanny ability to divine the thoughts of career killers dismisses out of hand the possibility that a killer he has apprehended might just be an "antisocial personality." To him, the killer seems better understood as "a monster... one of those pitiful things that are born in hospitals from time to time" (Harris, 1981, p. 62). And it is not only in fiction that these ideas appear. Around the time of Ted Bundy's execution in early 1989, the investigator widely acknowledged as the foremost authority on the case gave reporters this summary of why Bundy murdered over thirty young women: "I think he was born to kill" (Morgan, Nickens, and Lavin, 1989).

Whether or not a direct genetic link to antisocial behavior is ever conclusively established, the term "bad seed" has been assimilated into the vernacular. Many people find that the idea it stands for continues to provide a provocative and plausible framework for thinking about the conduct of certain individuals. Siann (1985) speculates about one reason why the notion of a genetic link to violence has such enduring appeal: it "releases society from any
responsibility" (p. 22). Mutants are born, not made. In a case such as that recounted by Meyer (1985), where two teenage boys attacked two twelve-year-old girls, killing one (a crime, according to Meyer, "without sense"), the appeal is likely to be greatest. The younger the killer, the more disturbing it is to imagine that he has "become" what he is.

A further implication of the biological approach to aggression is that it tends to create distance between the layperson and the pursuit of understanding. If it is levels of serotonin, or malfunctioning of the amygdala, or chromosomal configuration that constitutes the root cause of aggression, then there is little reason why the layperson should grapple, at least in this particular context, with the knotty but fundamental philosophical problems which form the core of existential understandings of aggression and violence. Implicit in the biological approach is an expectation that scientists working under controlled laboratory conditions will one day be able to account for varieties of violence that may now seem inexplicable.

Finally, I noted above that there is irony in the fact that biological perspectives on aggression have encouraged the depiction of violent criminals in terms of the Other - as predatory animals, as the carriers of some rare "disease," as the products of a "bad seed." The irony is this. On one hand, the biological perspective lends currency to the idea of "inexorability," or, in Siann's words, to the image of the "cold, calculating and relentless killer" (p. 19) who seems fundamentally different from other people and kills because of who he is. On the other hand, it implies the possibility of engineering
radical change in such a person, of controlling the threat which he represents.

Of course regardless of whether advances in biology pave the way for scientists to make fundamental alterations in who "they" are, for many people the question of who we are will remain open. As long as it does - as long, that is, as there remain radical differences in the ways people answer the foundational questions posed at the outset of this discussion - remaining open as well will be the question of how "normal" people such as we imagine ourselves to be are related to those among us who commit murder without apparent motive.

The Ethological Perspective

Overview

Ethology's warrant can be traced to Darwin's theory of evolution. Of course its adherents share fundamental assumptions with many researchers approaching the study of human behavior from what I have called the biological perspective. With roots in zoology and biology, ethology is concerned primarily with discovering how naturally occurring animal behavior can be understood in Darwinian terms; that is, as evidence of natural selection operating in the service of individual and species survival. Toward the goal of understanding behavior in this light, ethologists observe a given instance of behavior with four questions in mind: What releasing mechanism elicits the behavior? What role does the behavior play in the organism's development? What about the behavior is beneficial or adaptive? And, in what ways has the behavior evolved within the species (Hinde, 1982)?
As Siann (1985) points out, it has sometimes been difficult for the layperson to distinguish between "mainstream" and "popular" ethology. The difficulty has stemmed in part from the publication of immensely popular works by writers like Lorenz (1966), Ardrey (1961, 1966), and Morris (1968) which, while drawing on central tenets of the ethological perspective, have drawn fire from "serious" researchers in the field. Consider the example of Konrad Lorenz, generally credited with being one of the founders of ethology. Despite his work's popularity and influence, Lorenz' many critics have accused him of formulating spurious conclusions about the origin of human aggression from a hodgepodge of observations about conflict in various animal species (see, for example, the critiques contained in Montagu, 1968).

For my purposes, however, more important than the debates between these writers and their critics is the indisputable fact that certain aspects of the ethological perspective on aggression have become lodged in the popular consciousness. On Aggression (1966) has perhaps had as much to do with shaping that perspective as any other work, so for a synopsis of what I am calling the ethological approach to understanding aggression, I will turn briefly to Lorenz' bestseller.

In common with biological researchers, Lorenz contends that aggression is programmed into the neural/biochemical circuitry of animals and humans alike. He accepts as a given the existence of an aggressive "instinct." However, he allows that in human beings this instinct can be expressed in any number of ways. The ultimate form that expression takes will depend, he says, on the complex interaction among a variety of factors - learned social norms, for instance, as well as
"natural" evolutionary processes such as the development of "appeasement rituals" to mitigate the destructive consequences of intraspecies aggression.

Consistent with ethology's grounding in evolutionary theory, Lorenz bases his analysis of human aggression primarily on analogies with animal behavior. So, for instance, apparently "spontaneous" aggression at the human level is linked to the behavior of a cichlid fish which attacks his mate. Likewise, the tendency of human beings to aggress against humans belonging to other groups is linked to a similar tendency which Lorenz observes in rats. Of greater importance here than the specific content of his analogies is Lorenz' underlying assumption. Since humankind is a product of the same evolutionary processes governing adaptation or extinction of other species, common interpretive frameworks can be fitted to the behavior of animals and humans.

One of the ideas for which he is best known, the hydraulic model of instinctive energy buildup and discharge, Lorenz adapted from Freudian theory. Stated simply, the model describes an instinct, say aggression, as having a dedicated source of biologically-based energy which builds up over time and then must be discharged. Since the need to dissipate this energy is not tied to the presence of specific environmental factors, Lorenz contends that in addition to being inevitable, the expression of aggression is "spontaneous," and "rhythmic." Of relevance in the present context is Lorenz' further contention that if the energy "dams up" for lack of discharge, the
person in whom it has been allowed to accumulate might, if he is without insight and anything better to do, kill his best friend.

For obvious reasons, Lorenz counsels the need for society to systematically develop outlets for the constructive expression of aggressive energy. By this means, he says, it is possible to partially compensate for the fact that at a stage in human evolution where mass killing can be managed by remote control, human "appeasement rituals" like smiles and handshakes are no longer effective curbs on intra-species aggression.

Implications

It is first necessary to reiterate that the separation suggested here between the biological and ethological perspectives on aggression is a convenience, based on their different emphases rather than on differences in fundamental assumptions. In the brief discussion which follows, I will develop the idea that reflected in one popular understanding of murder is ethology's conception of aggression as an instinctive drive - in other words, as something "natural."

The pervasiveness of Lorenz' influence is attested to by a recent initiative organized to combat it. In 1986, an international group of scientists representing a variety of disciplines drafted the Seville Statement on Violence (see Landers, 1987). Since it was drafted the statement has been endorsed by a wide assortment of groups, including the American Psychological Association. While allowing for the possibility that aggression may be "natural," the Seville statement argues that it is scientifically inaccurate to regard warlike behavior as a genetic predisposition, or to assume that an instinct for
aggression survives in humans as the result of its natural selection as a particularly adaptive trait.

Of course the Seville statement will not succeed in eradicating what its authors consider a distorted conception of humankind. Reflecting the influence of both Freudian and ethological theory, man-the-aggressor has become a deeply ingrained image in contemporary Western culture. Klama (1988) has observed recently that "Much scientific analysis of aggression tends to reflect and, in turn, to reinforce popular beliefs in our culture about the intractability or even the inevitability of conflict" (p. 2). And Siann (1985) is only one among many commentators on research into violence and aggression to recognize that such beliefs can have important consequences: "It seems to me impossible to extricate a deep belief that aggression is largely innate, and therefore inevitable, from the political implications of that belief" (p. 225). Even if they are not overtly political, some implications of that belief have nevertheless had significant influence on the social project of interpreting apparently motiveless murder.

What follows from a belief that an instinct to kill is intrinsic to human nature? To some degree, such a belief serves to legitimize behavior that might otherwise be regarded as "inhuman." Like the psychoanalytic perspective with which it shares certain core assumptions, the ethological approach to understanding violence insists that we regard even a person who commits horrible crimes as "one of us." Just as important, it insists on the need for each individual to entertain a question on which few wish to dwell: Under what conditions, or more unsettling still, after the mere buildup of how much
undissipated aggressive energy, might I commit what others could regard as "irrational" acts of violence? For most people this is a disturbing question. It suggests that the sense we have of being in control of our behavior may evaporate without warning. The question's most profound influence perhaps stems from its subtle insinuation that we can never completely rely on the impressions we form of other people. It can certainly be argued that this skepticism about appearances has contributed to the nagging doubt people sometimes feel when they read accounts portraying the motiveless murderer as a case apart, an anomalous creature best represented with constructions of difference. Who can say with certainty that one's congenial neighbor is not a killer?

Lorenz' (and Freud's) use of the hydraulic model to describe dynamics underlying the accumulation and discharge of instinctual energy has particular relevance for understanding attempts to explain apparently motiveless violence. This model holds that if the accumulated energy cannot be dissipated in any other way, it may, in effect, "spill" out. The result might be seemingly irrational acts of aggression. One can discern the influence of this model in deFord's (1965) portrayal of killer Dick Loeb. According to deFord, Loeb's criminality was "congenital." DeFord also suggests, however, that in common with everyone else, Loeb possessed aggressive antisocial tendencies (instinctual energy) for which he needed to discover some sort of outlet. Most people, says deFord, might achieve the necessary catharsis by reading detective stories, or true crime accounts. For
Loeb, however, the pressure was greater than it is for the average person: "There was too much of it in him, and it overflowed" (p. 153).

The final point I wish to make about the ethological perspective on aggression is equally applicable to the psychoanalytic perspective, which I will discuss next. By positing a source of aggressive behavior outside the realm of observable experience — in humankind's animal ancestry (ethology) or in the unconscious mind (psychoanalysis) — both perspectives have made it more defensible for commentators to respond to the challenge of apparently motiveless murder by invoking what Lifton (1986) calls the "principle of unfathomability" (see Chapter Two). Recall the idea conveyed by this "principle," that certain acts of human violence cannot be explained, at least not in terms of discernible antecedent "causes." While perhaps these acts can be accounted for by the respective theories, their wellsprings may not be accessible to the methods of empirical research.

When "unfathomability" is accorded legitimacy, if only by implication, as a framework for thinking about the occurrence of apparently senseless violence, the pathway is cleared for the debate to shift from proof to polemics. Taking ethology as a case in point, a context is thus created for his critics to accuse Lorenz of being a right-wing ideologue intent on constructing a case for coercive social controls. Still without appeal to any "evidence" that is widely accepted as such, Lorenz can then turn around and argue that his critics are too personally threatened to accept as valid his "scientific" version of human nature (Siann, 1985). That the socially-negotiated parameters of the debate can accommodate such charges and
countercharges need not for present purposes be assessed as good or
bad, only recognized.

The Psychoanalytic Tradition

Overview

I have opted for the term "tradition" here rather than "perspec-
tive" in order to avoid the misleading suggestion that Freud and his
various followers all reason similarly about the sources and expression
of aggression. In fact, the topic has a long history of controversy
(see, for example, the diverse viewpoints contained in Goldman and
Milman, 1978; and in the review by Kutash, 1978). That Freud himself
occupies center stage in the psychoanalytic tradition is undisputed.
Adler, Jung, Rank, Fromm, Klein and other revisionists are still best
understood in relation to the perspective which provided them with
their point of departure. Of course Freud, too, was a revisionist, and
his thinking about aggression changed markedly over the course of his
career.

It would be presumptuous to attempt a synopsis of Freud's
personality theory, even though his thinking about aggression achieves
what coherence it has within that larger framework. For purposes of
this discussion, I will assume that the reader has a general
acquaintance with psychoanalytic concepts and theory. Against that
background, I will briefly describe several elements of Freud's
formulation which have been used frequently in accounting for the
sources and various forms of human aggression.
Not until relatively late in life did Freud assign aggression a primary role in his theory of personality development. In earlier formulations he had regarded it as derivative of the primary sexual instinct, a product of frustration experienced when during his formative years, the individual is unable to obtain satisfaction of basic, biologically-based needs. The later revision proposed the existence of two opposing instincts, Eros and Thanatos, the former involved in life-sustaining activities, the latter working primarily in the service of the individual's return to an earlier preorganic form. Freud regarded destructive aggression as an expression of Thanatos, the "death instinct."

It is necessary to pause briefly over Freud's three-part structural model of the personality. Representing everything with which the individual is endowed at birth, including the two sources of instinctual energy, the id acts only to satisfy instinctual demands. The ego develops later in response to the need for some accommodation between the id's selfish strivings and the requirements of external reality. And a further differentiation occurs when the superego develops as an internalized representation of moral authority.

Freud contended that the dynamic interplay among these three divisions of the personality determines the form in which the death instinct is ultimately expressed. As noted previously, destructive aggression originates in the id. The ego, serving primarily as an agent of the life instinct, directs such aggression outward. The superego, on the other hand, seeks to preserve society by redirecting the aggression inward. A framework is thus established for understanding various
manifestations of destructive aggression in terms of the equilibrium or
disequilibrium among these three aspects of the personality.

Also important for understanding the psychoanalytic approach to
aggression is Freud’s emphasis on the unconscious. Freud believed that
only a relatively small portion of the material comprising an
individual’s mental life enters awareness. The rest, including
unresolved conflicts and socially unacceptable impulses, remains in the
unconscious. Though Freud contended that without intensive
psychoanalytic therapy the individual has little access to it, he
argued that this unconscious material exerts a strong influence on all
aspects of the individual’s behavior. His every act is regarded as
psychically "determined." Spence (1988) makes the point that as soon as
one embraces the reality of Freud’s concept of the unconscious, the
notion of "motiveless" behavior, including motiveless murder, becomes
unteenable:

If the Unconscious truly does exist, then there
is always the potential for explaining all apparent
discontinuities in behavior. If the Unconscious is
always at work, then there is no such thing as a
random act or a piece of behavior that "doesn’t make
sense"; the limitation lies only in our understanding. (p. 69)

For an illustration of how Freud’s notion of psychic determinism
has insinuated itself into the public understanding of murder,
especially murder that seems "senseless," I would like to reference a
recently published letter to the columnist Ann Landers ("For some,
sanity is gone in a snap," 1988). According to the letter-writer’s
account, on one occasion she very nearly committed murder. Had she
carried out the act she describes contemplating, it might well have
earned the designation "motiveless murder." Her account is worth quoting at some length:

It happened one evening while I was watching TV with my husband. The children were asleep upstairs. Suddenly I wanted to kill the neighbors. Not because I was angry with them, but simply because I wanted to kill somebody.

I felt as if I were two people. One person was a coldblooded killer who wanted to kill just for the thrill of killing. The other was terrified and sick at the thought of it. Had I lost control of myself, nothing could have stopped me.

There is a happy ending to my story, Ann. I went immediately to a psychiatrist. He told me that for many years I had repressed the anger toward my mother and later toward my husband. The stress in my life had triggered the urge to kill. Since I was unable to direct that anger toward my mother or my husband, I subconsciously aimed it toward innocent, defenseless people.

Lander’s reply? "Your letter could have been written only by a 'witness.'"

On a recent television special, talk show host Geraldo Rivera offered a comment which, like Lander’s reply, has the effect of legitimizing this way of thinking about certain apparently inexplicable acts of murder. Some such acts need to be understood, he implied, as the desperate expression of intensely felt, but denied, emotions. When those emotions go unexpressed, they "can boil over anywhere, anytime" (Rivera, 1988). Of course Rivera’s comment reflects the assumptions of the "hydraulic" model, used by ethologists and analytic theorists alike to describe the "overflow" process through which undissipated instinctual energy gets discharged (see the related discussion under "The ethological perspective").
Among Freud's most significant contributions is his understanding of childhood. Wordsworth had written less than a century before Freud that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!" ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality," line 66) To Freud, early childhood was instead a time of intense conflict and psychological vulnerability. Where Wordsworth had imagined "clouds of glory" attending the infant's birth, Freud proposed instead a set of raging instincts the demands and satisfaction of which express the fundamental purpose of the unsocialized individual life. Since Freud's radical reconceptualization, many clinicians have focused their attempts to understand the roots of adult pathology by searching backwards for evidence of unresolved developmental conflicts. In the words of Yochelson and Samenow (1976), after Freud "an adult was to be understood and treated in relation to the child he had been" (p. 79).

The Oedipal complex is perhaps the most famous of the childhood conflicts which Freud described. Its outline is familiar enough. By her early care of his body, the mother becomes her son's first seducer. When, at around age three, the boy begins to experience pleasurable sensations in his penis, he fantasizes a sexual relationship with his mother. His father is perceived at this point as a rival to be overcome. If the Oedipal conflict is resolved constructively, the boy eventually manages a symbolic union with his mother through identification with his father. Abrahamsen (1985), Cheney (1976), Freeman (1955), Geha (1975), and Wertham (1941) are among the many writers who have explained acts of apparently motiveless murder in terms of unresolved conflicts traceable to the Oedipal period.
Of course other concepts deriving from the psychoanalytic tradition have figured, too, in attempts to account for apparently motiveless violence. For example: Jung’s concept of the "shadow" has been invoked to account for serial killer Ted Bundy’s description of the "entity" responsible for his acts (Holmes and De Burger, 1988, p. 133). Lifton (1986) has drawn on Rank’s description of the opposing self, the "double," as a framework for understanding how Nazi physicians could continue to think of themselves as healers while helping to orchestrate a program of genocide. And Kutash (1978) has suggested the relevance of Adler’s "will to power" for interpreting the acts of political assassins like Lee Harvey Oswald, Sirhan Sirhan, and Arthur Bremer.

Implications

Klama (1988) suggests that the primary importance of Freud’s writings on aggression lies in "their sanctioning before a wide public...the notion of the beast within" (p. 110). In the necessarily brief and very selective comments which follow, I will consider the implications of this most central among Freud’s many contributions to the ways we think about violence and murder.

Of course one implication of acknowledging a "beast within" is that a detached perspective from which to assess and pass judgment on other people, even people who may appear obviously "bad," is no longer available. The "badness" exists as a potential in everyone. To those individuals who might be inclined to regard the killer as some sort of alien, psychoanalyst David Abrahamsen (1973) addresses this caution: "Murder is part of our humanity" (p. 9). Elsewhere, Abrahamsen (1985)
remarks that "The beast lives in the breast of every man" and even suggests that the primary aesthetic appeal of Robert Louis Stevenson's story of Jekyll and Hyde is that it

appeals immensely to our magical wish to become, for a short while, evil beings who can perform violent deeds, and then, undiscovered, return to our normal, good selves without ever having to take responsibility for the evil we have done. (p. 187)

Writing from a similar perspective, Bromberg (1961) observes that "deep within the repressed layers of the psyche, every human is psychologically involved with murder." Furthermore, he says, "the crime of murder is present -- in potestia, lurking at times distorted, and at times undisguised in the human fantasy" (p. 3). Gaylin (1982) adds: "In Freud, instincts and feelings are never condemned...for we all share the same primordial unconscious. In our unconscious we are all killers, rapists, incestuous, exhibitionistic, voyeuristic, aggressive, and homicidal" (p. 156).

While still extremely influential, the psychoanalytic notion of an aggressive "beast" residing in each individual has lost its power to startle. In Compulsion, his fictionalized account of the 1924 Leopold-Loeb "thrill killing," Meyer Levin (1956) captures the highly personal sense of apprehension people felt in trying to grapple with the implications of Freud's ideas while they were still new. Following is Levin's description of what courtroom spectators experienced while awaiting psychiatric testimony during the highly-publicized trial:

Taken individually, I suppose everyone in the room would have agreed there was no excuse for the crime. And yet, it was clear that what all hoped for was to hear an excuse, an explanation. This could only be, I suppose, a reflection of some guilt that is in all of us, a fear that in the deepest unknown of
ourselves there exist capacities for doing what the boys had done. (p. 379)

Later, Levin offers this interpretation of the unease that attended the judge's announcement of his verdict:

There was a feverish having-to-know....I realize that it was not so much the act of decision that was awaited, not so much the who-wins, but the disposition, in terms of our own selves. In each there must have been identification; in each, the hidden sense that the disposition would symbolically apply to his own darkest impulse. (p. 473)

As these passages suggest, reality viewed through the lens of psychoanalytic theory does not permit the easy dismissal of anyone, even the worst murderer, as someone qualitatively different from other people. Perhaps the psychoanalytic tradition's most significant contribution to the social/psychological understanding of murder and other manifestations of "difference" has been in its rupturing of the barrier between "audience" and "exhibit." Now, according to Gaylin (1982), it is widely accepted that abnormal and normal behavior are connected "in a kind of continuous linked series of incremental changes" (p. 275). (For further amplification of the psychoanalytic approach to murder, see, for example, the studies by Abrahamsen, 1985; Guttmacher, 1960; and Tanay, 1976).

One vector resulting from this contribution of the psychoanalytic tradition has been an increased interest in how various meaning constructions reveal their creator/s. Keen (1985), for example, draws on Freud's concept of projection in attempting to understand the dynamics underlying our production of "enemy" images (for example, images of "murderers"). In effect, he says, such images mirror their creators since from the psychoanalytic tradition has emerged "the
undeniable wisdom that the enemy is constructed from denied aspects of
the self" (p. 11-12). Other writers sharing Keen's interest in the
complex and often ambiguous relationship between the "normal" and the
"grotesque" have made similar use of Freudian concepts. For example,
drawing like Keen on Freud's interpretation of projection functioning
in defense of the self, Twitchell (1985) has analyzed the imagery of
modern horror films. Similarly, Fiedler (1978) has discussed "freaks"
as embodying "myths and images of the secret self." Horror novelist
Alan Moore contends that this idea of projection is central to
understanding the internal structure and audience appeal of all horror
fiction since Freud: "We realize that we either are the monster or
we're creating the monster in some way. Either way, the horror comes
from inside: from our lust, from our fear, from our pain — all the
things that we haven't dealt with or sorted out" (quoted in Gilmore,
1988, p. 106).

How might the impact of Freud's ideas be summarized? Klama (1988)
suggests that as an explicator of human experience Freud is more
appropriately considered a poet than a scientist. He has provided,
according to Klama, "a new metaphysic for the interpretation of
everyday life" (p. 23). If not everyone has found Freud's "metaphysic"
to their liking, few would deny the pervasiveness of its influence. Of
course it is the "poetic" quality of his theorizing that has made Freud
something of a pariah among some contemporary psychologists. In a
critique of the psychoanalytic approach to understanding murder, Ellis
(1971) protests, for example, that Freud's theory "is so loosely stated
and its theoretical constructs are so inexactely tied to observable
evidence that, however plausible it sounds, it resists verification" (p. 124). Elsewhere in the same critique of Freudian theory, Ellis employs phrases like "totally unprovable gobbledygook" and "mumbo jumbo."

Other commentators, Gaylin (1982), for instance, see strength where Ellis sees weakness. Ellis seems to believe that by following Freud's storyline people will be lead away from what is most "rational" (and, presumably, most adaptive) to believe about themselves. Gaylin, on the other hand, himself a psychoanalyst, contends that Freud deserves to be considered, along with Christ, as someone whose "new story of why we do what we do" (p. 154) was so profound and powerful that it changed forever the very "reality" it was meant to describe. Employing another historical comparison, Gaylin writes, "As Copernicus shook the heavens, Freud shook man, and nothing since has looked the same" (p. 254). In his recent biography, Gay (1988) offers a perspective on Freud's influence that is only a shade more circumspect. He refers to Freud's pervasive impact on "Western culture as a whole, a culture whose sense of itself [Freud] transformed out of all recognition, forever" (p. xix).

Despite their different perspectives on the ultimate value of the story Freud told, Ellis and Gaylin join in acknowledgement of the story's influence. Nowhere has that influence been more keenly evident than in the widespread acceptance that even people who appear most "normal" harbor "the beast within," the presumed source of all that is "abnormal," including murder.
The Social Perspective

Overview

A wide variety of approaches to understanding aggression can be grouped together as "social" approaches because of their emphasis on aggression as a product of environmental influences: socioeconomic variables (e.g., Cohen, 1955), institutionalized cultural values (e.g., Holmes and De Burger, 1988; Nettler, 1982), role "models" (e.g., Bandura, 1973), systems of socially-sanctioned rules (Berkowitz, 1982; Marsh, Ross, and Harre, 1978), and subcultural norms (e.g., Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1962), for example. Again, it needs to be emphasized that few proponents of this perspective would deny the relevance of, say, biological factors for understanding certain aspects of aggression. Most would argue, however, that such factors are relatively unimportant compared to social-cultural influences which act to reinforce or legitimize aggression as a learned mode of responding.

Social theorists commonly discuss various aspects of aggression in the context of a broader concern with social conditions that contribute to "criminal" or "antisocial" conduct. They generally view aggression as one subcategory of antisocial behavior. I will cite several well-known theoretical frameworks to suggest the general orientation of these theorists.

Henry and Short (1964), for example, their theory based on the hypothesized link between frustration and aggression (Dollard et al., 1939), contend that homicide and suicide rates vary as a function of changes in a society's "external restraints" over individual behavior. Their theory suggests that when external restraints are high, blame for
individual problems will be externalized, and aggression will be
directed outward. Under such conditions, they predict, murder rates
will be high relative to suicide rates. Conditions of low external
restraint, on the other hand, will tend to encourage self-blame and, as
a result, lead to relatively high rates of suicide. Like many other
predominantly social approaches to understanding violence, Henry and
Short's theory focuses more on the expression than the etiology of
aggression.

Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1962) have suggested that certain
"subcultures" legitimize violent conduct which is not permitted by
society as a whole. In some situations, they say, violent individuals
are responding in accordance with the goals, standards of conduct, and
systems of reinforcement sanctioned within their more immediate social
milieu. Related to Wolfgang and Ferracuti's subcultural theory because
it, too, focuses on learned subcultural norms, Sutherland and Cressey's
(1955) concept of "differential association" attempts to shed light on
the question of why certain people become lawbreakers. Such individuals
have most likely been exposed, say Sutherland and Cressey, to a
disproportionately high number of "definitions" favoring criminal
conduct. As a result, they learn to behave in a way that violates norms
of the larger society.

Of course the central assumptions underlying these subcultural
theories also provide the foundation for Bandura's (1973) social
learning approach to understanding aggressive behavior. Consistent
with social learning theory, Bandura bases his analysis of aggression
on three closely related factors: how one learns aggressive modes of
responding (with an emphasis on the processes of modeling, imitation, and observation); how environmental cues activate those modes; and how certain patterns of reinforcement sustain the aggressive conduct.

Other commentators have sought an explanation for crime in the theory of "anomie" originally proposed by Durkheim in the nineteenth century and elaborated more recently by Merton (1949), as well as by Cloward and Ohlin (1960). Briefly stated, this theory interprets criminal behavior as a function of the disparity, real or perceived, between an individual's socially-sanctioned goals and the means available for obtaining them. According to the theory, when his aspirations are high and he feels thwarted in his efforts to achieve them, an individual may feel compelled to venture outside the limits of socially-approved modes of conduct in attempting to satisfy his wants. Frustration among individual members of the social order is hypothesized to be greatest when values and institutions are in a state of flux. These are broad theoretical frameworks. Each points to social factors underlying an individual's choice to pursue an "antisocial" or "deviant" mode of conduct. Destructive aggression is regarded as one such mode. Like the other general approaches to aggression outlined in this chapter, the social perspective implies the usefulness of fitting certain kinds of explanatory frameworks to the interpretive problem posed by apparently motiveless violence. I would now like to consider briefly how efforts to construct the meaning of such violence may reflect the influence of several currents of thought deriving from this social orientation.
Implications

The social perspective on human behavior insists that even individuals whose acts violate majority community standards have to be understood in relation to their social-cultural milieu. Not only does that milieu provide a setting for the acts in question, it also determines to a large extent the canons of interpretation used to construct what the acts mean. When it is viewed with these factors in mind, the interpretive challenge posed by apparently motiveless murder needs to be formulated with questions like these: To what extent can the perpetrator of such a crime be legitimately viewed as the product of environmental influences - the mass media, structures of opportunity, and so forth? Can the act of aggression be understood as a form of social communication addressed to a particular audience? When the murderer is seen as a social actor playing out a role that only makes sense when viewed alongside the roles played by other social actors, can his acts be seen as embodying larger cultural themes? Is there some sense in which even extreme acts of deviance are "functional" for the larger society in which they occur? In other words, is it possible that if the killer's role could somehow be eliminated, certain segments of society might be worse off? When parallel acts are committed by two actors, one occupying a more prestigious social niche than the other one, are both acts assigned the same weight in the scales of social justice?

All of these questions imply a central assumption. The individual citizen is best understood as involved in an uninterrupted "dialogue" with the society to which he belongs. Advocates of the social
perspective on aggression regard murder as a statement which can only be understood when it is considered in the context of that ongoing dialogue. In the comments which follow I will use several examples to highlight the way in which this basic assumption can influence the approach to, and the interpretation of, apparently motiveless violence.

Recall the description above of Durkheim's theory of "anomie." For an example of how the idea of anomie has been implied in attempts to "explain" certain acts of murder, consider Cassity's (1958) prologue to an account of the Leopold-Loeb case. Noting first that no one who heard courtroom testimony could possibly have concluded that the teenage boys were suffering from a severe mental disorder, Cassity continues,

The accused were apparently bi-products of a peculiar twist in our ever-changing culture. At that time (1924), the "sky was the limit." Gangsters were running the show in Chicago. Morals in adolescent circles were at an infamous low. The line between recklessness and crime seemed to be somewhat blurred. (p. 55)

Although he never actually uses the term "anomie," Cassity is clearly implying that Leopold and Loeb murdered Bobby Franks at least in part because they were experiencing a confusion of values and aspirations during a period of rapid social change. Crime historian Edgar Lustgarten (1976) makes a similar suggestion with reference to the series of murders committed in post-WWI Germany by Fritz Haarmann: "Economic and social institutions were dissolving - to produce the collapse of the Mark and the emergence of the Nazis; to foster and facilitate the vile career of Haarmann" (p. 196).

Research into the possible link between interpersonal violence and the mass media has clearly derived its impetus from the social learning
perspective on aggression. Social scientists disagree about how to interpret the findings of this research. However, it is frequently implied that either as a purveyor of fantasy and prevalent cultural themes, or as the vehicle by which individuals can achieve renown, the mass media plays an important role in creating a context for certain kinds of murder. A number of examples will illustrate the point.

Green (1980) repeats the explanation given in court for why Heinrich Pommerencke committed a series of brutal rapes and murders: Pommerencke, it was said, became "tensed up" after watching pornographic sex films (p. 187). C. Wilson (1984) recounts the case of Norman Smith, who in 1959 shot a woman through an open window in her house. Questioned later, Smith admitted that he had not known the woman. According to Wilson, "the impulse [to kill her] had simply come over [Smith] as he watched a television program called 'The Sniper'" (p. 12). A recent newspaper story suggests that a 15-year-old boy's impulse to bludgeon a classmate to death using a baseball bat may have formed as the result of viewing the videotape Faces of Death.

Apparently having had his curiosity aroused by the videotape, the youth committed murder "because he wanted to find out what it was like to kill someone" ("Boy, 15, handed life term, 1988). And Schickel (1985) cites Priscilla Johnson McMillan's analysis of America's "subculture of assassination." According to McMillan, the individual who assassinates a public figure tends to be a loner, someone who "lacking a sense of who he is, shops among artifacts of our culture — books, movies, TV programs, song lyrics, newspaper clippings — to fashion a character" (p. 378). Each of these examples points to the mass media as one
important social influence shaping a killer’s priorities, choices, and identity.

Also writing from a perspective that derives from social learning theory, other commentators contend that there exists between the media and certain killers a subtle complicity. By showering attention on murderers whose acts are especially gruesome or shocking, the media in effect holds out to other potential killers the promise of achieving the recognition that many so desperately seek. Capote (1973) reports that shortly after his capture one of the two men later convicted of the Clutter family murder asked, "Were there any representatives of the cinema there?" (p. 393). Reinhardt (1962) writes that while in jail following a murder spree that left ten people dead, Charles Starkweather asked anxiously, "How soon will [my autobiography] be published? What kind of cover? How many pages will it make? Will it be read in other languages?" (p. 120). C. Wilson (1984) describes the cases of two other murderers who were apparently equally determined to achieve celebrity at any price. After executing seven people in a Mesa, Arizona beauty parlor, Robert Smith explained, "I wanted to get known, to get myself a name." And after entering a hotel and killing a baseball player asleep in one of the rooms there, a young woman told police, "He was famous and I knew that killing him would make me famous too" (p. 12). In each of these cases it is implied that a person who was later declared legally "sane," capable at least of understanding the nature and consequences of killing, committed murder at least in part as the result of having learned that the media turns some killers into celebrities.
Not infrequently, the argument is made that murder committed for no apparent reason can be understood as reflecting another kind of "media" influence, the written word. Green (1980) notes that the fifteenth century French nobleman Gilles de Rais claimed to have learned the pleasure of torturing children from reading Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, especially the section devoted to Caligula. The conventional wisdom about Nathan Leopold and Dick Loeb (encouraged by defense attorney Clarence Darrow’s famous speech on his clients’ behalf) has long included the notion that at the time they murdered Bobby Franks, Leopold and Loeb were disciples of Nietzsche, under the sway of Nietzsche's idea that certain "supermen" cannot be expected to conform their behavior to the law (see, for example, Brophy, 1966; Levin, 1956; and C. Wilson 1969. Cassity, 1958, offers an opposing perspective.). The attorney who prosecuted Charles Manson made the influence of various Beatles’ lyrics a central element in his case. And, an additional example, accounts of the "Moors murders" committed by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley invariably include reference to the couple’s shared fascination with the literature of Sade and Nazism. Nettler (1982), for example, proposes a direct connection, remarking that "in their torture-kilings," Brady and Hindley "put into practice some of the ideas they had learned from the Marquis de Sade" (p. 138).

Leyton (1986) has argued that the only way to uncover the sense in most cases of multiple murder is to regard the killer as a rational social actor addressing a dramatic monologue to a segment of society he feels has excluded him. According to this perspective, most biological and psychological analyses miss the point. By not granting primacy to
the social context of the actor's monologue, advocates of those other perspectives sidestep, says Leyton, the challenge of deciphering what is in fact a perfectly rational social statement, albeit one delivered by an individual who feels desperately disenfranchised.

Like the psychoanalytic perspective, the social approach to aggression has emphasized the important constructionist role played by members of the social audience. As noted previously, writers like Fiedler and Keen, influenced by Freudian theory, have contended that to some extent we construct our images of "deviants" and "enemies" and "freaks" out of denied aspects of ourselves. Although more concerned with ideology and mechanisms of social control than with intrapsychic processes, the labelling perspective in sociology (see, for example, Becker, 1963 and Kitsuse, 1962) has in common with the psychoanalytic tradition a strong interest in the constructed character of social reality. Both orientations emphasize that social constructions, for example constructions of "deviance," or of "murder," must be understood as reflecting the needs and biases of their individual or collective creators. (The "functionalist" school in sociology, most frequently associated with Durkheim and Merton, includes a similar emphasis.)

What are the implications of the labelling perspective for the interpretation of apparently motiveless murder? Most significantly, the labelling perspective insists that as a part of the process of interpretation, we consider questions like these: Why, for many American citizens, does constructing the sense in Mark Essex's mass killing of white people he regarded as his oppressors (see Hemon, 1978) differ from constructing the sense in Lieutenant Calley's killing
of Vietnamese civilians? Is it possible that in some instances, behavior that is actually very similar is labelled differently and subjected to different processes of social valuation?

Of course the examples I have presented in no way capture the diversity of the many approaches which, for the sake of convenience, I have combined in a single group as "social" perspectives. The point I wish to emphasize here is of equal importance for all of the perspectives considered in this chapter. Selecting a predominantly social frame for organizing the elements of an apparently motiveless crime can be expected to offer observers a significantly different viewing experience than, for example, selecting a biological frame, or a psychoanalytic frame. To a far greater extent than these others, social frames insist that the observer trace connections between those elements in the picture, and other elements, near and more remote, in the larger social field of vision.

The Existential Perspective

Overview

The existential perspective on aggression and violence is distinguished by its emphasis on the aggressive actor. Determining what an aggressive act means is seen as possible only when the act is considered in the larger context of the individual actor's encounter with the challenges of existence.

Worth noting in this context is a position which stands in sharp contrast to the existential position. In an article critiquing the methods and epistemological assumptions that have guided the study of
multiple murder, Busch and Cavanagh (1986) state their conviction that
"The most common epistemological problem...is the assumption that
explaining the 'meaning' of the murder to the murderer is equivalent to
explaining why the murder occurred" (p. 11). Busch and Cavanagh see the
interpretive problem as only minimally involving the actor's
construction of the situation; in contrast, most existential writers
would see the actor's construction as the heart of the matter. Not
surprising in light of the existential focus on the individual actor,
many existential commentators evince a special concern with the
"phenomenology" of violence. Before looking at how several existential
writers have conceptualized aggression, it may be useful to pause
briefly over the term "existential."

Yalom (1980) suggests that an existential approach to
understanding human experience has as its focus the individual's
confrontation with four central challenges or "ultimate concerns" of
existence: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. Of course
Yalom's is only one among many statements of the existential
orientation. For present purposes, however, it will suffice as a frame
of reference. It captures the common interest of all existential
thinkers in understanding how each individual grapples with his
potentials, his limitations, and ultimately with the meaning of his
life. When the challenge of interpreting aggressive behavior is placed
within this broad philosophical context, the focus of our effort needs
to be on the individual's lifelong struggle to maintain personal
integrity, to withstand challenges to his sense of self worth, and to
develop a stable sense of personal identity (Siann, 1985). Inevitably,
according to this perspective, aggressive behavior reflects stresses experienced as part of this ongoing struggle. To further elaborate this approach to thinking about human aggression, I will cite the work of several well-known existential writers.

His point of reference the Nazi concentration camps, Frankl (1963) describes circumstances which might lead an individual to experience life as an "existential vacuum," devoid of meaning and without challenges worthy of his effort. Feeling unvalued, says Frankl, or perhaps simply bored and unstimulated, such a person might energize himself beyond passivity by developing a compensatory "will to power," one manifestation of which is destructive aggression. Understood in this way, aggression is an outgrowth of the individual's struggle to preserve a sense of himself as purposeful and capable of altering the circumstances of his existence.

Bronowski (1955) insists that if we listen closely, we can hear in acts of violence an individual's desperate "cry to be recognized." The struggle played out in aggression, he says, is the individual's struggle against insignificance. Castara is a god on Mount Olympus whose comments on the human situation occur throughout Bronowski's play, The Face of Violence, written following World War II. Contending that "violence has a human face," Castara summarizes in verse the conditions which may cause human beings to strike out in search of themselves:

Here is the moment of the dispossessed,
The sad anonymous
Whose grudge is that the world's indifferent;
Whom life has made a promise
It has not fulfilled.
They search the blank face of society
Toch (1969), another writer with an existential bent, has contributed a largely descriptive study of "violence-proneness," and of the contexts in which violence is most likely to occur. Highly critical of conventional attempts at understanding aggression, Toch argues that explanations which regard violence as a product of biological, economic, demographic, cultural, and psychiatric factors miss the point. Such explanations are inadequate, he says, and most of the suggestions which follow from them "would solve nothing." Consistent with his existential/phenomenological orientation, Toch contends that we can understand violence only if we can learn to see the world from the perspective of the "violent man." Ultimately, he writes, "violence occurs because men find it satisfying and effective in achieving their ends" (pp. 218-219). From this perspective, our challenge as would-be comprehenders of violence is to gain an understanding of the satisfaction such violence can produce for certain people.

May (1972) proposes a set of questions similar to those which Toch believes can point the way to an understanding of violence. For example: "What does violence do for the individual? What purposes does he achieve through aggression and violence?" (p. 39). Like the other existential commentators cited here, May believes that aggression is best understood in the context of an individual's attempt to overcome feelings of powerlessness and insignificance. By striking out, the person insists that he be accorded recognition, that he be acknowledged.
as unique, someone standing outside the crowd which the poet W.H. Auden
once described as consisting of "faceless Others."

C. Wilson (1961b, 1969a, 1972c, 1983), too, has written extensive-
ly from an existential perspective on the problem of contemporary
violence, especially murder. A synopsis of his central ideas is
contained in an essay entitled "Crimes of Freedom" (1985). He argues
that highly structured and impersonal societies contribute to inducing
in some individuals "a kind of mental strain based on boredom and
unfulfillment" (p. 224). Wilson sees Maslow's work on "peak
experiences" as a key to understanding what is missing in the lives of
violent people. Such people, according to Wilson, have not found a
constructive pathway through which to express the fundamental human
needs to grow, create, and live at a level of intensity beyond "the
indifference threshold."

Of course my sampling of existential viewpoints on aggression has
had to be extremely selective. Still, it suggests the general flavor of
analyses conducted from this perspective. Now I would like to consider
several ways in which this broadly-defined orientation has influenced
the study and interpretation of apparently motiveless murder.

Implications

A widespread interest in "the killer's own story" is perhaps the
most obvious indicator of the existential/phenomenological
perspective's influence on efforts to interpret the meaning in
motiveless murder. Toch (1969) states clearly the rationale underlying
this interest:
Ultimately, violence arises because some person feels that he must resort to a physical act, that a problem he faces calls for a destructive solution. The problem a violent person perceives is rarely the situation as we see it.... In order to understand a violent person's motives for violence, we must step into his shoes, and we must reconstruct his unique perspective, no matter how odd or strange it may be [emphasis added]. (p. 5)

Marsh, Rosser, and Harre (1978) base their analysis of "the rules of disorder" governing violent behavior among two subgroups in English society (soccer fans and disruptive students) on a similar assumption: "The best, though not necessarily the ultimate, authorities as to what [an] action 'actually' is, are the actors themselves. In their accounts are to be found, prima facie, the best interpretations of what went on" (p. 21).

Evidence that this interest in the actor's phenomenological perspective has carried over into the study of apparently motiveless murder can be found in several recent booklength studies. For example, in order to tell the story of Ted Bundy's career as a serial murderer, Michaud and Aynesworth (1983) went directly to the source. They spent hundreds of hours interviewing Bundy himself for their account of his crimes, The Only Living Witness. Although Cahill (1986) never actually met John Wayne Gacy, his account of Gacy's life and crimes is subtitled "inside the mind of a serial killer." In the book's introduction Cahill writes,

I have tried to present a picture of a man's mind, in his own style of speech, often in his own words. I wanted to put the reader inside that mind — the mind of the murderer — and that is why this book is written, for the most part, from Mr. Gacy's point of view. I have endeavored to make his best case for him, as he would have done. (p. ix)
And following the publication of some twenty other booklength accounts of his role in the Tate-LaBianca murders, Charles Manson (1986) has recently offered his own story in a book entitled Manson: In His Own Words.

Accounts which reflect the existential approach to studying violence and aggression generally have the effect of drawing the audience nearer to the actor. To reiterate an important point, often implicit in such accounts of motiveless murder is the assumption that if we are to have any hope of appreciating the "meaning" of the killer’s acts, we need to listen to the killer himself, and learn to see the world as he sees it. Also sometimes implied in such accounts is that at least to a certain extent, the killer must be viewed as a representative of suffering and defeated humanity. According to this notion, in the killer’s failure to overcome obstacles impeding his "will to meaning," and in his dramatic act/s of negation, it is possible to observe in extreme form the capitulation which tempts every individual during times of isolation, profound grief, or alienation.

It follows, then, that studying the murderer may enable us to acquire a better understanding of ourselves. Colin Wilson repeatedly emphasizes this point. Contending that the case studies contained in the first of his two "encyclopedias of murder" might best be regarded as "a series of exhibits in a lecture on the meaning of existentialism," Wilson (1961b) cautions readers against thinking that murderers are different in some fundamental way from other people: "Belief in the abnormality of the murderer is a part of the delusion of normality on which society is based. The murderer is different from
other human beings in degree, not in kind" (pp. 45, 25). Elsewhere in
the same work Wilson remarks that "The study of murder is not the
study of abnormal human nature; it is the study of human nature
stained by an act that makes it visible on the microscope slide" (p.
20). Attend to the pathetic results of the murderer's struggle with
existence, and thus learn to better understand your own struggle.
Stated simply, that is Wilson's justification for returning again and
again in his work to the philosophical implications of murder.

Holmes' (1967) essay on Lee Harvey Oswald is the sort of analysis
one might expect from someone writing with an existential orientation.
Holmes observes that most commentators have attributed Oswald's
assassination of President Kennedy to one of two motives: politics or
madness. He contends, however, that for most people, neither motive
provides a satisfying explanatory framework. Instead of regarding
Oswald as "mad" or driven by his commitment to Marxist ideology, Holmes
depicts him as a desperately isolated human being, "rootless,
traditionless...placeless," an idealist without a sense of meaningful
purpose. In the final analysis, writes Holmes, Oswald "struck back out
of his wound" (pp. 148, 150, 155). The assassin's "unwarranted act" was
in fact his desperate attempt to force the world from which he felt
excluded to acknowledge that he was alive. The effect of Holmes'
portrayal is to root Oswald's struggle in the human condition. Oswald's
"cry for recognition" is the same cry which Bronowski hears, sometimes
softer if no less desperate, in the lives of men and women everywhere.

I would like to remark briefly on one final implication of the
existential approach to understanding aggression and violence. Perhaps
more than any of the other orientations I have surveyed, the existential perspective emphasizes the link between violence and creativity. In common with the "cultural" school of psychoanalytic thinking as represented by Erich Fromm, the existential approach regards destructive (Fromm's "malignant") aggression as the dark side of a fundamentally adaptive mode of human behavior. When, for whatever reason, an individual is unable to find a constructive outlet for his creative drive; the impulse to realign the materials of one's life, to experience the sense of potency which follows from being able to effect change, may be expressed in destruction.

As I have pointed out previously, C. Wilson (1972c) is especially interested in the modern murderer (the "assassin") for whom killing is not instrumental in any conventional sense, but rather "a means of self-fulfillment, a creative act" (p. 1). Although such a person might lack the artist's ability to express his frustration through painting or music or writing, he may still have in common with many artists a powerful need to assert himself. In some ways, says Wilson, he is likely to resemble the painters Van Gogh and Munch. In their work one glimpses a vision of reality that "could obviously lead to murder just as easily as to art" (p. 11). Holmes (1967) makes a similar point in his discussion of Oswald. A man like Oswald, says Holmes, self-absorbed and feeling cut loose from the lives of the people around him, often "becomes a melancholic, or an artist, or a killer" (p. 150).

Mailer (1959), too, posits a link between violence and creative energy. In his famous and controversial essay "The White Negro," Mailer writes of the death-obsessed "philosophical psychopath," the man who
opposes conventionality by responding in the affirmative to the
"rebellious imperatives of the self":

The element which is exciting, disturbing, nightmarish
perhaps, is that [in the philosophical psychopath]
incompatibles have come to bed, the inner life and the
violent life, the orgy and the dream of love, the desire
to murder and the desire to create. (p. 342-343)

Later in the same essay, Mailer makes the connection he sees between
violence, creativity, and growth even more explicit: "It takes literal
faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts
of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth" (p. 355).

This notion that apparent "incompatibles" like murder and creativitv
can be traced to common sources - a powerful "will to meaning,"
for example, and the individual's desire to overcome feelings of
isolation and powerlessness - is a central current of much existential
writing. It figures prominently in many analyses of apparently
motiveless murder. I will explore this basic idea in considerably more
detail in a later discussion of Colin Wilson's construction of the
motiveless murderer as existential "outsider" (see Chapter Seven).

Concluding Remarks

It seems likely that if asked, most people would be unable to
specify a single interpretive framework which serves as the basis for
their understanding of aggression and violence. At least outside
academic circles, the perspectives discussed in this chapter exist as
loosely formulated currents of thought, not always well differentiated,
but each one suggesting a somewhat different vantage point from which
to undertake the interpretive challenge posed by apparently unmotivated acts of violence.

Consider this question: What range of interpretive possibilities confront members of the social audience who observe Richard Speck, the young man convicted twenty years ago of murdering eight student nurses in Chicago? One moment, as one lens slides into place, Speck may appear as the aberrant product of a "bad seed." Media accounts of the case frequently noted the presence on one of Speck's arms of a tattoo reading "Born to Raise Hell." The phrase became the title for a booklength study of the case, co-written by a psychiatrist (Altman and Ziporyn, 1967). Then, with a different lens in place, Speck's acts might seem atavistic, best understood as evidence that human beings have really not evolved so far beyond their animal ancestors. Perhaps if judgment is based on the view available through this lens, Speck is most appropriately seen as belonging to a class of social "predators" (Egger, 1985).

Seen through yet another lens, say an existential lens which enables the viewer to interpret aggression in the context of the fundamental human struggle for a sense of purpose and uniqueness, the killer may appear more familiar. Columnist Bob Greene (1983) sought Speck out for an interview and found the experience unsettling: "There is something about a Richard Speck that defies people to accept the fact that a savage killer is also, undeniably, a human being" (p. 83). In Speck's case, so Greene discovered, a human being who dreams of owning a small grocery store should he ever be released from prison. A similarly humanizing description is offered by the psychiatrist who
treated Speck following his conviction: "I like [Richard]. He can be courteous, thoughtful, generous, and witty, and he has considerable charm" (Altman and Ziporyn, 1967, pp. 249-50). My point is this: The interpretive lens supplied by each of the broad conceptual frameworks discussed in this chapter is bound to reveal Speck in a somewhat different light.

As I have stated, my sense is that few people can articulate with great precision what they believe about the sources and manifestations of human violence. Of course some readers might take issue with that statement. Less debatable, perhaps, is the proposition that the different frameworks for thinking about violence imply quite different answers to a question which at some point, in some form, most individuals feel compelled to ask themselves: What does the person who commits apparently motiveless murder have to do with me?

In their study of mass murder, Levin and Fox (1985) point out that once we accept that in all probability both nature and early nurture create some sort of predisposition to behave violently; and once we allow that of course a person's later experience and phenomenological perspective play important roles in determining his behavior; it may be possible only to conclude that a given individual's final course will fall somewhere "within the spectrum of possibilities" (p. 39). Until such time as there is widespread agreement that this very tentative conclusion is no longer the best we can do, for many people the question of how to define their relationship to the motiveless killer will produce only very tentative answers.
CHAPTER IV

THE VALUATION OF MURDER
OBSERVATIONS ON THE AMBIGUOUS SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
STATUS OF KILLING

Introduction

This chapter takes as its starting point Brophy's (1966) suggestion that "Our attitude toward murders seems to be full of discrepancies and ambivalences" which cannot easily be accounted for (pp. 18-19). Being able to account for the complex, often contradictory ways in which people respond to killing is a goal toward which, in the present context, it will be possible to manage only a few small, tentative steps along a well-worn path. My primary concern is with documentation - documentation of the relationship between ideology and notions of "legitimate" killing, of highly nuanced social attitudes toward various perpetrators and victims of violence, of the uneasy cult of celebrity that develops around notorious killers, of murder's "fascination." My intent is to highlight the complexity of the challenge which confronts an individual who attempts to develop a consistent moral perspective (or, in Norman Mailer’s words, a "coherent ethics") from which to pass judgment on killing and killers. Again, documentation is the primary goal. Consistent with that focus, I
will expose complications and apparent discrepancies without necessarily suggesting routes toward their resolution.

As convicted murderers often remind their captors, the selective, sometimes inconsistent application of social sanctions against taking life can induce a sense of disorientation. A recent example comes to mind. After being sentenced to die for a murder which, according to his attorney, had been of "no benefit to him," a man declared to spectators assembled in the courtroom, "Your government taught me how to kill people. As long as I killed the ones you wanted in Vietnam, it was all right. I come home and kill one for me, and they all get mad. It just doesn't make sense to me" (Franken, 1986). It is tempting to dismiss such a complaint as the self-serving lament of a "deviant" with whom we need recognize little affinity. Then we encounter statements like this one attributed to an individual who served as a juror at the trial of multiple murderer Juan Corona: "It's still hard for me to believe one man could kill twenty-five people. Of course, I done my share, but that was in the military" (Kidder, 1974, p. 265). There is substance to the claim that the social response to killing lacks coherence.

Schrader (1974) makes this lack of coherence the central theme in an essay about the Charles Manson murder case. In Schrader's view, Manson and his followers were symptoms of a "dramatic split in the American social consciousness." Far from being senseless, he says, the murders they committed need to be understood as mirroring a confusion of values that pervades the entire culture. Recall that the Manson murders occurred when social turmoil over U.S. involvement in Vietnam was at a peak. Schrader writes:
We have been asked to believe that [in Vietnam] killing is liberation, destruction is salvation, and violence is love. For the sake of life, we kill; for the sake of peace, we wage war; for the sake of freedom, we employ the ultimate in violence....Domestically we pursue one set of values and in Vietnam the opposite set, declaring in each instance that the set we pursue is positive....If Manson had been in the United States Army in Vietnam with an objectively certified enemy, would his conduct be judged either criminal or psychopathic? What counts as normal, sane, and morally acceptable behavior in the United States and in Vietnam are directly opposite....By institutionalizing our violence and our transvaluation of values, we give it the hallmark of rationality, order, and sanity. (pp. 45-47)

Like the Vietnam veteran whose confusion over American values I cited above, Schrader points to perceived ambiguities at the level of social policy. On a different level, the level where individual people search themselves and the culture’s codes of signification in order to decipher what murder means, similar ambiguities seem to exist.

Last year I visited in prison with an infamous multiple murderer. During our visit, the man showed me some of his correspondence, much of it from ostensibly "normal" individuals who for one reason or another chose to initiate contact with him. In one letter, a high school boy requested advice about sex. In another, a college student asked assistance - which was later given - in preparing a term paper on B.F. Skinner. In still another, an attorney who had been instrumental in prosecuting the man requested a personalized painting. Many letters contained requests for autographs. Some writers even requested a detailed account of what it feels like to kill someone. Reacting to the latter correspondents, those who apparently desire imaginative participation of some sort in the killing experience, the convicted multiple murderer declared, "People are really sick!" It was
disorienting to hear him say so, especially since the question of his mental status had been a subject of spirited debate among many experts who testified at his trial.

My sense of disorientation triggered memories of my similar reaction to the words of another convicted serial killer, David Berkowitz. Already in prison for the "Son of Sam" killings, Berkowitz had been asked by an investigative journalist whether he could shed light on a little-known aspect of the case: the possible involvement of certain Satanic cults. In his replies, Berkowitz told a story that was convoluted but, to the journalist as well as to the District Attorney in Queens (NY), finally convincing. The string of "motiveless" murders, he said, had not been the acts of a "demented" gunman (himself) acting alone. Instead, they had been part of a careful plan orchestrated by a loose confederacy of occult enthusiasts, many of whom, according to Berkowitz, continue to live and work as respected citizens, arousing not the slightest suspicion. One of Berkowitz’s letters contains this provocative passage: "Look, there are people out there who are animals....[Their] ranks are filled with doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and basically highly responsible citizens. They are normal, on the outside at least" (Terry, 1986, pp. 309-310). Is this claim merely a killer’s desperate attempt to divert attention from himself? Perhaps, although a number of people knowledgeable about the case found Berkowitz’s account credible. Particularly disturbing is the implication that even one’s neighbors, people whose "normality" is assumed, might have been involved in one of the most horrible and apparently senseless series of murders in recent American history.
Perspectives like these not only raise questions about the status of killing in our society, they challenge the reliability of everyday social judgments which serve as the most basic foundation for our sense of social cohesion. They suggest that we distrust surfaces. Unfortunately, in most aspects of social interaction, surfaces are all that we see.

Consider this chapter an exploratory contribution to the development of a phenomenology of murder perception. In effect, my aim is to isolate factors that contribute to the disorienting moral and ethical atmosphere within which each person fashions a response to individual and collective acts of lethal violence, some of them seemingly inexplicable. In a final section of the chapter I will attend particularly to the individual in his role as interpreter, or "reader." There I will look specifically, if very tentatively, at some answers to the question of why it is that murder so engages the imagination. I am operating from a simple assumption. If murder's fascination can be partially understood, if not understood then at least illuminated from several perspectives; it might be easier to appreciate why members of the social audience often seem simultaneously captivated and repulsed by people like Jack the Ripper, Charles Manson, Ian Brady, and Ted Bundy.

**Legitimating Contexts:**
**Ideological Pathways Toward the Normalization of Killing**

Paradoxically, the killing of one man by his fellow men, whether in the case of a common murder, or collectively, as in war, is never practiced without a moral justification on the
killer's side. It is not far from the point
to say that morality is the prerogative of
man-killing.

Halldor Laxness, Icelandic author,
Winner of the 1955 Nobel Prize.
Contribution, New York Times,
February 9, 1973

Political language...is designed to make lies
sound truthful and murder respectable, and to
give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.
George Orwell, Politics and the
English Language, 1946

We must say what everybody knows but does not
venture to say. We must say that by whatever
name men may call murder - murder always remains
murder....They will cease to see the service of
their country, the heroism of war, military
glory, and patriotism, and will see what exists:
the naked, criminal business of murder!
Leo Tolstoy, Address to the Swedish
Government Peace Conference, 1909

"Thou shalt not kill" provides a deceptively straightforward
prescription for social and moral action. Despite its frequent
invocation as such, the Biblical commandment was never intended as a
blanket condemnation of all lethal violence. At the time of the ancient
Hebrews, the commandment was widely interpreted to allow for killing in
some situations but not in others. Hardly surprising, such distinctions
depended less on abstract notions of justice and morality than on the
pragmatic question of how best to preserve the Israelite community
(Harmon, 1952). For centuries, then, Western sanctions against killing
have been tied to ideology and complicated by qualifications.

What is meant by the term "ideology"? Grundy and Weinstein (1974)
propose a simple definition: the public justifications made for
political action. Of course the political action to which they refer is
not confined to affairs of state; it can occur at the individual level as well. Almost always, advocates of various ideologies locate the source of their position in some presumably immutable set of moral tenets or principles. Only opponents are likely to describe their position using a term like "ideology," with its connotations of limited self-interest and historical boundedness. Since arguments are advanced frequently to the effect that certain acts of killing are justifiable because of the political ends they serve, it will be useful to consider the forms such arguments are most likely to take. To do so, I will draw on Grundy and Weinstein's description of four "ideologies of violence": legitimist, expansionist, pluralist, and intrinsic. While considering each of these four ideological justifications for violence, readers might ask themselves this question: Are there people somewhere (How many? Normal? Abnormal?) who might apply the adjective "motiveless" to the killings justified by advocates of that particular ideology?

Legitimist Justifications

Legitimist justifications for violence are based on the assumption that drastic measures are sometimes necessary to maintain a social order presumed by its advocates to be "normal" or "legitimate" - even, in the case of Marxism, historically inevitable. According to the legitimist position, violence that disrupts the "normal" order is bad, violence that preserves it is good.

Grundy and Weinstein point out that in a country like the United States, founded on democratic principles and ostensibly committed to fostering dissent, there are special difficulties involved in masking
this inconsistency from the citizenry. In America, they say, what passes for "acceptable" violence is, at best, "murky" (p. 43). One minute government representatives can be heard justifying state-sanctioned violence (or the euphemistic "force"), usually in order to preserve "self-determination" or "freedom" or "individual liberties." The next minute they can be heard condemning the "terrorist" activities of individuals or groups whose values and political agenda the United States government does not share. According to Grundy and Weinstein, an inchoate sense that there is something inconsistent about the government's position can induce in people a sense of "valuelessness."

One example taken from a newspaper editorial will serve as an illustration of the legitimist position ("An odious law, 1987). Here, a legitimist argument is invoked in order to justify exempting agents of the Argentinean government from the usual consequences of engaging in lethal violence. The author of the editorial expresses reluctant support for a law granting amnesty to Argentinean officials who were responsible for "atrocities" committed against leftist dissenters during the "dirty war" which lasted in that country from 1976 to 1983. Although expressing grave reservations about the atrocities themselves, he argues that by permitting prosecution of the accused officials, the elected government of Argentina might inadvertently create the conditions for widespread social unrest, even civil war. That cannot be allowed to happen since the existing government is presumed legitimate. Although perhaps a bitter pill to swallow, the passage of a law declaring amnesty for the officials can be justified as "a matter of expediency." The need to preserve a "legitimate" governing structure is
used as the rationale for setting aside legal sanctions that would otherwise have been considered "just."

**Expansionist Justifications**

Expansionist justifications permit violence when it is necessary in order to expand the scope and influence of a supposedly superior normative order. Drawing on the tenets of social Darwinism, most advocates of an expansionist ideology regard violence as an inevitable fact of life. Once one accepts that premise, it is a short step to the conclusion that if might is not exercised on behalf of what is "good," what is "bad" will eventually triumph.

Grundy and Weinstein point out that the expansionist position was often implicit in rationalizations offered for U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. The world is a dangerous place. Communist aggression is a fact of life. Unless the United States intervenes on behalf of democracy, the countries of Southeast Asia will topple like dominoes, subdued by the power of the "evil empire." By not killing, we forfeit the opportunity to see democracy achieve ascendancy over communism in that part of the world.

**Pluralist Justifications**

Pluralist justifications rest on the premise that no one social order is more "normative" or more "legitimate" than another. Any group of people has the right to self-determination, and attempts to deny that right can justifiably be resisted. The following example illustrates use of the pluralist position as a means of rationalizing violence.
In defense of campus radicals who protested during the late 1960's and early 1970's against what they regarded as a "coercive" and "aggressive" U.S. foreign policy, Widmer (1970) writes, "Our protest did not arbitrarily choose violence; it was driven to it [emphasis added] by an unresponsive order parading as 'moderation' and by the arrogant coercion which characterizes the American Second Empire style" (p. 46). From Widmer's perspective, the United States is seen as a colonial empire bent on denying the rights of self-determination and free expression to its foreign and domestic adversaries. Violence against the government is justified as a strike against oppression.

**Intrinsic Justifications**

Intrinsic justifications differ in an important sense from those ideological justifications discussed thus far. From the intrinsic perspective, the possibility that violence might bring about desirable social or political change is of only secondary importance. Given greater emphasis is the possibility that for certain individuals, engagement in violent activity might be a means of restoring vitality and mental health. Grundy and Weinstein argue that widespread advocacy of this perspective is a phenomenon of the twentieth century.

The writings of Sorel (1941) and Fanon (1963) illustrate how radical social theorists have drawn on intrinsic arguments in order to justify violent political struggle against an oppressor class. When individuals are denied opportunities for power and self-respect, they may legitimately engage in violence as part of their personal struggle for liberation. According to Fanon and Sorel, the perpetrators of such violence are likely to experience an enhanced sense of vigor,
participation, and mental well-being. In his most influential work, The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon (1963) writes, "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (p. 73).

Of course the ideas of political theorists like Sorel and Fanon provided the ideological justification for much of the violence committed during the 1960's by revolutionary groups in the United States. Bernadine Dohrn, a former leader of the radical Weather Underground, was able to rationalize even the apparently unfocused violence of Charles Manson as a creative extension of the revolt against an oppressive power structure: "Offing those rich pigs with their own forks and knives!...The Weathermen dig Charles Manson!" (Bugliosi, 1974, p. 221). Some leaders of the civil rights movement viewed black violence against whites as part of that same revolt. For example, the highly-regarded black novelist James Baldwin (1972) observed, "It is not necessary for a black man to hate a white man, or to have any particular feelings about him at all, in order to realize that he must kill him" (p. 191).

One encounters a certain sympathy for the intrinsic position in the work of existential writers like Colin Wilson and Norman Mailer. Both Wilson and Mailer take the view that individual acts of violence, especially those that might to observers seem committed without provocation, must often be understood as desperate attempts by the individual to experience himself as autonomous and able to effect change. However, Mailer has gone farther than Wilson in attempting to
justify such violence. In "The White Negro" (1959), for example, Mailer suggests that violence is sometimes the most effective way of overcoming the torpor induced by societal prohibitions on individual growth. Radical solutions may be necessary in defense of the self. Mailer elaborates: "Threatened with the extinction of our possibilities we react with chronic rage. Moral questions over the nature of one's violence come only as a secondary matter. The first reaction, the heart of the violence, is the protection of the self" (Mailer, quoted in Weatherby, 1982, pp. 28-29). Of course this insistence on the connection between violence and self-definition can be found in the writings of Sartre as well: "Violence is man recreating himself" (quoted in Brophy, 1978, p. 38).

If unwilling to imply like Mailer and Sartre that violence committed in defense of the self may be justifiable, Wilson agrees that by recognizing its intrinsic worth to the individual we may come closest to understanding such violence. When the organization of a society produces feelings of boredom, unfulfillment, and insignificance; the probable result, says Wilson, is "a sense of mental strain...that may find its outlet in violence" (C. Wilson, 1985, p. 224). Frequently throughout both his fictional and non-fictional writings on crime, Wilson emphasizes the creative, self-definitional aspects of such violence.

Summary

Frequently, socially-negotiated criteria for judging whether to condone or excuse or condemn certain acts of killing achieve their coherence only within the narrative developed by advocates of a
particular ideology. Of course conceptual frameworks other than the one suggested by Grundy and Weinstein might have served as well to describe the range of ideological appeals which permit a degree of moral disengagement from the act of killing (see, for example, Bandura, 1987). The point requiring emphasis is this: To recognize that the criteria often used in assessing the "rightness" of killing are historically-contingent constructions is to achieve a measure of awareness that the standards often applied to the evaluation of social action, killing included, are far from stable. An individual who achieves this awareness may experience a disquieting, preconscious sense of his affinity even with people whose violent actions seem on the surface like manifestations of a completely alien sensibility.

I recall the remarks of philosopher Philip Hallie at a recent conference devoted to the topic of human destructiveness. Hallie described as the central dilemma of his own life the struggle to reconcile two images of himself: that of the soldier who killed with relish during WWII in defense of a cause he believed just, and that of a human being dedicated to the mitigation of cruelty. In an earlier study Hallie (1969) had described the paradox: "[People] can at once want and not want to harm each other mortally" (p. 166). It is worth remembering that acts prompted by motives which seem familiar and "sane" can produce death with no less certainty than acts for which there seems to be no motive at all.
Some Ambiguities in the Value Analysis of Life, Killers, and Victims

When they are effective, ideological justifications provide frameworks which enable people to understand acts of lethal violence in a new way. In the preceding discussion I surveyed four such frameworks and suggested how each might be used to justify violence in a limited context. Here, while no longer explicitly concerned with the sanctioning use of ideology, I will continue to explore the same broad theme: the varied and highly nuanced social response to killing reflects much more than simply a general prohibition against one person taking the life of another.

The point I wish to emphasize is that often, puzzling and inconsistent aspects of that social response reflect an absence of consensus about how to answer certain fundamental questions. For example, What is the value of "life"? Is one life as valuable as another? Is the taking of animal life comparable to the taking of human life? Is it meaningful to say that one killer is "better than" another killer? If so, by what criteria is such a distinction to be made? The discussion which follows places a spotlight on these difficult questions. I make no claim that the various perspectives I cite are "representative" in any formal sense. The light they shed is not meant to illuminate solutions, only to suggest additional complications on the route to a coherent way of thinking about murder.

Questions About the Value of Life

During their formative years most individuals in our culture are taught that destroying life is wrong. With experience, however, they
are likely to encounter repeated challenges to that belief — many of them presenting in the form of everyday discourse about such topics as war, terrorism, censorship, capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia, and animal rights. Ethicists have sought to explicate the moral and ethical criteria on which the many exceptions to our culture’s general prohibition against taking life are presumably based (see, for example, Devine, 1978; James, 1979; and Kohl, 1974). Of particular note, according to one criminologist (Nettler, 1982), is their failure to achieve much consensus on "a moral principle...that would guide our attitude toward homicide" (p. 10). One might add, toward killing in general.

If ethicists and moralists have been unable to discover a reliable rule for use in evaluating killing — one need only consider the viewpoints on either side of the abortion and euthanasia debates to realize the protean status even of the word "killing," and Kahn (1972) suggests that what people define as "violent" is no less protean — then where does that leave the layperson? Scratching his head, probably. Every day the media reports multiple instances where groups and individuals engage in acts which result in the loss of life. Sometimes such actions are endorsed, either explicitly or implicitly; sometimes they are condemned. Often, criteria differentiating the two responses are not immediately apparent.

I will avoid for present purposes straying into the esoteric realm of philosophical debate about why and under what circumstances taking life might be viewed as more or less ethically justifiable. Here, I am more interested in suggesting the confusion likely to be
experienced by ordinary people as each day they encounter the complex, often contradictory codes and currents of thinking which in our culture define a range of possible responses to killing.

Earlier, I suggested that in ideological rationalizations, the most fundamental common denominator linking each act of human killing to every other one is often obscured. The common denominator, of course, is that either directly or indirectly, one person is responsible for the death of another person. When advocates of various ideological positions justify killing in some limited context, they say, in effect, "Even if you insist on thinking of what we do as killing, understand that it is in the service of a goal that transcends the value of individual lives." In such cases, and also in cases where the justification is couched in religious rather than ideological terms, it is apparent how refined, and how convoluted, our efforts to assess the significance of killing and the culpability of killers have become.

Clearly, a killer is not a killer is not a killer. We often think very differently about individuals and nations whose actions lead to the same result. As one might expect, our differing attitudes are sometimes reflected in differing vocabularies. For example, it seems apparent that something besides simply the loss of life is being decried when we use adjectives like "cold-blooded," "heinous," and "senseless" to describe selected instances of killing, say Ted Bundy's murder of middle-class women, or Ian Brady and Myra Hindley's murder of children. One might legitimately ask of killings described in this way,
what makes them so? In what ways do the acts differ from other acts which have similar results?

Of course seeking answers to questions of this sort requires dissembling such murky legal and philosophical constructions as intent, responsibility, free will, and sanity. Their focus the forensic application of such concepts, commentators like Gaylin (1983) and Foucault (1975) have suggested the extreme difficulty of doing so. My objective is more modest. I simply want to call into question the rarefied status accorded in our society to the kinds of crimes often described as "motiveless." Toward that end, I have assembled perspectives which convey in various ways some of the complications involved in distinguishing one variety of killing from other varieties. The commentators cited in the discussion which follows are united in their belief that whatever dynamics give rise to the dramatic murders we label "motiveless" are expressed as well in many actions which pass in our society for "normal," at least more normal, behavior.

Forty years ago in a famous study of human violence, Wertham (1949) argued that it is untenable to draw a sharp distinction between "murder," committed according to popular stereotype by shadowy predators with daggers, and the thousands of "preventable deaths" which result each year from social factors such as unsafe industrial working conditions, inadequate health care, and war. His provocative suggestion was that if members of American society could overcome their "lack of scientific imagination" and rid themselves of the delusion that in our society human life is really sacrosanct, it would become clear to them that they tacitly approve of murder every day (pp. 264-65).
In his study on "the meaning of murder," Brophy (1966) notes the same hypocrisy. However, Brophy takes the argument a step further, suggesting that it is also hypocritical to exploit the construction of ourselves as "lord of creation" in order to justify the widespread and unnecessary destruction of animal life. Conventions of language and the legitimizing, dulling effects of social custom help to anesthetize us, he says, to what should be obvious, namely the common impulse underlying much of the violence directed at both animals and human beings. Lustgarten (1968) echoes Brophy's position, remarking in a study of multiple murder that "There is no fundamental difference between the habitual murderer of humans and the habitual murderer of stags and deer" (p. 157). Both kinds of killer are "null," he says, lacking in "normal" sensibilities.

Some readers might react to these charges with disbelief. How is it possible to equate human life with animal life? Of course the idea that it is legitimate to link the two has fueled the mounting protests of anti-vivisectionists, and of critics opposed to recreational hunting and trapping. However, those powerful lobby groups are not alone in thinking this way. The belief that there are significant parallels between killing animals and killing human beings is more common than one might imagine.

In a recent book review, Nobel Prize winning chemist Herbert A. Hauptman (1988) criticized scientist Freeman Dyson for apparently failing to recognize that "human beings have no preferred status relative to other life forms." Hauptman's position is probably not all that unusual in certain enclaves of the scientific community. A broader
context for the conviction he expresses was suggested in a recent *Newsweek* article on the animal rights movement. According to the article, animal rights advocates of various stripes have lately derived inspiration from "current thinking about evolution, which has moved away from belief in a hierarchy of species, with man at the top" (Adler, 1988, p. 60). A recent newspaper editorial written by two anthropologists included the statement, "The traditional and seemingly obvious dichotomy between human and animal makes no sense" (Park and Feder, 1989). According to these authors, "the new view of life provided by modern science" requires that we "think long and hard about our treatment of the other species with whom we share such close family ties." (For further insight into the thinking of leading animal rights advocates see "Just like us?", 1988.)

Though it seems unlikely that he would endorse a position which assigned an equal weight to the lives of animals and human beings, psychiatrist Willard Gaylin (1982) tells an anecdote which suggests that he, too, considers it untenable to draw sharp qualitative distinctions between violence directed toward animals and violence directed toward other human beings. In the prologue to *The Killing of Bonnie Garland*, Gaylin writes of the feelings he experienced after meeting Richard Herrin, the young man who had hammered his former fiancee to death. Gaylin felt disturbed because he had liked Herrin; even more troubling was the fact that his response to the killer had preceded any sense of emotional identification with the killer’s victim. His recollection of two recent events brings Gaylin into closer contact with the wellsprings of his sympathies. Both events involved
violence against animals. His neighbor had used a club to kill a
bothersome woodchuck, and Gaylin himself had crushed a small field
mouse with a broom.

The thought of how he felt when he smashed the field mouse
reinforces Gaylin's uneasy sense of affinity with Herrin; at the same
time, the memory of the mouse's broken and fragile physical form
provides him with an avenue of access to Bonnie Garland's suffering.
The contemplation of violence directed against animals helps to il-
lluminate the significance of violence enacted within the context of
human relationships. Even Gaylin, someone who admits having little
patience with vegetarians and little compunction about trapping mice,
acknowledges that perhaps a common impulse gives rise to a wide range
of violent acts, including some which are generally endorsed - or, as
with the case of battering a field mouse, deemed insignificant - by
members of the social audience.

Godwin (1978) echoes the outrage expressed by Wertham and Brophy
over what both authors perceive as society's inconsistent and
hypocritical attitudes toward various acts of lethal violence. Unlike
Brophy, however, Godwin avoids drawing parallels between the
destruction of human and animal life. His focus is on humans killing
humans. He points out that a variety of actions which all result in the
loss of human life are evaluated using a sliding scale of condemnation.
This is wrong, he implies. By refusing to acknowledge that no sharp
divide exists between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" forms of killing,
we demonstrate a "moral cowardice" that reflects American society's
"increasing doubts about its entire value system" (pp. 363-64).
Liberals and conservatives alike prattle on, he says, about the "sanctity of life"; all the while they concoct out of their shared "dementia" ever more ingenious rationalizations for killing. The contradiction is sustained, according to Godwin, only by a "terrible uncertainty" about the value of human life.

The observation of that same uncertainty provided the theme for an editorial written by journalist Ellen Goodman ("What is human life worth?" 1987). The impetus for Goodman's piece was a testy exchange between then-Chief of Staff Donald Regan and inquiring news reporters. The reporters had been expressing doubts about the Reagan administration's decision to exchange arms for hostages in a deal with Iran. Angry, Regan had countered with a response presumably meant to be rhetorical: "What's a human life worth?" Goodman suggests the complex moral dilemmas which Regan's question inadvertently raised: Was the president's explicit or implicit sanctioning of the exchange fueled by the fact that "he perceived the hostages as family and the warring parties in the Middle East as strangers we could help kill each other without a qualm? Was he on safe moral ground because he only supplied the weapons, didn't push the buttons? Did he think about it at all?"

Most disconcerting of all, suggests Goodman, is that for many people, the conundrum of the arms-for-hostages deal was seen as strictly political, not moral.

Of course the fact that they observe an element of hypocrisy in the way society assesses killing does not distinguish these commentators as particularly astute social critics. The value of their remarks in the present context is that they hint at how shaky are the
foundations for our shared social attitudes about killing. In this small sampling of perspectives it is possible to discern an amplified version of what for many individuals probably exist s as a largely inchoate sense of disorientation. If it could be articulated, that disorientation might take the form of a question: If "life" is in fact the most sacred social value, then why is it that various acts of lethal violence, almost always committed for reasons which select groups of "outsiders" would regard as foolish or even incomprehensible, are subjected to such different rules of interpretation?

A Sliding Scale for Condemning Killers?

To this point I have emphasized that in certain instances — when ideology creates a legitimizing context, for example, or when there is distance of some sort between an action and its lethal consequences — killing can be made to seem like something other than killing, or at least like some sort of "special" killing. Some commentators have made the case, however, that even when murder is unmistakably murder; even in cases, that is, where few people would suggest that there is anything "special" or "right" in a killer's act/s; there are criteria that should be used in determining to what degree the killer deserves our scorn. Since the point has relevance for our larger concern with the social "valuation of murder" I want to address it briefly.

Perhaps because they are perceived as being more congruent with values embraced by the culture as a whole, certain killers often seem to be judged less harshly than others, even if their crimes are particularly horrible (Leyton, 1986). In a sense, that is as one would expect; it has been well established by attribution researchers that
perceived similarity is an important factor affecting our attitudes toward other people (eg., Byrne and Wong, 1962; Rokeach and Mezei, 1966; Stein, Hardyck, and Smith, 1965). Still, the suggestion that one killer is somehow "preferable" to another can be a little disorienting, especially when the preferred killer is someone like Jack the Ripper, whose crimes are among the most infamous in history. Faced with the proposition that such distinctions are called for, an observer might be moved to question the basis for moral judgments about all acts of killing. Again, the difficulty is in developing a consistent and coherent framework for responding to killers, and to the wide variety of acts which all result in death.

Consider, for the sake of illustration, the kinds of distinctions which Jesse (1958) and C. Wilson (1961b) suggest we make in formulating our response to murder. Both writers imply the need to judge murderers differently depending on how they conceive and carry out their crimes. Of course there is nothing novel about this idea. In fact, our entire legal system is based on the presumed value of just such distinctions. Frequently, for example, a decision on whether or not someone convicted of a capital offense should live or die is based on an evaluation of "mitigating circumstances." The difference is that Jesse and Wilson are not concerned, at least not in the way the legal system's so-called "mitigation experts" are, with the possibility that when his background is examined and his friends are consulted, the killer might be revealed in a new light - perhaps as more "worthy" in some way. Instead, they suggest that before we pass judgment on a killer, we should examine how he related to his victims before murdering them. Both commentators
clearly imply that a killer who cultivates his victim's trust before murdering him is more reprehensible than one who kills an unknown victim without a word.

It is not my intent to judge the validity of their contention. However, it needs to be noted that accepting such a premise necessitates a subtle shift in the angle of one's attention. Despite the fact that it remains the central interpretive issue, the fact of killing recedes somewhat in importance. Consider the implications of this quotation from Jesse:

> Of all murderers the poisoner is the foulest. He must have the confidence of the person whom he is killing; he must appear amiable, pleasant; he must be willing to give from his hand those drops that mean death. There is something far more vile about a human being who behaves thus than there is about a Jack the Ripper. (pp. 14-15)

To most people, such a distinction is likely to appear absurd. How can it be useful, morally or ethically, to speak of a certain type of murderer as being "far more vile" than someone like Jack the Ripper, who at times literally tore his victims' bodies apart before leaving their entrails strewn around the crime scene and then taunting the police with jocular missives?

Yet C. Wilson (1961b) advances a position similar to Jesse's. Peter Kurten, Frederick Deeming, Neville Heath, and Peter Manuel are all twentieth century multiple murderers. Of the four, Kurten is perhaps best known. In the early 1930's the so-called "Monster of Dusseldorf" confessed to numerous sadistic murders, as well as many instances of arson, bestiality, and necrophilia. Still, because unlike the other three Kurten was a generally honest man who did not routinely
resort to confidence games in order to obtain his victims, Wilson concludes that he was "in every way a better type of character than Deeming, Heath, or Manuel" (p. 37).

I do not wish to dwell on the reasons, justified or not, why Jesse and Wilson propose that such distinctions be made between individuals who commit murder, even multiple murder. For now, of greater relevance is the potential for disorientation introduced by their suggestion that a sadistic killer like Kurten or Jack the Ripper might be "better" than a poisoner like William Palmer or Neill Cream, or a swindler-murderer like Frederick Deeming. The effect is to underline Nettler's point, that there exists no invariant "principle" or rule from which might derive a consistent social and personal response to crimes resulting in the loss of life.

A Sliding Scale for Valuing Victims?

Finally, many commentators observe a fact which ought to be obvious: the victim's identity has a great deal to do with how members of the social audience respond to murder. Acknowledgement of that fact further complicates the challenge of describing what exactly we are condemning when we condemn acts of killing.

As C. Wilson (1984) cautions, it is probably naive to think it "natural" that we should feel empathy, except of the most abstract kind, for human beings with whom our lives are not entwined in some way. Feeling empathy for remote others, says Wilson, especially when they are people who look different and do not share our values, "demands a real effort of will rather than our usual vague assumption of 'mutual concern'" (p. 53). Storr (1972) repeats this observation,
remarking that for all people, not only those individuals we call "psychopaths," "It is difficult to make the imaginative effort to care deeply for human beings who belong outside the limited circle of relatives and friends" (p. 43). Several examples will amplify the point.

In the Introduction I alluded to Winston Moseley's murder of Kitty Genovese. Thirty-eight witnesses did nothing to prevent it. Soon afterward, before the later work by Latane and Darley (1968, 1970) on what came to be known as "bystander apathy," Rosenthal (1964) published a slim volume analyzing the case and attempting to extract its larger significance. In the quotation which follows, he struggles to determine what he might have in common with those bystanders who failed to assist Ms. Genovese:

I think I would have called the police to save Miss Genovese but I know that I did not save a beggar in Calcutta. Was my failing really so much smaller than that of the people who watched from their windows?...

Geography is a factor of apathy. Indians reacted to Portuguese imprisoning Goans, but not to Russians killing Hungarians.

Color is a factor. Ghanaians reacted toward Frenchmen killing Algerians, not toward Congolese killing white missionaries.

Strangeness is a factor. Americans react to the extermination of Jews but not to the extermination of Watusis. (p. 86)

Rosenthal is essentially repeating Wilson's point: without being fully aware that we are doing so, we often turn a blind eye to the murder of people for whom we experience little sense of affinity.
Wagner (1932) and Yallop (1982) present a slight variation on this same theme. Their remarks are made with reference to the crimes of Peter Kurten and Peter Sutcliffe (the "Yorkshire Ripper"), respectively. Wagner describes the public's "complete lack of personal interest" (p. 45) after Kurten's murder of a prostitute. Similarly, Yallop observes that until Sutcliffe killed a non-prostitute, many citizens were reluctant to regard his victims as "innocent." The women were perceived as whores first, murder victims second. The narrator of a recent film entitled Murder: No Apparent Motive (1984) remarks similarly of women killed by the still-at-large "Green River" serial murderer: "Because they were prostitutes, public outcry was not intense."

There is no need to belabor this rather obvious point. However, it bears repeating that the social response to killing involves multiple determinants; much of the variance in that response cannot be accounted for by a simple, undifferentiated abhorrence of any act which results in the loss of life. In his analysis of social attitudes toward violence, Wertham (1949) includes the acid suggestion that many people might be less upset by the murder of an obscure bookseller than by the theft of a valuable first edition. If his observation has any validity whatsoever, it suggests that we need to search carefully for the elusive wellsprings of our intellectual and emotional response when we condemn a particular act of killing.
The Killer as Curiosity and Celebrity

Crime writer Eric Ambler (1985) tells this interesting anecdote. After reading Dostoyevsky’s Crime and Punishment at age fifteen, he had become fascinated with the problems of good and evil. In search of a setting that could further stimulate his thinking, he made a pilgrimage to the cottage where shortly before, Patrick Mahon had murdered his mistress and dismembered her corpse. The gruesome case had been highly publicized in the British press. What Ambler encountered startled him and left an indelible impression. There was a large crowd of sightseers gathered at the cottage. Souvenir-seeking scavengers had practically torn the building apart.

To Ambler, the experience suggested that the "velvet" exterior which ostensibly decent people parade before their neighbors might be a carefully maintained but thin veneer over "the primitive" (p. 84). Years after the incident at Mahon’s cottage, he clearly remains fascinated by the question of what those souvenir hunters were after. Refusing to believe that the people collecting mementos of death were somehow out of the ordinary, fundamentally different from himself, he asks: Why if they were "normal" should so many sightseers have wanted to retain a souvenir from the bungalow where one person had boiled pieces of another’s flesh in saucepans and stuffed numerous boxes with the uncooked remains? How should we interpret their apparent desire to achieve some sort of connection with the murderer and his crime? And what does such behavior suggest about the delicate calibration necessary in order to arrive at an estimate of how far a killer like Mahon has departed from the territory we designate "normal"?
Sociologist Jack Levin observes bluntly, "We make [serial killers] into heroes" ("Is mass murder on the rise?" 1988). Leyton (1986) adds this qualification: "Whether mass killers subsequently become 'heroes' depends...on whether their personal protest is congruent with fashionable themes in the culture" (p. 190). A related perspective can be found in Lemay's (1973) introduction to a collection of entries from the diary of Arthur Bremer, whose assassination attempt left former Alabama governor George Wallace crippled. Following Lemay's observation that in America, violent outlaws like Pretty Boy Floyd and Bonnie and Clyde are transmuted into the "heroes of a bloodstained folklore," he poses a rhetorical question: "Why shouldn't [Bremer] reach for his place in the pantheon?" (pp. 19-20).

These comments, as well as Ambler's anecdote, all point to the same somewhat disorienting phenomenon. It is beyond dispute that members of the social audience frequently respond to killers, especially those whose crimes are most shocking and apparently inexplicable, with the same sort of rapt attention usually reserved for movie stars and other celebrities who possess goods and status (eg., money, influence) which are highly valued in our society. If not exactly common, it is certainly not rare for ostensibly "normal" (however one elects to construe that term) individuals to act out what must be regarded as versions of identification or affinity with the alleged killer, or perhaps with something he symbolizes.

Consider this small, unsystematic sample of largely anecdotal indicators:
In a popular Columbus, Ohio record store T-shirts are sold promoting a rock band called Ed Gein's Car. Gein was the cannibal-killer whose crimes are said to have inspired the movies Psycho and Texas Chainsaw Massacre. In the same record store, one can purchase albums by a group called Son of Sam.

A book dealer advertising in Bookman's Weekly recently offered to sell a personal letter written by Charles Manson follower and would-be presidential assassin Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme. The asking price? One hundred dollars. And at a recent auction held to benefit a struggling theatre company, items which Manson donated netted $1,200, "more than items donated by Hollywood celebrities" (Berliner, 1987).

An undergraduate student recently described to me an attempt he and some of his friends made to contact Manson by telephone. They did it, he said, because they "think Charlie's cool." This assessment seems somewhat less startling when considered in light of the fact that years earlier, the attorney who prosecuted Manson had observed with amazement that as publicity about Manson's involvement in mass murder increased, so did his following. In fact, according to the prosecutor, Manson came to be regarded by many young people as a "hero" (Bugliosi, 1974, p. 221).

According to C. Wilson and Pitman (1961), after his conviction on nine counts of murder (his trial had included long and graphic accounts of his sadism and necrophilia), Peter Kurten was bombarded with letters, love letters and hate letters arriving in about equal quantities. Many of the letter-writers requested Kurten's autograph.
A more recent example of the same phenomenon is the case of Ted Bundy. Even after Bundy had been convicted of two murders and implicated in dozens more, individuals comprising his "national following" continued to send him "heavy fan mail" (Michaud and Aynesworth, 1983, p. 290).

The scene Ambler describes witnessing at Patrick Mahon's cottage was apparently not an isolated occurrence. After demolition of the house under which John Wayne Gacy had buried twenty-nine of his victims, souvenir seekers carried away bricks and pieces of sod (Lindecker, 1980). A similar scene was enacted at the former residence of multiple murderer Edward Gein (Masters and Lea, 1963). And according to Lindsay (1958), the home where John Reginald Christie had stuffed his victims' bodies in cupboards and under floorboards became a "Mecca" to "Cain's devotees" (p. 31).

The Address Book: How to Reach Anyone Who's Anyone (Levine, 1984) is a directory intended to assist people who wish to contact various celebrities. On the same page which includes addresses for Mickey Mantle, the March of Dimes, and Marcel Marceau one can find out where to reach Charles Manson. Also included in the directory are addresses for Richard Speck, John Wayne Gacy, and Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme.

And finally, with reference to the case of Edmund Kemper, killer of ten and confessed necrophilic, Cartel (1985) observes that "As with all trials involving female-killing mass murderers, the front rows [of the courtroom] were filled with young, attractive girls, some becoming romantically attracted to the defendant (p. 104). Masters and Lea
(1963) and Lindsay (1958) describe the same phenomenon at the trials of other notorious multiple murderers.

It might be argued that the phenomena and the individuals depicted in these examples comprise an infinitesimally narrow band on a continuum representing the overall range of social responses to multiple murder. However, the examples need not be representative of the social audience in any statistical sense in order to function as sources of disorientation for the individual inclined to think about killers using constructions of difference - in terms, for example, of "deviance" and "pathology" and "sickness." One might stop far short of agreeing with playwright Eugene Ionesco's contention that "People like killers" (quoted in Olsen, 1985). Still, it must be recognized that instances of people responding to killers with something other than simple condemnation are not highly unusual; they cannot all be easily dismissed as anomalous and so insignificant aspects of the social response to killing.

If relatively few people actually scavenge for remnants of violent crime scenes and fantasize about romance with convicted killers, more apparently purchase and read the many accounts of multiple murder which are published each year. An article published in the New York Times Book Review noted an apparent contradiction. On one hand, members of the public express their "ostensible revulsion" over the idea that some murderers have been permitted to profit from selling publication rights to their stories. On the other hand, there is the indisputable fact that the same public's "appetite for such confessions...continues unabated" (Roberts, 1987, p. 35). If members of the
public do not want killers to make money, neither do they want such ironically-termed "enemies of the public interest" to hoard secrets for which there exists an undeniably lucrative market.

A thoughtful person observing these aspects of the social response to killing might experience a measure of disorientation. He might be moved to ask, as Michaud and Aynesworth (1983) ask following their consideration of the sometimes puzzling dynamic between serial killer Ted Bundy and his public audience, "Who is crazy, and who isn't?" (p. 320). Unease over attempts to formulate reliable answers to that question may be one reason for the lack of consistency in patterns of rhetoric and representation that emerge from the literature on motiveless murder. I will have more to say about this issue in Chapter Five.

Accounting for Murder's Fascination: Some Exploratory Propositions

Introduction

As I suggested previously, a phenomenology of murder perception is the elusive goal toward which this entire chapter might be regarded as a first small step. For now, that goal must remain a long way off. But even if at this point it is not possible to grasp what confusion of elements make up any individual's phenomenological response to killing in its various forms; still, readily discernable in the collective social response are persistent currents of ambiguity and uncertainty. Suggesting some forms and - to a lesser extent - some possible sources of those currents has been my primary objective.
However, any attempt to validate the premise that few people know precisely how they feel toward killing and killers would be incomplete without a consideration of why, at least since the time of Cain and Abel, people have found murder so compelling. Murder fascinates us. The fascination is part of what Goldstein (1975), a psychologist, and Twitchell (1975), a film critic, describe respectively as our "attraction to violence" (p. 40) and our "hunger for horror" (p. 24). In this final section I will offer several exploratory propositions about murder's fascination. Hardly original, the propositions are loosely formulated and deliberately elastic, meant simply as tentative hypotheses that might partially account for a very broadly defined tendency to seek out imaginative engagement with the killing experience in its various forms.

I hope that the reader will recognize here some continuity with the theme touched on in the preceding section. Why should we find in the social response to murder and murderers a distorted version of the social response to fame and celebrities? Schickel (1986) explores this parallel at some length in his examination of "the culture of celebrity". We condemn killing; yet there is abundant evidence to suggest that it fascinates us, too, perhaps even appeals to us in some elusive sense. How are we to account for this paradox? Before suggesting some tentative answers to that question, I will cite support from several sources for my decision to speak of murder's "fascination."
In a piece entitled "I’m the American murder man," journalist Seymour Krim (1974) observes that Americans are "violence junkies,...fascinated on a hundred levels that [we] don’t have the power to trace" (pp. 242, 245). Despite the efforts of scientists, philosophers, and theologians to discover those levels, often using one or another theory of human nature as a compass, many people claim no greater understanding than Krim’s of why we are so drawn to violence.

In the popular press, the uncertainty is often expressed in the form of an open question. For example, a review of a biography of Josef Mengele begins, "A fair question might be: Which is worse, our penchant for inflicting cruelties on each other or our grim fascination with these deeds?" (Schulte, 1986). Clearly intended as a challenge to the belief that we who consider ourselves "normal" are different in any fundamental way from someone like Mengele, the question was echoed in a recent column by humorist Andy Rooney about the popular television program, Murder She Wrote. After gently poking fun at the show’s formulaic plots, Rooney conveys his main point as an apparent afterthought: "And then there’s one other thing I wonder about when I’m watching a murder show: How come we find murder so amusing?"

Murder fascinates us, even if the reasons why are unclear. Many commentators have observed the phenomenon. I will cite just a few examples. Norman Mailer comments that "We’re all fascinated with killers" (quoted in Lennon, 1982). I have remarked previously on playwright Eugene Ionesco’s claim that "People like killers" (quoted in Olsen, 1985). In an older study of murder, Bierstadt (1937) proposes
that "all the world loves a murderer" and observes further that there is in each of us a "sneaking sympathy for Cain" (p. ix). Brophy (1966) calls murder "a universal obsession." And in her influential early study of murder and its motives, F. Tennyson Jesse (1924) contends that "The person to whom the very word 'murder' does not give a certain not unpleasing thrill is so rare that he may be ruled out for the purpose of discussion." The rest of the population Jesse divides into two classes, those who openly admit their fascination with murder and those who, "while secretly thrilled, disclaim any such interest and condemn it as 'morbid'" (p. 9).

If one is prepared to accept the premise that most people find murder fascinating, perhaps even appealing in some indefinable way (though commentators like psychiatrist David Abrahamsen [1973] who accept the tenets of Freud's personality theory do not hesitate to specify the source of that appeal: it stems, says Abrahamsen, from "a secret admiration for the murderer" [p. 16]), then discovering a stable perspective from which to interpret the personal and social significance of apparently motiveless killing becomes that much more difficult. We are deeply involved both imaginatively and emotionally, on levels and in ways which are perhaps explainable only in reference to some theoretical construction of our "nature," with the very event whose meaning we wish to determine. As I have implied repeatedly throughout both this chapter and those which preceded it, it is highly problematic to proceed as though the "meaning" in acts of murder exists independent of the observing social audience.
What is needed is some appreciation for how our experience of "seeing" murder is colored by the power which the act exercises over our imagination. It might be profitable to regard the "murder observed" as a variety of what in his phenomenological analysis of the "horror" experience Telotte (1987) calls a "reflexive text" (p. 115), one which must be understood both with reference to what it "is" and to what it becomes in the act of "reading." To understand what such a text means it is of course necessary to explore its internal logic - in the case of a horror film, Telotte's primary interest, the arrangement of the film's structural elements to evoke a desired response from the audience; in the case of a murder, the social statement encoded in the act (Leyton, 1986). But even more important in the present context is the nature of the viewer's imaginative participation. How is the viewer drawn into the event he is observing? What aesthetic or functional needs are met through his participation? In what ways does his engagement with the text result in its being transformed into something new? And how does that "something new" reflect who the viewer (or reader) understands himself to be?

The scope of this project will not permit a detailed examination of these questions. However, a study meant to explore what dynamics are at work when members of the social audience construct the significance in cases of apparently motiveless murder cannot ignore them. In the necessarily brief discussion which follows I will consider some possible dimensions of our imaginative engagement - our fascination - with murder.
Why Murder Fascinates:
Three Exploratory Propositions

Proposition One: The degree to which an individual seeks out imaginative "participation" in murder may depend in part on the individual's need for "arousal" or stimulation.

Our attraction to violence and murder may result from their "arousal potential"; perhaps they introduce desired stimulation into our lives. One approach to accounting for this dimension of murder's "value" has emphasized a physiological level of explanation. Another has interpreted the effect from a phenomenological perspective. I will comment briefly on each approach.

Developed largely in reaction to perceived inadequacies in Hull's drive reduction theory of motivation, the "optimal arousal" theory holds that any individual's pattern of seeking out high and lower levels of stimulation is comprehensible in terms of the person's desire to achieve some optimal level of arousal, hypothesized to vary among individuals (Berlyne, 1960, 1971; Hare, 1970; Hebb, 1955). A person experiencing too low a state of arousal would be predicted, for example, to seek stimulation; on the other hand, a person experiencing a state of arousal above the optimal level would be expected to seek ways of decreasing stimulation. Since murder experienced vicariously may share important characteristics with other forms of stimulation which researchers have found to be associated with heightened cortical, autonomic, and reticular arousal — characteristics like novelty, lack of final resolution, incongruity, complexity, and salience — individuals whose level of arousal is lower than optimal
may find the stimulation associated with murder rewarding (Fiske and Maddi, 1961).

In the story of her unwitting personal involvement with serial killer Paul John Knowles, journalist Sandy Fawkes (1977) alludes to "that terrible excitement that proximity to violent death always brings" (p. 108). Colin Wilson's (1969a, 1972c) existential-phenomenological approach to analyzing the source of that excitement has relied on his concept of an "indifference threshold." By the indifference threshold Wilson means a level of consciousness below which an individual feels sluggish, "indifferent." When he is functioning below the indifference threshold, says Wilson, a person can be aroused to a renewed state of alertness only by real or imagined stimulation that triggers a sense of precariousness, or an experience of pain. To illustrate, Wilson cites an autobiographical essay by novelist Graham Greene called "The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard." In the essay Greene describes his early years lived beneath the indifference threshold, where "boredom was far deeper than love" and he "could take no aesthetic interest in any visual thing." Following a game of Russian roulette, Greene says, his sense of being "fixed in...boredom" disappeared; he felt released from his state of torpor and disengagement (Wilson, 1961, p. 27).

Perhaps for some individuals, becoming imaginatively involved with the idea of murder provides the same sort of release from indifference. Siann (1985), Fromm (1977), Goldstein (1975), Mailer (quoted in Lennon, 1972), and Fowler (quoted in "People take secret pleasure," 1987) are among the many commentators who argue versions of Wilson's position.
This statement from Fowler, a professor of literature, is representative: "Life is a dial tone for most of us....But once we subject ourselves to terror [in the form, for instance, of horror movies or non-fiction accounts of mass murder], we get a resulting sense of danger and activity in our lives."

**Proposition Two:** Vicarious participation in murder, and imaginative identification with killing, may allow the individual a sense of control over his fear of death.

Here is how existential author and therapist Irvin Yalom (1980) describes our imaginative involvement with the prospect of our own death: "The fear of death...haunts as does nothing else; it rumbles continuously under the surface; it is a dark, unsettling presence at the rim of consciousness" (p. 27). One way of objectifying and achieving a measure of control over our fear is to court vicarious experiences with death. Imaginative participation in the crime of murder is one such experience.

Support for this way of interpreting our fascination with murder comes from diverse sources. In their discussion of the "borderline personality" diagnosis, Kramer and Weiner (1983) explore the idea that in a culture such as ours, relatively unstructured and affluent to the point that for most people staying alive is no great challenge, people often feel out of control. One way of regaining a sense of mastery over what happens to us, they say, is "to place ourselves in dangerous situations" (p. 73). Some individuals (the authors cite John Hinckley and Mark David Chapman as examples) might take extreme measures either to court their own demise or to become the agent able to effect the demise of others. Imagining all sorts of situations where the action
takes place at the borderline between life and death may serve a similar purpose.

Psychiatrist Marvin Ziporyn, co-author of a book on mass murderer Richard Speck, was asked on a recent television program to explain why people are so drawn to real and imaginary relationships with killers. In his response he emphasized our need to feel in control of the things we fear most. For example, he said, we go to the zoo not to look at the sheep but to contemplate the tiger's potential to destroy; by viewing him from outside his cage, we achieve a sense of being simultaneously close to and in control of the threat which the tiger represents. Following Ted Bundy's recent execution, a psychologist from the University of Florida contributed this perspective on why the area surrounding the penitentiary took on a carnival-like atmosphere on the morning Bundy died: "For a moment, we saw ourselves as in charge and in control" (Koff, 1989). Other commentators who emphasize this dimension of our fascination with murder and murderers include horror novelist Clive Barker (quoted in Gilmore, 1988), who suggests that our imaginative participation is a process of becoming armed to confront the themes and imagery of our nightmares; Goldstein (1975); and Levin and Fox (1985).

A brief digression seems warranted. Since at least the third century, writers concerned with what gives an object of contemplation its "aesthetic appeal" have commented on one ingredient called the "sublime." Though it has most frequently been used to suggest an elevated state characterized by a sense of awe and grandeur, sublimity has proven to be a slippery and often debated aesthetic construct.
Relevant to the present discussion, however, is Edmund Burke's (1757) well-known description. The sublime, he says, is the pleasurable sensation that is experienced "when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances." It may be that what I am calling "fascination" overlaps with Burke's "sublime"; in each case, imaginative engagement with an object or situation that would normally evoke fear and apprehension brings with it a sense of detachment and control.

Proposition Three: We are drawn to the contemplation of murder and murderers because in them we sense, if vaguely, a reflection of our own potential as human beings. Murder's fascination can be understood, at least in part, as the product of a desire to better understand ourselves. (Note: While I will not take it up explicitly, implied in this proposition is the companion idea of "catharsis": that through our imaginative participation we are able to experience a fundamental, if socially prohibited and consciously unacceptable, aspect of who we are.)

The theme embodied in this proposition is that the contemplation of murder provides for the contemplating subject an avenue inward. The idea contrasts rather sharply with the two propositions discussed previously, their respective emphases on murder's "arousal potential" and its power to evoke death-fear over which we can feel a degree of control. Here, the phenomenological experience of contemplating murder is seen as important and attractive primarily because of its reflexive properties, more specifically, because of its potential as an exercise in self-exploration. The crime writer Lustgarten (1968) captures the point of view. He suggests to the person interested in understanding human behavior that it is best to leave philosophers with the thankless task of deciding what is "natural" and what is "unnatural." Look to the
murderer, he says, and see yourself: "You will learn more about your friends and acquaintances, more about everyone, more about yourself, from the close-up study of [multiple murderers like John Haigh, Neville Heath, Desire Landru, and Peter Manuel]" (p. 9).

Of course clearly evident in this perspective is the influence of psychoanalytic theory. Psychiatrist Walter Bromberg is perhaps representative of the many commentators who have drawn on Freudian concepts to understand why murder seems to exercise such a powerful grip on the imaginations of "normal" people. In *The Mold of Murder*, for example, Bromberg (1961) offers this analysis of the relationship between the murderer and the observing social audience: "[U]nconscious participation in homicidal activity, via fantasy, by law-abiding persons confers on them a degree of psychological familiarity with crimes of violence." It is, he says, because there is "a buried Program for Murder in all humanity" that "the crime of murder is present 'in potentia,' lurking at times distorted, and at times undisguised, in human fantasy." That we approach crime stories and tales of horror with such avid interest is "a direct indication of the closeness of aggressive impulses to our innermost psychological core." We are not so very different even from killers whose acts may seem senseless and unthinkable. Their acts and our fantasies "derive from the same submerged emotional stuff" (pp. vii, 3, 4, 11-12).

Many contemporary psychologists would probably dismiss Bromberg's analysis much as Albert Ellis (1971) dismisses psychoanalytic interpretations of murder, as so much "gobbledy-gook" and "mumbo jumbo." But as I observed in the previous discussion of frameworks for
understanding aggression, it would be difficult to overestimate Freud's influence on the ways we think about the relationship between "normal" and (various forms of) extreme behavior. As Gaylin (1983) argues, the story Freud told has literally altered the reality it was meant to describe. Now it is not only analytically-oriented psychiatrists like Bromberg, Abrahamsen (1973), and Tanay (1976) who challenge us to see a distorted but still recognizable reflection of ourselves in the killers whose acts we are taught to abhor. Many other commentators issue a similar challenge. For example, Brophy (1966) contends that the modern "obsession" with murder stems from a vague recognition of the "interlocking dualities in ourselves" (p. 267). And Dunbar (1964) suggests that it is the "murder potential in all of us that accounts for our continued 'grisly' fascination" (p. 7).

Ambler (1987) implies that what draws the contemporary audience to murder is the possibility of finding a variety of knowledge that is in some ways very different from the knowledge that the social audience sought a century and a half ago. He provides an interesting slant on what he regards as a major shift in social attitudes toward murder. In the early nineteenth century, the murder that received most attention was the "everyday life" murder, committed out of passion, jealousy, the desire for revenge, or perhaps panic during the course of another crime such as robbery. The appeal of such crimes, he says, was their social embeddedness; they took place in familiar contexts, and they involved people who tended to define their social identity using frames of reference common to most of their neighbors: for example, marriage and family relationships, their involvement in local commerce, their
membership in a religious group. But now, according to Ambler, the murder that most engages our interest is the "willful, deliberate" murder, the kind that seems disconnected from the circumstances of everyday life, almost as if it were intended as a blow against all of humanity. A crime of this latter sort is both less and more "common" than its nineteenth century counterpart. It is less common in the sense that it seldom seems to develop out of the familiar, identifiable rhythms of people in relationship. On the other hand, it is more common in the sense that its apparently "pure" (divorced from an interpersonal context) quality raises questions more central to our understanding of human nature and so forces our consideration of how the mind of the killer relates to our own mind. It is this self-reflexive, "psychological" dimension of the modern fascination with murder that I particularly want to emphasize.

The possibility that the quality of our imaginative engagement with murder derives in part from as-yet unsatisfied curiosity about our origins, our nature, and the boundaries of our potential as human beings has been raised in unusually concrete terms by two commentators interested in accounting for the power of our fascination with Nazi killers. Neither Dicks (1972) nor Fuller-Torrey (1986) are so blunt as to pose the question which Askenasy (1978) poses in the title to his book about obedience: "Are we all Nazis?" However, both Dicks and Fuller-Torrey imply that our fascination with the Nazis can be partially accounted for by disturbing doubts about how the question ought to be answered. In particular, they each call attention to the unsettling if infrequently articulated recognition on the parts of
many Americans that they are closely tied by heredity to individuals who played some role in orchestrating genocidal policies. As Dicks states, the recognition is that "Germans are our cousins" (p. 18). Even if there is no such suspected genetic link, at least no close one, between ourselves and killers like Ted Bundy and Charles Manson, Ian Brady and Dennis Nilsen, we may be haunted all the same by the suspicion that at some level less easily specified than the level of genes and chromosomes, "we are all of us akin to the murderer" (Brophy, 1966, p. 271).

The Particular Fascination of the Motiveless Case

Finally, by exploiting a literary analogy I would like to make several observations about the dynamics at work when we "read" or become imaginatively engaged with cases of apparently motiveless murder. If we approach it as a text analogue, motiveless murder is perhaps best understood as one variety of a story lacking closure. Open-ended stories compel our participation and ensnare us in their complications. Because of their unfinished quality, they can also arouse the anxiety with which human beings often react to prospects of meaninglessness (Kegan, 1977). The desire to effect closure, the mental "itch" (Chance, 1975) that results when movement toward closure is suspended short of completion, and the anxiety which results from recognizing that closure cannot be achieved: these factors all contribute to the ambiguous fascination which lends the experience of "reading" motiveless murder its distinctive quality. ("Fascination" is actually a very imprecise term for designating the phenomenological
response I mean to suggest, but so long as its inadequacy is acknowledged it can continue to serve as a form of shorthand.)

Consider first the relevance of our tendency to seek closure. The Gestalt psychologists were the first to systematically describe how human beings seek to create perceptual "wholes" out of incomplete figures, configurations, ideas, and narratives. Their description has of course provided a framework for understanding the perennial appeal of much crime and detective fiction. Such fiction typically begins by posing a riddle; then, the reader is invited to participate in the discovery of a solution. Though his point of reference is a real rather than a fictional case, Colin Wilson relates a personal anecdote which testifies to the power of our urge to "solve" such riddles. When he was a child, Wilson says, he often fantasized that if a fairy granted him three wishes, he would ask first of all for an answer to the mystery of Jack the Ripper's identity because "the thought that it might remain a mystery forever was intolerable" (C. Wilson, 1972a, p. 19). The continuing popularity of television serials, movies, and novels which follow some version of the basic "whodunit" formula further attests to the strength of this human tendency to desire closure.

Of course that tendency can be manifest in different ways. For crimes that cannot be readily understood, achieving a sense of closure is likely to involve more than simply identifying the crime's perpetrator. What such crimes engage is our "will to meaning" (Frankl, 1959). Motiveless murder is the prime example. Seldom is there any question about who committed a "motiveless" murder. The still-unsolved cases of Jack the Ripper, San Francisco's "Zodiac" killer, the "Thames
murderer" of the early 1960's, and Washington's "Green River" killer are all exceptions. As a general rule, the open question in motiveless murder is the question of why. If the murder's "meaning" is to be understood as a concretion that incorporates both the murder's "facts" and the observer's interpretation of their significance, "closing" the question can be seen as more a process of construction than a process of discovery. Consider, for example, what might be required to achieve a sense of closure in the case of John Wayne Gacy, who was convicted in 1980 of thirty-three murders. One would need to construct plausible versions of the elusive answers to questions like these: What was Gacy's state of mind throughout the six-year period during which the murders occurred? How was he able to maintain his high level of involvement in business, civic, and personal affairs while simultaneously engaging in behavior so suggestive of being "out of control"? Perhaps most unsettling, in what relation must we place a person like Gacy to that vast territory we designate "normal"? Stated another way, what does Gacy have to do with the rest of us?

Of course the meaning in a crime such as Gacy's may be difficult to discern, impossible to agree upon. Still, few people are satisfied to accept passively what Lifton (1986) calls the "principle of unfathomability," the idea that for certain crimes there is no explanation. A more typical reaction - the kind which prompts from journalist Calvin Trillin (1984) the observation that "We can't tolerate a void" (p. 178) - is to work obsessively at a construction of the crime's "sense." In the final analysis, such constructions may have as much to do with our sense of what constitutes satisfying closure as
with the largely unrecoverable chain of events leading up to and
including the central event requiring an explanation: the crime itself.

Up to this point I have focused on our desire to achieve a sense
of closure as the primary impetus behind our imaginative engagement
with cases of motiveless murder. Additional insight into the quality of
that engagement is provided by the "Zeigarnik effect," named after its
discoverer, Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik. Stated simply, the
Zeigarnik effect refers to the fact that when movement toward
completion of a task is interrupted — by a real delay, for instance,
or perhaps by the discovery of contradictions/obstacles which impede
progress — tension is created. The tension acts to facilitate active
processing of the unfinished activity. Novelists often create tension
of this sort by structuring a plot which, in effect, says "Tick...";
the reader is then trapped in the interval before "Tock." By
entrapping the reader in this way, the novelist forces him to assume an
active role in constructing what the story "means" (Heller, 1987).

This is analogous to what happens when a "reader" confronts in a
murder the paradoxes and apparent contradictions which often
contribute to the murder's description as "motiveless." "He committed
monstrous acts, but...." "He looks like anyone's next-door neighbor,
but...." "To act in the way that he did he must have hated his victims,
but...." "Acquaintances would surely have identified warning signs,
but...." "There must be a motive, but...." Faced with ambiguities and
unanswered questions like these, the person struggling to make sense of
the murder is left in a position similar to that of readers who
encounter the "radical anti-closure" of certain "terror tales," Poe's "Ligeia" and James' *The Turn of the Screw*, for example.

In his analysis of the phenomenology of reading such tales, Heller (1987) describes the position as a kind of "limbo." The effect of being left in limbo is that the reader or observer is compelled to "repeat texts," seek new avenues of escape, construct different versions of an ending. He is trapped in the narrative. Lifton (1986) describes this state of entrapment in his remarks about a former Nazi physician who ascribes to the "principle of unfathomability." Because he has apparently reconciled himself to the view that Nazi war crimes represent, in effect, an open text, one for which there cannot be a sense of closure, the physician is "unable either to absorb (by finding narrative and meaning) or to free himself from Auschwitz images" (p. 333).

This experienced need to "repeat" or continue active processing of the unfinished text (or its "images") is precisely what is described by the Zeigarnik effect. In cases of motiveless murder, where the lack of resolution is more complex and thus more engaging than the lack of resolution that accompanies, say, the failure to answer the "whodunit" question; the effect is likely to be particularly powerful. It no doubt accounts for a large measure of the distinctive fascination provoked in "readers" who attempt the task of closing cases of motiveless murder.

**Concluding Remarks**

Recall Brophy's (1966) observation in the introduction to this chapter: "Our attitude toward murders seems to be full of
discrepancies and ambivalences" (pp. 18-19). My intention has been to assemble selected evidence, much of it anecdotal, all of it collected in a rather unsystematic fashion, which illuminates certain dimensions of the phenomenon Brophy observes. Perhaps aspects of my survey seem naive. For example: Is it really necessary to illustrate the ways in which ideology can be used to justify certain acts of killing? Everyone knows that there exist historically-bounded "sanctions for evil" (Sanford and Comstock, 1971). Why make the point one more time?

I have chosen to make it, perhaps even to dwell upon it, because like related points raised in this chapter, it often receives no more than passing attention in studies which propose ways of thinking about people who kill without apparent motive. In recent years there has been a proliferation of books about mass murder (Levin and Fox, 1985), serial murder (Cartel, 1985; Holmes and De Burger, 1988; Norris, 1988), compulsive killing (Leyton, 1986), and sexual homicide (Caputi, 1987; Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas, 1988). However, there have been relatively few attempts to link social constructions of the meaning in such crimes to the kinds of topics addressed in Sanford and Comstock's (1971) Sanctions for Evil, a volume which includes the chapters "Conditions for guilt-free massacre," "Dehumanization," and "It never happened and besides they deserved it." Of course when Sanford and Comstock's book was published in 1971, the Vietnam War had not yet ended. Lieutenant Calley's trial and conviction had fueled a vigorous public dialogue about killing and responsibility (for an interesting empirical study documenting aspects of that dialogue, see Kelman and Lawrence, 1972); and daily, members of the anti-war movement encouraged
Americans to acknowledge as salient and not just silly the question of whether individuals whose killing is socially-sanctioned can be regarded as fundamentally different from individuals whose killing reflects a more private logic. It seems to me that questions such as that one need to be at the center, not at the periphery, of attempts to understand who the motiveless murderer is, and how he is related to the "normal" population.

Obviously, the problems of finding a stable vantage point and developing a coherent ethics for assessing various acts of lethal violence are not easily resolved. Equally obvious, discovering means of resolving them has not been one of my aims. To borrow an apt description from the introduction to Morgan's (1989) recent exploration of "the sexuality of terrorism," my objective in this chapter has been to serve the "irritating function of asking questions, sensing connections, and suggesting perspectives" (p. 15). In other words, to engage in a willful complication of the problem of deciding what, from a constructionist perspective, "motiveless murder" means. Brophy's "discrepancies and ambivalences" are everywhere apparent. We kill and we condemn killing. Often, the difference between one response and the other is comprehensible only with reference to some historically-contingent ideology. Not infrequently, when people die following preventable action taken by either individuals or governments, we are able to avoid the word "killing" altogether by fitting to our eyes some conceptual lens which transforms killing into an event that seems not like killing at all. In ways that are sometimes subtle, sometimes not, we respond to certain murderers as though in their acts or in their
inscrutable public personas we discern evidence of some ineffable "star quality." And no matter how brutal their acts, we continue to find murderers imaginatively engaging; they fascinate us.

The problem of determining where we stand in relation to killing and killers remains a problem, an important aspect of a complex interpretive dilemma. Documenting the problem's existence has been my primary concern in this chapter. In addition, however, I have been concerned to lay the groundwork for the discussion which follows in Chapter Five. From the present focus on killing's ambiguous social and psychological status, I will now turn to an exploratory consideration of how that ambiguity is manifest in shifting patterns of rhetoric and representation in the literature on motiveless murder.
PART TWO: DISCOURSES OF MOTIVELESS MURDER
CHAPTER V

OTHERNESS AND AFFINITY:
TWO CONTRASTING PATTERNS OF RHETORIC AND REPRESENTATION
IN TEXTS PORTRAYING THE MOTIVELESS MURDERER

Introduction

Is the relationship between the motiveless murderer and the majority social audience best depicted through constructions of continuity or constructions of discontinuity? In this chapter I will present an exploratory survey of answers. At one end of the continuity-discontinuity continuum is the perspective expressed by writers like C. Wilson (1961b) and Leyton (1986). They contend that even a killer like Ted Bundy is not fundamentally different from individuals who occupy that vast territory we call "normal." At the opposite extreme is the perspective expressed in a psychologist's recent study of serial murder. Norris (1988) argues that Bundy and others like him are only comprehensible if their behavior is viewed as the manifestation of a disease process that leaves them no more capable of exercising free will than a one-celled animal.

For this survey, I have consulted a wide variety of texts portraying the motiveless murderer. My selection of sources has in part been guided by Gilman's (1985) very elastic notion of what the term "text" includes - any written or illustrative material prepared for
public scrutiny. For convenience, I have found it useful to organize patterns of rhetoric and representation using the continuity-discontinuity continuum described above. The two poles of the continuum — call them continuity and discontinuity, otherness and affinity, or difference and similarity — represent a fundamental thematic opposition. By tracing variations on the general viewpoints which define that opposition, it is possible to gain further insight into the same dynamic relationship discussed in Chapters Three and Four: the relationship between the struggle to understand apparently motiveless murder and the struggle, in many ways parallel, to define the nature and boundaries of human potential.

As a field of inquiry where the movements and clashes of this latter struggle can be observed with unusual clarity, the social construction of motiveless murder has a great deal in common with the social construction of "insanity," and with the social construction of what it means to be a "freak." People who behave oddly or look different challenge our most deeply-held ideas about who we are. In his introduction to Gilman's (1982) study of the iconography of insanity, Carlson (1982) poses a question to which all our images and ideas about the insane are, in effect, partial answers: "What is [man's] ultimate reality? Is he closer to the angels, or can we visualize him in a naturalistic or structural fashion which includes the dangerous implications of materialism" (p. vii)? Fiedler (1978) sees reflected in the "freak's" ambiguous social and psychological status a struggle with the same kinds of ultimate questions. Is it possible, he asks, that the appearance of a fundamental distinction between "audience and exhibit,
we and them, normal and Freak, is an...illusion, desperately, perhaps even necessarily, defended, but untenable in the end" (p. 36)?

Of course these questions, like the question with which I introduced this chapter, sound a familiar theme which has preoccupied generations of thinkers from a variety of disciplines. The theme is the problem of self-definition: Who am I? What am I capable of becoming? What boundaries, delineated by whom, divide self and other, human and non-human?

Providing the foundation for this chapter's discussion is my belief that much of the thematic variation in texts portraying the motiveless murderer can be traced to unanswered, probably unanswerable questions about human nature. At some level we may acknowledge along with Terence ("I am a man; nothing human is alien to me") and Goethe ("There is no crime of which I do not deem myself capable") that as human beings we exist in relation with even the worst murderers. At the same time, we may find it nearly impossible to account for who they are using the same frames of reference we use in defining who we are. For many people, even attempting the construction of such bridges is likely to pose a grave threat to boundaries they have erected in defense of their self-image. In any case, a great deal of the variation in the rhetoric and imagery used to portray the motiveless murderer can perhaps be understood as an artifact of the struggle to understand whether, and if so where, those boundaries actually exist.

Writing with specific reference to the genre of the horror film, Waller (1987) describes the reflective experience of horror in terms which work equally well for describing what may result from our
imaginative engagement with the idea of "pure" or apparently motiveless murder. Enter the unsettling world of the horror film. Contemplate the misshapen figures of Fiedler's "freaks." Imagine a person who looks and seems quite ordinary, yet who kills repeatedly - for no apparent reason. Each of these experiences constitutes a challenge to what Fiedler describes as the "desperately maintained boundaries on which any definition of sanity ultimately depends" (Fiedler, p. 24). The experience of imagining motiveless murder forces us to a new level of introspection. Like the experience of horror, it
defines and redefines, clarifies and obscures the relationship between the human and the monstrous, the normal and the aberrant, the sane and the mad, the natural and the supernatural, the conscious and the unconscious, the daydream and the nightmare, the civilized and the primitive - slippery categories and tenuous oppositions indeed. (Waller, p. 12)

When the boundaries which define such categories and oppositions are disturbed, fundamental but fragile assumptions about our identity and the identities of others are called into question, too. Its potential to disturb those boundaries accounts in part for the special social and psychological resonance of motiveless murder.

Preliminary Observations About Murder and the Construction of "Normal" Human Behavior

Framing the Issue

Like the two preceding it, this chapter is concerned with exploring how various ideas about what constitutes normal human behavior are reflected in discourse about killing and killers. Consider for a moment the problem of defining "normal." Fortunately, it is neither feasible nor necessary to consider in any depth the
problem's philosophical, psychological, and sociological dimensions. The present context requires only that we acknowledge the very tenuous status of the whole notion of "normality."

Dinitz (1979), a criminologist, refers to a modern "collapse of consensus" (p. 116) on what "normal" means; and Durkheim (1958), Becker (1963), Foucault (1965, 1975), and Szasz (1961) are only several of the most notable among many social theorists who have written extensively on the subject. What is necessary in the present context is to recognize that there is a great deal of disagreement over how we should answer a deceptively simple question - "How normal is the impulse to commit murder?" In the discussion which follows I will highlight selected viewpoints on either side of the debate. First, however, I would like to cite several ways in which different commentators frame the same basic question.

One way of framing the question is to imagine that all members of humanity might be represented with a huge Venn diagram, each individual overlapping to a greater or lesser extent a circle standing for an abstraction called "normal human behavior." Of course a conceptualization of this sort implies distinctions among people - "normal" people, freaks, murderers - that are quantitative rather than qualitative. This model provides the underpinning for Norman Mailer's approach to thinking about killer Gary Gilmore and the rest of society. It was his sense that lawbreakers and law-abiders need to be understood primarily in terms of their affinities rather than their differences that initially drew Mailer to the Gilmore case. Eventually, according to Mailer, he:
realized that being a murderer was not a final factor, and shouldn’t stop all thought. Once we allow ourselves to see Gilmore in his contradictions, the fact that he is a murderer is significant, let’s say it’s as much as one-quarter of his personality while the potential murderer in each of us might be only one sixteenth or one sixty-fourth of our personality, but fundamentally he is still more like us than unlike us. (quoted in Lennon, 1982, pp. 166-167)

One can glimpse a parallel perspective in a short story based on the famous multiple murder case of "Brides in the Bath" killer George Joseph Smith, who eliminated a series of wives by drowning them in the bathtub. The story’s narrator decries press coverage of the case, lamenting the public’s apparent fixation with the idea that the perpetrator of such a crime must be a "monster." In actuality, the narrator cautions, "How little do you know about a man if you only know that he has committed four murders!" Like Mailer, he suggests the likelihood that the greatest portion of a circle representing even a multiple killer would overlap with the larger circle standing for "normal human behavior" (Vickers, 1984).

Other writers have investigated the same fundamental question - "How normal is the impulse to commit murder?" - by asking of ostensibly normal individuals, "Could you have done what the killer did, under any conceivable circumstances?" For example, as part of his investigation of the "Yale murder case" (in which Richard Herrin bludgeoned his former girlfriend to death while she was sleeping), Gaylin (1983) interviewed a number of people, most of them members of the Catholic community at Yale who had rallied behind Herrin following his arrest. He asked them, "Can you imagine yourself doing what Richard did?"
Perhaps surprising, perhaps not, a number of them answered that they
could. Their responses no doubt contributed - along with Gaylin's psychoanalytic orientation - to shaping the psychiatrist's conclusion that "the place...[Herrin] holds on the spectrum from normal to psychotic is securely within the area we must reserve for normalcy" (p. 305).

The author of a book about the controversial murder case of Alice Crimmins approaches the question of the killer's "normality" in much the same way that Gaylin does. During the 1960's Crimmins was convicted of killing her two children. Jones (1980) encourages readers to contemplate the conditions under which they themselves might be revealed as people capable of far greater violence than they ordinarily suppose. The effort required to imagine such conditions is not great, according to Jones. Any mother who is isolated daily with her children knows, she says, "that maybe, just maybe," she, too, could do exactly what Crimmins apparently did (p. 278).

Whether or not we can imagine ourselves doing what "subway vigilante" Bernhard Goetz did is another variation on the question which Gaylin asked his interviewees. Although he stops short of suggesting an answer, Iyer (1988) raises the issue in a recent Time magazine essay examining the "grey area" where "eccentricity" blurs into "weirdness" and the boundaries we imagine around "normal" seem to evaporate. The question Iyer poses is this: "Was Bernhard Goetz just a volatile Everyman, ourselves pushed to the limit, and then beyond? Or was he in fact an aberration?" Like those posed by Gaylin and Jones, Iyer's question is meant to challenge our ideas about what "normality" means.
Finally, some commentators examining the relationship between the crime of murder and our ideas about "normality" have framed the question in still another way. Their approach is to consider how the collective social audience would respond to questions such as these: Can the person who committed murder, in particular an apparently motiveless act of murder, ever change? Can he become someone different from the person he was in the act of "senselessly" murdering another person? In other words, is it possible that one day the murderer might more closely resemble members of the social majority; or is his essential identity that of "killer," someone who will always remain fundamentally different, "abnormal"? Nearly everyone can cite an example of a "rehabilitated" murderer, so the question's answer may at first seem obvious. However, when the question is asked about people who kill for no apparent reason - motiveless killers - there is less consensus.

Often, commentators imply that such killers cannot change. Bromberg (1961) suggests that this belief might serve an important social function. Two constructions often used to explain the actions of apparently motiveless killers - "insanity" and "psychopathy" - make it possible, he says, for society to accomplish a kind of ritualistic rite of purification. Murderers construed as "insane" or "psychopathic" function as "the unwitting carrier[s] of our own violent fantasies and impulses" (p. 15). They are who they are; we are who we are. In Bromberg's view, it is because of their vital interest in disowning the impulse to kill, that many members of society tend to regard the apparently "insane" or "psychopathic" murderer as irredeemable,
incapable of change - fixed in his identity as a representative of the absolute Other. What is "bad" in the self is fixed in the criminal through the defense of projection.

I will return to some of these conceptual issues in a later section of this chapter. First, however, in order to lay the groundwork for the subsequent survey of rhetoric and imagery used to represent the motiveless murderer, I want to underline the striking lack of consensus which exists about how to answer the deceptively simple question I raised earlier: "How normal is the impulse to commit murder?" I will begin by citing several commentators who encourage the belief that murder is normal, that in fact it is untenable to regard most killers as being fundamentally different from the majority. Then, under a separate sub-heading, I will cite a number of commentators who take the opposing position.

The Continuity Model: Illustrative Constructions of the "Normal" Killer

[The most common misconception held by most people is that a murderer is different from the ordinary man. Too often he is described in exaggerated terms such as "an insane monster" or "a cold-blooded brute." Such melodramatic ideas are far from the truth. Actually a murderer is quite normal. (A. Williams, 1984, p. 367)

The speaker in this quotation is not a social theorist or even the author of a true crime account; he is the first-person narrator of a short story entitled "Being a murderer myself." However, the idea that a person who commits murder may be "quite normal" - even when his act reflects a private rather than a widely-sanctioned public logic - is found frequently throughout the non-fiction literature on motiveless murder as well.
In a sense, of course, the question of whether a killer is normal or abnormal is moot, at the very least overly simplistic. The categories "normal" and "abnormal" are linguistic conventions. As I have pointed out before, there exists little agreement about the range of reference for either one. Still, in the present context they are suggestive of two very different frameworks or paradigms for understanding murder as a social and psychological problem. In this section I will present the viewpoints of several commentators who, like the speaker in the above quotation, suggest that we need to understand many, perhaps even most, instances of murder without appealing to constructions of "pathology" or "sickness" or "deviance." Represented in their shared perspective is what I am calling the continuity model for conceptualizing the relationship between the killer and other members of the social community.

In Chapter Three's discussion of existential perspectives on aggression, I cited the work of Colin Wilson. Wilson (1961b) argues that when members of society construct the murderer as a being apart, in effect the representative of an "alien species," they do so in order to reinforce the boundaries around "normal." The problem, says Wilson, is that normal is a gerrymandered territory: "Belief in the abnormality of the murderer is a part of the delusion of normality on which society is based" (p. 25). Wilson suggests that the killer's act of negation is only an amplified version of more common forms of life denial. We are abnormal, he insists, abnormal in the sense that our easy acceptance of "who we are" has blinded us to what Maslow called "the farther reaches of human nature." Even if the murderer's vision of
what life might be is more dramatically impaired than ours is, it is
still not feasible to use ourselves as the standard against which to
gauge the murderer's "abnormality."

In a famous early study of multiple murder, Bolitho (1926)
reaches the same basic conclusion as Wilson, only by a somewhat
different route. Wilson's is a philosopher's perspective; he
emphasizes "life failure," the failure to confront the existential
implications of being alive, as the common link between murderers and
most non-murderers. Bolitho, in contrast to Wilson, is more a
sociologist than a philosopher. Like Brophy and Godwin, who I have
cited previously, Bolitho observes that often, the behavior which
society regards as "normal" is not so very different from the behavior
of murderers. In fact, he says, to understand even the worst mass
murderers we need to follow the roots of their behavior to "that huge
animal, Society" (p. 283). (Of course, Bolitho is far from alone in
emphasizing the role of the environment in prompting behavior that may
seem "deviant" or "abnormal." Most sociologists and behaviorally-
oriented psychologists would take the same position. Bolitho is singled
out here because of his focus on multiple murder.)

Bolitho's comments (and his diction) are obviously the product of
a different historical era, specifically the period following World War
I. However, his theme is echoed frequently in the more recent litera-
ture on multiple murder (eg., Holmes and De Burger, 1988; Levin and
Fox, 1985). The flavor of his analysis is captured in the following
quotation:
No one can nowadays dare to reproach [multiple murderers], after a collective killing of such magnitude as we have all committed, of an exclusive mark of blood-stain [sic]. All our foreheads are smeared. Those who innocently persist in imagining that mass murderers are different from themselves...
I refer to the printed achievements of the heroes of the war; or if they are unwilling to read them again, I call the witness of all ex-combatants that at the Front it was never found difficult to induce even the mildest recruit to kill. Mere aptitude for homicide... cannot divide us from these men, for we all most horribly and certainly possess it. (p. 284)

This passage recalls philosopher Phillip Hallie's claim (see Chapter Three) that the central aim of his academic work has been to reconcile his abhorrence of cruelty with his recognition that he participated in a wartime effort to kill large numbers of human beings. Another contemporary philosopher, Sam Keen (1986), agrees with Hallie and Bolitho that soldiers on one hand, and on the other hand individuals who kill without appeal to a socially-sanctioned "cause," may be more alike than is commonly assumed:

Sadism in war is hard to explain only if we assume there is a discontinuity between soldiers who enjoy inflicting pain and normal men and women. The assumption that there is a vast difference between the moral fiber of the man who enjoys killing in battle and you and me is the illusion on which the notion of normality is built. (p. 124)

An additional example will further emphasize the importance some commentators place on interpreting the killer's behavior in its larger social context. In their analysis of the nineteenth century case of mass murderer Pierre Riviere, members of a study team headed by French historian Michel Foucault (1975) suggest that killing which at first appears "abnormal" or "insane" may in fact reflect quite common social and psychological processes.
Pierre Riviere was a young man who used a blunt instrument to murder his mother, his sister, and his brother. Contemporary accounts of the crime refer to the murderer as a "raving madman," a "maniac," a "fanatic," and a "monster" (pp. 16-18). Though many people at the time remained convinced that Riviere was insane, a judge sentenced him to death. Later, even after commutation of his death sentence, Riviere committed suicide in prison.

Foucault and his colleagues present a variety of historical documents pertaining to the case. Their analysis concentrates on ways in which the case illustrates the complex interrelationships among power, ideology, narrative, and social constructions of free will and responsibility. However, it is not necessary to delve into details of the crime and the response it evoked among Riviere’s contemporaries in order to consider its relevance for the question at issue here. What are we to make of Riviere? Need we regard the murders he committed as the acts of a madman? Or can they be considered in some sense "normal"?

Answers to these questions are suggested in a contribution to the Foucault volume written by historians Peter and Favret (1975). Riviere belonged to an underprivileged class, they point out; he was without power, and he harbored an inchoate rage against representatives of the social order which excluded him and denied him opportunities to better himself. Furthermore, he perceived his family as a microcosm of society as a whole. Just as the landlords tyrannized the poor, in his family his mother tyrannized his father. In both cases, contracts were broken, and individuals were coerced into forfeiting their rights. "It is not surprising," write Peter and Favret, that at the time the mass murder
was committed, "no means was left untried [by those in power] to reduce
the significance of [Riviere's] act; since it was aimed at the social
order, the order of the contract, it could only be something done by a
beast or a madman, the opposite of a man" (p. 193).

But Riviere was not a madman, insist Peter and Favret, a fact
attested to by the lengthy and lucid memoir he left behind, in which he
explained what he had hoped to accomplish through his acts of outrage.
Riviere's contemporaries who held positions of power and influence -
the lawyers, for example, and increasingly the alienists - had to con-
struct the case as an anomaly, suggest Peter and Favret, so that they
could preserve not only their authority but also their sense of what
constitutes the "normal" social order. With their "operations of
discourse" they "distorted the literal meaning of the facts." As one
result of their efforts, they retained the ability "to look at
themselves in a glass without shuddering." At least, say the
historians, they wanted to retain that ability. Peter and Favret ques-
tion whether their efforts to depict Riviere in terms of the Other were
entirely convincing, even to themselves:

[S]ecure holders of power as they were, could they really make us believe that they did not
tremble when they discovered...that the aggres-
Sive monstrosity of the 'other' fell back on
them, that in them [emphasis added] someone was
speaking the same language, that desire can leap
barriers, and that normal is simply a word one
applied to oneself?" (p. 189)

This latter notion, that at root "normality" is a self-reflexive idea,
has not been superceded despite over 150 years of research and debate
on the subject since Pierre Riviere's crime (Chance, 1988).
To conclude this brief look at several writers who encourage us to believe that most killers are people not fundamentally different from ourselves, I would like to cite the perspectives of two other commentators, the first one an anthropologist, the second a journalist. Leyton (1986), the anthropologist, analyzes the cases of six multiple murderers who seem to have killed "for its own sake" (p. 25). In not one of the cases, according to Leyton, are the acts of murder indicators of mental illness; rather, he says, they are part of a "culturally programmed dialogue" that must be subjected to social analysis, not medical diagnosis. Leyton allows that there is a "special horror" in contemplating multiple murderers like Ted Bundy, Charles Starkweather, and David Berkowitz. However, the horror is misunderstood if it is interpreted as the response of "normal" people to confronting aberrations. Instead, according to Leyton, the horror stems from our recognition that Bundy, Starkweather, and Berkowitz "are as 'normal' as you and me, but they kill without mercy, and they kill to make a statement" (p. 22).

Harrison (1986) supplies a final corroborating viewpoint. Referring to Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, England's "Moors murderers," he writes:

[Brady and Hindley] are not "monsters" until they have been labelled as such by the media. How, then, can we identify them as separate from the rest of us? How can we be sure that we are not afflicted with the same fatal propensities? These are some of the painful questions that, all too often, are hidden away. (p. 11)
The Discontinuity Model: Illustrative Constructions of the "Abnormal" Killer

In the preceding section I cited several commentators who suggest that murderers, including those who murder without apparent motive, are best understood in relation to "normal" human behavior. I called this the continuity model. Here, I will cite a number of commentators who argue in favor of a sharply contrasting orientation. Theirs is a discontinuity model; they suggest that as a general rule, killers are best conceptualized using constructions of "abnormality" or difference.

In order to clarify the style of thinking I intend to evoke when I speak of this discontinuity model, allow me to cite Braginsky, Braginsky, and Ring's (1969) discussion of the same style in their larger consideration of different approaches to thinking about the person labelled "schizophrenic." According to these authors,

Possibly the primary axiom [underlying] the psychiatric conception of the schizophrenic is that there is some fundamental and undesirable way in which he differs from the rest of mankind...[He] seems to be on another unnameable and terrifying continuum altogether, one that ordinary men never encounter except perhaps in their dreams. He is supposed to inhabit an unreal world governed by fantastic images and a pervasive illogicality. It is almost as if he had defected from the human race to join another antediluvian one, for his schizophrenia renders him both other and less than human. (pp. 31-32)

To further illustrate this line of thinking, Braginski et al. cite Schooler and Parker's (1966) description of the schizophrenic as "an alien creature" who is "intriguing because he negates many criteria which have been used to distinguish men from other animals" (p. 67).

Many examples of a parallel style of thinking can be identified in the literature on murder. For his collaborator on the first of two
"encyclopedias of murder," (C. Wilson and Pitman, 1961), Colin Wilson selected an individual whose perspective on murder and "normality" differs sharply from his own. In her personal introduction to the co-authored volume, Pitman (1961) expresses the view that if "normal" people find themselves fascinated by individuals who kill, it is not out of a felt sense of affinity, but because the killers "are so utterly different" (p. 50). In the same essay, Pitman explicitly allies herself with those students of homicide who "regard the average murderer as a creature utterly different from themselves [emphasis added], a creature for whom there can be no redemption" (p. 51).

Linda Wolfe (1986) expresses a similar perspective in the introduction to an anthology of "true tales of murder and madness." Recall Gaylin's version of the continuity-discontinuity question, posed to individuals who had campaigned on behalf of murderer Richard Herrin: "Would you be capable of doing what Richard did?" Wolfe reports that when she embarked on her own investigation of murder, Gaylin's was the general question she thought most compelling. However, by the time she was through, the question struck her as "quaint"; until then, she says, she had been "under the sway of...pop psychology." As she learned more about the circumstances under which people kill one another, she developed a firm belief that individuals who murder suffer from "psychiatric diseases." Among the "diseases" she cites is sociopathy. Her conclusion? The belief that murderers are "people just like us" is a myth (pp. xv, xvi).

What about motiveless murderers, those individuals who Leyton (1986) says commit multiple murder "for its own sake"? Recall Leyton's
argument that most such killers are "as 'normal' as you and me" (p. 22). The commentators cited below take a radically different view.

Boar and Blundell (1983), for example, view such killers as not only abnormal, but totally unfathomable. They write, "No one can hope to explain the savage slaughters of Jack the Ripper, the maniacal fervour of Charles Manson's band of assassins, the callous child slayings of the Moors Murderers" (p. 7). This suggestion that the motiveless murderer is beyond understanding—subject to Lifton's "principle of unfathomability"—calls to mind a film critic's comments linking Jack the Ripper, Charles Manson, and the Boston Strangler to the predators which populate modern horror films. Like these real-life killers, says Twitchell (1985), "Horror monsters exist without explanation." They "simply are" (p. 34). I am reminded, too, of this statement from Boyd's (1986) essay about the uses of homicide as a fictional theme: "Many of the murderers of life [people, he suggests, like mass murderers Fritz Haarman and Peter Kurten]...are not believable— they just exist; and by no stretch of the Freudian imagination does their behavior become essentially understandable" (p. 323).

Following are a number of other citations, each one of them implying the same fundamental belief in the "motiveless" killer's abnormality. The killer is regarded as a being apart, qualitatively different from other human beings.

Norris (1988), a counseling psychologist, contends that the person who commits serial murder "is no longer recognizable in human terms" (p. 208). Such a person, he says, is the product of a matrix of
physiological, chemical, and psychological events which make of him "a type of nonperson, an individual...so far beyond the bounds of normalcy that the traditional categories used to describe deviant behavior" are no longer applicable (p. 124). Once the killer enters into a "compulsive" phase during which he "trolls" for victims, he is, or at least so Norris claims, "no longer functioning as an individual in the real world" (p. 25).

In his account of "Lonely Hearts" killers Raymond Fernandez and Martha Beck, Brown (1952) suggests that despite many indicators to the contrary, "to interpret by normal standards Raymond Fernandez' conduct...is quite impossible. Only the unpredictable logic of insanity can make his actions understandable" (p. 84).

Stack (1983) argues similarly with reference to the "lust killer" (someone for whom killing seems to be a source of pleasure). It is useless, he says, to apply normal standards to the behavior of such individuals since "the motivations behind the commission of a lust murder are emotions alien to a normal male" (p. 218).

Of people who kill repeatedly Lindsay (1958) comments, "There is no possible way in which one can appeal to such creatures. One cannot reason with them, one cannot argue or plead with them. One's only safety is in striking out before one is struck down oneself....[These] creatures cannot be cured once they are fully grown and it is dangerous sentiment to pretend that they can be made human again" (p. 192).

And finally, Johnson (1967) describes the behavior of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley as "out of the human scale as we conceive it," (p. 33).
The Motiveless Murderer as Other:
Texts Emphasizing Difference and Discontinuity

Some Conceptual Groundwork

The other as a self-projection. Many investigators have understood various kinds of "other" images as distance-creating devices employed by individuals and societies in defense of important boundaries: boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious, between self and non-self, between friends and enemies, between human and non-human, between "good" and "bad." According to Fiedler (1978), these boundaries exist as "desperately maintained" hedges against the disintegration of our constructions of "sanity" and "normality." The monsters and freaks which appear repeatedly in the literature of the Western world are, says Fiedler, expressions of "our basic uncertainty about the limits of our bodies and our egos" (p. 27). By constructing "enemies" from "denied aspects of the self" (Keen, 1986, p. 11) we seek to limit the elasticity of the terms by which we define who we are. We fix in a source external to ourselves those anxieties which arise out of threats to self-integration and social stability.

Psychoanalytic theorists trace the dynamics behind these processes of projection to early stages of human development. Among the questions for which they have sought answers are these: Why does each child seem to develop a need to split off the "bad" self from the "good" self, and then to project the "bad" self onto external objects? More fundamental yet, by what criteria are aspects of the child’s sense of self assigned to one category or the other? Drawing his inspiration from the work of psychoanalytic theorists like Mahler, Kernberg, and
Kohut, cultural historian Sander Gilman (1982, 1985) has shed light on these issues in his studies of stereotypes. He points out that for the young child not yet able to conceptualize a working basis for the relationship between the self and the external world, that which he is unable to control becomes a source of anxiety. In the course of normal development, the child's initial sense that whatever appears outside his influence is "bad" soon gives way to more adaptive, more fluid processes of splitting. When this transition occurs, he becomes able to combat anxieties associated with feelings of impotence by often perceiving as "good" even those objects and people which do not respond to his efforts to control them.

Of crucial importance for understanding what Gilman calls "the deep structure of stereotypes," there is taking place at around the same time a parallel process whereby the child shapes a differentiated sense of self. The sense of a "good" self develops as an extension of the earlier stage when the child's control over the world seemed absolute. The sense of a "bad" self develops in association with the child's growing awareness that he cannot always successfully manipulate the objects which would satisfy his desires. This latter division of the self is subject to anxieties since it is related to a diminishing sense of mastery. By the time he is around six years, says Gilman, the child's increasing cognitive capacity to recognize finer gradations of "goodness" and "badness" makes it appear to him as though there is a real basis for making these distinctions between being in control and out of control, between the good and bad world, between the good and bad self.
Because the sense of these distinctions survives intact (the result, according to Gilman, of "an illusion of verisimilitude"), an additional, higher-level process of splitting becomes possible. The "bad" self comes to be identified with mental representations of the "bad" object, and is thus divided away from the "good" self. The act of projecting the "bad" self onto the "bad" object saves the person, says Gilman, "from any confrontation with the contradictions present in the necessary integration of 'bad' and 'good' aspects of the self" (p. 17). In most individuals, the result is an adaptive "illusion of integration," the byproduct of projection used to externalize the "bad" self. The illusion would break down, of course, were those individuals unable to maintain a line of demarcation between self and object. In stereotypes, says Gilman, there is preserved this "needed sense of difference between the 'self' and the 'object,' which becomes the 'Other.' Because there is no real line between self and the Other [emphasis added], an imaginary line must be drawn" (p. 18). Of course this perspective on the function of stereotypes recalls Fiedler's (1978) contention that our cultivation of apparent distinctions between ourselves and our images of the Other may be based on an "illusion, desperately, perhaps even necessarily, defended, but untenable in the end" (p. 36).

Gilman's analysis provides a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics behind various constructions of the motiveless murderer as Other. The Other becomes necessary when our senses of self-integration and control are threatened. How, one might
ask, does the idea of the motiveless murderer prompt such feelings of vulnerability?

Consider the threat which the motiveless murderer represents. Frequently, he is described as a person in whom acquaintances have found it easy to see a reflection of their own positive self-image: he has been enjoyable company, for example; he has been a dedicated worker; sometimes, as in the cases of John Gacy and Dennis Nilsen, he has impressed others with his apparent commitment to civic or social causes. In other words, viewed in the same light under which our assessments of most other people are made, he has fared quite well. The titles of various texts dealing with motiveless murder highlight the fact that the cues on which we ordinarily rely to form judgments about the people around us are unlikely to aid us in the task of identifying a motiveless killer: for example, The Stranger Beside Me (Rule, 1980), The Boys Next Door (Rubenstein and Howard, 1984), and Ted Bundy: The Killer Next Door (Winn and Merrill, 1979). The literature is replete with instances of acquaintances reacting with disbelief to the news that their former friend/lover/confidant/neighbor (even spouse) is wanted for multiple murder. A close acquaintance of Ted Bundy's expressed his surprise this way following Bundy's arrest: "Ted was one of us." Journalist Sandy Fawkes (1979) found Paul John Knowles a charming and attractive person during the week they spent together before Fawkes discovered that Knowles was wanted for at least eighteen murders. The news that her companion was capable of such violence left Fawkes profoundly disoriented. She writes that she later sought out photographs of his victims, recognizing that she "needed to be rescued
by hate" (p. 105) - that is, rescued from her sense of personal disorientation by a new image of Knowles as the Other.

A man who began a brief affair with Diane Downs even after her identification as the prime suspect in the attempted murder of her three children remarked later, "I couldn't believe it - I wouldn't allow myself to think that anyone - not anyone I was sitting there talking with [emphasis added] could do that" (Rule, 1987, p. 272). Of John Gacy's former neighbors, Cahill (1986) writes, "The monster...? None of the neighbors had met that John Gacy. No one could believe it" (p. 8). And Eric Ambler (1987) suggests that for most of us, a trip to see the multiple killers represented in wax at Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors would be an unsettling experience: "There is something very familiar about some of the faces. Can it be something in the faces of the [people] standing beside you" (p. 149)? When someone with whom we are able to identify turns out to have been a multiple murderer (perhaps even having committed murder at the same time he was working or living or sleeping alongside of us), there is a psychological need to create distance. Out of that need arises at least a portion of the repertoire of "other" images used to represent the motiveless killer.

Society's scapegoats? Our tendency to depict the motiveless killer as some version of the Other can be understood, then, as an act of psychological self-defense (for further discussion of the psychoanalytic assumptions on which this understanding is based, see Bromberg, 1961; Gaylin, 1983; Reik, 1959; Tanay, 1976; and Wertham, 1949). By fashioning an image of difference, we replace a discomfitting sense of affinity with a sense of detachment. The Other becomes a kind
of "scapegoat" (Brophy, 1966). Some commentators have suggested that a parallel process operates at the level of the collective social group.

I have alluded previously to the case of nineteenth century mass murderer Pierre Riviere. Peter and Favret (1975) describe Riviere as having been among the "disinherited of the earth," a member of the underprivileged class for whom "the horrible is the quotidian" (pp. 176-177). Riviere "played in the margins" (p. 198); he challenged the invisible social barriers which separated him from those holding power. How could those with a stake in preserving the structure of society absorb Riviere’s symbolic blow against them without conceding ground? As Porter (1987) argues in his recent social history of madness, traditionally "whatever is strange and disruptive has been marginalized as monstrous" (p. 125). It was because of their need to blunt the impact of Riviere’s radical protest that those in power were prompted to draw from a repertoire of what Porter (1987) calls "mythologies about the madness of storming the social order" (p. 81). According to Peter and Favret, they opted for a construction of Riviere as the embodiment of man’s basest aspects, all those atavistic qualities which threaten to undermine "civilization." Thus, to the prosecutor Riviere was "solitary, wild, and cruel, ...a savage not subject to the ordinary laws of sympathy and sociability" (p. 193). By fashioning Riviere in terms of the Other, those in power created a scapegoat and thus dissasssociated themselves from the responsibility for conditions leading up to Riviere’s act of outrage. Or at least so goes the argument advanced by Peter and Favret.
The idea that depictions of the murderer as Other often originate with society's need to create a scapegoat of some sort appears frequently in texts about motiveless murder. According to Brophy (1966), the seventeenth century poisoner Madame de Brinvilliers became for her French contemporaries a "legendary 'monster'... a moral dunghill functioning as the approved depository for anybody's surplus filth" (p. 76). Cullen (1965) notes the eagerness with which Londoners of the late nineteenth century embraced theories identifying the unknown Jack the Ripper as a foreigner, a "maniac," or a "beast." Most people were not prepared to look among their own acquaintances for a person capable of the Ripper's acts. As a result, they overlooked the real killer - according to Cullen's theory, an idealistic barrister who murdered prostitutes as a form of social protest. Jones (1980) contends that blinders of a like variety have prevented modern American society from understanding many acts of murder committed by women. Too often, she says, women who kill have been viewed as anomalies. In them, society has found "a simple scapegoat for the incalculable complex of factors... that may rise against us, threatening change or destruction" (p. 4). To blunt the impact of the social message codified in many such murders, according to Jones society packages the perpetrators as versions of the Other.

Horror novelist Alan Moore, an Englishman, recently observed a parallel phenomenon in his own country. Moore's reference is to a case where a quiet young man in a small English town shot and killed several people for, so the newspapers reported, no reason: "It's one of those horrible instances when our society just sort of throws up. We say, 'Oh
well, he must have been some monster —nothing to do with us, really.’

And while we keep saying that, it will happen again and again, because
we’re refusing to accept our role in it” (quoted in Gilmore, 1988, pp.
106-107).

Perhaps the steadiest reminder that our constructions of the
motiveless murderer as Other might serve society’s need for easily
digestible objects of scorn comes from the killers themselves. If only
because it is an active force shaping our understanding of the
relationship between society and its killers, their perspective
deserves mention. One convicted multiple murderer wrote to me in a
letter, "The media was only a cover over the truth. That beast was not
me. But it’s what people want me to be so they make me up to be a
reflection of all their fears, lies, and bullshit" (C. Manson, personal
communication, April 9, 1975). After cataloguing in his prison
journals the many roles he has played throughout his life, Dennis
Nilsen describes himself as "now rapidly becoming a national
receptacle into which all the nation will urinate, warped monster,
madman, ungodly, cold and alone" (quoted in Masters, 1985, p. 184).

Three years before his execution, Ted Bundy told a newspaper reporter,

If anyone considers me a monster, that’s just something
they’ll have to confront in themselves. For people...
to dehumanize someone like me is a very popular and
effective way of dealing with a fear and a threat that
is just incomprehensible. When they fail to see their
common humanity with me..., when people are not ready to
see me as I am, they propose these stereotypes. (Quoted
in Nordheimer, 1986)

And Myra Hindley echoed the familiar refrain in a letter she wrote from
jail to the British Home Secretary: "I have served Society in good
stead as scapegoat and whipping boy for far too many years. Is my life going to be sacrificed?" (quoted in R. Wilson, 1986, p. 174).

Identification as a "zero-sum" equation. An additional dynamic which perhaps contributes to our tendency to construct the motiveless murder as Other can be described with reference to an economic concept: the zero-sum game or equation. When they use the term "zero sum," economists mean that in order for one player in a competitive situation to gain, the other player has to lose. Stated a different way, resources at stake in the contest are finite; since there can be no absolute increase, all that can occur are shifts in the way the resources are distributed among those competing for them.

How is this idea relevant to the way we conceptualize our relationship to the motiveless murderer? Often, and this observation is based largely on personal experience, individuals regard the distribution of their empathy/identification between criminals and victims as a kind of zero-sum game. For example, attempts to engage people in a consideration of what they might have in common with someone who commits an apparently senseless murder often elicit responses like this one: "My concern is for the victims, not for the killer." The implication is that attention paid to the killer is attention subtracted from those he killed. Similarly, identification with the killer is viewed as identification that is no longer possible with his victims. To the extent that an individual embraces such assumptions, consciously or unconsciously, he is likely to conceptualize the murderer in terms which will result in the creation of psychological distance.
Some insights from attribution theory. Several concepts from attribution theory can shed light, too, on why people often depict apparently motiveless murderers in ways which emphasize difference and distance. My coverage of them will be necessarily brief.

Heider (1958) concluded from his studies of ordinary people engaging in "commonplace" or "intuitive" psychology that individuals tend to view the behavior of others - their own behavior as well - as resulting either from internal (dispositional) causes, or from external (situational) causes. Researchers investigating Heider's hypotheses have identified what has come to be called the "fundamental attribution bias," our tendency to overemphasize dispositional or internal causes in accounting for the behavior of others (Ross, 1977). As Jones and Nisbett (1971) point out in their description of the "actor-observer difference," the effect is not repeated when we account for our own behavior. When viewing others, we focus on the person; when viewing ourselves, we tend to emphasize situational rather than dispositional variables.

How can these ideas help to explain why the apparently motiveless killer is often depicted in terms of the Other - for instance, as sick or animalistic or monstrous? Consider as an example the case of Charles Manson. What we learned first about Manson was that he was suspected of multiple murder. This alone is important since Asch (1946), Luchins (1957) and others have demonstrated the power of first impressions, a phenomenon known among psychologists as the "primacy effect." In this particular case, the murders had occurred some months before Manson's identification as a suspect, and they had been highly sensationalized.
Words like "carnage" and "mayhem" had appeared regularly in television and print coverage of the crimes, so once Manson was apprehended he was immediately connected with the images evoked by such rhetoric.

The fundamental attribution bias perhaps explains why many people seemed to focus almost exclusively on the question "Who is Manson?" while discounting contextual factors which might have helped to account for his behavior. Often, the assumption that what a criminal does accurately reflects who he is goes unquestioned. Consider, for example, the following statement from a recent book about "sexual homicide" (Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas, 1988). The authors are explaining how law enforcement officers use criminal "profiling" in order to specify the personality type most likely to have committed a certain crime:

"The theory behind [criminal profiling techniques] is that behavior reflects personality [emphasis added], and by examining behavior the investigator may be able to determine what type of person is responsible for the offense" (pp. 9-10). If one views behavior as providing a direct avenue to "personality," one might well conclude that monstrous acts are committed by monstrous people. To return to the case in point, since what Manson did (or was suspected of having done) was so extreme, many of the character traits which people ascribed to him were extreme as well. It is hardly surprising that one effect of such ascriptions was to underline how different Manson was from "normal" people. In his discussion of how employing the label "antisocial personality" can influence the way we think about criminal offenders, Wulach (1983) emphasizes this latter aspect of the attribution process:
One effect of [blaming criminal behavior on 'inherent personality causes'] is to further widen the artificial gulf between the criminal and the noncriminal and to decrease the opportunities for creative empathy with criminal behavior, which allows for treatment of criminals as part of the family of human beings rather than as demons who become the repositories of our projected and unacknowledged aggressive impulses. (p. 335)

Jones and Davis' (1965) "theory of correspondent inferences" specifies the conditions under which observers are most likely to conclude that what an individual did accurately reflects who that person is. In effect, the theory attempts to explain the operation of the fundamental attribution bias, as well as to account for instances where it seems not to occur. The emphasis is on whether behavior in a particular situation strikes observers as normal, expected, typical, consistent with the actor's perceived role. If the behavior is perceived as congruent with the actor's role, then a dispositional attribution is less likely than if the behavior occurs despite the resistance created by contrary role expectations.

A contrast between public perceptions of one widely-known killer, Lieutenant William Calley, and another, Josef Mengele, may serve to highlight the importance of Jones and Davis' "correspondence" heuristic. In a survey conducted shortly after Calley's murder trial on charges that he lead the "My Lai massacre," Kelman and Lawrence (1972) found that a large segment of the American population saw Calley as "one of us." Those respondents expressed their belief "that most people would do what Calley did under similar circumstances, that they themselves would do so, that Calley did what he should have done, that his action was right and in keeping with his duty" (p. 210). These
people tended to focus on their affinities with Calley; they "identified with" him (p. 209). In Calley's case, then, operation of the fundamental attribution bias seems to have been suspended. What Calley did was perceived as congruent with his role as a soldier taking orders from a "legitimate" authority.

What about Mengele, the Nazi physician who came to be known among inmates at Auschwitz as the "Angel of Death"? Authors who have written about Mengele (e.g., Astor, 1985; Lifton, 1986; Posner and Ware, 1986) point out his complexities, as well as the paradoxical aspects of his personality; yet they emphasize that already, a legend has developed around Mengele which depicts him as an extreme version of the Other. Lifton, for example, alludes to the "cult of demonic personality" (p. 337) surrounding Mengele. As an example, he cites Rolf Hochhuth's play, The Deputy, which features a Mengele figure described in the play notes as having "the stature of Absolute Evil." Hochhuth explains that because the character contrasts so sharply with other human beings, he seems more like a "visitant from another world"; it is pointless to search in his personality for "human features" (quoted in Lifton, p. 338).

Jones and Davis' theory sheds some light on possible dynamics underlying this extreme representation of Mengele-as-Other. Unlike Calley, Mengele acted under orders from an authority few people regard as "legitimate." Furthermore, Mengele's killing is difficult to connect with the rest of his life. On a recent television talk show, Gerald Posner, co-author of a book on Mengele, observed that his investigation had turned up nothing in Mengele's early life that might have predicted
what he did at Auschwitz. Because Mengele's behavior has not been perceived as explainable in terms of situational influences (eg., orders from a legitimate authority, events in his past), the tendency has been to make dispositional attributions, that is, to assume that Mengele's actions reflected who he was (eg., evil, the product of bad genes). This may help to account for the frequency with which Mengele has been described as one of the most evil human beings who ever lived.

A similar dynamic can be discerned in public perceptions of English serial killer Peter Sutcliffe, an individual who Yallop (1982) refers to as "the personification of evil." Again, had situational variables impressed observers (including Yallop) as significant influences on what he did; despite his actions, Sutcliffe might not have been perceived as being so far beyond the range of "normal." However, reports Yallop, "Examination of Sutcliffe's early life shows no abnormal features, no traumatic events, nothing to trigger him into mass murder" (p. 322). Because they perceived Sutcliffe's actions as "contextless," many people made dispositional attributions about him and represented him as someone whose essence is accurately reflected in words like "evil" and "killer." Or, we might add, "dangerous." In an interesting empirical study which lends support to these observations, Quinsey and Cyr (1987) found that criminals are more likely to be perceived as dangerous (and less likely to be perceived as treatable) if there is little evidence to suggest that historical or situational factors played a major role leading up to their criminal activity.

One additional finding from the attribution literature deserves mention. Borgida and Nisbett (1977), Hamill, Wilson, and Nisbett
(1980), and Tversky and Kahneman (1980) have all conducted research which demonstrates the "vividness effect." This refers to the tendency of people to infer general truths from a particularly vivid single instance (or from a small number of instances). Levin and Fox (1985) point out that the popular image of the mass murderer is the distorted product of disproportionate attention paid in several major media markets to an extremely small number of cases: for example, Charles Manson and Richard Ramirez, the "Night Stalker," in Los Angeles; John Wayne Gacy in Chicago; and David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" in New York City. Manson mugging for the cameras as everyone's image of the bogeyman, Ramirez declaring the satanic roots of his attacks on women, Berkowitz claiming to have acted on orders received from a neighborhood dog: this is the vivid and memorable stuff, say Levin and Fox, from which the popular conception of the mass murderer as a "glassy-eyed, pale lunatic" derives (p. 7). The "other" images which result are, in accordance with the "vividness effect," likely to be extended to the larger class of mass/serial/motiveless killers.

A practical note. I have drawn on a variety of concepts to help explain the dynamics behind the tendency to fashion images of the motiveless murder which emphasize difference and distance. One conceptual point remains to be made. Often, there is a practical dimension to the promulgation of these representations. Certain parties have an obvious stake in depicting the killer in terms which serve to create psychological distance. Among them are relatives and friends of the killer's victims, surviving victims themselves, and defense attorneys. Only of the latter group need anything additional be said.
The defense team working on behalf of an accused killer may determine, particularly if there is a strong case against their client, that the best defense strategy is to argue "insanity." Once the decision to do so has been made, the killer's familiar features often fade quickly from view. Brief reference to several cases will suffice to illustrate the point.

In his recent book analyzing the social symbolism in the acts of six well-known multiple murderers, Leyton (1986) presents a strong argument to the effect that Albert DeSalvo, the "Boston Strangler," was a perfectly sane individual who killed in order to "claim his manhood" (p. 148) and to protest his sense of social exclusion. However, in the course of pursuing an insanity defense, his attorney described DeSalvo as "a completely uncontrolled vegetable walking around in a human body" (Green, 1980, p. 188). Regardless of whether one accepts Leyton's thesis in its entirety, the background Leyton presents makes it very difficult to conclude that DeSalvo's acts were really the acts of a "completely uncontrolled vegetable." The description seems driven by the objective of a successful insanity defense, not by what is known of the actual circumstances of DeSalvo's life and crimes.

One can observe similar dynamics at work in the insanity defense pursued by attorneys for Harvey Carignan. When Carignan went on trial accused of multiple murder, his attorneys elected to portray him as a "raving, frothing paranoid schizophrenic" (Stack, 1983b, p. 168). Though the jury in Carignan's trial concluded that he was sane and guilty as charged, first they listened as his attorneys described
Carignan as merely a "form ...a shell of a human being...a homicidal maniac" and a "stainless steel schizophrenic" (p. 203).

Finally, Lustgarten (1976) cites two further examples. Though both killers were eventually found guilty and sentenced to death, Neville Heath and John Christie were described in court by their attorneys as, respectively, a man "as mad as a hatter, absolutely insane, a maniac" (p. 83); and an "insane man" who during the time when he committed his crimes was "mad as a March hare" (p. 216). It seems unquestionable that rhetoric of the sort contained in these descriptions, often given prominence by the news media, further fuels the tendency for people to think about apparently motiveless murderers in terms of the Other.

Versions of the Motiveless Murderer as Other: A Survey of Rhetoric and Representations

Having explored above some of the dynamics behind a tendency to depict the motiveless murderer in terms which emphasize how different he is from "normal" people, we can now turn to a consideration of the forms such depictions most commonly take. I make no claim that my survey of "other" representations is exhaustive. In fact, it is highly selective. The particular representations I have elected to highlight are those which I judge to appear most frequently in texts proposing some version of the "sense" in acts of apparently motiveless murder.

I am not concerned here to pass judgment on the validity of certain ways of thinking about the motiveless murderer, still less to suggest that certain patterns of rhetoric, or imaginal representations, are more "appropriate" than others. My goal is primarily descriptive. Using selected examples drawn from a wide variety of texts, I intend simply to present an abbreviated repertoire
of "other" representations (i.e., images, metaphors, narrative descriptions) which encourage our conceptualization of the motiveless killer as a being fundamentally different from ourselves.

The killer as beast/savage/monster. On a recent television program devoted exclusively to the subject of America's fascination with convicted mass murderer Charles Manson (Geraldo, ABC, May 9, 1988), there took place an interesting exchange between host Geraldo Rivera and an invited guest, sociologist Jack Levin, the co-author of Mass Murder: America's Growing Menace (Levin and Fox, 1985). In the context of explaining how people protect the images they have of themselves by imagining mass murderers as individuals with whom they have almost nothing in common, Levin remarked of Manson, "We distance ourselves by making him a monster." Another guest, FBI agent Robert Ressler, concurred, saying, "[Manson's] symbolic of everything we fear; he's America's bogeyman." But, asked Rivera, "Isn't he a monster?"

Interestingly, since he had just implied that the construction of Manson-the-monster is a fiction which must be understood in terms of who we are, Levin capitulated: "Yes."

Since his arrest for masterminding the Tate-LaBianca murders nearly twenty years ago Manson has frequently been described in this way, as some sort of beast or monster. One of the earliest books devoted to the case begins with this description of an encounter with Manson at the county jail where he was being held pending the outcome of his trial. The imagery evokes scenes from the primate pavilion at a zoo.
He is standing behind bullet-proof glass in the Los Angeles County Jail, a windowless concrete complex bordered by a cement wash and old freight yards. He puts one palm flat against the glass. An odd gesturing. Strange. His bones themselves appear to bend. He contorts his body with the control of a fakir — into a shape not human. His skeleton seems rubbery, unbreakable; mystifying. The small hands, the thin lengthy fingers with long squared-off nails, mash together suddenly. They move protectively across the body, knotting at the chest. Hunching down, his habit for effect, he makes the ugliest face possible; the cheekbones themselves bend up, wrenching as the brows gnarl down increases; the whole face folds into itself. In a moment the skin is a gum rubberiness, drawing tight, stretching tense as a drumskin. The eyeballs seem sucked inward and the insistent outline of his skull is right there. You are shocked. He is a monster. This is Charles Manson. (Gilmore and Kenner, 1971, p. 11)

Of course the question of whether it is more appropriate to consider the man in the cage as some sort of beast/monster, or, rather, as an adept practitioner of "impression management" is not of primary concern here — though a clue is available in a statement which Manson made to Geraldo Rivera following Rivera's reference to him as a "beast" during an interview shown on the program referenced above: "I'll be whatever you need me to be for you" (Geraldo, ABC, May 9, 1988). (Incidentally, Manson's comment calls to mind Porter's [1987] caveat about the calculated dimension of the "madness" often attributed to Romantic poet William Blake: "[Blake] needed a persona permitting him to perturb people" [p. 64].) For present purposes I wish simply to document the frequency with which accounts of the motiveless murderer feature descriptions similar to the one above, suggesting that the killer is best understood, or at least represented, as some sort of animal or monster.
Porter (1987) refers in his social history of madness to a "degenerationist" way of thinking about the severely mentally ill. Viewed in accordance with the degenerationist perspective, people whose behavior seems inexplicable with reference to socially accepted standards of human conduct are conceptualized as "throwbacks" or "regressives." The perspective is apparent in the passage about Manson quoted above, and it can be discerned as well in other texts which convey the idea of the motiveless murderer as a beast of prey, or a primitive, or a pre-human "monster."

For example, in terms embodying atavistic notions of criminality which later received wider currency under Lombraso's sponsorship, the prosecutor in Pierre Riviere's trial during the early part of the nineteenth century described Riviere as an uncivilized savage: Riviere, he wrote, is "solitary, wild, and cruel,...a being apart, a savage not subject to the ordinary laws of sympathy and sociability." Consistent with reports circulating at the time that Pierre had once inquired of his father whether it might be possible to survive in the woods subsisting solely on plants and roots, the prosecutor noted in his report that Riviere presents as more an animal than a human being. He observed, too, that in addition to having a "narrow and low" forehead, Riviere "moves in bounds, he leaps rather than walks" (quoted in Foucault, 1975, pp. 10-11).

This atavistic theme is present throughout later descriptions of the motiveless murderer as well, from the late nineteenth century up to the present. The following examples attest to its resilience, even in
the face of modern progress in understanding criminality as a complex, multiply determined social and psychological phenomenon.

During the 1880's when Jack the Ripper was murdering prostitutes in London's East End, coverage of the case in the London Times included multiple references to the unknown killer as a "brute," a "savage," a "fiend," and a "maniac" (reprinted in Bernard, 1953). Almost a century later, in one of many fictional embellishments on the case, the Ripper is imagined as a being "hunched over in a crouch and watching, like some hungry jungle animal, for the first sign of his prey" (Andrews, 1977, p. 10). Several years after the Ripper murders, an article in the Times employed similar imagery to describe another mass murderer, poisoner Neill Cream. According to the article, Cream was "inhuman," a being who society is obligated to "hunt down" and "exterminate" (cited in Jesse, 1965, p. 212).

Similar descriptions have been commonplace in twentieth century accounts of motiveless murder as well. For example, as much for the brutality of his crimes as for his simian posture and gait, American serial killer Earle Nelson became known during the 1920's as the "gorilla-murderer." In a fictional recreation of the Nelson case a detective imagines the as-yet-uncaptured killer as a variety of uncivilized predator: "He's going to go on killing at random....Live off the land, take the bare minimum to survive, and go on moving and killing" (Nash, 1982, p. 125). Jesse (1965), too, draws on imagery of the jungle in her description of the case of "thrill killers" Nathan Leopold and Dick Loeb, suggesting that if society were ever to release such criminals from their captivity, it "would be equivalent to
letting loose man-eating tigers on Main Street" (p. 47). Again echoing the theme, at various times another commentator refers to Peter Kurten, the so-called "monster of Dusseldorf," as a "beast," a "maniac of almost supernatural powers," a "creature of sub-human brutality," an "ogre," and "a creature of such inhuman quality...as to warrant the name of vampire" (Wagner, 1932).

Other examples of the use of such imagery and rhetoric can be culled from still more recent cases. At the late 1950's trial of mass murderer Charles Starkweather, for example, a psychiatrist testifying for the defense described Starkweather this way:

"The act of killing meant to him no more than stepping on a bug. You can take a creature out of a jungle and tame him and maybe develop a surface crust of being domesticated...but...when such a creature tastes blood it breaks through and a wild rampage occurs in which a primitive impulse comes back." (quoted in Leyton, 1986, p. 249)

That the surface restraint inhibiting expression of this "primitive impulse" might be precarious indeed is the suggestion of another commentator who describes multiple killer Ian Brady on the witness stand as having the appearance of a "wild animal at bay" (E. Williams, 1968, p. 259). In a newspaper article about Richard Speck, murderer of eight student nurses in Chicago, columnist Jimmy Breslin evokes the image of Speck as a kind of primordial slug, a being who killed after "crawling out into the life that others lead" (quoted in Warden and Groves, 1980, p. 221). And in an article about the use of psychological profiling to investigate violent criminals, Campbell (1976) cites a police profile compiled in the mid-1970's describing Los Angeles' "Skid Row Slasher" as "a jackal, an animal who hides in the dark" (p. 110).
Finally, to bring this brief survey up to the present, I would like to cite briefly one of the most recent additions to the literature on multiple murder. Norris (1988) opens his booklength study of serial killers by stating his scientific credentials: "I am a trained counseling psychologist" (p. 1). Then he proceeds to describe his subjects as being like "tormented beasts of prey" (p. 15) and "wild animals" (p. 18) whose approach to the act of murder is "animallike, primal" (p. 39). The serial killer, he suggests, is more like an amoeba than a human being. His is a world "in which everyday choices no longer exist." Since according to Norris the killer has become "simply a biological engine driven by a primal instinct," his acts must be regarded as no more mindful than the response made by "a single-celled creature reacting to an overpowering chemical stimulus" (p. 23).

The killer as sick/insane/diseased. Of course it is beyond the scope of this discussion to examine the controversial parameters of such slippery concepts as "insanity" and "mental illness" and "disease." As I consider below a number of texts which depict the motiveless murderer as "sick" in some way, I will have in mind an admittedly oversimplified criterion. For my purposes, killers depicted as "sick" are those represented as being without the capacity to appreciate the reasons for and consequences of their decision to kill. They are seen by their interpreters as being, to use the colloquial phrase, "out of touch with reality."

In an earlier reference to the case of Harvey Carignan, I suggested one practical dimension of the tendency to depict apparently motiveless killers as "sick" or "insane" or "diseased." Sometimes doing
so is interpreted by teams of defense attorneys as the only way to avoid imprisonment, or even death, for their clients. Lustgarten (1976) is guilty of exaggeration when he states that "Absence of ascertainable motive always tends to sustain a plea of insanity" (p. 149). However, he is correct in pointing out that when a murder seems motiveless, there is a tendency not only among courtroom advocates but among less biased observers as well, to construct the act as resulting from the killer's "sickness."

Wells (1962) makes the same connection between apparent motivelessness and the inference of insanity in her essay probing the dynamics behind a particularly puzzling case of parricide which occurred in the late nineteenth century. There is no "obvious motive" animating most real-life cases of parricide, she argues, and in such cases, "society is more likely than not to say therefore [emphasis added] that the murderer must have been insane" (p. 30). The connection appears again in Gaylin's (1983) recounting of another case, this one involving a police officer who shot a black teenager in front of a crowd of witnesses for no apparent reason. When the officer was brought to trial, his defense team succeeded in having him judged sick rather than guilty. Gaylin observes in his analysis that for the chief psychiatrist testifying on behalf of the police officer, and apparently for the jury as well, "the gratuitous nature of the shooting...was in itself a sufficient sign of insanity" (p. 256).

The notion that certain killers must be insane often develops as the result of the inability of observers to imagine that a person in touch with reality could kill for no apparent reason. Since the popular
press often emphasizes sensational details of "senseless" murders, it is not surprising that the image often conveyed is of irrational acts perpetrated by "a crazed homicidal maniac" (Holmes and DeBurger, 1988, p. 51), a "psycho" (Levin and Fox, 1985, p. 6), or a "mad killer" (Godwin, 1978, p. 259).

In fact, not infrequently the killers themselves encourage such thinking. For example, whether or not his "crazy" routines are calculated for effect is debatable, but there is no arguing the fact that Charles Manson has frequently presented as someone for whom any variety of "sick" labels might seem appropriate. Thus, it is not surprising to hear Geraldo Rivera refer to Manson (in the space of several minutes) as "mad Manson," a "sick Messiah," a "weird little man with the Satanic glint in his eyes," and as having "the mind of a madman" (Murder: Live from Death Row, WGN-TV, April 13, 1988). Nor is it surprising that the narrator of a recent video program about the case alludes to Manson's "demented band of followers" as being a "sick sad lot" (Moore and White, 1986).

David Berkowitz is another convicted multiple murderer whose public presentation has contributed to the perception of him as "crazy." Before an arrest was made in the "Son of Sam" murders to which Berkowitz eventually confessed, Jimmy Breslin and Dick Schaap (1978) published a fictional account which had the crimes committed by what another commentator on the case has described as "a drooling, demented madman" (Terry, 1987, p. 248). After his capture, Berkowitz acted as though he was attempting to validate the fictional portrait. He presented for public consumption all the symptoms of paranoid
schizophrenia: people were out to get him, he heard voices, a dog had commanded him to kill, and so on. But a recent book updating the story (Terry, 1987) suggests that much of Berkowitz' public demeanor might have been a show staged to obscure the real story behind the Son of Sam murders. In a letter written from prison to journalist Maury Terry, Berkowitz himself contemplates the amalgam of fact and fiction which he helped to create:

What does the public think when they see my name mentioned somewhere?...They think I'm just a crazy madman....They think and see in their own minds a sick madman who hears voices of destruction and hears barking dogs which tell him to kill. (Terry, p. 331)

Regardless of whether Manson and Berkowitz are "crazy" (by whatever definition) in some real sense or only adept at recognizing instances when acting crazy might advance their interests, their public personae have helped to reinforce the tendency to understand motiveless murder using sickness as the explanatory framework. Manifestations of the tendency are common throughout the literature, for example in references to Jack the Ripper as a "diseased creature" (from a contemporary newspaper account quoted in Cullen, 1965, p. 168); to English multiple murderers John Haigh, Neville Heath, and Donald Neilson as "crazy killers" (Green, 1980); to American serial killer Edmund Kemper as a "drooling sadist" (Nash, 1984, p.170); and to mass murderers in general as "nearly always mentally deranged" (Godwin, 1978, p. 259). But seldom can operation of the tendency be seen as clearly as in Wenzell Brown's (1952) account of Raymond Fernandez, who was responsible along with Martha Beck for a series of killings which came to be known as the Lonely Hearts murders. Though the exact number
of their victims is unknown, Wilson and Pitman (1961) speculate that the two might have killed more than twenty women who responded to the ads Fernandez placed in a "lonely hearts" column during the late-1940's.

The details of the case are not important. Of particular interest here, however, is Brown's construction of the meaning in the murderous behavior of a man who, until he was thirty, impressed many of his acquaintances as "trustworthy, reliable, wholly rational, and open to reason" (p. 51). As an adolescent, Fernandez had apparently stolen some chickens, but that had been his only criminal activity prior to a head injury suffered at age thirty. From the time of the injury on, according to Brown, despite the fact that Fernandez struck many people as charming and engaging, only the "logic of insanity" can be applied to explaining his behavior. Not long after his accident Fernandez teamed up with a nurse, Martha Beck, and the two began their string of murders.

Before commenting further on Brown's account, I should note that evidence of the severity of the head injury Fernandez suffered was not apparently so incontrovertible as Brown's construction of its significance would suggest. Toward the end of his book, Brown describes a meeting, following the execution of Fernandez and Beck, which he arranged with the defense psychiatrist who had testified in Fernandez' trial. Brown reports that he questioned the psychiatrist about what repercussions might have resulted from the head injury Fernandez suffered. The psychiatrist had replied, "[The injury] was nothing" (p. 196).
To Brown, however, it is the key to understanding why Fernandez became a party to multiple murder. This is the view, too, of Philip Lindsay (1958), who remarks that the head injury Fernandez suffered "turned an ordinary young man...into a murderer" (p. 136). After being struck on the head, says Brown, Fernandez became "divorced from reality" and began groping through life on a "blind unreasoning quest" for "the temporary security of being loved" (p. 83). Dating from the time of his injury, Fernandez "was operating outside of any moral concepts" (p. 128). Though Brown allows that medical studies performed at the time of Fernandez' injury noted "no neurological evidence...of a tangible physical nature" to suggest severe brain damage, he embraces the speculative conclusion that as a result of the accident, Fernandez became "sick," in effect a "moral monster" (p. 85).

The notion that there may in certain cases be a fairly direct link between head trauma (as well as other varieties of organic dysfunction) and multiple murder recurs in Norris' (1988) examination of serial killers. Since no other recent commentator has so completely embraced the construction of the serial killer as someone who is diseased or insane, I will conclude this section by citing Norris' perspective.

Before presenting Norris' conclusions, I should note in passing the striking visual image which appears on the cover of his book. Even among the most lurid recent entries in the horror sub-genre known as "slasher" cinema one could not find a more arresting image of utter derangement. A hairless bronze head with bloodshot eyes, no nose, and its lower face contorted in a grimace is partially obscured by a large knife protruding from a clenched fist. Accustomed to attention-grabbing
jacket art that often has little to do with a book's contents, readers of Norris' book might be surprised to discover that in this case cover and content are closely connected.

A psychologist, Norris regards the serial killer as suffering from a "disease" with demonstrably "medical" origins. According to Norris, such severely incapacitated individuals are scarcely more human, as that term is generally employed, than an amoeba, or even, to cite one of Norris' particularly memorable images, "a watermelon seed" (p. 171). His outlook even disposes Norris to accept what many people would surely regard as an outrageous claim from one incarcerated serial killer: that as the result of a distinctive hormonal imbalance which functions as a kind of arousal-producing "menstrual cycle," killers unable to see the sky from their cells on Florida's death row still "know when the moon is full" and "begin to howl and fight among themselves" (p. 93). To further appreciate the flavor of Norris' conceptualization of the serial killer, consider these quotations:

On his own initiative, the serial killer can no more stop his killing than a heroin addict can kick his habit...He may loathe what he does and despise his own weakness, but he can do nothing on his own to control it. (p. 20)

Passing through [what Norris calls the "aura phase" during which the killer experiences a kind of "hallucinatory" withdrawal from reality] the serial murderer is translated into a different kind of creature. Whatever is human in him recedes....[He] has in fact lost all power of reason, inhibition, and control. (pp. 22-24)

[While actually carrying out their episodic acts of killing] serial murderers are out of control. They are unable to own any sense of right and wrong....They have lost their free will....Their condition is beyond insanity. (pp. 36-37)
[The serial killer attacks his victims] in response to electrochemical impulses deep in his limbic brain. (p. 79)

Neurologists have...established that [the serial killer’s tendency to travel great distances in search of victims] is actually a physiological mechanism within the limbic part of the brain that sets the individual in motion. (p. 92)

As brain-damaged or dysfunctional individuals, [serial killers’] organic pleasure centers in the primitive brain do not operate, and they are physically incapable or sensing pleasure. (p. 237)

Though his book contains no formally documented references, Norris argues that these statements are supported by the findings of violence researchers such as Dorothy Otnow Lewis (whose studies of limbic disorders have been cited in support of the conclusion that a man who is simply "reminded of the tale of Lizzie Borden’s ax murder of her parents" might "without apparent motive" feel an irresistible compulsion to strangle his 14-year old brother "[Brain disorder triggers acts of violence," 1986]), Vernon Mark, Helen Morrison, James Prescott, William Walsh, and Alice Miller. The question of their ultimate validity aside, such conclusions illustrate clearly the distancing effect of constructing the apparently motiveless killer as an individual who is insane or diseased.

The killer as stranger/foreigner/alien. In their search for ways to talk about individuals who have killed for no apparent reason, some commentators have favored the use of "stranger" imagery. When he is rendered in this way, as an interloper of some sort on the human stage, the killer is not depicted as a beast or a monster, nor is he regarded as someone who is "crazy" in any definable sense. Instead, he is imagined as representing some uncharted dimension of not-quite-human
functioning. All the outward trappings which suggest identification
with the tribe may seem to be in place; yet the killer is described as
different somehow, set off from others by an alien sensibility.

One finds an example in the way in which several commentators have
elected to describe Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, England's "Moors
murderers." One commentator, Pamela Hanford Johnson (1967), repeatedly
alludes to the killers' inscrutability. She seems to regard the vantage
point from which Brady and Hindley view the rest of the world as
unimaginably remote. Observing the two at their trial, Johnson
reflects, "What were they both thinking? It is almost impossible to
imagine" (p. 31); then, "One cannot hear the tape-recorder [sic] that
Brady carries in his skull: of this we shall never read the transcript"
(p. 32). Elsewhere in her long essay on the case, Johnson notes again
her sense of a severed connection between the defendants and the rest
of the human community. Brady and Hindley are depicted as being like
humanoid characters from a science fiction fantasy, not quite real, yet
not totally foreign either.

I kept having the impression that Hindley and
Brady were a long way off, divided from me by
some thing like a thin fog....

Away from the house at Hattersley [where the two
had lived], jerked out of the strange dimension that
had been theirs into one that was ours, they hardly
seemed real at all....[T]hey were like visitors from
another planet, disconnected from our lives. (p. 94)

In his imaginative recreation of the Moors case, revealingly
titled Beyond Belief (1968), playwright Emlyn Williams draws on similar
imagery. The intriguing questions of who the killers really are, how
they came to be, how they see the world are not, according to
Williams, questions which can be answered with any degree of definitiveness. Brady and Hindley represent the unfathomable Other. Their identities must remain a mystery: "It is not a case of finding the key to a locked door. There is no door" (p. 44).

Williams imagines that at some unidentifiable point prior to committing murder the killers left forever the "territory of human kindness" and journeyed to a faraway "fearful country" (p. 151). He is not speaking literally, of course, but he is implying that there was a time in their personal histories when Brady and Hindley became foreigners to everything by which we identify a living being's humanity. Describing the reaction of law enforcement officers after Brady and Hindley had been apprehended, Williams again invokes the idea of the killers as aliens:

The [police officers] felt what they were all gradually to sense about them both: that they were like two people from another world who had suddenly been parachuted down into this one, word-perfect in the local dialect but somehow not with you. (p. 281)

This notion that murder, especially mass or apparently motiveless murder, can serve as a marker indicating citizenship in a foreign country of the mind echoes a similar observation made by Lustgarten (1968). At the time when they first commit murder, suggests Lustgarten, individuals like Brady and Hindley sever connections with the past and cross over into a new frontier. What transpired before the crossing is unlikely to shed much light on what transpires after: "If Leopold and Loeb had picked someone's pocket, if Jack the Ripper had bilked a publican, if Ian Brady had forged a signature, what light would it have thrown upon their subsequent enormities? None. In cases of
murderers - mass murderers particularly - any crimes of a different character are irrelevant" (pp. 191-192). This perspective differs radically from the common viewpoint which holds that murder needs to be understood as the culmination of a long pattern of antisocial behavior. Both Lustgarten and Williams seem to be implying that a fundamental, qualitative departure from the past has to precede the commission of murders so incomprehensible that they earn the label "motiveless."

Despite the fact that at the time of his trial few people seriously questioned Ian Brady's "sanity," another commentator who has written about the Moors case has described Brady's mind as "one of the most peculiar in recorded history" (Potter, 1966, p. 123). This emphasis on peculiarity and uniqueness, on the killer's highly idiosyncratic phenomenological perspective can be regarded as a further variation on the theme that the killer is a foreigner among human beings, the possessor of an alien sensibility. Potter's description calls to mind the way serial killer Peter Kurten was described in court by his defense counsel: "A soul of this kind cannot be dissected, cannot be analysed like ordinary people. Kurten is a psychological riddle" (Wagner, 1932, p. 208).

Finally, the notion of the killer as an interloper not quite renderable in terms normally applied to human beings is present, too, in the description of Josef Mengele offered by a woman who worked alongside him at Auschwitz. Mengele, she says, was "not aware of worldly things." He was "very strange,...a stranger to the world." To the woman it seemed as though Mengele had come "from a different planet...in a space ship" (Lifton, 1986, pp. 367, 376). Like many other
observers struggling to formulate the sense in acts of murder so puzzling that they seem meaningless, this woman finds it nearly impossible to conceive of the "Angel of Auschwitz" in human terms. Since he cannot easily be comprehended as "one of us," to her as well as to others Mengele has seemed more appropriately understood as one of them: a stranger, a foreigner, an alien being.

**The killer as evil.** It is perhaps the ultimate distancing construction to imagine the killer as the non-volitional agent of an impersonal force. Commentators writing about motiveless murder have often eschewed the explanatory frameworks developed by psychologists and criminologists and opted instead for an explanation rooted in the religious concept of evil. Most commonly the idea takes one of two forms.

One variation holds that certain individuals are born evil (i.e., they are products of a "bad seed"). This notion is evident, for example, in a description of Gary Gilmore which has been used to promote the mass market videotape of *The Executioner's Song* (Schiller, 1982), a movie about Gilmore's crimes and execution. Gilmore, according to the promotional blurb, was "destined to kill"; he was a man "with an inescapable destiny from the day he was born." The same theme is evident in Conrad Phillips' (1956) reference to serial killer John Christie as the product of "blind forces of nature which from time to time throw up monsters as indifferently as they do cataclysms and epidemics" (p. 174); and also in Ann Rule's (1987) observation, made in the context of trying to account for Diane Downs' decision to shoot her three small children, that "More than one rational forensic psychia-
trist has said flatly, 'Some children are simply born evil. They start out evil, and they remain evil'' (p. 445). Recall, too, one law enforcement officer’s explanation for why Ted Bundy committed multiple murder: "I think he was born to kill" (Morgan, Lickens, and Lavin, 1989).

The other variation on the idea assumes that "evil" is an occult force which operates in the universe and plays an active role in human affairs. Presumably, some individuals succumb to its influence, some do not. Consider the following examples. Cahill (1986) suggests that if we assume that in some meaningful sense John Gacy can be described as "sane," we "are confronted with an intensely disturbing moral and philosophical concept. It is not something we ordinarily care to examine too closely, this idea that evil exists in our world" (p. ix).

As his "personal credo" about what lies behind many confounding acts of violence, Lustgarten (1976) states, "I believe that, as there is pure Good in this world, there is pure Evil. Evil which takes human shape in the most heinous criminals. Evil which works through the most heinous crimes. Evil irrespective of environment or breed" (p. 216). One author who has written about the series of "Hillside Strangler" murders committed by cousins Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi described Buono in a personal communication as being "about as purely evil...as one can get" (Author’s name withheld, personal communication, January 8, 1986). And writing of the time he spent interviewing Ian Brady in prison, journalist Fred Harrison (1986) remarks that, "Slowly, in that darkened cavern, I began to understand the nature of evil" (p. 17).
Like the other distancing constructions I have discussed, this one can be understood as a form of capitulation before the unfathomability of the motiveless murderer's acts. Of course some commentators whose perspective is explicitly religious might maintain that "evil" offers the most appropriate explanation for unmotivated acts of violence. Thus one often reads in the newspaper of comments like these spoken at memorial services held for the victims of such crimes: "What we see here is a victory of the Evil One" (Franken, "The death penalty," 1986) and "Evil will always be with us. It will destroy anything that makes sense" ("Last victim," 1986).

I have alluded previously to a recent television talk show (Geraldo, ABC, May 9, 1988) on which several commentators, two of them authors of booklength studies about multiple murder, offered their perspectives on Charles Manson. Sociologist Jack Levin, who for several years has been among the most widely cited authorities on the subjects of mass and serial murder, was attempting to place the "Manson phenomenon" (both the crimes attributed to Manson and the American public's continuing fascination with Manson as an individual) within a complex web of contributing social, cultural, and psychological influences. But Geraldo Rivera, the show's host, pressed Levin for his perspective on a different question: "Is [Manson] evil?" Levin responded with a rambling statement (that included the disclaimer that his colleagues in the social and behavioral sciences would cringe at what he was about to say) which concluded thus: "I don't see any other way of describing it. He's evil." Rivera obviously agreed: "My diagnosis? He's evil."
There is probably a connection between the conclusion that certain killers must be "evil" and the sense sometimes noted of a phantom, incorporeal quality about some individuals whose murders strike observers as "pure" or unmotivated. Commentators often express this latter sense either by describing the killer in terms which suggest he is more essence than form, or by observing around him a kind of occult aura that defies explanation. A woman who survived Auschwitz found Josef Mengele so terrifying in his contradictions and cruelty that he seemed to her "more like an abstraction" than a human being (Lifton, 1986, p. 380). One author who recounts Mengele's life describes him at various times as the "invisible man" and the "phantom" (Astor, 1985). Yallop (1982) notes that during the crime wave of England's "Yorkshire Ripper," people often described the unknown murderer of prostitutes as almost a spiritual presence, an "invisible man" thought to possess "extraordinary powers, astonishing gifts" (p. 34).

According to one commentator, the Yorkshire Ripper's namesake, Jack the Ripper, seemed such a shadowy and elusive presence in London’s East End that some of his contemporaries (the "superstitious") began to believe that "he wasn’t a real person at all, but a phantom of some sort who could appear and vanish at will" (Hynd, 1953, p. 20). Another commentator on the Jack the Ripper case cites a nineteenth century newspaper account which suggests one reason why people might develop such a belief. When the motivation behind certain crimes seems utterly incomprehensible, writes the article's author, "the mind turns...to some theory of occult force (Cullen, 1965, p. 79). This dynamic
apparently contributed, too, to public perceptions of late-nineteenth
century serial killer Herman Mudgett, better known by his alias H.H.
Holmes. After the murderer’s trial, Franke (1975) writes, "Talk began
of an ‘evil eye’ and of an ‘astral’ quality in Holmes" (p. 214). Soon,
Franke continues, "there was talk of ‘something magnetically evil about
the man...’ and of ‘an influence malignant in the extreme...which
pervades the very atmosphere about him’" (p. 215).

This notion of an occult force manifest in murder appears in more
recent accounts as well. For example, in his book about the seven "Ann
Arbor murders" eventually attributed to John Norman Collins, Keyes
(1976) describes the sense Ann Arbor residents had of being "under
threat from some spreading, unseen evil" (p. 74). And to Cameron and
Frazer (1987), it seems apparent that Yallop (1982) regards Peter
Sutcliffe not as a flesh and blood human being who makes the choice to
kill women, but as the representative of a kind of impersonal force, "a
mysterious, inescapable wickedness which cannot be understood by
society at large" (p. 136).

Contributing to the association of motiveless murder with occult
or "evil" forces are the descriptions offered by some investigators who
have had personal contact with a killer whose acts have seemed
senseless. Two such descriptions come to mind immediately. When he was
being interviewed for Kinder’s (1982) book about three murders
committed in 1974 by Air Force pilot Dale Pierre, a police officer
recalled a point during his interrogation of Pierre when "this cold,
cold atmosphere came over [Pierre]...That look, that whole attitude,
it was an eerie, eerie feeling that would emit from him. He could
probably scare the daylights out of somebody. I’ve never run across it before or since" (p. 86). Clearly, what is being suggested here is that there is about Pierre an aura of evil, something other-worldly that no diagnostic tag could be expected to capture. An assistant attorney general who had been present at the arrest of William Bradfield, the high school English teacher later convicted for his participation in murdering a woman and her two children ("I guess it must be said that you are some kind of an anomaly" said the judge at Bradfield’s sentencing [Schwartz-Nobel, 1986, p. 241]), offers a description of Bradfield which echoes the description of Dale Pierre:

As soon as I walked in, I saw Bradfield’s eyes. There was something about those eyes. I never felt anything like it. Almost like some part of him had reached out and touched me. I felt his power. It’s hard to describe. I literally had a sense of a struggle between good and evil. I was uncomfortable, shaken. (p. 192)

In Chapter Two I outlined the case of English serial killer Dennis Nilson. Even to those who have examined his life and crimes most carefully, Nilson remains an enigma. Ironically, it was Nilson himself who first introduced the idea of "innate evil" at his trial; neither the prosecution nor the defense had done so. If his summary statement can be taken as an indication, the judge thought that Nilson’s suggestion provided an appealing explanatory framework: "There are evil people who do evil things," he said. "Committing murder is one of them...A mind can be evil without being abnormal" (Masters, 1985, p. 238). What does it mean to be evil but not abnormal? Presumably, what the judge meant to suggest was that in common with everyone else Nilson entered the world tainted by Original Sin; but that unlike
most, he succumbed in particularly dramatic fashion to the malignant influence of Satan.

This language of discourse sounds odd spoken in a court of law. We prize rationality. Our tendency is to place in the hands of scientists the greatest imponderables and then to await a solution based on empirical evidence. To base an explanation for acts such as those Nilsen committed on the metaphysical concept of evil is not in keeping with the temper of the times. Levin knew that as a scientist he risked opprobrium for suggesting that Charles Manson is "evil." Godwin (1978) remarks, perhaps only partly in jest, that were a psychologist to invoke "evil" as the answer to why someone commits murder, it "would be worth [his] diploma" (p. 303).

The debate over whether labelling a person like Dennis Nilsen or Charles Manson "evil" represents the acknowledgement of a real possibility or an abnegation of the responsibility to attempt understanding will not be settled soon. As Masters (1985) reminds, the question of evil is incapable of proof one way or the other. The point, however, is that when individuals (scientists in particular) who are normally committed to finding answers in the human realm to the mysteries of human action invoke "evil" to explain murder, the effect is to create distance between the social audience and the person assumed to have fallen prey to the nonconfirmable powers of darkness.

A variation: The killer as pathogen. If the killer kills because he has succumbed to the forces of "evil," might not something similar happen to us if we should fall under his influence? This is the idea of the killer as pathogen. Seen as dangerous and potentially
contaminating, the killer is someone from whom, to avoid taint, one needs to maintain a certain distance.

In suggesting that the killer as pathogen is another form of distancing construction, I owe a debt to Sander Gilman's (1985) discussion of the philosopher Nietzsche, widely perceived by his contemporaries as "the quintessential outsider, the madman whose insanity is infectious," and known to many people even today as "the crazy man whose works, if you read them, may drive you crazy" (p. 59). Ironically, it was Nietzsche himself who wrote the famous words, "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look into the abyss, the abyss also looks back at you."

With Nietzsche as his point of departure, Gilman traces the notion of "dangerous texts" and shows how it has colored the social construction of the meaning in certain acts of murder, from the nineteenth century up through Leopold and Loeb, and on into the present (as, for instance, in the case of John Hinckley, Jr., for whom the seductive text was said to be Martin Scorsese's film Taxi Driver). According to Gilman, the pattern has been to equate a particular "reader's" vulnerability with some variety of constitutional weakness, for example "neuro-circulatory-asthenia" in the case of Nathan Leopold, a "shrunken brain" in the case of John Hinckley. For purposes of this brief discussion, I want simply to demonstrate the use by commentators on motiveless murder of the idea that the killer himself is a form of "dangerous text." The application does not depend on too fanciful a use of the "text" metaphor since, as Gergen (1988) has recently argued...
(while at the same time expressing his own reservations), the "person as text" has become an influential paradigm guiding contemporary approaches to the interpretation of human action.

LeMay (1973) points out that in a letter to his publisher, Dostoyevsky described his fictional killer Raskolnikov as having "submitted to certain, strange incomplete ideas that float on the wind" (p. 17). This is an interesting description because it implies the power of intangibles: ideas, images, beliefs, and spiritual forces like "evil," for example. The construction of the killer as pathogen assumes, first, the power of such intangibles; and further, the concentration of contagious evil in the person of the "pure" or apparently motiveless murderer.

We encountered earlier, in the perspective of Bruno Bettelheim (see Chapter Two), the notion that anyone who examines too closely the acts of certain "evil" persons risks becoming spiritually contaminated. Lifton (1986), whose study of Nazi physicians triggered Bettelheim's words of caution, seems to have anticipated the criticism, remarking at one point that we often avoid studying subjects like "Nazi evil" because of our "fear of contagion" (p. xi). He acknowledges the danger, pointing out that when we cultivate an imaginative connection with the worst instances of cruelty and destructiveness, we "alter [our] relationship to the entire human project" (p. 3) We risk, in other words, being transformed into everything embodied in our images of the Other.

Of course the notion that exposure to "evil" can turn a good person bad is hardly new. I know of no more vivid expression of it than
a description from Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (cited by Masters and Lea, 1963). The story Saint Augustine tells is meant, say Masters and Lea, to depict "the seductive effect" of the amphitheatre. A pious young man who had long avoided attending the gory spectacles staged at the amphitheatre accompanied friends there one day. Though he had intended to keep his eyes closed, he looked; and from that moment, writes Saint Augustine, he was lost: "[W]ith the sight of blood, he absorbed a lust for cruelty; he could not turn away; his gaze grew fixed; he was drunk with the lust for blood...He looked, his blood burned, and he took away with him a madness which goaded him to return again" (p. 54).

The motiveless killer has been depicted by some commentators as exercising an influence perhaps less dramatic but no less compelling than that which transformed the boy at the amphitheatre. He seems at times to cast a spell which makes those with whom he comes into contact lose their bearings. Several examples drawn from both fictional and non-fictional writings will suffice as illustrations.

In his novel about a serial murderer, apparently based in part on the case of John Norman Collins, Loken (1985) describes the killer's influence as subtle, but powerful as a vortex. Sitting across from his client, the killer's attorney "found himself being drawn...into those deep clear-blue Lake Michigan eyes. They tugged at him, submerged him softly in their gentle undertow" (p. 113). This same seductive power is an ingredient in Bloch's (1974) fictional portrayal of serial murderer H.H. Holmes. The killer is described as having "deep, dark eyes" and a "terrible vitality flowing from his fingertips" (p. 216). A female
associate avoids her own image in the mirror for fear of finding that contact with the killer has transformed her into something terrible. Conrad Phillips (1956) uses terms like "chemical magnetism" (p. 18) and "animal magnetism" (p. 27) with reference to multiple murderer Neville Heath; and Bloch seems to suggest that some similar quality drew people, especially women, to Holmes. Of the same woman referred to above, Bloch writes, "She had to fight the strength she sensed in [Holmes]....The power, attracting her in spite of all she knew, the power within his eyes..." (p. 232). This description brings to mind Franke's (1975) comment that following Holmes' actual trial, rumors circulated to the effect that there was "something magnetically evil" about Holmes which had "the telepathic property of transmission" (p. 215).

Another fictional example can be found in the recent movie Manhunter (Mann, 1986), which tells the story of a psychologically troubled detective who comes out of retirement to assist in apprehending a serial killer. Early in the film, viewers learn why the investigator had retired in the first place. While tracking another serial killer, he had tried to achieve an imaginative identification with his quarry. He had succeeded in learning how to think like the killer, but his success had had its price: he had ended up in a mental institution, unable to free himself from the killer's thinking patterns. In the novel on which Manhunter is based, the narrator describes the investigator's struggle to maintain his tenuous grip on reality: "If he felt [the killer's] madness in his head, he had to contain it quickly, like a spill" (Harris, 1981, p. 69). In the movie,
the theme of the killer as seducer or dangerous pathogen is given further emphasis during the climactic scene, just before the second murderer is shot dead. Blaring in the background is the insistent 1960's rock anthem "In-a-Gadda-da-Vita," which includes the words, "Oh won't you come with me and take my hand/ Oh won't you come with me and walk this land."

Variations on this same theme have appeared in nonfiction texts about motiveless murder as well. I have commented already on Bruno Bettelheim's warning about the danger of looking too closely at the subject of Nazi atrocities. Masters (1985) sounds the same cautionary note in his book about Dennis Nilsen:

[T]here is always the possibility that if one seeks to understand how such events as are related in this book occurred, and even more if one seeks to feel from within the motive forces of the man who caused them, one might oneself become infected or contaminated by deeply-hidden streams in the human psyche which are, in the normal course of events, severely inhibited. (p. 25)

Masters seems to suggest that rather than infecting people from without, a killer such as Nilsen might act as a catalyst in uncovering hidden sources of evil within.

Other commentators who have deliberately sought out some form of contact or identification with motiveless murderers describe experiencing a sense of dread or disorientation. Writing of what it felt like to be in the presence of Myra Hindley, Johnson (1967) uses the word "terror." Everyone who encountered Hindley felt it, she says.

As one detective said to me, "You were terrified. I was terrified!" He told me that in the prison where she was being held on remand, officers would take turns to go to her with meals, or on any other errand. "No, I went last time. It's your turn now." (p.33)
What they all experienced, according to Johnson, was a form of "spiritual fear." And of the trial itself she writes: "It threw us all out of kilter: some of the badness rubbed off on us, all of us felt unclean" (p. 94).

Finally, I want to cite briefly two other commentators, one a journalist and one an actor, whose remarks corroborate the impression Johnson conveys: that contact with certain killers, be it actual or imaginative, can induce a kind of vertigo that is in effect a form of contamination.

Journalist Joe McGinnis had agreed with Green Beret physician Jeffrey MacDonald to write the story of events leading up to MacDonald’s arrest and trial for the murders of his wife and two young daughters (McGinnis’ book, Fatal Vision [1983], later became a best-seller). When he began work on the project, McGinnis believed MacDonald’s claim of innocence. Nothing in MacDonald’s background suggested a pattern of violent or antisocial behavior. In MacDonald’s presence, McGinnis found it nearly impossible to imagine that the likeable and apparently compassionate emergency physician could have done what prosecutors claimed he did, especially in light of the fact that he showed not a single sign of guilt or remorse. His problem, he would say later, was with "reconciling the horror of those crimes with the appearance of the man [he] knew." It was not, he said, until he escaped "the kind of magnetic field of [MacDonald’s] personality" that he was able to recover his sense of objectivity and see that MacDonald had to be guilty (Murphy, 1987). In common with many police investigators and social acquaintances who had tried to "read" Jeffrey
MacDonald, McGinnis seems to have become disoriented under the influence of a "dangerous text."

Actor Mark Harmon apparently experienced a similar sense of disorientation after agreeing to play serial killer Ted Bundy for a television mini-series. In an article describing an interview with Harmon, Washington Post reporter Michael Hill (1986) writes that after filming began, Harmon found himself playing the part offstage of an outsider-voyeur, even to the point of "stalking women in the supermarket." His attempt to manage an actor's identification with Bundy was, says Harmon, triggering a subtle transformation over which he had to struggle for control:

People who have known me for 20 years come over to the house, take one look at me and turn around and leave....My dogs don't recognize me....I try to keep it in perspective, but in a role like this, I find myself reminding myself more and more of that all the time.

Of course how much of the effect Harmon describes is "real" and how much imagined, or played up to promote the mini-series, is irrelevant. The point is that his remarks sound a recurring theme - beware of the killer or you may become infected by him - in social discourse about the motiveless murderer.

The Motiveless Murder as "One of Us":
Texts Emphasizing Affinity and Continuity

"Other" representations place the motiveless killer outside all that is quotidian. When we speak of him as a beast, a monster, a lunatic, an alien, or an agent of "evil," we are employing the language of exception, exclusion, difference, distance, and discontinuity. We
view him from far off; he is perceived as an exhibit from which we imagine ourselves capable of maintaining an observer's detachment.

The larger portion of this chapter I have devoted to exploring selected manifestations of the "difference" theme. But as I have stated elsewhere, a central tension by which the entire body of literature on motiveless murder might be characterized is the tension between contrasting themes of difference and relatedness. There is in the literature a dialectical interplay among images, constructions, rhetoric, and metaphors; one theme is pitted against the other. In its most compressed form, the tension is captured in book titles which exploit the resonance of the oxymoron: for example, in those describing John Wayne Gacy as the "killer clown," (Sullivan and Maiken, 1983), Ted Bundy as "the stranger beside me" (Rule, 1980) and "the killer next door" (Winn and Merrill, 1979), H.H. Holmes as "the torture doctor" (Franke, 1975). A further example can be found in Ambler's (1987) description of Jack the Ripper's crimes as the product of "madness with intelligence" (p. 144).

Representations of the killer as Other are often bluntly drawn, embodying little if any of the ambiguity involved in most attempts to construct the sense in what people do. Texts which emphasize the theme of relatedness, those which in effect draw the killer closer so that we are forced to consider him among rather than "divided away from" (Reinhardt, 1962) the rest of us, function to reinstate the ambiguity. They force an acknowledgement of the paradox implied in the idea that there are human beings who resemble other human beings in many, even most ways, yet who kill for no apparent reason. The implied message of
these texts is that we overlook something important about the murderer, perhaps by implication about ourselves, when we rely too heavily on images of difference to represent those aspects of human behavior which we find most disturbing. Typically absent from texts emphasizing the theme of relatedness is a sense of final resolution. Profound questions about the implications of "insane" acts performed by apparently "sane" individuals are raised but often left open, for contemplation. For example, though Lustgarten (1968) clearly believes that many multiple murderers must be regarded as "evil," he struggles for a sense of how such people compare with others for whom the idea of killing as a "routine activity" is, consciously at least, unthinkable. Most people, he says, would regard the mass or serial murderer as "unnatural." Then, "Every instinct prompts me to agree. Every reflection makes me hesitate" (p. 8).

I am reminded of a personal anecdote. For many years I had been thinking about, and puzzling over, what I considered to be profound and complicated questions raised by multiple murderers like Ted Bundy, John Gacy, and Charles Manson (and the range of social reactions triggered by their crimes). After enrolling as a graduate student, I took a course on the psychology of criminality composed primarily of undergraduates. Just before dismissing class one day the professor who taught the course produced a newspaper article which quoted a forensic psychiatrist who had interviewed John Wayne Gacy. People who commit serial murder, the psychiatrist was quoted as saying, are "carbon copies" of one another. Her experience, she claimed, made it possible for her to describe a serial killer without even meeting him. Obviously
in agreement with the psychiatrist's perspective, the professor quipped, "There. Just in case anyone here thought it might be possible to rehabilitate one of these people...."

My sense was that many students in the class felt reassured. The notion that all serial murderers are cut from the same mold and utterly unreachable clearly results in the creation of psychological distance. They kill; we don't. They are static; we change (a conceptualization consistent with the frequently observed fundamental attribution bias).

At the time, I was reading *Intimate Strangers*, Richard Schickel's (1985) exploration of the "culture of celebrity"; and I was reminded of Schickel's comments about the need many people have, during an age of mobility, information overload, and social fragmentation, for "simplifying,...readily apprehensible symbols" (pp. 38, 42). Schickel suggests that when such symbols satisfy a particularly important need (eg., for a sense of intimacy, or for control of a compelling fear), people might avoid gathering additional information "that would blur their sharp, clear images with ambiguities" (p. 360). Perhaps the idea that all serial killers are remote clones is a byproduct of the need to cauterize away the paradox and ambiguity which so many commentators have observed in these disturbing figures.

In the sense that they insist on the inadequacy of images and explanatory constructions which depict motiveless killers solely in terms of the Other, the texts to be discussed in this section, those emphasizing ambiguity and the possibility of affinity, represent a radical challenge to what often has passed as the conventional wisdom. It may, however, be necessary to add a caveat. Few texts exploring
motiveless murder can be neatly categorized as one or the other, a
"difference" text or a "relatedness" text. Often, however, a text
emphasizes one theme over the other. While the primary effect of one
text is to create distance between the killer and the social audience,
the primary effect of another is to lessen that distance. Not infre-
quently, one can observe a dialectic between the two orientations
operating within a single text.

When Appearances Lie: The Killer as Neighbor

Even without the vast body of social psychological research
demonstrating the axiom's truth, our experience would tell us that
things, and people, often are not what they seem. Yet it can be argued
that on an everyday basis most individuals take for granted their
ability to formulate reasonably accurate judgments about other people
based on "intuition" and a very limited set of superficial cues.
Without such confidence it would be difficult to experience the sense
of mastery that most psychologists agree is an essential ingredient of
successful social adjustment. In the discussion which follows I will
develop briefly the idea that one function of some motiveless murder
texts is to cast doubt on the ability of people to make the kinds of
social judgments necessary not only for social adjustment, but for
survival.

Authors of these texts ask that the reader bracket his privileged
knowledge that an individual has committed a horrible crime. Observe
this individual, they say, as you would observe the other people with
whom you have casual social contact - at the supermarket, for instance,
or on the walkway outside your place of residence. What kind of person
do you see? Using the same cues with which you formulate your impressions of most people, do you perceive him as being fundamentally like you, or does he stand out as someone very different, perhaps someone to be avoided? These texts force in readers the recognition that even the person who, like Ted Bundy or John Gacy, kills repeatedly over an extended period of time, may disclose few if any outward signs of difference.

Even trained diagnosticians aware that such a person is suspected of multiple murder may find themselves stymied. Recall, for instance, the clinical psychologist who after interviewing and testing concluded that Ted Bundy was a "normal person... an extremely intelligent young man who is intact psychologically," and who demonstrates "a positive self-identity" and "good ego strength" (cited in Leyton, pp. 83-84). Another psychologist who spent a considerable amount of time with Bundy said of him, "[He] is either a man who has no problem, or is smart enough... to appear close to the edge of normal" (cited in Daly, 1978, p. 61). These assessments of a man who police believe killed over thirty young women seem less surprising when considered in the context of broader efforts by mental health professionals to predict dangerous behavior. John Monaghan, a widely-cited authority on the prediction of dangerousness, offers this assessment of those efforts:

Several studies... indicate that psychiatrists and psychologists are vastly overrated as predictors of violence. In the best of circumstances, with lengthy multidisciplinary evaluations of people who had already manifested their proclivities for violence on several occasions, psychologists and psychiatrists seemed to be wrong when they predicted violence at least twice as often as they were right.
Monaghan goes on to observe, more generally, that "prison psychologists, psychiatrists, and parole boards have shown little ability to distinguish the safe from the violent" (quoted in Moore, 1983, p. 40).

The case can certainly be made, however, that most individuals assume that they can avoid falling prey to the extremely violent few: the Gacys, the Bundys, the DeSalvos. Recall a landlady's comment to police officers investigating her former tenant, suspected multiple murderer Randy Woodfield: "[I]f he was a killer, I would have known it, wouldn't I?" (Stack, 1984, p. 140). Like most repeat killers Woodfield wore a convincing, and deceptive, social mask. His landlady assumed herself able to assess people with reasonable accuracy, only this time she was mistaken. Police apparently made similar assumptions while investigating the Utah "hi-fi murders" later attributed to Dale Pierre. According to Kinder (1982), suspects surfaced in the case, many with violent records; but to the police officers, "none of them seemed capable of [emphasis added] committing a crime of this magnitude" (p. 65).

Sometimes, as was the case recently in a small Missouri town, events reinforce the notion that making assumptions like the police and the landlady made is not unreasonable. When seven relatives died in a shooting rampage, police concluded that one of the deceased, a 14-year old boy, had done the shooting and then killed himself. They reasoned that pressures brought on by extreme poverty had made the boy desperate. Townspeople who knew the murdered family protested. "There's no way the boy could have done it," said one acquaintance. "He's a good
boy. Everybody knows that." When police eventually arrested the boy's uncle for the murders, thus exonerating the already-buried teenager, many people felt it confirmed their ability to assess "capability" to commit murder. "Around town," wrote one reporter for the New York Times, "many residents said they knew all along that Kirk, a well-mannered youth who rose every day before sunrise to do his chores, could not have committed such heinous crimes." The boy's junior high school principal knew the youngster couldn't have killed because "This boy could look you in the eye and talk sense" (Johnson, 1987).

Many texts which emphasize points of similarity (even if they are only superficial ones) rather than points of difference between the killer and "normal" people challenge our capacity for making accurate social judgments. They insist that it is often impossible to determine who would and who wouldn't be capable of committing unprovoked murder. Perhaps representative of these texts is a widely-distributed home video entitled Murder: No Apparent Motive (Horvath, 1984). In documenting the multiple murders committed by the likes of John Gacy and Edmund Kemper (whose victims numbered ten, including his mother and his grandparents), the video's script emphasizes repeatedly that nothing in the way the killers looked or acted when in the company of casual social contacts would have identified them as violent offenders.

Not because the lesson they teach is new, but because it has the effect of further eroding the illusion of predictability on which a sense of social cohesion ultimately depends, these are subversive, disturbing texts. They are disturbing in that they highlight the disparity between appearance and reality. Horror films featuring
innocuous-looking monsters who prove deadly may have a similar effect. One movie critic writes: "If, after all, such a frightening reality is able to masquerade as a harmless fiction, then how safe can we ever be? On what perceptions can we really rely?" (Telotte, 1987, p. 119). These very questions form the coda to a book recording Loretta Schwartz-Nobel's (1987) personal investigation of English teacher William Bradfield's involvement in multiple murder. I have alluded to Bradfield previously, but several additional details will help to place Schwartz-Nobel's response to him in its proper perspective. A lover of poetry, particularly the work of Ezra Pound, Bradfield had graduated with honors from exclusive Haverford College before chairing the English department at a high school located in an affluent Philadelphia suburb. Following Bradfield's eventual conviction on charges of conspiring to commit triple murder, witness after witness came forward to testify that he had taught with the kind of inspiration that shapes students' lives. One said, "I can't say that I've ever met anyone who is so seriously devoted to the truth as Mr. Bradfield." Another said, "Beyond all things, he was an example to me. He taught me what was important...." A third former student recalled Bradfield as "the most inspiring teacher" she had ever had (Wambaugh, 1987, p. 338). A group of supporters consisting, according to Schwartz-Nobel, of individuals who were "without exception...highly educated, religious, and cultured people" (p. 7), invested their life savings in Bradfield's defense and trusted their young children alone with him.

Yet this charismatic, soft-spoken teacher apparently conspired with his principal to murder another teacher and her two small
children. The prosecution argued that the motive was greed since the murdered woman had shortly before her death named Bradfield as the beneficiary of a sizable insurance policy. But people who had known Bradfield well testified in court that he was a generous man of ascetic inclinations who had never been much motivated by material things. The judge in Bradfield’s trial called him an "anomaly."

In the course of researching her account of the case, Schwartz-Nobel visited Bradfield in jail frequently, trying to get to know him so that she could make sense of his crimes (which he always denied). He impressed her as "a gentle scholar," someone who seemed "warm" and "genuine" (p. 6). "Everything about the man," she writes, "was absolutely incompatible with the act of planning a triple murder" (p. 9). Eventually, although she developed a fondness for Bradfield, she could not deny the evidence against him. But the incongruity between the person Bradfield appeared to be and the crimes for which he was convicted induced in Schwartz-Nobel a profound sense of disorientation:

If this man, who appeared to be so honest, was looking me straight in the eye and lying to me, then who and what could I believe? I had been an investigative journalist for a dozen years....I had learned to trust my instincts. Now I was no longer sure. I liked and admired the person that William Bradfield appeared to be. But I had no way of knowing what was real. (p. 7)

Her experience with Bradfield caused a pervasive change in Schwartz-Nobel’s outlook toward other people: "I knew I would never again be certain that anyone was what he or she appeared to be" (p. 290).

From all accounts Dennis Nilsen impressed others as a thoughtful and conscientious, though unremarkable, civil servant. No one who knew
him considered Nilsen out of the ordinary. He was somewhat of a loner, but certainly not unfriendly. He showed no signs whatever of being violent. Yet Nilsen killed fifteen people over a period of four years. Unlike many serial murderers, following his arrest Nilsen readily admitted his guilt. How is the paradox of a person like Nilsen to be resolved?

Brian Masters' (1985) account of the case has radical implications. Instead of suggesting a way of resolving the paradox, Masters lets the paradox stand. Unlike some commentators who, even though they emphasize the killer's familiar appearance, end up by exposing him as a person totally unlike the mask he hid behind; Masters insists that what casual acquaintances saw was the real Nilsen. He resists the temptation, in other words, to allow the light cast backwards by knowledge of Nilsen's crimes to invalidate other dimensions of the life Nilsen lived before his arrest.

Nilsen's prison diaries, which he made available to Masters, provide a fascinating record of the killer's own attempt to solve the riddle of his identity. In the following entry he lists the principles, values, and roles which he believes define his essence:

I like to see people in happiness.
I like to do good.
I love democracy.
I detest any criminal acts.
I like kids.
I like all animals.
I love public and community service.
I hate to see hunger, unemployment, oppression, war, aggression, ignorance, illiteracy, etc.
I was a trades union officer.
I was a good soldier and N.C.O.
I was a fair policeman.
I was an effective civil servant [these are all positions which Nilsen actually held].
STOP. THIS ALL COUNTS FOR NOTHING when I can kill
fifteen men (without any reason) and attempt to
kill about nine others - in my home and under
friendly circumstances.
Am I mad? I don’t feel mad. Maybe I am mad. (pp. 168-69)

Masters does not dismiss these statements as merely lies or
rationalizations. In fact, his investigation of Nilsen’s life suggests
that they are essentially accurate. This is hardly the profile of a
"psychopath," though that label was invoked frequently by commentators
attempting to formulate the meaning in Nilsen’s behavior.

Where is the "real" Dennis Nilsen? Masters suggests that "perhaps
there were two Nilsens at large" (p. 168). But he does not seriously
entertain the controversial diagnosis of multiple personality. Instead,
he considers, in turn, the various insights available from psychiatry,
philosophy, and religion. Then he concludes, "Men like Nilsen elude
classification....They remind us, depressingly, of the essential
unknowability of the human mind" (p. 293). When all of the tentative
explanations have been examined for their usefulness, what remains,
says Masters, is novelist Iris Murdoch’s "rough contingent rubble," the
"unplumbable mass of contradictions which may surface in every man" (p.
286).

I have used the adjective "subversive" to describe texts which
undermine confidence in our ability to perceive what is "real" about
other people. In this sense, Masters’ account is especially subversive;
it views the reality hidden behind surfaces as complicating, not
cancelling out, the "truth" we formulate using the limited information
available through everyday social interactions. Dennis Nilsen is a
multiple murderer. In most ways, however, he is what he describes
himself as being, "just an ordinary man" (p. 26). The paradox, says Masters, is finally "insoluble" (p. 298). Though he displayed almost unfathomable callousness, "Nilsen is a man who feels, who can bestow loving care on a sparrow or surprise a colleague with a thoughtful gift" (pp. 298-299).

Many other texts stop short of suggesting, like Masters' book, that a killer's deceptive appearance may be no less "true" than the "reality" behind it. But by insisting on the need to regard even the worst criminals as in many ways similar to ourselves, they, too, advance a radical theme. One can locate it in many different accounts of multiple murder, for example in Phillips' (1956) description of John George Haigh as "a killer...who looked and behaved like any other bloke sitting opposite you in a bus or train" (p. 67); in a psychiatrist's description of Peter Kurten as a killer whose "line of thought and the thoughts themselves in no way differed from the normal" and in whom there seemed to be no "aberration of feeling" (Wagner, 1932, p. 189); and in Yallop's (1982) description of Peter Sutcliffe as a good-looking man..."quiet, unassuming, gentle," appearing "absolutely ordinary in every way" [p. 37]). In the introduction to his book about "sex killers," Lucas (1974) adds the disturbing reminder that we should not be surprised when even immediate family members prove totally unaware that there is a killer in their midst. The subversive element of these texts is well represented in Lucas' suggestion that women who read his book should subject to closer scrutiny the "habits, characteristics, and temperaments of husbands, sons, and brothers" who might, in spite of all appearances, be murderers.
Resistance to the "Medicalization" of Murder

In an earlier section of this chapter, I discussed the "sick killer" as a construction which tends to create distance between the killer and other, presumably "healthy," members of the social group. One can discern variations on this construction in the numerous published case histories where experts trained in psychiatry (or psychology), and armed with tools of analysis derived from one or another theoretical system, work backwards from an act of murder in order to unearth the roots of difference, or "pathology" (for example, Abrahamsen, 1985; Ansbacher et al., 1966; Blackman et al., 1963; Bruch, 1967; Freeman, 1955; Galvin and Macdonald, 1959; Kahn, 1960; Katz, 1964; Kennedy, Hoffman, and Haines, 1947; Lunde and Morgan, 1980; Ruotolo, 1968; Sattan et al., 1960; Stearns, 1957; and Witmann and Astrachan, 1949).

Not all commentators, however, have conceded the usefulness of this orientation. Too often, argue critics, the application of stigmatizing labels has created an illusion of the killer's remoteness that extends far beyond the antisocial character of his violent acts; and too often abstruse language (Potter [1966], for example, laments the use by experts of "semi-incomprehensible psychological jargon" [p. 263]) standing for loosely operationalized theoretical concepts has created around those acts an illusion of intelligibility. What is needed, suggest some, is an alternative approach which places greater emphasis on the social and cultural, even evolutionary, embeddedness of the killer's behavior (eg., Bolitho, 1926; Daly and Wilson, 1988; Lifton, 1986). In this sense, many attacks on the "medicalization" of
murder can be seen as attempts to focus on themes of social relatedness rather than on themes of individual difference. Though these critiques take a variety of forms, for purposes of illustration I will focus on one example and then cite briefly a number of corroborating perspectives.

Perhaps the most sustained recent critique appears in Leyton's (1986) examination of "compulsive killing." His book revolves around Leyton's refutation of what he regards as a flawed psychiatric premise: namely, that there is a useful analogy to be drawn between organic "disease" on one hand, and on the other, mental disturbance that is manifest in bizarre behavior. Repeatedly, Leyton argues the need to conceptualize acts of multiple murder in terms of their "social content" and their "social symbolism" rather than in terms of "psychopathology" or "mental disease." The core psychiatric analogy is misleading, he says, echoing earlier positions argued by critics like Szasz (1961) and Sarbin and Mancuso (1980). Leyton is an anthropologist, and he contends that in fact "the whole notion of mental disease...becomes quite untenable when subjected to the anthropological, cross-cultural evidence" (p. 21).

At the center of Leyton's argument is his belief that by fitting the multiple killer like Ted Bundy or David Berkowitz to a Procrustean theoretical framework, for example the Freudian perspective, psychiatrists have often obscured the fact that many other individuals who might look similar if forced into the same framework never commit a single act of violence. Too few mental health professionals are prepared, says Leyton, to admit with psychiatrist Willard Gaylin that
psychiatric diagnoses are often "trivial, ephemeral, descriptive, and meaningless" (cited in Leyton, pp. 31-32). Even the elite among contemporary forensic psychiatrists come in for pointed criticism: David Abrahamsen's construction of the "real" David Berkowitz is, according to Leyton, a hodge-podge of "psychiatric cliches" (p. 171); Donald Lunde is blinded to important social dimensions of symbolic acts of violence because of his "imprisonment within traditional psychiatry" (p. 268); and Emanuel Tanay misinterprets Ted Bundy's "crazy" role-playing as evidence of "psychiatric illness" and in so doing overlooks the message contained in Bundy's protest against a deeply-experienced sense of social disenfranchisement.

Of course Leyton develops his case against psychiatry with much more care than these few criticisms, lifted out of context, might suggest. For present purposes, however, the point requiring emphasis is that like a number of other commentators, Leyton feels that psychiatry has contributed to the creation of an illusion of distance between the apparently motiveless killer and the larger social order. What is needed, says Leyton, is a shift in emphasis, from the diagnostic to the hermeneutic. More useful than the analogy which regards the bizarre behavior of these killers as a symptom of "illness" would be another which sees acts of "senseless" violence as a form of suicide note. Could we accomplish this shift in perspective, says Leyton, our task would then be "to learn to read the note, to pore over the killings and the speeches of the killers, searching for meaning" (p. 27).

Leyton's dissatisfaction with psychiatric approaches to understanding motiveless murder is echoed by other commentators. Some
of the criticism centers around the unreliability of psychiatric diagnosis. During an appearance on a recent television talk show (Geraldo, ABC, May 9, 1988), an agent from the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit alluded to the fact that one can find in Charles Manson's prison file a reference to just about any diagnostic label imaginable. Echoing the point, Terry (1987) refers to the "scatter-gun diagnoses" (p. 22) and the "dime-store definitions" (p. 47) applied by various psychiatric experts to the Son of Sam killer. And Yallop (1982), voicing a similar complaint, comments that "virtually every psychiatric label" (p. 301) has been applied at one time or another to Peter Sutcliffe, the "Yorkshire Ripper."

Another criticism is that psychiatrists and to a lesser extent psychologists have neglected social context and placed too great an emphasis on the individual killer's mind. This is the perspective argued by sociologists Levin and Fox (1985) in a chapter entitled "The psychiatric mistake" from their booklength study on mass murder. Holmes and DeBurger (1987), also sociologists, observe that the tendency to interpret apparently senseless violence as evidence of mental illness or brain disorder is "an erroneous view that reflects more about contemporary social thought regarding criminality than it does of the actual behavioral forces in the serial murderer's background and current behavior" (p. 62).

In other words, according to these critics the "difference" implied by labelling the motiveless murderer using one or another diagnostic label needs to be regarded as a social construction. Acknowledging the truth of this contention requires that all attempts
to construct the killer’s behavior in terms of "deviance" or "difference" from some normative standard of conduct be regarded with at least a degree of skepticism. Examination of the killer must necessarily include examination of ourselves as well. The substitution of an emphasis on social factors for psychiatry’s traditional emphasis on the individual as a product of his unique personal history has the effect of drawing killer and social audience closer together.

It is necessary to add a brief caveat. The rule governing inclusion in the brief discussion above is simply that a given text must cast doubt on the legitimacy of psychiatric approaches to explaining apparently motiveless murder. Thus, not every text cited is appropriately categorized, at least not in its entirety, with texts emphasizing the "relatedness" theme. Yallop, for example, is critical of psychiatrists’ use of diagnostic labels to "explain" Peter Sutcliffe. However, for such labels he would substitute another construction of difference, the notion of Sutcliffe as "the personification of evil."

The Killer as the Embodiment of Social Themes

I have cited the case of multiple murderer Peter Sutcliffe, about whom one commentator wrote, "Examination of Sutcliffe’s early life shows no abnormal features, no traumatic events, nothing to trigger him into mass murder" (Yallop, 1982, p. 322). This same commentator describes Sutcliffe as "the personification of evil." When, as in Sutcliffe’s case, an individual’s behavior is particularly horrifying; and if situational factors seem not to have played a major role in shaping it; observers often conceptualize the person using one or
another of the distancing constructions I have described elsewhere in this chapter. The authors of one popular article examining "shy murderers," people whose acts shock acquaintances because they seem so out of character, remark, "Since [murders committed by such people] don’t make sense, we tend to write them off as quirks of nature, the acts of madmen gone berserk" (Lee, Zimbardo, and Bertholf, 1977, p. 70). Or, one might add, as evidence that the perpetrators have succumbed to "evil" or "degeneracy." This process of attributing causation can be summarized thus: If the environment, either immediate or remote, cannot be shown to have "produced" these killers, then the killers must be different in some fundamental way from other people. They kill because of who, or what, they are.

A number of commentators have suggested, however, that for the "sense" in many acts of apparently motiveless murder we need to trace connections between the killer’s attitudes, beliefs, and values and those prevalent throughout the larger social group to which he belongs. To do so is to allow that, at least in part, the killer is, as Charles Manson has repeatedly claimed he and his followers are, "a reflection" of society. "You make your children what they are," said Manson at his trial. "I am just a reflection of every one of you....I am whoever you make me" (Manson, 1973). Though few commentators would advocate such an extreme position (Schrader [1974] may be an exception), many have suggested that by constructing killers like Manson in terms which emphasize difference, we obscure the essentially social character of their acts. They argue that when we relegate such individuals to a position far beyond the
pale of "normality," we often fail to recognize in what they say and what they do the reverberations, albeit highly amplified, of prevalent social themes. This is the perspective I will examine briefly in the discussion which follows.

Recall, for purposes of contrast, several of the distancing representations discussed earlier in this chapter. Norris likened the serial killer to "a single-celled creature reacting to an overpowering chemical stimulus." To a journalist who was his contemporary Jack the Ripper seemed a "diseased creature." One commentator suggested that only the "logic of insanity" can account for the murders committed by Raymond Fernandez. Josef Mengele impressed one co-worker as an alien "from a different planet." Lustgarten explained that certain acts of apparently unprovoked murder must be regarded as manifestations of "evil irrespective of environment or breed." Consider how different is the perspective suggested by descriptions of Charles Manson as "a vessel for the zeitgeist" (Wilson, 1972c, p. 158); of mass murderer Ronald DeFeo as "suburbia's child" (Sullivan and Aronson, 1981, p. 253); of William Heirens as a teenager who murdered two women and one six-year old girl "because of a life cradled in grief and grown in grief" (Freeman, 1955, p. 138); of Mark Essex, the "New Orleans sniper" who killed ten and wounded twenty-two others, as "a casualty of history" (Hernon, 1978, cited in Leyton, 1986, p. 212); and of assassins like Lee Harvey Oswald, Mark David Chapman, and John Hinckley as people with "the capacity...to follow to its end the inherent logic of our age" (Schickel, 1985, p. 381).
These latter descriptions clearly tilt toward the "nurture" side of the enduring (and of course misleadingly stated) nature vs. nurture controversy. In so doing, they encourage observers to consider even those killers whose acts seem most aberrant as having been shaped by external influences. Of course, what most such commentators propose is not the wholesale rejection of one perspective in favor of another but, rather, a shift in emphasis, and in the angle of attention. Focus, they say, on factors operating in the killer’s immediate environment, and on pervasive social themes. Try to discover points of access to a way of apprehending reality which upon surface inspection might appear absolutely alien. Examine a series of photographs depicting the killer as a smiling infant, then as a child, an adolescent, and finally as an adult; and contemplate the possibility that the killer once thought and felt much like you did at a similar age. Or listen to the reminiscences of the killer’s family members and acquaintances, and see whether it is possible to discover in their descriptions support for Agatha Christie’s often-quoted statement that "Every murderer is someone’s old friend." As Brophy (1966) points out, those killers in whom we can discern few signs of congeniality or charity are those we are most likely to regard as being fundamentally different from ourselves. On the other hand, if a murderer "leaves behind the impression that people...enjoyed his company and that he had a sense of humour, ...we are readier to admit that [he] belong[s] to the same species" as we do (p. 248).

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to examine in any detail how specific commentators have presented the case for
understanding one or another motiveless murderer as the embodiment of prevailing social themes. For purposes of illustration, however, I would like to cite two such commentators and briefly summarize their perspectives.

Her study of the life and crimes of Edmund Kemper seems to have convinced Margaret Cheney (1976) that Kemper is a more familiar figure than he might at first appear. The difficulty some observers have experienced in trying to imagine the 6'9", 280-pound Kemper as a human being in many respects like other human beings is understandable in light of Kemper's crimes (and, perhaps to a lesser extent, his bulk). Included among Kemper's ten victims were his grandparents and his mother; and accompanying his various murders were multiple instances of mutilation, necrophilia, and cannibalism. As Cheney points out, "the nature of these crimes was so heinous and bizarre to a 'normal' person that they seem to belong more to a dark phase of pre-history. [Kemper] was a throwback." The atavistic construction of difference is invoked. Then, the caveat: "Yet he was a product of today" (p. 206).

A product of today? It is because of its focus on the environmental and social influences which may have shaped Kemper's perspective on reality that Cheney's study must be seen as a thematic departure from other texts which depict the motiveless killer primarily in distancing terms, as a remote and finally inaccessible figure. Kemper's family background was a troubled one, and intensely ambivalent feelings toward his domineering mother seem to have festered until a sense of vulnerability evolved into a sense of rage. But Cheney emphasizes that the hardening of Kemper's rage, and the violence
through which it was eventually expressed, cannot be understood without reference to the larger social context. Ours, she says, is a culture that "nurtures sociosexual violence" (p. 215). We "feed on violence," she continues, and in fact "the American Dream...seems inseparable" from it (p. 221). Edmund Kemper might at first glance appear to us like a freak, what Lee, Zimbardo, and Bertholf (1977) term a "quirk of nature," but, reminds Cheney, we need to remove our blinders so that we can trace connections between Kemper’s behavior and the larger social community.

As violence becomes more and more accepted in the United States, our definition of "normal behavior" is being inexorably changed. What is acceptable savagery for us is not normal for Canadians just over the border....

The view is widespread that a person who could commit the series of brutal and bizarre crimes that Edmund Kemper committed...had to be crazy....

[W]e do not wish to admit that persons such as he exist....

[But while] it is difficult to feel any sympathy for a Kemper,...he too was one more victim. (Cheney, 1976, pp. 219-222).

In contrast, William Allen (1976) does not suggest that we regard Charles Starkweather as society’s victim. He does, however, insist that our understanding of Starkweather be grounded in an understanding of what it was like to be a "typical" teenager during the 1950’s. The effect is to make Starkweather’s rebellion seem a little less aberrant, a little less the frenzied response suggested by defense psychiatrists, who in court described the killer using phrases like "creature out of a jungle," "primitive impulse," "frightened animal," and "diseased mind" (Leyton, 1986, p. 249). Allen was himself a teenager, two years younger
than Starkweather, when the murders took place. And although he recognizes the absurdity of making facile comparisons between a boy who killed ten people during an eight-day rampage and other young people of the day (after all, he allows, "Charlie was hopelessly disjunct from all humanity" [p. 2]); still, he finds it difficult not to see in Starkweather a reflection, distorted but not beyond recognition, of a self which struggled with other selves during Allen's own difficult passage to an adult identity.

It is the mental journey back in time to recover his personal experience of late adolescence that shapes Allen's perspective on the relationship between Starkweather and his contemporaries. In many ways, Starkweather and his girlfriend Caril Fugate seem to Allen "disturbingly close to being like other young couples of the time" (p. 1). The more clearly he is able to imaginatively recapture the inchoate tensions of his own youth, says Allen, those tensions traditionally associated with adolescent identity struggles as well as those traceable to the influence of contemporary prototypes of rebellious youth like James Dean and Marlon Brando, "the less broad [seems] the gulf between Charles Starkweather and the rest of us" (p. 2). And to drive home his point, Allen recounts an anecdote that might be entitled "How I nearly became a motiveless killer":

One time [Allen and some friends] were out at a local rock quarry, shooting bottles with .22s. There was a small airport nearby, and a light plane came in low over the quarry on a landing approach. Almost casually, we pointed our rifles upward and took a few pot shots. Nothing happened, the plane flew on, but I was deeply disturbed by the incident later. To us, that hadn't been a human being up there, it had been more like shooting at a bird, or perhaps acting out a scene in a war movie. For just
a moment, our fantasies had blurred into reality:
if we had been better shots it might have been
irrevocable. (p. 6)

While he obviously regards Starkweather as an extreme case, Allen
searches for, and finds, common roots linking Starkweather's rebellion
to the lesser rebellions of other, "normal" teenagers. The form of
understanding which he suggests we strive for in attempting to
formulate the "sense" in what Starkweather did is radically different
from other forms of understanding which are cast primarily in terms of
"mental disease," for example, or "evil." A human being who responded
in highly idiosyncratic and tragic ways to the strains of living,
Starkweather must also, from Allen's perspective, be understood as a
social being whose acts bear the imprint of a particular place and
time. It is because of his insistence on the need to explore the
socially-situated Starkweather that Allen can be regarded as among
those commentators who emphasize the theme of "relatedness" rather than
the contrasting theme of "difference."

This emphasis is apparent in many other texts as well. In an
account significantly titled "The imperialism of J.B. Troppman,"
Bolitho (1926) suggests that Jean Baptiste Troppman's murder of a
family of eight in 1869, as well as the French public's fascination
with and highly ambivalent response to his crime, must be understood
with reference to then-salient ideas of "empire," to the "ferocious
hunt for wealth" which was taking place all throughout France, and of
course to the prevalent spirit of conquest and imperialism associated
with Napoleon (who, suggests Bolitho, "seemed the supreme sanction to
the chase for success in which the whole nation was now engaged" [p.
75]). As Bolitho observes, "The collapse of Troppmann's ignoble dream [combining themes of personal wealth, technological achievement, power, and social prestige] pulled with it the immense and instable structure of the Spirit of the times, into which it was interlocked" (p. 120).

I have discussed elsewhere Leyton's (1986) perspective on the social roots of "compulsive killing," or killing "for its own sake." Perhaps with as much conviction as any other contemporary commentator, he has argued that our understanding of such crimes must be rooted in a recognition that, hardly aliens among us, multiple killers like Ted Bundy, Charles Starkweather, Albert DeSalvo, Edmund Kemper, and Mark Essex are uniquely the children of their times. "If," says Leyton, "we were charged with the responsibility for designing a society in which all structural and cultural mechanisms leaned toward the creation of the killers of strangers, we could do no better than to present the purchaser with the shape of modern America" (p. 295). A statement summarizing Leyton's perspective can serve as well to summarize the broader perspective advocated by each of the commentators cited in this final section: "[The multiple murderer] is in many senses an embodiment of the central themes in his civilization as well as a reflection of that civilization's critical tensions. He is thus a creature and a creation of his age" (p. 269).
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF
APPARENTLY MOTIVELESS MURDER:
CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVES
VOLUME II

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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CHAPTER VI
THE "INCOMPLETE MAN":
A CONCEPTUAL AND APPLIED EXPLORATION OF THE
MOTIVELESS MURDERER-AS-PSYCHOPATH

Introduction

Despite Cleckley's (1941) suggestion that the psychopath (used here as a synonym for sociopath and antisocial personality) seldom commits major crimes, few killers of the kind under consideration in this study avoid being labelled "psychopathic." In fact, a list of modern multiple murderers to whom the label has been applied would include the names of Charles Manson, Edmund Kemper, Albert De Salvo, Ted Bundy, Dennis Nilsen, Ian Brady, John Wayne Gacy, Charles Whitman, Gary Gilmore, Charles Starkweather, Harvey Carignan, Randy Woodfield, and Peter Sutcliffe. Often, it is implied that the crimes we find most difficult to comprehend are the work of psychopaths. Craft (1965) notes that the discussion of psychopathy which was included in the English Mental Health Act of 1959 reflected professional as well as lay interest in the problem of "aggressive and apparently motiveless crime" (p. 101). Cameron and Frazer (1987) observe that the label "psychopath" has "been applied indiscriminately in popular culture to the mass sexual killer" (p. 87). And Holmes and DeBurger (1988) cite the
"central role of sociopathic character in the homicidal violence of serial killers" (p. 67).

Katz (1988) traces a direct connection between the idea of apparently unmotivated murder and the idea of "psychopathy." In his recent study of the phenomenology and social construction of crime, he suggests that once members of the public decide that a particular murder is "senseless," the assumption often follows that the act can be explained with reference to "a psychological theory of antisocial personality disorder" (p. 309). Two examples drawn from actual cases lend support to Katz's observation. At the time John Wayne Gacy went to trial, there was little public consensus about why Gacy, a successful business contractor, might have killed thirty-three young men and buried twenty-nine of them in the crawlspace beneath his house. However, the attorney who prosecuted Gacy offered a neat construction of the crime's "sense" when he addressed his opening statement to the jury: "The evidence will show that John Gacy is plainly and simply an antisocial personality [emphasis added]. That only means that he will murder and murder and murder again and again if you allow him to do so" (Sullivan, 1983, p. 342). The same sequence—first the idea that a murder seems "senseless," then the conclusion that it must have been the work of a "psychopath"—obtained in the case of Ted Bundy: "In a time when most murders can be explained by passion or revenge or drug-induced despair, Bundy has remained a mysterious aberration....The only explanation that people can seem to agree on is simply that Bundy is a psychopath" (Morgan, Nickens, and Lavin, 1989, p. 11A).
The objective of this chapter is to inquire into the relationship between psychopathy and motiveless murder. Before examining that relationship, however, it will be necessary to look more closely at what "psychopathy" means. How has the idea evolved? In what ways has the condition been understood? How have various commentators answered the fundamental question "What is wrong with the psychopath?" Why does psychopathy remain one of the most controversial constructs in the psychiatric nosology?

Once I have addressed these preliminary questions, I will explore the proposition that the association between motiveless murder and psychopathy can perhaps best be understood in thematic rather than clinical terms. More specifically, I will suggest that discourse about motiveless murder and discourse about psychopathy are both animated by a thematic concern with the elusive parameters of "human-ness." As Goffman (1961) points out, "human being" is the "largest and most abstract of social categories" (p. 16). Often, metaphors employed as a means of focusing this concern with the conceptual boundaries of "human" exploit the idea that there exists an idealized "whole human" model against which individuals who engage in anomalous behavior can be judged. Constructions of deficiency which result from such comparisons tend to be expressed as some variation on the notion of human "incompleteness." I will suggest, first, that the motif of "the incomplete man" is foundational in the psychopathy literature; then, that it figures prominently in accounts of motiveless murder as well.

Here, as in previous chapters, I am more concerned with conceptual issues than with the fine points of clinical diagnosis. I
should, however, comment briefly on my decision to employ the term "psychopath," long absent from the American Psychiatric Association's official nosology. I agree with Millon (1981) that the most recent alternative to "psychopath," the "antisocial personality," repeats a mistake which many commentators on the subject have decried, namely the practice of implying too strong a relationship between psychopathy and criminality. In his criticism of the current nomenclature Millon laments the "major regressive step" of lending official sanction to a term which he contends is "but a minor variation of earlier, ill-considered and deplorable notions such as 'moral insanity' and 'constitutional psychopathic inferiority'" (p. 181).

The other factor influencing my decision is more pragmatic. The fact is that neither "antisocial personality" nor its predecessor, "sociopathic personality" (which was suggested first by Birnbaum [1914] and later included in the DSM-I [1952]), has supplanted "psychopathy" at the level of discourse in which I am primarily interested, that which occurs outside academic and professional circles. Clear evidence that even in academic circles the term "psychopath" retains its popularity can be seen in the titles of two recently published scholarly works, Unmasking the Psychopath (Reid et al, 1986) and Understanding and Treating the Psychopath (Doren, 1987).

The Construct of Psychopathy: Evolution and Variation

A Brief Historical Overview

Individuals to whom the eighteenth century physician Pinel applied the famous description "manie sans delire" (madness without
confusion) often behaved in ways which struck other people as self-defeating and "senseless." However, their powers of reasoning seemed intact. Of course Pinel’s subjects were the counterparts of today’s "psychopath" or "antisocial personality." Not surprising given the ambiguous nature of their clinical presentation (Kiger [1975] emphasizes the "paradoxical" features of the psychopath), these individuals have engaged their interpreters in a kind of projective exercise. From the results, it is possible to learn something not only about psychopaths and their interpreters, but about the evolving social context as well. For the highly condensed historical overview which follows, I am particularly indebted to the accounts provided by Craft (1965), Millon (1981) and Smith (1978).

As Rennie (1978) has observed, Pinel was not the first to observe that "rational" people sometimes behave in ways that most people of good sense find very odd. Long before, Hippocrates had commented on the same phenomenon; and in the seventeenth century, the physician to James II had described a condition "in which all the upright sentiments are eliminated, while the intelligence presents no disorders" (quoted in Rennie, p. 252). What did Pinel add to these prior descriptions? Most important, he is generally credited with first suggesting that "madness" and "defective reasoning" are not synonymous. Important as well was Pinel’s commitment to the ideal of objectivity. He attempted to describe features of a patient’s clinical presentation without making value judgments about the rightness or wrongness of his behavior (Millon, 1981). In historical accounts tracing the development of contemporary notions of psychopathy, this latter aspect of Pinel’s work
is often emphasized because it stands in such sharp contrast to the orientations of many later commentators.

It may be instructive to recall the zeitgeist around the time when Pinel was writing. Smith (1978) has provided an illuminating overview of several major historical themes. One highly influential current of thought was the empiricist orientation reflected in the writings of Locke, Hume, and Bentham. According to these writers, human beings are primarily the products of their experience. Change the environment; change the person. Pinel was impressed by the implications of the empiricist doctrine, particularly as it was expressed in the writings of Locke. Inspired by the twin notions of man’s innate nobility and the possibility that negative environments might be made more conducive to positive human development, he campaigned for treatment reforms that would address the "moral" defect he supposed present in those suffering from "manie sans delire."

Pinel lived and wrote during a period in history when the most fundamental ideas about man and society were undergoing radical transformation. It was, of course, the period of the French Revolution and the American colonies’ struggle for independence. In both Europe and America, the slogan "liberty, equality, fraternity" became a rallying cry for people whose commitment to individual freedom presaged the twentieth century’s "human potential" movement. In this climate of optimism, "moral therapy" became a widely advocated approach to treating the kinds of patients Pinel had described. There was a widespread belief that, given the proper conditions, even the most dysfunctional life could be turned around. By the mid-nineteenth
century, however, changes in the social climate were prompting changes in social attitudes toward deviance.

Actually, as Millon (1981) points out, the groundwork for these changes was laid long before mid-century. In 1812, the American psychiatrist Benjamin Rush had proposed that Pinel's earlier terminology be replaced with the pejorative labels "moral derangement" and "moral depravity." Rush believed that the disorder to which these terms referred was largely the product of a constitutional defect. Several decades later, Pritchard coined the term "moral insanity" and encouraged the view that the behavior of the morally insane was depraved, therefore deserving of social censure. Millon argues that the value judgments of Rush, Pritchard and other clinicians like the British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley signalled a radical departure from Pinel’s attempts at objective clinical description.

By the time Koch introduced the term "psychopathic inferiority" in 1888, it was widely held that people who seemed mad but rational were born that way. A variety of factors contributed to this perception. Probably most important was Darwin's contention that at any given point in history, there will be "atavistic mutants" (Smith, 1978, p. 7), individuals who are naturally inferior to their fellows. Also important was the rapid pace of progress in physical medicine. As scientists' understanding of the human body increased, many people believed it only a matter of time before even the most perplexing aspects of human behavior could be traced to organic causes.

Though the adjective "psychopathic" has remained a part of the vernacular in English-speaking countries, there occurred in the early
decades of the twentieth century, particularly in America, a gradual "transmutation" in the label's meaning (Millon, 1981, p. 189). In contrast with Pritchard, who had viewed the "psychopathic" individual as someone whose "depravity" causes him to violate standards of "decency and propriety" (quoted in Millon, p. 186), Koch eschewed value judgments and focused instead on actual behavior. He emphasized that because of what was apparently an innate disadvantage, the psychopath lacks the capacity for self-discipline. In Koch's conceptualization, Millon sees an attempt to reinstate the tone of clinical neutrality that had characterized Pinel's description nearly a century earlier.

Before long, a new current of thinking would foster yet another shift in focus, this time away from constitutional factors and observable behavior, to the realm intrapsychic dynamics. Freud and his followers emphasized the developmental roots of adult psychopathology, and by the decade of the 1930's, theirs was the dominant paradigm by which American clinicians were formulating the "sense" of the psychopath.

A review of the voluminous psychoanalytic literature on the construct of psychopathy is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, in order to suggest the flavor of that literature I will cite several influential texts by authors writing from a psychoanalytic perspective. In one early formulation, Partridge (1927) proposed that the insistent, self-indulgent qualities of the adult psychopath's behavior be understood as expressing unfulfilled oral needs. Alexander (1930) and Bartemeier (1930) distinguished the psychopath from the "true criminal," both authors suggesting that the psychopath is more "conflicted"; he is at once asocial, his ego lacking the strength
necessary to prevent the expression of unconscious impulses, and self-condemning. Somewhat later, Greenacre (1945) addressed explicitly the question of whether or not the psychopath possesses a "conscience." Her conclusion was that he does, albeit one which is "degraded" and "devitalized" due in large part to the confusing blend of severity and overindulgence which characterized early interactions with his parents.

Deserving special mention is a crotchety diatribe by Karpman (1948) in which the author attacked what he termed "the myth of the psychopathic personality." Far too often, Karpman opined, neurotic and psychotic individuals had been lumped together with the "true psychopath." The range of opinion about how to define the psychopathic personality had become, according to Karpman, "as wide as the world itself" (p. 524). Five years before, Cason (1943) had made a similar observation, noting that a review of the literature had yielded over 200 different words and phrases which had been used as synonyms, or near synonyms, for "psychopath" and "psychopathic." Especially interesting when compared with the earlier formulations of Alexander, Bartemeier, and Greenacre is Karpman's contention that unlike the neurotic, "the psychopath has no conflict" (p. 524). According to Karpman, the true psychopath is extremely rare, so rare in fact that his disorder warrants a new label, "anethopathy" (a term which seems never to have aroused much interest among other clinicians).

Karpman's article was particularly important because of its forceful insistence that many writers who, following in the footsteps of Kraepelin, seemed to accept as an end in itself the problem of naming and classifying variants of "psychopathy" ought to shift their
focus from description to the more challenging task of explanation. What, Karpman asked, can account for the behavior of a select few individuals whose persistent pattern of antisocial acts seems to occur despite the apparent absence in their lives of "material...that could be interpreted as psychogenic" (p. 533)? Where is their motivation? In his article, Karpman offered several tentative ideas. Significantly, however, he allowed the puzzle of the psychopath's behavior to stand. In so doing, he demonstrated the same attitude as later commentators who would invoke the idea of psychopathy when confronted with the perplexing interpretive problem posed by apparently unmotivated criminal acts.

For the reader wishing to consult additional authors who interpret psychopathy using concepts drawn from psychoanalytic theory, I suggest the following references: Bursten (1972), Cason (1943), Glover (1960), Gurvitz (1978), Halleck (1967), Menninger (1940), Storr (1972), and Wittels (1937).

I have alluded to the many early twentieth century commentators who attempted to refine the diagnosis of psychopathy by proposing a number of sub-categories. Primarily because they reflect the widespread uncertainty, still evident today, about what features of behavior and/or personality organization are encompassed by the rubric of "psychopathy," it may be useful to recall several such attempts.

I have already cited Kraepelin. As Millon (1981) points out, in the successive editions of Kraepelin's pioneering text on the classification of mental disorders, one can observe shifts in the emphasis accorded the "psychopathic syndrome." By the second decade of
the twentieth century, when the eighth edition of his work was published, Kraepelin was writing of "psychopathic personalities" and proposing that they be broken down into two sub-types, those with a "morbid disposition" and those with "personality peculiarities" (Millon, p. 190). The two sub-types were in turn divided into a number of smaller groups, some of them only marginally related to contemporary notions of the antisocial personality (Millon, 1981). Kahn (1931) contributed one of the earliest books devoted exclusively to the psychopathic syndrome, but he used the term "psychopath" to designate a far wider band of abnormality than most subsequent commentators (Yochelson and Samenow, 1976). And in a text as controversial as it was influential, the British theorist Henderson (1939) proposed three sub-types of "psychopathic state": the predominantly aggressive, the predominantly passive/inadequate, and the predominantly creative. According to Millon (1981), the debate which followed publication of Henderson's book was primarily a debate about "terminological confusion and issues of syndromal scope" (p. 192).

In a subsequent section of this discussion, I will cite a number of commentators who argue that those same problems are as prevalent today as they were then. First, however, I would like to present for consideration a range of modern responses to the questions, "What is psychopathy, and what is wrong with the people we call psychopaths?" In common with most contemporary writers on the subject, I have chosen as my starting point the vastly influential study by Hervey Cleckley, The Mask of Sanity (1941).
Cleckley and Beyond:  
Selected Conceptions of the Psychopath

In the brief descriptions which follow, I will focus exclusively on the way in which selected commentators have conceptualized the psychopath. The survey falls far short of being comprehensive. Still, it is sufficiently broad to suggest the range of opinions on how we ought to think about the disorder codified as "psychopathy." My limited focus will not permit detailed discussion of the research evidence supporting, or challenging, any particular formulation. The survey's purpose is twofold. First, it will suggest the diversity of opinion about what is fundamentally wrong with the psychopath. Second, it will provide a foundation for the subsequent discussion of human "incompleteness" as a theme linking discourse on psychopathy and motiveless murder.

Cleckley (1941, 1955): psychopathy as "semantic dementia".  
Although best known for his vivid case descriptions of psychopathy, Cleckley also made a significant contribution to the dialogue about how best to conceptualize the psychopathic syndrome. The psychopath, he proposed, is someone suffering from a disorder of unspecified etiology the cardinal feature of which is an inability to comprehend the deeper meanings of human experience. At various points during a chapter from The Mask of Sanity entitled "What is wrong with these patients?" Cleckley (1955) alludes to the psychopath's deficient "awareness of significance" (p. 428); to his inability to experience "those more serious and deeply moving affective states which make up the tragedy and triumph of ordinary life (p. 427); and to his permanent status as an outsider looking in, a non-participant unable to enter the
"dimension of experience which gives to all experience its substance or reality" (p. 425).

Cleckley describes the psychopath's condition as "semantic dementia." In order to clarify this conceptualization, he develops an analogy between the patient with semantic aphasia and the psychopath. The former patient, while able to produce speech, falters when it comes to the "complex shaping of significance" necessary for the effective use of language. Similarly in the case of the psychopath, the peripheral manifestations of competence remain intact despite the fact that the ability to grasp meaning is severely impaired. In Cleckley's words, "The purposiveness, the significance of all life-striving and of all subjective experience are affected without obvious damage to the outer appearance or superficial reactions of the personality" (p. 438).

Cleckley contends that the profound sense of emptiness which characterizes the psychopath's inner life can only be inferred from his complete inability to manage "the practice of actual living" (p. 424). To an observer, says Cleckley, even a trained one possessing the diagnostician's array of assessment instruments, the psychopath is likely to appear entirely normal. His is "a smoothly operating psychic apparatus," and he is capable of "appropriate simulation of normal human emotion in response to nearly all the varied stimuli of life" (p. 424). According to Cleckley, it is only "very slowly and by a complex estimation or judgment based on multitudinous small impressions" that one can recognize the psychopath as a "counterfeit" - someone who, appearances notwithstanding, is "not real" (p. 424).
Manne (1967): a communication theory of psychopathy. Manne sees important parallels between the early family environments of psychopaths and schizophrenics. In both cases, parents send the child ambiguous, confusing messages. Verbal and non-verbal communications are often contradictory. The child may sense: Don’t do this or you will be punished; if you don’t do this you will be punished. The result is a double bind situation in which the child views punishment as a possible consequence of any response he chooses. Where the schizophrenic child withdraws to an internalized world that offers a feeling of safety, the psychopathic child "flees into life" (p. 800). His response reflects the fact that in his family, actions rather than words are the primary vehicles through which meaning is conveyed.

Manne’s conceptualization of psychopathy is founded on the premise that from an early age, the developing psychopath learns acting-out as the response style most likely to achieve two benefits: first, the covert approval of his parents, who themselves view the world as a hostile and threatening place; and second, a reduction of the personal tension associated with living in a confusing, inconsistent family environment. As an adult, the psychopath remains emotionally immature and has difficulty adjusting his earlier preferential response style to the complex demands of life outside the immediate family environment. The result is a chaotic pattern of apparently self-defeating actions which nevertheless has, for the psychopath, a certain psychological economy. Through his action-oriented behavior, he challenges a world his parents taught him to perceive as hostile and rejecting. At the same time, says Manne, he
re-enacts his need for clarity: "He reaches out for a controlled environment, such as a prison, which provides him with clear-cut, consistent rules, with unitary messages" (p. 805).

Gough (1948, 1965): psychopathy as a role-playing deficiency. Gough has proposed that psychopaths are pathologically deficient in their ability to see themselves as others see them, and to anticipate the social (that is, interpersonal) ramifications of their behavior. Drawing on George H. Mead’s (1934) earlier account of the "self" as primarily a product of social interaction, Gough describes the psychopath as lacking "the capacity to look upon one’s self as an object...or to identify with another’s point of view" (p. 363). This rigidity of perspective, manifest as extreme self-absorption and an inability to empathize, is hypothesized as the sine qua non of the psychopathic syndrome.

It is worth noting that Gough has very little to say about what causes the psychopath’s role-playing deficiency. Hare (1970), Smith (1978), and Doren (1987) are among the critics who, while acknowledging the conceptual appeal of Gough’s formulation, have pointed out its limited heuristic value.

Eysenck (1964, 1975, 1977): psychopathy as biologically-based deficient learning. For Eysenck, "psychopathy" is the manifestation of an impaired ability to learn the inhibitions against antisocial behavior (see Trasler, 1978, for a related perspective). According to this view, psychopaths behave as they do - selfishly, impulsively, erratically - because their genetically-determined biological makeup prevents them from recognizing and internalizing the temporal relations
among various environmental events. More specifically, they are less likely than other people to develop a conditioned avoidance response to situations or actions with predictably aversive consequences; this, says Eysenck, accounts for their tendency to violate social prohibitions repeatedly in spite of what most people would recognize as multiple disincentives for doing so.

Eysenck hypothesizes that the psychopath's poor conditionability is related to specific biological characteristics, characteristics which also underlie his personality style (for a related discussion of psychopathy as one manifestation of an inherited temperamental disposition, see Claridge, 1985). According to Eysenck's model, personality varies along three independent dimensions: extraversion-introversion, neuroticism-stability, and psychoticism. (The interested reader can consult Doren, 1987, as well as Eysenck and Eysenck, 1978 for a description of Eysenck's somewhat idiosyncratic use of those terms.) Psychopaths are expected to score high on extraversion, suggesting sociability, sensation-seeking, unpredictability, and impulsivity; high on neuroticism, suggesting a tendency to respond with intense emotion to external stimuli; and high on psychoticism, suggesting a tendency to act in ways which are self-serving and potentially injurious to others.

Where a given person falls on the first two of Eysenck's dimensions, extraversion-introversion and neuroticism-stability, is thought to depend on genetically determined biological factors. In the case of the psychopath, a relationship is posited between high scores on neuroticism and unusually high levels of reactivity to external
stimuli, the latter associated with constitutional characteristics of the psychopath's sympathetic nervous system and limbic system. Likewise, the psychopath's high score on extraversion is hypothesized to be related to a low cortical "idling speed" (Doren, 1987, p. 25). Eysenck argues that when the cortex is underaroused, the result is increased activity in the lower brain centers and, consequently, a pattern of excitable and gregarious social behavior.

In summary, then, the psychopath is conceptualized as a person constitutionally disposed to being action-oriented, excitable, and stimulation-seeking. As a result, he tends to be impulsive, a poor learner who adjusts his behavior minimally if at all in response to prior experience.

Quay (1965, 1977): psychopathy as pathological stimulation-seeking. Quay first presented his formulation of psychopathy as pathological stimulation-seeking in 1965. Twelve years later, he restated his original position, that the psychopath's appetite for intense and varied stimulation has demonstrable physiological underpinnings, and added to it the notion that early interpersonal transactions play an important role in shaping the adult psychopath's personality style. For present purposes, I will provide a brief summary of the revised formulation.

According to Quay, the cardinal feature of psychopathy is an inability to tolerate sameness. What impresses observers as impulsivity is often the psychopath's insistence on seeking change at any cost. To account for this pattern of behavior, Quay hypothesizes that in psychopaths, basal reactivity to stimulation is lower than it
is for most people. The result of this heightened activation threshold is that greater amounts of sensory input are needed to produce an optimal level of cortical functioning. A second hypothesis states that the processes of habituation and adaptation occur unusually quickly in the psychopath, again prompting a need to seek out intense, and novel, stimulation.

The revised version of Quay’s theory expands upon this basic formulation of psychopathy as pathological stimulation-seeking. It is an attempt to address the fact that adult psychopaths consistently describe having experienced their parents as hostile and rejecting. What might account for this pattern? Quay hypothesizes a cycle set in motion by the child’s genetically-determined need for stimulation: The child’s irritability, restlessness, and demandingness provoke hostile reactions from the parents, who resort to physical punishment; since only unusually harsh measures work to produce the desired avoidance reaction, the level of punishment escalates; and finally, in response to what he perceives as his parents’ rejection, the child becomes more and more unruly. The adult psychopath is thus conceptualized as the end-product of interaction between his constitution and his early experience.

Hare (1965, 1970): psychopathy as response perseveration due to cerebral impairment. The bulk of Hare’s research has been devoted to the search for physiological correlates of the psychopathic syndrome. For present purposes, I will limit my focus to Hare’s suggestion that the "psychopathic" behavioral style be conceptualized as response perseveration due to brain abnormality (see Doren, 1987). It is
important, however, to add the caveat that Hare’s extensive efforts to account for the complex behavior of the psychopath have not been entirely circumscribed by the idea of "response perseveration." To cite just one example of research devoted to another feature of the disorder, Hare [1986] has recently investigated the possibility that the psychopath’s left cerebral hemisphere is less specialized for processing language than the left hemispheres of most people, a hypothesis consistent with Cleckley’s conceptualization of psychopathy as "semantic dementia."

His notion of "response perseveration" obviously echoing Eysenck’s theoretical formulation, Hare has suggested that lesions in the limbic region of his brain might be responsible for the psychopath’s apparent inability to learn from experience. The lesions presumably interfere with mechanisms which normally inhibit the repetition of unproductive (i.e., unrewarded, punished) behavior. The result, suggests Hare, is that the psychopath often repeats patterns of antisocial behavior, impressing observers as either oblivious to, or unable to anticipate, the consequences of what he does.

Doren (1987): a "control" theory of psychopathy. Doren calls his an "integrated" theory of psychopathy because it attempts to incorporate, then elaborate on, the fundamental postulates included in the theories of Gough, Eysenck, Quay, and Hare. The principle elements in Doren’s formulation are "control" and "challenge." The psychopath is conceptualized as an individual who perceives people as obstacles to be overcome; by achieving mastery over them, he gains a sense of control over the rewards and punishments which follow his own behavior.
Limitations of space will permit neither a detailed explication of Doren's complex "integrated" formulation, nor a discussion of his attempt to fit a broad range of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings into his own conceptual framework. I will simply attempt to state the theory's most important features.

According to Doren, there are two factors which together (even though they are considered to be independent of one another) are necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of psychopathy. One is a genetically-determined low level of cortical arousal. The other is an early learning environment in which the same behavior can elicit both reward and punishment, with no predictable pattern governing which will occur when. Doren uses the term "partial helplessness" to describe the conditioned response to living in such an environment.

There are two hypothesized ramifications of an innately reduced level of cortical arousal. One, the individual seeks stimulation. And two, the arousal deficit adversely affects the limbic system, leading to an impairment in the individual's ability to inhibit established patterns of behavior, even when they result in punishment (recall Hare's description of psychopathy as "response perseveration"). According to Doren, if a child predisposed to these patterns of behavior by his inborn level of cortical arousal finds himself in the kind of learning environment described above, the conditions are present for the development of adult psychopathy. Punishment becomes ineffective because the child perceives it as something to be endured en route to reward. The child persists in action-oriented behavior because he
learns that if he does, reward will eventually follow (a point emphasized as well by Manne, 1967). And furthermore, the child fails to become adequately "socialized" because the parental embodiments of social values are perceived as frustrating and unreliable.

Doren's contention is that such a child learns early in life to see other people as impediments to the satisfaction of his short-term needs. The frustration he feels when confronted with the inconsistent behavior of his parents fuels the tendency to respond to others in callous, even aggressive ways. The child develops what amounts to an obsession with control, and he perceives people as challenging, unpredictable objects to be overcome (an orientation consistent with Gough's emphasis on the psychopath's inability to appreciate perspectives other than his own).

Kegan (1986): psychopathy as developmental delay. Kegan has examined the similarities between "psychopathic" adults and 10-year old children. His thesis is that in terms of his ability to think; his ability to grasp social concepts such as mutuality and reciprocity; and his capacity to engage in adaptive, meaningful relationships with other people; the psychopath suffers from a developmental disorder. Except physically, he has never grown up.

Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion to describe in any detail Kegan's attempt to establish patterns of behavior common to the psychopath and the pre-adolescent child, two examples will suggest the flavor of his analysis. He lists the following words and phrases employed by clinicians to describe the psychopath's way of relating to other people:
a con-man, manipulative, a facile and convincing liar, selfish, callous, charming, disarmingly capable of understanding others and their motives well, naive, a blamer of others rather than oneself, an irresponsible parent, unable to sustain consistent work involvement, unaccepting of ordinary social norms with respect to lawful behavior or meeting financial or other agreements and social contracts, incapable of significant loyalty or enduring attachment of warmth and responsibility to others. (pp. 60-61)

According to Kegan, these descriptions reflect a level of cognitive functioning generally associated with the pre-teen years. During these years, the child "is a prisoner of an epistemology that includes others on behalf of his own goals and purposes" (p. 61). He can appreciate the existence of perspectives other than his own, but he is unable to appreciate the value of these perspectives except insofar as they can be "instrumental" (Kohlberg, 1984) in furthering his own aims. Kegan emphasizes that for the psychopath operating at this epistemological level, as well as for the child, there is nothing necessarily sinister in such an egocentric orientation. It derives naturally from the cognitive schemas available for organizing interpersonal relationships.

Kegan contends as well that many of the descriptive features long associated with the diagnosis of psychopathy can be understood if we assume that the psychopath's thinking is at the level Piaget described as "concrete operations." Again, concrete operational thinking is associated with the pre-adolescent period of normal development. Most striking about this level of cognitive functioning is the inability to abstract, generalize, or engage in meaningful self-reflection. According to Kegan, it is because his thinking has not developed beyond the concrete operational level that the psychopath often impresses
observers as naive, impulsive, remorseless, and capable only of shallow
and self-serving sexual relationships.

Finally, and related to his conceptualization of psychopathy as
developmental delay, Kegan emphasizes the distortions which inevitably
occur when adults interpret the psychopath's behavior using adult norms
as a frame of reference. One example will suffice to illustrate his
point. The psychopath has often been described as "hollow," unable to
experience deep emotional involvement with other people. It may be,
says Kegan, that this attribution of inner emptiness says more about
the developmental chasm separating normal adults and psychopaths than
it does of the psychopath per se. He writes:

[The psychopath's inner self] looks hollow to us because we construct a "bigger" inner world, and when we "try on" the sociopath's world within ourselves it doesn't fill us up; it leaves us feeling empty or hollow! So we then attribute hollowness to the sociopath... The inner world may be concrete; it may be more filled with persons-as-tools than persons-as-sharable-psychologies; but it is not empty or hollow. If a caterpillar doesn't know its future has wings, it hardly experiences itself as land-bound. (p. 69)

Vaillant (1975): psychopathy as defensive process. Vaillant
argues that Cleckley's classic psychopath is a "mythical beast" (p.
178). Three of its hallmarks - absence of anxiety, lack of motivation
for change, an inability to experience depression - are, according to
Vaillant, erroneous attributions based on the misidentification of
defense mechanisms as trait-like characteristics. The anxiety which
appears absent may only be concealed, kept hidden because the
developing child's parents, perhaps even subsequent therapists, were
unable or unwilling to tolerate its expression. Similarly, apparent
lack of motivation for change might in fact be a way of expressing
fear. For example, Vaillant cites the example of a young man who
learned at an early age to associate competence with the danger
implicit in challenging parental superiority. Along the same lines, the
capacity to experience depression may only appear lacking in the so-
called psychopath. Most likely, says Vaillant, these individuals have
developed defense mechanisms, anger, for instance, that are less
threatening than the explicit recognition that one is dependent on
others and vulnerable to the pain associated with loss.

The primary theme underlying Vaillant’s conceptualization of
psychopathy as "human process" is this: Our constructions of
difference often reveal more about us than they do about the
individuals they are meant to describe. "Psychopaths," he says, are
neither mysterious nor incorrigible. Contrary to much clinical lore,
they are in no sense "inhuman." They feel anxiety, they experience
guilt, they possess the capacity to feel depression, and they are
perfectly capable of learning from experience. What clinicians think
they see is not always what is there. Vaillant urges that greater
attention be paid to the intrapsychic dynamics underlying the
psychopath’s presentation. At the same time, he urges that little
credence be given to constructions of the psychopath as a remote and
enigmatic type, different in kind from other human beings.

Guggenbuhl-Craig (1980): a Jungian perspective on psychopathy as
"crippled Eros". Guggenbuhl-Craig is a Jungian analyst, and his ideas
about psychopathy need to be understood in that context. Of primary
importance is the idea of archetypes as basic schemas by means of which
human beings understand and order their lives. Presumably, each
archetype originated with a concrete human experience and eventually became part of a collective unconscious which is transmitted from generation to generation. For reasons which Guggenbuhl-Craig admits remain a mystery, the various archetypes (e.g., mother, father, health, invalidism) are "constellated" differently in each individual. That they are is a primary cause of differences among people, though of course within the Jungian system allowance is made as well for the influences of biology and the environment.

To Guggenbuhl-Craig, the difference between ourselves and those individuals who we call psychopaths is strictly a matter of degree. Each person has a "psychopathic" side; it is that side of his personality which is undeveloped, consisting of what Guggenbuhl-Craig refers to as "lacunae" or empty places. We are all "psychic invalids" in the sense that the invalid archetype, with its emphasis on incompleteness, is an important if often unrecognized framework in terms of which we construct the meaning of our lives.

It is important to recognize that in the Jungian system, no archetype, including the invalid, is inherently good or bad. Creative, loving, and growth-oriented expressions of an archetype reflect the powerful presence of Eros, conceptualized by Jungians as an archetypal force, a kind of fuel. According to Guggenbuhl-Craig, the individuals to whom clinicians apply the label "psychopath" are people for whom invalidism plays a central role in organizing experience, and in whom Eros is conspicuously lacking. A constellation of five primary symptoms distinguish this variant of the human condition from others: a striking inability to love, a deficient sense of morality, a lack of psychic
development, chronic depression, and pervasive fear. Each of these symptoms is regarded as the result of the psychopath's lack of Eros.

By his own admission, Guggenbuhl-Craig is unable to shed light on why psychopaths exist, why certain individuals seem incapable of love: "We have no idea why more of one archetype and less of another is constellated in certain individuals. We do not know...why Eros 'neglects' some individuals, why there are 'erotic' individuals" (p. 121). The only certainty, he says, is that "many individuals lack what gives life meaning" (p. 122). By seeing in such people an exaggerated but still recognizable reflection of ourselves, he says, we can come a step closer to mastering the psychopathic "monster" in each of us (p. 125).

Challenges to Psychopathy as a Diagnostic Entity

Who, then, is the psychopath? Is he best understood as someone who, because of a peculiar form of brain impairment, is unable to comprehend the deeper meanings of human experience? Is he a genetically-programmed deficient learner? A sluggish sensation-seeker? A man-child victimized by an early double-bind environment? A poor role player? An adult whose epistemological sophistication is similar to that of a ten-year old? A person in whom Eros is mysteriously lacking? Some combination of the above?

It may be necessary to reiterate the problem under investigation in this chapter. I began by observing the strong association between the diagnosis of psychopathy and the social understanding of what propels, at least permits, the motiveless murderer to kill. If a given
instance of apparently motiveless murder is understood as one extreme manifestation of psychopathy, then it becomes incumbent upon us to try and specify what is implied by the label "psychopathy." The preceding survey will, I hope, have underlined the difficulty of doing so, at least with any degree of precision.

Fortunately, the problem of trying to reconcile often very disparate viewpoints about the nature of psychopathy falls outside the scope of this inquiry. It is not my intent to either attack or support the use of psychopathy as an explanatory framework for interpreting motiveless murder. However, since the construct is so prevalent in accounts of these crimes, it is important that we consider the construct's status. Already, we have observed a diversity of opinion about what is fundamentally wrong with the psychopath. Now, it is necessary to consider - briefly - some more fundamental challenges to the construct itself, and to its status as a diagnostic entity.

With the possible exception of "hysteria," it is unlikely that any term in the psychiatric nosology has been associated with more conceptual confusion, or more debate, than psychopathy. Referring to the literature on psychopathy published before his own The Mask of Sanity, Cleckley (1955) observed "a confusion unparalleled in the whole field of psychiatry" (p. 258). A student searching for some common thread in the various early accounts of the disorder would find instead, wrote Cleckley, "a veritable diagnostic salad of incompatibles" (p. 258).

Other commentators writing around Cleckley's time echoed his observations. Lindner (1944), for example, termed psychopathy a
"miscellany" and alluded to its "half-understood nature" (p. 1). Greenacre (1945) wrote that the diagnosis of psychopathy had "tended to be a catchall" (p. 495) for any disorder characterized by a pattern of antisocial conduct and not accompanied by those symptoms traditionally associated with either neurosis or psychosis. Gough (1948) referred to psychopathy as a "protean disorder" (p. 361). In the same year, Karpman (1948) suggested that the whole notion of psychopathic personality had for some time functioned as a "wastebasket" (p. 524) for collecting a vast assortment of only vaguely related psychiatric conditions. Wertham (1949) asked, "What is a psychopathic personality?" and answered that it is a "vague term" used to designate an arena of human possibility somewhere between "mental disease" and "normality" (p. 85). Lindsay (1958), who happened to be writing about the problems of formulating the sense in acts of multiple murder, dismissed "psychopath" as a meaningless label, "one of those abstract nouns which can be produced with a flourish to dumbfound the ignorant who are always impressed by what sounds like a technical word" (p. 101). Sutherland (1950) reported that a psychiatrist at one prison diagnosed 98% of the inmates as psychopathic personalities; at another prison, clinicians believed that the label applied to only 5% of the inmate population.

Judging from the remarks of more recent commentators, not a lot has changed. Shoham (1970) writes that psychopathy often serves as a "kind of psychiatric wastebasket" (p. 28), an observation repeated by Dinitz (1977), and also by Revitch and Schlesinger (1981). Storr (1972) contends that psychopathy "has been used to designate so wide a variety
of unusual human beings that it has become almost meaningless except as a word indicating disapproval or lack of comprehension" (p. 36).

Kittie (1971) shares Storr's perspective:

Generally, the term "psychopath" appears to be an open-ended concept of convenience, drawn to accommodate social and administrative purposes, and used to group together disparate types of deviants identifiable only by their nonconformity with the standards of conduct established by a given community at a given historical period. (p. 193)

Vaillant (1975) labels most textbook descriptions of psychopathy "illusions" and Cleckley's psychopath a "mythical beast" (p. 178). Rabin (1979) calls psychopathy a "diffusely defined concept" (p. 342). Cameron and Frazer (1987) call it "an all-purpose term of abuse" (p. 87), with no scientific credibility whatsoever, and "an infinitely elastic catch-all category" (p. 89). Malcolm (1989) sees in the very concept of psychopathy "an admission of failure to solve the mystery of evil" (p. 56). Perhaps Rennie (1978) sums up the feelings of many students of the so-called psychopath when she writes, "We simply do not know how to categorize this phenomenon" (p. 251). Not atypical is the attitude expressed by an investigator in a novel about a serial murderer: "[The psychiatrists] say he's a sociopath, because they don't know what else to call him" (Harris, 1981, p. 62).

Some commentators, for example Maier (1959), Harrington (1972), and Smith (1978), have departed from the notion that psychopathy describes a distinct clinical syndrome, and suggested that it may instead describe a broad dimension of human functioning, one which is perhaps becoming more and more prevalent in modern society. Between this perspective and the perspective of clinicians who equate
psychopathy with "pathology" or "sickness," there exists the same
tension which I explored in Chapter Five. Are individuals whose
behavior (or appearance) challenges our understanding of "human" better
represented using constructions of difference or constructions of
affinity?

Many conceptualizations of psychopathy, with Cleckley's perhaps
the clearest example, emphasize the inconstancy of the psychopath's
social presentation. He is viewed as protean, chameleon-like, changing
along with shifts in the social context, always attuned to what is
required to accomplish his agenda. As Gergen (1972) has pointed out,
however, in order for such behavior to be considered pathological, the
assumption must be made that the healthy human being has a solid and
coherent sense of identity. Perhaps, say some critics, that seldom-
challenged assumption is false. Gergen, for example, sounding very much
like William James, alludes to the normal person's "shifting masks of
identity" (p. 32) and remarks further, without meaning to equate self-
flexibility and disingenuousness, that "We are made of soft plastic,
and molded by social circumstance" (p. 64). Argyle and Little (1972)
make a similar case. Psychoanalyst and literary critic Jay Martin
(1988) has examined the "fictive personality" in a recent study
entitled Who Am I This Time? While cautioning against the dangers
inherent in constructing a self composed only of fictions, Martin
states clearly his belief that much of what the normal individual
designates with the pronoun "I" is "fictive," not to say false.

It would be possible to cite many commentators in addition to
those I have already mentioned — Mailer, Harrington, Smith, Gergen, and
Martin - who have argued that certain characteristics traditionally associated with psychopathy are prevalent throughout, even encouraged by, society as a whole. Consider, simply for purposes of illustration, these three additional examples. Victor (1973) suggests that at various levels of social discourse, the "psychopath" commonly appears as a bluntly delineated human type, with nuances and ambiguities cauterized away. The importance of this symbolic representation of difference, says Victor, is that it assigns to an ostensibly remote image the sense of social and personal alienation which, in reality, is "common enough to be considered normal" (p. 2). Yablonsky (1972) observes the lack of empathy traditionally associated with psychopathy, and then poses a disturbing question: Might there be more similarities than there are differences between "psychopaths" and people like Richard Nixon, the National Guardsmen at Kent State, the American soldiers at My Lai - all members in the large class of numbed humanity Yablonsky calls "robopaths"? And a final example: It has often been said that two cardinal characteristics by which the psychopath can be identified are his "pathological egocentricity" and his "hollowness" (Cleckley, 1955). However, in a highly influential study, social critic Christopher Lasch (1979) has argued that "narcissism," frequently accompanied by a sense of "the void within," has become "one of the central themes of American culture" (p. 61).

As these examples suggest, the boundary separating psychopathy (whichever of its various definitions one chooses to employ) and normality (whichever of its definitions one chooses to employ) is sometimes difficult to identify. What seems clear is that much of the
debate about the nature and parameters of psychopathy, in common with
the debate about how best to conceptualize and represent the motiveless
murderer, revolves around two closely related, exceedingly difficult
questions: What does it mean to be human? And what does it mean to be
normal?

Of course those questions lack definitive answers. Our attempts to
tackle them ensnare us in the central dilemma of the human studies:
self-reflexivity, humans studying human-ness. How, from our position
inside the category from which deviation is being assessed, can we
diagnose with any certainty what is "wrong" with the psychopath, or
"disordered" about the motiveless murderer? Where is the detached
perspective from which to observe the entire human realm? There is no
such perspective, of course, and unless we accept "average" as being
synonymous with "normal," we may find ourselves wondering to what
extent the problems of the psychopath and the motiveless murderer are
our problems, too. Fortunately, diagnostic refinement is not my
intention in this chapter. The search here is for a loosely formulated,
conceptual grasp of the psychopathy idea; then, for selected
variations on that idea in texts about motiveless murder. Ultimately,
of course, the goal is to shed new light on the association between the
construction of a murder as "motiveless," and the conclusion that its
perpetrator is a "psychopath."

At this juncture, it may be necessary to reiterate my basic
thesis. As theoretical notions, both "psychopathy" and "motiveless
murder" challenge widely-held assumptions about what it means to be
"fully human." When questions arise concerning the conceptual
boundaries of "human," there is often an implied appeal to some idealized "whole human" model against which, it is supposed, individuals who engage in anomalous behavior can be judged. Constructions of deficiency which result from such comparisons often express some variation on the notion of human "incompleteness." We should not be surprised, then, to find that the motif of "the incomplete man" appears regularly in discourse about psychopathy, as well as in discourse about motiveless murder.

The Psychopath as an "Incomplete" Human Being

Consider how frequently the problem of man's nature has been framed (even if only for purposes of discussion) as a choice between two extremes: for example, between angel and beast (Dubos, 1974), or, as Colin Wilson has sometimes phrased it, between god and worm. The construct of psychopathy serves the function of reinstating an ambiguity which is easily obscured in such oppositions. It underscores the imponderables of human nature. With its emphasis on paradox and the discrepancy between appearance and reality, it suggests how Sisyphean is the task of searching, from within the human condition, for sharp lines demarcating the boundaries of human possibility.

In the very idea of psychopathy are captured a number of tensions, for example the tensions between normality and abnormality, sanity and insanity, free will and determinism, the way people seem to be and the way they really are. When an individual who commits apparently senseless murder is labelled "psychopathic," there is an implicit acknowledgement of those tensions. Constructions of meaning
which imply disjunctiveness or discontinuity seem untenable. The psychopath does not act as he does because he has "broken with" or "lost touch with" reality. He does not seem "sick" in any obvious sense; nor does he seem "out of control." In contrast with such constructions, the various conceptualizations of psychopathy summarized earlier in this chapter imply that the psychopath is, at least appears to be, like most other people in most ways. He exists in the same world we do; he looks like us; he conveys an impression of belonging; he seems to know precisely what he is doing - but still, he seems to lack important qualities which we identify with being human. He seems unfinished somehow, incomplete. Cleckley wrote of him: "We are dealing here not with a complete man at all" (quoted in Rennie, 1978, p. 252).

The psychopath's relationship to commonly held notions of normal human functioning is one characterized by deficiency, not disjunction. The striking (apparent) absence of certain core human qualities in an individual who otherwise resembles "normal" people can be regarded as the sine qua non of the psychopathy construct, even those variations of it which in their particulars seem very different (eg., Guggenbuhl-Craig's and Eysenck's).

Having described, if imprecisely, this central thematic emphasis on "incompleteness" in the psychopathy literature, we can now look to the literature on motiveless murder for variations on the same basic theme. Seldom do authors writing about motiveless murder specify which variation on the psychopathy construct they have in mind when they invoke psychopathy as an explanatory framework. Instead of being concerned with precisely what it is that makes a person "psychopathic,"
most commentators seem to employ the label "psychopath" as a way of conveying the profound interpretive dilemma posed by individuals who often seem almost, but not quite, human - "incomplete." Their behavior sets them apart, but the locus of difference eludes our efforts at detection.

This point brings to mind an essay by psychiatrist Robert Coles (1975) written shortly after Charles Whitman ascended a tower at the University of Texas and shot eighteen people. Coles explains in that essay that he and others who searched in Whitman's past for some clue that might have revealed the sense in what Whitman did were left with "nothing substantial to 'explain' a terrible crime." In fact, Coles says, with each new piece of information accumulated, with each new interview conducted, "Whitman became steadily more ordinary" (p. 16). In most ways, he seemed like other people. Unwilling to accept the conclusion to which many puzzled observers flocked, that a small tumor near the killer's brainstem somehow triggered an explosion of rage, Coles concludes that "we simply do not know" how to explain acts like Whitman's. It is not surprising to discover in such a puzzling case that the report prepared by the pathologist who examined Whitman's body included this familiar diagnostic conclusion: Whitman must have been "an anti-social [sic] psychopath" (p. 15).

The case of Dennis Nilsen comes to mind as well. Recall that Nilsen was the London civil servant who, between the years of 1978 and 1983, killed fifteen people. At a loss to explain how Nilsen, who struck his acquaintances as quite normal, certainly in no obvious sense "crazy," could have murdered repeatedly, many people interpreted his
behavior as "psychopathic." However, the author of a book about the Nilsen case argues that the label serves as little more than an indication that Nilsen is a human mystery:

I have avoided using the word "psychopathy," which seems to me to be a passe partout noun dragged in to apply to any criminal whose motives are inaccessible. Its connotation is so wide as to be useless....So-called psychopaths can be to the expert as well as to the casual observer perfectly normal people who are so adept at concealing their disturbance that they can live among us undetected for years. A man has to be called a psychopath before the symptoms of his condition stand out in relief or slot into place; the label usually precedes the diagnosis. By this yardstick, we are all potential psychopaths, yet it is only those of us who do something vicious and inexplicable who earn the label.... Before his arrest, no one would have thought of calling Dennis Nilsen a psychopath. (Masters, 1985, pp. 293-94)

Masters' position is congruent with the suggestion being advanced here, that its questionable status as a diagnostic entity notwithstanding, "psychopathy" is often employed as a means of capturing the paradoxical quality of the motiveless murderer. It serves as an index of the sense observers often have that the motiveless murderer seems not quite human - unfinished or incomplete in some fundamental way.

Very loosely operationalized, then, the "psychopathy theme" is sounded in the literature on motiveless murder whenever the killer is depicted as an individual who does not demonstrate the symptoms traditionally associated with neurosis or psychosis, but in whom one or more fundamental human characteristics seem conspicuously lacking. In the discussion which follows, I will explore briefly several frequently recurring expressions of this basic theme. Each can be understood as a
variation on the notion that the motiveless murderer is, like the psychopath, an "incomplete" human being.

The "Psychopathic" Motiveless Murderer: Selected Variations on the Theme of Incompleteness

The primary objective of this study is to present a number of interpretive perspectives on the ways we think about people who commit apparently motiveless murder. Consistent with that objective, I have been concerned in this chapter to discover what broad understanding of the motiveless killer is implied in his designation as a psychopath. In the preceding section, I suggested that what remains after brackets are placed around the particulars (especially those addressing etiology) which differentiate constructions of psychopathy is a consistent, if variously sounded, thematic emphasis on the idea of human incompleteness.

It will be clear, then, that my reference in the title of this section to the "psychopathic" motiveless murderer is not meant to imply a one-to-one correspondence between some monolithic construction of psychopathy and the phenomenon, hardly homogeneous, of apparently motiveless murder. At least when it is used in a non-technical sense, "psychopathy" serves most frequently as an imprecisely specified construction of human deficiency. Those people it is used to designate are nearly always rendered in terms of negative symptomatology, that is, in terms of core human qualities which they apparently lack. About the origins of these curious "lacunae" (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1980) in the psychopath's personality makeup there remains a striking absence of consensus. Some commentators, Coles (1974) and Masters (1985) for
example, have gone so far as to suggest that the term "psychopathy" often stands for two other words, "beyond comprehension." The psychiatrists in a contemporary novel about serial murder call the killer a "sociopath," but not because they understand what makes him kill: "They don't know what else to call him" (Harris, 1981, p. 62).

To conclude this discussion, I will document three variations on the idea that the motiveless murderer is an incomplete, that is "psychopathic," human being. The variations I have chosen to discuss are those which I judge to occur with greatest frequency, and which most clearly echo the theme of human incompleteness as that theme is conveyed by the psychopathy construct. Only in passing will I trace connections between expressions of the incompleteness theme in the literature on motiveless murder and their [sometimes] more technical counterparts in the clinical literature on psychopathy. However, to the reader familiar with classic clinical descriptions, like Cleckley's, of the psychopathic syndrome, the connections will be readily apparent.

A Sense of Inner Emptiness:
the Motiveless Murderer as a "Hollow Man"

In the course of proposing his developmental model of psychopathy, Kegan (1986) makes reference to the psychopath's "vaunted hollowness" (p. 68). At least since Cleckley, most commentators have agreed that the psychopath experiences a profound inner emptiness. Their construction of this aspect of the psychopath's phenomenology calls to mind one writer's description of how the avant-garde poet and dramatist Antonin Artaud experienced himself. Artaud, according to this writer, felt in himself "a nightmarish terrifying emptiness. His consciousness was anguished nothingness" (Porter, 1987, p. 143).
The same hollowness long associated with the diagnosis of psychopathy has been attributed with remarkable consistency to the motiveless murderer. Typical is Harris' (1988) description of a serial killer as "not anything, really, just a sort of total lack that he wants to fill" (p. 157). Of course, the idea of the "hollow man" is dependent on what one film critic has identified as a central image in "folk" psychology: the self as "container" (Graham, 1987). Frequently, it is implied that for individuals who commit apparently motiveless murder, killing is connected somehow with the need to feel solid or whole, filled up. Thus, it is not surprising to find that in many instances, eating is the metaphor used, both by writers and by the killers themselves, to suggest this craving for inner substance. In what the killers suggest about themselves through their self-descriptions, and in the efforts by interpreters to determine the sense in what the killers say and do, one can observe clearly the dialogic character of the social constructive process. Consider the following examples.

Leyton (1986) records Albert DeSalvo's [the Boston Strangler] description of himself as always, since early childhood, having an "uncomfortable feeling..., wanting more food so bad and not being able to get it." According to his own testimony, DeSalvo reached adulthood prepared to break whatever rules he had to in order to satisfy his unceasing hunger. Only figuratively related to the question of whether or not he had food to eat, DeSalvo regarded himself as "a person who never quite got enough of a full belly" (p. 131).
In a letter to columnist Jimmy Breslin, Son of Sam killer David Berkowitz described himself thus: "Thirsty, hungry, seldom stopping to rest....I love my work. Now [after he has committed a murder], the void has been filled" (Terry, 1987, p. 49). It is interesting to note that Berkowitz often ate immediately following a murder, perhaps a sign that the act he associated with becoming "full" was not fulfilling its intended purpose.

This pattern of killing followed by eating has been observed by a number of authors who have written about cases of apparently motiveless murder. We know, for example, that followers of Charles Manson raided their victims’ refrigerator after killing Leno and Rosemary LaBianca in their own home (Bugliosi and Gentry, 1974). Immediately after killing 14-year old Bobby Franks, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb felt the urge to eat and treated themselves to dinner. Truman Capote (1965) records that after participating in the murder of the entire Clutter family, Dick Hickock (who, incidentally, is portrayed as a prototypic example of Cleckley’s psychopath) experienced an insatiable craving for food. Elliott Leyton (1986) reports that after killing two women in one afternoon, Ted Bundy "ate voraciously" (p. 78). And in his account of a series of puzzling murders which occurred in Columbus, Ohio, Daniel Keyes (1986) quotes a relative’s comment about one of the killers: "Particularly when he killed somebody he always would have a ferocious appetite" (p. 150).

The idea that killing and voracious eating might both be responses to a feeling of inner, existential emptiness has been suggested as well in fictional treatments of motiveless murder.
Several examples come to mind immediately. A lengthy passage in Chris Loken’s The Boy Next Door (1985), a novel about serial murder, describes the killer as possessing a ravenous, almost animalistic appetite. He “dives” into his food before “wolfin” it down; he chews “hungrily”; he is, writes Loken, a “greedy eater” (pp. 246-47). In Robert Bloch’s American Gothic (1974), based loosely on the case of nineteenth century multiple murderer H.H. Holmes, the killer is described as “impeccably correct...a model gentleman...so calm, so poised,” yet possessing an “animal” appetite for food (p. 192). And in The Glass Cage, Colin Wilson (1966a) describes a multiple murderer using imagery similar to that employed by Loken and Bloch. Sundheim, the killer, is described as periodically engaging in “obsessional eating bouts” (p. 162). We are told that despite his having a rather bland appearance and casual demeanor, Sundheim “ate with voracity and total concentration.” To depict the determined way in which the killer consumes his food, Wilson uses words like “hacked,” “shovelled,” “heaped,” and “tore.” When he is through eating, writes Wilson, Sundheim looks like “a sated animal” (pp. 160-61).

Of course the suggestion that the motiveless murderer be understood as a “hollow man,” often in search of a sense of fullness, or satisfaction, is not always conveyed through the use of metaphors involving food. Capote (1965), for example, implies a broader applicability for the words “hungry” and “appetite” when he quotes this description of Perry Smith, Dick Hickock’s partner in the Clutter family murders, contained in a letter written by one of Smith’s buddies from the penitentiary: “You are...a hungry man not quite sure where his
appetite lies" (p. 43). The suggestion here is that the object of his search for substance somehow eludes Smith's grasp. A further example of the killer portrayed as "hollow" is provided by Stack (1983b), who writes that as an adult, multiple murderer Harvey Carignan experienced himself as an unfillable "void" (p. 206). Carignan's attorney conveyed a similar impression when he described his client in court as "that form - just a shell of a human being" (p. 203). According to another commentator, the "overriding emotion" which characterized serial killer Ian Brady's formative years was "a strange emptiness" (Harrison, 1986, p. 22).

Rule (1987) sounds the same "hollowness" theme in her description of another multiple murderer, Diane Downs. Downs, we are told, "was like a robot" (p. 35). Her eyes "looked somehow dead" (p. 38). After shooting her three children, killing one, she impressed a friend as sounding "hollow" (p. 45). At one point in her account of the case, Rule suggests that "emptiness" was the overpowering feeling which dominated Downs' adult life. Elsewhere, she refers to the "twisting hollow places" (p. 160) which Downs tried desperately to fill by having baby after baby. This latter connection, between Downs' sense of herself as "empty" and her desire to conceive, Rule states explicitly: "Being pregnant figuratively - and literally - replaced the emptiness Diane felt. A baby in her womb anchored the floating hollow core inside" (p. 117).

Affective Poverty: the Motiveless Murderer as a "Cold" Killer

It has been said that in his relationships with other people, the psychopath enacts "the pantomime of feeling" (Cleckley, 1955, p. 428).
According to Cleckley, by even the most intense aspects of human experience the psychopath "is not adequately moved" (p. 429). In one form or another, this broadly conceptualized deficiency has been incorporated into nearly every description of psychopathy. To cite just a few examples: Guggenbuhl-Craig speaks of psychopathy as "crippled Eros." The McCords' (1956) formulation emphasizes "lovelessness" as a cardinal trait. Kegan and Gough both emphasize the psychopath's inability to appreciate perspectives other than his own, a problem which may appear in sharp relief only when he fails to demonstrate the "fellow feeling" we expect to find, with at least some degree of reliability, in the normal individual's relationships with other people. And the Psychopathy Checklist, an assessment tool which Hare (1980) developed using Cleckley's clinical formulation of the disorder, includes two criteria obviously related to the problem of inadequate emotional resources: shallow affect and callousness/lack of empathy.

Of course, many observers would argue that one need not look very far to find evidence of affective poverty in a person presumed to have killed repeatedly for no apparent reason. With circularity which approximates the form of arguments often used to establish such a killer's "insanity," the reasoning generally goes like this: Someone with normal feelings for other people would not commit motiveless murder; therefore, the person who does so must be an emotional cripple. Its circularity notwithstanding, for many people the argument has intuitive appeal.

For present purposes, however, I would like to look at some constructions of the killer's emotional life which are not dependent on
the observer's simple knowledge that the individual in question has killed. In other words, I will review selected inferences about the killer's emotional makeup, all of them ostensibly based on information (e.g., his attitude toward people, especially toward those he ended up killing) other than the fact that he is a murderer. My intent is to deconstruct, if incompletely, the notion that individuals who commit motiveless murder are by nature "cold" killers, lacking emotion. The reader will observe that many of the descriptive passages I cite vary only slightly from some cited previously which depict the motiveless murderer as a "hollow man." Here, the idea of emptiness is retained; to it is added a further specification, that the normal capacity for emotional responding is part of what is missing.

Sometimes, "absence of emotion" seems an inference apparently based on nothing more than elements of an individual's superficial appearance, or mien. Most often, the elements in question are eyes; the implication is that in some cases at least, eyes convey essential information about a person's inner makeup. One writer about the Moors murder case describes Myra Hindley's face as "an inscrutable mask, the eyes, cold as ice" (Wilson, 1986, p. 125). Another writer about the same case observes that in the eyes of Hindley's partner, Ian Brady, there was a "glacial look" (Harrison, 1986, p. 56). A reporter who covered the case of serial killer Randy Woodfield thought she saw Woodfield's essence in his eyes:

The first time I ever saw [Woodfield], I noticed he was quite good-looking. But then...I saw his eyes. They were flat. Dead eyes. Shark's eyes....There was no emotion there at all, no compassion, just
emptiness. I've never seen eyes like that in a human being, never before and never since. (quoted in Rule, 1988, p. 240)

Similarly, a number of people who had an opportunity to observe Jay Smith, the high school principal convicted of killing a teacher and her two children, detected in Smith's eyes evidence of an inner life devoid of emotion. His secretary: "You've never seen such a pair of eyes in all your life. There was no feeling in them" (Wambaugh, 1987, p. 27). With reference to Smith, author Joseph Wambaugh refers repeatedly to "those eyes" and comments that they "had all the expression of a pair of hubcaps" (p. 402); "[Smith] looked..." writes Wambaugh, "emotional as a grapefruit" (p. 404). Observations like these appear with such regularity in the literature on motiveless murder, both fiction and non-fiction, that they seem almost a convention.

In other instances, the source of an observer's attribution of emotional emptiness is less easily specified. Typical, perhaps, is the following description from a novel about serial murder. A police officer reflects on a young man who is later revealed to be the killer: "There was something lacking within him. Like...he wasn't quite all there. Something had been left out of him. Feeling" (Loken, 1985, p. 47). Another officer, considering the possibility that the same suspect might break under the emotional strain of an interrogation, reflects, "[Maybe] there's nothing in him to break" (p. 66). A similar construction of emotional absence, this one drawn from Godwin's (1978) account of an actual case, is apparent in a description by a prison official of three men who killed seven people after their escape from
prison: "They didn't seem to feel anything. No fear, no regrets; nothing....[It] was like they were dead inside" (pp. 299-300).

Constructions like these, emphasizing the motiveless murderer's emotional "emptiness," are often based in part on indications that the killer regards other people, more specifically regarded his victims, as less than human. The assumption in such constructions is that the killer lacks the capacity to feel empathy; he cannot, so the assumption goes, achieve emotional identification with other people. Of course, one might require nothing more than the fact of murder, combined with the unavailability of a script that would render it comprehensible, in order to make such an assumption. In many instances, however, the way in which a murderer talks about himself, and about others, helps to foster the belief that he is callous and unfeeling.

Of the eight murders for which he was convicted, Edmund Kemper recalls, "It was more or less making a doll out of a human being...and carrying out my fantasies with a doll" (Lunde, 1975, p. 55). The German multiple killer Klaus Gosmann told the judge at his trial, "People are no more than things to me. Inanimate. Ciphers" (Wilson, 1969a, p. 247). Ian Brady is quoted by one chronicler of the Moors case as using terms like "insects" and "cabbages" and "maggots" to describe other people (Potter, 1966, p. 251). In a 1984 interview, serial killer Henry Lee Lucas remarked that, "Killing someone is just like walking outdoors. If I wanted a victim, I'd just go get one" (Starr, 1984, p. 100). Following his arrest, Ted Bundy reportedly told police officers, "I'm as cold a motherfucker as you've ever put your fucking eyes on. I don't give a shit about those people [his victims]" (Holmes and DeBurger,
Revitch and Schlesinger (1981) report a particularly striking example of a killer apparently unable to identify with his victim's perspective. The impression in this first person account of a rape-homicide is one of almost total dehumanization.

I hit her, dragged her into a yard and then I opened her coat, pulled up her blouse and pulled her bra off. I took her slacks off and her panties, too. She was about fifty years old. I took her leather bag and leather gloves too and went about ten to twelve feet away. I saw her lying there; I recognized her as a woman. I looked into her bag and was conscious of her being a woman. (pp. 168-69)

Ironically, it is the purse, an artifact of her status as a woman, along with the purse's contents, which triggers in this killer a consciousness of his victim's status as a human being. This brings to mind a comment by the attorney for serial murderer Paul John Knowles, that although Knowles remembered almost nothing of his eighteen victims, he could catalogue in great detail all of their possessions (Fawkes, 1979, p. 162). Similarly, Freeman (1955) reports that although he was unable to remember people's faces, serial killer William Heirens claimed to have a photographic memory for objects - things, he said, "with substance" (p. 132).

Whatever its source - whether the killer's appearance, the mere fact of his having killed, or the script he composes to convey his sense of being estranged from other people - the notion that the motiveless murderer is an individual devoid of feeling seems obviously related to the tendency to explain his behavior by invoking the psychological construct of psychopathy. Constructing the killer as a psychopath conveys the sense that he is "cold," without emotion - once again, an "incomplete" human being.
The Self out of Focus:  
Motiveless Murder and the Problem of Identity

The psychopath (of course other "personality disordered"
individuals as well) often impresses observers as someone uncertain who
he is. He acts in ways which prompt others to describe him as erratic
and reckless. He tests limits, challenges his own mettle, engages in
behavior that seems senseless - unless, that is, one assumes that its
purpose is to prompt from others an acknowledgement that he is powerful
enough to make his presence felt, that he exists. The psychopath's
erratic behavior has sometimes been understood as frantic striving
after an elusive goal: the sense of himself as an integral and
substantial human being.

In his work describing identity formation, Harry Stack Sullivan
accorded an important place to related interpersonal processes he
called "consensual validation" and "reflected appraisal." A simplified
statement of Sullivan's position is that if the images other people
reflect back at him are generally positive and consistent, an
individual develops a solid sense of who he is. Sullivan's ideas are
echoed in the emphasis placed by contemporary "self" psychologists on
the importance of early "mirroring."

What, in the development of the psychopath, might contribute to a
chronic malfunctioning of this important feedback system? A
comprehensive answer, which would actually be a survey of various
answers, is of course beyond the scope of this discussion. But
consider the implications in the ways several commentators have
conceptualized psychopathy.
Recall, for example, Manne’s (1967) emphasis on the developmental implications of the double bind situation. Faced with contradictory messages from his parents, the people whose feedback will most strongly determine his sense of who he is, the child may have difficulty discerning a predictable relationship between actions and their consequences; as a result, suggests Manne, he may be unable to grasp his own impact, a problem with dire implications for the development of a strong sense of identity. Gough’s (1948) conceptualization of psychopathy as a role-playing deficiency is relevant as well: if he cannot appreciate other peoples’ perspectives, the psychopath cannot use feedback in the way "normal" people can, to flesh out his sense of self. Other commentators like Eysenck (1977) and Hare (1970) have offered theories to account for the psychopath’s apparently stunted capacity to profit from experience. If, for whatever reason, the psychopath is less able than other people to grasp the contingencies between events in the environment (including his own actions), then it is logically consistent to assume that he would have difficulty clearly understanding the connections between what he does, and the ways in which others respond to him. Here again, the problem is a breakdown in the effective functioning of the feedback system which allows most people to use the input of others to construct a relatively stable sense of who they are.

The notion of the psychopath as someone lacking a strong inner core of identity can be understood as one more variation on the theme of incompleteness, a theme which I believe constitutes the fundamental link between patterns of thinking about psychopathy and motiveless
murder. I will now trace several expressions of the "incomplete self" in the literature on motiveless murder. My remarks are organized under three sub-headings: the fragmented self, the chameleonic self, and the featureless self.

The fragmented self. The motiveless murderer is frequently described as a kind of "split personality," though not in the same sense as someone suffering from a major dissociative disorder, multiple personality for example. The "split" in the personalities of killers like Ted Bundy, Edmund Kemper, John Wayne Gacy, and Dennis Nilsen is more likely to be characterized as a form of self-alienation, an "out-of-touchness," what some psychiatrists would call "depersonalization." Such killers, according to these characterizations, differ from other people in the extent of their divisibility. Everyone can relate to the mild form of self-alienation conveyed when the familiar phrase "The right hand didn't know what the left was doing" is used to describe an individual's absent-mindedness. However, few people have a frame of reference for understanding the dramatic, chronic self-division often attributed to the perpetrators of motiveless murder.

A number of commentators have identified his incredible detachment from his own actions as a signature characteristic of the motiveless killer. Although the killer may evince curiosity about what he is said to have done, he often speaks as though the actor in question is someone other than himself. The attitude is that which Neustatter (1957) attributes to the serial killer John Reginald Christie: "cooperative interest in an intriguing problem" (p. 32). Reinhardt (1962) comments similarly on the fictional killer Raskolnikov
in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov, says Reinhardt, was relieved, at least for a time, of having to feel remorse for murdering an old landlady because by engaging in some subtle mental gymnastics, he was able to maintain the "interest of a bystander" (p. 13). That seems to have been the perspective from which Dennis Nilsen viewed his victims as well. Nilsen explained to his biographer, "I seem not to have participated [in the killings], merely stood by and watched them happen - enacted by two other players" (quoted in Cameron and Frazer, 1987, p. 151).

I am reminded of a discussion I had several years ago with an FBI investigator who had recently returned from interviewing serial killer Ted Bundy. Thought to have killed at least thirty-five women across the United States, Bundy had impressed the agent as congenial and engaging. Bundy insisted, however, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that he had never killed anyone. Several days after returning from the Florida prison where the convicted killer was being held, the agent had received a letter. In it, Bundy had commended the agent for his interviewing acumen and expressed optimism that, if they put their heads together, they could perhaps make some progress toward solving the social problem of serial murder. "Cooperative interest in an intriguing problem."

The quality of fragmentation which some commentators have presumed to be the central structural feature of Bundy’s personality makeup is conveyed even more clearly in a book written by two journalists who conducted extensive interviews with Bundy in prison (Michaud and Aynesworth, 1983). After wearying of Bundy’s evasions and
denials, the reporters had decided to drop their attempts at direct questioning to pursue a less confrontational approach. They suggested to Bundy that he speculate on what sort of person would be capable of committing the acts he had been accused of committing. The ploy worked. Designating the killer with terms like "this individual," the "entity," the "disordered self," and the "malignant being," Bundy told a story which no one but the actual killer could have told. Here is a brief sample of his narrative:

Frequently after this individual, uh, committed a murder he would lapse, uh, into a period of sorrow, remorse, et cetera. And for a period of time he would do everything to overcome and otherwise repress the, uh, the overt behavior. Indeed, on one particular occasion he went to extraordinary lengths to do this following a crime, and he felt that he had succeeded, that the abnormal course of conduct had just sort of, uh, extinguished itself. (pp. 145-146)

Of course for the murderer Bundy is describing, himself, the "abnormal course of conduct" continued. Important to remember in considering the startling detachment evident in Bundy's account is the fact that the voice in this narrative is the voice of a man who struck almost no one who knew him as remotely abnormal. Lifted out of a context where he is designated as the suspect in thirty-five murders, Bundy has always tended to impress observers as "charming" and "bright" and "sensitive." Michaud and Aynesworth point out that nearly all of the various psychiatrists who examined Bundy after his arrest and concluded that he was "mentally disturbed" had begun with the presumption that their examinee was a mass killer. "Once the assumption of guilt was made, nearly all the classic symptoms of psychopathology were identified and duly noted. But before that time, no one saw it" (p. 17). This, of
course, echoes Masters' (1985) remarks about the public and professional reaction to another serial killer, Dennis Nilsen: "A man has to be called a psychopath before the symptoms of his condition stand out in relief or slot into place....Before his arrest, no one would have thought of calling Dennis Nilsen a psychopath" (pp. 293-94). Or, one might add, of considering the possibility that he was a multiple murderer who killed, to quote Masters, "for company."

Ted Bundy's third-person account of the crimes he himself committed illustrates in particularly dramatic fashion the kind of evidence which has prompted commentators to conceptualize the motiveless murderer as someone suffering from an as-yet incomprehensible form of radical self-division. Versions of the same idea appear regularly throughout the literature. Simply for purposes of illustration, consider these several examples.

In an essay which proposes an existential framework for interpreting Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination of President Kennedy, Holmes (1967a) remarks on the voice that resonates throughout Oswald's diaries. It is, he says, the voice of "a man observing himself as if he was not himself" (p. 149). A similar portrait of Oswald emerges from the pages of Don DeLillo's (1988) recent novel, Libra, a book intended, says the author, to offer "a way of thinking about the [Kennedy] assassination" (p. 458). According to DeLillo's construction of him, Oswald was a man "not quite connected to himself" (p. 89). He "barely noticed himself talking....The more he spoke, the more he felt he was softly split in two" (p. 90). Oswald's experience of a sexual encounter is at a remove from the actual scene: "He saw himself having sex with
her. He was partly outside the scene. He had sex with her and monitored the scene" (p. 84). "In every direction," writes DeLillo, "[Oswald] came up against his own incompleteness" (p. 211). One reviewer offered this astute description of DeLillo’s assassin: Oswald is "a hollow man, a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces, a bridge to nowhere, aching in space for completion" (McEnroe, 1988).

The sense of agency and self-integration so strikingly absent from DeLillo’s Oswald are missing as well from Albert DeSalvo’s description of the thirteen murders he committed as the "Boston Strangler." Not inconsistent with his contention that DeSalvo was entirely "sane," Leyton (1986) emphasizes the quality of befuddlement evident in the killer’s attempt to construct the sense in what he did.

The recurring theme in DeSalvo’s] revelations was his mystification at his own behavior. Like so many multiple murderers, DeSalvo usually spoke of his killing in a distancing third person...as if the murders had been done by someone else and he had only observed them ("I looked in a mirror in the bedroom and there was me - strangling somebody!") (pp. 125-126)

Again, we see expressed here the idea that the killer was somehow "out of touch" - though not, as in the case of a psychotic person, with reality, but with himself.

A final example of killers interpreted as suffering from a radical form of self-fragmentation can be found in Lifton’s (1986) proposal of "doubling" to explain the actions of Nazi doctors. How could physicians ostensibly dedicated to saving lives have engaged in mass murder under the Third Reich? Lifton concludes that "only a form of schism or doubling can explain the polarities of cruelty and decency" evident in a number of the physicians’ personalities. The
capacity for doubling is no rare phenomenon, according to Lifton; it resides in everyone. Given the right conditions, he says, the right combination of strains and aspirations, it is possible for a part of the self to split off and function separate from, even at moral odds with, the other self. Lifton elucidates this process at length in his book, The Nazi Doctors. It is important to recognize that as Lifton conceptualizes it, the doubling process is not equivalent to what occurs in psychosis, nor is it the same process that is codified in the psychiatric nosology as multiple personality disorder. A person such as Josef Mengele, Lifton's prototype of the "double man," might, like Ted Bundy and a number of other multiple killers, strike acquaintances as falling well within the boundaries of "normal."

The chameleonic self. Emphasizing the "split" in a motiveless murderer’s personality organization is one way of conveying the sense that he is "incomplete," unintegrated, at times not all there. Another way is to emphasize the killer’s malleability. When, as he often is, the motiveless murderer is portrayed as a changeling, an individual adept at replacing one mask with another to meet the changing demands of social circumstances, the link to Cleckley’s conceptualization of the psychopath as a master of impression management is obvious. Like the psychopath, the motiveless murderer has frequently been depicted as an elusive presence behind a protean social mask. To develop this variation on the motif under consideration here, the "self out of focus," I will highlight several examples drawn from the literature on motiveless murder.
Many observers have remarked on the difficulty of fixing certain killers in a stable visual image. One moment, they say, the killer looks one way; the next he appears completely different. It may be, of course, that such claims are best understood as a partial objectification of more deeply disturbing uncertainties - over such issues as the killer’s motivation, for example, or, a broader issue yet, the parameters of human "nature." It may be, too, that there is an element of mythmaking in the claims that killers like Ted Bundy and Charles Manson actually seem to undergo physical transformations (like werewolves?). If there is an element of mythmaking in such claims, and it seems likely, the claims lose none of their interest, nor any of their relevance for understanding the constructive processes involved in formulating the "sense" in motiveless murder.

Consider these several examples of murderers depicted as chameleon-like figures. Charles Manson was described by one of his followers as "a changeling. He seemed to change every time I saw him" (quoted in Bugliosi and Gentry, 1974). An attorney who once prosecuted him described Ted Bundy in similar terms: "[Bundy] changes his appearance as often as I change my shorts. And I change my shorts every day" (Daly, 1978, p. 60). About the various photographs of herself which Diane Downs submitted with her application to a clinic for surrogate mothers, Rule (1987) writes, "In each [photograph] she looked so different; she might well have been a mirror reflecting the fleeting images of many women. A chameleon" (p. 122). Elsewhere in her account of the Downs case, Rule remarks on the frustration experienced by courtroom artists who tried to capture the defendant’s essence in a
sketch. Throughout Rule's book, Downs is depicted as infinitely malleable, "like heated wax" (p. 481).

Another killer whose motives have been the subject of much debate, Lee Harvey Oswald, is described in DeLillo's (1988) recent fictional portrait as "the multiple Oswald":

Oswald...looks like different people from one photograph to the next....He looks like everybody. In two photos taken in the military he is a grim killer and a baby-face hero. In another photo he sits in profile with a group of fellow Marines on a rattan mat under palm trees. Four or five men face the camera. They all look like Oswald. (p. 300)

While he is contemplating the difficulty of determining who exactly Oswald was, where he came from, how he thought, even what he looked like, the retired CIA agent in DeLillo's novel whose Sisyphean task it is to sort endlessly through archives on the assassination case begins to feel overwhelmed by "the Oswald shadings, the multiple images, the split perceptions." Nothing seems fixed and, finally, the archivist "concedes everything. He questions everything, including the basic suppositions we make about our world" (p. 300). This illustrates clearly the point made above, that at times an author's emphasis on the killer's elusive physical identity serves as a means of conveying the interpretive dilemma confronting those who would try and fathom the killer's motives. Where, descriptions like DeLillo's seem to ask, is the foothold from which to conduct inquiry in a world where there are no absolutes?

One additional point deserves mention. I have focused on how various commentators have conveyed the sense of a "self out of focus" by emphasizing the motiveless murderer's ever-changing appearance.
Another, less concrete, variation on the same motif is found in a frequently occurring emphasis on the killer’s uncanny ability to conform his presentation to shifting social demands. The killer is often depicted as being, like Cleckley’s classic psychopath, a consummate actor, a master of impression management – so much so, in fact, that commentators often attribute to him a striking absence of inner standards. Commenting on Dick Loeb, his accomplice in the "thrill killing" of 14-year old Bobby Franks, Nathan Leopold (1958) writes: "[Dick] fitted in with everybody, became instantly a charter member of any group. He blended with his environment as some moths and butterflies do" (p. 26). Wagner (1932) describes serial killer Peter Kurten as a "consummate actor" and remarks further on "the skill with which [Kurten] could play the part he thought suitable to the occasion" (p. 90). In his fictional treatment of the case of Earle Nelson, who committed numerous murders in the United States and Canada during the 1920’s, Nash (1982) remarks that when he was orchestrating his attacks on women, Nelson "instinctively...knew what kind of person he should be" (p. 2). And on a recent television talk show, sociologist Jack Levin summarized Charles Manson as "a master presenter of self" (Geraldo, May 9, 1988).

Of course it is by no means obvious how to interpret such descriptions. Perhaps, it might be argued, the primary reason why people like Dick Loeb, Peter Kurten, Earle Nelson, Charles Manson, and Ted Bundy are able to fit in so readily with different groups of people is that they are uncommonly conniving and duplicitous. However, one need not discount that possibility in order to speculate, as many
commentators have done, that behind their inconstant, if ostensibly confident, social presentation, these killers are struggling with a flickering sense of who they really are. Influenced, no doubt, by Ted Bundy’s own admission, "I’ve always felt somehow lost in my life" (p. 90), as well as by his knowledge that Bundy probably killed over thirty-five women at the same time he was impressing his acquaintances as "one of [them]," author Elliot Leyton (1986) writes, "Few have had such a fearful absence of a crisp identity as Ted Bundy" (p. 102). Of course similar attributions have been made about other so-called motiveless killers, and about many among the large group of individuals, some violent, most not, who have been gathered together under the rubric of "psychopathy."

The featureless self. We have examined two patterns of description through which commentators have conveyed their sense that the motiveless murderer has a radically unstable self-identity. First, we looked at expressions of the killer as someone "divided away from" himself, disconnected from his own experience. Second, we looked at descriptions of the killer as someone whose flickering sense of himself is manifest as an inconsistent, always changing physical appearance, or through his extensive repertoire of social personas. Finally, I would like to consider very briefly a third pattern of description, one which suggests the killer’s "incompleteness" through imagery of absence: for example, formlessness, invisibility, and colorlessness.

Each of the following descriptions can be read as a variation on a single idea: the motiveless murderer is somehow "not all there." At times the idea of absence is implied, ironically, through an emphasis
on the killer's elusive presence. For example, Holmes (1967a) describes Lee Harvey Oswald as "anonymous" (p. 148), a "man of paper" (p. 145). In the words of the novelist DeLillo (1988), as a social character Oswald was "never fully there," he was "not really part of things" (p. 203). Of Josef Mengele, a former co-worker recalls: "He was a very difficult man to trace...[and] would disappear and reappear,...would be gone and reappear again" (quoted in Lifton, 1986, p. 367). Godwin (1978) describes multiple killer-rapist James Ruzicka similarly, as "an apparitionlike creature" (p. 220). After one of his murders, writes Stack (1984), Randy Woodfield not only felt "invisible," he "was invisible" (p. 18). Of the trial of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, Francis Wyndham writes, "This 'sensational' trial seemed to have a hollow center where the accused should have been...[Brady and Hindley were like] ghostly presences in an empty dock" (quoted in Johnson, 1967, p. 80). The serial killer in Loken's (1985) The Boy Next Door is described as "the proverbial invisible man" (p. 104). And Iyer (1988), contrasting "weirdos," among whom he places killers of the sort under consideration here, and "eccentrics," remarks that the weirdo is to society almost like a poltergeist: "something of an absence, who casts no reflection" (p. 76).

Other descriptions emphasize the killer's lack of color, or lack of identifying characteristics. Leyton (1986), for example, alludes to David Berkowitz's "nondescript handwriting" (p. 160); unlike that of most other people, Berkowitz's script, implies Leyton, affords no access to the personality from which it issued. Godwin (1978) comments on the "colorlessness" and the "lack of vivid overtones" (p. 35) which
often make it difficult for observers to convey their experience of certain "overcontrolled" people who commit multiple murder.

Interestingly, Dennis Nilsen characterized himself as "the monochrome man" (Masters, 1985). Years before Nilsen's crimes, Johnson (1967) had written of Ian Brady's "monochrome appearance" (p. 30). Olsen (1974) describes serial killer Dean Corll as "vanilla." And also referring to Corll, Godwin (1978) offers this description which embodies perfectly the idea of the "featureless self": "There was no color or substance to him, no sharply etched characteristic anyone [could] recall. He was nondescriptness personified" (p. 165).

Summary

It remains to summarize briefly the progression of ideas and documentation presented in this chapter. I began by recording the frequency with which "psychopathy" has been invoked by commentators attempting to construct the "sense" in apparently motiveless murder. An overview of how various authors and researchers have answered the question, "What is wrong with the psychopath" was included in order to demonstrate the difficulty of answering, with any degree of precision, a second question: What understanding of the motiveless murderer is implied in his designation as a "psychopath"?

Next, I suggested that their differences notwithstanding, the various conceptualizations of psychopathy can be understood as expressions of a fundamental thematic concern with the parameters of "human-ness." Each conceptualization proposes a way of thinking about a particularly puzzling disorder said to affect certain human beings.
Implicit in them all is a resonant metaphor: the "incomplete man." When individuals who commit apparently motiveless murder are described as "psychopathic," the label represents a codification of the sense observers often have that the killer, even if he resembles "normal" people in many ways, is somehow "less than" or "not quite" human - incomplete, like the elusive psychopath. In the final section of the chapter, I turned to the literature on motiveless murder in order to trace variations on three frequently recurring expressions of the "incomplete man" motif.
CHAPTER VII

THREE ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTS:
MOTIVELESS MURDER THROUGH THE LENS OF
"EVOLUTIONARY EXISTENTIALISM," FEMINISM, AND HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

Introduction

Before describing the relatively circumscribed focus of the present chapter, it might be helpful to review briefly the content, and the particular emphases, of those chapters which have come before.

Chapter One was an attempt to sketch with broad strokes some implications of studying "motiveless murder" as a constructed, by definition unstable, form of social understanding. Chapter Two provided some working parameters for the term "motiveless murder." In Chapter Three, primarily for illustrative purposes, to suggest how conceptual biases can contribute to shaping both the direction of inquiry and the content of our interpretations of social phenomena, I focused on five different approaches to understanding aggression and violence, in particular on the implications of each for how members of the social audience tend to construct the sense in acts of apparently motiveless murder.

Chapter Four considered some possible determinants, as well as some expressions, of the equivocal social and psychological status of killing. In Chapter Five, the focus shifted to documentation of the
tension, evident throughout the literature on motiveless murder, between representations of the killer which emphasize his difference from "ordinary" men, and other representations which emphasize his relatedness. Obviously, linking Chapters Four and Five is my concern with documenting how difficult it can be to define with any degree of precision the relationship between the "normal" individual on one hand, and on the other, the individual whose acts of lethal violence earn from the social audience the label "motiveless." In Chapter Six, I posed a question: "What understanding of the motiveless murderer is implied in his designation as a psychopath?" The answer tendered, albeit somewhat tentatively, is that the construct of psychopathy often serves as an imprecisely specified index for the theme of "human incompleteness," a theme which appears as a leitmotif throughout much of the literature on motiveless murder. Underlying both constructions, the "psychopath" and the "motiveless murderer," is a thematic concern with the parameters of human-ness.

That brings us to the current chapter. Here, my role will be primarily that of reviewer. I will present for consideration three somewhat distinctive approaches to formulating the significance in many acts of "motiveless" murder. Recall my earlier statement, that in the most fundamental sense this study is intended as an exploration of the multiplicity of "ways we think about" individuals whose acts of murder seem senseless. The commentators whose works will be discussed in this chapter have each suggested new avenues toward an understanding of what such actors, and their actions, mean. They have each illuminated some
new dimension/s of the social project of coming to terms with apparently motiveless murder.

The order in which the three perspectives will be discussed is as follows. First, I will examine Colin Wilson’s application of his "evolutionary existentialism" to the problem of motiveless murder. More specifically, I will look at the construction of the motiveless murderer-as-Outsider. Next, I will discuss Deborah Cameron’s and Elizabeth Frazer’s feminist analysis of "sexual murder," a category which overlaps significantly with the more inclusive category of motiveless murder as defined in Chapter Two of this study. Finally, I will present the conclusions which anthropologist Elliott Leyton draws from his historical-sociological approach to various motiveless murder texts.

It is necessary to add a caveat. My intent is not to fully explicate any of these perspectives. Particularly for Wilson, who has written extensively on the philosophical and psychological aspects of murder, but for the other commentators as well, the task of detailed explication falls outside the scope of this inquiry. My objective here is more limited. I wish simply to illustrate how the authors under consideration have pushed back the frontiers of "how we think about" motiveless murder.

The Struggle Against Insignificance: Colin Wilson’s Construction of the Motiveless Murderer as Existential Outsider

An Introduction to Colin Wilson

I want, first, to say something of Colin Wilson’s status as a commentator on contemporary culture. Depending on one’s perspective,
Wilson might be regarded as any of the following: an existential philosopher of great importance, an astute literary critic, a chronicler of human atrocities, an occultist, an arrogant appropriator of others' insights, a brilliant evolutionary thinker, or simply a crackpot. The long-range verdict on Wilson is still undecided, despite the fact that in the years since publication of his first book, The Outsider (1956), which resulted in his becoming an instant celebrity at twenty-five, Wilson has published over fifty books on an astounding range of subjects. The prolific author assessed his own significance as a commentator on the human predicament in this excerpt from the autobiographical Voyage to a Beginning (1969b): "Twenty years of work have not taken me far. (This is not modesty. I know that I have come further than any of my contemporaries. I would be a fool if I didn't know it and a coward if I was afraid to say so.)" (p. 336).

Abraham Maslow thought Wilson one of the most exciting authors writing during the late-1950's, even though Wilson was an autodidact and not yet thirty. The two corresponded and became friends, each recognizing in the other an ally in the search for the "farthest reaches of human nature." (Later, Wilson [1972b] wrote a highly appreciative critical-biographical study of Maslow.) However, where Maslow saw highly original, provocative thinking, some other readers of Wilson's work have identified naive optimism and a disturbing tendency to formulate vast generalizations about humankind based on a relatively small sample consisting of anomalous cases.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Wilson's current stature as a writer and social critic, especially striking in light of early
comparisons with Sartre and a conviction expressed by many early reviewers that the young Wilson was a thinker of immense importance, is the fact that Wilson is almost completely ignored by academics writing in those disciplines most relevant to his concerns: philosophy, psychology, sociology, and the literary studies. For over thirty years, Wilson has remained a maverick intellectual, neither identifying with the academy nor receiving much attention from its members. In short, he has pursued the course of the archetypal figure he is most famous for describing, the Outsider.

I have thought it necessary to preface my discussion of Wilson's perspective on "outsiderism" in general, and more particularly on motiveless murder, with this brief comment on what has been referred to as the "Wilson phenomenon" (Bendau, 1979). It has seemed necessary because some readers may have had no prior exposure to Wilson's oeuvre: as noted above, consisting of more than fifty books, most of which must obviously go unmentioned here even though they all develop some aspect of the same philosophical concern with human freedom which informs Wilson's many works on the subject of murder. It is to that subject, though by an indirect route, that we can now turn our attention.

Wilson's "Outsider" Thesis

It is easier to grasp Wilson's "outsider" thesis if one thinks in terms of a sensibility, rather than a human type. The device of personification is a convenience, employed largely for rhetorical purposes. Wilson's real interest lies in exploring how, in the lives of certain men, a peculiar blend of insight and frustration produces
results (e.g., great art, murder) which fall outside the "ordinary" realm of human enterprise.

What are the shared qualities of outlook which for Wilson justify combining in a single category - outsiders - individuals as apparently dissimilar as the Marquis de Sade, Van Gogh, T.E. Lawrence, Nijinsky, and Charles Manson? Expressed in the most elementary terms, these individuals shared a vision of life's futility. The starting point for their respective rebellions was expressed thus by the painter Gauguin: "Life being what it is, one dreams of revenge." Feeling somehow cheated by life, they were all prompted to seek a higher level of intensity than most people ever experience, or aspire to. Their sense that they possessed rare insight into the sham that most other men accept as "what life is" led them to feel alienated from society. They believed themselves uniquely conscious of being sick in a society too overwhelmed by triviality to recognize its own sickness. Each, according to Wilson's thesis, became an "outsider." Each, in a highly individualistic way, shook his fist at a reality that struck him as fundamentally false.

Any attempt to summarize Wilson's conception of the outsider sensibility risks distortion. The reader encountering Wilson's ideas here for the first time should keep in mind that my objective is to accomplish a most radical distillation. The outsider thesis runs throughout every one of Wilson's books, and the subject matter of those books includes the origins and various expressions of the "sexual impulse," the occult, the lives and ideas of figures such as Rasputin,
Gurdjieff, Reich, Jung, and Maslow, the "criminal history of mankind," as well as the entire range of modern literature and philosophy.

I have pointed out that what the "ordinary" man sees as reality, the Outsider sees as a sham. Like the narrator in one of Wilson's early novels, he feels disdain for those people who live shallow lives and are content to do so: "Most people live on the surface of life; they can be brushed off like flies. My roots are a little deeper, and every day I try to push them deeper still. That's why we die; we don't want to live enough" (Wilson, 1964b, p. 40). The Outsider thinks: there must be more. He is often the type of individual described by the novelist Robert Musil as a "possibilitarian," someone who refuses to accept that living should be an ongoing process of adjustment, compromise, and accommodation (Wilson, 1964a, p. 30). Like his Romantic forerunners in the nineteenth century, the modern Outsider possesses to an unusually intense degree the "strange appetite for mental freedom" (Wilson, 1966b, p. 81). He strains against the idea that he is "merely mortal."

Himself a possessor of the Outsider's basic sensibility, Wilson argues that "everyday consciousness is a liar" (Wilson, 1966b). He employs an assortment of metaphors - for example, those of the "octopus" and the "mind parasites" which constrain man's mental powers - to convey his sense that most human beings have allowed themselves to become the victims of forces they no longer try to control, or even understand. They feel trapped in life. Caught up in the trivialities of day-to-day living, they have become, to use Heidegger's phrase, "forgetful of existence."
According to Wilson, an understanding of the modern predicament must begin with a recognition that each human being has, so to speak, two "selves." The first self sees life as though through a microscope; the emphasis is on detail and "efficiency," on putting one foot in front of the other. This self concentrates on what Alfred North Whitehead described as "presentational immediacy" (Wilson substitutes "immediacy perception"). It is the mode of being which William Blake called the "spectre." Describing Blake's notion of the spectre, Wilson writes, "It is as if man contained an invisible parasite, whose job is to keep man unaware of his freedom" (Wilson, 1966b, p. 161). When the spectre is dominating awareness, the world is seen from a "worm's eye" perspective; the trees are the focus, not the whole forest. The power of the spectre, according to Wilson, goes a long way toward explaining "the great mystery of human boredom" (Wilson, 1966b, p. 113).

The problem, says Wilson, is that this first self has become too efficient. In fact, many of the activities which once could be performed only if the individual marshalled his powers of concentration are now performed almost automatically. To illustrate the evolutionary process whereby a subconscious "robot" comes to handle tasks which once required conscious attention, Wilson uses the example of learning to drive a car. Activity which for the beginner seems to demand deliberate effort is eventually performed in a mode of consciousness which Wilson calls "automatic pilot." There is a trade-off, of course, as anyone who has operated a vehicle while on "automatic pilot" knows. As the "robot" becomes increasingly efficient, the individual's conscious awareness of the world around him, and of
his own powers as an active agent, becomes less focused; there is a blurring of contact with reality.

The second self sees not through a microscope, but through a telescope. It concentrates on what Whitehead called "causal efficacy" (Wilson substitutes "meaning perception"). Wilson clearly links this mode of perception with "mystical" or "visionary" consciousness, and with what Maslow described as the "peak experience." He cites an essay by William James in which James describes certain moments when "the present coalesces...with ranges of the remote quite out of reach under ordinary circumstances." In the same essay, James describes a perceptual mode of consciousness which can produce a "vision of increasing ranges of distant facts," a glimpse of "distant realities" (quoted in Wilson, 1966b, pp. 103-4). This, says Wilson, contrasting it with the first self's blinkered view of life, is the "god's eye" perspective.

What needs to be emphasized is Wilson's conviction that the "vision" afforded by this second self is neither mysterious nor outside man's control. It can be summoned, but only through the disciplined exercise of the imagination. According to Wilson, cultivating this discipline is the necessary next step in man's evolution.

Sleep is Wilson's favorite metaphor for the condition of modern man. While throughout the course of his evolution man has attained ever greater mastery over his external environment, he has all but lost touch with his power to activate wider fields of consciousness. It is ironic, Wilson writes in The Outsider (1956), that the existential
thinker Gurdjieff chose to describe ordinary awareness as "waking consciousness" (p. 265). Most men, Wilson believes, are sleepwalkers only dimly aware that each day they are engaged in a confrontation with their own limits and possibilities. They seldom pause to consider any but the strictly political dimension of human freedom. In effect, they exist on "automatic pilot," nudged along by the pressure of external events. They are "forgetful of existence."

Here it is important to again emphasize that Wilson's is an evolutionary existentialism. He identifies his vision of man as an evolving creature with the earlier visions of individuals like Nietzsche, Julian Huxley, Teilhard de Chardin, Shaw, and Maslow. Shaw spoke of the "life force" powering man's evolutionary development; Wilson speaks in Beyond the Outsider (1965) of the need for mankind to cultivate a "conscious dimension of evolutionary purpose [emphasis added]" (p. 182). In other words, man needs to recognize that evolution is not something happening to him; he is now in a position to direct its course. He has broken with his animal past and emerged into a new evolutionary realm, what Huxley called the "noosphere," or the realm of the mind. H.G. Wells shared this same vision of modern man's evolution: "We are like early amphibians, so to speak, struggling out of the waters that have hitherto covered our kind, into the air, seeking to breathe in a new fashion" (quoted in Wilson, 1966b, p. 80).

We can see more clearly now why the Outsider stands out as a distinctive figure against the background of "normal" humankind. In most individuals, according to Wilson, the first self, the one which sees with a "worm's eye" view, is clearly dominant. The result is that
these individuals become so enmeshed in the details of making a living and managing the activities of daily life - and recall, the "robot" is always there to assist - that they forget all about their second self. They forget that they possess immense inner power, the resource which Wilson calls "Faculty X." Although the person possessing the "outsider" sensibility may be just as lazy or as weak as the "normal" person, his sensitivity sets him apart. He is more aware than most people of his self-division. It is significant that Wilson used The Pain Threshold as the working title for the book that was eventually published as The Outsider (Wilson, 1957). The Outsider is more easily aroused than other people. He is unable to escape from his sense that if life is worth living at all, it should be worth living more.

At the core of the Outsider's discontent is his struggle against what Wilson calls the "passive fallacy," or the "fallacy of insignificance." The Outsider observes that the majority of men face life with an attitude of resignation. The society comprised of such individuals has lost faith in, at least lost touch with, the heroic ideal: its citizens simply endure, a mode of being which Wilson sees exemplified in the fictional protagonists of Sartre and other writers whose work embodies assumptions of the "old existentialism" (see especially Wilson's The Stature of Man, 1959). The Outsider senses that something more should be possible, even if he cannot quite specify what that something is. As his angst develops, he feels persecuted by the impersonal forces of the universe, and condescending towards those people too dull to share his insight.
His perspective is captured in a passage from Wilson's own early novel, *Adrift in Soho* (1961a). The youthful narrator of that book, a cerebral type like Wilson who has recently arrived in London, has just smiled at a passing girl, and been ignored as though he were "invisible":

> The whole city was a part of the great unconscious conspiracy of matter to make you feel nonexistent.... A city can sit gently on you and squash you flat. It is a monument to your unimportance, a perpetual gesture of disrespect from the universe to people who lack a sense of their own necessity. (p. 20)

Or, as Sartre might have phrased it, who are unable to overcome their feeling of "contingency." Surely, thinks the Outsider, there is some transcendent meaning in being alive, a reality beyond the everyday, some destiny toward which he might advance. His is a fundamentally religious sensibility, but he is unable to accept the existence of God. Neither can he accept that society's blank indifference, even hostility, is the final word. Life as it is lived by those around him seems strange and absurd. Much of the time his own life strikes him as equally absurd. He never feels satisfied.

In fact "satisfaction" of the sort to which most men aspire, with its connotations of stasis and complacency, is the very antithesis of what the Outsider seeks. In order to better appreciate the quality of the Outsider's struggle, we need to consider several forces operating in support of the enemy, the "passive fallacy." Why is defeatism such a prevalent attitude? On what grounds does Wilson (1972c) justify his conclusion that "everything about modern life favors the unchecked growth of the passive attitude to existence" (p. 197)?
For one thing, Wilson posits a close connection between prosperity and passivity. Never before in history, he says, have people been afforded greater opportunity for leisure. Life for the majority of people is comfortable; there is a sense of security, a feeling that come what may, survival needs will be provided for. According to Wilson, one frequent consequence of this relatively high standard of living is boredom. Many people experience a lack of clear purpose in their lives. In his autobiography, H.G. Wells cites a question which he argues might reasonably be asked of a modern citizen, but which would have been incomprehensible a mere five hundred years ago: "Yes, you earn a living, you support a family, you love and hate, but - what do you do?" (quoted in Wilson, 1966b, p. 80). It is true, suggests Wilson, that often people are unable to decide what they should do with the freedom they possess. In this sense at least, they are like one of Beckett’s characters: suspended in a state of inactivity, trapped by their passive attitude toward existence, always waiting for something to happen.

Reisman (1950) has suggested that there is in modern society a trend away from self-reliance ("inner-direction") and toward a more dependent, passive attitude ("other-direction"). Other-directed people have much in common with the type of individual who Rotter (1973) describes as having an external "locus of control." These are people who tend to look outside themselves to explain the occurrences in their lives. Wilson argues, especially in The Stature of Man (1959), that "other-direction" has become increasingly prevalent during the last two centuries.
Much of the "blame" for that trend he assigns to Rousseau and other social philosophers of "liberation" whose influential writings appeared in the late eighteenth century. According to Wilson, Rousseau encouraged belief in a completely erroneous idea, that man is "born free" and subsequently enslaved by oppressive authorities wielding power in the name of "society." Wilson (1983) observes the paradox that many people who ought to feel free (e.g., they live in an ostensibly democratic society, they have money and leisure) instead feel miserable and trapped. Conversely, there are many individuals who, if one applies Rousseau's conception of freedom, ought not to feel free and vital, yet do. These apparent contradictions notwithstanding, the basic tenets of Rousseau's philosophy are generally accepted throughout much of what Americans often designate the "free world."

The connection with a trend toward "other-direction" should be obvious. Wilson writes:

Rousseau's assertion that freedom is everybody's birthright appeals because none of us feels free, and we are all delighted to have someone to blame. But it is rather like asserting that every lion's birthright is to have an antelope for breakfast. The truth is that a lion can only have an antelope for breakfast if there are antelopes available, and if it will go to the trouble of catching it [sic]. There are no rights involved.

This is not to assert that political freedom is unimportant. But it can only be achieved through effort and realistic thinking, not by misdirected resentment.

"Unfortunately," Wilson continues, "Rousseau's anti-authoritarianism is now in the very air we breathe." The result? "There is an enormous reservoir of vague resentment in our society, fed by this notion that
we ought to be free, and that if we don't feel free, then somebody must be to blame" (pp. xvi-xvii).

To summarize the preceding few paragraphs, then, Wilson argues that two factors - the effects of increased prosperity, and a widespread belief that society is to blame for the individual's feeling of being not free - have combined to foster growth of the passive attitude toward existence.

It is important to again emphasize that even though the Outsider may be more resistant than most people to the "passive fallacy," he is not totally immune to its deadening effects. Like other men, he is involved in a struggle against the image of himself as wholly contingent, accidental, ultimately unnecessary. The difference is that because the Outsider is more sensitive, more easily aroused than most men, his struggle is more intense. Like the protagonist in Barbusse's novel, L'Enfer, cited in chapter one of The Outsider (1956), he sees "too deep and too much" (p. 11) to adopt an attitude of resignation.

The Outsider rejects society's conventions and seeks out new, sometimes forbidden fields for the expression of his personality. He might be a genius, like Van Gogh, and channel his frustration into the production of great art. More frequently, however, he possesses neither Van Gogh's talent nor his discipline. Without these assets, and if he is a weak personality, he might live the obscure existence of the socially alienated man to whom life seems a miserable joke. If he possesses a more dominant disposition, however, the need to assert his potency as an individual might develop into an obsession. In the most
extreme case, says Wilson, such an individual might become a "motiveless" murderer.

The "Outsider" Thesis Applied to the Problem of Motiveless Murder

As Cameron and Frazer (1987) point out, no one interested in the cultural study of murder can afford not to consult Wilson's "obsessive" work on the subject. A sentence from one of Wilson's most recent essays about murder summarizes a challenge to which he has returned frequently: "We need to know what it was in [the 'casual' killer's personality] that responded to the idea of mass murder" (Wilson, 1983, p. xi). In an earlier essay, Wilson (1961b) had observed the importance of trying to understand "the complex pressures and strains that lead to...apparently 'motiveless crime'" (p. 29). Wilson's way of framing the interpretive challenge brings to mind a question, posed by another commentator with existential leanings, about Lee Harvey Oswald's decision to assassinate President Kennedy: "What was the specific need in this peculiar man that demanded this particular expression" (Holmes, 1967, p. 148)? For both Holmes and Wilson, it is their apparent "motiveless-ness" which makes certain acts of murder especially provocative subjects for existential analysis. To designate the category of crimes in which he is most interested, Wilson uses a variety of different terms, all roughly equivalent: "murder for pleasure," "murder for its own sake," "resentment murder," "assassination," "joy murder," and the German "lustmord."

The hallmark of these acts, says Wilson, is "a kind of motiveless viciousness" (1983, p. ix). Often, their perpetrators seem bored, only capable of being energized beyond passivity by the prospect of some
extreme situation set up to test their limits. In the extreme case of serial murder, the killer creates an elaborate, high-risk game which pits him against society. The game is an attempt to accomplish the same effect as a hypnotist snapping his fingers: the ending of a trance.

The economic metaphor (introduced in Chapter Two as the problem of "value analysis") is useful to further clarify Wilson's focus. He wants to understand why men "invest in" certain acts of murder the returns from which are paltry, or apparently nonexistent. Always, his approach to the interpretive problem is primarily philosophical; his excursions into psychology and sociology are subsidiary to his main purpose, which is to examine "illness" (conceived of in the broadest possible sense) as it relates to the problem of human freedom.

Murder appears as a theme, or subject, in many of Wilson's books. Five works of non-fiction, and at least six novels, have had murder as their central focus. Why this persistent interest in murder by a writer and thinker who considers himself an existential philosopher?

Of course there are precedents. Many authors who might be grouped together loosely as "existential" writers - for example Dostoyevsky, Gide, Durrenmatt, Genet, Camus, and Sartre - have also used the situation of murder as a vehicle for conveying their ideas about human beings confronting the problems of their existence. Wilson is explicit in stating the roots of his interest. Murder, he suggests, is simply the endstage of a disease epidemic among human beings: "life failure," in other words indifference to the ultimate questions implied by the fact of life. Instances of murder can be held up for examination as though they were "exhibits in a lecture on the meaning of existen-
ternalism" (Wilson, 1961b, p. 45). For Wilson, it is an article of faith that "We must study criminals in order to know ourselves" (p. 39).

We should not, argues Wilson, be lulled into easy acceptance of distorting stereotypes, especially those which encourage the belief that murderers are fundamentally different from other people: "Belief in the abnormality of the murderer is a part of the delusion of normality on which society is based. The murderer is different from other human beings in degree, not in kind" (Wilson, 1961b, p. 25). Wilson proposes that we view the murderer as a human being struggling, as every person must struggle, to determine what of value there is in being alive. The study of murder, he writes, "is not the study of abnormal human nature" but "the study of human nature stained by an act that makes it visible on the microscope slide" (p. 20). In the killer's act of negation we can observe "the meaningless of life become dynamic" (Wilson, 1961b, p. 20). Wilson invites us to consider the source of the killer's vision of futility, and to recognize in our own actions, and in the actions of people we know, some of its more familiar trajectories. Our dissection of the killer's act Wilson compares to the autopsy a pathologist may be obligated to perform on a dead infant. Both processes have as their objective the discovery of something which might enhance life.

I will sketch some broad parameters of the construction which emerges from Wilson's attempts to apply aspects of his outsider thesis to the problem of motiveless murder. Since for Wilson, the novel form has always functioned primarily as a vehicle for the conveyance of
ideas, my discussion will include selected works of fiction, as well as works of non-fiction.

I have alluded previously to Wilson’s (1972a) report that when he was a child, he often thought that if a fairy would only grant him three wishes, his first wish would be for a conclusive answer to the riddle of Jack the Ripper’s identity. The riddle remains, but Wilson’s extensive writings on the subject of crime have made it apparent that even were the riddle to be solved - even if, that is, the Ripper’s name was to become known - his curiosity would not necessarily be satisfied. The real mystery is far more intriguing, and more complex: What variety of human being, experiencing what combination of pressures and strains, would have responded to the challenge of living by brutally murdering five prostitutes, and taunting the authorities who were unable to stop him?

A brief look at Wilson’s several attempts to imaginatively construct Jack the Ripper’s personality, or the personality of a Ripper-like fictional character, will be revealing since the portraits convey Wilson’s essential ideas about how a certain kind of Outsider might resort to multiple murder as a radical "solution" to the intense dissatisfaction he feels. The primary sources for the remarks which follow are an essay which Wilson contributed to a casebook on the Ripper case (Wilson, 1988); Wilson’s own book on "the psychology of murder," Order of Assassins (1972a); and his A Criminal History of Mankind (1984). Three novels will be discussed briefly because they include main characters modelled in part on Jack the Ripper, or on other real-life killers who bear important similarities to the Ripper.
According to Wilson, the Ripper must have possessed a sensibility in some ways like that of an artist. He looked at the world around him and felt a compelling urge to make it over, to conduct experiments designed to test limits and examine new possibilities. The "worm’s eye" perspective could hardly have satisfied such a person; the Ripper wanted, as had Nietzsche, to become like a god, to find some way of transcending what Heidegger called "everyday-ness."

It is almost certain, says Wilson, that the Ripper belonged to the "high dominance group," made up of about five percent of the population during any period in history. In fact, in one of his books Wilson states that membership in that group is the "first requirement for a Jack the Ripper" (Wilson, 1969a, p. 142). In support of his contention that it is meaningful to speak of the "dominant five percent," Wilson (1984) cites research conducted by psychologists like John B. Calhoun and Abraham Maslow, as well as by ethologists like Konrad Lorenz and Desmond Morris. He cites with approval Nietzsche’s comment in a letter to the playwright Strindberg, that "the history of criminal families ... always leads one back to an individual too strong for his particular social environment" (quoted in Wilson, 1972c, p. 28; Wilson’s emphasis). In addition, he cites some intriguing anecdotal evidence. George Bernard Shaw once asked the explorer H.M. Stanley how many of his men could assume Stanley’s leadership position if he himself became ill. In reply, Stanley said without any hesitation, "One in twenty." Shaw asked whether that figure was exact or approximate. "Exact," said Stanley. Another anecdote points toward a similar conclusion. The Chinese discovered during the Korean War that if they
isolated the dominant five percent of American POW's, separated them from all the other prisoners, the remaining ninety-five percent became passive and made no attempt to escape (Wilson, 1972c, p. 72).

Of course not every individual who is highly dominant possesses the talent necessary to become a leader, or to in other ways compel society to accept him on his own terms. And, of course, not every person who is highly dominant is an "outsider." Wilson is especially interested in a small subset of the dominant five percent, that group comprised of individuals he describes as "ungifted Outsiders" - people who feel alienated from the everyday world inhabited by their fellow human beings, who experience a burning need to express their potency, yet whose quest for primacy and recognition is continually thwarted by their own limitations (Wilson, 1984, p. 73).

Sensitive, highly dominant, probably of above-average intelligence, but lacking real creativity, according to Wilson Jack the Ripper probably felt tremendous resentment over the absence of a suitable field for the expression of his personality. Having accepted Rousseau's dictum that society is the villain which deprives man of his natural rights, he plotted his revenge. In deciding how to "solve" the problem of his rage, he engaged in what Wilson (who acknowledges indebtedness to Sartre's A Sketch of a Theory of the Emotions) calls "magical thinking" - simply put, permitting a strong emotion to cancel out reason. He "reasoned" that by committing the most brutal acts of murder and mutilation imaginable, he could outrage the society he loathed, and thus find deliverance from his feelings of insignificance. His powerful sense of resentment had no focus; so society became its
target. This is reminiscent of Brophy's (1966) description of the Victorian poisoner Neill Cream. Cream, suggests Brophy, "had the desire and intention to kill but it was not directed against any particular person or persons" (p. 62). Like the "solutions" arrived at by most apparently motiveless killers, the Ripper's solution was "magical" in the sense that it bore no relation whatever to the core problem: his inability to maintain a consistent image of himself as a potent and valuable human being.

Wilson speculates that at some point, Jack the Ripper must have suffered a tremendous blow to his self-esteem. His response would have been greatly amplified because of his dominant nature. Most likely, the blow caused him to withdraw into himself. "If anything in the Ripper case can be stated with certainty," writes Wilson, "it is that Jack the Ripper worked alone, and almost certainly lived alone" (1969a, p. 151). He probably brooded over the wrong he had suffered until his feelings of resentment swelled to paranoid proportions. Finally, in a series of explosive attacks intended to create outrage, he announced, as the infamous criminal Lacenaire had announced before him, and killers like Ian Brady, Charles Manson, and Ted Bundy would announce later, "I don't wish to be a part of your civilization anymore" (Wilson, 1969a, p. 263).

The acts which the Ripper committed thrust him into a position outside society, thus validating the emotional alienation he had long felt and confirming his status as an outsider. At the same time, they provided a tangible product of self-assertion on which to stake his claim of significance. I am reminded here of Wilson's suggestion that
his eighteen murders finally permitted serial killer Paul John Knowles the thought, "I have the power to do" (Wilson, 1984, p. 667). Holmes (1967) speaks in similar terms of Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination of President Kennedy. In one "ultimate, severing act," says Holmes, Oswald was able to "experience himself as acting, as living" (pp. 151, 152).

In several novels, Wilson has elaborated his ideas about the sort of individual Jack the Ripper might have been. I will discuss briefly the portrayal of a serial killer in the three books which comprise Wilson's "criminal trilogy": Ritual in the Dark (1960), The Glass Cage (1966a), and Lingard (1970; published as The Killer in England). Obviously, the present context will allow only an overview of each characterization.

The two main characters in Ritual in the Dark (actually begun before The Outsider) engage in radically different, though parallel rituals aimed at subduing the shared sense of purposelessness that initially draws them to one another. Gerald Sorme and Austin Nunne are both "outsiders" with money. Neither has to work; both are bored. They have in common, too, a nagging dissatisfaction with life, and a disdain for the kind of complacent people who Nietzsche calls "ground fleas" - people unable to transcend the "worm's eye" perspective. Sorme (for whom Nietzsche served as a model) is in many ways like Wilson, cerebral and obsessed with discovering the meaning in life that lies just outside of awareness. Nunne is a spoiled dilettante who, it turns out, has committed a series of ritualistic murders.
During the course of the novel, Sorme’s ritual of self-discovery consists of a number of experiments in morality, some physical, as in the case of his affairs with Nunne’s aunt and her teenage niece; others intellectual, as in the philosophical constructions he attempts to fit to the violent acts of which he eventually suspects Nunne. All of Sorme’s experiments are probes intended to test the limits of human freedom. For much of the novel, even after he is no longer able to deny Nunne’s involvement in murder, Sorme imagines his friend as a kind of artist in embryo, what one critic calls a "half-developed evolutionary type" (Bendau, 1979, p. 43). In Nunne, Sorme thinks he sees "the dark forces of the irrational, before they learn to adjust themselves beyond revolt" (Campion, 1962, p. 187). Nunne himself encourages this interpretation, remarking of his urge to kill, "It’s a kind of inverted creative impulse....It’s...it’s like a need...to build" (p. 372).

Only after confronting a badly disfigured female corpse during a visit to the morgue is Sorme able to fathom the enormity of Nunne’s failure as a human being. Nunne may have thought more deeply about life than most people. It might even have been true that his urge to kill was an inverted desire to create, to assert his individuality. But in the end, thinks his friend, Nunne’s acts can only be seen as "a complete negation of all our impulses" (p. 412). Sorme eventually concludes that Nunne chose murder ("let himself go rotten") when his overwhelming sense of futility would no longer permit him the vision of a meaningful future.

By the end of the novel, Sorme has achieved a critical insight into the nature of human freedom. He now regards Nunne as a pathetic
creature trapped in a cul de sac. Violence as a primitive expression of the evolutionary drive only serves to dissipate the vital energy necessary for creativity and forward movement.

In The Glass Cage (1966a), Wilson continues exploring the implications of identifying in the murderer an inverted creative impulse. Damon Reade is a reclusive Blake scholar. He is also an outsider who describes himself as having "a strong sense of wanting something else - something apart from the things people do with their lives" (p. 17). When the police inform Reade of a serial murderer in London who scrawls Blake quotations on a wall near where his victims are found, Reade begins his own investigation. Following a far-fetched hunch (that the murderer, disgusted with himself, may have attempted suicide by drowning, and landed in the emergency room of a hospital along the Thames), he identifies a suspect named Sundheim.

Although Reade's intuition leads him to Sundheim, it is some time before he can believe that the individual who looks so ordinary to him, like a "somewhat clumsy American college student" (p. 170), is actually capable of multiple murder. Even when he can no longer deny that Sundheim is the murderer, Reade argues that Sundheim is no ordinary criminal, that he has "something of the artist in him" (p. 151). The turning point in Sonne's understanding of Nunne came at the morgue; for Reade, a parallel insight into Sundheim's failure as a human being follows a visit to the house of a recently deceased painter. The painter evidently viewed life as a trap; his work has a quality of bleakness. Still, however, Reade experiences his painting as vital and strangely affirmative. Where the painter faced life courageously, and
fashioned beauty out of the ugliness he saw, Sundheim has allowed himself to be defeated. Reade now regards him as weak and lazy, his violence as the last desperate attempt of a dying man to regain a sense of purpose and control.

*Lingard* (1970) is the third book in Wilson's "criminal trilogy." It is not quite a novel in the same sense that *Ritual in the Dark* and *The Glass Cage* are novels. Told from the perspective of a psychiatrist struggling to understand an imprisoned man who turns out to be a multiple murderer, *Lingard* is primarily an extended case history based on a number of actual cases.

The structure of the book is simple: Dr. Kahn, the book's narrator, is asked to treat the prisoner, Arthur Lingard; and during the time he is unearthing the facts about Lingard's past, he periodically returns to the prison and confronts or cajoles Lingard with what he has learned. In the end, Arthur is killed by another prisoner.

The salient elements of Arthur's sordid background are these: Following the deaths of their parents, Arthur and his older sister, Pauline, are taken to live with their aunt, uncle, and six cousins. There, in an incestuous atmosphere which he finds repulsive, Arthur fires his imagination by reading stories of magic and adventure. Soon, he develops an erotic dependency on Pauline; then, after discovering that she is his uncle's mistress, Arthur employs what he has learned about hypnotism to turn his cousin Aggie into his sexual slave.

Eventually, Arthur discovers in burglary and fetishism ways of venting his needs for dominance and erotically-charged adventure. When both
Pauline and Aggie turn their attention from him to other men, Arthur's sense of desertion prompts him to engage in a series of rapes and murders.

Lingard embodies certain characteristics of science fiction writer A.E. Van Vogt's (1962) "violent man" or "Right Man." According to Wilson, Van Vogt's theory provides "the key" to Lingard. There are some men, argues Van Vogt, highly dominant and obsessed with being in the right, who derive their only sense of self-esteem from relationships with women who submit to their every whim. When a woman leaves such a man, says Van Vogt, he becomes desperate; and his mind turns to thoughts of suicide and murder as he struggles to re-establish control.

Wilson attempts to combine in Arthur Lingard a number of his ideas about the kind of man whose frustration can lead to murder. Lingard is an "outsider," a "violent man" of the sort about whom Van Vogt writes, and a man of nascent artistic talent who seems unable to discover a positive outlet for his energy - for his intense desire to live life more. Each of these frames offers an angle that illuminates one side of Arthur's personality. Even considered together, however, their explanatory power is limited. There remain many imponderable aspects of Lingard's choice to become a serial killer.

Wilson's crime fiction is radical in the sense that it refuses to confine killers in neat conceptual boxes, or to limit them using constructions of "pathology" or "illness." Wilson suggests in the note which accompanies the novel that "[Lingard] might be regarded as a wilful complication of the problem [of accounting for, then learning as
a society to re-direct, the impulse experienced by certain individuals
to commit multiple murder]" (p. 248). Arthur is not really creative in
the sense that most of the artists Wilson describes in The Outsider are
creative; yet he is more like the artist than most men. He is
intelligent, and his imagination refuses to accept "everyday-ness" as
the only reality. He resembles Van Vogt's description of the prototypic
"violent man"; but Wilson clearly regards the drive underlying
Lingard's destructive acts as at root a positive force, preferable to
the sluggishness of people who live their lives on "automatic pilot."

Lingard is, without question, a man who has failed to meet the
challenge of living. Kahn recognizes, though not until late in his
investigation, that what Arthur ultimately does with the frustration he
feels is "a deliberate act of choice" (p. 203). Wilson refers to
Arthur's "wrong choices made freely" (p. 10). Arthur might have
converted his frustration to creative energy, but he did not, perhaps
could not. Yet it is his intense frustration over what to do with his
life, together with his powerfully developed assertive drive, that
makes Arthur, in a sense, of one sort with men like Nijinsky and Van
Gogh.

Concluding Remarks

Considered in light of Wilson's "evolutionary existentialism,"
motiveless murder begins to seem not so much a problem of "pathology"
or "deviance," but a problem of human freedom - of determining what to
do when, lacking any real talent or originality, one still feels
desperately the need to discover a level of heightened intensity beyond
the level of everyday awareness. Wilson regards "assassins" like
Charles Manson and Ian Brady as particularly dramatic examples of the "no" response to life's possibilities. Such men scream what many "normal" men, living trance-like, only whisper: that existence hardly seems worth the struggle.

There is everywhere in Wilson's work a sense of ambivalence toward the murderer whose acts signify his refusal to be content with "mere mortality." A typical expression of this ambivalence is contained in the following passage from the diary of Gerald Sorme, included in a novel which appeared as a sequel of sorts to Ritual in the Dark:

In a strange way, I can't help envying Austin [Nunne] the experience of murder. No, I don't mean that I want to commit a sex crime....And yet I wish my imagination was powerful enough to tell me exactly what it would be like to commit a murder. Why are we such miserably inefficient machines? I am perpetually aware of my tremendous limitations....But I know that this body is not merely designed for this boring, irritating, two-dimensional life that so easily becomes a burden to me.

This, I suppose, is the reason for my sympathy with Austin. Since last year, I've read books about various sex killers - Heath, Christie, Kurten, and they repel and horrify me. And yet I still feel that Austin was dimly, vaguely trying to follow his own deepest nature to some unheard-of form of self-expression. It is strange that he always makes me think of Nijinsky. (Wilson, 1964b, pp. 8-9)

It must be emphasized in conclusion that Wilson in no way suggests that we regard the murderer as a noble character. He is a failure. However, in the killer's dramatic act of negation, says Wilson, we can glimpse as it is wasted the awesome energy which might, with discipline and effort, be harnessed to power mankind's progress forward. The murderer's act is a misguided, "magical" blow against the passive fallacy. Murder is "the attempt of the individual to evolve at the expense of society" (Wilson, 1984, p. 657); as such, it can be seen
as a negative expression of the drive to push back the frontiers of human possibility. This is the perspective from which it is possible to understand Wilson's contention that many acts of murder which we label "motiveless" are more appropriately regarded as "crimes of freedom" (Wilson, 1985) - crimes, that is, which express in a particularly tragic way the urge which for Nietzsche became an overpowering obsession, the urge to become a god.

The Problematization of Gender: Cameron and Frazer's Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder

Between 1975 and 1980, truck driver Peter Sutcliffe, who became known as the "Yorkshire Ripper," murdered at least thirteen women, most of them prostitutes, in northern England. In addition to the obvious terror it caused, Sutcliffe's crime spree gave rise to an acrimonious public debate about the broader social problem of male violence against women. The debate included the specific allegation, brought by men and women alike, that so long as Sutcliffe killed only prostitutes, authorities assigned his apprehension a relatively low priority. The outcry reached a crescendo after the prosecutor at Sutcliffe's trial remarked that the case had become truly tragic when Sutcliffe killed a woman who was not a prostitute. Perhaps to a greater extent than any before it, Sutcliffe's case prompted feminist writers to become involved in the challenge of formulating the sense in acts of "motiveless" murder.

English commentators Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer begin their book The Lust to Kill (1987) with a straightforward observation:
"There has never been a female Peter Sutcliffe" (p. 1). By approaching the problem of "sexual murder" - loosely operationalized as murder where there is an "eroticization of the act of killing in and for itself" (p. 18) - from a feminist perspective, Cameron and Frazer attempt to give an account of why this should be so. Although "sexual murder" as Cameron and Frazer define the category is not precisely equivalent to our category of "motiveless murder," the two terms share a large range of reference. For example, the figures to whom Cameron and Frazer devote the greatest amount of attention - Peter Sutcliffe, Jack the Ripper, Dennis Nilsen, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, Peter Kurten, John Reginald Christie - all fit within the working parameters sketched in Chapter Two for the "motiveless murderer." In fact, at one point in their analysis Cameron and Frazer observe that "sexual murder is frequently regarded as a motiveless crime" (p. 76).

In the present context, Cameron and Frazer's study is important for two reasons. First, its approach is clearly constructionist; that is, the authors are concerned not with the possibility of determining what is indisputably "true" about the perpetrators of sexual murder (nothing is, they say), but with criticizing existing discourses about murder, and offering an alternative one. Second, the study is a self-conscious attempt to "problematize" gender, to place the fact that sexual killers are inevitably male at the center of the interpretive problem. By making the issue of gender central, Cameron and Frazer offer a new angle from which to observe, and criticize, the social project of deciding the meaning in acts of murder for which there may exist sharply divergent constructions of motivation.
Method

According to Cameron and Frazer, researchers investigating murder have often mistaken interpretation for explanation. How, they ask, have we acquired that which passes for "knowledge" about the multiple killer whose acts seem to include an element of eroticization? From which sources does the conventional wisdom derive? Narrative is the form through which understanding about such killers is typically conveyed, and continuously modified. Killers tell stories; policemen tell stories; former acquaintances of the killer tell stories; psychiatrists and psychologists tell stories. From various accounts are cobbled together versions of who the killer is. These range from scientific-sounding accounts, which employ existing categories and conceptual frameworks in an attempt to depict the killer's acts as instances of one or more previously identified social/psychological phenomena; to more popular accounts, which often depict the killer using stereotypes of difference, for example the "sex beast" or the Hyde half of a "split personality," as well as stereotypes of affinity, like "the boy next door."

The problem, say Cameron and Frazer, is not necessarily with the interpretations themselves, although they clearly believe that some come closer to the mark than others, but with the weight those interpretations are sometimes made to carry. A recent case illustrates their point. Ted Bundy, facing execution within days, went on record as stating that he became a serial sex killer largely because of his early exposure to pornography. Among members of Bundy's audience, there was a tendency to embrace this particular construction of what happened,
perhaps in part because it came from the killer himself, but also because it was embedded in one man's ritualistic preparation for his own death. "Last words" have traditionally been accorded great importance; many people believe that, as Oscar Wilde once stated, the prospect of death brings great clarity and focus to a person's mind. Of course the irony in Bundy's case was that the infamous liar was now treated by many, in particular those belonging to the anti-pornography lobby, as a kind of oracle. With the process fueled by ideological zeal, many listeners engaged in subtle and not-so-subtle attempts to accomplish the transmutation of interpretation into evidence.

Cameron and Frazer emphasize the constructed character of knowledge about social phenomena, in particular sexual murder. A section from the introduction to their book, in which they contrast their approach to investigating murder with more traditional approaches, deserves to be quoted at some length:

Many previous researchers on the subject of sex murder have assumed that somewhere there is a kernel of truth about why it occurs; they have often made the further assumption that particular methods, say psychoanalysis or karyotyping, would systematically reveal that truth. Our own assumptions are very different....

[If the objective is to arrive at some understanding of sexual killing], what would constitute "the heart of the matter"? Interviews with sex murderers, perhaps? A detailed breakdown of factual details, culled from the records of psychiatrists and police? Even if these lines of enquiry [sic] were possible, we believe they would beg very fundamental questions. The accounts that policemen and psychiatrists give of killers, not to mention the accounts that killers give of themselves, are not "the truth," they are...constructed texts: as such, they depend, like biographies and news reports, on the codes of the culture to give them meaning. When the murderer writes a confession, a life story, he cannot do it outside the limits of his own understanding of what
he has done and how it appears to others. Furthermore, this understanding is not miraculously given, a pristine and privileged insight into the killer's own mind; the killer who tells us "I don't know what came over me," or "I really loved her" or "I was cleaning up the streets" [or "Pornography made me do it"] is using a formula, a generic convention which he learned in society and which both he and others recognize as "the sort of account someone might give of that sort of event." It is these cultural codes that interest us: we have chosen to study them in and of themselves. The discourse by which sex killing is made intelligible to us [emphasis added]... is not parasitic on some higher truth: it is the heart of the matter. (pp. xi, xii)

Viewed in the light provided by this description, Ted Bundy's account of how he became a serial killer assumes a place at the center of a complex and dynamic social transaction. The account is constructed from an existing form of understanding: exposure to pornography leads to sexual violence. Quite apart from the question of whether or not Bundy's particular version of what happened is "true," it is certain to become an aspect of the discourse from which commentators will draw when they construct the sense in future cases of multiple murder.

Consistent with their constructionist orientation, Cameron and Frazer devote a major portion of their study to social "processes of representation." They ask, for example: How have various fictional characterizations been used by their creators to convey ideas about the sort of human being who commits multiple murder? How have these figures been received by the social audience? In what relation to the larger social order have the authors of these literary texts placed their murderous characters? Of course, underlying questions of this sort is the conviction that representations, even those not likely to appear in "scientific" accounts of murder - the "sex beast," for example, or the "fiend" - exercise a powerful legitimizing influence. As Gilman
(1985) has cautioned in his study of the interaction between images of and beliefs about "difference and pathology," such representations are not some special class of entity separate from the "real" world. Our actions take place in the world structured by our mental representations.

Finally, before moving on to a consideration of what conclusions Cameron and Frazer draw from their investigation, it is necessary to note the criteria by which they ask that their contribution be evaluated. There is, they insist, no "truth" about what prompts an individual's act of sexual murder. All that exist are constructed accounts, and each account is made possible only by already extant "cultural codes" (p. xiv). Since there exists no yardstick with which to conclusively determine a given account's truth, progress in understanding must take place through processes of argument and negotiation among members of a knowledge community.

If they are not exactly indifferent to the views of sexual murder held by male commentators whose more traditional analyses have tended to obscure the question of gender, Cameron and Frazer are primarily concerned with a different knowledge community, one made up of people sharing their feminist perspective. They make no pretense of ideological neutrality. Their aims, and the expectations they have of their audience, are stated explicitly: "We evaluate our account and expect others to evaluate it...by the usefulness for feminist politics of having the concepts and categories we propose" (p. xiv). One statement appearing toward the end of their study brings into sharp relief the authors' sense of their audience. They suggest that a
typical reader of their account might well find it "unorthodox" for them to conclude that sexual murder is not simply a product of socially-sanctioned "misogyny and terror" (p. 166).

Conclusions

Critique of existing discourses about sexual murder. For purposes of this overview, the primary contentions and conclusions of Cameron and Frazer's investigation can be stated fairly briefly. The largest portion of their book is devoted to a critique of two "controlling discourses" on the subject of sexual murder: popular or "cultural" discourse, in which the killer-as-protagonist is a stereotypic "sex beast," or a rebel of the sort suggested in writings by existentialists like Sartre, Camus, Genet, and Wilson; and, alternatively, scientific discourse, in which the killer is generally rendered in terms of "pathology" or "deviance." Before stating Cameron and Frazer's own conclusions, it is necessary to consider their objections to these two very broadly-defined discourses about the sexual killer.

In a chapter entitled "The Murderer As Hero" (by "hero" the authors mean "chief male protagonist"; their concern, at least in their choice of this term, is with prevailing point of view, not with values per se), Cameron and Frazer show how the popular myth of the "sex beast" has evolved over the centuries through a variety of cultural forms and ideas. Included in their discussion of the sex beast stereotype are the true crime broadsides of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Gothic novel of sensation and cruelty (highly influenced by Novalis' contention that pleasure and pain have a similar physiological basis), the Hobbesian notion of "natural man" as a brute
requiring society's leash, the cult of "true crime" magazines, and the
popular notion, given a scientific gloss by Freud, that there resides
in each individual two separate "selves," the Jekyll and Hyde of
Stevenson's famous novel.

A second form of cultural discourse suggests that we regard the
killer as an individual at war with conventional society. Sade's
libertine is one example; Gide's "gratuitous" killer is another; and
Genet's murderer who, having killed, is "left alive, without identity
and therefore free" (Coe, 1968, p. 125) is a third. Cameron and Frazer
argue that different as they may seem, the two notions - the killer as
a "sex beast" and the killer as an "outsider" rebelling against society
- actually serve a similar social function. Each is grounded in a
particular understanding of the "state of nature." In the former case,
natural man (as represented in the stereotype of the "sex beast") is
envisioned as an unregenerate brute driven by animal passions; this is
the Hobbesian vision. In the latter case, natural man is idealized; if
all that civilization entails is bracketed, so that a vision of pre-
civilized man is allowed to come into focus, we see that before he
became subject to society's chains, man lived simply and in harmony
with nature. This, of course, is the vision most often identified with
Rousseau.

What similar function do the two variations of the murderer as
"natural man" serve? According to Cameron and Frazer, both encourage
the idea that the sexual murderer is unlike the larger mass of human
beings in some fundamental way. Regardless of whether he is envisioned
as a predator/fiend/monster/beast or a disaffected outsider, "by
placing the killer in a state of nature, both lines of thought deny he could be in a 'state of culture'; that is, a product of society, not an outcast or a freak" (p. 67).

This is the primary basis for Cameron and Frazer's criticism of popular discourses about sexual murder. The discourses discussed above create distance between the killer and the observing social audience. They obscure questions which Cameron and Frazer believe are central. Who murders whom? To what extent are the roles of sexual killer and victim prescribed by social constraints? Why are sexual killers always male? Why, when a spouse in emotional turmoil strikes out by killing other family members, do men most often kill their wives while women far more frequently kill their children? Does this not suggest, the authors ask, that for intra-familial as well as other kinds of killing, the socially-determined distribution of power has a great deal to do with who gets killed by whom?

They pose the question as well, What connection exists between murder and the cultural influences which in part determine what things constitute appropriate objects of erotic desire? Was it merely coincidence that the eroticization of domination and cruelty in western European culture became far more prevalent following the period during which Sade wrote works like Justine and The 120 Days of Sodom? What needs to be given new priority in attempts to understand sexual murder, say Cameron and Frazer, is the "'culturalness' of sexual murder and its connections with cultural ideas of sexuality and gender" (p. 67).

Under the heading of "The murderer as deviant," Cameron and Frazer examine various "scientific" discourses on sexual murder, among
them biological, psychological, psychoanalytic, and social accounts. They argue that in most cases, these accounts are little if any more illuminating than those often dismissed by academics as "popular."

Research in biology may one day permit a detailed description of what happens at the neuronal level when a male rapes and then mutilates a woman; it will not, however, in fact cannot address the issue of what the act means, either to the larger social audience or to the individual who commits it. "Sex murder is not a physiological event but a socially meaningful activity" (p. 82).

Cameron and Frazier criticize much research on personality for its "gender unawareness"; its tendency to perpetuate cultural stereotypes, especially through the use of supposedly "objective" personality inventories to measure traits like "sociability"; its tendency to accept as almost axiomatic that personality is relatively fixed; and its complete inability to account for sometimes "wildly contrasting but contemporaneous behaviors" exhibited by the same person (they use Adolf Eichmann as an example; Dennis Nilsen would certainly serve as well). "Psychopathy" they dismiss as "an infinitely elastic, catch-all category" (p. 89) not at all helpful in determining why an all-male subset of the gigantic class of people who behave impulsively and erratically seem compelled to satisfy desires which "often have a sexual component and are systematically misogynistic" (p. 91). Psychoanalytic discourse on the origins of aggression and sexual sadism is faulted for minimizing the importance of western society's "patriarchal power structure" in shaping the intrapsychic lives of its members - more specifically, in creating a context in which "castration anxiety" and
"mother-hatred," central ideas in most psychoanalytic accounts of sexual murder, become salient psychological realities.

Finally, Cameron and Frazer are critical even of those commentators who have sought to explain sexual murder as primarily a social phenomena. They review a number of research currents - for example learning theory, subculture theory, labelling theory, and victimology - and they conclude that these accounts all fail to adequately address the extent to which the roles and labels available to particular individuals are determined by "social structures and divisions" (p. 116). Even those commentators sometimes lumped together for their Marxist leanings as "radical criminologists" have, say Cameron and Frazer, largely overlooked the "power dimension of gender" in accounting for patterns of criminal activity. Almost no attention has been paid to the special problem of accounting for sexual murder - a crime committed exclusively by men, against women.

**Cameron and Frazer's feminist account.** It is now possible to consider, if briefly, the alternative account of sexual murder proposed by Cameron and Frazer. Of greatest importance is their contention that the objects, and vectors, of sexual desire are cultural artifacts. For example, they credit the Marquis de Sade with having radically transformed aspects of masculine sexuality. It is impossible, they suggest, to comprehend either our "cultural conception of sex killers" or the sex killers themselves without first comprehending the vision of sexuality reflected in Sade's work. For support, they cite philosopher and social historian Michel Foucault: "Sadism...is a massive cultural fact which appeared precisely at the
end of the eighteenth century [when Sade wrote], and which constitutes one of the greatest conversions of the Western imagination" (quoted in Cameron and Frazer, p. 56). In Sade's work, there is a constant conflation of pleasure and pain, violence and sex, transgression and "transcendence." Echoing Simone de Beauvoir's claim for Sade's importance, if rejecting her value judgments, Cameron and Frazer argue that before Sade, breaking society's laws and violating its taboos were not linked in the collective imagination with the possibility of transcending the self-as-object, with "the struggle to free oneself, by a conscious act of will, from the material constraints which normally determine human destiny" (p. 168). Since Sade, particularly in the work of twentieth century existentialist authors, this desire for freedom-through-transcendence has been a dominant motif in Western culture.

But it is necessary to pause before returning to the idea of transcendence, and to its implications for understanding the phenomenon of sexual murder. Again, the question: Why are sex killers always men? Cameron and Frazer begin their answer by stating a familiar feminist position: Ours is a patriarchal society where male violence against women -- sex killing being only the most extreme example -- is deeply ingrained, institutionalized. The various forms of male intimidation which Susan Brownmiller (1976) chronicled in Against Our Will need to be understood as expressions of "a collective, culturally sanctioned misogyny which is important in maintaining the collective power of men" (p. 164). That there exists this "culturally sanctioned misogyny" is accepted by Cameron and Frazer as an article of faith.
However, they take issue with other feminists who believe that no further explanation for sexual murder is necessary.

They point out that not all cases of "sexual murder" are misogynistic, at least in any obvious sense. What of the fact that in some cases, those of John Wayne Gacy and Dennis Nilsen for example, the victims are not women, but men. According to Cameron and Frazer, the feature which requires closer scrutiny, the common denominator linking homosexual and heterosexual sex killings, is the cultural construction of masculine sexuality, even masculinity in general. Even after it is allowed that the victims are not always women, the fact still remains that sexual killers are always men.

Cameron and Frazer propose a two-part explanation. First, they say, our culture has consistently affirmed male subjectivity:
"Culturally it is men who stand at the center of the universe" (p. 168). The natural subjectivity which women share with men, the sense of being conscious, potent, capable of meaningful action, has often been subverted because men have perceived female subjectivity as a threat to their power: "In order to protect the centrality of the male subject, the not-male, the female, are [sic] defined by the culture as Other, objects." The authors continue: "Subjectivity is at the heart of men’s existence, whereas women’s subject status is constantly being negated" (p. 168).

The second aspect of Cameron and Frazer’s explanation concerns the way in which our culture has defined this male subjectivity. Citing prominent narratives in the western philosophical and literary traditions - for example those telling of Faust, Prometheus, and Icarus
they argue that transcendence has long been equated with the male subject's struggle for a sense of personal freedom, for a sense of being able to conquer material constraints and become more god-like.

"Transcendence," say Cameron and Frazer, "has...come to be seen both as the project of the masculine and the sign of masculinity" (p. 169). In the arena of male sexuality, they say, the transcendence theme has been manifest in the familiar motifs of performance, penetration, and conquest. The writings of Sade are identified as the concrete link between the ancient theme of transcendence as the fundamental project of the male subject, and sexual desire. Sade defined the violation of social taboos about sex as inherently satisfying, forms of transcendence; the transgression of law and convention he equated with power and pleasure, thus, according to Cameron and Frazer, "paving the way for that male sexual sadism which becomes, at its most extreme, the lust to kill" (p. 169).

Two claims clearly distinguish Cameron and Frazer's analysis from most other accounts of sexual murder. First is their claim that sexual murder is a modern phenomenon that arose when Sade and his imitators prompted a massive transformation of sexual desire, in effect a transformation - or, as Foucault would have it, a conversion - of the Western imagination. Second is their insistence that we accord primacy to the fact that men, not women, commit sexual murder.

Can the historical process which has given rise to sexual murder be reversed? According to Cameron and Frazer it can, but only through a pervasive restructuring of the ways in which our culture envisions the ideas of sexuality and freedom. Barriers to women's full
realization of their subjectivity need to be removed, they say — not only in the arena of sexual desire, but in all aspects of life. Since sexual desire is assumed to be a cultural artifact (as the authors point out, "no feminist would dream of saying that women’s desire for heterosexual romantic love was natural and valid" [p. 173]), it follows that its objects need not remain invariant. Say Cameron and Frazer, nothing short of a revolution will satisfy the need to transform sexual desire so that the male subject no longer requires a female object. They predict that a critical outcome of that revolution will be an uncoupling of sexual desire and the idea of "transcendence," with all its implications of one person exercising dominion over another. They write:

We insist that there can be a vision of the future in which desire will be reconstructed totally.... We must be critical of the whole project of transcendence and the subject-object, self-other dichotomies it entails.... We must aspire to an equal and feminist future in which murder is no longer a metaphor for freedom, in which transcendence is not the only possible self-affirmation and in which the lust to kill has no place. (pp. 176-77)

The Social Meaning of Compulsive Killing:
Leyton’s Historical-Sociological Account of Modern Multiple Murder

The Thesis: Multiple Murder as Symbolic Social Levelling

Like the other commentators whose perspectives on apparently motiveless killing are summarized in this chapter, anthropologist Elliott Leyton (1986) has concentrated primarily on the intense study of existing murder texts, calling such texts his "field notes" (p. 13). His study of modern "compulsive killing" offers no new data, only his
revisionist interpretations of "classic texts," among which he includes selected accounts written by social and behavioral scientists, but also some written by less academically-inclined writers like Norman Mailer, Gerald Frank, Truman Capote, and William Allen. The neglect of these latter texts he regards as a major shortcoming in more traditional studies of multiple murder.

Leyton's primary thesis is that with very few exceptions, multiple murder is best understood as the attempt by a perfectly "sane," if intensely frustrated individual to accomplish a symbolic process of "social levelling" (p. 295). By "levelling," Leyton refers to a process whereby the killer seeks to discipline members of a class which he believes has oppressed or excluded him, or which he views as challenging his fragile sense of social identity. Recent serial killers like Edmund Kemper, Ted Bundy, and David Berkowitz are not "crazy"; nor, according to Leyton, is it accurate to consider them freaks. Leyton's controversial claim is that such killers are "as 'normal' as you or me" (p. 22); they "can only be accurately and objectively perceived as prime embodiment of their civilization, not twisted derangement" (p. 16).

According to Leyton, these crimes need to be treated as decipherable social statements. But if, as he contends, our understanding of those statements can be only minimally enhanced by the conceptual vocabulary of the behavioral sciences, then with what alternative ideas, and with what lexicon, are we to comprehend and describe the killers' determination to enact a symbolic ritual of "social levelling"?
Leyton proposes that we use whatever information is available to try and understand how the killer perceives his status in society, his "social niche" (p. 71). We need to pose questions like these: How does the killer construct the story of his origins? What relationship exists between his goals and ambitions on one hand, and on the other the selections he makes from the menu of possible identities offered by the society in which he lives? What aspects of the dynamic social order might be experienced by the killer as constituting obstacles to his progress toward an imagined future of "success"? Of course implicit in these questions is the belief, challenged in a recent article by Busch and Cavanaugh (1986), that explaining what his act "means" to the murderer is equivalent to explaining why the act occurred.

Leyton suggests that if we study the modern multiple murderer with questions like these in mind, we may discover that he appears less anomalous than he is often made out to be. Like everyone else, the individual who ends up a killer is involved at some level in a struggle to understand who he is. At intervals, he bumps up against what Cameron and Frazer (1987) call the "material constraints" of his life, those personal weaknesses and social factors which seem to stand in the way of his development. According to Leyton, the killer tends to be an individual whose uncertain origins cloud his sense of identity and contribute to his sense of precariousness as he attempts to move through the social hierarchy; whose fundamentally conservative values and intense ambitions place him on a collision course with the obstacles to social betterment which exist in a highly stratified society; and whose culture has a long tradition of venerating violence
as a legitimate response to frustration. Typically, says Leyton, although not always, the modern multiple killer is illegitimate, adopted, or the son of a mother who has been married three or more times. Often, it turns out that from an early age he was encouraged to adopt highly conventional ideas about his society (Leyton writes primarily about American killers), in particular about the unlimited opportunities available to those who work hard and aim high.

According to Leyton, one of two scenarios is commonly played out as the future killer develops into adulthood. In the first scenario, he is thwarted in his attempts to ascend the social ladder; he reacts by becoming bitter and developing a sense of betrayal. In the second scenario, he succeeds in moving to a higher rung on the ladder; however, once there he experiences overwhelming status anxiety, a sense of not belonging, and he then sets about trying to validate his feelings of estrangement. In either case, says Leyton, the individual endures a traumatic confrontation with the personal and social constraints which combine to make his lofty ambitions unrealizable. When he begins his program of murder, it is "to relieve a burning grudge engendered by [his] failed ambition" (p. 298). Most commonly, his rage is focused on members of a single social category, the one he perceives as having denied him the recognition or sense of social belonging that he covets.

Thus far, I have been describing Leyton's perspective on the modern multiple murder, whose crimes have been committed since World War II. What about multiple murderers from previous historical eras? Can they, too, be understood as enacting a symbolic ritual of "social levelling" that is actually a radical program of revenge against a
particular social class? Consistent with his contention that it is necessary to locate the phenomenon of multiple murder in an evolving social context, Leyton answers somewhat equivocally, yes and no: although it is nearly always possible to understand "for-its-own-sake" murder as a form of social protest against a particular class, as social conditions change, so does the "typical" motiveless killer. In a broadly sketched, somewhat tentative step "toward an historical sociology of multiple murder," Leyton describes what he considers to be representative cases of apparently motiveless murder in three different historical periods - the pre-industrial period, the industrial period, and the mature industrial or "modern" period. He describes as well the individuals most likely to become the killer's victims in each of the three periods. I have attempted below to summarize the basic thrust of his analysis.

As already noted, regardless of the particular historical context in which his acts occur, the multiple murderer is someone experiencing intense anxiety over his social status. At one juncture in history, he may be an individual observing from a position of privilege while members of a lower stratum eye him with envy. At another, he may be a member of the lowest class in society, watching his "betters" become prosperous, and protesting his exclusion from the social order. Alternatively, he might be someone who has recently risen to a new level in the social hierarchy, only to experience the anxiety and insecurity of the "arriviste." At another juncture, he might be an individual who, having envisioned his life unfolding like the plot of a Horatio Alger story, encounters an economic and social reality which he
perceives as inimical to the realization of his ambitions. In any case, his crimes will reflect the times in which he lives. As a general rule, says Leyton, multiple murder is more common at junctures in history when pervasive social changes, in particular those affecting the distribution of wealth and power, bring into sharp relief the precariousness, or perhaps the hopelessness, of the killer’s social status.

Before returning to Leyton’s analysis of modern multiple murder, I will review briefly what he has to say about analogous crimes committed during two previous historical periods, the pre-industrial and the industrial. Little data exists on multiple murder committed during the pre-industrial period. However, Leyton contends that the Baron Gilles de Rais, one of the wealthiest men in fifteenth-century France, a devoted follower and companion of Joan of Arc, and a torturer-killer whose child victims probably numbered in the hundreds, might be regarded as a representative case.

Gilles de Rais was a member of the landed aristocracy. He lived at a time when the class to which he belonged was struggling to re-assert its dominion over the peasant classes, whose protests over the preceding two centuries had caused widespread ferment throughout all of western Europe. According to Leyton, the aristocracy was "in a state of crisis" (p. 272). It was a time for quashing the peasants’ ambitions, and re-restablishing order. Here is Leyton’s construction of the sense in the Baron’s program of multiple murder:

It can be no coincidence that the only pre-industrial multiple murderer, who killed purely for its own sake and of whom we have reliable record, was a member of [the] threatened established order. Neither does it
require an impossible stretch of the imagination to comprehend that the manner in which the Baron...
tortured and killed the children of the peasantry was a personalized expression of the sweeping repressive thrust of his class, and a sexual metaphor in which he tested and enforced his terrible powers. Thus his indulgence of his violent sexual fantasy was an embroidery upon the central political event of his era - the subordination of the rebellious peasantry and the restoration of the absolute powers of the old nobility. (p. 273)

It is evident from this passage that Leyton regards de Rais as an instance of the killer who perceives his privileged social status as being under attack by the class from which he draws his victims. The "levelling" accomplished by the murders is in this case a symbolic blunting of the peasants' drive for social equality.

Leyton contends that during the industrial era, lasting from the late eighteenth century until around the time of the Second World War, motiveless murder was most likely to be committed by an individual coming from one of two social categories: the proletariat and the newly-arrived petit bourgeoisie. Like the landed aristocracy at the time when de Rais killed peasant children, these two groups were undergoing a definitional crisis during a period of rapid economic and social change. Although for many people, industrialization brought with it new opportunities for increased prosperity and social advancement, for some members of the proletariat it engendered a sense of total exclusion. Leyton cites American serial murderer Carl Panzram as an example of a lower-class individual whose career of killing is best understood as a program of revenge enacted against a society that he felt had brutalized him almost since birth.
But what about Leyton's second category, the multiple murderer who belongs to the petit bourgeoisie? Would one not expect contentment rather than rebellion from an individual for whom the changes brought about by industrialization paved the way for entry into a higher social stratum? Not necessarily, according to Leyton. As an example, he cites the well-known case of the German mass murderer, Franz Wagner, who killed fourteen people and injured many more in 1913. Leyton argues that although Wagner was eventually committed to an asylum for the insane, his explosion against the inhabitants of a small town where he had once worked as a schoolteacher is better explained in social rather than psychiatric terms.

Wagner had struggled to overcome "crushing poverty and abasement" (p. 280), eventually obtaining an education and qualifying as a teacher. However, says Leyton, "he never recovered from the hypersensitivity that such a rapid rise in the social hierarchy can create" (p. 277). Wagner aspired to literary fame; but after a number of sexual indiscretions and a "shotgun" marriage to a woman from a lower social class, he began to doubt whether he could ever achieve, then hold onto, the social position linked to his idea of "success." Furthermore, he was haunted by the fear that discovery of his "sins" would result in public humiliation.

At all times, suggests Leyton, Wagner was acutely aware that his rank within the social order was tenuous, and predicated on an adherence to social codes of respectability. His insecurity caused him to become paranoiac, obsessed with the idea that others would find him out. Leyton analyzes the predicament in which Wagner found himself:
[F]ew things are so corrosive to the individual than rapid social mobility: he is no longer in the world he knows, he does not know quite how to behave, nor how much leeway the public will allow him in the performance of his role. All he knows is that the penalty for failure is disgrace and an unceremonious return to the ugly status from which he has escaped: hence the common quality of a defensive status hysteria - which manifests itself as a kind of extreme personal insecurity - that is found so often among those who have risen or fallen dramatically in the social hierarchy. (p. 281)

Wagner was terrified that he would be exposed and subjected to public humiliation. However, he knew of no way to intervene on his own behalf without parading before others his profound sense of social and personal vulnerability. "Therein," according to Leyton, "lay the seed of [Wagner's] terrible crimes: the only way to avoid the impossible abasement of himself and his family, and claim revenge, was to kill them all" (p. 281). Leyton clearly regards the Wagner case as a classic illustration of his primary thesis, that multiple murder is most frequently committed by an individual from a "threatened class." In the particular context of the industrial period, he writes, "No case better represents the timorous nature of the new petit bourgeoisie than Wagner, disciplining the social inferiors who threatened his position" (p. 282).

We can now consider in somewhat greater detail Leyton's analysis of multiple murders committed in the mature industrial (or "modern") period, since the Second World War. How are these crimes to be understood in terms of Leyton's thesis? I addressed this question briefly in the opening paragraphs of this discussion; several important aspects of Leyton's response are repeated below. Since his book purports to tell "the story of modern multiple murder," killers of the modern period
receive most of Leyton's attention. Included in the book are detailed analyses of five cases: those of Edmund Kemper, Ted Bundy, David Berkowitz, Mark Essex, and Charles Starkweather. After first reiterating in very general terms Leyton's construction of the typical modern case, I will illustrate his approach, and try to suggest how he justifies his conclusions, by discussing his revisionist interpretation of serial killer Ted Bundy.

As a foundation for the discussion which follows, consider these statements, quoted in Leyton's book, from serial killers Charles Starkweather, Edmund Kemper, and Albert DeSalvo:

I just got fed up with having nothing and being nobody....[D]ead people are all on the same level....[Killing] makes everything even... it evens what I done and what everybody is done [sic]. (Charles Starkweather, quoted in Leyton, pp. 242, 244, 255)

I was frustrated in my dreams and desires totally.... My little social statement was, I was trying to hurt society where it hurt the worst, and that was by taking its valuable...future members of the working society; that was the upper class or the upper-middle class, what I considered to be snobby or snotty brats, or persons that was actually - that ended up later being better equipped to handle a living situation than I was. (Edmund Kemper, quoted in Leyton, pp. 60-61)

I'm not educated and these girls [who he assaulted after posing as an agent from a modelling firm] was all college graduates, understand me? I made fools of them....I give it to you - I wanted to build myself up. They were all college kids, and I never had anything in my life and I outsmarted them. I felt they were better than me because they were college people....I'm not good-looking, I'm not educated, but I was able to put something over on high class people [emphasis added]....Boy, it makes me feel powerful when I can make those girls do what I want - make them submit to me. I'm nothing in this life....But I want to be something. (Albert DeSalvo, the "Boston Strangler," quoted in Leyton, pp. 137, 138, 140)
Recall Leyton's contention that most multiple murderers since World War II are individuals with basically conservative values, whose uncertain origins complicate their efforts to develop a crisp sense of social identity. The sentiments expressed in the passages quoted above Leyton regards as typical. Although they articulate their sense of mission with varying degrees of clarity, most modern multiple killers feel at some level that they have been wronged by a particular segment of society. Most frequently, their tenuous position in the social hierarchy is just beneath the lower margin of a class which they long to join. Their frustration festers until they glimpse, in an imaginary vision of themselves as soldiers in a righteous class war, a way of venting their rage.

In a clear link with Colin Wilson's construction of the multiple murderer as a highly dominant individual, Leyton repeatedly emphasizes that most of these killers are unusually ambitious. As Leyton points out, they are not the individuals who the sociologist Durkheim described as "contented men"; on the contrary, they are often obsessed with obtaining more - more goods, higher status - than they have. At some point, most have been given reason to believe that they can actually obtain a social position which later seems to elude them. They begin to feel that the "system" in which they placed their faith is a sham. Like the authors of another recent text on multiple murder (Holmes and DeBurger, 1988), Leyton points out the long tradition in American culture which encourages violent rebellion as a legitimate, even heroic, response to the frustration of the social outsider. Thus provided with a context for seeing their acts as part of a larger
campaign waged by disenfranchised individuals against an insensitive society, the killers often undertake their program of murder with a strong sense of justification.

Since Leyton's emphasis is on the social nature of the killers' rebellion, it is necessary to comment briefly on how he assesses the American social and economic context since World War II. He points out that up until the mid-1960's, the American economy underwent tremendous growth both in its industrial and service-oriented sectors. Many new jobs were created, and a sense of optimism pervaded the culture. Many individuals from the lower (if not the lowest) economic strata could entertain the realistic hope of a more prosperous future for themselves and for their children. "As might be expected," writes Leyton, "these were quiet years for multiple murder as the population scrambled to better itself" (p. 286).

However, says Leyton, things began to change in the late 1960's, also the period when there occurred a sharp increase in the incidence of multiple murder. A "closure" was taking place throughout the American economy. Fewer new jobs were being created, and former openings were either discontinued or filled. The result was an increase in the number of individuals who found themselves unable to achieve the positions of social respectability and economic stability to which they had aspired. According to Leyton, a small proportion of these individuals "began to react to the frustration of their blocked social mobility by transforming their fantasies into a vengeful reality" (p. 286). The targets the killers chose tended to occupy the social stratum
that only shortly before had seemed an accessible "promised land" of opportunity.

Before moving on to consider in somewhat more detail Leyton's analysis of the case of Ted Bundy, I would like to share Leyton's response to a question likely to preoccupy many readers of his text. Why, if multiple murder is to be understood using such commonplace social concepts as frustrated upward mobility, limited economic opportunity, and "anomie" experienced during a period of rapid social change, is the phenomenon not far more common than it is? Surely, one might argue, the strains Leyton describes are the same strains felt by huge segments of the population comprised mostly of individuals to whom the idea of multiple murder would seem unthinkable. How is it possible to avoid psychological accounts of multiple murder when the responses of individuals who exist in similar social contexts differ so radically? Here, for the reader to evaluate according to his own notions about the multi-faceted dynamics underlying "health" or "pathology," is Leyton's response:

The problem remains that while many people are subject to the same tainted origins and thwarted ambitions, yet only a tiny minority of them become killers. Why then do most of them refuse to do so? There are no data that would allow us to address the problem in any scientific fashion....Yet it seems most likely that such people (the vast majority) are touched, however superficially, by some person or institution that renders their lives bearable - offering the common life of "quiet desperation" in place of the massive refusal of self and life that characterizes our killers. We can only posit that somewhere in the journey from institutionalized or illegitimate child to lofty but thwarted ambition, some family member, a lover, a job, or group membership (or the hope of any of these) offers most people a taste of fulfillment and interrupts their passage to murderous identities. (Leyton, p. 262)
An Application: The Case of Ted Bundy

I have chosen the case of Ted Bundy to illustrate the application of Leyton's thesis because Bundy is perhaps the most widely known among those multiple murderers given extended treatment in Leyton's book, *Compulsive Killers* (1986). For purposes of this discussion, I will first present an overview of Bundy's early life and criminal career. A synopsis of Leyton's interpretation follows.

An overview of Bundy's life and crimes. There is no longer any doubt about Theodore Bundy's culpability as one of America's most prolific serial murderers. Before his execution by the State of Florida in January, 1989, the convicted killer of three people confessed responsibility for dozens of deaths. Many police officers who worked on Bundy's case believe that the former law student and rising star of Washington State's Republican party may have killed upwards of fifty young women. Some have speculated that Bundy began killing before he even entered high school.

What happened along the path leading from the home for unwed mothers in Vermont where Bundy was born in 1946 to the electric chair where he died forty-two years later? Of course, answering that question with a chronology of major events may shed little light on the question of why Bundy chose a career of serial murder. However, with such a chronology in mind we may at least be in a better position to appreciate the raw materials from which Bundy constructed the autobiographical narrative of a rootless young man, his efforts at upward social mobility blocked, who arrived at a solid sense of
self-identity only after he embarked on a program of killing middle-
class women.

The father Ted never knew was rumored to have come from a wealthy family. Ted’s mother, Louise, bore Ted out of wedlock and had to endure subtle attitudes of rejection from the East coast relatives who shared her lower middle-class roots. Before Ted was five, the mother and her son relocated from the East coast to Tacoma, Washington, where Louise hoped that they might make a new start. Soon after they completed their cross-country move, Louise met and married an army cook named Johnnie Bundy.

The Bundy family lived on Johnnie’s meager salary, augmented by the money Johnnie and Ted were able to earn as part-time agricultural laborers. Ted’s progress through school was for the most part unremarkable. Former classmates have recalled him as a shy boy, intelligent and well-mannered, but without the easy affability, even grace, that would strike so many viewers fifteen years later when Bundy appeared on television following his arrest on suspicion of murder.

It was at some point during his teenage years that Bundy first confronted directly the issue of his illegitimacy. By this time, he was on his third surname. First, he had been given his mother’s maiden name of Cowell; then, apparently in an effort to de-stigmatize her son, Ted’s mother had had his name legally changed to the common "Nelson"; and finally, when Ted was still four, he had assumed the surname of his stepfather. Ted had grown up unsure who his mother really was. At times, he thought she was his sister; this impression was supported by the fact that he was urged to call his maternal grandparents "mother"
and "father." When he finally learned the truth about his illegitimate birth, Ted apparently suffered a serious blow to his sense of self. Michaud and Ayresworth (1983) cite the reminiscence of a boyhood friend in whom Bundy confided his new knowledge. The friend recalls: "I think I said I thought it was no big deal. But [Ted] said something to the effect that for him it made a big difference. This was important to him....When I made light of the situation he said, 'Well, it's not you that's a bastard.' He was bitter when he said it" (p. 65).

After graduating from high school, Ted began an erratic college career that commenced at the University of Puget Sound, then proceeded in stops and starts at the University of Washington, Stanford, and Temple, and finally culminated in a psychology degree back at the University of Washington. Of particular significance during these years of college were Ted's relationship with a wealthy young woman, and his trip back East, where he located his original birth records and confirmed his status as a bastard.

Most of Bundy's biographers have placed a great deal of emphasis on his relationship with Stephanie Brooks, the wealthy woman he began to see while a student at the University of Washington. She was beautiful, wealthy, and sophisticated, according to one biographer "the epitome of [Ted's] dreams" (Rule, 1980, p. 25). Even before they began dating, Ted felt acutely the difference between his social status and Stephanie's: "She and I had about as much in common as Sears and Roebuck does with Saks." Stephanie seemed to him like "some elegant creature on the fashion page" (Bundy, quoted in Rule, p. 25). Just over a year after she began seeing Ted, Stephanie ended the relationship,
explaining that their lives were on divergent paths. A number of years later, after he had gained admission into law school and established himself as a young Republican who many people thought had a bright future in politics, Ted rekindled the relationship, finding Stephanie newly receptive. However, this time he was the one to leave, even though Stephanie had apparently agreed to marry him. Not long afterward, Ted began murdering young women, many of them from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds, many of them bearing a striking resemblance to Stephanie.

The conventional wisdom about Bundy’s career as a serial killer is currently undergoing revision in the aftermath of his pre-execution confessions. Consequently, the remarks which follow must be regarded as somewhat tentative.

Most accounts have identified Lynda Healy, who disappeared from her rented room in Seattle on January 31, 1974, as Bundy’s first victim. Over the next six months, seven more women disappeared from the Seattle area. In September, grouse hunters discovered two decomposed bodies on a local hillside. The bodies of other missing women would turn up later. Some have never been found.

That fall of 1974, Bundy relocated to Salt Lake City, where he began classes as a law student at the University of Utah. Soon after his arrival there, women began to disappear. In August of the following year, Bundy was arrested on suspicion of burglary. Using credit card receipts and the scant other evidence they had, law enforcement officers began to track Bundy’s whereabouts over the previous twenty months. The pattern seemed unmistakable; where Bundy went, women
disappeared. Several eyewitnesses described having seen a handsome man with his arm in a sling who would approach young women, sometimes identifying himself as "Ted," and then request that they assist him with some small task. Because his car was found to contain physical evidence linking him to the disappearances of two women in Colorado, Bundy was extradited from Utah to Colorado in January, 1977.

After five months of incarceration, he executed a daring escape through a window of the law library where he had been allowed to study while being held in Aspen. He was captured eight days later. Five additional months passed before Bundy escaped again, this time through a hole he had managed to saw in the ceiling of his cell. He eventually made his way to Tallahassee, Florida, where he rented an apartment under an assumed name. On the night of January 15, 1978, he entered a sorority house at Florida State University. Using a club, he beat two young women to death and severely injured two others. Ninety minutes later, he attacked a woman living in a nearby apartment. She suffered a fractured skull but survived, most likely because an incoming telephone call interrupted the attack.

Less than a month after the "Chi Omega" murders, Bundy abducted a twelve-year old girl from outside the elementary school she attended. Following Bundy’s apprehension four days later, the girl’s body was discovered in an abandoned shed. She had been sexually assaulted and strangled.

Eventually convicted of the three Florida homicides and sentenced to death, Bundy remained in custody until his execution in January, 1989. He acted as his own attorney, prompting the trial court judge to
remark at Bundy’s sentencing, "Take care of yourself, young man....You’d have made a good lawyer. I’d have loved to have you practice in front of me" (quoted in Wilson and Seaman, 1983, p. 41). Although in the days immediately following his capture, and afterward in extended interviews with two journalists (see Michaud and Aynesworth, 1983), Bundy teased his interrogators with vague, often contradictory references to his culpability for various crimes (Leyton refers to Bundy’s "scrupulously honest ambiguity," p. 87); until the days just before his execution, he officially maintained his innocence.

Leyton’s interpretation. Leyton has attempted to discover in Ted Bundy’s career as a serial killer some overall thematic unity. It is necessary to reiterate here Leyton’s strong conviction that accounting for acts such as those Bundy committed requires a predominantly social, not psychological or biological, approach. Of course he would not argue that the insights of these other disciplines are irrelevant to the study of murder. He would, however, contend that psychology and the biological sciences have traditionally erred by placing insufficient emphasis on the symbolic, interactive "process in which the individual psyche accommodates itself to its environment" (p. 266). The particular contempt which Leyton feels toward psychiatry’s use of the medical model to "explain" aberrant behavior as "illness" pervades his alternative account. Leyton argues that in fact, the analogy between mental disorder and physical disease "becomes quite untenable when subjected to the anthropological, cross-cultural evidence" (p. 21).

A statement from his book provides a pithy summary of Leyton’s perspective on the Bundy case:
To understand [Ted Bundy], we need merely examine two of his personal qualities—his relentless snobbery, and his uncivil behavior toward the authorities—and the two central events in his personal history: his illegitimacy, and his inability to love the woman he wanted to love. (p. 97)

For purposes of this overview, I will address briefly each of the four elements to which Leyton alludes.

First is the issue of Bundy's morbid sensitivity to matters of class distinction. From an early age, Ted demonstrated an obsession with social status. Leyton provides many examples. Speaking as an adult, Bundy recalled feeling "humiliated" when, as a ten year old, he had to be seen in his stepfather's "common" Rambler. Louise Bundy, Ted's mother, has recalled that even as a small boy, Ted would insist that she take him to where clothing stores displayed the most expensive items. As he grew into manhood, Ted cultivated a clipped British accent and postured as a connoisseur of fine wines. After his arrest on charges of multiple murder, he commented in a letter to his former friend Ann Rule that "Personalized stationery is one of the small but truly necessary luxuries of life" (Rule, 1980, p. 221). Asked by journalists to describe what satisfaction a killer might derive from his acts, Bundy employed a curious analogy: "How do you describe the taste of bouillabaisse? Some remember clams, others mullet" (quoted in Leyton, p. 98).

Until he reached a crucial turning point in his life, the point at which he declared himself incapable of meeting the membership demands of the upper-middle class position to which he had aspired, Bundy steered a cautious and ideologically conservative life course. He avoided the competitiveness of the Greek scene while a student in
college, considering himself without the "skill or social acumen" (Bundy, quoted in Leyton, p. 99) to merit the attentions of the women he desired - middle and upper-middle class members of sororities, the kinds of women he would later attack at Florida State. A girlfriend from Bundy's high school years recalls Ted's reluctance to meet her parents: "He didn't feel that he fit in with...my 'class.'...He wouldn't come to my parents' home because he said he just didn't fit in" (quoted in Leyton, p. 98). Judging from his recollections, Bundy experienced a similar kind of social anxiety when he later fell for Stephanie Brooks at the University of Washington: "She moved like something out of Vogue, and anything she wore looked like a million dollars. I, on the other hand, possessed the innocence of a missionary, the worldliness of a farm boy....She and I had about as much in common as Sears and Roebuck has with Saks" (quoted in Leyton, p. 99).

Leyton suggests that an important factor underlying Bundy's social insecurity was his own status as an illegitimate child. We know that Ted was given three different surnames before he turned five. For some time he was uncertain whether Louise was his mother or his sister. He apparently discovered the truth about his origins when he was a teenager. Although often in later years he would claim that the revelation had no traumatic effect on him, acquaintances have recalled that Ted reacted with bitterness, confusion, and defensive attempts to mask the emotional turmoil which he felt. Whatever the truth about the initial impact of learning that he was a bastard, it is known for certain that during the period he would later describe as the worst in his life - after Stephanie Brooks broke up with him - Ted journeyed
cross country to locate the original records of his illegitimate birth.

Leyton regards Bundy's failure to sustain a relationship with Stephanie Brooks as the pivotal event of his adult life. She represented "ideal woman" to him; she had beauty, wealth, privilege, everything he felt that he wanted in a woman. He dreamed of rising in the social order with Stephanie at his side. However, after following her to California during the summer after his sophomore year in college, Ted began to experience feelings of pressure and disorientation: "I found myself thinking about standards of success that I just didn't seem to be living up to" (quoted in Leyton, p. 104). He felt like a "loser." Stephanie dropped him, justifying her decision by saying what Ted already sensed, that their lives were on different tracks.

When he returned to Seattle after locating his birth records and visiting relatives back East, Ted faced new humiliations. He worked a series of menial jobs and struggled with a sense of purposelessness. Soon he began stealing the material goods he coveted: clothes, a stereo, art, and home furnishings. Over the next several years, he showed signs of recovering from his doldrums. Following the advice of an acquaintance, he began taking an active volunteer role in Republican politics. "It just felt good," he recalled later, "to belong again....The reason I loved politics was because here was something that allowed me to use my talents and assertiveness." There were other attractive aspects as well: "The social life came with it....I didn't have the money or the tennis-club membership or whatever it takes to
really have the inside track. So politics was perfect. You can move among the various strata of society. You can talk to people to whom otherwise you’d have no access" (quoted in Leyton, p. 105).

Also during this period, Ted returned to his studies and graduated college with a B.A. in psychology. He continued his political work, playing an active role in the successful 1972 campaign for re-election of Washington’s incumbent Republican governor, and pursued plans to attend law school. Leyton speculates, however, that whatever surface manifestations of adjustment made it appear to observers that Bundy was on an upward social and political trajectory, a terrible insecurity was festering within. Increasingly, Bundy felt the taint of his illegitimacy, as well as his lack of preparation for a successful career as a member of the professional classes.

According to Leyton, during 1972 and 1973 Bundy’s conception of his personal mission was undergoing a radical transformation. In order to establish a starting point from which to begin the new phase of his life, he would appear once more in the life of Stephanie Brooks; he would win her back, then reject her. From the point of his rejection on, Bundy would exchange the role of a conservative Republican moving upward through the social hierarchy for a different role altogether, that of the rebel out to destroy the symbols of the success he had long coveted, but finally could not achieve.

From all indications, Bundy’s adoption of the rebel role came only after he concluded that the role he initially preferred, the Republican establishment type, was not going to pan out for him. A former acquaintance who worked with him for the Republican cause has
remembered Ted as "a believer in the system," a conservative young man who zealously opposed student protestors during the tumultuous last years of the Vietnam War. Leyton describes the shift in Bundy’s whole outlook: "When it became apparent to him that his psyche could not make the transition from Tacoma bungalows to California socialites, when he abandoned the closest thing to love he ever experienced [Stephanie Brooks], he radically altered his ideological stance, and became Bundy the rebel" (Leyton, p. 100). After he was later apprehended and charged with multiple murder, Bundy played his dissident role to the hilt, often carrying with him during courtroom appearances a copy of Solzhenitsyn’s The Gulag Archipelago.

Leyton summarizes his construction of the sense in Bundy’s crimes thus:

[Bundy] opposed all radical causes until he realized he was annulling himself - pronounced by himself unable to climb the hierarchy. Only then did he embark upon his radical crimes, crimes possible only for those so disenfranchised that they can reverse all social values and thereby act as gods. His world had spun apart twice; first, when he had discovered his illegitimacy and thereby lost his identity and purpose, and second, when he had discovered his inability to live with the creature he had fabricated in order to win the socialite.... Killing those who were at once the object of his desire, the symbol of his annulment, and the now closed avenue for his escape, became the purpose of is existence. (p. 110)

From most reports, Bundy’s years on death row were far from unhappy. Repeatedly, however, he declared his desire to live. Michaud and Aynesworth (1983) include in their account this quotation from the prisoner: "I feel much more confident about myself. It’s really marvelous! I feel not powerful, but in control of things" (p. 307). A number of years later, Bundy would express the same sense of
contentment in a letter to this writer: "All I can say is that I've never felt better in my life, spiritually, mentally, physically"
(personal communication, December 18, 1985).

Concluding Remarks

I have presented in this chapter three accounts of "motiveless murder" which differ significantly from the conventional wisdom(s) about why such crimes are committed. Wilson, Cameron and Frazer, and Leyton all express dissatisfaction with the more traditional approaches to understanding killers like Ted Bundy, Peter Sutcliffe, and Jack the Ripper. It has not been my intention to offer either explicit support or criticism of these three alternative accounts. I have tried instead, given the limitations of space, to accurately describe each perspective so that the reader can assess for himself its relative usefulness. At the very least, the inclusion of several minority viewpoints as part of this analytical survey of interpretive perspectives on apparently motiveless murder will have underlined the extent to which the understanding of such crimes is, in fact, an interpretive enterprise.
CHAPTER VIII

THE PRESENTATION OF A SELF IN LETTERS:
SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE FROM A CONVICTED MULTIPLE MURDERER

Introduction

This chapter includes a series of source documents - letters written to the author by a man convicted of more than twenty murders. The letters could stand alone and still be of interest; they provide a self-portrait, sketched in words, of an individual whose alleged crimes fit our working definition of "motiveless murder." However, I have added a limited commentary to the letters, my primary objective being the identification and documentation of several prominent thematic currents.

I recognize that by highlighting certain statements from the letters while ignoring others, I leave myself vulnerable to a host of methodological objections. However, in my defense I propose that my treatment of these primary documents be viewed as an instance of what Maslow referred to as "reconnaissance work" (Hoffman, 1988, p. 225) - work that is self-consciously tentative and exploratory, at best suggestive, certainly in no sense definitive. Fully aware that the format I have chosen for presenting the letters has striking limitations, I can only repeat the words of caution which Gordon Allport addressed to readers of his Letters from Jenny (1965): We "shall do

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well to hold our interpretations lightly"; and "our hopes should not be too high" (p. 160).

Of course as with any autobiographical narrative, there is reason to suspect the veracity of the letter-writer's (hereafter referred to as B.) account. Objectivity seldom if ever goes hand-in-hand with autobiography, a point implied in Bakin's (1985) choice of "studies in the art of self-invention" as the subtitle for his critical work, _Fictions in Autobiography_. In the present case, the likelihood of bias, especially bias of a self-serving type, is particularly strong; after all, a competing version of B's story, told in a court room by an assortment of other narrators, was sufficient to convince a jury that satisfactory closure would require the protagonist's - that is, B's - death. For this reason, it is important that we approach B's own account with the clear recognition that it is meant to serve a corrective function; B. declares as much in nearly every letter. To proceed with the caution such a recognition demands is not, however, to diminish the importance of B's perspective, its inevitable distortions notwithstanding.

I will return to the problem of interpretation, but first: What place have these letters in a project purporting to examine interpretive issues involved in the social construction of apparently motiveless murder? Previous chapters have contained repeated references to various "discourses" about motiveless murder. The narratives which killer's compose about themselves constitute an additional form of discourse. By examining one such narrative, we can seize an opportunity to balance views from "outside" with a view, even if that view seems
self-serving, from "inside" - from the killer's own vantage point. We
will do well, of course, to remain aware of the possibilities for
distortion, but the caution applies as well to our interpretive
confrontations with other forms of discourse.

Each reader will need to determine for himself what weight to
accord B's perspective. It would be naive, however, to argue that the
stories which convicted killers tell about themselves are unimportant,
without much influence on the development of conceptual frameworks for
analyzing the significance of their acts. Often, these narratives
provide information from which other forms of discourse, both "popular"
and more "scientific," draw inspiration. Recall, for example, my
previous reference to the receptive audience which Ted Bundy found for
his self-narrative about a man driven by pornography and alcohol to
kill dozens of young women. Quite aside from the question of whether
or not his claims were "true," future investigators studying serial
murder are sure to include Bundy among the "authorities" they cite.

I would like to suggest a perspective from which to view the
correspondence excerpted in this chapter. William James once remarked
that each individual has as many social selves as he has acquaintances
whose opinions he values. Over a three-year period, B. responded to my
letters with around fifty letters of his own, totalling close to 200
typed pages. If the amount of time and energy he devoted to the
correspondence can be taken as an indicator - imprecise, but an
indicator nonetheless - that on some level at least, B. valued my
opinion, then in studying the letters we might ask: What do these
personal documents suggest about the self B. would like a valued
acquaintance to see? And, What concerns are manifest in the letters as predominating themes? If B’s letters are viewed with these questions in mind; if the letters are regarded as part of a managed attempt at self-presentation (see Goffman, 1973), undertaken in a very circumscribed interpersonal context, rather than as a window on some imagined "essential self"; then they can be accepted as a source of valuable data. Even if that data can be used only to support the most tentative hypotheses about the person who produced it, the data deserves our attention nonetheless.

Personal Documents as Data: Selected Methodological Considerations

In what remains the classic work on the use of personal documents in psychological investigation, Allport (1942) proposes this definition: A personal document is "any self-revealing record that intentionally or unintentionally yields information regarding the structure, dynamics, and functioning of the author’s mental life" (p. xii). Among the examples he cites are various kinds of deliberately-produced autobiographies, artistic productions, diaries, and letters. As noted previously, at issue here is a collection of letters, written by one individual to another, in the context of a correspondence spanning three years. Space will not permit a detailed discussion of methodological problems related to the use of personal documents as "scientific aids" (Allport, 1942, p. 20); however, it seems clear that such a discussion would need to address literary as well as scientific considerations. For a broad introduction to some of these issues, readers are referred to Chapter One, which includes a description of
the social constructionist orientation to inquiry in psychology; and also to Appendix One, which addresses relevant questions such as these: What boundaries need be drawn around "the science of psychology"? And, by what criteria should the appropriateness of various methodological approaches to psychological knowledge be assessed? For immediate purposes, I will confine my brief comments to two issues, the value of the documents as sources of data, and the process of interpretation.

The Value of the Letters

I do not intend to formulate any generalizations about multiple murderers based on the letters included in this chapter. The knowledge I seek is idiographic; the level of my analysis is primarily descriptive. Given these parameters, by what criteria might the letters' value be judged?

One consideration is the letter-writer's honesty. Here, declaring his innocence over and over again, is a man who a jury found guilty of more than twenty murders. Is the author of the letters to be believed? If not, should we bother attending to what he writes? Of course to the first question there is no easy answer. No doubt many of the claims B. makes are accurate; others are almost surely false. At any rate, important to remember is the fact that B's life may well depend on whether he and his attorneys can convince an appeals court that he was not the compulsive killer portrayed at his original trial. Obviously, the incentive to depict himself in a favorable light is a powerful one. Its existence should remind each reader how important it is to approach B's letters with an attitude of skepticism. Although the reasons justifying it might be less compelling, that same attitude
would be appropriate for an investigator approaching any individual’s personal correspondence. Studies in social psychology have demonstrated repeatedly the power, and prevalence, of the self-serving bias.

The second question posed above is the more interesting one. If there is strong reason to suspect deception, perhaps both deliberate and unintentional, should we bother with B’s letters at all? Allport’s (1942) refreshing pragmatism is nowhere more evident than in his references to the value of personal documents whose authors intend their writing to serve primarily a "rebuttal" function. He suggests that even when we are without a reliable yardstick for conclusively determining the accuracy of competing versions of the same individual’s story, "good sportsmanship" demands that we not ignore the individual’s own subjective account (p. 44). Granted, B’s letters are biased; it seems likely, in fact, that they contain deliberate falsehoods. Still, B. deserves his say, especially in light of the fact that the selectively chosen "facts" which emerge as "truth" in any judicial proceeding do not always inspire absolute confidence, either.

What about the possibility of unintentional deception, deception which is rooted in the subject’s inability to fathom what is "true" about himself? Allport (1942) addresses this issue. Most important, he emphasizes that a document’s value is not a function of whether the statements it contains can be accepted at face value.

A point made by nearly all writers is that, in order to be useful, personal documents need not be taken at face value. Even the production of a paranoid, not one word of which may be believed, can reveal much concerning the writer. (p. 30)
In Allport's taxonomy of the motives which prompt writers to produce personal documents, B's letters probably fall most clearly under the heading of "special pleading" (p. 69). These are documents produced because the writer wants "to prove that he is more sinned against than sinning" (p. 69); often, such documents reveal "artifices and forms of self-deception of interest to the psychologist." In fact, writes Allport, "the more extreme and obvious [an author's process of self-justification], the more value [his autobiographical materials] may have in helping the psychologist" glimpse the kind of person he is (p. 70). Again, Allport counsels pragmatism. An investigator attempting to assess which of a subject's statements can and cannot be believed must take into account whatever information he can gather about the subject from other sources, and then proceed with caution, as always "alert to symptoms of self-deception and rationalization" (p. 31).

This much should be clear: the question of the letters' validity is not to be confused with the question of whether the letters provide the reader with privileged access to B's "essential self." Because our interest is in the letters as a managed attempt at self-presentation, the important issue is whether the letters help to clarify B's situation as he would have it understood. This interest in the subject's own "definition of the situation" is consistent with Allport's perspective on the value of personal documents, and also with the perspectives of other, like-minded investigators who have argued in support of phenomenologically-oriented research (for example Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927, and Marsh, Rosser, and Harre, 1978). To help determine whether or not the "definition of the situation" which emerges from his
letters is indicative of how B. actually perceives himself and his accusers, I have relied on several informal procedures. On two separate visits to the prison where he is incarcerated, I spoke with B. for a total of around twenty-five hours. I have also spoken with him by telephone on several occasions. In addition, I have attended to other non-quantitative validity checks which Allport suggests, among them the letters' internal consistency, and my intuitive sense about their author.

Finally, it is necessary to ask whether the letters excerpted here are representative of B's perspective over time. I will have more to say on this issue under a section entitled "Notes on the editing process." For now, it will suffice to point out that the letters selected for inclusion span the entire period of my correspondence with B., approximately three years.

The Process of Interpretation

Even if one is prepared to concede that an individual's personal letters constitute a valuable source of psychological data, questions may persist about how to go about the interpretation of that data. This is hardly surprising. Scholars who debate the canons of textual interpretation differ sharply on many issues. According to Allport (1942), one particular issue looms large, is in fact the "essence of the methodological problem of personal documents" (p. 21). That issue concerns the appropriate balance between a purely inductive approach, where an investigator working with a "know-nothing" attitude (Spence, 1988) tries to identify patterns emerging from the text; and another approach, perhaps more familiar, where an investigator tries to
"discover" in the text material supporting a pre-existing conceptual or theoretical bias. Is pure induction a realistic goal? That is, can B's letters actually be permitted to "speak for themselves"? Or is it inevitable that each reader will discover in them evidence to confirm prior "truths" about multiple murderers? What balance is desirable, and possible, between the processes of induction and illustration?

These are complex questions, certainly not to be decided here. It seems apparent that "simon-pure induction" (Allport, 1942, p. 49) is an impossibility, but less obvious is the issue of the extent to which an investigator's pre-existing conceptual biases can be bracketed in the service of "objectivity." In the present case, I have deliberately sidestepped some thorny methodological problems by attempting a minimal amount of interpretation. I have not, for example, tried to demonstrate how the content of B's letters might be used to support some theoretical understanding of violent behavior, or, more specifically, multiple murder. I have tried to operate primarily at a descriptive level, and I wish to again emphasize the exploratory character of my observations about thematic currents emerging from the letters.

Recognizing that even my attempts at description will reflect the biases I bring to my reading of the letters, I have tried to keep in mind several of the criteria Allport (1942) lists for "validating" any conceptualization of a text. "Feelings of subjective certainty" is one such criterion. Themes which I sense are present in the letters but for which I can identify relatively little support have not been included. Another criterion is "social agreement." While I have stopped short of convening a diagnostic case conference of the sort which Murray (1938)
advocated for negotiating consensus about a given clinical case or written document, I have informally discussed selected letters with other interested persons, using their reactions as an imprecise but still valuable check on my own. A third criterion mentioned by Allport is "internal consistency." If, for example, themes of narcissism and self-effacement were to emerge from a collection of letters written by the same author, then an effort to resolve the apparent contradiction would be indicated. I have tried to be sensitive to whether the few prevalent themes I identify seem congruent with one another.

In conclusion, then, I would like to restate my primary points. The interpretation of personal documents is inevitably an inexact enterprise (even when formal, quantitative methods of content analysis give the appearance of precision), requiring that the conscientious interpreter occupy a middle ground between the poles of pure induction and theory imposition. To the extent possible, I have tried to avoid the treacheries of interpretation by confining my gloss on the letters to a descriptive identification of emerging themes. Even so, Allport's (1965) cautionary words are worth another repetition. We "shall do well to hold our interpretations lightly"; and our "hopes should not be too high" (p. 160).

Background to the Correspondence

I first wrote to B. in February, 1986. Before that time, I had read three booklength accounts of his arrest and conviction. In the back of my mind was the comment made by another notorious killer with whom I had corresponded at some length more than ten years earlier:
That beast [created by the media] was not me - But its what everyone wants me to be so they make me up to be a reflection of their fears lies and Bullshit [sic]." I wondered whether if given the opportunity to speak for himself, B. might force me to re-evaluate the impressions of him I had formed from reading secondhand accounts. It was not even clear at that point whether B. would admit any culpability for the crimes he allegedly committed. How would a man who was declared legally "sane" discuss his conviction on more than twenty counts of murder? I wondered, so I invited B. to engage in a dialogue with me. The following excerpt from the one-page letter I wrote will convey the tone of my gambit:

I’m a graduate student in psychology.

I don’t want to waste your time and I don’t want to bother you.

I’m interested in you, though, so I thought I’d write and let you know. I’ve read the various books about you so I already know at least what was brought out in court about the crimes for which you were convicted.

What I’m most interested in is how you tell the story of your life. If you had to isolate the relationships, the important experiences, the decision points, etc. that have given your life its shape, how would you tell the story?

I’d appreciate it if you’d take the first step in entering into a dialogue with me.

Just over a week later, the first letter from B. arrived, encouraging me to write back. For several years the exchange of letters continued, at first very regularly, eventually at a more uneven pace. During that time, B. phoned me on a number of occasions, usually after arranging a time when I would be at home to receive the call, but at least once without giving me any prior notification. Twice, I visited him in
prison, each visit consisting of around twelve hours of face-to-face contact over a period of two days.

Notes on the Editing Process

For inclusion here, I have selected eighteen from among the forty-five letters B. has written to me. Not included in the total count are a number of handpainted Christmas cards, birthday cards, and other miscellaneous items. In choosing which letters to include, I have sought to accomplish two objectives. First, I have tried to select some of the more interesting letters. Second, I have tried to present a representative collection. Toward these ends, I first arranged the letters in chronological order, then grouped them in clusters of five, and finally chose two letters from each cluster, eighteen letters in all.

A major concern has been to remove from the letters all information which directly identifies their author. Of course readers well acquainted with the literature on serial killers will have little difficulty discovering a number of tantalizing clues. Suffice it to say that I have taken what I consider are reasonable measures to protect B's identity. One effect is the deletion from the letters of many detailed autobiographical passages. This is regrettable; obviously, some of those sections are of particular interest. However, where the aims of disclosure and confidentiality have come into conflict, I have generally allowed the goal of protecting B's identity to dictate my editorial decision. Where I have judged that certain autobiographical
references are not so specific that a typical reader could use them to identify the author of the letters, the references have been retained.

Unrelated to the issue of confidentiality but also affecting content, I have in several instances deleted passages which were repetitious and seemed to add little. However, for the most part I have tried to preserve the original balance among various kinds of content. The one exception is autobiographical material.

I have taken few editorial liberties where matters of style and form of expression are concerned. Generally speaking, misspellings and grammatical irregularities (both of which abound) have not been altered. I have corrected misspellings only where I judge that the mistake is a typing error. In a few cases, I have reworded very small portions of text, hardly ever more than several words, to preserve the essential meaning of a sentence. For example, in an instance where I delete a specific reference to a book, substituting for it a more generic reference, that change might necessitate a minor alteration in the structure or wording of the sentence.

B. does not indent to indicate the start of a new paragraph or train of thought. Although I recognize that in doing so I might create an appearance of coherence and organization which is not always present in the original documents, I have added paragraph divisions. Usually, these divisions are implied in B's letters - as, for example, when he breaks off typing in the middle of a line and begins his next sentence at the left margin.

I have used brackets in two ways. When I have altered B's original wording slightly, for clarification, I have indicated my
revision with brackets. In other instances, where a gloss has seemed necessary in order for the reader to understand a reference, I have used brackets to enclose the commentary in the middle of the letter. In such cases, the bracketed material is underlined.

Finally, I have inserted between some of the letters a commentary intended to fill in some of the gaps created by my choice to include only a relatively small portion of the total correspondence. These comments are as brief as possible, meant only to highlight selected points from the omitted letters.

The Letters

March 1, 1986

Dear Jeffery L. Smalldon,

I received your letter dated February 20, which arrived here on the 27th. If you feel by reading these books on me that you have learned about me, then I am sorry to have to tell you, you don't know nothing about me. There are five books out on me with two more coming out this year. Since I never granted an interview, nor my family to any of them, they are fantasy. One guy took all the newspaper clipping and wrote a book about my life, another to files from the transcripts, yet another did his based on some fake attack of him. The other two one from a doctor is bits and pieces, and the latest one claims he had interviewed me for hundreds of hours at the prison. he wants you to believe that we are close friends. His investigator has been at the prison one time for an hour. What he wrote is fantasy and fraud. So what you may have read about me is about a made up character. Now if you say its from what you read in the News Media, nearly 80% of that is not factual.

In regards to what you ask, that you wanted to know what I think of my life or what has happen with it, I have no comment on it. I have already written a book telling everything that has happen to me, will be on the market later this year hopefully. Also a biographical psychological novel has been written on my entire life, which again will be out later this year.

Most of my time is spent doing oil paintings, which I sell to off set my needs. Enclosed is a list of my oil paintings.
You don't have to defend yourself in order to build up trust, with the number of letter I get I answer most of them to pass the time away.

Look forward to hearing from you, have a nice day.

Sincerely,
B.

March 16, 1986

Dear Jeff,

I received your letter on the 13th of March, thought I would get this one off since I am doing letters today. You mention that you have read the books on me, all five of them? And now you have read [the most recent one, which is a big hoax]. I am sure you will be reading about it soon as I believe that AP will pick up [the hoax] story and carry it nation wide. You see when I tell you something I don't expect anyone to believe me, nor do I defend myself. You see if its coming from me, most people think I am going to say anything that is favorable to me. And in the legal circle they call it self serving. So I always look to think that people don't believe what I say, but when I do say something, you'll know its factual as it can be confirm by more than me. I think I mention nearly 80% of what has been written about me is false, fantasy, second or third hand information, as I have never granted an interview, and the prison knows it.

[A former journalism professor, a friend of mine,] wrote the Psychological novel only because he has been a legal researcher on my case [for years]. He has researched my entire family and has talked to most of them. So if anyone has information, he would have it from all angles. But his book is soon to be released. It is not out yet. In it, they profile both families, my parents and my own. But it does not cover my arrest or case at all. As it ends with my arrest. The book which I wrote with help contains 80% of first hands quotes and factual information from the official record. It is not out yet, there is where you would get the factual information about my life and thoughts, and its not based on a one sided view of my case, it gives all the facts as they actually are. Thats why I don't answer questions.

I am sure as you say you have thoughts about many things, well if you read some of those book at least you would know some of the things I was involved with [names several]. I think it would be easier if you give me more back ground on yourself, then I would have some questions about you or find out what we have in common to write about. I didn't say I didn't want to write, but many areas of my life I am not allowed to comment about, not my choice, but my legal staff. I have many rules to follow, more than what most people in prison have. But if I don't follow what my attorneys say then why have them.
Oh I am sure your curiosity is no different then anyone elses. But I must be a disappointment to many as I at least answer people. [Other widely-known individuals convicted of multiple murder] from what I understand don't answer people unless they are conning them. In regards to being infamous, I don't like it. I am just a person caught up in the system. I am stereotyped from what has been written about me. Most people don't know me. The warden at the County Jail is the only man who ever quoted the truth, he said: "There is a great deal of difference between [B.] the man, and [B.] the media monster." As for the others [who’ve been convicted of multiple murder] who they want to put me in the class with. I am not their judge nor do I know if they did what they did. I am sure only they know so I have no comment about them. Before you ask, yes I have heard from some of them. No, I don't write to them except for [names one] and that was years ago. [Another one] is at the other end of the state, and I only hear what the grapevine says.

If your wondering why I write to so many people to pass the time away as you put it, its because I am in bed 20 hours a day. The doctors say I have [a disease], a form of. For this reason I type letters and do the oil painting. I have been painting [for four years], never even was into drawing before that time. So what I have learned is self taught. I think most people buy them as collectors items, not for art value. And I think I have priced them so any one who really wants one can afford one. [Another convicted multiple murderer] get between $300 and $500 a painting, and his work I am not sure rates those prices. And by the way all of my oil paintings are originally done by me. My famous [proper name] series even with doing many of the same painting, no two are alike. In fact if a person wants there's personalized, I have done that too. There is 2700 color mixes I can do. So see even if you bought four of the same painting I would never make them the same. I have done 235 [of one kind of painting] and no two of them are alike. This is not paint by numbers, according to [a well-known art museum] when they looked at my work, I asked them what I could do to improve since they were the experts. I was told I had a style all of my own and I should not change but stick with it. I don't consider myself an artist, even with selling 350 art works, I price the work according to what it cost me and the time involved. Oh I am sure I could charge more, but why? As long as the art work pays for itself, that is all I care. The rest of the money is used for me to cover postage and envelopes and my cigars. I have no other income, don't want charity and refuse money from family and friends. If they want to help me out they buy paintings. As long as I can afford to write to people I do, if not I'll stop. But the problem I have is the [disease] is causing me problems, and I don't know how long I'll be able to paint, or even type.

Listen, Don't feel I put you on the defense alert, because I was not intending to do so. Your going to find, you will get straight bold not tackful answers to what you write, because that's the way I am. Same if you want to ask a question now and then, don't beat around the bush, ask what you want to know. You'll find you may get an answer.
And listen student, I know you may not have a lot of money, but don't expect the paintings to last. Sure I promote them, but it also pays for me to keep writing. You may never been to prison and I hope you never try for a first hand experience. But once here you'll learn you better have money. As they don't allow anything to be sent in. You must buy from them and at their prices. No, there is no discounts, full price sometimes higher then street prices.

I think you will find the first few letter you will unsure as to what to write, relax, I am just an average guy, forget the infamous, give me the same respect you would like given to you and that's what you will receive. I am know one special. I am independent, open minded, considered a liberal, non judgemental of anyone or anything, outspoken, and not tactful. I do consider myself honest and a man of my word. There is only one thing you got that know one can take from you, thats your word, if your word is know good, then your no good. That's simple, yes I'm a character. Listen I am going to cut this one off as I still have five more to go tonight. Write when you have time, send a photo of yourself, itu for my collection, I have one of everyone I write, if you want it back say, and it will be returned.

As always,

B.

Commentary

Three additional letters from B. were dated April 6, April 22, and May 4. All three were long letters, running three or four typed pages. In them, B. filled in some of the details of his life (e.g., family members, marriages, education, work history). He also expressed frustration over the popular image of him as a "monster." In no instance, he said, had concrete evidence been introduced which proved conclusively that he killed anyone. He encouraged me to regard with skepticism everything I had read about him, and cautioned me against trying to read between the lines in his letters. He emphasized the need for each of us to learn how the other one thinks. In one letter, expressing his satisfaction over my having provided him with some details about my own life, he wrote, "Now you have given me something to feed on."
Dear Jeff,

Sorry it's taken so long to getting back to you, but I haven't been feeling up to par. Now I am behind about 20 letters. By the way yes your letters are easier to read, I think it was just one or two that I had trouble reading, guess you must have tried to go to fast. The same thing happens to me when I try to type too fast as I am not the best at typing. I get carried away. Of course with my own hand writing you wouldn't be able to read it at all. Thank you for sending both those reports [a psychological assessment of myself, done as a course assignment; and a short working paper I'd written for myself on "some ways we think about people who kill"]. I have read them over once, and will do so again before sending them back so that I get my opinions down. I could give you general comments as the psychological profile I compared to several of my own, as I have nearly all the reports the doctors made on me, at least copies of them. Your psychological profile seems to me to be geared to only two areas, that being education and your work habits [largely true, since the report responded to a hypothetical referral for "vocational counseling"]. I felt it was shallow as it didn't give a clear profile of the person only for those two areas I mention. I tried to compare your M.M.P.I. test. But you must have used a different scoring system. Both mine were graded in Minnesota. You show no lie factor on your scale, mine came back zero on both. That test was an issue with the state at my trial. They didn't want to believe that I did the test in two and half hours answering all 576 questions, I believe that's what there is. But I did. And I took the test twice, some 11 months apart by two different doctors. The state contended I faked the test. Bullshit.

Your other writing I will comment on later, and the only comment I have is you took alot of pages to only bring out one point, but I guess that was to justify that point.

I am glad to see that both of us are not so defensive about comment to each other, I was getting to the point of saying I have had enough of this, and call it quits. I don't like to argue all the time as I respect others to have a different view of me, since they can only go from what they have read about me. But what I am saying is that most of what has been printed is not a true picture of me. But I find your perspectives and positions both interesting, and I am not into stroking you just telling you how I feel. The reason I ask more about is so I get a better understanding of where your coming from. I don't assume anything you say, and I don't like to read anything into it. If I am not sure of what your saying I'll ask more questions. Something I learned along time ago. If you don't understand ask.

So how did things go on your last quarter tests? I trust that you passed them all with flying colors. Hey what do you think of the M.M.P.I. test? I have taken so many tests its hard to believe what they all tell. What I don't like is what they assume in them when they give
their interpretations. I know in my case many doctors have read things into what I have said, because actually I don't explain myself clearly all the time. You know how you make one statement and they want to label you, for just that one thought. I have been told my several of the doctors I am the most complexed person they ever met, so if thats the case then how can some of them draw conclusions to what I say when they only talk to me for a few hours?

Oh by the way your psychological profile, I did learn things about you, but as I said it did not cover your entire thinking pattern, or all aspects of life, but now thats my view of it, so don't get mad by it. Maybe in comparing it to mine and the areas they covered it just seems broader. I appreciated your honesty and it shows in that report, but still some areas you just touched on the surface. Of course in mine they wanted to cover sexual areas of thinking more then others, so that maybe the reason.

You asked with taking so many tests do I have strong feeling about them. Well I don't feel a test given on any given day can tell what makes up the whole person, simply because there are many factors to be considered, stress, pressure, type of setting, the paranoid feelings I had, but I did the best I could on them. Never knowing what they were looking for, and I never got any of the results until after I was here at the prison. The first time I heard about them was at the trial. God with the number I had taken I could fake or cheat on them if I wanted to, because I didn't know what they were looking for in the first place.

Yes some of the things said about me from the test depicted me as the way I am, but for the most part I thought they didn't spend enough time to get the true picture of me. I guess we are all different in our own ways, maybe I am too gullible an not tactful enough, but one things is for sure I say what's on my mind at the time, and if you honest you never have to remember what you say as it will come out the same each time. Its when you start to lie, that you forget what you said to the last one, you know what I mean?

As I mention above I will comment more on your paper on "Some ways we think about people who kill." Its harder for me as I have never knowingly killed anyone, and I don't think I could as I don't get that mad about anything. I know that may sound strange to you since I have been convicted of killing [many], but its true. I have had what they call truth serum the largest amount they could give me, and I still didn't know anything about the killings. so my opinion on this report or paper will be just my opinions from a readers point of view, or what I got out of it.

I thought you were going to bring up this next subject, as I watch the show both nights [a television movie about a well-known serial murder case]. Did you happen to read the book, while I didn't several of the men who did thought they left alot out. The movie left too many unanswered questions, and didn't tell the true story. I agree with your comments too. But you notice they never actually put [the
alleged killer] with the victims, you have to assume he is the person, notice they never show his face when this so called crime is going on. Hey they could be copy cat crimes as you can get so many facts out of the newspapers when they happen, even if some of it is theory. Take [the case of ___________, another well-known serial killer], I have never believe he and he alone killed all those [people] yet your left to assume he did. In [the case depicted in the movie] your left to assume that the young girl jumping rope is the one [the accused] killed yet he was never tried for that case, so why put it in the movie. I am sure if [the State] had the evidences they would have tried him on that case, so why didn’t they? In my case they have never put me with any of the victims before, during or after the crime. Even the last one there is breaks in the chain of events. By joining them all together in my case you have to assume that I killed them all.

Hey with the oil paintings, you don’t have to keep telling me your going to get one, what do you think if after you by one I will stop writing? Well your wrong, all it will do is make me feel that I should continue to write, as the reason I sell them is so I can pay the cost so that I can write to people. I have to tell you this, and you may not like it. The prices of my oil painting are such that anyone can by them, I have open up such a range anyone can afford them. In fact I have even had people buy them on time in payments. I get alot of flack from the men around me who are selling paintings, because they think I keep my prices too low. See they feel everything they paint should get $100 or more. And I feel I price my painting according to the amount of time and cost I have in them. And as long as I can cover the costs plus pay for my little needs then I will continue to paint. I just wanted to let you know where I am coming from with them. They are my livelyhood, without them I would not be pen-paling, as I couldn’t afford it. You know we pay for everything we get on death row, nothing is free. And we have to pay the prices they set, many are higher then on the street because they feel they should be allowed to mark things up ten percent.

You asked if I felt I was better at faces or landscapes. I don’t consider myself a portrait painter, after all I am a beginner, yet I have tried many different things. I have just done a new one called Pale Rider. Its Clint Eastwood all in dark brown against a bright orange speckled background in earth tones. Its 22 by 28 and sells for $75, but its one of a kind and will never appear in my listing. You can put it on hold for $25.00 and the total price of it is only $75.00. To me Pale Rider remines me of you, because like him who rides into town and searches out the truth and rights the wrong. I think in your field you want to do the same. You don’t stay with one job, but are searching for what you want. No I am not stroking you, its just my gut feelings.

In regards to phone calls, thats up to you. I think I have given you all the times and weekends are cheaper then week days, all calls are limited to thirty minutes. And believe me that time goes fast. I talk to you directly from my cell, and all calls are collect.
So I guess I have covered most of the questions in your letter. I just threw up again so I think I am going to cut this off for now.

By the way I have enclosed a joke for you to try [a quiz called the "Polish College Entrance Test"], in your next letter you can list all thirty answers as to what you think they say and then I will send you the answer sheet. Go ahead and fill it out have some fun in life. Yes before you ask, I made up most of it. I make up many cartoon jokes and interesting saying to add to my letters where I don’t type a small chapter in a book when I write. Just like this one, I feel if I don’t sign off soon I’ll tire you out. don’t read in any thing to what I say, if your not sure of where I am coming from ask questions because I sure as hell am going to ask you when I am not sure.

Take care for now, sorry for the long wait in writing, it doesn’t happen that often. Unless I have things to do for my attorneys then all pen pals go on hold. By the way, don’t forget you will have to give me your phone number ahead of time, and I won’t call unless we are set up for it. Hell your not that far from here, maybe some day you would like to visit. Yes I have the right to approve all and any of my visitors on my list. Who knows maybe you would bring your wife with you. She is welcome. I notice you don’t have much to say about her. Fill me in on how married life is? You have only been married a short time, I would like to hear your opinion on it. You know I have been married twice? Do you have any children. Do you have a sense of humor or wit. I notice you don’t display much in your letters. Hell thats what keeps me going as thats the way I was on the street.

Take care for now, write when you have time, as always, 

B.

June 10, 1986

Dear Jeff,

I received your letter on the fifth of June, you seem to have the time to get back to me right away, and I appreciate that.

Hey in regards to what you say and don’t say, don’t assume anything like I would stop writing for that reason if you say something that I am not in agreement with, I would tell you. What I don’t like is that you don’t fully answer my letters when I ask questions, I don’t know if your doing that, but you avoided some in the last letter.

In regards to your [paper, "Some ways we think about people who kill"], while they are based on your opinions I didn’t take offense to where you had my name in it. Everyone has a right to an opinion, if we all agreed with each other just think of what the world would be like. I think I told you I agree with some of your thoughts on the subjects,
only I felt you used alot of pages just to reinforce the tip of the iceberg. Nothing was wrong with it. Your psychological report, you had told me was a class project, so certainly it was limited to just what you wanted them to know and get the job done to get a grade on it. By the way, how did you do with that project, what grade did you get?

I also agree with you on the psychological tests, but I think are views are different. The conclusions that are drawn from them are theories and not fact, and just like no two bodies are alike, how then can they make a general conclusion to someone mind?

You seem to think the M.M.P.I. can be faked, but your also in the know of that test. I am not. And I still maintain I was not faking the test, because I didn’t know what the tests was suppose to show, or what they were looking for. In fact to this day I don’t know what that test shows. All I know is that its alot of short questions, 576 of them, and I took it as a speed test, to see how fast I could do it. Many of the questions were dumb to me, but then maybe my answers were dumb too. I picked the answers that went along with my way of thinking. Certainly when your answers three questions a minute, there is no way to remember what answer you gave on number 100 when I was on 300, because I was moving too fast. The state’s attorney was trying to say I had help, when I was alone taking the test each time. I took a large battery of tests with four different men or doctors. But none of them ever told me what the tests show or what they were looking for. No doubt if you understand the tests and someone told you what to look out for, you might be able to fake it. I also took the SADS test with some 2500 questions asked orally, and I was beginning to think their was something wrong with [the psychologist administering it]. Because I thought the questions were stupid. I spent five weeks in trial not for whether or not I was guilty or innocent, but if I was sane or insane, and I could have told them I wasn’t. So tell me what is the M.M.P.I. test suppose to show, I mean why is it given? I was also told that the only place they can score it is back in Minnesota, is that true? Since they made up the test they hold the answers, for the scoring. At least that is what I was told.

When I asked about your sense of humor, I was just making a comment from your letters, you don’t seem to be loose with me. In many cases I think your too serious, where I have always been with most pen-pals witty and humorous, in many cases adding jokes to my letters. I think that is one of the draw backs in your letters, your too serious never cracking a joke. To me life is not meant to be that way. I guess I also use it to keep the pressure off me, and no I am not running away from anything, its just the way I was when I was on the outside. I am outgoing, and can make friends easy. I have even noticed that with the pen-pals who not only write but who have visited me here. Many come down up tight because they have never been to a prison before. Well I learned in public speaking, when your not sure of the group crack a joke to get them on your side in case you make an error, they will take it lightly. Well I do that with people too who I have just met, kinda
like trying to get them to relax. I can go up to a perfect stranger
and to some insult them, but in a joking way, just to break the ice.

You come on in a serious way even with your letters, so that why I
have backed off from my being loose so to speak with you. While your
letters are interesting, they are on a serious level, and even when I
bring up like Clint Eastwood, you had no comment about that. I compare
you to him, while I was telling you about having a painting of him, but
you were not interested in handling that, instead you again reassured
me you were going to be ordering one and that's not what I was looking
for. I wanted your opinion on Clint Eastwood, while at the same time
trying to find out if you were interested in him. You went to the
defensive side. In fact your not interested in talking about anything
like art, world affairs, sports, and even family life. Your up tight,
and keep in mind that an opinion based on what I have read from your
letters. And no I am not a doctor trying to examine you, its the way
your coming across.

So what did [your wife] see in you, and why so late to marry? She
sounds like the best thing that has happen to your life. What do you do
to get away from your schooling and heavy thoughts? So you have been
married just a little less then a year, is this the first time? Both?
What is she interested in besides you? You know I have been twice that
route, and I would do it again. Also I have lived with three others,
one broke up on her own, the other two I dumped of the live in's. In
any case she must be more interesting then you as you are too rapped up
in your schooling, and if I have the wrong impression let me know.

On page three [of your letter] you went back to the M.M.P.I. test
again. You say its easy to fake it [this is not an accurate paraphrase
of what I actually said], unless they are out of touch with reality,
and I disagree with that too. Not only those people, but also the ones
who have no understanding of the test. So they don't have to be out of
touch with reality as you say. But I notice you covered yourself with
adding that you don't know that much about the test, so I can live with
that.

I am glad to see we look at psychologists and psychiatrists the
same way [I had expressed my general distaste for fitting individuals
into diagnostic boxes, what Maslow called "rubricizing" people]. You
say your a complexed man and I have been told the same so how then can
they come up with simple answers to fit us? That to me is where I say
their theories and opinions are just guessing at it. They seem to think
that everything has an answer, and that you can fit into whatever group
they want to fit you in. And I don't agree with that, not in a few
hours or a few hundred hours can they understand your thinking for [all
the years of your life]. Purely speculative.

So you think its strange for a person who you claim was convicted
of _ murders or killings to say he couldn't kill anyone. Why? First
off, my trial was on insanity not guilt, so you have to assume that I
was guilty because they found me to be sane. [You have to make a lot of
assumptions to conclude that I committed all the murders]. I was out of the state when [lots of the victims] disappeared and it can be proven. Now you see why I don't defend myself to people who don't know the facts, and I let them believe what they want. The news media never printed the facts only what they were given behind a gag order issued by the court from the state. Your assuming I am the killer because I was convicted, and that's hogwash. What is your factual bases to fall back on?

Let's assume you loan your car to a friend, you get it back three hours later, your driving home and a cop stops you for going across the double yellow line. In looking in your car, because you don't look right to him, he opens the car trunk and finds a nude male body, and a couple penthouse magazines. Your arrested, charged with murder, sexual assault, kidnapping. That enough for the death penalty in [the state I'm from]. How do you prove you didn't do it? The other guy who borrowed your car says he didn't. The victim is a stranger. Just reading what the headlines would carry: Schooling doctor experiments with Murder. From the start since the body is nude we can assume you had sex with him, since he is in your trunk you put him there for you kidnapped him, and since he is dead you murdered him. Oh and since he is male you homosexual. Now with that sound strange if you said, But I didn't kill him, I couldn't kill anyone.

Knowing me and the way I have been most of my life, I have never been in a fight, deplore any violences. It's not out of line for me to say I couldn't kill anyone. I have never been in the service, don't own a gun. Have the attitude of not getting mad but getting even, I have always used the law and the courts. Think about it. Could you kill someone? Why?

Moving on, the telephone: we are allowed to call on weekends 8 am to 12 noon cut off. 30 min. collect. If I was to call you on the 21st or 22nd, on the 21st best time would be 8 am or 10:30 for Saturday. On Sunday, it would have to be 11 a.m. my time. I think your on the same time as we are. Weekdays we are allowed from 8 am to 2 pm cut off. Keep in mind we have 12 men back here on the unit so its who ever ask first gets it. Regards to visiting here, I would have to add you to the list with information to get you cleared first. But thats up to you and later on. Your questions [about one of the books describing my case]. Believe 50% of what you read and it may be close. Bye for now.

B.

Commentary

Four additional letters were dated June 22, July 5, July 25, and August 12. The June 22 letter was written primarily to follow up on our first telephone conversation, which had taken place the day before. I had expressed previously my general dislike for speaking over the telephone, and B's letter included the reassuring comment, "You came across on the phone as a friendly good
The July 5 letter expressed a great deal of anger, and included the suggestion that we break off our correspondence. In my letters, I had been pressing B. to explain what I perceived to be striking incongruities between his version and the "official" version of his case. B. complained about my habit of "reading things into" what he said. "I don't like to feel that everything I say is going to be challenged," he wrote. He allowed that his conviction, his incarceration, and all the negative publicity about his case had prompted him to become a "very touchy person." He added, "Whether you know it or not, you can go nuts being confined the way I am without too much help from the outside. I don't need to be tested any more then I am right now." The letter concluded with an invitation to "write if you want."

B. responded to my attempt at conciliation by writing, "I am still interested in writing you and I am sure you will still have questions, but take my answers for what they are." The problem, he proposed, had been "a lack of understanding." He asked that I keep in mind the predicament he was in, imprisoned and reviled for something he did not do. "Don't get the impression that I am an innocent babe in the woods so to speak. I may be guilty of many things...but killing is not one of mine." He also expressed some frustration over my apparent unwillingness to help him pay for stamps and stationery by purchasing one of his paintings.

In his August 12 letter, B.'s references covered a broad range of topics, including sports, the use of diagnostic labels ("people who don't know what they are talking about always want to put a label on you"), politics ("we are living on credit, and sooner or later the bill is going to come due"), religion ("I believe in God, and all that goes with him. It is my faith in HIM that has kept me going.... No matter what they say about me, they can't take my faith from me"), and art. He thanked me for a newspaper clipping about his case, and asked that I send copies of any references to him that I come across. With regard to the recent friction over my requests that he explain certain puzzling aspects of his case, B. indicated a willingness to let bygones be bygones: "Hey Jeff, instead of going
over the past and continue to talk about what was done or said, Let’s just forget it and go with the present letter." In an apparent attempt at humor, he added, "If it happens again, I will be over to your house for dinner, and it better be a good meal....ha ha."

August 31, 1986

Hi Jeff,

I received your long letter along with the clippings and your paper [on the diagnosis of psychopathy, written for a course on delinquency] on the 28th of August. And since this is a holiday weekend I have time to get this one off to you since we don’t do much on the holidays. First off thank you for sending all the things, How are you doing? And say hi to the better half, [your wife]. She is the better half isn’t she?

Well guy how did all your class studies go with the final papers? By the way the one that you sent to me, what kind of grade did you get on it? Congratulations on the first anniv. Just think its only the first five that are the hardest, once you get passed that you got it made, or so they say. But then who are they?

Thank you for your consideration in wanting to get back to me when you get a letter from me. But I understand you have more things to do besides write to me, so I don’t expect a return right away. But if it went beyond a month, then you would be put in the inactive files.

Hey you know the encyclopedia of modern murder [I had sent a xerox copy of the synopsis of B’s case contained in Wilson and Seaman (1983), The Encyclopedia of Modern Murder], it would take me almost three pages to explain all the errors. This is total garbage. Hell they would have been better off taking something out of one of the fantasy books written about me at least where the case is concern they do have some of the facts right. Then to the transcripts of the trial is a matter of public record, all they would have had to do is a little research. I hope your college doesn’t put faith in that book as a reference book. I don’t think you can put a whole paragraph together being truthful. And no I am not defending myself, just telling you a fact. Things that could have easily been checked out or taken from the news media would have done just as well. Even any of the police arrest records could have cleared much of this fantasy up. But thanks for sending it. I get a kick out of reading how so many people can change my whole life around and yet never have they met me. Never researched anything, and they print it as if it was fact. It makes you think if with just my case and the number of false claims and stories what they did to some of the others. Enough on the subject. But if you have some questions of some area you would like explained let me know.
With regards to your paper, Psychopath: Clinical Type or Quantitative Conceptual Model? I will take the time to give you a written report on the paper and also get some views from some other guys on death row, if you don’t mind. I just finished a letter with a pen-pal where we were talking about labeling people. Like as if we all belong in one group or another. Whatever happen to individualism? If like they say the mind is a complexed things then how come these doctors claim to know all and are able to group people. Thats why I don’t think much of psychic doctors. Its like trying to be an expert in too many fields at one time, don’t you think? Dr. [himself] says that. ha ha.

Hey Jeff in one paragraph you want to have me answer [that paper you wrote about psychopathy] and would appreciate comments, then you say to throw it away [I had told him he could pitch the copy when he was finished with it]. Be proud of what you do, the idea of just throwing it away, is not my cup of tea. You asked me to comment right on it, but I assume you really don’t care if you get it back, as then you say if I don’t comment just throw it away. But I would like to keep it and comment on another piece or two of paper. But if you need it back say so? Otherwise I am going to read it over and get back to you on it. But think positive when you write to me don’t put your work down before I get to it. I assume you want my honest opinion and not a pat on the back if I don’t agree with you. Hell I am just kidding with you. The only kind of opinions I give out is what I really think, and at times outspoken, so thats the kind of opinion your going to get from me.

Now since I skipped around I have to go back to number two.

[I had sent along a newspaper article on serial murder which featured a psychologist who had testified at B’s trial, in support of his attorney’s "insanity" strategy. B. goes on at length about what a joke he considers the psychologist to be, and about how quotes attributed to her in the article distort the amount of time they spent together. In particular, he found it outrageous that she would claim that she knows exactly what a serial killer will be like without even meeting him. She fits me in by saying I describe myself as a good father, good worker, but have extreme outbursts. Well the first two parts are true, but extreme outbursts. I have never had what they call an extreme outburst so she is not talking about me. In fact many of the things she mentions doesn’t fit me. I get a kick out of her comment: "Mass Murderers have an incapacity to relate to other people, to separate themselves from you and me" [not likely an accurate quote from the article]. Well then I must have been in the wrong business as all I did was around people. You name it I was around people nearly all the time. I am interested in knowing what you think of her, so fill me in?

Moving back to the letter. No I don’t know about the Dennis Nilsen case.
Yes the Cubs are washed up for the year and if they don’t watch out they will end up in the basement. I can’t believe they are so bad this year. Since I don’t follow the American League I don’t know how they are doing. I am pulling for L.A. Angels in the West to win. I think between the Mets and Houston that Houston can beat the Mets. In any case I don’t want to see the National East win the title for the National League.

Yes I have to agree with you that Jim McMahon he is a character, but I also think that’s what makes him work. Besides that the Bears have a good backup quarterback in the polock [presumably Mike Tomczak]. What do you think? I realize I am out on a limb with the Bears taking the super bowl, but it’s a better then average chance they will.

Hey it looks like Buffalo new quarterback Kelly didn’t do that well against the Bears last week, then too he didn’t play much, I don’t care for preseason as they don’t play all first string players. But next week we will start the regular season so its off to the races.

With regards to politics as you can see whatever I get into I know what I am talking about even if its just my political opinion. Many people don’t look beyond the top people and they don’t get involved in politics, I do. I hope I didn’t sound like a political teacher [the reference is presumably to his last letter, where he went on at some length about current political events].

With regards to the Catholic church, you got that right too, while I believe in the church as the center for religion I don’t think one religion is better then another nor do they have all the right stands that they take. So I guess I would be considered a catholic liberal, or Maverick.

It would be nice talking to you again so let me know.

In all the research I have done on Christ drawing and paintings there are no two alike. Each person sees Him how they want to. In mine [in his last letter, he had enclosed a copy of a drawing he did of the crucified Christ’s face] I believe the eyes tell the story, although the photo copy doesn’t do it justice. Keep in mine when your looking at his mouth at the time of his crucification he Thirst so thats why the mouth looks that way. He was in pain so thats why I did the face the way I did. Father _____ here says I got him looking mad. But I don’t think so.

Well I am going to let you go for now. Bye for now take care and I hope all is well at your end. Nothing new on the appeal so I guess we just have to wait again. As always,

B.
Two other letters were dated September 13 and September 22.

The September 13 letter, a long one that took "most of three hours," was written immediately following our second telephone conversation, about which B. commented, "I enjoyed talking to you.... How fast the 30 minutes goes when your talking with someone interesting. No strokes, just facts." He distinguished himself from most of the other death row inmates, remarking that he tends to keep to himself rather than spending time with "people who have I.Q.'s equal to their shoe size." As usual, he referred to all the "fantasy" that had been written about him. What goes on in the courtroom, he said, "is not about justice.... Its whoever tells the best story, most convincing actor." He suggested that I consider purchasing his painting of Christ's crucifixion ("Its going to be one of my classics"). Also, he alluded to his assorted pen pals: "I cover 14 states. From California to Maine, Oregon to Alabama, much of the midwest. From writers to house painters. Acid rock singer to professors, housewives to professional women."

The September 22 letter was written solely as a commentary on my paper, "Psychopathy: clinical type or quantitative conceptual model?" He had promised to respond, he reminded me: "One thing you will learn is my word is my bond." Remarking on Cleckley's list of "essential" features characterizing the psychopath, allowed, "I would have to say at one time or another I have had all of them but not together." He singled out two of the characteristics - unreliability and failure to follow any life plan - as completely missing the mark in his case.

Hi Jeff,

Well I hope you got caught up on your schedule and didn't take what I said the wrong way. I wasn't saying you were long winded, it was that your letters are long, with alot of subject. Your letters run six to eight pages long hand and that equal to four typed, oh well its no big deal, but I think if I got one 4 pages I would think your not feeling well. ha ha.
Hey let’s get another thing straight I am not against questions, as long as the whole letter doesn’t turn into just questions and answers. I had three such people try that and I felt like I had to make a statement to them. But they no longer receive letters from me. I guess they didn’t believe I’m a man of my word. But don’t think or feel you can’t ask questions because with me I assume everyone has got to have questions, just because of what has been said about me. That’s natural. End of subject.

Yes I too believe the phone call was less tense than the first one. Your easy to talk to, its just that 30 minutes can be so short when you want to get a lot in. You ever notice that. Yet there have been times when 30 minutes seemed like an hour. I think we both use the time well, you wonder about people who have long silences.

So did you get to watch number one and two go at it in Miami? I had Miami over Oklahoma, and I don’t follow college football. good game. I agree with you that Miami can’t be giving up that many points with their defense. Something is not going right. I think the Bears are giving up too many points in each game, I hope they are better with McMahon being back. Yes Atlanta is someone to watch this year, look for them in the playoff if they get going the rest of the year. You watched the Jets games, what about the turnover in overtime? That’s what I don’t like about the instant replay. they are doing no better than the guys on the field, what do you think?

So you thought the Green Bay/Chicago game was bad, so did I, it seems the Bears don’t have it together without the McMahon image. Tomczak is for the future but he needs playing experience. Buddy Ryan has to show instead of talk, they are making him eat everything he says. Don’t brag if you can’t deliver, and that’s his problem now. I have picked your Buffalo Bills to win today over Kansas City Chiefs. In fact its a key game for me in betting. I have them along with the Bears and San Diego Chargers, need to win two out of the three. Wish me luck. By the way I have never been a Notre Dame fan, I guess because I don’t follow college ball.

Well I guess by now you have received my paper about your paper on Psychopaths. If you have questions as to some of my statements or comments, let me know. Right now I have a professor [a well-known criminologist] who has a manuscript on Serial killers who wants me to read it over and give my comments. You ever hear of him? Want to know what I think so far, too much conjecture I think anyone can take down stats and make them come out the way they want. Oh by the way, yes he has me in his manuscript, but I have already told him his information is wrong.

I haven’t read the article on the labeling [I had sent him a brief essay by Maslow about how resistant most people are to being "rubricized"] so I can’t comment on it yet, let you know next letter.
If your wondering about my independence in prison, its because I have never been a follower in my life, which doesn’t mean I can’t follow orders. But if there is a choice, then I take the lead. My problem is that I don’t think like a con. And I started out treating people the way I wanted to be treated. but that doesn’t always work. You see in here they take kindness as weakness, and want to walk all over you. and that’s with guards too. You can’t think like you would on the outside. and the key is to mind your own business however hard that may be. Don’t get involved, it works the same as it doesn’t in our society, nobody wants to get involved. But in here your better off.

[Reference is made to one writer’s account of B’s case.] See that’s the trouble with the science of Psychology or psychiatrists they based their opinions on conjecture and rationalizations. and that you can’t always go by. First off how can they define the kinds of people who are in jail for committing murder, without defining the kinds of murder. and what constitute murder over killing? What do you think?

Hey I have to agree with you about Miami going to the superbowl. They just don’t have it, but they may go to the playoff so maybe they will get it together in defense. their offense is fine. So you like the Jets in the AFC, well I guess I would have to go with Denver. Jets, New England and Denver along with Seattle will be in the playoff for AFC, what do you think? The Rams I don’t agree with you on them. just because they are 3-0 doesn’t mean they are going anywhere because of their division.

So your going with the Mets, what can I say. I’ve bet on Houston and Boston to go to the series. You want the other two? ha ha I bet with two of my pen-pals in the mail, we mail the picks back and forth, picking a week early. But you can change picks as long as its postmarked prior to the day of the game. I do agree with you in the American league taking the whole show. boston is going to be tough.

So let me know more about the Rorschach test after you have had a few classes. Thats the Ink blot test isn’t it? I got a kick out of it, they told me I didn’t give them enough answers for the 12 or 13 blots they showed me. Hell I looked at them as flower designs, what can I say. What was I suppose to fine little green men or something?

Hey I wouldn’t have mention it if I didn’t want you to visit. The only information I need to make sure your on the visiting list before hand is address, zip code and date of birth which goes along with the identification you carry, same with your wife should she want to come too. I am here seven days a week, visiting is seven days a week from 8am to 1pm, come early and stay for lunch actually visiting is from 8am and ends at 2pm, but you can’t get in after 1pm. To get you cleared I need ten days, just so you know who and when is coming, or if your coming alone. Some people are afraid to come in. If [your wife] wants to come, she is welcome. But like I said even with it being a first meeting come early, as the time goes by fast. Actually you should be at the prison at 7:30 if your coming that early, as they will let you in
at 8am. See you have to figure it takes almost an hour to get in. You have to be searched, and check your personal belonging, and the only thing your allowed to bring in is $10.00 per person, and make sure its change. Quarters, dimes, nickels, dollar bills. thats so you can buy from the machines. I'll supply the lunch, let you find out what a prison meal taste like, served the same way I get all of mine. Me I like the junk food which I can't get in here accept from the machines on the visits. Also the drinks come from the machine accept coffee which they give free. We have a room all by ourselves, under a video camera at all times. Just like sitting in a kitchen at the table.

[B. refers to having finished a painting of Man of La Mancha that he had agreed to do for me.]

You can let me know about the phone call date and time, but remember weekend its hard before 11am my time. Night calls are from 3pm to 10pm but you go to sleep early. so I guess we are stuck with weekends. no problem most days but saturdays are better. Holidays are bad. and I don't like calling people. In fact I won't even call my family.

Well I see the Bears are sticking it to Cincinnati. see what happen with McMahon.

Catch you later be good, don't study too hard. I got two more letters to get out today. Your letter has just about taken me the whole Bears game, so you see why long letter are hard on me. ha ha. Bye for now, Sincerely,

B.

Commentary

Two additional letters were dated October 22 and October 24.

The October 22 letter was written in response to what B. considered a "great letter" from me, one that "made many things clear." He described the variety of diagnostic labels applied to him during his trial and commented, "These doctors feel their success or failure depend on whether or not they can examine a person and fit him into some group. ...Isn't it possible a person doesn't fit at all?" This same theme was reiterated when he complained about the approach taken by the criminologist who had sent him a manuscript on serial murder: "It looks like he wants to fit [serial killers] into groups instead of following through with anyone person." He also remarked on the tremendous difference between himself ("the person") and "the monster" which the media had created. Also in this letter, he speculated at some length about who might have committed the crimes for which he was
convicted. Finally, looking ahead to my planned visit in about six weeks, he informed me about visitation procedures at the prison.

The October 24 letter, although brief, included this interesting comment on why he liked to paint the figure of Don Quixote: "The Quest, the reason I like it is because I relate to the song. Impossible dream, you know the song?...For what is a Quest but positive mental attitude. and I am a strong follower of FMA. Just like in the Sound of Music I love the song; Climb every Mountain."

November 5th, 1986

Dear Jeff,

I received your letter today or tonight as we get mail at 5 pm, and thank you for the cute card. So your a fan of the Sound of Music, I have always liked the film and have seen it many times. I don’t care what others think of it, I enjoyed the film, love the landscape, the music, and story lines. Peggy Wood who sings Climb every mountain, had been a favorite of mine for many years as I remember when she did the TV show "I remember Mama" back in the early 50’s. Do you remember that?

Once again I am glad you like the painting ["The Quest." an adaptation from the popular poster picture of Don Quixote on his steed; in this one, my initials were painted on the shield], and hope you can help with other sales. Hey thats the way I cover my expenses, so I am always promoting them.

Now on to your letter and some of your questions. By the way yes I would like to see what the painting looks framed. Once that is done it makes a world of difference to my art work. When you come [to visit] I will bring out my photo album so that you can see some of my art work where they have the pictures framed. You spoke of the gaps in the black part of the painting, that is an effect which is gotten by undercoating the canvas with a heavy oil base color before applying the black paint with very little oil added to the tubed paint. Hey its something I stumbled on by accident, and then later learned what I did to get it. So it came by accident. You know learn while doing. In answer to your other question, No, I do not draw my figures out before painting, I can take an object and set it to one side and just paint what I see. Of course it doesn’t always come out the same or in the right form, so its done with the eye, but insofar as drawing, I can do very little of that, as I am no good at it. The only time I would use a pencil before painting is to lay out a portrait or something where I am trying to make the painting deep. Many times the lines are what I call layout line, so as I can get balance in the painting. I don’t consider myself an artist for two reasons, one is I have no professional training, and
two I don't consider myself of having any talent. What I have is a gift from God. And Artist to me is a person who craftsmanship is of a high standard. And while I don't let any painting out unless it meets my standards of being suitable to hang in my own home. I feel when I have finished one, I think I could do better, and so that's why I don't consider myself an artist. I guess it's because I expect such high standard, some say I am too picky or I am trying to be a perfectionist, if that's the case, then so be it. Jeff it was the same kind of standard I used [outside, when I did business with people], may be that is why I didn't get bigger then I was. But you know the state tried to get [someone I had done work for] to talk against me and they couldn't fine one. And if we missed something [a customer had been promised], all it took was my word, as my word was my bond. And don't think I am something special, it was just my way of I guess winning approval, which goes back to my childhood. With my dad I never did anything right. I was dumb and stupid to him. But I [started with almost nothing and wound up with a very successful business enterprise] and I was never out of work, people waiting for my service. I appeared [in person whenever I had a job to do] and I worked seven days a week. I was married to my business.

Maybe if I followed your words of an artist then I am one. As I think a part of me is in the paintings.

Since I am strong on PMA [positive mental attitude], nothing is just out there in life you have to reach for what you want, but never set goals too high, as failure has a way of defeating you in the long run. My life has been simple, making and meeting little goals and then making them harder and harder so as to challenge my ability. I think people have things hidden within, but don't reach for them so they will never know if they can do it. I guess they can't accept failure, but you can learn from failure, if you make work for you. Just like I have proven from my paintings, each one of them I learn from, same as when I [was working] each job, gave me the challenge. E.C.F. is the method I used. You always had to have two of them. Easier, Cheaper, or Faster. Something can be easier and faster but not always cheaper, so you have to pick the ones your looking for. Something cheaper is not always easier or faster, nor is faster always easier and cheaper. You understand what I am saying. Another words you should try to have at least two working for you to succeed in what your doing. Hey it worked for me, but may not be for everyone.

When you talk about creative impulses, I happen to think I am creative person, and I like things done my way so I take control, and I am not afraid to take blame. But I guess I have been lucky since when I do take charge it has worked out for me. But this is only in areas I know about. You will find if I don't know about an area, I am the first to admit it. Your only fooling yourself, when you try to take charge of something you don't know enough about. Don't mean to be giving you all my philosophy, but I don't mind sharing what I feel works for me. But I don't accept or see things the way others do. And while I may not always be right, I never claim that to be true.
Well our Boston lost, but they lost and they had it on saturday night, and let it get away from them. And I don’t blame Buckner alone. But I don’t understand the management. During the playoff leading to the series, in each game Buckner was taken out in the later innings. Hell they should have done the same in the series. But his wasn’t the only error. The pressure was great on the pitcher and they waited too long in the 10th inning of saturdays game. He got two out, when he put the first man on base that when they should have changed pitcher. Of course what we say is hindsight now. I also feel they should have won two at home. The Mets you can’t take it away from them, they did what they had to do, when they had to do it. Oh well next year is just around the corner.

Let’s see we have covered most of the psychopathy paper [I had sent for him to comment on] pretty good and may talk about it when you come here, so I will leave it alone for now, unless I haven’t made everything clear. Just let me know? DSM II and DSM III is another thing I will go into more with you so that you can better understand where I am coming from [he had expressed uncertainty over the implications of the official nomenclature having changed from the old "sociopathy" to "antisocial personality"].

Well lets see, I am going to jump over the visiting rules until I get to the next page so you will have it all on one page. On the subject of marriage; when I say I took my marriage for granted, I mean I didn’t give it a chance to work, as I was too wrapped up in [other things, like working]. [My wife] was always there for me, but if your working seven days a week 14, 16, 18 hours daily. How much time did I really give to the marriage, once every two week I had time to do things with her, or take her with me for some civic thing, but if I was chairing it it wasn’t much fun for her. So thats why I say I didn’t give it a chance to work. But it wasn’t our only problem. [She] didn’t take any interest in what I was doing and its important to make it a part of you too. The sharing of time together is what failed for me. No love as we are still in love even with her being remarried. My second wife and I still talk and write, and the children both do to. When we divorced it was friendly, and I helped her move, fixed up her new place and we went out alot, more so then when we were married. So figure that out. I got her into a bowling league with me so we saw each other every week, then if she needed something for [the children] I was always there, and if out of town, all she had to do is call. I took her after divorce with me on [some work-related trips], as she liked to go and her mother babysat. So you can see we had a different kind of divorce you might say.

Now to the visiting. December 15, 16, 17 is fine with me at this point, should there be a move or change in that I would let you know by phone. No problems forseen for now. Visiting hours as I told you are from 8 am to 2 pm, you must be in by 1 pm and still leave by two. Thats why I say come early, longer visit. Coming first thing in the morning its best to be here at 7:30 am as it will take 30 to 45 minutes to get checked in. Conditions, we visit in individual rooms, no two visits are
together. So we together are in a room 8 x 9 feet, with a table and
three chairs, a video camera is on us the whole time and the hallway is
locked. For you to get in to where I am you will go through at least
five doors, but don’t worry they will let you out the same way. Hell
we are out of room on death row. Its like sitting across a kitchen
table. Drink coffee they have it here? I am sure you will be relaxed
once your in the room for awhile. anything new is scary.

The rules are simple you will be searched before coming in, your
not allowed to bring in anything like I said before. just change. up to
$10.00 No cameras, recording equipment. So you can’t tape anything, if
you want I could bring a legal pad if you wanted to take note, which
with my okay take out with you upon leaving each day, or whatever.

I can see your leading to a photo of me [I had asked whether tape
recorders and/or cameras were permitted by prison regulations], what to
show your wife you visited with me. ha ha. You can’t bring a camera in
but they have an inmate cameraman who for $1.50 each take a shot of us.
of course it would cost you $3.00 since I would want one too. right?
Yes they will take photos as long as I say ok. It can be ordered at the
time you come in, just ask the officers who is bringing you in from the
gate. he will take you to the place you pay at. $1.50 each. Hell you
should have known the prison would find a way to make a buck. No games
or cards, like I said no nothing can be brought in by you [I had
mentioned the possibility of a card game during our planned visit]. If
we wanted to play cards I would have to bring them out. I am sure your
going to find that the time goes by fast even if you got in for a six
hour visit, you know like 8 am to 2 pm. Yes I am a card player, but I
think the first day we will have enough to do with the [serial murder
manuscript, which an academic criminologist had sent B. for comment,
and in which I had expressed interest] your note taking and my photo
album. If you want to play cards then bring Betsy, and her and I can
talk and we won’t bother you. Just kidding. but some day if she happens
to come along she is still welcome, and I am here to answer any
questions on marriage ha ha.

My marriage failures wasn’t for lack of love for each other but a
lack of time, and doing things together. But I also felt that a wife
should take an active interest in what her husband is doing. With my
wife I knew what she was doing and that was mainly around the house
which I always told her how great it looked. She was a good housekeeper
and mother. But spending time together was a factor, and I take the
blame for that. Had it been a 9 to 5 type job I am sure it would have
been better. then I had a mother in law who kept putting things in her
head too. so you know that didn’t help.

I agree with you on the Jets, Broncos, and the Bears in that
order, but I think your over looking the Giants, New England, and the
Rams and cowboys. None of them are out of it and what about Atlanta and
Minnesota who are both making some moves? Bears need a big win to put
them back on track these close wins and two losses haven’t helped them.
Of course they are the target of everyone since winning the super bowl.
Kelly under new coach may start to move I have picked them to win this weekend.

Well what did I tell you about the U.S. Senate, what is it now? 55 to 45 Democratic. Well I guess the public let Reagan know what they thought of his programs. in the nine states where he went to help his Republican senators, 8 out of 9 lost. I wonder if he got the same message the voter was trying to tell him.

Hey guy I am going to close for now, see what you can do about promoting the art work, as I can use the sales. Take care for now, Hi to the wife, stay healthy and well, The flu season is upon us, I was given a flu shot last week. Bye for now.

B.

Commentary

A letter dated November 22 began, "Whats this 'Dear John' shit, we are not going together? I want you to know that I don't let girls write it to me; 'Dear John', always think its followed by bad news. But I am also having some fun with you." I had asked that he provide his perspective on what constitutes creativity. In his response, he first objected to several popular notions about what makes certain people "creative," then added, "As you can tell I am not always one to accept anything just because someone tells me its so, and I don't limited myself as to not making mistakes, as I feel you can learn from mistakes. Now you can understand why [a forensic psychiatrist] said I was the most complexed man he had inter­viewed." Later in the letter, he again portrayed himself as an independent, take-control type of person: "Do you have strong feeling that you control you, then if so you make things happen for you. I don't agree with the people who think things are just out there in life and they happen outside your force to control. I think its like if you took all the money in the U.S. and gave everyone the same amount equal within ten years the same people would end up with it. Do you agree with that theory and why? Because they make it happen."
Hi Jeff,

I received your letter and photo [of the framed "Man of La Mancha" painting] last night and thought that I would get this one off to you. Everything is still good for your visit [planned for the following week].

Hey thank you much for the photo, it looks great framed. The Quest is an interesting study in simple art and the only other thing that I have done that way is "My Christ".

Thanks for the information on your birthday [required, or so I had been lead to believe, by prison officials prior to a visit], but all the information was given and passed some time ago, so your late.

So now your out of school until after the holidays, then will you be teaching the same class or courses again next year?

[In my last letter, I had expressed interest in having B. recount his earliest memories]. So you liked the memory question, what a problem for me is that I can remember way back as clear as a bell, yet the last ten years, I need something to jar my memory. I guess thats from taking all the Valiums, even now I have to make copies or keep records otherwise I forget, so its not a cop out for the case, its the same about everything. I can give dates, addresses, numbers important to me, yet I can't remember my last phone number, or going to [a relative's funeral, around the time of my arrest]. Yet others have told me I was a pallbearer. But go back to August of 1953 when you were born it was the first summer in our new house. Now some of my earliest memories is at the age of three but parts of some go back to when I was just two. thats when I was visiting my aunt, and so as to get me out of their hair for awhile, they put me in one of those baby straps, you know over your shoulders and around the waist, and had me hooked to the clothesline in the back yard, but I got out of it by taking my play suit off, and went down the drive way to the sidewalk and started toward the capital. A Neighbor picked me up and under his arm returned me to my aunt's house; asking if this belonged to them. Now I can still remember parts of that, or when at five an older girl took my clothes off and was playing with my private until she was caught by my mother. The girl was 14, an suppose to be watching me.

I also can remember having scary dreams when I had to take a nap, at 2 and three, but some of that foggy. I guess what has helped me with the past is being very organized as a kid. Do you know I could account for every dime I made from the age of ten, through teenage. I know this may sound dumb, but I kept a log book as to every incoming and outgoing penny all during my school years. entries like ten cent for candy, 7 cent for CTA (bus) $1.00 for cutting [the neighbor's] lawn, 50 cents for shoveling snow. Then at the end of the year I would total it up and make an income statement, and go against the next year to see if I got better. Sounds crazy. Yet even today, not only the mail
incoming and outgoing, but every dime I use in here is recorded, plus what I do daily. You will see the log book when you come as it goes with me everywhere. Since day one of prison I can tell you what has been served both lunch and dinner. I am a bug about keeping records, my [work affairs] were handled that way, and that's why the state destroyed my business record as it shows I wasn't in [the state] when [many] of the victims disappeared. [I always kept very careful records of business expenses like] rentals, any store purchases, and a log of the working hours on the jobs. So you know its impossible to be in two places at once.

Now you see where I am coming from with creativity. certainly your going to do better at something you like to do then something you have to do. If given two jobs of equal pace or time, one you like and one your not interested in but can do it, at the end which one is going to show how much more you put into it?

So you never read: "The games people play" well have you ever been in transactional analysis? I think I spelled it right? I had seventeen months of it. The id, ego and superego. and don't get on the defensive when I say your trying to out think me, its not meant that way. The visit should be interesting as it will clear the air on our thinking, as long as you don't make it as if you come to research me. But don't worry I won't let you get on one track, and I believe you will come away with a different opinion then you had of me prior to ever writing me. Of course I can see the change in your letters too. I am not something special, just a man caught up in a mess of contradictions. Which when you hear all sides it becomes clearer then it is from the one sided picture painted of me.

I see your Buffalo team didn't make it against cleveland, I bet on Cleveland. I am against Buffalo again this week too and they are playing the indianapolis colts, but I have the point spread too. Hey everyone thinks the Chicago bears are out of it, watch what they do next monday night against Detroit. You will be able to stay out of trouble and watch the game at the motel, and you better watch it as Betsy can quiz you on the game when you get home. ha ha Just kidding around. I know Betsy must trust you, if not then you don't belong together, as thats part of marriage having faith in the other.

Listen I am going to keep this one short, have a safe trip and don't push it as I will be here even if you a day late. Take care for now, see you soon. Sincerely,

B.

Commentary
On December 16 and 17 I visited B., each day spending approximately six hours at the prison in uninterrupted conversation with him.
December 18th, 1986

Dear Jeff,

Well its not even 24 hours since you left, and I feel we could have gone on talking for the rest of the week. Now you see what I mean about how fast six hours can go by. I never did get to the letter last night [this reference is to the letter that he'd jokingly "threatened" to write my wife immediately following my departure from the prison; the implication was that in the letter he would give her some cause to doubt my fidelity] as after the visit I got back to the cell to take a nap and got up for dinner, fell back asleep until after nine which was too late to get one off to you. So your lucky I didn’t get to tell [your wife] anything before you got home. But I will write to her in this letter, I think it would have been after you got home anyway. It would have been nice or it will be nice if you bring [your wife] next time your in the area, as I would like to meet her. Now I didn’t mine that you brought this black girl with you [I visited alone], but next time you should at least know a little more about her. But don’t worry [my wife], she was a pig, I would have thought Jeff would have had better taste, but you know what happens when you let him go on his own. I am just kidding with you, as Jeff will tell you I like to joke around. We really had a nice two days of visiting, of course we did not carry the same subjects from day to day and we didn’t cover all we would have liked too. But like I say he and you are always welcome to come next year when the weather is better.

Now Jeff, I guess I should get back to you, I didn’t realize the time was running out so fast on the second day, I don’t know if you noticed but I hated to see you leave, as we kind of broke off without finishing what we had just started to talk about. I still had plenty of questions I had wanted to cover with you, but never got to them. I trust that you enjoyed the visit as well as I did, didn’t know if this was your first time for being in a prison, but at least you got to see what they serve for the noon meal.

Also I wanted to thank you for the junk food you got for me, I enjoyed having that, even with not needing it. Its always a treat to get something we don’t have all the time.

I trust that you had a safe trip home and were well rested when you left. I even forgot to wish you happy holidays and to thank you for coming, maybe we can do it again. I guess I will wait to see what kind of questions you have before getting into too much. I am sure you have some comments about the visit and some things which you were left in puzzlement. But you know all you have to do is ask. I am sure I enlighten you on many things and I wanted to tell you some of the things we discussed and I showed to you are considered privileged at this times. The things that you read in the post conviction are not a matter of public record and only the courts and the people involved know anything about it. This is why I say the news media doesn’t know what they are talking about when they write about me. They never get to
see what you got to see until after the hearing when it becomes a part of the official record, that is the rules by law.

You know even when you were getting ready to leave I could feel you had a lot more you would have liked to say like me, but time has a way of getting away from us. We never did talk about marriage or home life styles. So you can tell Betsy you didn’t get to learn anything about married life, from me. Also you never got to tell me much about yourself.

I notice with you I felt that I had known you for awhile, you know what I mean? I guess all the letters helped, plus the fact your a relaxed person. I can bet you get along with your students in class, as I was very relaxed with you, and that doesn’t happen with every one I talk to. I found you to be interesting to talk to, I assume you were open in your comments to me, and couldn’t see signs of holding back. I hope I did the same for you. I try to stay away from sounding like I am trying to convince you. Like I said in the book that I did [an unpublished manuscript, recounting the story of his arrest and trial from his point of view], I wasn’t looking for people to be on my side but just take an open objective look at the facts, and you will see the facts haven’t been printed about me. Just mostly fantasy, theories, and things taken out of context. Of course I guess any person could read anything into what they read or hear, so that’s why I like to show things which will stand without me trying to make the point. You must tell me how you perceived the visit and how it actually came out? I would be interested in hearing what you had to say.

Well what more can I say at this time. Oh I will give you your written picks for this weeks NFL games [while I was at the prison, B. had asked me to participate in a weekly pool conducted by the death row inmates] listing them first with the ones we agree on and where we differ, so you can see how we come out for week 16. Out of the 14 games we agree on 10 of them. Both taking 49ers over the Rams, Denver over the Seahawks, Giants over packers, Vikings over Saints, Cardinals over Tampa Bay, Redskins over Eagles, the Browns over the Chargers, Bengals over the Jets, Bears over the Cowboys, Miami over New England. Now on the ones we don’t agree on. You like the Bills over my Houston Oilers, you take the Chiefs over my Steelers, Your Atlanta Falcons over my Lions, and your Raiders over the Colts. So now we can see on the last four who can pick them, but I wonder how many we will mispick on the first ten? I still happen to think the Chicago Bears are going to go to the super bowl and if not still I think the NFC is going to beat the AFC. Take my word on it.

Now I see we didn’t cover everything about your president Reagan, but you know how I feel about that. Just own up to it, I see now they [President Reagan, as well as many members of his cabinet and staff] are all getting sick and heading for the hospital. What does Reagan think, it will go away when he comes out? You know why I called him your president, because I didn’t vote for him [nor did I].
Well I'll let you go for now, take care and get back to me when you can, and have a happy holiday and let's hope that next year will be better than 1986.

Bye for now, Sincerely,

B.

Commentary

Three additional letters were dated January 4, January 19, and February 3.

In the January 4 letter, B. again commented on my recent visit to the prison: "It was like I had known you a lot longer than the visit....I think we could have gone another day." And toward the end of the letter: "You know now that you know where [the prison] is, you don't have to stay away." He also commented on the "tunnel vision" that had made law enforcement officers unable to realize that B. could not possibly have committed the crimes for which he was convicted. Emphasizing what an unlikely suspect he was, B. remarked, "I have no motive for the crime, no reason to commit the crime."

In his January 19 letter, B. chided me for seeming "on the defensive." I had attempted to explain to him why I needed to get clarification on several points related to his case. B. himself seemed to be struggling for a sense of how things fit together: "You know if I had lived a simple life, simple job, simple surroundings, maybe it wouldn't be so hard to understand me or the case, but the reason it's complexed is I am a very involved person, and I came in contact with thousands of people and my life has touched thousands of people, and for any part of it I guess you can come to more then one conclusion on it, don't you think? That's what makes the pieces of the puzzle not easy to fit in, nor do they match what the state says." At the conclusion to his letter, B. reminded me, "Like I said your welcome back, just let me know when your coming to visit."

The February 3 letter contained several reminders of how much B. had enjoyed our recent visit: "Let me say it again. I enjoyed meeting with you, I found you very interesting....I wish we would have met under different and more pleasant circumstances. ...You're welcome to come anytime you want here, just let me know ahead of time." One passage in
the letter contains B's perspective on the
irrevocability of what has already occurred: "Now
I always have compared [the situation in court
where remarks that have already been made out
loud are ordered by the judge stricken from the
official record] to when people say I am sorry after
they have done something. Why say I am sorry, if you
were really sorry you wouldn't have said it to begin
with. Oh I know there are exceptions to the rule,
but for the most part we control what we say, and
if you say it you meant to say it, right?"

February 19th, 1987

Hi Jeff, and [my wife] too.

I received your letter last night and since I was sitting here
doing letters I thought I would get to yours. I trust that this letter
fines you both well and things going good for you both. Also I hope the
puppy [a Valentine's Day present which I gave to my wife] got his
sleeping time straighten out, so you can get yours.

So I guess by now you have caught up with your sleep, how is the
puppy doing, and what did [your wife] have to say when you gave it to
her. A Cairn Terrier my younger sister had one for along time, cute
little dog, she also had a poodle. Then my first wife had one too but
when we got married her mother kept the dog with them. We ended up
having a pair of cats, siminese, called Mayling and Ting, they were the
opposite of each other, Mayling loved to play and be around people, and
Ting didn't want to be held or around people, when anyone came over,
Ting would run to hide, whereas Mayling would jump right into your lap.
But as a kid I always had a dog and during the second marriage I had a
St. Bernard, registered, and got to the size of 153 pounds. But you
never would want a more loving or playful dog. Even with [the
children] being small, they could lay on him and even ride on him
without him getting mad. Boy that sales lady had your number putting
the puppy in your hands, once that is done she had it sold, your lucky
she didn't put a monkey or a snake in your arms. And you being into
psychology I would have thought you would know better, ha ha. Thats the
oldest trick in the book.

Well I am glad you understand about you said or what I said, its
better that way. Oh I know when I try to explain something to you I get
rather long winded and I am into ambivalence, I sometimes wonder way
off of what I am explaining by giving you more questions by what I
explain so I can see where I may be at fault in the misinterpretation
and misunderstandings. Thats what I meant about sticking too one or two
sentences to explain something. When I feel I should set the stage to
make you understand then I will continue to do so, and let you figure
out what I am saying by asking more questions. If you don't then its
your problem. I see we both understand a little about the jury system, but like you I still can’t understand if they know it’s not allowed [as, for instance, when a point is knowingly made by the defense or prosecution that will need to be "struck from the record"] why the prosecutors do that to get something into the record which they know is not allowed. The judges remarks after wards the acts doesn’t change it has been planted like a seed in their heads. And they do draw more attention to it unless your attorney doesn’t object to it.

[Often at home], I had to watch my mouth at the dinner table with the [children] when they were young, I would be explaining something about [work] and say it was for shit or fucked up, and my wife would remind me that we had little ears at the table. So we said the best way to handle it was not to call attention to it and let it blend into the subject and it would go over their heads you hoped. But at least by not drawing attention to it, They wouldn’t hear the word repeated. You know how it can slip out and then someone says "what did you say?" and you say the word again. Well we thought it best to just let it blend into the conversation so it didn’t stand out. Hey my wife would do it just as much as I did at time, when she would get mad at them or something she was doing. Maybe the words weren’t the same, but you know how you sometimes swear, not thinking of whos around you. My little [one] used to pick up the words, but not [the other one]. I caught her one time telling her older sister to pick up this shit, as mommy already said to do it twice. But again I didn’t draw attention to it, just told my wife she picking up words by you. and we would laugh about it. sometimes its cute when they are just four, but its certainly a surprise how fast they can pick up on you.

About the word sorry [in a previous letter, we had spoken of how paradoxical it would be for an individual convicted of a crime he did not commit to be labelled "psychopathic" because he demonstrated no "remorse"; this evolved into a larger discussion of expressing regret for things already said/done], I guess that’s because I am not a tackful person, and I say what’s on my mind. You know they say your true thoughts come out first, not that they are always the right one to use. That’s why I say what I do about using the word I’m sorry, because I feel people use it as an excuse many times. They really meant to say what they did, so why say I’m sorry if that’s what you meant to say, at least you know the person is being honest. Not tackful but then I would rather be honest with someone then being tackful and saying what they would like to hear from you. In a way your helping that person even if it hurts at the time. I feel being honest even if its not tackful or nice to the person it shows your concerned about the person and not his/hers feelings. Then again it doesn’t mean you always have to hurt someone to make a point, but that’s being diplomatic, and so on. I think you get where I am coming from. I still use the word I’m sorry, but I still don’t like it. And don’t come back and say it takes a bigger man to admit he is wrong then say I am sorry. Because I don’t believe that bullshit either. Sorry is like you said: "I didn’t mean to say it." or I didn’t mean it. either way you did, so sorry doesn’t change what has been said. Now that I got you totally confused I will move on to
something else. Now you see what I mean about getting long winded, right?

[I had asked whether B. might be willing to do a picture that would capture his impressions of me, not using a photograph, but just based on what he remembered from our meeting. He responded that he found doing work of that sort difficult. He prefers working from a picture so that what he paints will "look like the person." You know I told you I was a bug about my art work. If its not something I would be happy with myself then I won't let it out. I think at times I am harder on me then others. But its a draw back in my character I guess. Because thats the way I used to be on the outside, when I did work for other people, if I didn't like the work then I didn't expect the customer to either. Maybe too that why I was never out of work as word of mouth was the best advertising. I think thats why when the state prosecutors went around to some of my customers to get them to talk about me all they had was good things to say about me. The ones who talked to the news media I would think just wanted some attention in their lives. You know, what I mean wanting to get involved in something important happening. What do you think?

Now you see the ambivalence I got clear off art work, and I do the same thing when I am just talking to someone. Most of the time I don't realize I am away from what I was talking about. Hey do you have a cure for that? ha ha

Now what is the difference between what I say and my meaning of facts. If I say to you thats a fact, or facts, or factual, it means not only do I know it to be so but others can back it up. If I tell you that isn't how it came down, and I explain that is what I know is fact because it involves me personally, so I would have to know. But its not confirmed by others big deal thats when we are talking about my case. You will notice I don't like to give many theories as to what I think happen or who I think did it because thats speculation. I am sure I could put several of them together for you as I have had to do that for my attorneys but I just don't like to do that. What I give them, they go and check out, and telling you theories would be no help to me.

Well big guy, go feed the dog, as I am going to cut out. I see again I ended up with three typed pages, I keep saying I am going to cut back but I have so much I want to say when you write and cover everything you write. Don't worry as long as the letters stay as interesting, I will continue to go the distance, ha ha. Later,

B.
Commentary

In a letter dated March 8, B. commented on his several former acquaintances who chose to speak about him with the media: "People sometimes want to be noticed, or feel important, kind of like name droppers, you know what I mean?" Also, he professed little interest in following up on my suggestion that he read accounts of several other well-known serial murder cases: "I am not into reading about murderers or murderers, so I have a very limited knowledge of the subject." A suggestion to me was that I tune into one of his favorite television programs, Highway to Heaven.

April 1, 1987

Hi Jeff,

I received your letter as always its nice to hear from you. The stationary to me doesn’t make no difference as long as I am able to read it. I believe I used some of the color paper I had on yours and what you didn’t know is that it was cut uneven, and they wanted to throw it away so I took it. So see your not alone. remember its the contents that counts.

Well I hope this letter finds you well and things going well for you after Indiana won its basketball, I finally found out who Bobby Knight is. I was looking for UNLV or North Ca. to pull it off but they went out early. but like I said I don’t follow it, so who cares. Baseball is around the corner. I don’t think the N.Y. Mets will repeat, nor Boston for that matter, what do you think?

Yes its always been my rule to answer letters faster from people I find more interesting. The ones who I don’t hear from often or think they have nothing to say go on the bottom of the pile. See yours just came in tonight and out it goes again, so you will remember what we are talking about, right?

The reason I say Hi to [your wife] is because I assume you let her read the letters, besides I don’t put anything in your letter that I wouldn’t want her to read.

Glad to hear things are working out with the dog, I told you they would. even the potty training will come around once he get set times to go out.

When you asked what do I find most difficult [about being in prison], its hard to say as there are many ways to look at it. the con’s call it pulling hard time or easy time. I would think I pull average to easy time. Hard time is trying to buck the prison on everything or the people around you. Well first off I am in a group by myself because case size, I can’t compare it with others., secondly I
relate to them because no matter what I have done or convicted of, I am doing the same time they are, some of them have one conviction for murder, yet have death awaiting them too. I think the individual person makes the difference, a person who was busy on the outside like me has to fill his time up or go nuts, a person who hasn’t worked much and is lazy can get alot of sleep. But it works both on the mind and the body not just one alone. Lack of movement, being fed three meals a day, and time to think are all bad for the body thinking brings on worry, lack of education causes depression, guilt is a factor for those who have nothing going for them. In my case I have found that since I don’t relate to many, you know being in business myself, having respect for others, my set of values, not following others, and not accepting everything as fact. But all this didn’t come over night its been over the years through trial an errors that I have learned how to do this kind of time. I think I have aged 20 years [since coming here]. Why mainly because I was active on the outside, that took me the longest to over come, my high energy level, secondly being a loner in the cell was easy as I liked to work alone. But if you think that just because in meeting me its easy, then I have given you the wrong impression. Yes I make it easy and I thank God for Faith in Him and my own positive mental attitude. You can take time and think of all the negatives and thats what you will have around you or you can think positive and make it work. But its work to make it work. I have found by trying to keep myself busy and staying in touch with the outside its been an asset to me. Yes you miss the little things people take for granted, walking on grass, smelling the air right after a rain. But you put those things out of your mind and deal with what is around you.

Mail and visits are a high point of my every day life, blocking that off, it would be my painting, doing letters, and reading, learning the law. You realize we have guys here who are sitting back waiting for the appeal attorneys to come up with their defense on appeal. Hell who better would know what happen then you? right. So you have to give them help, and no matter how small it seems let them tell you it can’t be used. In my case I made it organized and in so doing wrote [my own account of what happened], mainly for my attorneys so they would know what happen in the order that it happen and they can question me on that as it has alot of answers in it also many questions for them.

Being positive has alot to making the time go easy, yet in the back of my mind I know just from seeing the way the legal system works, I could never be leaving here or even getting executed. But you have to keep that out of your mind as that will drive the negatives out. When I paint I can almost feel I am in that area when painting landscapes.

But don’t feel bad about you trying it [I had mentioned in a letter that I found it difficult to imagine what it would be like to spend the greater portion of one’s life in a cage] and getting depressed, because it happens to me, I get down and I only have me to pick myself up or its over for me, so you have to be strong in that respect. Keep in mind I grew up always being called dumb and stupid, so I have always had to prove I could do it, and the positive thinking is
the way to do it. Even you can do anything you set your mind to doing
if you keep telling yourself you can. People think I am kidding about
that, but you know we are our own worse enemy, you can talk yourself
right out of trying something, just by saying I can’t, well how do you
know you can’t unless you try it. How many times have you heard of
food sounding terrible, yet you never tried it, are you right for
doing that? what your saying is I give up before trying it. What
happens as soon as we start that in life, we tend to go through life
that way. Try it then if it doesn’t work at least you know what your
talking about. Hell I could give up and say drop the appeals I can’t
win. Hell in the beginning I was against winning on a legal point, I
wanted it proven that I did the crime and wouldn’t take nothing less.
Then I found the system and had to go along and play their game, its
kind of like you have to play to their rules as they have the ball so
to speak. But I won’t say if I had it my way I would stay and play the
game this way if I could make the rules. So its kind of like the things
we can’t change in life you have to adjust to make them work. But give
up, never, they would have to spend every dollar in [the state treasury
where I was convicted] before I would give up on appeal. Yet I can
still loose. But at least I’ll know when its all over no matter how it
comes out I tried. and I am not a looser.

How many times have you worried about a test before taking it and
then found it was easier then all the worry you put on it., thats what
you have to do with life, nothing was said to be easy, so think
positive and try it and don’t give up even when it gets hard. If the
man got at the foot of the mountain looking up and said it can’t be
done, then he has let the mountain defeat him without trying. What
makes a baby get up and walk knowing he/she will fall, because they
have objective and goals and that to me is positive thinking. Besides
no matter what they take from me I am never alone as Jesus Christ who
died for me already is with me. And no I am not a cold blood, hard,
bastard, just a man with a goal and purpose in life and no matter how
hard they make it for me I will hang in there. And thats the way it is
from [names himself] and not the media monster image that everyone
knows.

I don’t like prison mainly because of my educational background it
makes it harder to cope with the thinking and the bullshit. I have
never met men who are worse then females bitches who spend the whole
day thinking of ways to start something to make others feel as bad as
they do. You listen to all the bullshit, and they want you to believe
it at fact value. but wait a day or so and they say something different
and when you call him on it, your a liar and trouble maker. its a no
win deal so you have to learn to avoid it. I tried to help a 23 yr. old
man to read and teach him the ABC’s, I was accused of trying to con
him because I was white and he was black, that I was after his money.
So I dropped that, what is normal or helpful, in here can get you into
fights or killed, as they saw him first. Well I see I have rambled on
so forgive. But Jeff I am just as human as you I get depressed,
sometimes think of ending it all, cry at times, sad feeling and glad
ones which con’t come as often, but over the years I have had to build
up this black out not to be offended by everything people say or I read about me, as if I know its not true let them worry about it instead of filling my head up with it. I kind of feel sorry for them. I don't have to hate them, I don't have to think about them, so its their problems whether or not what they know is the truth.

Well Jeff I'll let you go for now. Happy Easter to you both. Bye for now, always your buddy B. Write back sooner so the subject won't drop.

Commentary

A short letter dated April 12 (enclosed with an Easter card) contained B's request that I send him any information I might have about B.F. Skinner's Walden Two. As it turned out, B. had been asked by a penpal to help her write a paper on the book for a college psychology course.

May 7, 1987

Hi Jeff,

Thank you for your letter and the clipping and information on B.F. Skinner. Hey why do you label him a radical [as in "radical behaviorist"]? I don't think his theory of a community is that far out of line. I think we have a problem as a society of taking things for granted without wanting to do our own share of the work. Another words we are lazy. But thats my viewpoint. Like me I am a positive thinker, and don't believe you get anything without hard work. Nothing for nothing. I guess thats why I am against all this civil rights bullshit of handing out job because of race and color when other have to earn them. One of my favorite saying is: "You cannot hope to enjoy the harvest without first laboring in the fields." I wasn't born into a rich family, yet I was the first one to [make a lot of money].

Well on to your letter, so your wondering why, why me of all people wanted information on B.F. Skinner. Well a girlfriend of mine in Maine is going to Husson College and she had to do a book report on the book Walden two's, so I told her to send it to me and I would read it and do the report for her. The book itself was boring some 300 pages, but I got through it, and then wrote an eight page report about the book. But not a regular type book report, as I explained what the author was trying to say, what the walden two community was like and how it was set up, and the psychological thinking was for the setting, then I took the seven main characters and did a profile on them, showing how they think and what part they played to make the story work. But thanks for your information even if I got it after I finished the project. She is taking psychology as one of her subjects and
doesn't understand it too well. And just so you know, I don't believe in everything in the way Skinner thinks.

So it sounds like you have been busy with all you had to do and then visitors on top of it. So your sister wanted to know what I was like and which book is the best one to read about me. [A long review is included here of the various books recounting B's case, with special emphasis on how inaccurate they all are, and how their sales suffered as a result]. Now you see why I make my claim as to about these books and authors? They want to sell books and the public is gullible enough to believe what they hear.

[He describes his continuing difficulties with a criminologist who first tried unsuccessfully to arrange a visit with him, then reportedly claimed at a law enforcement seminar (about which B. heard news from an F.B.I. agent who was at the prison to speak with him) that he had spent a considerable amount of time with B.] You see what I mean about how the truth has a way of working itself up to the surface. Here all along he write me telling me that he was just interested in meeting me and going over some of the issues in my case. When all along he wanted to impress others with falsehoods about me making his ego bigger. I informed him that if I heard anything else coming from him saying he met me or visited with me, that I had some friends, which I do in Kentucky in the news media and I would expose him as a fraud. You know he didn't say nothing about that in his return letter to me.

So your baseball team isn't doing well. Tigers are 9 and 16 and I think your right about New York wanting to make a move this year. My [team is] 15 and 11 and certainly look good even with the sportscasters saying that [they] are not even in the division running this year. Looks like Milwaukee cooled down now and is playing close to normal, but its nice to see someone different get off to a good start. Hey you have a good team to follow in the National, Cincinnati Reds I think they could take the Western division. I don't follow the American league much and I watch every [one of my team's games] since I can see 149 out of the 162 played.

Hey how come you didn't answer my question in the April first letter? No, none of it was any April fool joke. So you found it interesting, that good. But I think the public just like myself has a stereotype vision of what prison life is like, that why I explained it the way I see it or cope with it. The question I asked which you did not answer is when I asked Do you let [your wife] read my letters as to thats why I say hi to her in them? The strong impression I left you with about being in control, maybe a false one. I just try to take it a day at a time. its like looking at a mountain to climb, if you think only about getting to the top without taking it a step at a time you will never reach the top. And thats the way it is in here, I can't worry about death or if it will happen, I just worry about today and what I think I'll be doing tomorrow, beyond that you never know. Things set these guys off so easy, that anything could happen. So life is from day to day, if you know what I mean while waiting on the appeal.
I think what you were seeing in me is the positive mental attitude I have always had, and the belief that I can win if I keep trying, but that's just something to keep me going. I know now I don't have an easy task, just understanding the law is a bitch, just when you think you have it figured out something else comes in. Just like I know I have things to prove what I am saying about not committing the crime, yet I am told by my own attorneys I can't bring it out. Now that to me is crazy, if he and I both know it then why can't we just tell the court so they reverse the case and get me a new trial, but that's not the way it works, we have to wait and right now all I can appeal is what came out at trial and the errors that happen there nothing else. talk about frustration, that's what I have had to learn to control. Its like watching TV quiz show and knowing the answer, but they can't hear you. If that makes any sense.

But being persistent as I am I guess its paying off, I had a visit from the F.B.I. in March who now want to open an investigation in my case, why? because they don't think I committed all the crimes if I wasn't in [the state] at the time. They came to me asking if I would help them with information showing where I was at the time, so they can check out my records and visit these places. Now hold on don't get the idea the F.B.I. are doing this for me alone. No, see they passed a new law in '86 appointing a new serial killer task force and they want to see if when I was in the different cities at these times if a crime like mine occurred. Since I have nothing to hide I am willing to cooperate if they clear it with [my attorney]. because they will prove once and for all that I wasn't in [the state], so how could I have committed the crimes here. It should be interesting. Will let you know or send you clipping once this is announced in the media. By the way mine is not the only case they are checking into. They want to clear up other unsolved crimes.

So you want to come again and with [your wife], I told you before you don't need me to say its okay, but I would have to add [her] to the visiting list with the same information I got from you. Full name, age address, which matches her I.D. and by the way, let me go on record now, that when you go to England and Ireland this summer, I expect post cards, what do you think of that? Now on your visit here just let me know when your coming as I believe I will be here. Same rules we will follow as before is something comes up I would call you.

Since you have the dog to keep you company and never got a painting for [your wife] I have enclosed [one for her], and make sure she gets it or I will find out, bye for now and don't take so long to write again that excuse won't work a second time. Later,

B.
Commentary

Additional letters were dated June 2, June 20, and July 26.

On June 2, B. offered this assessment of Skinner's Walden Two: "The book was boring and I don't agree with what he has to say....His ideas may sound good, but I would rather just have a place on a large farm in the hills or mountains."

The June 20 letter contained a reiteration of B's frequently expressed disdain for the media. "The media is a business and they are not interested in the truth. Just selling or being first with something. Its a business and they are out to make money. I am sure every reporter would like to say I got the first interview with (himself) or its exclusive." Emphasizing that unlike many other individuals convicted of multiple murder, he has never cooperated with the media, he repeated his long-standing policy: "No interviews!"

On July 26, B. railed against the "hogwash, fantasies, and theories" that various writers have proposed as the "truth" about his case. "Each person has his own way of explaining my life, what did I have 26 life's?" Sooner or later, according to B., the appeals courts will need to take into account the evidence which B. seems convinced will exonerate him. The conventional wisdom about his case simply cannot stand up. "There are too many unanswered questions."

August 23rd, 1987

Hi Jeff,

Thank you for your letter of the 14th which arrived on the 19th. I hope you got my birthday card, it was mailed late and then our post office has been slow. But any way I trust that you had a nice birthday, and look forward to many more.

Hey thanks for the transcript of the [popular television talk show, on which there had been a program devoted to multiple murder]. [The host] is a regular grandstander. Of course I notice that most of the shows only tell one side of the story, so I don't know what people see in the show. [B. refutes a number of comments made on the show about his case.]
You asked about visiting, all of September is open along with the end of August, so for now you can confirm the date you want. I have some others who are thinking of coming, but have not told me when yet. So whoever confirms first is the one I will block the dates open for.

Yes I see your Tigers are making a run for it, and it looks like the Yankees have run out of gas. I happen to think thats because of the owner and the way they handcuff the players. Looks like its going to be a race down to the wire with the Blue Jays. [My team] had so many chances to get back into it, but they are having pitching problems, you can’t bring up all the kids from the farm team and expect them to fill a full starting roll, and thats what they are expecting, I am surprised they are not down lower then what they are.

Oh well the NFL is looking good for this year and the Bears even with all the quarterbacks are looking good. Did you see who Playboy picked for the coming year? They have Bears winning NFC championship and Cleveland Browns winning AFC with the Bears winning the superbowl. It might be, but I think there are other teams to watch this year too. So who do you pick? Are you ready to go out on a limb this year?

So your getting some of the hot weather we have been having, yesterday they say it was 103. I wouldn’t know since I have been staying in the cell. What no Air conditioning? how do you put up with it? I have to stay in air conditioning when it get hot just for easy breathing.

I see where Ohio has its own Monster, Donald Harvey [a nurse’s aid who admitted to causing the deaths of more than 50 patients and acquaintances], but they only convicted him of 24, and I guess they are not going to open up the other ones, strange case don’t you think? Right now out in California they have another case breaking with this guy who picked up hitchhikers and Marines. But I notice it hasn’t been making the headlines, his name is Kraft, the highway patrol stopped him with a dead Marine sitting in his van. They believe he is involved in some 35 dissapearing men and young boys.

Haven’t read the novel "Killing Time" [by Thomas Berger; I had mentioned reading it] so I am not sure of what they are saying, but you can bet thats what goes on in the court room, and I wonder why the justice system doesn’t stop it. of course both sides do it [say things which they know the judge will order struck from the record, but after the jury has already heard them] knowing that the other side will object, but what good is it once the jury has heard it. And the thing of it is, they know its improper yet do it anyway.

Listen I am going to let you go for now, nothing new from FBI. In any case say hi to [your wife] and let me know when your coming. Take care for now. Later.
Commentary

In early September, I spent two days visiting with B. at the prison where he is confined. As on the previous occasion when I had been there, I spread approximately twelve hours of visiting time over two days.

September 13th, 1987

Dear Jeff,

It’s not even 24 hours since you left [the prison] and I am still thinking of some of the things we never got too. But it sure was great to see you again and I thank you for coming. I enjoyed the time we had and I hope you came away more enlighten then before. In just 8 and 1/2 hours of visits I think we did cover enough for five hundred pages of writing between us, don’t you think? You were looking good and I could see you were more relaxed then the first visit. Still wish you would bring [your wife] with you then that Black pig you were with, but who am I to judge of you [this is a continuation of a "joke" B. began following my first visit, suggesting to my wife that I had brought an unidentified Black woman with me on my visit to the prison]. Look how they have passed judgment on me without knowing me. But don’t worry [names my wife] I made them sit across from each other while they were on the visit. And I hope you know I am just joking around, because he didn’t meet her until after he left. ha ha.

Well getting back to the more serious stuff. I think we cover alot of things and I hope it helped you out in figuring out what is facts and fantasy. As for [the manuscript version of a book on serial murder, sent to B. for comment by its author, a criminologist; B. gave me the manuscript to take with me]. I would like to hear what you have to say about [it] if you get around to reading it. I think I gave you my opinion so I would like to see if I am way off or not.

By the way the Walden Two book report I also would like to hear your opinion on that too. Its been nearly 20 years since I had done a book report on a book. I always figured you had to write it in such a way so that if the person hadn’t read the book the review would give them enough knowledge that they would not have to read the book unless interested. thus 14 pages knocks out a book of 350 pages. If you want which I am sure you will, you can make a copy of it before returning it to me thats my only copy.

The photo [taken during our visit, by a guard at the prison] came out well so I hope your happy with them, why someone would want a picture of me is beyond me, I am nothing to look at.

Thank you also for picking out and taking a painting, as I told you that the jew in me to try to push sales, but I do appreciate it
when someone finds something they like. You know art is a funny thing, I have now done 500 oils, some of them I can’t do enough of and others which I think would be a nice painting or something I would hang in my own house, doesn’t sell. And of course you know an artist even someone like me with no talent paints what he likes, yet now all are eye appealing to others. What I get a kick out is that people tell me that after I am dead my art will be worth more so that when a person buys now its more for investment. the only ones I have seen take off like that so far from me is the [fantasy] stuff I do, the first one sold for $40.00 and yet that same painting has also sold for $200, so you figure it out.

We didn’t spend much time on the NFL but make the picks for the first week, and now I am watching the first game of the year in regular season. I see we only disagree on two games [we had made predictions for the week’s games while I was visiting] you like the Chargers over Kansas city chief and the Giants over the Bears. Well on the second game we will see I think alot of people will be surprise the bears can play without Jim Mcmahon as the quarterback. I think they have enough talent to keep them going for Mac to come back in six weeks or so, but we will have to wait and see.

Hey how did the route come out [B. had suggested that after leaving the prison, I take a route different from the one I had taken when arriving the day before ]? Was it faster? Or your old way faster? You know I forgot to tell you another way that I know too, not only cutting off miles but saving time too.

Well did I leave you with anything that you feel puzzled about after this visit? I am sure you had more questions, but doesn’t the time go by fast once we get going? Now 8 and 1/2 hours sounds like we could talk about alot and I think we do, but still you leave with the feeling you never got to talk about this or that, at least I feel that way. I notice your pretty good at keeping the conversation on me and thus we never talk about you. I wanted to ask about your trip [to England and Ireland]. Oh well maybe in letters we can talk about that.

Thanks for bringing in the sandwiches and assorted things, I enjoyed that since I don’t get a chance to have it without a visit. Like the Good n plenty, that has got to be close to 20 years since I have had them, I remember the old pink and black box they used to come in.

Enclosed is a comic I found that I thought you would like, Listen I am going to let you go for now, I hope your trip was safe going home and you too had a good time in coming. Thanks again for coming as I enjoyed it alot. and as I said maybe in time some of the things I didn’t explain you will come to understand more clearly once my appeal come down. in any case your far ahead of anyone else who seems to want to talk about me with no knowledge at all.
Well let you go for now, look forward to hearing your picks for the teams going to the Superbowl this year, so come on with it as I was first last time.

Hi to [your wife], stay well and I will be looking to hear from you. catch you later,

B.

Commentary

Enclosed in B's September 13 letter was a copy of the 14-page book report on Walden Two which he had done at the request of a female penpal who had been assigned the project for a college psychology course. B's paper is a generally sympathetic overview of Skinner's book, written in a rather ingratiating tone. For example, the paper concludes, "Setting all jokes aside, I think the book was pretty good. I learned a lot about the structure of the community, and the way the community is set up to work. The book has taught me things I didn't really understand and I am glad that I read the book. Thank you for recommending this book to me, Dr. ______."

In a letter dated September 29, B. compared the widely-believed distortions about his case with the results of the chain storytelling game often played at children's parties. "I would think anyone who reads enough of the books [about my case] can see how each one copies the others each time actually taking quotes from them. Its like spreading a rumor in a group of people, You start it off at one end of the evening and by the time you reach the end of the evening its nothing like it started off. Ever do that?" At length, B. disputed accusations contained in a book written by an individual who claims that B. assaulted him. He concluded this section of his letter, "I don't think anyone knows what really happen and I can only explain me." I had always been very forthright with B. about the origins of my interest in him and his case. He knew from the start that I was a graduate student in psychology with a particular interest in multiple murder. Still, he ended his letter by responding to a remark I had made only recently about serial killers: "So your planning to be an expert on serial murders, or at least not yet? or so your quote goes. let the cat out of the bag. Is that the reason for the visits with me? want to come again, let me know."
Dear Jeff,

Hi to [your wife] and thank you for your letter of October 19th, thought you got lost. Since the last time was back in September. Then too with your Tigers doing so well I thought you got caught up with the team. So what happen to them? I bet on them upsetting the Twins and they couldn’t pull it off. Now I am with the Twins for this seventh game as I don’t want to see the St. Louis Cardinals again winning it. Let someone else have a chance, so I am for the underdog. Yes I switched from the National league in the series.

Well at least we have real NFL football back although the way they are playing maybe the replacement teams better come back, Chicago Bears are behind in second quarter 20 to nothing against Tampa Bay Bucs.

Well did you get off all your applications for your schooling and grants [actually, for a pre-doctoral internship in clinical psychology]? That sounds like it would be alot of work.

I agree with you about the irritation the announcer can give during a [baseball or football] game. The Twins didn’t just come out of the blue as they were ahead most of the year. the comeback team would have been the Tigers as they had a battle on their hands. You notice the Eastern league teams in both the American and National league have the stronger teams? Take any team from the East and put them in the Western division and they will beat them all. What might be remarkable is if the Twins win by doing it all with home game wins as this has never been done before. But in the playoff the announcers sounded one sided, as I watched all the playoff games and every game of the world series. The umps haven’t been on the ball either as I notice some bad calls. Oh sure you can say it even itself out over the series but these umpries are suppose to be the best of the league. I don’t like to see them giving the Cardinals 4 outs in a inning at Bush field, and they certainly did that a couple time. Oh well, its just a game.

Your opinion I agree with on [the section devoted to B’s case in a recently-published book on multiple murder, which I had criticized as being very shallow]. What gets me is all [the author of the book] had to do was read the other books and pick up some of the meaningless information to have some of his facts right. this guy just went all fantasy.

So you only skimmed through [another book about B’s case, one written by an individual who claimed he had survived being attacked by B], well if you did it that way then you didn’t get a true picture of this guy as if you read the whole thing then you can see the fantasy world this guy lived in or his willingness to do anything to make a buck. [B. provides a long account of all the discrepancies included in this particular book, all the reasons why the author’s claims could not possibly be true]. I don’t assume anything, so you can take it any way you want. I still feel had a good open investigation been done in the
case, then more of these questions would be answered. Forget about truth serum, as I don’t believe in it anymore than I do with a lie detector test. I cooperated [with being interviewed while on sodium amytal] because I had nothing to hide, and that’s what it shows as I didn’t hold back to their questions what it proved or didn’t prove is for theory and I don’t deal with that. With regards to my statement to the judge in court [to the effect that B. might have done some things he was unable to recall] don’t imply that I meant murder because I said I might have done things I don’t remember, as that is not what I was referring too. Note if you read the statement then you know what I said my conversation or statement was about the trial and all the theories and fantasy that was being told, the psychic doctors and there theories and labeling me an onion, swiss cheese, or giving reasons for what I had told them I got into. like I told you before that so called science is a whitch hunt. they are not happy unless they can explain everything so neatly so they fit you into what they think your state of mind was thinking, thats hogwash to me. and we have been all over that too.

In asking questions about memory block and truth serum thats out of my field so I wouldn’t know if what your saying is right or wrong. your sounding more and more like a doctor asking me to explain the things I know nothing about. They would give me examples and fit me into them then come away and say I said it, but no so as it was their example just getting a answer. Moving on, Hey I don’t mean to cut you short on some questions but I can’t explain what I don’t know and I am not going to assume what they were thinking or why [the author of a book about him which B. finds particularly objectionable] would say it was me or what as I don’t know, truth serum and lie detectors are bullshit to most, but certainly I would know what I did or how I did think and do about my own life style. They are the ones dealing with the theories not me Kind of like an I.Q. test some have high one but they lack common sense, so how smart are they? I believe things have to be shown in black and white and you can’t guess that they could fit into a gray area or your just as bad as they are.

Jeff I am sure we could go around and around on any subject like when I was kidding you about waiting so long before you got married for the first time. I am sure given just some of your back ground information, we could get ten different opinions from doctors as to why you didn’t get married young, and all of them could be wrong as they would be assuming, only you know why you waited so long. I know you told me and I accept it as fact as your the one who would know, as for the other ten opinions as to why to me that would be theories or fantasy and thats why in any given incident if your not the one involved many stories can come out of it. What moves [the author of the book alluded to in the preceding paragraph] is beyond me what he say might be fact but living in a fantasy world he hyped it up so now its distorted, the only thing I can be sure of and I have seen him face to face is I never met the man.

My personal approach to management is what I did and I was successful at it or at least it worked well for me, others may not
think so, but I was never out of work, in fact had more then I could handle the more I made the more I spend or gave away by sharing with others. Would I say most of the people who worked for me liked me?? I could care less as I didn’t have them hired so they would like me, all I can say many were very loyal and willing to give me extra time at a minute notices or go out of their way for me. So if you call that like then I guess they did. but I wasn’t easy to work for, very demanding expecting the best for my customers as my name was on the job. a bastard to some as I was always wanting 100% for my time paid for. perfectionist I demanded quality work, but then I paid top dollar too. Age had nothing to do with what you were paid as I had some [young worker] making $400 a week. Some as young as 20 in charge of men in their 30’s and 40’s. So I don’t know if you can say they liked me, but they knew where I was coming from, and if they were honest with me I took good care of them, the phoney ones were weeded out fast. No drugs or drinking on the job. My customers I didn’t say they liked me? I said that the state couldn’t find any to come out and speak out against me. so I assume it was because I was honest with them and did a good job in the time I said it would be done. to commercial business this was important to them. My word was my bond. I doubt you could find a customer who could say I didn’t keep my word and I delivered on time. I believe I was successful because I was honest, did quality work and a fair price and kept my word. To me your word is important because no matter if your rich or poor if your word is no good then your no good. You are what you make your word to be. you start lying, then you have to keep it up because you don’t remember what you said to the last one, I never had that problem tell them the truth and it will come out the same every time. Honesty in business is hard to find this day.

Take care for now, until the next letter, go Twins tonight,

Later,

B.

Commentary

B. and I had a telephone conversation in mid-November. As always, consistent with prison regulations, he phoned, collect, from his cell.

November 21st, 1987

Dear Jeff and [names my wife],

Happy Thanksgiving to you both. I enjoyed talking to you on the phone on Saturday it nice to hear your voice once in a while. Glad I was able to get the phone early, had wanted it at 8 am my time so as not to tie up your day but it worked out well anyway.

You covered some of the things in your letter so I can cut through some of them faster then normal with my explaining. I know I am
long winded at time explaining myself but thats me and I want you to understand with no double meaning to what I am saying. I wonder at times if I make myself clear, but if I leave you confused just ask questions of what I am saying.

Lets go backwards you asked about what goes on in here for the holidays? Well really nothing. the prison gives us a special meal twice a year thats Thanksgiving and Christmas. same meal for both day and same as years before: Turkey, dressing, yams, and a vegetable, lettuce salad, carrot and celery sticks, cranberries sauce, hot rolls, milk, tea, and pumpkin pie at the end. Its a large helping then regular meals so they use two trays. each man. You have seen the size of the trays, same ones. By the way its fresh turkey, the rest of the year if we get turkey its that rolled stuff. I have a visit on Monday which is for Thanksgiving and generally during Christmas I don’t want visits passed the 15 of december. I generally call my mother and sister before the 20th of december to wish them well. and I don’t call anyone on holidays, thats been my rule not to bother people on holidays. we do get the phone but I never use it then.

I forgot to ask if you were still going to the East before xmas? you mention in your letter that you may go for a few stops, does that mean you will be moving out that way if your accepted [for the one-year predoctoral clinical psychology internship]?

The baseball season is over sorry about your Tigers I had bet on them to win, but went with Minnesota against the Cardinals in the series.

Glad we touched on the presidential candidates. you never said who you thought might be in the running for either party. I feel Simon is a guy to watch and you may very well see him in either position with Mario Cuomo. Bush for the other side looks good for now. But I don’t see him as a winner no matter who is he up against. its time for a change again and if the Democrats run someone decent then they will win. Remember you heard it here first.

NFL the Bears are looking okay not good from the way I am watching them, they lost heart since the strike. Cleveland looks like a dark horse for the Super bowl what do you think?

Hey always keep my letter on the light side as I do alot of kidding with you unless its a serious issue and I am explaining something to you. You said you never know where I am coming from at times, I would think by now you were getting a feeling for my comments and letters as I know I am doing that with yours. I know when your kidding more now then before and I don’t take offense to what you say at times like I used to. Got to remember to me its natural to be a paranoid person with what has happen to me. as I have found with being honest and straight forward has not always been the right way to be, but I can’t help that as thats the way I am, outspoken to boot.
The question about management and liking me or thought of me. I think we have gone over it. My customer had confidence in me, as my word was my bond and if I said it, it was done that way no matter if it cost me more in the end. We covered I felt the end of the job was more important then the doing of it, as that's what is what the customer is going to remember and they are the best advertising, don't you think so?

Insofar as my employee, I was fair and friendly without getting into their personal lives. They knew what I expected and I respected them when they were honest with me. He who thinks they can put one over on the boss is wrong as results show for themselves if they are working for you or just doing a job. Understand that? Their pay revealed if I was making money off them if I was doing good then they were making great money for their age, if not they didn't last with me. Age has nothing to do with ability to get the job done where I am concerned. As long as they show a willingness to learn while making money then I would take the time with them. Not many bosses will do that, right? But I was no saint so don't read that from what I was saying as I was hard to get along with if they were loafing on me while it was costing me. I yell alot then fire but like in a baseball game they had three strikes before they got the ax. Anyone can make a mistake but three was out. If you can't learn from your own errors then it's hopeless.

Let me know more about your terms in "Abnormal Behavior" studying. We covered anti-social as being a catch all, but give me your view with terms that you feel are not used properly.

How is my health? Just going along seen the specialist this week and he is telling me to wait on surgery as he found another problem with the spine at L-5 of the lower back. The herniated disc is the last one at the tailbone. I guess you can live with it since its on the end but it's been painful the last five months.

Take care for now, enclosed is a page you might be interested in [a reprinted article entitled "Mass murder and rock and roll," sent to B. by one of his correspondents]. Bye for now,

B.

Commentary
Five additional letters were dated December 29, 1987; January 17, March 29, May 7, and June 12, 1988.

In the December 29 letter, B. wrote disparagingly of the people who write him only because they desire contact with someone who is well-known. "Some are phoney and hope to get an autograph letter from me...But they get fooled as I don't sign anything with my full name." Although he agreed to indulge me, he also chided me for my
continuing tendency to display obtuseness in my letters: "Your letters are always interesting and you have come along way since you first started writing, oh at times you go back to silly or what I call dumb questions, but I try to answer even them." Then later in the same letter: "Hey don’t get mad just because I got on you but some of the things I would hope you can figure out for yourself without me saying anything." of the manuscript which he had written describing the events leading up to his trial, B. commented, "The publisher who have turned it down most of them say its because its too honest and factual and they don’t feel it will sell like the sex and gore will, so they are actually wanting the monster not the man."

The January 17 letter followed a letter in which I had described to B. the recent death of a family pet. B. offered these words of consolation: "Was sorry to hear about your dog, I know how the feeling can, as I remember when I had to have my dog put to sleep because of old age. Anytime you get attached to a pet they are hard to lose any way, by accident or old age. Maybe the best thing after awhile is to get another one, nothing can replace the one you lost but life must go on."

In the same letter, he commented on the musicians who play "heavy metal," and on their audience: "These are artist who couldn’t make it in the real music form so with no talent they play off key and hype the people listening to them to get them to believe that their music will be around for awhile. Hey it goes along with our younger generation and their drug thinking society, live fast and die young with no care to having or being responsible for their deeds...The artist has to be responsible for his work and while he may not live that lifestyle he is advocating it, and to many its a living, they actually think they are giving the public what they want. More then likely they couldn’t hold a regular job."

The very brief letter dated March 29 was primarily an Easter greeting. In addition, B. expressed his chagrin over some recent adverse publicity about his case, commenting "I haven’t been in the mood for writing with all this bullshit publicity that has been going on."

The May 7 and June 12 letters are taken up primarily with B’s reactions to an acquaintance who
had appeared on national television making dis-
torted claims about their relationship. By simply
using his name, he pointed out, the person had
become "famous overnight."

July 16th, 1988

Hi Jeff,

Well I had wondered if you had moved and forgot to write back, but
I also know you have been busy so I’ll let you get away with it. Yes I
look of late at your Tigers going up against Oakland for the
championship. Besides I can’t stand the Yankees anybody but a New York
team, in either league. I can’t stand the Mets either and if the Cubs
are not going to make it I would like to see Pittsburgh knocking off
the METS.

Well we both thought the Brunansky trade for Herr, I can’t figure
out why the CUBS traded Martinez for Websters of Montreal they are both
hitting about the same with Martinez having more R.B.I.’s and H.R.’s
Webster is 6 years older too. I would think even with Martinez still
learning the game the CUBS are about a year away from being contenders.
Next year for sure they will have to be dealt with don’t you think?

So your going to Connecticut the end of the month, well don’t
forget to send the new address, so we can keep writing if you want too.

[An agent with the FBI] has already thanked me for my help in
research [leading to publication of a book on multiple murder]. I am
now working with the Indiana University, The Kinsey Institute with
giving them some research material. As you may or may not know they
have a collection of prisoner art and Manuscripts.

Regarding my appearance [by videotape, at an international law
enforcement conference], that came off well as far as I was concerned,
also according to [the law enforcement officer who arranged it], he
said that I was a really surprise to the group as they were looking for
the monster and someone who would dodge the questions, instead they got
the man who gave them facts to each question put to me without hedging
on anything. Hell I have nothing to hide. What did I talk about the
facts verses the fantasy and about what I thought of doctors testifying
at trials and what I thought of them. Keep in mind what I didn’t know
was that there was 175 law enforcement officers, doctors and federal
judges some thing like 250 people. Because of how well it went,
according to this [officer] then spent another two hours discussing my
case after I was off the air, as I raised alot of doubt in my case, and
didn’t fit the mold of their serial killer theories. I took all
questions and gave sound answer to them. See thats the problem I am
fighting, people are so used to wanting to believe what they read about
a person, and I guess thats what threw them the most.
[B. comments on a clipping he enclosed which describes a recent art show that featured some of his paintings. B quotes a reviewer as suggesting that the organizer of the show saw in B's work "the man of action, the artist whose passions could not be restrained."]

Hey you mention the [recently-published book on serial murder]. I've never heard of [the book's author] but if he is drawing opinions about me then its based on the fantasy books that are out. I'll make you a good deal pick me up a copy of the book and let me know what it cost and I'll send a check or you can pick out an oil painting, the choice is yours? But I would like to get a copy of that book. And by the way he can't be any worse then what anyone else has said about me. I think its crazy that people can make opinions of a person they have never met, and try to come across as a professional. Now would you trust someone like this?

Nothing new [here at the prison], just that its hot very hot. By the way I didn't loose the All Star game as I went with the American league to win since they were and 8 to 5 underdog.

Take care for now, don't forget about that book and let me know which way you want to go with it cash or painting? Hi to [your wife] and take care for now, as ever

B.

July 31st, 1988

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for your letter and I just received the book as well. Much appreciated. I notice in your last letter you mention this guy's book saying that I wouldn't like what he had to say about me. Too some I guess it would bother them but when you know the truth and since so much fantasy has been written about me, nothing would surprise me. Hell I read one book called "Unprovoked Murderer" and in it they said I was into satanism and that I used to cut the heads off live chicken and drink their blood. This of course is from one of the so called experts on me. I figure if people are dumb enough to believe it let them. I think we have discussed this issue before, yes I have feeling and don't like any of it but I also have learned not to let it get to me. I just can't wait until I get a reversal and a new trial, then what will they say, know what I mean? But don't ever think it doesn't get to me as it does at times, and as much as I would like to respond to these jerks, my attorneys forbid it. Hey many of them are trying to goat me into answering them, and I just won't play the game. Just like my side of the story will come out some day and then where will all these so called experts be. But thanks for your concern.

Regarding the check, I have made out the voucher which takes another five days for them to get. So it will be coming in another
envelope. The check is for $21.00, so please let me know when you get it.

Hey I see you have a birthday coming up on August 17th, number 35, well in case I forget to send the wishes let me say now, Happy Birthday.

[B. comments disparagingly about the untruths told about him in a number of books on his case]. People have to assume your guilty if you were convicted. Now I know thats wild but thats how Edward Meese thinks, so the effect to anyone never involved in the law or how the judicial system works can only believe that too. If your convicted your guilty, nobody wants to say the law fucked up or they withheld evidences that was unfavorable to their side. Like I keep saying if I was as guilty as they would like for you to believe then my appeal would be open and shut. As it doesn’t take no eight years to go through the system. Meanwhile everyone is making money off the case.

Jeff you have to understand no matter what they write its self serving to them. [A law enforcement official with whom I’ve spoken] has privileged information and he knows my involvement in the crime and what I do know about them. But I will not go into it and have to let you believe what you want. No questions either, please. In time you’ll understand, and I think it will come to light within the next year or slowly after that, as they are running out of ways to block me into getting into the federal levels of the court.

You asked why I bet against the National league in the all-star game, that was simple once I knew Gooden was going to be starting pitcher for National league I knew the American league could score. The National league has won more but under Herzog they have lost all three times he has been the manager/coach for the all-star game.

I see your tigers are holding on, lets hope they stay there. Cubs are having a bad month and I can only hope for a better August. At least the race is not a runaway for the Mets. Your right about the Red sox’s, but the young talent alone won’t do it for them, at least I don’t think so. I still am sticking with Oakland to win the American league besides the division championship.

Right now I am going to be picking the Super Bowl and the divisional champs next week so I have been working on that. Hey the Bears are all right even with loosing Willie Gault but the Raiders are going to be an interesting team to watch with all the speed. But I think one of the teams in the bowl is going to be Denver. So how do you see the match ups?

I don’t even know who your talking about on this Jim Wright investigation [Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives]? Whats it all about? Who is Bush going to name as a running mate? and do you think Dukakis can beat him? I do. The time is right for a change and I
don’t think Bush is well liked even within his own party. so what’s your views?

It will be some time before I get the book reviews [on several recently-published books about multiple murder] to you since I am very busy with all the summer art exhibits I have involved in. enclosed is a new list showing what’s up and if you notice the prices have gone up based on increased cost of material. I have shows running until the end of September for now and a new outlet opening in Pittsburgh next week or two. till out in California where they are going real well sold close to 40 paintings just from L.A. and San Francisco. the F.B.I. agents have taken five of them thus far too.

[In regard to my own case], I am not interested in reversing the death penalty, I would rather have the hearing to add more fuel to the fire before we get to the federal level. See you can only add things at certain levels. You would have to understand [my attorney's legal] strategy which even I don't at times. It's an election year the case is too controversial, that's why we pushing the reversal of the D.P. next to an all out reversal. I can only tell you from what I know but I do know the main argument was on the conviction and that the state had no argument to counter it. The main issue being the ineffective assistance of counsel. So again the news media doesn't want to be one sided in printing the proof showing the states argument were frail. You got to remember the media gets many of their stories from the state as it was a closed oral argument, I can't even get a transcript, just hear what my attorneys told me, and that's how I relayed it to you. And believe me my attorney has no reason to build it up as its his fight, I had six attorneys present and the same story comes from all of them. I’ll bet right now they will stall it as long as they can trying to find a way of addressing the issues without giving us anything knowing they can be reversed in the higher courts. Like I said its a game they play and I don't understand all of it. But if they are so sure I and I alone committed the crime then lets get on with it and let me go to the federal courts. at least they don't have to worry about their jobs as they are on the bench for life and will follow the law. Keep in mind I still believe I could be executed because of the way its being played. They would rather I died then admit they made an error and thats a fact too. Nobody like to admit they are wrong judges are lawyers past, so they are not going to rule against themselves if they can avoid it. You would not believe the politics involved in the justice system.

Hey I am going to let you go, your questions are interesting but I can only tell you what I know or what I am told, there is no telling what the Supreme court is going to do. All I know is [my attorney] backed them up against the wall using the law 1. reverse the conviction based on ineffective assistance of counsel, 2. Reverse the sentence, as I never had a proper hearing when I was sentence to death, or 3. grant us a post conviction hearing so that we can present more evidence to show why the conviction has to be reversed. those are the facts as I know them now lets see how they deal with them. You talk about frustration in moving how would you like to be in this boat, knowing
they have the power to do it and also know they are going to stall as long as they can to try to avoid it.

Hey another thing stop and think about it when your addressing the court you don’t address the sentence without attacking the conviction, so you tell me why the media didn’t print it how it went down and that answer is they got the story from the prosecutors who you know are not going to say what the real issue are, as it would make them look bad. Like I keep telling you believe what you want in what you read I can only tell you what I know as I am not there either. but if they are so sure then why is it taking them so long? which has got to tell you something alone. They haven’t got a good argument to stop me from reversing my case that’s why we play the game. Hey I was told along time ago, they could drag this on for ten years and we are not far from that now.

Hope your moving was safe and complete take care for now say hi to [your wife]. Catch you later,

B.

Commentary
In a brief letter dated August 27, B. provided a terse assessment of a recent book offering a biological perspective on multiple murder: "the same old bullshit."

Selected Themes
Emerging from the Letters

Five themes appear with great regularity throughout B’s correspondence. Of course it is possible to identify others. In fact, another reader of the letters might argue that a theme I have neglected deserves the same emphasis as those I have chosen to highlight. Obviously, an exploratory handling like mine of a collection of source documents invites that sort of criticism. I hope, however, that readers will share my sense that the five themes identified and documented in this section capture important aspects of B’s self-presentation.

A different subheading identifies each of the five themes. The five themes are:
. A preoccupation with truth standards
. A resistance to being pathologized
. A sense of being "special"
. A resistance to being "rubricized"
. The importance of "positive mental attitude"

Following each subheading is a very brief introduction to the theme in question. Then, a sampling of quotations, most but not all of them extracted from letters which are excerpted at greater length elsewhere in this chapter, are used to illustrate the presence of that theme. Several quotations appear twice since they are relevant to more than one of the identified themes. For the most part, my case for the presence and importance of a particular theme is allowed to rest on the evidence of the letters themselves.

A parenthetical reference after each quotation identifies the letter from which the quotation has been lifted. If the source document is not included in the present chapter, the reference reads "Unexcerpted letter." Where I have judged that a gloss is needed to establish more clearly the original context in which a quotation appeared, I have provided one, underlined and contained within brackets. In cases where the original letter has been excerpted, readers are encouraged to trace the quotation back to its source.

Finally, the same editing procedures described earlier with reference to the letters pertain as well to the extracted quotations.

Theme #1: A Preoccupation with Truth Standards

What is "true" about any individual life? Who is qualified to answer the question of "what really happened" in any given instance?
According to what criteria are we to evaluate any commentator's claim to authority? To what extent does "truth" - in society, in the courtroom - reflect ideology and "presupposition" (a term which B. uses frequently) rather than "fact"?

B's preoccupation with questions of this sort is evident in nearly every one of his letters. When he considers the media's role in disseminating information: "[The media] made the monster image." When he comments on this country's legal system: "Truth has no place with the cast of characters who perform [in the courtroom]. Its whoever tells the best story, most convincing actor." When he delivers his verdict on the value of psychological tests: "The conclusions that are drawn from [them] are theories and not fact." When he explains the nature and limits of his Catholic faith: "I believe in God, and all that goes with him....I am Catholic,...[but] I don't agree with everything just because the church says so." Even when he reflects on marriage: "Once you get passed [the first five years] you got it made, or so they say. But then who are they?"

In a sense, the perspective which B. argues in his letters is that of a dyed-in-the-wool empiricist. According to this view, only when it is based on direct experience can a commentator's account of something (or someone) be accorded even qualified truth status. "I think its crazy," B. writes in one letter, "that people can make opinions of a person they have never met." And elsewhere, "In any given incident if your not the one involved many stories can come out of it."

Quotations from the letters.

"Each person has his own way of explaining my life, what did I have 26 life's?" (July 26, 1987)
"I always look to think that people don’t believe what I say, but when I do say something, you’ll know its factual as it can be confirm by more then me. I think I mention nearly 80% of what has been written about me is false, fantasy, second or third hand information, as I have never granted an interview."
(March 16, 1986)

[Alluding to a booklength manuscript which B. has written about his own case]: "It is not out yet, there is where you would get the factual information about my life and thoughts, and its not based on a one sided view of my case, it gives all the facts as they actually are." (March 16, 1986)

[With reference to other individuals who have been convicted of multiple murder]: "I am not their judge nor do I know if they did what they did. I am sure only they know so I have no comment about them." (March 16, 1986)

"Your going to find, you will get straight bold not tackful answers to what you write, because that’s the way I am." (March 16, 1986)

"I do consider myself honest and a man of my word. There is only one thing you got that know one can take from you, thats your word, if your word is know good, then your no good. Thats simple." (March 16, 1986)

"In regards to criminality, the only thing I have learned about it, is the system is not fair, and that they don’t really deal with facts and truth. The trial system is more theory and fantasy, and who has the best actor before the jury." (Unexcerpted letter, April 6, 1986)

"The public is not interested in the truth, they want revenge, in the news media, it far better to make up a fantasy to sell newspapers because that what our society wants. The truth is dull." (Unexcerpted letter, April 6, 1986)

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"Your impressions of me is based on the assumption that what is printed is factual. That's rather dangerous for a person with education." (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)

"You have to prove to me that something is fact." (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)

"In court it's a game, they are not interested in truth or facts, it's winning that counts." (Unexcerpted letter, March 22, 1986)

"The public deals with what they read, if I distort something then your view is the same distorted by what I have said or printed." (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)

"I know what is fact and what is fantasy in my own life." (Unexcerpted letter, May 4, 1986)

"I...agree with you that many people don't limit their opinions to fact. Maybe I am not in the main stream but I personally don't make judgement calls, maybe it because of my religious beliefs. I am not perfect, don't claim to make all my answers the only way to look at things." (Unexcerpted letter, May 4, 1986)

"The conclusions that are drawn from [psychological tests] are theories and not fact, and just like no two bodies are alike, how then can they make a general conclusion to someone mind?" (June 10, 1986)

"Your assuming I am the killer because I was convicted, and that's hogwash. What is your factual bases to fall back on? Let's assume you loan your car to a friend, you get it back three hours later, your driving home and a cop stops you for going across the double yellow line. In looking in your car, because you don't look right to him, he opens the car trunk and fines a nude male body, and a couple penthouse magazines. your arrested, charged with murder, sexual assault, kidnapping. That's enough for the death penalty. How do you prove you didn't do it? The other guy who borrowed your car says he didn't. The victim is a stranger. Just reading what the headlines would carry: Schooling doctor experiments with Murder. From the start since the body is nude we can assume you had sex with him, since he is in your trunk you put him there so there for you kidnapped him, and since he is dead you murdered him. oh and since he is male your homosexual. Now with
that sound strange if you said, But I didn’t kill him, I
couldn’t kill anyone." (June 10, 1986)

"Congratulations on [your] first anniversary. Just think its
only the first five that are the hardest, once you get passed
that you got it made, or so they say. But then who are they?"
(August 31, 1986)

"Today’s courtroom is not about justice, and truth has no
place with the cast of characters who perform their. Its
whoever tells the best story, most convincing actor."
(Unexcerpted letter, September 13, 1986)

"In my case I am not fighting the facts, as nobody seems to
want to hear them. Most peoples opinion of me is from the
news media, the conviction... built a concrete wall around me
so that nobody wants to know the facts." (Unexcerpted letter,
October 22, 1986)

"Like I said in the book that I did, I wasn’t looking for
people to be on my side but just take an open objective look
at the facts, and you will see the facts haven’t been printed
about me, just mostly fantasy, theory, and things taken out of
contexts. Of course I guess any person could read anything
into what they read or hear, so that’s why I like to show
things which will stand without me trying to make the point."
(December 18, 1986)

"It’s a known fact the police like to clean the books and get
out of it the easiest way possible. As a result of such
thinking, you take on tunnel vision, and forget about the
facts, just make the pieces of the puzzle fit....All I am
saying if you want to pass judgement on me do it with the facts
and not from what has been printed about the case, as certainly
that’s theory and fantasy, show me the facts which support it."
(Unexcerpted letter, January 4, 1987)

"I don’t think you are naive or are pitting me against the
books, I look at you with an open mind and hope your just
looking to get every angle of the case before drawing your
whole picture of the case, Nor am I trying to sell you that I
am all right and they are all wrong. What you have to do is
read between the lines, the state is not going to say some-
thing that would be favorable to me if it would add doubt to
what they are saying, so they keep going to their fantasy and
theory to fill in the blanks, while I will take the fantasy
and theories and fill it in with the actually facts of what
has happen." (Unexcerpted letter, January 19, 1987)

"Now what is the difference between what I say and my meaning
of facts. If I say to you thats a fact, or facts, or factual,
it means not only do I know it to be so but others can back it
...You will notice I don't like to give many theories as to what I think happen or who I think did it because thats speculation." (February 19, 1987)

- "Forget about truth serum, as I don’t believe in it anymore then I do a lie detector test. I cooperated [with taking some] because I had nothing to hide, and thats what it shows as I didn't hold back to their questions what it proved or didn’t prove is for theory and I don’t deal with that." (October 10, 1987)

- "In any given incident if your not the one involved many stories can came out of it." (October 25, 1987)

- "I want you to understand with no double meaning to what I am saying." (November 21, 1987)

- "I don’t want you to just take my word for anything, as I will always back it up so you can tell or make your own conclusion. I will always give you facts no matter what it is."(Unexcerpted letter, December 29, 1987)

- "I think its crazy that people can make opinions of a person they have never met, and try to come across as a professional." (July 16, 1988)

Theme #2: A Resistance to Being Pathologized

B. insists that he is basically no different, at least no more abnormal, than anyone else. He expresses great regret over his notoriety and contends that if people will only look beyond the media's "monster" image, they will find "the man" - "just an average guy."

Often, he implies that observers who label him "abnormal" or "psychopathic" or "insane" would do well to examine themselves first before passing judgment on others. Why, he asks, if he is such a horrible "monster," has he received so many requests for autographed paintings from law enforcement officials, including some who served as members of the prosecuting team at his trial? Why do these individuals seem concerned with securing concrete evidence of an association with him? Why does the market value of his paintings continue to increase?
And why are ostensibly "normal" people so fascinated by killing and killers in the first place?

In one letter B. asks why anyone who actually believed that he was a multiple murderer would want to correspond with him? He would certainly never choose to write someone he thought was a killer. Repeatedly, he observes the absurdity of much that passes for "normal" in our society and asks, along with two other commentators on the ambiguous status of the multiple murderer in American society, "Who is crazy, and who isn't?" (Michaud and Aynesworth, 1983, p. 320).

Quotations from the letters

- "I am just an average guy, forget the infamous....I am no one special." (March 16, 1986)
- "In regards to being infamous, I don't like it. I am just a person caught up in the system....There is a great deal of difference between [B.] the man, and [B.] the media monster." (March 16, 1986)
- "I guess [people who visit me] are expecting to meet this monster image that has been projected of me, and they find someone no different from them." (Unexcerpted letter, April 6, 1986)
- "[The media] made the monster image, not based on meeting the man, but what they were fed from the state. But do you actually think the public wanted to hear I was a nice guy?" (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)
- "I have never knowingly killed anyone, and I don't think I could as I don't get that mad about anything. I know that may sound strange to you since I have been convicted of killing [many], but its true." (May 26, 1986)
- "Knowing me and the way I have been most of my life, I have never been in a fight, deplore any violences. Its not out of line for me to say I couldn't kill anyone....Could you kill someone? Why?" (June 10, 1986)
- "I am not something special, just a man caught up in a mess of contradictions." (December 9, 1986)
Theme #3: A Sense of Being "Special"

On one hand, B. insists that his infamy is ill-founded; he is not a serial killer. On the other hand, he evinces little surprise at the intense curiosity about his life and his opinions. Many people apparently contact B. because they want to sample the perspective of an individual capable of murdering more than twenty people. B. denies that he possesses any special expertise on the subject of murder, then proceeds to air opinions for which he assumes a rapt audience: opinions about politics, sports, marriage, psychology, religion, sexual mores, and a wide variety of other subjects. On a number of occasions he has expressed hope that I have felt "enlightened" after hearing his perspective on something.
In one sense, of course, B's assumption of "specialness" can be viewed as a response to the fact that ever since his arrest on suspicion of multiple murder, he has been accorded a kind of celebrity status. At least one famous author has expressed interest in writing B's life story. Books about his case continue to appear. Television talk show hosts want to interview him. Letters from would-be "pen-pals" arrive every week. Well-established attorneys offer to represent him on appeal.

One gets the impression, however, that even though he insists he is not what most people assume, a serial killer, B. accepts this attention as his due. After our first telephone conversation, he wrote immediately to assure me that I had actually spoken to him; the implication, it seemed to me, was that he believed the experience might have left me a little starstruck. About a painting he did of Christ's crucifixion, B. remarks in one letter, "It's going to be one of my classics." In several letters he reminds me that one psychiatrist described him as the most "complexed" person he had ever interviewed - "not that I am trying to be that, it just happens to be me." His life, he says - this despite protestations that he is "just an average guy" - has "touched thousands of people." Even in prison, he stands apart: "I am in a group by myself because case size, I can't compare it with others."

Quotations from the Letters

[Writing of a defamation suit B. and his attorneys had filed against the authors and publishers of a book about B's case]: "I am sure you will be reading about it soon as I believe that AP will pick up the story and carry it nationwide." (March 16, 1986)
"[When I had experts from a well-known art institute examine my paintings,] I was told I had a style all of my own and I should not change." (March 16, 1986)

"I...believe many people write to me because they are insecure in their own life never amounting to anything, so they feel they want to be part of something that is infamous, for whatever reason. I don't buy it but some come up with that. Just to go around and say I write to [B.]. Ego's that are inflated." (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)

"I have been told by several of the doctors I am the most complexed person they ever met." (May 26, 1986)

"[When we have a phone conversation,] I talk to you directly from my cell." (May 26, 1986)

[After our first telephone conversation]: "Just a note to let you know that you did talk with [B.], I know it may sound funny to you. But on Saturday at 11:05 it was me." (Unexcerpted letter, June 22, 1986)

"Thank you for your comments on 'Christ' painting. In time I think you would get it as its going to be one of my classics." (Unexcerpted letter, September 13, 1986)

[With reference to B's various correspondents]: "In so far as where they are from, I cover 14 states. From California to Maine, Oregon to Alabama, much of the midwest. From writers to house painters. Acid rock singer to professors, housewives to professional women." (Unexcerpted letter, September 13, 1986)

"I am not always one to accept anything just because someone tells me its so, and I don't limit myself as to not making mistakes, as I feel you can learn from mistakes. Now you can understand why [one psychiatrist] said I was the most complexed man he had interviewed. Not that I am trying to be that, it just happens to be me." (Unexcerpted letter, November 22, 1986)

"I am sure I enlighten you on many things." (December 18, 1986)

"I enjoyed [our visit at the prison] and I hope you came away more enlighten than before." (September 13, 1987)

"[Before being arrested,] I came into contact with thousands of people and my life has touched thousands of people. " (Unexcerpted letter, January 19, 1987)

"You mention [former acquaintances of mine] and how you wondered what makes them talk to the media. I think its just like I told you. People sometimes want to be noticed, or feel
important, kind of like name droppers, you know what I mean?" (Unexcerpted letter, March 8, 1987)

[Here in prison] I am in a group by myself because case size, I can't compare it with others." (April 1, 1987)

"The media is a business and they are not interested in the truth, just selling or being first with something....I am sure every reporter would like to say I got the first interview with [B.] or its exclusive." (Unexcerpted letter, June 20, 1987)

[In reference to a copy B. had sent me of a report he had written on B.F. Skinner's Walden Two]: "It's been nearly 20 years since I had done a book report on a book. I always figured you had to write it in such a way so that if the person hadn't read the book the review would give them enough knowledge that they would not have to read the book unless interested. Thus 14 pages knocks out a book of 350 pages. If you want which I am sure you will, you can make a copy of [the report] before returning it to me." (September 13, 1987)

"People tell me that after I am dead my art will be worth more so that when a person buys now its more for investment." (September 13, 1987)

Theme #4: A Resistance to Being "Rubricized"

Commenting on the "impenetrability" of an imprisoned killer, a psychiatrist in a recent novel about serial murder observes, "I think he's afraid that if we 'solve' him nobody will be interested in him anymore" (Harris, 1981, p. 68). Whether for the reason the psychiatrist suggests, or for some other reason, it is apparent from his letters that B. reacts strongly against those individuals who would try and tag him with a diagnostic label, or fit him into a limiting conceptual box. I have described this theme in B's letters as a resistance to being rubricized.

The term "rubricized" I have borrowed from Maslow (1968), who suggests that a certain amount of what many psychotherapists call "resistance" may instead be the client's "healthy distaste ...for being rubricized or casually classified, i.e., for being deprived of his
individuality, his uniqueness, his differences from all others, his special identity" (p. 119). What clients - any individuals for that matter - frequently object to is another's attempt to grasp their essence, their possibilities, through "a cheap form of cognizing..., a quick, easy cataloguing whose function is to make unnecessary the effort required by more careful, idiographic perceiving or thinking" (p. 119).

According to Maslow, resentment is the individual's customary reaction to being rubricized. B. repeatedly expresses his disdain for those who would claim that they understand him, or who would represent all that he is with a diagnostic label. One is reminded of Moosbrugger, the sex murderer on trial in Robert Musil's novel, The Man Without Qualities (1953). Even the judge's acknowledgement that he is different somehow, a case apart from most other human beings, does not satisfy Moosbrugger's need to see himself as someone whose possibilities are without limit: "For the judge Moosbrugger was a special case; for himself he was a world, and it is very difficult to say something convincing about a world" (p. 84).

Quotations from the letters

1. "You don't know nothing about me." (March 1, 1986)

2. "The media also loves labels. I have a section in my book about the media and how it worked with me...That's what I am fighting in my case, not the truth or the facts." (Unexcerpted letter, April 6, 1986)

3. "You know how you make one statement and they want to label you, for just that one thought. I have been told by several of the doctors I am the most complexed person they ever met, so if that's the case then how can some of them draw conclusions to what I say when they only talk to me for a few hours?" (May 26, 1986)
"For the most part I thought [the various doctors who examined me] didn't spend enough time to get the true picture of me." (May 26, 1986)

"In my case they have never put me with any of the victims before, during or after the crime. Even the last [killing] there is breaks in the chain of events." (May 26, 1986)

"Hell, I would have to write a thousand page book to dispute all the bullshit which has been written. But I have no motive for the crime, no reason to commit the crime.... None of it fits." (Unexcerpted letter, January 4, 1987)

"The conclusions that are drawn from [psychological tests] are theories and not fact, and just like no two bodies are alike, how then can they make a general conclusion to someone mind?" (June 10, 1986)

"You say your a complexed man and I have been told the same so how then can they come up with simple answers to fit us?...They seem to think that everything has an answer, and that you can fit into whatever group they want to fit you in. And I don't agree with that, not in a few hours or a few hundred hours can they understand your thinking." (June 10, 1986)

"I am sure we both agree that you may have read a lot about me, but you still don't know me, and from the way your going about it you never will." (Unexcerpted letter, July 5, 1986)

"Hell when I first was arrested I was a mass murderer, it wasn't until [a couple of years later] that I became a serial killer as they say. Labels, I just love them, people who don't know what they are talking about always want to put a label on you. doesn't matter if it fits or not." (Unexcerpted letter, August 12, 1986)

"I just finished a letter with a pen-pal where we were talking about labeling people. Like as if we all belong in one group or another. Whatever happened to individualism? If like they say the mind is a complexed thing then how come these doctors claim to know all and are able to group people. Thats why I don't think much of psychic doctors." (August 31, 1986)

"I guess I would be considered a...Maverick." (August 31, 1986)

"Its like [the doctors] pick out terms which they can use as a catch all, just to make it sound like they know what they are talking about. I for one don't buy it." (Unexcerpted letter, September 22, 1986)

"These doctors feel their success or failure depends on whether or not they can examine a person and fit him into some group...
Isn’t it possible a person doesn’t fit at all?” (Unexcerpted letter, October 22, 1986)

“You mention psychology of [the apparently motiveless murderer]. I would assume you could fit anyone into that science, that gets down to labeling people, trying to make them fit.” (Unexcerpted letter, January 4, 1987)

"Like I told you before that so called science [of psychology] is a witch hunt. They are not happy unless they can explain everything so neatly they fit you into what they think your state of mind was thinking, thats hogwash to me....They would give me examples and fit me into them then come away and say I said it, but not so as it was their example just getting a answer.” (October 25, 1987)

Theme #5: The Importance of "Positive Mental Attitude"

Despite his pronounced tendency to externalize blame for his legal problems - witnesses against him lied, the "psychic doctors" talked only "theory" and "fantasy," the state suppressed evidence that would have exonerated him, the media made him into a mythical "monster" because monsters sell - B. often expresses his belief that each individual must take control of his life. He has been wronged, he says, but he will not accept defeat: "Give up, never, they would have to spend every dollar in [the state treasury] before I would give up on appeal."

Consistent with this never-say-die attitude, B. lists as two of his favorite songs "The Impossible Dream" and "Climb Every Mountain." Always set goals, he advises, but set them so that they are achievable. Once the old goals have been attained, set new ones. Never capitulate before other people’s definition of your situation. Recognize that each individual has choices to make about how to live life: "Nothing is just out there in life you have to reach for what you want."
Quotations from the letters

"Do you vote regularly, or are you one of those who let the others do the job and then sit back and complain. I feel those who don't vote haven't got the right to complain." (Unexcerpted letter, April 6, 1986)

"You control you, you choose to believe what you read as factual, I don't." (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)

"I would have [a view of my case and my life as distorted as yours] if I believe in the news media, but I don't, I have a mind of my own." (Unexcerpted letter, April 22, 1986)

"[I had told B. that when he was finished reading a paper I had sent him, he could throw the copy I sent him away.] "Be proud of what you do, the idea of just throwing [the paper] away, is not my cup of tea... Think positive when you write to me don't put your work down." (August 31, 1986)

"I believe you can plan life and make it work." (Unexcerpted letter, September 22, 1986)

"Some people are go getter, and can get more done. I know if someone said it couldn't be done in a certain amount of time, I was always out to disprove it." (Unexcerpted letter, September 22, 1986)

"I have never been a follower in my life. which doesn't mean I can't follow orders. But if there is a choice, then I take the lead." (September 28, 1986)

"[The painting of the Man of La Mancha,] the Quest, the reason I like it is because I relate to the song Impossible dream, you know the song?...For what is a Quest but positive mental attitude. And I am a strong follower of EMA. Just like in the Sound of Music I love the song; Climb Every Mountain." (Unexcerpted letter, October 24, 1986)

"I expect...high standard, some say I am too picky or I am trying to be a perfectionist, if thats the case, then so be it....And don't think I am something special, [it's] just my way of I guess winning approval, which goes back to my childhood. With my dad I never did anything right. I was dumb and stupid to him." (November 5, 1986)

"Since I am strong on [positive mental attitude], nothing is just out there in life you have to reach for what you want, but never set goals too high as failure has a way of defeating you in the long run. My life has been simple, making and meeting little goals and then making them harder and harder so as to challenge my ability. I think people have things hidden within,
but don't reach for them so they will never know if they can do it. I guess they can't accept failure, but you can learn from failure, if you make it work for you." (November 11, 1986)

"I happen to think I am creative person, and I like things done my way so I take control....But I guess I have been lucky since when I do take charge it has worked out for me." (November 5, 1986)

"Do you have strong feelings that you control you, then if so you make things happen for you. I don't agree with the people who think things are just out there in life and they happen outside your force to control." (Unexcerpted letter, November 22, 1986)

"Now some of my earliest memories is at the age of three but some parts of some go back to when I was just two. That's when I was visiting my aunt, and so as to get me out of their hair for awhile, they put me in one of those baby straps, you know over your shoulders and around the waist, and had me hooked to the clothes line in the back yard, but I got out of it by taking my playsuit off, and went down the driveway to the sidewalk and started toward the capital." (December 9, 1986)

"I know this may sound dumb, but I kept a log book as to every incoming and outgoing penny all during my school years. entries like ten cents for candy, 7 cents for bus, $1.00 for cutting the neighbor's lawn, 50 cents for shovelling snow. Then at the end of the year I would total it up and make an income statement and go against the next year to see if I got better." (December 9, 1986)

"I assume I can do anything I set my mind to doing, and I will try anything once." (Unexcerpted letter, March 8, 1987)

"I make [doing time in prison] easy and I thank God for Faith in Him and my own positive mental attitude. You can take time and think of all the negatives and that's what you will have around you or you can think positive and make it work, but its work to make it work....Yes, you miss the little things people take for granted, walking on grass, smelling the air right after a rain. But you put those things out of your mind and deal with what is around you....We have guys here who are just sitting back waiting for the appeal attorneys to come up with their defense on appeal. Hell who better would know what happen then you? right. So you have to give them help....In my case I made it organized....Being positive has a lot to do with making the time go easy, yet in the back of my mind I know just from seeing the way the legal system works, I could never be leaving here or even getting executed. But you have to keep that out of your mind as that will drive the negatives out....I only have me to pick myself up or its over for me...." Keep in
mind I grew up always being called dumb and stupid, so I have always had to prove I could do it, and the positive thinking is the way to do it. Even you can do anything you set your mind to doing if you keep telling yourself you can....[You] know we are our own worse enemy, you can talk yourself right out of trying something, just by saying I can’t....[The] things we can’t change in life you have to adjust to make them work. But give up, never, they would have to spend every dollar in [the state treasury] before I would give up on appeal....I’ll know when its all over no matter how it comes out I tried. and I am not a loser." (April 1, 1987)

- "Nothing was said to be easy, so think positive and try it and don’t give up even when it gets hard. If the man got at the foot of the mountain looking up and said it can’t be done, then he has let the mountain defeat him without trying. What makes a baby get up and walk knowing he/she will fall, because they have objective and goals and that to me is positive thinking...I am not a cold blood, hard, bastard, just a man with a goal and purpose in life and no matter how hard they make it for me I will hang in there." (April 1, 1987)

- "I am a positive thinker, and don’t believe you get anything without hard work. Nothing for nothing....One of my favorite saying is: ‘You cannot hope to enjoy the harvest without first laboring in the fields." (May 7, 1987)

Concluding Remarks

The letters excerpted in this chapter will not strike the same chords in every reader. It is even possible, although I hope not likely, that some readers will find fault with my selection of five predominating themes. Perhaps some will feel that a theme I have chosen not to discuss deserves equal emphasis. Others might argue that certain quotations included as supportive evidence under a given theme do not belong there. Dissenting viewpoints are welcome. I claim no privileged access to the "truth" in B’s letters, nor do I claim to possess a very keen sense of how the world looks from B’s perspective.

I cannot claim, either, to have avoided completely the temptation to stray from the primary data. The letters do not simply "speak for
themselves"; nor, at least in their edited form, can they. Although I have tried to exercise restraint in doing so, at times I have spoken for them, as when I have organized selected quotations around a small number of themes. My subjective involvement in the interpretive process is, in fact, everywhere evident. B's letters were written in response to letters which I wrote. I decided which among B's letters should be excerpted in this chapter. I made many editorial decisions which affected not only relatively minor grammatical and stylistic aspects of the letters, but content as well. I identified five themes, and I selected quotations which I felt expressed various aspects of each theme.

Obviously, I can make no claim of objectivity. I have, however, by providing some general background about the correspondence, and by providing brief glosses intended to bridge the gaps between excerpted letters, tried to minimize the extent to which readers may experience the letters as context-less, or distorted, communications. If I have been at all successful, then an admittedly small step toward standardization of the interpretive situation will have been achieved.

Again: what can we learn from B's letters? About the psychology of that constructed category of criminal we have been calling "motiveless murderers," perhaps we can learn nothing at all. On the other hand, through the letters we are afforded access to the way in which one member of that larger category (assuming for the moment that B. is guilty as charged) defines his situation. But even this latter statement requires a qualification. Perhaps B. proposes a different definition of his situation for each audience he addresses. Since we
have only very limited access to B's life - his personal interactions with other people, his various correspondences - we cannot know for certain.

In the final analysis, we have little except one small crack through which to glimpse the world of an apparently "sane" man thought to have engaged in behavior which most people regard as a pathognomonic indicator of insanity. Although it may be difficult to feel satisfied with such a restricted view, looking and seeing only a small portion of what is actually there is surely preferable to the alternative, not looking at all.
I will conclude by briefly stating what I have tried to accomplish. "Reconnaissance work," Maslow's term, seems an apt description; it implies a preliminary inquiry into an area about which little is known or understood. The area I set out to explore - the social construction of motiveless murder - remains largely uncharted, but future travellers will perhaps benefit from my attempt to survey the lay of the land.

For the ethnologist who travels to this area with the aim of documenting social praxis, the language barrier is likely to present a formidable problem. Because of the area's polyglot population, various understandings of motiveless murder often become intelligible only after a careful examination of linguistic conventions, and of customs shared by some but not all of the area's language groups. Some people speak the language of psychiatry. Others speak the language of the law. Still others speak the language of theology. Not infrequently, parochialism impedes communication across groups.

Primarily, I have been concerned to document the extent of this cultural diversity. Description, not explanation, has been my main objective. Forms of understanding, not forms of behavior, have been the targets of my attention. Having attended closely to how practitioners
of the various language systems have attempted to render acts of apparently motiveless murder intelligible, I now tend toward the perspective expressed by Pamela Hanford Johnson (1967) in her long personal reflection on the terrible crimes committed by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley: "There is little to be done except to ask questions" (p. 104). I would add, "and to remain open to the likelihood that for each question asked, there are a variety of different answers, all of them partially 'true.'" No group, no single language has a monopoly on the truth. Of course the discovery of "truth" is never the aim of constructionist inquiry. Instead, the aim is to hold up to the light different versions of the truth, and to inspect the foundations on which they seem to be built.

To conduct this kind of inspection, I have adopted the attitude Gergen (1985) describes as "radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world" (p. 267) - the constructionist attitude. A number of questions have animated my work: According to what criteria of "sense" do certain murders strike large segments of the general population as "senseless"? When faced with such acts, with what language forms and conceptual schemes do people attempt the transmutation of apparent senselessness into intelligibility? What constructions of meaning emerge from the various kinds of discourse, both popular and more scientific, about motiveless murder? In what ways do these constructions embody assumptions about such imponderables as human nature and the roots of "madness"? And finally: What continuities are there between our perceptions of the world and the perceptions of people like Ted Bundy, Dennis Nilsen, Josef Mengele, and John Gacy?
In Chapter IV I cited a fictional character's words of caution: "How little do you know about a man if you only know that he has committed four murders!" (Vickers, 1984). For me, that statement sets off a chain of images and associations. I think of the touching note which Dennis Nilsen wrote to thank the co-workers who had taken up a collection to get him through a lean financial period. I think of investigative journalist Loretta Schwartz-Nobel, who after realizing that it was genuine fondness and admiration she felt for multiple killer William Bradfield, resolved never again to trust her intuitions about other people. I think of journalist Sandy Fawkes, who discovered that the man with whom she had had a week-long affair was in fact Paul John Knowles, the murderer of at least eighteen people. I think of Ann Rule, now one of America's recognized authorities on serial murder - she lectures on the subject at the FBI's training academy - working a crisis hotline and enjoying a late-night meal with her then-friend Ted Bundy. I think, too, of my own extended personal encounter with an infamous multiple killer, and of the feeling I had that even if I didn't like the man, he certainly seemed no more strange and idiosyncratic than countless other people I had met.

These are disturbing associations. They underscore the need to examine our everyday assumptions about people, ourselves included, with an attitude of "radical doubt." They underscore the need to problematize our ideas about difference and pathology as we seek ways of dividing up the human pie. They underscore, too, a theme that has run throughout this entire project. Solving the crime of motiveless
murder is a self-reflexive process; at its core is the problem of "solving" ourselves.

Literary critic Leslie Fiedler (1971) specifies the locus of the interpretive challenge in an essay about a crime which perhaps seems less anomalous today than it did during the 1920's, when the press dubbed it "the crime of the century": "The meanings of the crime of Leopold and Loeb are implicit in the act itself as that act is apprehended by the popular imagination [emphasis added]") (p. 431). To survey and explicate the various ways in which Leopold and Loeb's "thrill killing" has been apprehended by the popular imagination is, says Fiedler, "to solve the crime" (p. 432). A loosely defined category of crime — motiveless murder — has been the subject of the present exercise in detection and explication. If I have achieved a small step toward the kind of "solution" that Fiedler envisions as the only kind possible, then I have achieved my objective.

Finally, I would like to suggest several avenues for future investigators interested in the study of motiveless murder. Some avenues hold the promise of clarifying aspects of the killers' phenomenology. Others would focus on the fit between an available explanatory framework and the actual behavior of the individuals who commit these acts. Still others would illuminate social attitudes about killing in general and motiveless murder in particular.

1) A more thorough attributional analysis of social attitudes toward a killer like Ted Bundy might make it possible to view more clearly the kinds of ambiguities discussed in Chapters Four and Five.
The work by Kelman and Lawrence (1972) on social attitudes toward Lieutenant Calley provides a model for this kind of investigation.

2) It would be interesting to apply techniques of content analysis to motiveless murderers' accounts of their lives and crimes. Such techniques have been used with some success in the study of schizophrenic language. For example, this kind of research might allow for a more precise articulation of a puzzle of which Masters (1985) became aware while studying the case of Dennis Nilsen:

Nilsen's concepts of love and death are inextricably entangled in his mind. This has little to do with psychology, or even with ethics, but is bound up with the perception of ideas. We still know nothing of how ideas, represented by words, are formulated in the mind. Why does the word "love" persistently strike a chord which releases the word "death" in Nilsen's sentences? There have been manifold examples of this in [Nilsen's own] narrative. "I searched for love and in my struggles made death," he writes. Even if this is conscious rationalization, an artful stab at trying to make tangible the dichotomy which he wishes us to believe is the root of his illness in a neat antithetical sentence, why did those two words rather than any others serve his purpose? (p. 295)

3) Also of interest would be the use of content analysis techniques to analyze patterns of word and idea associations in secondary texts that describe motiveless murderers, or purport to explain acts of motiveless murder.

4) Two prevalent forms of discourse about the meaning in acts of apparently motiveless murder - the closing statements of attorneys involved in such cases, and the sermons given at memorial services for the victims of such crimes - would provide interesting subjects for content analysis as well.
5) The CAVE (content analysis of verbatim explanations) technique described by Zullow, Oettingen, Peterson, and Seligman (1988) might be used to identify patterns of "explanatory style" in the first-person accounts offered by motiveless murderers. It would also be interesting to explore the relationship between explanatory style and attitudes toward motiveless murder among members of the general population.

6) To further clarify the relationship between one widely-held view of psychopathy and the behavior of motiveless murderers, it would be interesting to apply Hare's (1980) Psychopathy Checklist to the careers of motiveless murderers. In fact, Hare reports already having undertaken such an exercise for the case of John Wayne Gacy (personal communication, November 24, 1988).

7) It has become almost a cliché to say that multiple murderers become model prisoners. However, I know of no systematic attempt to document this contention. Prison guards with responsibility for them might be surveyed in order to fill out the picture of how such killers respond to incarceration.

8) A constructionist investigation of "remorse" might help to clarify the status of an enacted feeling state which in most discussions of psychopathy is employed as a means of distinguishing "psychopaths" from "normal" people.
APPENDIX A

A PERSPECTIVE ON INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INTERPRETIVE APPRAOCHES TO THE INVESTIGATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TOPICS

Introduction

Winkler (1987) has observed a sharp increase in the amount of interdisciplinary research being conducted by investigators whose primary affiliations are with branches of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. She cites scholars who have characterized the trend as a "turn to interpretation," and a renewed interest in the close analytical study of various texts and text analogues. Gergen (1988) laments the fact that psychology has been slow to assimilate these developments. The discipline's "debilitating romance with empiricist methodology" has made it difficult, he says, for many psychologists to appreciate the emerging "literary consciousness in psychological inquiry" (p. 18). This "literary consciousness" is referred to by other psychologists as the "hermeneutic attitude" (Woolfolk, Sass, and Messer, 1988).

Both of these phrases point to the same phenomenon, a relatively new openness among at least some psychologists to interpretive modes of inquiry. These interpretive approaches rest on the critical assumption that social knowledge is constructed knowledge. "Truth" is made, not discovered. In psychology as well as in other disciplines, its
philosophical, political, personal, and rhetorical dimensions need to be considered fit subjects for historical and "literary" analysis.

My decision to investigate "motiveless murder" as a social construction is best understood in the context of this trend toward interpretive, interdisciplinary research in psychology. In the discussion which follows, I want to consider some currents of thinking which have fostered that trend. In particular, I would like to review some implications - especially for the way psychologists think about the doctoral dissertation - of reconceptualizing psychology as a "human science" with boundaries elastic enough to accommodate a wide range of methodological approaches, both empirical and nonempirical.

Is Psychology "Science"?

In the introduction to A Century of Psychology as Science, editors Koch and Leary (1985) designate their subject using phrases like "the tissue of psychological inquiry," the "psychological enterprise," "activities pursued under the banner of psychology," and "the jagged and extralogical storyline of 'scientific psychology' since Wundt." One senses their reluctance to say simply "the science of psychology." Indeed, the words "scientist" and "science" and "scientific" have often been enclosed within quotation marks, suggesting some uncertainty about their meaning, but never so frequently as during the years since publication by philosophers of science such as Toulmin (1953), Kuhn (1962), and Feyerabend (1975) of critiques calling into question the most fundamental assumptions underlying the traditional, or "received view" of science (Polkinghorne, 1984). Now, it seems, with or without quotation marks
the word "science" is becoming more and more difficult to use. At the very least, it lacks a precise referent.

This definitional problem has been perceived as especially acute by many scholars and practitioners in the field of psychology, where legitimacy has long been linked with the discipline's identification as a science. Since the inauguration in 1879 - with the opening of Wundt's Leipzig laboratory - of what Koch (1981) calls the myth of an independent scientific psychology, its self-declared status as a science has served for psychology as a buttress, if a brittle one, against its former identity as a part of philosophy. The ambition of duplicating in the human realm the successes which the natural sciences had achieved by adopting rigorous empirical methods was spurred on not only by the somewhat parochial aspiration among psychologists for a respectability beyond that which a continued identification with philosophy could bestow, but by another aspiration as well. This second aspiration, perhaps articulated most forcefully in the writings of Comte, was to develop a new, enlightened social order based on scientific findings rather than on the pessimistic speculations of philosophers (Polkinghorne, 1983). From this early vision of social reform developed the notion of a "positive" or positivist science; its methods were to be carried over from the physical sciences.

Participants on the "interpretive" side of the lively debates which marked the early history of psychology are well known. Dilthey and his student, Spranger, focused on the historical and cultural boundedness of the individual life, and emphasized the applicability of hermeneutic techniques pioneered by Schleiermacher and others to the
understanding of human "texts" or meaning systems. The German sociologist Max Weber argued that human phenomena differ from phenomena in the natural sciences because human beings are, above all, active agents and makers of meaning. The pioneering phenomenologists Brentano and Husserl emphasized intentionality as the most important feature of all human perception. And of course there was Wundt.

Although Wundt has often been caricatured as the champion of positivist psychology, Koch (1985) points out that Wundt actually advocated a much broader and more multifaceted approach to studying the human realm than the term "positivist" would imply. In fact, says Koch, "Wundt would have perceived as grotesque and unacceptable (and, during his lifetime, did so perceive) many of the aspects of the reconception of psychology set in motion by the symbolism of its 'first' laboratory" (pp. 10, 11). Koch has in mind especially the fact that from 1879 on, "the core meaning of ‘psychology’ would be dominated by the adjectives scientific and experimental" (p. 8).

For present purposes, the point requiring emphasis is that psychology’s status as a "science" has for the past century been a subject for heated debate. Of course, all along there have been within psychology true believers in the positivist paradigm for investigating psychological topics. One thinks of Wundt’s student, Titchener, for example, and of the radical behaviorists. However, of equal importance is a contrasting perspective. Many commentators have argued that the study of human psychology requires an approach very different from the approaches used in the physical sciences. Simply to suggest the flavor
of writing which reflects this latter perspective, consider these several quotations:

Is the relationship between psychology and science one of synonymy or antonymy? The answer...is that such determinations depend upon the nature of psychological explanation and that this depends upon the nature of the phenomena psychology chooses to address. Those that lend themselves to a purely causal account, requiring no recourse to concepts such as intentionality or rationality, are fit for scientific explanation, but the discipline that provides it cannot qualify as psychology ...There is ample room and considerable need for both a nonscientific psychology and a scientific nonpsychology as human beings go about the important business of understanding themselves. (Robinson, 1985, p. 73)

To adopt an active agent conception of science requires a very radical departure from the simple-minded positivist methodology of dependent and independent variables, of statistics and correlation coefficients. It demands...a return to the idea of a human being as a responsible agent, capable of constructing and managing his social world. (Harre, 1974, p. 243)

The hoary old question of whether psychology should properly be designated a science should always have been seen as a non-question. To label disciplines "science" or not is never more than an administrative convenience. The only thing that ought to matter for psychology is if its practitioners can justify their conclusions against some rational criterion; whether convention dubs the criterion "scientific" or not is really totally irrelevant. (Westland, 1978, pp. 46, 47)

What are the implications of responding as these commentators have to the question "Is psychology a science?" Once the question of whether or not a particular kind of inquiry qualifies as "science" can be seen as at least debatable, perhaps even a red herring, then another question immediately presents itself: By what criteria - if not the traditional criteria used for evaluating "good science" - should the value of investigative work carried out by psychologists be assessed? Of particular relevance in the present context, how can the worth of
psychological inquiry that is interpretive rather than empirical be evaluated? Inevitably, the task of evaluation is made more difficult if traditional features of scientific research such as precise measurement, tight control over experimental conditions, and replicability of findings are no longer regarded as essential hallmarks of all productive research in human psychology.

Should the "human science" paradigm proposed by a growing number of psychologists become the prevailing rubric for psychological investigation, what would be the result? Koch (1981) contends that there would no longer be such a strong press to carry out research "as if uncertainty, mootness, ambiguity, cognitive finitude, were the most unbearable of the existential anguishes" (1981, p. 259). Instead, he suggests, there might develop a renewed appreciation for "that quality of ambiguity, mystery, [and] search" (p. 269) that makes each individual life, in fact the entire human enterprise, at once fascinating and ultimately unfathomable.

What is Implied by the Reconceptualization of Psychology as "Human Science"?

Polkinghorne (1983, 1984) and Gergen (1985) are among the most articulate spokesmen for the position that psychology needs to be reconceptualized as a discipline inherently distinct from the physical sciences. Gergen defines the "shared consciousness" to which he ascribes as the social constructionist movement in modern psychology (p. 266). I would like to summarize briefly several of the assumptions which I believe unite Polkinghorne, Gergen, and many others (see, for example, Allport, 1955; Cronen, Pearce, and Tamm, 1985; Giorgi, 1970;
and Samelson, 1975) in pursuit of a human science which has as its goal
the development of imperfect, always debatable understandings of human
experience.

Polkinghorne argues that a fundamental distinction between the
positivist and postpositivist philosophies of science (with the human
science paradigm based on the latter) can be drawn using their very
different conceptualizations of the knowledge scientists seek. The
logical positivist framework for research provided, at least in theory,
a process for acquiring "apodictic," or absolute and irrefutable,
knowledge. The postpositivist viewpoint on the other hand, grounded in
the challenges to the idea of apodictic knowledge raised by Witt-
genstein, Gadamer, and others, holds that for better or for worse, we
are contained within our language system and our culture. Since no
absolute outside point of reference is available, all that we can
legitimately pursue is "assertoric" knowledge, knowledge that is
"conditional...constructed within our conceptual systems... relative to
time and place" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 13).

If there can be no such thing as certain knowledge; if, as
Polkinghorne argues, statements asserting knowledge can only be
pronounced false or confirmed with degrees of probability; then what is
the alternative to a retreat into complete relativism? To this
concern, Polkinghorne and Gergen respond that understandings of the
world are negotiated among informed members of various knowledge
communities. In light of available information, some knowledge claims
are convincing, others are not. Those claims that are convincing will
be accorded provisional acceptance and looked to as the basis for
action; the others will be rejected. This conceptualization of knowledge as "personal" (see Polanyi, 1964), subjective rather than objective, argument rather than truth, has obvious implications for the traditional view that only if the findings on which they are based can be replicated by other researchers can a scientist's interpretations be regarded as legitimate. Viewed in this light, the idea of "replication" loses some of its former connotation as a performance restaged. Instead, replication can be seen as shorthand for describing the social process whereby members of a knowledge community negotiate successive versions of the map used to guide their progress forward. Always, the map is a working document.

Dilthey grasped both the promise and the limitations of a science based on interpretation rather than explanation. Polkinghorne (1983) notes that in his espousal of hermeneutics as the best approach for investigating the human realm, Dilthey was acting out of a conviction that while an "objectivity of certainty" is an impossibility, an "objectivity of approximation" is not (p. 223). In other words, as successive interpretations of phenomena are argued before the scientific community, it is possible to move ever closer to a consensual truth. [For an amplification of Dilthey's ideas by contemporary writers concerned with the problem of validity in interpretation, see especially Hirsch, 1967, and Ricoeur, 1970, 1976.]

The validity of an interpretation is not necessarily dependent on whether the investigator employed one or the other methodological approach. In fact, Gergen (1985) argues, virtually any methodology may be appropriate so long as it enables the investigator to develop "a
more compelling case" (p. 273). Whether or not his case proves convincing may well depend, Gergen says, on the investigator's "capacity to invite, compel, stimulate, or delight the audience, and not on criteria of veracity" (p. 272). (For a more detailed discussion of Gergen's perspective, see Chapter One on the social constructionist orientation to psychological research.)

Psychology and Other Disciplines

The perspectives advocated by Gergen, Runyan, Polkinghorne and others who favor the "human science" paradigm for psychological investigation have obvious implications for evaluating the trend noted by Winkler (1987) toward increased interdisciplinary research. Reconceived in accordance with the human science paradigm, how does the work of psychology relate to that carried out by other disciplines committed to the goal of understanding human experience? Often in the past, scientists and humanists have acted like and been perceived by others as breeds apart, involved in radically different pursuits. Kimble (1984) catches the flavor of their relationship to one another by including in his article on the "scientific" and "humanistic" cultures within psychology this quotation from C.P. Snow's famous 1959 Rede lecture at Cambridge University:

There have been plenty of days when I have spent the working hours with scientists and then gone off at night with some literary colleagues....Constantly I felt that I was moving between two groups — comparable in intelligence, identical in race, not grossly different in social origin, earning about the same incomes, who had almost ceased to communicate at all. (p. 833)
In the particular case of psychology, the schism between psychologists and their academic colleagues in, say, the literary studies, may be the result in part of psychology's early commitment to methods borrowed from the physical sciences. Physicist Robert Oppenheimer (1956) argued before members of the American Psychological Association in 1955 that psychology had erred from the first in attempting to so completely emulate the natural sciences. He reminded the assembled psychologists that whatever they might be said to share with the animal and material worlds, human beings are different and have to be studied differently, using a variety of methods beyond those employed by the laboratory scientist (see Van Leeuwen, 1982, pp. 17, 18).

Many advocates of the human science paradigm for conducting psychological investigation foresee a gradual blurring of the boundaries which have traditionally set psychology apart from such other disciplines as cultural anthropology, history, and the literary studies. The social constructionists argue, for example, that psychology, in fact all of science, is history. The products of research, even the assumptions underlying the process that leads to them, are seen as artifacts of social interaction, negotiated constructions (see, for instance, Pepinsky and Patton [1971] on the psychological experiment as a "practical accomplishment"). This perspective leads advocates of the constructionist position to argue that the whole research enterprise - its processes as well as its products - is a ripe subject for historical, even literary analysis.
Polkinghorne (1983) and Koch (1981) agree that no longer is it always tenable to use methodological criteria for distinguishing psychological inquiry from that conducted, for example, in the humanities. Listen to Polkinghorne first, then Koch:

The line of demarcation between "science" and other scholarly attempts loses its edge [when the positivist view of science is discarded]. The methods developed in history, literary criticism, and the other humanities are not clearly separated from the methods of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and the other sciences of the person....[The] divisive wall which has been built between types of scholarship needs to be removed so as to allow interaction for mutual benefit. (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 13)

Psychology is not a single or coherent discipline but rather a collectivity of studies of varied cast, some few of which may qualify as science, while most do not ....[Psychologists] must finally accept the circumstance that extensive and important sectors of psychological study require modes of inquiry rather more like those of the humanities than the sciences. (Koch, 1981, pp. 266-269)

Of course it has long been recognized that the insights of literature can illuminate psychological phenomena, and that the findings of psychology can help point the way in literature toward more accurate renderings of human experience. Levitas (1963) calls the relationship between the two – literature and psychology – "Janus-headed" and suggests a familiar conclusion, that quite often literature can yield profound psychological knowledge beyond that which psychologists are able to produce. Sounding a similar theme, Leyton (1985) urges academic criminologists not to proceed as though the visions of imaginative writers like Norman Mailer and Truman Capote are somehow irrelevant to the search for what is most "true" about the minds of violent criminals. Even Cook and Campbell (1979), although they clearly
favor a modified paradigm for psychological research that retains many essential features of the natural science model, conceive the two modes of inquiry - "qualitative humanistic scholarship" on one hand and "science" on the other - as located along the same validity continuum. They caution that regardless of which mode of inquiry they employ, investigators need to understand their findings as tentative constructions always subject to later modification.

Few commentators challenging psychology's claim to be a "science" (as that term has been traditionally understood) and predicting its increased affinity with other disciplines argue their case in terms of retreat or capitulation. Instead, they speak of an opening up, a new inclusiveness that will allow for the development of broader understandings of human meaning systems. Allport (1955), for instance, contends that modern psychology's most important task is to "enlarge its horizons without sacrificing its gains" (p. 18). Alluding to the "crippling schism" which has separated the sciences and the humanities, Maslow (1968) urges a rapprochement and speaks of the need to "enlarge the jurisdiction of science" (p. 218). Elsewhere, in arguing for the legitimacy of evidence in psychological research that is personal, idiosyncratic, and subjective, Maslow (1966) suggests that if science as it is traditionally understood cannot accommodate such data, then it is our conception of science, not the data, that needs alteration.

Some Implications for the Conduct of Research/Scholarship in Psychology

These calls for a reconceptualization of psychology's research agenda are of practical as well as theoretical interest. Their echoes
can be heard in arguments advanced by psychologists who favor a broadened conception of the doctoral dissertation, traditionally the capstone of graduate research training in psychology. Because the dissertation serves as such an important point of departure for any consideration of research in psychology, I will address several of these arguments in somewhat more detail.

Stricker (1973, 1975) has provided an instructive overview of debate within the field of psychology about the most appropriate model for graduate training. More specifically, he has reviewed debate about the nature and purpose of the doctoral dissertation. In part, his intent is to provide a historical context for considering whether there are, or should be, alternatives to the traditional empirical dissertation. It will be useful to sketch in that historical context.

During a period of less than thirty-five years, members of the American Psychological Association convened first in Boulder (1941), then at Stanford University (1955), then in Miami (1958), in Chicago (1965), and finally in Vail (1973) to discuss doctoral training in psychology. More recently, a national conference on graduate education was held in Salt Lake City (1987). From Boulder, of course, came the scientist-practitioner model; it continues to provide the dominant paradigm for training psychologists as skilled clinicians and able researchers. Though the scientist-practitioner model was conceived as a means of satisfying both those favoring an emphasis on applied psychology and those arguing for a more "foundational" approach, the Boulder conference recognized that not all graduate students would be equally well served by the proposed model. With particular reference to
the dissertation requirement, they noted that "the net result may be an extinction rather than a reinforcement of research drive" (Rainy, 1950, p. 88).

The Miami Conference served mainly to affirm the direction established at Boulder. Research training continued to be regarded as a hallmark of graduate training. However, primarily in response to dissatisfaction among some attendees with the prevalent requirement that doctoral dissertations be based on empirical studies, there was majority support for a liberalization of some traditional specifications for the dissertation. Nonempirical studies, group research, and exploratory research were among the suggested alternatives. Stricker (1973) identifies in the dialogue that took place at Miami evidence of a broadening conception of what constitutes acceptable research. He notes, however, that with very few exceptions, students continued to produce traditional, empirical dissertations.

According to Stricker, neither was there much change in the immediate aftermath of the Chicago Conference which was held in 1965. However, an important conclusion of that conference was that "the basis of the PhD degree was independent scholarly work representing a contribution to knowledge, and that research was but one form of scholarship and empirical experiments but one form of research" (Hoch et al., 1966, p. 56). For some time, there had been a growing faction within psychology consisting of individuals who felt that traditional PhD programs were too inflexible to accommodate their interest in a primarily practice-oriented graduate education that would not require completion of an empirical dissertation. At Vail in 1973, that faction
won a major victory. Its members lobbied successfully on behalf of recommendations calling for the creation of separate professional schools which would award the Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) degree.

Stricker (1975) and Shoben (1980) regard the Vail recommendations, more specifically their partial implementation, as the unfortunate consequence of psychology's failure to provide a training atmosphere hospitable to students with varying interests and a wide range of professional aspirations. Though the perspectives from which they have written differ in some cases from those of Stricker and Shoben, a number of other commentators have examined the traditional model for training psychologists as researchers and found it similarly wanting. I will summarize briefly what several of these commentators have had to say about the doctoral dissertation.

Proshansky (1972) contends that the "root model" of the experimental research-scientist has been the Procrustean bed of graduate training in psychology. Students of all skills, backgrounds, interests, and aspirations have been forced into it, he says, many experiencing considerable anguish in the process. Citing what by now is a familiar and well-documented complaint (see, for example, Gelso, 1979; Magoon and Holland, 1984; and Fitzgerald and Osipow, 1986), Proshansky points out that less than half (Fitzgerald and Osipow's more recent findings suggest that the figure is around 30 percent) of those individuals who earn a PhD in psychology ever conduct an empirical study following their graduation. But the tragedy, he says, is not in the graduates' failure to produce empirical research; rather, it is in the very real possibility that students who may have become excited and
stimulated had they been permitted to pursue scholarly work more in line with their interests might instead become discouraged. Proshansky has no gripe against empirical research per se. He asks only that psychology give up its "fetish for discipline purity" and take steps to accommodate on their own terms, rather than in the terms of some preconceived mold, the wide variety of students who will always be attracted to the study of human psychology. He writes:

The PhD degree should be given for scholarly achievement, and for me scholarship means research defined in very broad rather than very narrow terms....The thesis then may involve research which can take one of many forms, for example, critique of existing literature; development of a conceptual scheme...and so on. (p. 208)

Raush (1974) shares Proshansky's perspective. In arguing for the need to "scuttle a narrow, parochial, outdated definition of research" (p. 679), he asks why so many of the most influential contributors to psychology — people like Freud, Piaget, Erikson, Rogers, Fromm, Maslow, and May — have eschewed formal psychological research methods. Raush answers that it is not research these giants of the field have rejected, but a conceptualization of research that is too narrow to include the wide range of legitimate approaches to investigating various dimensions of human experience. On the specific subject of the doctoral dissertation, Raush argues that the only necessary common denominator for all dissertations in psychology should be their development or investigation of a psychological theme or theory. Students so inclined should be encouraged, he says, to conduct empirical studies. He adds, however, that a variety of other approaches might be more appropriate when the subject of the dissertation calls
for discussion of plays, novels, films, cases seen in practice, or cases from the literature.

Concluding Remarks

There is obviously a close relationship between how one understands a particular discipline and how one thinks about the legitimacy of various approaches to conducting research in that discipline. Advocates of the human science paradigm for psychological investigation argue that it is necessary to relax the boundaries around psychology, or at least to allow for their greater permeability. Seen in the context of this perspective, the arguments advanced by Raush, Proshansky, and Stricker in favor of more flexible criteria for the doctoral dissertation, and the trend observed by Winkler toward a greater number of interdisciplinary research projects can be seen as harbingers of constructive change, as part of what one influential advocate of the human science paradigm describes as the process of "opening psychology to the full richness and subtlety of human living" (Giorgi, 1971, p. vi).

In an article about qualitative research strategies, Eisner (1981) proposes ten dimensions for use in distinguishing "scientific" and "artistic" modes of inquiry. Among the dimensions he cites are "forms of representation employed," "points of focus," "degree of license allowed," "sources of data," and "ultimate aims." His conclusion is that although scientific approaches have dominated social science research in the past, "artistic" approaches can be just as useful. I would like to conclude this brief overview of the trend
toward more interpretive, interdisciplinary work in psychology by citing a passage from Eisner's article. Where Eisner has made reference to the field of education, I have taken the liberty of substituting a parallel reference to psychology.

Each approach to the study of [psychological] situations has its own unique perspective to provide. Each sheds its own unique light on the situations that humans seek to understand. The field of [psychology] in particular needs to avoid methodological monism. Our problems need to be addressed in as many ways as will bear fruit...

This issue is not qualitative as contrasted with nonqualitative or quantitative, but how one approaches the [psychological] world. It is to the artistic to which we must turn, not as a rejection of the scientific, but because with both we can achieve binocular vision. Looking through one eye never did provide much depth. (p.9)
APPENDIX B

"MOTIVELESS MURDER" AS A THEME IN MODERN FICTION:
A REFERENCE LIST OF SELECTED WORKS


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