Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

The Pure Moment Of Murder

The Symbolic Function of Bodily Interactions in Horror Films

Steve Jones

As a popular genre, horror has been tarnished with the reputation of being "lowbrow" (Hawkins 2000, 2007; Hellerman 2004: 225). It is my contention that the visceral horror film should be regarded as more philosophically pertinent than such a dismissal would suggest. Horror that is focused on the body is constituted by literal instances of trauma, and these, I argue, have metaphoric significance. In my reading of the horror film, moments of physical violence that incur on the body demonstrate (albeit in an augmented, hyperbolic manner) a number of long-standing problems that continue to fuel philosophical discussion regarding the nature of selfhood. Here I concur with Stephen Mulhall's (2002:2) view that popular cinema can act as "philosophy in action." Narrative examples concretize and allow me to work through the same puzzles of selfhood raised in philosophy. If cultural psychology seeks to define the self relative to its cultural setting (which shapes self-conception), my argument for the horror film is that it is equally important to consider how cultural manifestations reflect and articulate some of the problems of self,

In cinema, selfhood is represented by images of bodies. Ergo, spirits typically appear in anthropomorphized forms in horror fiction, indicating that the body image has become synonymous with the conception of selfhood, and vice versa. The body—at least in its cultural objectification—stands in for a conceptual unity and integrity of self. The "contingency of the I," following Descartes, is popularly considered to be comprised of "a structured pair of my body and something else," which is abstract or intangible (Castaneda 1994: 165), the latter being rooted in an experience of being. Although I will go on to contest the conclusion that "[t]he realm of the mental is radically different from the physical" (Erneling 2009:172), for the moment it is sufficient to note that as a two-dimensional representation, cinema condenses that apparently dualistic access to self into a visual emblem. This condensation may fail to adequately capture the way in which we experience ourselves as embodied, yet it does reflect the way in which we perceive other selves.

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

Because we are embodied, we can never access the Other's thoughts and feelings, and we rely on language or the Other's bodily gestures in order to comprehend their emotional states (Erneling 2009:172). Although I am not convinced that we have to necessarily divide body and mind, I agree with the problem that follows, which interested Descartes as much as it does "much of contemporary psychology" (Erneling 2009:173): we exist as social beings, but can never truly know each other as intimately as we can know ourselves. Our ability to understand each other via physical gestures, language, and bodily signs might appear inadequate in that sense (see McGann and De Jaegher 2009: 417)

For me, this is the horror of selfhood. Our relationship with the world and each other is limited to our embodied field of experience. The anxieties that arise as a result are subject to cultural investigation via fictions that revolve around individuals. Horror, I contend, is particularly useful in exploring those tensions by placing individuals under duress, threatening them with destruction. In the horror film, the body—that which physically manifests the self— is frequently disturbed: most commonly, the boundaries that declare the body to be "whole," "functional," or "normal" are subjected to literal deconstruction. This deconstruction can be articulated via, for example, the bodily decimation caused by *Saw*'s traps (seven films, made between 2004 and 2010); the genital anomalies of *Teeth* (2007), *Bad Biology* (2008), or *One-Eyed Monster* (2008) (murder occurring via intimate bodily contact); or even by the rape and revenge—both of which incur upon the body and disturb the self—of *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978, remade in 2010).

Self-boundaries—corporeal (literal) and mental (metaphysical)—are disturbed during the eruptions of violence that characterize visceral horror movies. Instead of focusing on a particular film, my case study here is a particular type of visual incident that occurs in a variety of horror films, which I term the "pure moment of murder." That said, for the sake of coherence I will limit my study to American horror drawing particularly on two sub-genres that centralize explicit depictions of homicide. The first is the slasher cycle, which will allow me to draw on "classic" examples as well as their recent counterparts, and the contemporary body of films that have been dubbed "torture porn."[1]

An example will help me illustrate the characteristics of the pure moment of murder. In the climactic sequence of *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 3: Dream Warriors* (1987), Freddy thrusts his razor-gloved hand into Nancy's torso. Moments later, in order to save her friends, the near-dead Nancy defeats Freddy in exactly the same way, using his own weapon against him. These parallel actions are portrayed in two-shots that isolate these bodies from the other characters present. The dual

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

incidents depict Freddy's razor fingers penetrating first Nancy's, then Freddy's body, joining the two figures. We find similar couplings in any instance of contact murder (as opposed to non-proximate homicide, such as shooting) occurring on film and represented in two-shots. Another example is found in *Hatchet* (2006), whereby the murders of Jim, then Shannon, are framed in two-shots: Victor first cleaves Jim in two with an axe, and then rips Shannon's head open with his bare hands.

In the case of the latter especially, it becomes difficult to envisage a point of separation between the two bodies, to establish where the body that bleeds ends and where the body bled upon begins. As a two-dimensional form, there is no apparent division between adjoining bodies on film; once they forge this kind of unified presence, they are inextricable, visually speaking. Any separation between supposed individual bodies is an illusion once they enter the frame and engage with one another. That is to say, during their bloody combination there are no clear boundaries between the bodies that previously appeared to be separate. More than just visualizing the opened body, in the instant of contact-murder, the two figures are merged into one; a gruesome twinship. One of the reasons this is so abhorrent is not only be-cause it results in the destruction of an individual, but also because it involves the combination of two bodies; the self is limited to a singular body, and thus the momentary melding disturbs that fundamental premise of being, depicting the combination of bodies as a moment of terror. This abutment may last only a fraction of a second, but the instance is pivotal because it is the center-piece of this type of horror film.

As Vivian Sobchack has theorized, even the portrayal of "senseless and violent and horrible" death reveals "a moment of truth ... an internal order" which eases "the movement of the body toward nonbeing" by imbuing it with "meaning" (2000:119). In this article, I investigate aspects of that "meaning," considering what the collusion of bodies in the pure moment of murder signifies about the nature of selfhood.

A final caveat is necessary before I begin. In this article, I am exclusively interested in murder. Although erotic couplings bring bodies together, sex does not destroy the body, which is the central point of interest to my pure moment of murder hypothesis. Rape (an attack forced on the body of the Other) is a different matter: though there are clear parallels between rape and murder that are befitting to my premise, rape does not usually cause death. In my current theory, it makes little difference whether the killer and victim are male or female; though much scholarship has focused on gendered power within the slasher film (see, e.g., Clover 1993), such an investigation is beyond the

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

scope of the work in hand. This article will act as a springboard for specific discussions of gendered power, selfhood, and sexual violence elsewhere. [2]

Body, Self, and Other

What I have started to develop is the way in which horror films manifest (however exaggeratedly) some of the philosophical problems of selfhood. Be-fore going any further in analyzing the films themselves, it is vital to discuss precisely what those problems are, and where I position myself in relation to contemporary philosophical debates that regard selfhood as a problem. In-deed, Schlicht et al. note that there are a variety of responses to this puzzle, yet they find it "questionable whether we can dispense with the notion of self altogether" (2009: 688), as the paradigm is the founding concept underpinning our understanding of existence.

Let us begin with the non-physical aspect of self-experience. We might term this element the "mind" if using a Cartesian model; however, for reasons that will soon become apparent, I choose to use the term "identity" instead. In making this distinction, I seek to overcome Michel Henry's (1988) problematic defense of the Cartesian principle "I think therefore I am," whereby he claims that the mind would continue to exist without the presence of Others (his position has come under scrutiny recently for the same reasons I outline here [Alweiss 2009]). I agree that "the mind" would exist without sociality. How-ever, identity (the self's identification of its uniqueness) would not, because identity is defined by the presence of Others. Alweiss does not make this terminological distinction, but I concur with her Husserlian critique of Henry's position: "[t]he ipseity of the self only becomes meaningful in the presence of the world and other selves. Without the other I have no sense of a self; indeed, I have no sense of what makes me distinct" (Alweiss 2009: 428; see also Datsur 1996: 7; Strawson 1997: 405). Without Others, "self" becomes redundant as a label, because identity (inner self-conception) is only necessary to demarcate the self.

Identity is thus located according to the social environment that situates it. It is the Other that partially constitutes the self because of identity: indeed, the Other can claim a stake in another's self because without the Other, there would be no identity. As Diana Fuss observes, "to the extent that identity al-ways contains the spector *[sic]* of non-identity within it, the [embodied] subject . . . is always divided and identity is always purchased at the price of exclusion of the Other, the repression or repudiation of non-identity" (1989: 102–103). Therefore, while subjects may only truly know their

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

own self, one of the fundamental paradoxes of being is the lack of distinct selfhood without an Other (a not-"I"), to define against; "[i]f 'I' only exist by virtue of my difference from 'you,' then 'you' are a necessary part of my constructed being, and 'I' can no longer claim …sovereign individuality" (Shildrick 1997:112). Because we cannot truly know the Other firsthand, we also cannot fully apprehend the aspects of our own identity that are constituted by the Other. The potential horror of identity articulated by the pure moment of murder then literalizes the problem that the always-already present Other disrupts self-integrity. An-other terror is that identity itself—that which is most privately ours—is a condition of our sociality. Shildrick (1997: 10) contends that "the boundaries of exclusion are never wholly secure against the threat of the absent other to disrupt the unity and definition of the selfsame," thereby problematizing the reading of the body as a "discrete entity."

Identity, then, is only half the story. The self is not just bounded by the metaphysical inner-distinction of identity, but also by the physical body: both borders work together to delimit where the self begins and ends. Cartesian philosophy distinguishes between these two, resulting in two modes of self. This stance must be flawed—and Alweiss (2009: 415) observes that "[m]odern neuroscience and phenomenology" agree with this conclusion — because the self is always-already embodied, and thinking is tied into sensory experience.[3] Descartes' separation of mind and body is thus too extreme. Even if we agree that some aspect of experience is non-physical, and cannot be accessed by others firsthand, our experiences are still always-already embodied. In fact, embodiment and the limits of perceptive ability permit us to have such an inner-life. In order for that privacy to have meaning, to be distinctive or be perceivable, we first have to have Others to distinguish ourselves from. The self, being contingent on identity, is thus tied into sociality (see Erneling 2009: 174-175; McGann and De Jaegher 2009:427).

As McGann and De Jaegher note, "[t]he body provides a basis for the agent's perspective but that perspective cannot be reduced to biology" (2009: 433). In my view, identity is vital in order to avoid such biological reductionism.[4] Identity (subjectivity, the part of self experienced only by the subject) al-lows individuals to recognize themselves as unique entities. The integrity of the body barrier functions to symbolically delimit the individual's experiential field, acting as a symbolic as well as physical barrier that defines the self as whole and separate from Others. Thus, when the integrity of the body is compromised, identity is also violated. It is in this sense that the body is more than simply a vehicle for the "real," mental self: it is fundamental to our sense of being.

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

I find de Vignemont's (2007) model of the body as an object "owned" by the subject unsatisfying, then, because it implies that the body is separate to "the self" (implied to be mental).[5] The separation of these two is an illusion partially based in vision, because the body represents the self, both to Others and to the subject (see Carruthers 2009:126,128–129). That visual illusion, which is fundamental to the reading of bodies as symbolic representations in cinema, is consolidated by the way in which we perceive ourselves and Others as individuals defined by bodies. Lacan ([1966] 2006) conceived of that sense of self-apprehension as problematic because it means envisaging one-self as an integral unit only from a distance (as a reflection). Galen Strawson (1997) uses the physicality of the body to make a case that the mind has a material presence, but in my view this undersells the representational and conceptual value of the physical body: that is, how the body functions to stand in for our own and others' identities.[6] It is less important in my view to consider the mind as object than it is to consider the emblematic work the body does in representing those aspects of self that are not readily accessible to or in Others.

Representing the Self-Other Paradigm in Horror Film

Following Peter Strawson, Seemann observes that "perceptual experiences of other persons" are crucial as "the perceptual experience itself constitutes an understanding of the other as a minded creature" (2009: 512), because our experiences are limited to our bodies. Perceptual access to Others' bodies is our means, in this view, of assessing that other beings experience selfhood in the same way we experience our own self firsthand.[7] As R. Bruce Elder theorizes, "[m]y body is the source of all my personal knowledge." The cinematic body is thus an image through which we can appositely "express our beliefs about ourselves," even if, like the body, these notions are "contradictory ... some-times beautiful and sometimes horrible and sometimes simultaneously both" (Elder 1997: 22–23). This is certainly the case when disfigured, psychopathic murderers are caught in the pure moment with their typically youthful, beautiful prey in the slasher film (Sipos 2010: 62; see also Clover 1993: 30, 32, 42).[8]

The body, as both representative image of self and the object of deconstruction in the horror film, is central to these concerns. The skin boundary signifies bodily unity and the segregation of that unit from other bodies. The body also delineates the subject's transience. Simply put, because the self is embodied, we are biologically vulnerable: visceral horror presents that fragility as a source of terror. In opening the body, the mechanisms of life it-self are revealed and destroyed, emphasizing that

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

vulnerability. The visual de-construction of one individual by another in this graphic manner in horror also works on a symbolic level in my view. Our knowledge of the Other is limited by our embodiment, and even our access to our own body is incomplete in the sense that we understand that bodies are biological organisms, but rarely encounter firsthand the complex homeostatic processes that maintain corporeal functionality. In the pure moment of murder, one body is opened, exposing those processes (causing their failure). This action figuratively stands in for the paradoxes arising from embodiment and the self-Other contingency

This is not to suggest that horror narratives support a quest for solipsistic autonomy; that the self simply seeks or desires to eradicate all Others. This would, after all, lead also to the redundancy of the killer's identity. One implicit release offered in these moments could be a destruction of the *barriers* between self and Other. However, these are not moments of relief: the figures are brought together via violence, and that awfulness, I argue, is apposite be-cause it symbolizes the impossibility of such collusion. In horror, and particularly in slasher and torture porn films, the insistence with which murder occurs means that the self is continually attacked by the Others that surround it. This, to me, reflects the nightmare that we are social beings, yet there are Others in the world who value our existence so little that they are willing to harm or even destroy us.

The slasher-killer, often masked, rarely vocal, is a one-dimensional misanthropic machine. The same is true of the backwoods degenerates present in, for example, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* movies (six films, made between 1974 and 2006), *The Hills Have Eyes* films (four films, made between 1977 and 2007), the *Wrong Turn* series (three films, made between 2003 and 2009), *Timber Falls* (2007), and *Carver* (2008) to name but a few examples. Because they often have little sense of identity that we can perceive (because their only social gesture is violence), there is little for them to risk in ridding the world of their Others. They have no stake in the self-Other contingency. The killer does not share the same field of consciousness as the "normal" subject, making the victim a more likely point of identification for the audience. The audience thus see their own self-vulnerability meta/physically endangered by these killers.

These concerns are pivotal for *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (2006), which acts as an indicative point of summation concluding this section. The first of the teens to be killed, Eric, has his face removed by Tommy (Leatherface), who wears the skin as a mask. When he looks in the mirror to see his "new" face, the pure moment of Eric's death reveals an inextricability of self and Other that is augmented by the cannibalizing of Eric's body later in the film. Eric and Tommy (victim and killer)

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

become unified externally via the mask, and internally via the consumption of his flesh, resonating from their connection in the pure moment. The cannibalism is paralleled by an incident prior to the murder; Eric, looking in his van's wing-mirror, notes that it is broken. The crack running the length of the mirror cuts directly across Eric's reflection, cruelly echoing the later incident of Tommy wearing his face: the literal fissure of the mirror symbolically echoes Tommy's inability to define self and Other. This is the source of Tommy's homicidal rage, and thus the narrative's horror is motivated by the blurring of self and Other.

Killer/Victim, or Killer [slash] Victim: The Symbolic Function in Contact Murder Sequences

In moments of conjunction where the victim and murderer are visually intertwined, their roles are defined (until this time, their positions are only potential, however inevitable they may seem). Indeed, it is in this moment that the victim becomes memorable, attaining a unique identity.[9] We are interconnected as social creatures, but that interdependence threatens our sense of unique identity: in horror, that threat is turned into a nightmare vision as one self is attacked by another. The body is crucial in cinema, as it represents a distinct individual(ity). In the instance of murder, the bodily borders that visually and symbolically separate the two selves are compromised, or subjected to disruption.

At the moment in which two bodies interact visually in the cinema of homicide, their narratologically determined self-roles come into fruition (their fullest expression). It is only in the pure moment of murder that these positions are finally enacted rather than preconstructed. For a split second, the killer is inseparable from victim; their bodies are one, however fleetingly. I contend that this manifests the dependency of self and Other, be-cause it is at this point that the figures come to attain their identities as "killer" and "victim." The fact that this identification process results in death manifests a philosophical conundrum underpinning identity formation. That the joining of the two figures culminates in the eradication of one party suggests that the joining of self and Other paradoxically entails the consolidation and failure of identity. This is why the visual motif of adjoined bodies is so crucial to the symbolic meaning of the pure moment: if two selves were co-joined in the way they are visually during the pure moment, the "I" that signifies one identity would no longer be exclusive.

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

This melding is the nightmarish reversal of the trust involved in joint action. Seemann describes such interdependence by envisaging the dual moment and co-operation of dancers; "[t]o the observer, it does not seem that two persons are adapting their movements to one another. They really are acting in unison . . . acting as one" (2009: 500–503). Although this sense of co-operation does not erase "one's awareness of oneself," in the case of the pure moment, that is the result because it entails the erasure of one party. That ability to distinguish is also affected by form: while Seemann describes the experience of performing as one of the parties, a different problem arises from watching two figures who are reduced to two dimensions (onscreen), and whose bodily boundaries are obscured by gore. In fact, this possibility of melding between self and Other, which is exaggerated in the filmic context, is hinted toward in Seemann's discussion of "joint control," inasmuch as "there is a way in which I can be said to possess immediate control over your doings (and you over mine) in a joint action" (2009: 505). In the pure moment, this coupling arises from a generic agreement on the roles of victim and killer.

A number of films play with the interaction, creating slippage between killers and victims that emphasizes their reciprocity. Killers too are subjected to victimization, as is the case with my opening example of Freddy and Nancy. The killer must be laid to rest to complete the narrative arc. That restorative balance blurs the roles of killer and victim by creating two parallel pure moments that reverse the dynamic (Freddy becomes Nancy's victim). Similarly, in *Last House on the Left* (2009), Paige (a teen victim) is murdered by Krug and Francis in a three-person pure moment. The two men stab Paige (one cutting her abdomen, the other knifing her back) in an intimate framing that captures all three characters in a collusion of homicide. Later in the film, Francis and Krug are murdered by John and Emma Collingwood (parents of Paige's friend Mari) in parallel pure-moment shots that echo this original crime. Emma is presented in a two-shot, stabbing Francis in the front, then John (in another two-shot) lodges a hammer-claw into the back of Francis's head. The couple violently assault Krug in a similar fashion, Emma attacking him from the front with a fire extinguisher, and John from behind with a poker. Both events (the effects) aesthetically evoke Paige's pure moment (the cause, which is being avenged). This methodology optically concretizes concerns raised by the narrative and characters: the innocent parents become homicidal. The lines between victim and victimizer are blurred in the incidents of slaughter, both visually and in terms of their character arcs.

Given the generic context, the roles of killer and victim are accepted as naturalistic identity roles. Horror distills a view of the world offered in Schopenhauer's assertion that the wickedness and

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

misery of human existence "balance one another" as a kind of "eternal justice." These fictional instances help us "begin to understand why everything that lives must atone for its existence first by living and then by dying" (Schopenhauer 1970:140). Pure moments are unique inasmuch as they simultaneously symbolize life/presence, and the destruction of being. Although we need not perceive our own existences as the kind of brutal self-versus-other struggle that Schopenhauer suggests, horror amplifies the quest for identity into a battleground, and, in doing so, literalizes the underlying implications of individualism.

Variations on the Pure Moment

The pure moment highlights one of the central themes of the horror film, namely the self-Other relationship. The pure moment is a visual motif that expresses the complex tensions underpinning identity: in particular, that the Other simultaneously affirms and jeopardizes the integrity of self. Though ubiquitous in the cinema of homicide, the pure moment is not just presented in the direct two-shot form I have examined thus far. In this final section I consider variations on the pure moment, each of which develops in its own way the horrors of identity raised by the self-Other paradigm.

The implications are somewhat different if, for example, the moment is removed (as in the censored version of *Friday the 13th* [1980]),[10] or absent (for example, the kills occur during cut-away shots throughout *Scream Bloody Murder* (2000), and the same is true when Wade is slaughtered in *Friday the 13th* [2009]). The moment is implied in these cases, and thus cannot signal the fulfillment that the slasher or torture porn film allots to physical violence. Murder *is* the plot: if the narrative is designed for, yet is unable to show this moment, the build to homicide (the doomed life of the victim), the finality of that character (suffering and death) could become meaningless.

That said, the moment might be only suggested when theme and character require, and especially when technique can create an experience as vivid and meaningful as the pure moment. The ancestor of the Slasher film, *Psycho* (1960), for example, is designed to playfully avoid the pure moment, and that decision is appropriate given the relationships between Norman, Mother, and their victims. In the shower sequence, shots infamously converge to present an illusion of explicit carnage through a culmination of near static instances. The pure moment itself is lost amid the montage of non-contact shots: the single moment of contact (where the knife tip breaks the abdominal skin) is present, but is swept over. This symbolically evokes the sense in which Norman participates in the killing: he is an

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

Other to himself and so is not responsible for slaying Marion. In a sense he (like the contact shot) is present, but we are given the impression that something else (or someone else) is the focal point: it may be Norman piercing Marion's flesh with the knife tip, but what we perceive is Mother committing an act of brutal homicide. The murder is constructed by misassessment of the composite images, meaning the viewer has to decode the juxtaposed shots. The spectator is thus an accomplice of sorts, participating in the construction of an impression of the murder. In parallel, Norman too becomes an accomplice to what he perceives as his Mother's crime by disposing of Marion's body.

Psycho, then, presents us with another of our philosophical issues: the coherence of a singular individuality being defined by the borders of an individual body.[11] The shower scene avoids pure moment contact because Norman and Marion are not meant to be unified in murder, as Norman is not the killer (psychologically speaking); he is a conduit for another identity. More akin to a pure moment is the image at the end of the film in which Mrs. Bates's face is superimposed over Norman's, a combination that quickly dissolves into the image of Marion's car (containing her body) being dragged from the swamp. The physical distances between these three bodies (Norman, Mother, and Marion) are accentuated by the fact that each is locked away: Norman in the asylum, Marion in the car, Mother in the cellar (the image used during the dissolve is taken from the earlier scene in which her corpse is discovered). Yet the dissolve collapses those distances, both visually and symbolically, paralleling these physical distances with the psychological distance that closes between Norman and his Mother. In fully "becoming" Mother in this final sequence, Norman evades taking conscious responsibility for Marion's murder. That results in the destruction of the Norman aspect of his self, who is replaced by the Mother persona, the murderous will that overcomes him. Yet the destruction of Norman's self is visually intertwined with the consequences of his actions in this final moment of the film as we witness the melding of Norman, Mother, and Marion in a single dissolve. It is here that the relationship between the three is finally manifested: that Norman's two selves unite and then merge with the victim in a dissolve that obliterates the single self of the victim amidst the overwhelming force of the now single Other.

Another technique employed in filming murder is to deny the visual presence of the killer in the moment. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), for ex-ample, Freddy is never shown slaying a teen, because slaughter is inflicted on their bodies from within. His bodily disfigurement clearly marks him as the teens' ultimate Other. Yet this overt bodily difference is balanced by his symbolic relationship with the teens: he is a figurative presence for the majority of the film, who emerges from their

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

unconscious. He is the Otherness within, the internalized Other, the object of their dreams and nightmares that both defines and threatens to destroy them. He does not need to be portrayed explicitly victimizing externally because the film focuses on the teens' night-mares (their inner-perspective). Accordingly, the nightmare in which Tina is stalked by Freddy lasts four times longer than the scene in which she is physically harmed (where Freddy is not shown). It is the symbolic self-Other relationship that is manifested in the nightmare sequences. In this case, murder is *more* intimate than bodily contact; it erupts from within, unto the victims' bodies. The result of confronting the Other is the destruction of the victim's body. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street,* the moment of murder is the externalization of the individual's internalized Otherness, which helps constitute their identity. That exposure destroys the self; the invisible Other explodes from within the self.[12]

We find a more recent variation on the pure moment in the "traps" of the *Saw* series. Although in *Saw* (2004) Amanda is forced into a hands-on pure moment, having to cut a key out of her cellmate's stomach in order to free herself from the reverse bear trap on her head, the series revolves around a central notion that individuals are coerced into becoming murderers. The real killer is Jigsaw (John), who places victims in situations whereby they have the choice only to kill or be killed. This motif is augmented in the cases of Jeff *(Saw III),* Rigg *(Saw IV),* and William *(Saw VI),* all of whom undergo tests whereby they witness rather than directly instigate the violence; they have to choose whether to stop the killing (enacted by mechanical trap), or decide which victim to condemn. Here, then, the killer is absent (replaced by a machine), and the witness becomes a distanced murderer by proxy. Death ensues, and the pure moment is driven by the same theoretical interactions as in the two-shot pure moment. In the original *Saw* the victim is forced to confront her willingness to preserve the self at the expense of the Other—Jigsaw compels the victims to eradicate Others in order to save themselves. The futility of this action— the dangers inherent in defining the self at the cost of the Other—is made clear in *Saw V* where the two surviving victims out of a group of five realize that they were expected to work together rather than kill each other in order to complete the test.

This narrative set-up significantly complicates the victim/killer relation-ship, even if the gruesome detail of suffering appears to compensate for the murderer's partial absence. In all of these variations of the pure moment, the apparent physical distances between victim and killer—be they psychological (as in the case of *Psycho*'s Norman Bates), or physical (as in *Saw*)—are based on proximities and distances between self and Other. Just as there is a symbolic and visual slippage between two only

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

apparently separate bodies in the two-shot pure moment, in the instances I have described here it is still not possible to separate self from Other.

A final point worth noting is how the pure moment can vary within a particular film, and how those changes inform our engagement with the homicidal action. In the slasher film, it is clear that the death of each victim is narratologically important in the sense that it spurs the film toward the over-throw of the killer's regime. However, in some cases the manner of presenting each victim's passing also plays a role in the development and larger totality of the work's impact. In *Friday the 13th* (2009) the dominant mode of portraying murder shifts as the film progresses. In early cases (those of Wade and Mikey), the victim is killed offscreen and revealed after the fact. This mode gradually changes: when Richie, Nolan, and Chelsea are slaughtered, they are present onscreen in the moment of death while the killer remains offscreen. The majority of later killings (Lawrence, Bracke, Bree, Trent, and Chewie) are quite intimate, framed in tight two-shots involving both victim and killer. These shifts occur as an increasing number of teens are dispatched, meaning the accumulating loss of life has direct impact on the film's method of portraying murder.

Both slasher and torture porn films are driven by acts of murder. Yet the message of these films, despite focusing on and centralizing interactions as horrific, ultimately suggests that the apparent paradoxes of identity formation are inescapable (much like the killers). I contend that rather than operating based on misanthropic pleasure, horror films of this kind symbolically process some of these problems. They do not necessarily resolve them, or even explicitly discuss them in the narrative. Nevertheless, I suggest that horror films routinely work through the same problems raised by philosophy regarding the self, even if those notions are articulated in a very different mode and on a figurative level. As I have been attempting to demonstrate throughout this article, the notions that Otherness is part of selfhood, and that our bodies necessarily separate us from one another are horrors of the human condition that find apposite expression in the pure moment of murder.

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

Notes

[1]As categorizing labels, "slasher" and "torture porn" are distinct from one another: the implications differ. The reason I use both here is because in practice, the boundaries between the two sub-genres are more porous than the terminology would suggest: a number of the films dubbed as torture porn have evolved from slasher film franchises, such as the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* films (1974–2006) (Johnson 2007; Thompson 2007; Rodriguez 2009). Also, some pundits have recognized that the lineage of torture porn descends directly from the slasher franchises of the 1980s (Williams 2006; Safire 2007; Thompson 2007; Zinoman 2007), not least because both sub-genres dwell on a set-piece structure that centralizes homicide. Thus, the combination of these two sub-genres provides coherence to my current study, allowing me to compare the contemporary horror film with its forbearers. Throughout, I draw on slasher criticism (which remains one of the most attended to sub-genres of horror in terms of academic research), because torture porn remains, as yet, undertheorized: my forthcoming monograph on torture porn will seek to rectify that issue.

[2] See, for example, my own 2011 essay. For a detailed critical discussion of the Cartesian model of selfhood and rape, see Brison (2002).

[3] Here I disagree with McMahan's contention that "our identity is a function of" the capacity for consciousness resulting from mind-body dualism (see Degrazia 2003: 414). I concur with Schectman (1997) that embodiment is a prerequisite for experience.

[4] My uses of "self" and "identity" here differ to the way McGann and De Jaegher employ them (2009: 432).

[5] If we conceive of the body as part of the self, as part of the identity process, as part of what allows us to form an identity that is separate from others, there is no problem of ownership. Ownership only becomes an issue if we seek to separate physical from mental experience, which cannot be as we are always-already embodied in order to experience.

[6] See also Degrazia's (2003:420–421) criticism of McMahan, which is founded on the assumption that the mind is problematic if we view the self from the materialist perspective. My critique of Degrazia's stance is that consciousness is a state rather than a substance. Even if we were to

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

assume that consciousness is supported by physical properties of an organ, the brain can be thought of as existing in one of two states: that is, able or unable to support consciousness.

[7] For discussion of the development of such awareness in infancy, see Baron-Cohen et al. 1993; Gopnik 1993; Masangkay et al. 1974.

[8] It is worth iterating at this stage that both male and female slasher victims are typically beautiful and youthful: this is not a remark aimed at establishing a gender binary.

[9] Lake Crane identifies the homogeneity of "anonymous," "faceless masses" in favor of "the manner in which untold victims perish" (1994:145, 148, 151). Saplonsky and Moilitor (1996: 46) note that moments that offend viewer sensibilities (such as murder) are more likely to be remembered.

[10] *Friday the 13th* was released in Britain in an uncut format in 2003; previously it was only available to the UK market in a highly censored format, which removed most of the graphic violence.

[11] In Locke's Cartesian paradigm, this is envisaged as a case of a single spirit being as-signed to each individual body (see Campbell 1970:45).

[12] This is a motif that would be worth exploring via other horror sub-genres. The demonic possession narrative—exemplified famously by *The Exorcist* (1973) and more recently by *The Last Exorcism* (2010)—would be worth considering in terms of a worth considering is the alien narrative where human bodies are infected by foreign bodies: most famously, this occurs in the *Alien* series. Although demon figures retain the rudiments of anthropomorphism, in the case of aliens infiltrating the bodies of human organisms, the problem is that the pure moment becomes a visceral interruption of self whereby the Other is literally designed as wholly foreign. Mulhall (2002) explores the series in relation to the philosophy of self; investigating how the pure moment operates in such films would present a way in which to develop this subject.

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

References

Alweiss, Lilian. 2009. "The Bifurcated Subject." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17 (3): 41 5–434.

Baron-Cohen, Simon, Helen Tager-Flusberg, and Donald Cohen, eds. 1993. *Understanding Other Minds.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brison, Susan. 2002. *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Campbell, Keith. 1970. *Body and Mind.* London: Macmillan.

Carruthers, Glenn. 2009. "Is the Body Schema Sufficient for the Sense of Embodiment?" *Philosophical Psychology* 22 (2): 123–142.

Castaneda, Hector-Neri. 1994. "On the Phenomeno-Logic of the I." Pp. 160–166 in *Self Knowledge,* ed. Quassim Cassam. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clover, Carol. 1993. *Men, Women and Chainsaws.* London: BFI.

Datsur, Francoise. 1996. *Death: An Essay on Finitude.* Trans. John Llewellyn. London: Athelone.

Degrazia, David. 2003. "Identity, Killing, and the Boundaries of Our Existence." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31 (4): 413–442.

de Vignemont, Frederique. 2007. "Habeas Corpus: The Sense of Ownership of One's Own Body." *Mind and Language* 22 (4): 427–449.

Elder, R. Bruce. 1997. *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry.* Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Erneling, Christina E. 2009. "The Limits of Mindreading." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 40 (1): 172–177.

Fuss, Diana. 1989. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference.* London: Routledge.

Gopnik, Alison. 1993. "How We Know Our Minds: The Illusion of First-Person Knowledge of Intentionality." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16 (1): 90–101.

Hawkins, Joan. 2000. *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———.2007. "Sleaze Mania, Euro-Trash and High Art." Pp.125–134 in *Horror: The Film Reader,* ed. Mark Jancovich, 4th ed. London: Routledge.

Hellerman, Kevin. 2004. *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Henry, Michel. 1988. "Critique of the Subject." Topoi 7 (2): 147–53.

Johnson, Kevin C. 2007. "Dissecting Torture." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* October 26. http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis/ (accessed on July 22, 2010).

Jones, Steve. 2011. "Porn of the Dead: Necrophilia, Feminism and Gendering the Undead." Pp. 40–60 in *Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead,* eds. Cory Rushton and Christopher Moreman. Jefferson: McFarland.

Lacan, Jacques. [1966] 2006. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function." Pp.75–81 in *Ecrits.* Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton.

Lake Crane, Jonathan. 1994. *Terror and Everyday Life: Singular Moments in the History of the Horror Film.* London: Sage.

Masa ngkay, Zenaida S., Kathleen A. McCluskey, Curtis W. McIntyre, Judith Sims-Knight, Brian E. Vaughn, and John H. Flavell. 1974. "The Early Development of Inferences About the Visual Percepts of Others." *Child Development* 45 (1): 357–366.

McGann, Marek, and Hanne De Jaegher. 2009. "Self–Other Contingencies: Enacting Social Perception." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 8 (4): 417–437.

Mulhall, Stephen. 2002. *On Film.* London: Routledge.

Rodriguez, Rene. 2009. "Horror Gets its Groove Back with 'Friday the 13th' Remake." *Miami Herald,* February 16. http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis/ (accessed on July 22, 2010).

Safire, William. 2007. "As Gorno Ankles, Zitcoms Roll Out." *New York Times,* November 11: 38.

Saplonsky, Barry S., and Fred Molitor. 1996. "Content Trends in Contemporary Horror Films." Pp. 33–48 in *Horror Films: Current Research on Audience Preferences and Reactions,* eds. James B. Weaver and Ron Tamorini. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Schechtman, Marya. 1997. "The Brain/Body Problem." *Philosophical Psychology* 10 (2): 149– 164.

Schlicht, Tobias, Anne Springer, Kirsten Volz, Gottfried Vosgerau, Martin Schmidt-Daffy, Daniela Simon, and Alexandra Zinck. 2009. "Self as Cultural Construct? An Argument for Levels of Self-Representations." *Philosophical Psychology* 22 (6): 687–709.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1970. *Essays and Aphorisms.* Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.

Seemann, Axel. 2009. "Joint Agency: Intersubjectivity, Sense of Control, and the Feeling of Trust." *Inquiry* 52 (5): 500–515.

Shildrick, Margrit. 1997. *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)Ethics.* London: Routledge.

Sipos, Thomas M. 2010. *Horror Film Aesthetics.* New York: McFarland.

Sobchack, Vivian. 2000. "The Violent Dance: A Personal Memoir of Death in the Movies." Pp. 110–124 in *Screening Violence,* ed. Stephen Prince. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Strawson, Galen. 1997. "The Self." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4 (5/6): 405–428.

Thompson, Luke. 2007. "Why 'Torture Porn' Isn't: Notes on the Contemporary Horror Movie." *LA Weekly,* September 6. http://www.laweekly.com/2007-09-06/film-tv/why-torture-porn-isn-t/ (accessed August 11, 2011).

Williams, Alex. 2006. "Up to Her Eyes in Gore, and Loving It." *New York Times,* April 30. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/30/fashion/sundaystyles/30horror.html?pagewanted=all (accessed August 11, 2011).

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

Zinoman, Jason. 2007. "A Bloody Cut Above Your Everyday Zombie Film." *New York Times,* June 10: 14.

Filmography

Aja, Alexandre. 2006. *The Hills Have Eyes.* USA.

Bousman, Darren Lynn. 2005. *Saw II.* USA and Canada.

———. 2006.*Saw III.* USA and Canada.

———. 2007.*Saw IV.* USA and Canada.

Burr, Jeff. 1990. *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3.* USA.

Craven, Wes. 1977. *The Hills Have Eyes.* USA.

———. 1984. *A Nightmare on Elm Street.* USA.

———. 1985. *The Hills Have Eyes Part 2.* USA and UK.

Cunningham, Sean S.1980. *Friday the 13th.* USA.

Fields, Adam. 2008. *One-Eyed Monster.* USA.

Friedkin, William. 1973. *The Exorcist.* USA.

Giglio, Tony. 2007. *Timber Falls.* USA. Green, Adam. 2006. *Hatchet.* USA.

Greutert, Kevin. 2009. *Saw VI.* USA, Canada, UK, and Australia.

———. 2010. *Saw VII.* USA and Canada.

Guerrero Jr., Franklin. 2008. *Carver.* USA.

Hackl, David. 2008. *Saw V.* USA and Canada.

Henenlotter, Frank. 2008. *Bad Biology.* USA.

Originally published in:
Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind
Volume 5, Issue 2

Henkel, Kim. 1994. *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation.* USA.

Hitchcock, Alfred. 1960. *Psycho.* USA.

Hooper, Tobe. 1974. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.* USA.

———. 1986. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2.* USA.

Iliadis, Dennis. 2009. *Last House on the Left.* USA.

Lichtenstein, Mitchell. 2007. *Teeth.* USA.

Liebesman, Jonathan. 2006. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning.* USA.

Lynch, Joe. 2007. *Wrong Turn 2: Dead End.* USA.

Monroe, Steven R. 2010. *I Spit on Your Grave.* USA.

Nispel, Marcus. 2003. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.* USA.

———. 2009. *Friday the 13th.* USA.

O'Brien, Declan. 2009. *Wrong Turn 3: Left for Dead.* USA.

Portillo, Ralph E. 2000. *Scream Bloody Murder.* USA.

Russell, Chuck. 1987. *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors.* USA.

Schmidt, Rob. 2003. *Wrong Turn.* USA, Canada, and Germany.

Stamm, Daniel. 2010. *The Last Exorcism.* USA and France.

Wan, James. 2004. *Saw.* USA and Australia.

Weisz, Martin. 2007. *The Hills Have Eyes 2.* USA.

Zarchi, Meir. 1978.*I Spit on Your Grave.* USA.