4

Posthuman Monsters: The Erasure of Marilyn Manson

I scan the spines of hundreds of plastic cases lining my shelves. Each holds a silver disc where music is etched as a digital code. Transformed from the live sounds of the recording studio into the 0:1 co-ordinates of the information grid, the music on each CD must be decoded by the machines of digital technology in order to be heard. Unlike the musical trace contained in the analogue system of phonography, digital recording re-presents, stores and transmits music as data (Rothenbuhler and Peters 1997: 245). To access this code, I need to enter the musical matrix, which in this case is my labyrinthine CD collection. The process of selecting, sorting and playing CDs seems antiquated when compared to the digital downloading of songs. Lacking the speed and accuracy of such technologies, my eyes skim the titles numerous times. Clumsy, frustrated, I search the files again for a particular disc. Read: error. I can't see the title. I know it is in here somewhere. My eyes lock on the CD's clear blue spine and I struggle to retrieve it from my disorderly classifying system.

INTD-90273 MAR1LYN MAN5ON MECHANICAL ANIMALS NOTHING RECORDS

Turning it in my hand, my eyes fix on the cover. CD art can't be found on my iPod. I want an image to hold in my hand and I'm going about it the old-fashioned way. Specifically, I want this picture. It depicts goth rocker Marilyn Manson, circa 1998. His face is lean and vampiric, framed by a mass of iridescent red hair flecked through with yellow and blue streaks. His infrared stare radiates out at the viewer in a way that is unsettled and unsettling. There is also something awkward about the contours of Manson's body. Against a slate–grey backdrop his shape seems to jump out of the page, evoking the potential to bend and contort. The texture of his distended form could be likened to a composite of pasty flesh and rubber. Although his skin is the colour of plaster, it displays a plasticity that stretches over

his frame to cover and contain his interior elements. This artificial skin, like plasticine, begs to be moulded, disrupted and reformed.

Both troubling and fascinating are the small mounds on Manson's chest and his indeterminate genital bulge, which are emphasised by his pose. With his shoulders pulled back and flanked by a pair of disturbingly long arms, Manson accentuates his ambiguous genitalia. Like a malleable sheath, his skin stretches firmly, yet comfortably, over a body that is neither male nor female. Despite clearly suggesting sex organs, these body parts show no trace of the inversions and extensions that typify the human body. The characteristics of the abject self are absent—protruding nipples, coarse hair, the vaginal cut, the eye of the penis, or the umbilical remnant of birth. No such markers rupture the seamlessness of the skin's surface.

I wonder about this confused depiction of sexual difference. How can we explain bodies that exist outside of the distinct categories of 'male' and 'female'? Queer and transgender theorists have provided one framework through which to make sense of bodies that go beyond culturally prescribed norms of gender and sexuality, and in the process have challenged the notion that the socially constructed category of 'gender' is the enactment of a person's biological 'sex', or indeed that 'sex' itself is a biological given (Bornstein 1994, Butler 1990, 2004, Halberstam 1998, 2005, Stone 1995).[1] What I want to examine here goes beyond critical understandings of gender and sex toward the realm of simulated realities. While sharing the vision of queer and transgender thinkers to destabilise a two-category system of gender difference, I want to focus on a different site where gender identity is contested—that of the posthuman body—and situate this analysis in a climate where digital technologies inform how images are made and understood.

Can posthuman, post-gender images, like queer, bisexual and transgender bodies, encourage us to move beyond a dialectical way of thinking about, not only gender, but other social categories of difference? What can novel depictions of gender identity reveal about the circulation of categories of sexual difference? How might we speak about differences when the markers that once distinguished categories of gender and race are no longer distinct or definable? On what level can individuals identify with such images? Using the images from *Mechanical Animals*, this chapter reflects on these questions, and in the process of doing so, makes the argument that the posthuman is a monster for the digital age; a boundary form that calls into question ontological configurations of difference. In particular, it considers the implications of digital image making for understanding sexual difference and its accordant power-effects in the context of virtual worlds and biotech breakthroughs.

Figure 2. Marilyn Manson, *Mechanical Animals* album centrefold image.

But it is not only the difference between the sexes that Manson contests. Opening the cover sleeve reveals a centrefold image of Manson languidly stretched out on a sofa made of grey tubing (see figure 2). What this picture shows that the front cover doesn't is Manson's metamorphosis into a hybrid of animal, human and machine. Most striking is the transformation of Manson's feet into pincer-like hoofs that define him as the 'mechanical animal' of the CD title. Rendered like a cartoon character's, there is a comic element to his clumsy, oversized hoofs. These bovine appendages challenge the integrity of the organic body, teasing and taunting the viewer to make something of Manson's morphogenesis into an animal.

As neither male nor female, organism nor machine, human nor animal, Manson confuses the role of the image as either reflecting the self or representing an Other. He displaces this logic for the ambiguity of a transitional state that defies a natural order. Part feline, part bovine, part hominid, Manson is the mutant product of a perverted genetic code. Resplendent with red glowing eyes, a metallic sheen and elongated fingers, he invokes the terror and fascination of the alien–vampire–monster. Accordingly, Manson may be located in what Braidotti has observed as late postmodern, postindustrial society's fascination with 'borderline figures' (Braidotti 2000: 157). The

popular cultural trend toward the freakish, vampiric, alien and mutant has been theorised by Braidotti in the context of an increasingly technologised cultural climate where 'classical iconographic representations of monstrous others' cross-over and mutate with contemporary technocultural artefacts (Braidotti 2000: 157).

As a boundary figure that resists being classified in the natural order of things, Manson's posthuman is also closely aligned with the field of teratology—the scientific discourse of monsters. Various theorists have observed that the monster functions as both Other to the normalised self, and a third state or hybrid entity that disrupts subject constitution understood in terms of hierarchical binary dualisms (Braidotti 1996: 141, Cohen 1996b: 7, Shildrick 1999: 78). The monster occupies potentially contradictory discourses and signifies 'potentially contradictory meanings' (Braidotti 1996: 135). Ambiguity typifies these figures, eliciting anxieties concerning the boundaries and borders of the body, subjectivity and the human. Monsters simultaneously threaten and uphold the integrity of the human, serving as a deviant category, or marginal extreme through which the limits of normal, natural, human identity are defined and secured (Cohen 1996a: ix). Or, as Hanafi puts it, 'the monster is a concept that we need in order to tell ourselves what we are *not*' (Hanafi 2000: 218).

The posthuman shares with the monster a confusion of boundaries that challenges what it means to be human. Both act as boundary figures, and it is this ambiguity that has been strategically used by feminists who analyse monster discourse, to disrupt a humanist version of being. But digital images of the posthuman monster can't be interpreted in the same way as the hybrid creatures of old. Manson and other posthuman forms like him belong to an age of 'cybernetic teratology', typified by the techno–human hybrids, digital mutants and genetically modified freaks of popular culture (Braidotti 1996: 141). In order to approach this image of Marilyn Manson we first need to take into account the context in which contemporary images are produced, how they are consumed by viewers, and what this means for theories of the subject in the posthuman landscape.

Simulation and the Implosion of Meaning: Questioning Categories of Difference

At the beginning of the 1980s, Jean Baudrillard's reflections on the human condition led him to observe that Otherness disappears in a culture of simulation, 'when all becomes transparence and immediate visibility, when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication' (Baudrillard 1983: 130). This moment—when electronic media and communication proliferate and accelerate to the point where the

individual is subsumed by the relay of information—creates what Baudrillard refers to as the 'transparency of the subject'. Not only does the subject disappear in the hyperreal cacophony of visual signs and information, but the social system is said to exceed its maximum capacity to circulate such data. Society approaches an ecstatic state, overloaded by the positive accumulation and endless proliferation of knowledge, data, facts and signs. He observes:

> Things have found a way of avoiding a dialectics of meaning that was beginning to bore them: by proliferating indefinitely, increasing their potential, outbidding themselves in an ascension to the limit, an obscenity that henceforth becomes their immanent finality and senseless reason (Baudrillard 1990b: 7).

By exploring what resides beyond the extremities of the social, Baudrillard attempts to pass from a dialectical system of interpretation into a space where referential values are impossible. It is at this point of saturation by simulacra that the social is pushed beyond its limits to 'the point where it inverts its finalities and reaches its point of inertia and extermination' (Baudrillard 1990b: 10–11). This form of inertia, however, is not an empty void that is drained of all meaning, but a fatal site of excessive multiplication that causes a reversion or implosion of traditional value systems.

Baudrillard likens this accelerated growth of the world pushed beyond its limit to a cancer. Termed 'hypertely', it is a process of proliferation without beginning or end. Moreover, it is deemed impossible to locate the original source of this state of excess, or to predict its conclusion (Baudrillard 1990b: 13). Our experience of the world has become, using Baudrillard's parlance, 'overdetermined'. This overdetermination is of the order of the hyperreal, where real is no longer opposed to false, but accumulates to become something that is more real than reality. Accordingly, Baudrillard maintains:

> To the truer than true we will oppose the falser than false. We will not oppose the beautiful to the ugly, but will look for the uglier than ugly: the monstrous. We will not oppose the visible to the hidden, but will look for the more hidden than hidden: the secret (Baudrillard 1990b: 7).

This excess of positivity is radically different to the struggle of dialectics that sees the beautiful oppose the ugly and the true oppose the false. Meaning is no longer a question of opposites, but of excesses that destroy stable oppositions by collapsing inward. Manson acts out this proliferation and disappearance by exceeding the boundaries of the natural body.

The centre spread of the *Mechanical Animals* CD sleeve notes sees Manson stretched out on a sofa. The piece of furniture is grey and synthetic with a metallic sheen that reflects off its surface. Its tubular shape and long frame appear distorted and artificial. In this regard, the sofa complements Manson's own plastic form. Both surfaces look technologically produced, they appear almost to be merging into one other. The plasticity of the two forms creates the sense that they are in motion, engaged in the process of stretching beyond their individual boundaries. There is a palpable sense of tension, of process, at the liminal border where the forms touch. Their shared artificiality makes it hard to think about Manson as an autonomous, free and coherent subject that is entirely distinct from an inanimate, fixed object such as the sofa. Rather, both of these forms display a fluidity that works against an interpretation that positions them as animate and inanimate opposites. In the context of this relationship, Manson appears as 'more mobile than mobile', engaged in an act of metamorphosis (Baudrillard 1990b: 7).

Through this play of surfaces, the distinction between the subject and the object is disturbed. Manson's metamorphosis into a mechanical animal is made possible through the process of reversion, whereby his skin pushes beyond its limits, imploding in on itself to annihilate the difference between subject and object, and the structure of signification that differentiates the two. But the paradox of simulation is at play here, whereby 'if two things resemble each other too closely they no longer resemble each other at all' (Butler 1999: 35). This paradox arises because the purpose of simulation is to make the real possible, and in order to maintain an illusion of reality, Manson and the couch can't become the same thing, even though their distinctiveness is increasingly blurred in a hyperreal world. Hence, it is at the point where the subject and object become too much like each other that Manson's plastic body reverses in on itself in a fatal gesture that preserves the reality principle. Like the Barbie doll discussed previously, Marilyn Manson's taut, plastic mould indicates both containment and flexibility. His elongated limbs and distended fingers further signal an elasticity that threatens to morph, mutate and shift into something else, yet never rupture. Absolute annihilation of the subject is made impossible by fatality because the subject disappears at its limit point when its semblance to the Other is too close. The subject does not fragment, but disappears; its form reverses inward in an act of metamorphosis that produces *something else*.

This reversion can be located at the site of Manson's skin. It fails to act as a definitive boundary distinguishing the inside from the outside, the individual from the others, or the organic from the artificial. Instead, his skin signals a Baudrillardian play with categories, a point of liminality where self becomes Other, nature fuses with technology and the organic cannot be

discerned from artifice. Judith Halberstam has written of skin as 'at once the most fragile of boundaries and the most stable of signifiers; it is the site of entry for the vampire, the signifier of race for the nineteenth-century monster. Skin is precisely what does not fit' (Halberstam 1995: 163). In a discussion of Jonathan Demme's 1991 film *The Silence of the Lambs*, she argues that contemporary images of the monster locate horror at the level of the skin, thereby disrupting the established gothic model of horror as one of surface and depth. Referring to several scenes in the film, Halberstam illustrates how skin functions to confuse boundaries such as interior and exterior, consumption and being consumed, male and female. What ensues, she argues, is a construction of a posthuman gender founded on mis-identity that remakes gender and the humanistic assumptions upon which identity is forged (Halberstam 1995: 176–7).

Similarly, Manson's emphasis on his plasticity of form suggests that he exists only as a surface, as a simulation without any relation in the real. By digitally manipulating Manson's synthetic flesh so that it looks like moulded plasticine, the function of skin as a boundary between biological interiorities and externalised technologies is complicated. No longer is the technological/human interaction configured in terms of a prosthetic extension or invasion of the unified and organic self by technology. Instead, posthuman configurations play with the boundaries separating the organic and machinic, the human and non-human, interiorities and exteriorities, self and Other. As Manson proliferates, both in terms of digital image reproduction, and the elasticity and endless possibilities of the body, he confounds the finalities of binary oppositions to contest the fixity of signifying practice. Indeed, Manson is that which Halberstam says 'does not fit'; that which annihilates established identity categories.

Manson's artificial skin also makes us question the idea that race categories, like gender, can determine a person's identity. Traditional interpretations of the skin as a 'reflection of the inside' or 'a mirror of the soul' creates the perception that an individual's inner character and identity can be made visible on the skin's surface (Benthien 2002: ix). Skin that was not white immediately located someone as a racialised or ethnic 'type' and accordingly, in opposition to the universal, unmarked norm (Gilman 1985). Although Manson glows with a ghostly pallor, this shade of white is not human. It is more like paint or plaster, with a fake and shiny patina that can't be mistaken for organic, fleshy tones. This plasticised surface does not secure whiteness as the normal human state. Rather, Manson's white skin is overtly visible in a way that ruptures the deep-seated associations between 'whiteness' and the universal, unspecified subject. It exposes the 'slippage between white as a colour and white as colourlessness' which 'forms part

of a system of thought and affect whereby white people are both particular and nothing in particular, and both something and non-existent' (Dyer 1997: 47). This display of artifice demonstrates how cultural, not biological, categories construct difference based on skin colour.

In this respect, Manson challenges the reality principle. On certain parts of his body, his skin gleams with a disturbing incandescence that highlights whiteness as a constructed rather than given state, and complicates the ability to locate the 'truth' about racial identities. The metallic sheen that radiates off the grey, shaded, areas of his body also evokes the artifice of the machine. This suggests to me that the surface of his body is a product of technological intervention, and in turn, this highlights that race is a historically contingent and culturally determined category. The vision of whiteness that we are being asked to consume in this picture is not necessarily an endorsement of the technobody that has absorbed the range of human differences. Rather than implying that Manson erases racial specificity, he circulates as an imagining that casts speculation on the role of information and biotechnologies in forging both our raced and gendered identities.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, Manson also defies the natural order because he displays both male and female attributes. Even his name is an amalgam of arguably the most famous female sex siren of Hollywood cinema, Marilyn Monroe, and one of the most notorious male monsters of recent times, cult leader Charles Manson. He is depicted with barely-discernible breasts and an ambiguous genital bulge. These amorphous grey lumps suggest that Manson is no androgyne, but a more complex figuration than either male or female. Manson's sexually indeterminate status complicates an identity based on the oppositional categories of 'man' or 'woman'. These genital lumps and bumps suggest that Manson's sexual status is not denied, but becomes a proliferation of possibilities opened up by the posthuman condition. Anatomical being is no longer a stable referent as Manson's sexual markers exceed the limits of the natural body. By blurring the corporeal signs of sex difference through digital manipulation, Manson leads us to not only question these categories, but the very status of the body and embodied reality as the sites where identity resides. Sexual difference, like skin, is a surface effect, rather than an emblem of identity locatable in the body. By confusing his status as man or woman, machine or organism, Manson refuses to be categorised in traditional terms. Difference, as a marker of sexual, racial and ethnic identity, is under attack.

To suggest that Manson ignores sexual difference, however, is to bypass the key dimension of the technological in reshaping the very status of the human. I think that Manson's image here can be useful in helping us forge a new feminist politics of the subject because he exceeds the categories of

woman and man, not because he denies or negates the specificities of difference. This move toward a proliferation of subjectivities and bodily experiences is generated by the social and symbolic interactions between things that confuse the limits of where once autonomous elements begin and end, such as those relations between organic and technological forms. No longer the source of the authentic or natural, the shifting boundaries of the corporeal in turn refigure sexuality, race and gender as fluid and displaced terms. Manson opts for a skin that is neither male nor female, neither organic nor technological, but something mutable that confuses essentialist notions of the body and the natural, occasioning a range of possibilities for what might constitute subjectivity beyond the limits of the body and identity.

In this respect, Manson's is a fatal image, a place of unstable signification that can't be contained in an economy of exchange that relies on a dual and hierarchical model of difference. Manson's ambiguous, yet obvious, sexual markers offer an example of an excessive proliferation of the signs of sex in popular culture. Baudrillard tells us that crossing over into the space beyond signification sees hypertelic growth paralleled by an implosion or reversion where that which is prolific also disappears. Sex, by virtue of its visibility, too, has disappeared. For Baudrillard, sexual indifference is about a 'lack of differentiation between the sexual poles, and on indifference to sex *qua* pleasure' (Baudrillard 1999: 20). In speaking about this phenomenon, he cites Andy Warhol, Michael Jackson and the porn star La Cicciolina as examples of a sexual ambiguity; a lack of gender specificity 'where sexuality is lost in the theatrical excess of its ambiguity' (Baudrillard 1999: 22). Sexual indifference is everywhere. The proliferation of sex has ensured its disappearance. The sexual ambivalence displayed by Manson ruptures semiotic order, so that coherent meaning is not only challenged, but made impossible. For Baudrillard, this fatal strategy is a catastrophic process.

The Subject and the Image in a Posthuman Landscape

In a culture overrun by the speed and proliferation of digital technology, Baudrillard makes the point that our experience of being a subject is fundamentally altered. Postmodernism's fractured and dispersed subject in crisis isn't sufficient to explain our contemporary experience. Instead for Baudrillard, the subject is understood more appropriately in terms of catastrophe. So, too, does Manson circulate as a catastrophic subject rather than a coherent sign or carrier of meaning. Catastrophe is the excess, acceleration and precipitation typified by the information age. Unlike Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's productive possibilities for the subject, catastrophe is a fatal strategy whose potency resides in the unmaking of the subject and the triumph of the object.

Baudrillard's idea of catastrophe allows us to reconceive the relations of reality against representation, and subject versus object, on which a politics of identity depends. Subjectivity eludes definition in a self/Other dichotomy, becoming instead a process of disappearance. Moreover, configuring the subject as catastrophic contests a Marxist-inspired model of the resisting subject. Understanding the subject in terms of his/her defiance of dominant ideologies has been a way of securing identity in resistance to particular aspects of culture and society. In this framework, subjects and objects remain firmly opposed. Catastrophe, on the other hand, makes identity disappear in the acceleration and proliferation of popular cultural signs and artefacts.

Rather than focusing on the centrality of the subject, Manson's catastrophic posthuman form encourages a decentralised model of subjectivity. In this sense, posthuman figurations do not pose as objects or subjects unto themselves, but act as fatal sites that displace the value system on which subjects and objects are constructed in relation to one another. In the process of reversion, the possibility of making meaning is denied. The potential of this mode of theorising for feminism may be located at the point where the logic of dialectical thinking is exceeded, where disappearance problematises coherent meaning. Following this schema, a subjectivity forged on identification with the posthuman is made impossible. Rather, subjectivity is understood as a series of displacements, as identity cannot be secured in relation to popular images in terms of identification or resistance. Identity is abolished by posthuman figurations in favour of a model of the subject that is unstable, transformative and catastrophic.

While Manson embodies the idea of the catastrophic subject who can't be pinned down, he also encourages us to rethink the idea that images are interpreted through distinct and discrete systems of meaning. As the site of confusion between both the species-divide and the categorical distinctions between specialist discourse and popular culture, Manson's posthuman hybrid of animal, machine and human transforms and recodes highly specialist and often complex knowledges such as biotechnology and information technology. Manson gives the impression that he has been moulded into shape, yet can morph, implode or turn against the meanings inscribed on the body through culture. In effect, posthuman figurations like Manson in this image act as mediators between high and low; between the specialist discourses of biotechnology and popular cultural representations. According to Katherine Hayles, the posthuman can be understood as unfolding along the axis of multiple cultural and technical locations, emerging from complex, highly specialised discourses such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality and biotechnology, as well as popular culture sites including science

fiction literature and popular film (Hayles 1999: 247). This confusion of categories through which the posthuman emerges reflects the postmodern breakdown of the divide between high art and low or mass culture, by signaling the intermixing of biotechnological narratives with science fiction fantasy. This, of course, is the order of the hyperreal; a Baudrillardian concept explained in chapter two as the point where fact and fantasy are no longer distinguishable. The function of the once-separate disciplines of advertising, art, politics and science to stabilise meaning is abolished in the context of the hyperreal. As the distinctions between autonomous spheres no longer hold, the production of meaning in particular categories and genres is made impossible. Meaning, instead, is everywhere and nowhere, existing beyond any one definitive order of interpretation.

By collapsing the distinction between scientific fact and science fiction fantasy, we are encouraged to engage with contemporary images in a new way. For when highly specific fields of knowledge and specialised discursive practices, such as biotechnology, converge and intermix with popular cultural sites, the images that result from these exchanges need to be negotiated differently. As discussed previously in this book, understanding the role of the image in simulation culture leads us to focus on the image as an object that acts on us, rather than asking 'what does this image mean?' By contesting a value system predicated on binary difference, simulation complicates a model of the self as either entirely resisting or complying with particular aspects of culture. In order to further explore the idea that we need new frameworks to understand how posthuman images act, I want to return to the monster that predates the simulation age to compare how past images of hybrid forms have been approached.

We have already established that the posthuman is the latest borderline figure in a long line of monsters, mutants and hybrids throughout ancient mythology, literature, science fiction and the biological sciences. In a representational economy of simulation culture, however, Manson's posthuman image should be treated differently from earlier representations of the monster. As has been emphasised throughout this book, digital images provoke alternative approaches to the process of analysis and interpretation because the experience of the visual is altered in a simulation society. In the context of digital image making, the real and the imaginary aren't separate spheres but merge to create a hyperreal experience.

In the history of Western painting, the posthuman is preceded by a rich and varied genealogy of freaks and monstrous entities such as the devilish creatures inhabiting Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1500–10) or the fantasy figures of surrealism, typified in the work of Salvador Dali and Max Ernst. An example like Francisco Goya's oil painting *Saturn*

Devouring One of His Children (1820–3) shows how the categories of the real and the imaginary are maintained in an order of simulacra that depends on the idea of the natural. Goya's painting depicts the monstrous image of Saturn emerging from a murky darkness. There are no other forms or figures in the painting to situate the narrative historically or culturally. Saturn fills the frame, illuminated against the dark background by a pool of light. His angular and muscular form grips a small, limp body. With mouth agape, Saturn is caught in the act of devouring his victim. His wild hair and bulging eyes radiate with a white luminescence that accentuates his unnatural monstrosity.

Saturn is depicted by Goya as the crazed antithesis of a humanity whose natural order is that of civility and rationality. This is in keeping with the understanding of the monster as a figure through which the human is defined as natural and normal, as well as a hybrid form that threatens this category. As a figure of the uncanny, that which is like yet unlike the human, Saturn provides a means of understanding our place in the world. For in the logocentric order, humanness is defined against what it is not. As noted in Braidotti's study of monster discourse, a unitary and singular notion of selfhood is reinforced and legitimated in the forms and images of the Other; the feminine, the racialised, the monstrous and the technological Other. Taking another approach, Sigmund Freud argues that the myth of the gods acts as a cultural ideal on which man projects his fantasies and 'attributed everything that seemed unattainable to his wishes, or that was forbidden to him' (Freud 1969: 28). As a phenomenon that is more and less than human, this mythical figure is both ideal and abhorrent.

In the act of cannibalism and infanticide, the subject of ancient myth is depicted here as horrendous and unnatural, displaying the magical and mythical powers of ancient gods,[2] while evoking the terror of humanity's own consumption and violence. As a frightening echo of what humanity has become, or the self's Other, Saturn is an assemblage of multiple meanings in the context of the barbarism of nineteenth-century revolutionary society and the gore and terror of ancient myth. In keeping with his renditions of the stark violence and suffering of humanity, depicted in such works as *Executions of the Third of May* (1808), Goya takes an inert and unreal figure from ancient myth and imbues it with a sense of the violence of which society is capable. Functioning simultaneously as a rendition of the real and the unreal, or reflection of the self in the form of an inhuman Other, Saturn acts as a boundary figure who upholds the natural world as reality.

Contemporary images of the posthuman rupture the distinction between the human as the site of a unified, coherent self and the non-human Other of technology. While Goya's Other remains locked in a dialectical relationship with the self, I believe that the posthuman can't be contained in such

terms. As a product of simulation culture, it has no Other; no referent from which to constitute the self. Manson's image on the CD is not a representation of Manson in 'real life'. Rather, Manson is himself a simulacrum, unhinging the dichotomy between self and Other, original and representation. The image itself suggests that there is no original Manson to be located outside of the image.

Through the mechanisms of production and circulation, posthuman representations in popular culture are different to the monstrous and inhuman imagery of earlier times, as typified by *Saturn Devouring One of His Children*. Goya's work was painted before the industrial revolution and the advent of technologies such as the camera. By way of its production, it maintains a commitment to the notions of origins and nature. Goya upholds an unproblematic relationship with the real in his image. The real and the natural are what the representational and the artificial are not. His image of the monster operates as a mirror that allows us to know ourselves as that which is not monstrous, but human. *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* also reminds us that mutant creatures have long been a part of the Western cultural and visual landscape. This artwork, along with other depictions of monsters and freaks, is part of a genealogy of mutant and mythical forms that illuminates the precursors to contemporary hybrids like the posthuman. But I'm wary of simply juxtaposing early visual forms against new modes of representing the monstrous. On its own, this strategy doesn't allow us to consider how the image may be understood in a context where the difference between the real and the imaginary is blurred. Contemporary representations of the posthuman allow for engagements with the subject that reside beyond an understanding of the fantastical and transformative images represented throughout earlier imaging practices such as painting, photography and cinema. Moreover, it is crucial for a feminist engagement with contemporary figurations of posthuman, post-gender entities, to examine the impact of technology on the limits of the body, and the accompanying shift in relations between the real and representation in the economy of simulation. In order to do this, we need to consider how feminism has understood the monster so far and the extent to which such ideas are applicable to the posthuman.

The Monsters of Feminism

The question of the monstrous and its relationship to the feminine shares similarities with the debates about women and technology discussed earlier in this book. Like the monster and the human, women and technology are simultaneously compatible *and* incompatible. This seemingly paradoxical and ambivalent approach to technology forged the basis of my argument

that posthuman images are neither good nor bad for women, but demand a more complex understanding. Like these debates, an analysis of the monstrous is preoccupied with the ambiguity that surrounds notions of the natural, the technological and the feminine.

Feminist thinkers have identified that difference, deviance and monstrosity are often conflated. And the ontological grounding of this difference is an oppositional structure where women, ethnic, racialised and non-human Others are devalued relative to a unified, positive, masculine model of the self (Braidotti 1994a, 1996, 2000, Shildrick 2000). In a system of binary dualisms, the monster comes to stand for something that is different to the established norm, and this difference is construed as negative. That is, '(t)he freak, not unlike the feminine and ethnic "others", signifies devalued difference' (Braidotti 2000: 164). The monster's ability to simultaneously secure and destablilise our perceptions of selfhood is explained by Braidotti as:

> The peculiarity of the organic monster is that s/he is both same and Other. The monster is neither a total stranger or completely familiar; s/he exists in an in-between zone. I would express this as a paradox: the monstrous other is both liminal and structurally central to our perception of normal human subjectivity. The monster helps us understand the paradox of 'difference' as a ubiquitous but perennially negative preoccupation (Braidotti 1996: 141).

One example of the monster's liminal status in the cultural psyche is the phenomenon of conjoined twins. In her discussion of conjoined twins, Margrit Shildrick sees the monster as unnatural yet not outside nature, functioning as an 'instance of nature's startling capacity to produce alien forms within' (Shildrick 1999: 80). The monster is aligned with nature along the dichotomised gender divisions that associate femininity with (among other things) the body, nature, objectivity and Otherness. So even though conjoined twins are not thought of as the natural human state of existence, they are 'a product of nature's deficiency' (Hanafi 2000: 61). As supposed monstrous, therefore *not* normal bodies, conjoined twins act as a benchmark against which we establish and legitimate what is considered to be properly human.

This example also suggests that reproduction is a key site where women, technology and monstrosity are aligned. In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994a), Braidotti also establishes a link between monsters, mothers and machines in contemporary reproductive technology, which she argues 'displaces women by making procreation a high-tech affair' (Braidotti 1994a: 79). She charts the shift in perceptions of

the monster, from pre-Enlightenment discourse that views the monstrous as 'something wonderful, fantastic, rare, and precious' (Braidotti 1994a: 85), toward a scientific paradigm where the monstrous is something to escape, control and suppress. Along with this denial of the monstrous in scientific discourse is the rejection of the monstrous power of maternal desire and imagination (Braidotti 1994a: 84–6).

The status of the monster as the anomalous Other to the human, masculine norm, is shared by the feminine. Braidotti argues that the advent of biological sciences in the sixteenth century marked the beginning of a flight from the feminine and a control of the monstrous and maternal, leading to a diminished wonder in the monster (Braidotti 1994a: 89). In claiming that modern science is a male domain that controls the natural, maternal and feminine, Braidotti implies that the new monsters of contemporary technoscience are harmful to women. For Braidotti, the medicalisation of the body denies women the agency and power of maternal reproduction.[3]

Braidotti claims that today's science strives to make the abnormal perfect in order to contain the unruly and unquantifiable elements of the monstrous. As she explains:

> Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, the abnormal monstrous beings, which had been objects of wonder, have fallen prey to the massive medicalization of scientific discourse. The marvelous, imaginary dimension of the monster is forgotten in the light of the new technologies of the body (Braidotti 1994a: 88).

Yet by distinguishing the 'old' monsters of pre-Enlightenment times from the 'new' monsters formed through the technologisation of the body and reproductive technologies, Braidotti creates a new hierarchy. The monsters that preceded scientific and medical institutions are valorised for their affinity with nature and the feminine over those man-made monsters. Not only is nature's monster celebrated for its association with maternal power, but as a figure of wonder and awe it challenges the scientific, masculine way of constructing the world as rational and knowable.

In expressing a nostalgia for the maternal and feminine untainted by the invasion of masculinist technologies of control and classification, Braidotti perpetuates the idea that women are incompatible with technology, and that technology is unproductive for women; a position I have questioned. By aligning the monster with the organic Other, she reinforces the monster and human as mutually constitutive. Yet, there are a number of feminist scholars who have contested this division. Rather than separate the natural from the artificial, Donna Haraway has suggested that the monsters of

technoscientific worlds offer the promise of new and productive affiliations between the feminine, the non-human and the technological (Haraway 1992: 327). Even *Frankenstein*, the ultimate scare-story about the dangers of technology, has been put to use by feminist thinking to challenge the separation of categories like nature and technology, the self and the Other (Waldby 2002).

Gail Weiss has been particularly critical of Braidotti's use of the monster metaphor as a feminist tactic to challenge the social order. Whereas Braidotti is wary of biotechnologies because they repress and control the subversive elements of the monster, Weiss argues that new technologies do not attempt to deny their monstrous tendencies. Rather, biotechnologies 'replicate, rather than efface, the horror and fascination that has always accompanied the interpellation of the monster' (Weiss 1999: 173). And, according to Weiss, it is through this process of replication that biotechnology takes away much of the monster's potency as a feminist metaphor for a difference that threatens to disrupt phallogocentric models of selfhood (Weiss 1999: 174).

Significantly, it is through the body that the feminine and the monstrous are associated in terms of the horror and fascination of abjection (Kristeva 1982). For Kristeva, there is a kind of power in abjection, in that it disturbs the secure boundaries of the body. Particularly because of the associations between the feminine and the body, the abject has been used by many feminists to revalue and re-empower the female subject, and especially the maternal body and the birth process (Creed 1993, O'Connell 2005, Shildrick 2000). So without the wound of abjection and, notably, without a belly button, does Manson diminish the positive associations between the feminine, the monster and the maternal?

In a backlash against Shulamith Firestone's suggestion that women's liberation would be achieved when they were freed from the reproductive burden though technological advances (Firestone 1970), a number of feminists have been largely critical of the effects of reproductive technologies on women's social power and status. One feminist position sees the control of human life and creation accorded to the male scientist, hence positioning woman as the passive, exploited subject of a masculinist medical and scientific establishment (Arditti, Klein and Minden 1984, Corea 1985, Spallone and Steinberg 1987). Such arguments have been complicated and extended to explore how technology displaces the symbolic power of the maternal (Braidotti 1994a, Sofia 1992).

I resist an interpretation that reinscribes the myths of technology as erasing the body in favour of the abstract information of the machine, or as signaling a flight from the material and maternal conditions of bodily

experience. Rather than reading Manson's missing umbilical hole as an explicit rejection of the maternal, his image provokes us to question the notion of origins, or indeed, a 'natural' in an age where the involvements of medical technologies in the birthing and reproductive processes are commonplace. Like the cyborg before him, Manson reminds us that a state of nature contra the artificial is fast collapsing.

The Power of Myth: New Conceptions of Difference

Contemporary myths associated with biotechnologies, particularly those informed by feminist debates around who controls reproduction, tend to construct these technologies as dangerous for women. From Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1969, originally published in 1818) to Dolly the cloned sheep, tampering with the genesis of life has been intimately associated with the monstrous and that which threatens human integrity. At the same time, these feminist critiques have rightly exposed that scientific narratives obscure the monstrosity of new reproductive technologies, promoting the myth that biotechnologies protect women from the uncertainties of natural reproduction. I want to move beyond this way of thinking to consider instead the ways that popular culture images act to disrupt and make ambivalent complex and highly specialised discourses such as biotechnology and digital technologies.

Importantly, it is the posthuman image *as simulation* that can challenge myths of biotechnology that uphold established constructions of the body and identity. Popular perceptions of biotechnology often operate along the lines of myth-making as it is understood by Roland Barthes, whereby myths serve to naturalise elements of culture so that they appear to be a normal part of our everyday life. In the case of biotechnology, the way this is done is to obscure or gloss over its potential dangers, to allay the fear that is associated with technologies controlling us and perhaps ultimately threatening what it means to be a human being. Meaghan Morris offers another view of the operations of contemporary culture in her observation that 'commercial culture today proclaims and advertises, rather than "naturalizes", its powers of artifice, myth invention, simulation' (Morris 1993: 306). It is this approach, whereby artifice is exposed rather than obscured, that in my mind better explains how images of the posthuman such as Manson operate in popular culture.

According to Barthes, myth functions to naturalise mass culture in the popular psyche. Barthes makes this claim in his keynote text *Mythologies* (1957), where he argues that ideology is reproduced and expressed in the objects we encounter in our day-to-day activities. Myth becomes the common language through which the products of mass consumerism are ac-

cepted into our lives (Barthes 1973: 11). In the series of short essays that make up the volume, Barthes reveals how popular cultural objects such as cars, soap powder and steak and chips become normalised through semiotic and ideological mechanisms.

As a signifying practice, myth operates as a communicative form that makes meaning (Barthes 1973: 109). Barthes draws heavily here on Saussure's theories of language as a system of signs through which the world is constructed. While Barthes differs from Saussure by firmly locating myth within a historically determined sign system, Barthes nonetheless maintains a commitment to understanding the structure, rather than the content, of the text founded on an underlying system of meaning (Barthes 1973: 111). As ideological tools, myths are cultural constructs that function to mask systems of power. Myth, in Barthes' terms, is '*depoliticized speech*' (Barthes 1973: 143, emphasis in text). In keeping with Althusser's understanding of ideology as the reproduction of dominant systems through the imaginary relation of individuals to the world in which they live, Barthes says that '(w)hat the world supplies to myth is an historical reality…and what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality' (Barthes 1973: 142). The purpose of myth, then, is to empty everyday objects of any political significance and in doing so render them powerless and banal.

Although Barthes' concept of myth relies on the collapse of the artificial and the natural as separate categories and exposes such terms as cultural constructs, myth is said to operate as an ideological practice that produces reality. Compare this to the current sign order of simulation, where artifice and nature collapse in an act that simultaneously secures and displaces the real. I would like to pursue, then, the culture of simulation that Baudrillard advocates as a model of figuring signification that challenges Barthes' notion of myth as a production of ideology and semiotics. I argue that a biotechnological, informational and digital age requires a different approach to myth that takes into account how visual images are experienced. In reconsidering the established idea of myth as something that naturalises culture, as Morris does, I favour an interpretation of myth as a simulation effect that can disrupt the seamlessness of signifying practice. To further explore the changing nature of signification and its implications for popular cultural engagements, the face of Greta Garbo as described by Barthes in *Mythologies* is compared to that of Marilyn Manson. It is because they emerge from two different economies of representation—the cinematic and the digital respectively—that this juxtaposition is useful for rethinking the concept of myth.

Describing Garbo in the film *Queen Christina*, Barthes asserts that her 'make-up has the snowy thickness of a mask: it is not a painted face, but one set in plaster' (Barthes 1973: 56). In likening Garbo's skin to a plaster

cast, Barthes reveals the function of myth as that which obscures reality. Garbo's face–mask is the myth, unchanging and perfect; forever upholding the 'Platonic Idea of the human creature' (Barthes 1973: 56). The mask never cracks and never deteriorates. Artifice is made natural through the constancy of Garbo's face as an 'absolute mask' (Barthes 1973: 56). Fixed as the ideal woman, her face is an archetype that never changes. This mythic woman is upheld and legitimated by representation; what resides behind the mask is never exposed but ever present.

The cinematic face is Garbo's mask; her copy that confuses yet relies on an original in order to function as myth. As Walter Benjamin has discussed, while mechanical reproduction displaces the aura of the original, there remains an original nonetheless (Benjamin 1968b). For cinema, like photography, is an analogue reproduction of the second order, locked in a relationship between an image and its reality. Upholding the distinction between the image and the real is crucial to the function of myth in Barthes' terms, whereby myth is the false representation of a reality that resides behind the sign. Without a distinction between the real and representation, there can be no myth. Hence, myth must maintain a differentiation between the image and its referent, illusion and truth. Accordingly, the face of Garbo operates as myth on the cinematic screen by sustaining the relationship between sign and referent. For myth to mask reality, our understanding of what is real cannot be disturbed.

Unlike Manson, whose fluidity of surface disrupts the categories of gender, the fixity of Garbo's face ensures that gender distinctions are secured. Although Barthes describes Garbo's face as 'almost sexually undefined' (Barthes 1973: 56), he never challenges her status as a woman. The female 'face–object' is of the order of the patriarchal imaginary. The gendered boundaries between male and female, self and Other are maintained by the unmoving surface of her skin. Compare this to the plasticity of Manson's skin. Like Garbo, Manson displays the fragility of a plaster cast, yet will not break. His skin is more like plasticine than plaster. Skin, like gender, is viewed by Manson as a malleable and fluid surface phenomenon. The posthuman hides no truths about gender beyond what is represented. Rather, in an economy of simulation where the relationship between the image and its referent collapse, simulation becomes reality. There is no falsity to be revealed by the simulated image. The myth of origins cannot be upheld. In accordance with Baudrillard's understanding of the shifting status of the image, Manson does not reflect, mask, pervert or obscure the absence of reality (Baudrillard 1994: 6). In a world of simulation, the sign *is* real.

For Barthes, Garbo represents the 'fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype

leans towards the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman' (Barthes 1973: 57). Here Barthes exposes the naturalisation of the cultural construct 'woman'. Garbo is revealed as an archetype, an essence of woman constructed on the cinema screen. As myth, her face is deployed by ideology to present a truth about woman. Yet as Barthes claims, this myth of the woman-ideal, in fact, masks a truth. The historical, social and cultural contexts that allow for the differences between women are transformed by myth into an unchanging ideal. In much the same manner, second-wave feminist film theorists approached the representation of women in cinema as untruthful and distorted accounts of women's lived experience. Like Barthes' theory of myth, early feminist analyses of representation were founded on theories of ideology and semiology, and advocated material existence and experience as the true site of women's reality. Feminist critiques of patriarchal systems of power and knowledge have also exposed the function of binary thinking on the construction of the subject. Woman, it was revealed, was positioned as object in opposition to a male subject, thus accorded non-existence in the paradigm of binary thought (see Cixous 1980, Grosz 1987, Jay 1991). In Barthes' schema, Garbo is positioned in a predetermined regime of signs that negotiates difference in a binary dialectic.

By signifying the archetypal woman, Garbo's face both affirms and *masks* difference. As Barthes' exemplar of the female form, Garbo denies the differences between women in a process of representing difference *as* sameness, while also being positioned vis-à-vis man as radical alterity, the representation of difference *as* difference. Camilla Griggers has spoken about the female face as the site of a coded system actively produced and fixed by the dominant phallogocentric regime. In deploying the Deleuzian notion of faciality to make her argument, she points out that faciality is not a process of identification but 'a question of technology, of a machinic operation of signs' (Griggers 1997: 3), whereby the mechanical gaze of both cinema and the digital structures how the viewer sees and constructs a face in this mechanism of signification.[4]

According to Griggers, the face of white woman, embodied by the Hollywood screen icon, is contained by the mechanical gaze of the cinematic apparatus. This face is made to neutralise, contain and police 'minoritarian forms', otherwise described as all forms of Otherness that do not comply with a model of white, bourgeois, feminised and democratised identity (Griggers 1997: 5). Griggers thus accords a dual function to woman in the Hollywood system. The threat or difference of white woman is accommodated by Hollywood cinema so the Other of race and class is subsumed by the white woman who comes to signify 'the consumable face of democra-

tized and feminized bourgeois identity' (Griggers 1997: 17). Garbo, as the archetypal face of white woman, operates very much in line with Griggers' mode of thinking. In both instances, difference is acknowledged, but rendered meaningless and non-threatening by the representation of race, class, sexual and ethnic difference inherent in the category Woman, as the same.

Unlike Garbo's mask-like face, Manson's plastic skin suggests a reversibility and fluidity of form akin to the virtual morph generated in digital space. While it is impossible to witness Manson change over time on a CD cover, the potential for Manson to morph resides in his status as a digital image. Vivian Sobchack considers 'implied reversibility' a key feature of the morph, stating that '(w)hether or not one actually sees the reversal is irrelevant to the "lived" knowledge of its possibility' (Sobchack 1994: 44). It is according to these terms that I want to think about Manson as a new monster for the virtual era, as an example of a digital image that confuses the categories of difference.

The Digital Morph: Same or Other?

Sobchack's edited collection on digital morphing, titled *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* (2000a), provides a contemporary point of engagement to pursue the question of difference in relation to transformative images. By situating the morph in a broader genealogy of mythology, magic, 'trick' films and attractions, Sobchack invites the reader to consider the digital morph's 'continuities and discontinuities with earlier forms and figures of "marvelous" transformation' (Sobchack 2000a: xv). Indeed, the strength of the essays in *Meta-Morphing* resides in their awareness of the historical formation of the transformative figure before the advent of digital technologies. This is consistent with my own examination of the reshaping of perspective in chapter two, which saw the modernist subject of nineteenth-century lifestyle and technologies as a subject in flux, a protean precursor to postmodernism's fragmented figurations of identity.

In her own contribution to *Meta-Morphing*, Sobchack turns her attention to the erasure of difference as a crucial marker of identity in contemporary instances of digital morphing. The essay titled '"At the Still Point of the Turning World": Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis' argues that the digital morph circulates in popular culture as a figure that is banal and familiar, but also a site of fascination and impossibility (Sobchack 2000b: 131–2). The widespread practice of digital retouching in magazines, particularly images of models and celebrity photo shoots, is one such example of this making the strange common and the common strange. Sobchack in part celebrates the uncanny and paradoxical qualities of the morph, arguing:

> It calls to the part of us that escapes our perceived sense of our "selves" and partakes in the flux and ceaseless becoming of Being—that is, our bodies at the cellular level ceaselessly forming and reforming and not "ourselves" at all (Sobchack 2000b: 136).

Morphing taps into our own sense of being a subject in flux. Sobchack claims, however, that the material experience of space and time is complicated by the digital morph's 'quick-change' qualities and powers of reversibility. Sobchack is especially critical of the way that the morph assimilates difference and Otherness into a figure of the same. Taking Michael Jackson's *Black or White* video clip as one of her examples, Sobchack argues that its parade of multi-ethnic and racial faces seems to celebrate difference, while denying it through the morphing of one face into another (Sobchack 2000b: 139). And while difference is conventionally understood in terms of binary hierarchies, whereby man is privileged over woman, black over white and self over Other, Sobchack suggests that the reversibility of the morph presents a myth of equality by undoing these structural disparities. This process of reversibility also obscures the spatial and temporal aspects of lived existence in which difference operates (Sobchack 2000b: 141–2).

This homogenisation of the heterogeneity of difference in the space of popular culture is also said to occur in Benetton advertising. As argued by Henry Giroux, mass advertising adopts a legitimising function in order to 'disguise the political nature of everyday life and appropriate the vulnerable new terrain of insurgent differences in the interests of a crass consumerism' (Giroux 1994: 6). The threat of difference risks destabilising the unity of white, Western masculinity, thus difference is diffused into sameness, and denied political efficacy. According to Giroux, Benetton negotiates difference via a 'strategy of containment', whereby the potential antagonisms of difference are marketed in such a way that differences are dissolved into a depoliticised pluralism that invokes a myth of global harmony.

As a 'digital morph' or techno–mediated mutation, it would be easy to analyse Manson in a similar way to these other examples. Barthes' understanding of myth lends itself to a reading of Manson as an image that reinforces or naturalises meaning through a repetitive process of endless signification. If we approach Manson in critical terms, he appears decontexualised; space and time fall away as he hovers against a nondescript grey backdrop that gives no indication of his spatial and temporal co-ordinates. His body denies any definitive markers of sexual difference in a way that negates the power relations between gendered subjects. In this framework, Manson is a 'bad' representation because he does not accurately reflect 'real life'. Yet one of the problems with taking this kind of interpretive approach

to the posthuman is that it sustains an oppositional style of thinking, in that the image has currency or meaning relative to something 'outside' of it. In turn, this can tell us little about how images shape our sense of reality. In a simulated world that strives to produce the effect of distinct categories in the wake of their collapse, Manson is what Baudrillard calls a 'fatal object' because he challenges the reality principle. His body is not natural or harmonious, but a surface that radiates a synthetic sheen to prompt a response from the viewer. He engages us because the image is pure spectacle, a surface without any 'deeper' significance. There is no reality outside of this representation, no subject to be defined against an object, no self to be secured relative to an Other. And it is this unintelligibility that complicates an analysis of difference in posthuman images. Outside of signification, difference is dispersed, annihilated and opened up, so that identity is not enforced but destroyed.

Traditionally, the potential threat of difference is contained in a mode of signification based on a self/Other logic whereby radical alterity is denied and negated. Sobchack's study of the digital morph, feminist interrogations of difference, and Giroux's critique of Benetton, all see difference in this way. So even though difference is erased in each of these examples, an oppositional model of thought always needs a latent Other for the self to exist. Each example highlights the inability for difference to be conceptualised outside of a dominant regime of thinking by stressing the way that difference is absorbed and contained in the dialectical model of the self/same. Accordingly, difference within this system allays the threat of the Other, because it may be controlled and knowable. The question I ask, then, is 'can difference be otherwise negotiated in image culture so as to configure the posthuman, not as the denial of difference, but as a catastrophe and illusion?'

It is a difference that exceeds a dialectical logic that threatens how we know the world and make meaning. For this type of difference is no longer understood relative to a dominant term. Rather in Baudrillard's schema, difference is annihilated so that it cannot be interpreted as different to something. As Grace explains:

> These 'differences', which, in Saussurian terms, create the possibility of 'identity', are conceptualised by Baudrillard as *parallel positivities* (my term); they are not differences that have a negative valence relative to a positive, but rather they represent an infinity of positive values that never converge, never engage, that can never transform an 'other' or be transformed, but rather jostle around in an endless, shifting, arbitrary hierarchy. Baudrillard calls this a logic of difference, as did

> Saussure in this theory of signification, but this is a difference that separates and distinguishes positive identities and not a difference that constitutes otherness (Grace 2000: 23).

What Grace is describing is a kind of exponential logic, a proliferation of differences that escape containment and homogenisation by exceeding signification. This focus on difference and its representation is fundamental to understanding what is at stake for women in the age of the posthuman. Refiguring the concept of difference is crucial to a feminist politics of representation as it enables an understanding of how images function in a post-material, post-gender and posthuman landscape. As a sexually indeterminate, technologically mediated entity, Manson destabilises the Cartesian dualisms that underpin the liberal–humanist subject, as well as a notion of female identity based in positive difference. Through his plastic form, Manson dismantles the over coding of signification that structures a coherent identity.

The illuminating red glow of Manson's stare is reminiscent of the penetrating gaze of the disembodied lens of science. With eyes like infra-red lasers, Manson mimics the all-seeing gaze of the visual technologies of science and the military. Science and medicine have been understood by Foucault in terms of biopower, in which their analytical, neutral and objective gaze fixes and regulates knowledges. For Foucault, visual control is a form of power deployed in the service of knowledge making practices (Foucault 1977). Yet like the monster, Manson challenges the scientific rationale of order, classification and naming. There is no system under which he can be categorised. Even an attempt to make Manson conform to a socially sanctioned 'type' through modifications to his body (genetic or otherwise) is hopeless because he is the aberrant product of these technologies. His burning stare 'sees through' an overarching biotechnological narrative of a new world order, refusing to comply with a seamless and controlled vision of a technological future. But he belies any such definitive meaning as he is both the watcher and the watched, confusing the boundaries that traditionally serve as a limit point between self and Other.

Manson's infra-red eyes are no window to the soul. The viewer is not welcome to gaze into them. Confronting the viewer is a laser-like stare that mimics the scanning devices of military technology, or the spaces of consumption—the beep of the supermarket scanner. As perception is made technological, Manson evokes the machine as an aspect of the self (Turkle 1980). He confuses the distinction between bodily interiorities and machinic exteriorities so that the machine becomes an integral dimension to embodiment. Manson cannot become an inert and 'safe' product of bio-

technology because he simultaneously occupies the position of the body threatened by the scientific gaze, and a body who exceeds the empiricism of the scientific paradigm. The interconnections and interfaces of the techno–human interaction complicate simplistic distinctions, making it impossible to judge the effects of biotechnology as either good or bad.

Donna Haraway has theorised the 'New World Order, Inc.' as an imaginary configuration, a way of understanding the global tendencies of culture and capital precipitated by information technologies and technoscience (Haraway 1997: 6–7). Haraway's use of the term functions along the lines of ideology-effects, whereby representations both construct and reflect a contemporary cultural landscape. In the instance of posthuman figurations, it is a world of biological, informational and digital technologies in which these representations circulate. Yet an interpretation of posthuman images in terms of semiotic meaning-production and ideology-effects is limited for this study, because posthuman images do not operate to reflect who we are or define what we are not. Rather, they reside in a space of simulation that questions conventional understandings of subjectivity, the body and reality.

Challenging traditional ideas of the subject, language and culture offers the possibility to think about difference in another way. The articulation of difference as an oppositional posturing between self and Other, reality and representation, is rethought. Beyond dialectics, difference functions as an ongoing process of proliferation that can account for the experiences of different bodies to various technologies, recasting how bodies are lived and imagined. Manson encourages a new vision for feminist thinking about the status of the subject in a climate of information technologies. He does this by destabilising difference. This is not the utopian cyberpunk dream of transcending the flesh to enter the virtual. Instead, Manson is a mutant entity that causes a slippage in the formation of meaning. By disrupting the limits of the body, Manson exceeds signification, challenging established notions of identity and difference, and enabling new models of embodied existence beyond dialectical thought.