“It’s All Me… In One Way or Another”:

Transgressive Queer Embodiment in the Music Videos of Marilyn Manson

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My work attempts to understand the deployment of transgressive queerness in contemporary American popular music videos. Rather than aligning with either the conservative moral panics or liberal arguments regarding free speech, I suggest that productive alternative understandings exist outside of this oppositional binary. Focusing on Marilyn Manson, particularly, I analyze how various performances open up a space of potentiality for greater imaginings of embodiment and erotics.

The music of Marilyn Manson presents a scathing critique of the cultural landscape of the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Through performance, the band is critical of religion, particularly Christianity, capitalism, and numerous ideologies of normativity, including beauty and sexuality. This performative commentary manifests in a number of different forms, which can each be traced, in true Deleuzian fashion, back to different nodes along a common theoretical plane—a rhizomatic constellation of critical discourse—of queer and gender studies.

I begin by situating Manson as gesturing toward an eroticized posthuman aesthetic. Informed by diverse scholars such as feminist theorist of science Donna Haraway, gender theorists Kim Toffoletti and Judith “Jack” Halberstam, and musicologists Suzanne Cusick and Judith Peraino, I argue that Manson discursively suggests alternative ways of being—and ways of being erotic—outside of normative humanity. Essentially, Manson asks why, in a society so

inundated with intersections of technology and the body, must we insist on notions of the "natural" body as superior to other modes of being, particularly regarding the erotic? I extend this argument to examine tropes of the non-normative erotic body in Marilyn Manson's oeuvre in relation to theories of transgender embodiment, which is informed by my own musicological work, as well as the work of contemporary queer and transgender studies scholars.

I suggest that through constant erotic depiction on non-normative bodies, the performances of Marilyn Manson provide a space of possibility for the viewer to realize powerful alternatives to the normative mainstream discourse regarding viable ways of being and forms of erotic pleasure. As such, these polemical performances might serve to destabilize conservative notions of appropriate behavior and acceptable citizenship in contemporary American culture.

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PREFACE

First and foremost, I thank Dr. Adriana Helbig, whose question during her Music, Gender, and Sexuality seminar—"So, you're going to write your dissertation about this, right?"—helped me realize that I could actually get away with writing about Marilyn Manson and queer studies. And, while not a dissertation, her constant support and honesty has been immensely productive in the development of this thesis. My other committee members have also been invaluable in aiding me in the process of this work. Dr. Todd Reeser has been supremely supportive and insightful regarding my implementation of gender and queer studies, and has always given so graciously of his time to help me navigate the plethora of sometimes conflicting queer scholarship. Jim Cassaro has for years allowed me to bounce ideas around and complain about life when it gets stressful. He has always been genuinely interested in my success and progress as a scholar and human being. Dr. Deane Root has provided me with a critical eye for music scholarship since I took his Introduction to Musicology seminar, and has taken time out of his busy schedule to help me in my various academic pursuits. Thank you all so much!

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the first decade of the twenty-first century has been a pivotal moment for approaching, challenging, and transgressing the boundaries of gender and sexuality in American popular music videos. While the moralistic rhetorics of the 1990s Culture Wars have been reignited by the conservative public and their social commentators, popular music artists have found more and more effective ways to discuss, through performance, issues of gender and, increasingly, sexuality.[1] Most prominently, these discursive strategies are currently deployed by artists associated with the dance music, hip-hop, and rhythm and blues (R&B) genres, particularly female performers. Artists such as Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, and Lady Gaga represent only a few of the most popular performers who utilize transgressive tropes of empowered, female sexuality in order to initiate discussion, instigate debates regarding cultural ideology, or even simply to sell more records—the music industry is, after all, a capitalist enterprise.

The transgressive performances of these contemporary artists bear similarities to another cultural figure who became infamous for creating highly transgressive performances in the midst of the '90s Culture Wars: Marilyn Manson.[2] Though an exact parallel cannot be drawn between Manson's work and that of contemporary pop artists, we might consider how the performances

[1] Here, the Culture Wars refers to the shift in political focus in the 1990s toward cultural debates such as sexuality, censorship, and religion.
[2] Since Marilyn Manson is both the pseudonym of lead singer, Brian Warner, as well as the name of the whole band, to avoid confusion, from this point forward I will refer to the whole band as Marilyn Manson, and the person as simply Manson.

of Marilyn Manson, and in particular Manson's public discourse on the band's work, helped make available certain possibilities for future performances of transgressive sexuality—specifically, performances of sexuality that reject normative Western notions of chastity, respectability, and propriety—in popular culture and media. And so, I begin with a diversion, followed by a juxtaposition.

1.1 AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC VIDEOS: A 'BAD ROMANCE' WITH QUEER TRANSGRESSION

I commence by discussing three of the most popular, current musical performers—Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, and Lady Gaga—and their music videos. This will reveal how many similar themes are differently utilized across a wide array of contemporary popular music, and will additionally help to contextualize musical, queer transgression in contemporary American popular culture, particularly media perceptions of the discourse surrounding such transgressions. Further, this initial discussion will have the reciprocal effect of illustrating how the performances of Marilyn Manson have opened possibilities for contemporary performative experiments in sexuality, while also allowing for an understanding of the ways these contemporary performances might inform our analyses—situated in a contemporary cultural and political context—of Marilyn Manson's performative oeuvre.

1.1.1 Rihanna

Robyn "Rihanna" Fenty has become immensely popular from her explicit musical discourses of fierce female sexuality, independence, and power. For example, in the video for her song "Rude Boy" (2010),[3] Rihanna asks if the subject of the song's lyrics can "get it up" and if he is "big enough" (Figure 1) before informing him that she will allow him to be the "top" in their sexual relationship. However, she reminds the listener during the bridge of the song that she is in control by asserting that "what I want is what you want," thus ultimately retaining the power to dictate the direction any erotic interaction takes. Throughout the video, Rihanna alternates between playing drums, dancing seductively, and interacting, albeit somewhat disinterestedly, with men who appear intermittently throughout the music video.

Figure 1. Rihanna sizes up Rude Boy's package ("Rude Boy," 2010)

[3] Rihanna, "Rude Boy," YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/e82VE8UtW8A (accessed February 13, 2012).

In her video for "S&M" (2011),[4] Rihanna turns the tables on the entertainment industry, particularly regarding the media discourse around the female body and sexuality. In what begins as a press conference, Rihanna is forcibly held to the wall and covered in clear plastic, transforming her into a specimen for the on-looking journalists to write notes about—notes that are revealed to be negatively gendered remarks such as "slut," "bitch," "daddy issues???," "princess of the illuminati," and "sex tape?." In the opening verse, Rihanna comments on the prudish ideals regarding sexuality by which American woman have come to be measured by stating that "love is great, love is fine," but reminding us that normative America considers anything that is sexually "out the box, outta line." This simply will not do for Rihanna, as she remarks that "vanilla" sex leaves her wanting more. In the chorus, it quickly becomes apparent what the "more" is that she wants—more daring forms of sexual activity. In an ironic twist, Rihanna emerges from a house leading Mario Lavandeira—more commonly known as Perez Hilton, who became famous by blogging and speculating about the sex lives of celebrities, as well as posting scandalous photographs of them online—on a leash to simulate urination on the fire hydrant in the front yard while she sings that "[she] may be bad," but is "perfectly good at it," and that "chains and whips excite [her]." What follows is another example of Rihanna displaying that she is in fact the one in control, by tying up all of the journalists and engaging in, or at least creating the psychic imaginary of, BDSM play (Figure 2).

[4] Rihanna, "S&M," YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/KdS6HFQ_LUc (accessed February 13, 2012). Due to age restrictions, the viewer must be logged into YouTube in order to watch this video.

Figure 2. Rihanna with her "captive" audience ("S&M," 2011)

Throughout the video are also scenes of a rambunctious group of mostly female sexual misfits, led by Rihanna. In these shots, she can be seen playfully whipping and spanking some of the group. Since she is engaging with both women and men at various times throughout the video, these actions open up the possibility of Rihanna being identified as queer. Additionally, at one point Rihanna suggestively eats a banana, and later, a strawberry, suggesting both phallic and vaginal oral sex since bananas commonly replace the phallus and the strawberry is often considered representative of the vagina. Many more references to powerful female sexuality can also be found in Rihanna's songs that have not been produced as music videos such as recent "Cockiness (Love It)"—the opening lyric is "suck my cockiness, lick my persuasion"—which, through an auditory play on colloquial terminology referring to sex organs, positions Rihanna as possibly having both a penis and a vagina. Through such tactics, Rihanna has aligned herself with the (third-wave) feminist politics of having and enjoying control of one's own body and sexuality in a multiplicity of ways.

1.1.2 Nicki Minaj

Figure 3. Nicki Minaj—Phallic Woman ("Did It On 'Em," 2011)

Catching the media's attention only somewhat recently, Nicki Minaj has become known for explicit lyrics concerning sexuality. Often compared to Lil' Kim, Minaj asserts herself as always in control, sexually, and even imagines herself, lyrically, at times as having male genital morphology—Lil' Kim has performed similar phallic imaginaries in songs like "Suck My Dick" (2000). The video for "Did It On 'Em" (2011)[5] presents multiple, cleverly worded slippages of gender. Minaj begins the first verse by saying, "All these bitches is my sons," which subtly confuses normatively gendered discourse since "bitch" is most commonly used as a derogatory reference to women, who are now textually made "sons" by, and of, Minaj as soon as the verse

[5] Nicki Minaj, "Did It On 'Em," YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/iKk94CzHz50 (accessed February 13, 2012).

begins. She concludes the first phrase by discursively suggesting the phallic woman, saying, "If I had a dick, I would pull it out and piss on 'em." In the video, which is a collage of live footage of the song's performance, Minaj herself becomes the embodied phallic woman when she picks up a dildo from the stage, holds it against her crotch, and swings it around in a helicopter motion coinciding with the aforementioned lyric (Figure 3). Later in the song, Minaj further imagines her phallic self by claiming, "You my seed. I spray you with the germinator." This lyric is accompanied by Minaj gesturing a spraying motion with her hand in the direction of one of her backup dancer's genital area, creating the allusion to impregnation (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Minaj spraying the "germinator" ("Did It On 'Em," 2011)

While Minaj appropriates the phallus, and asserts control over her sexuality, she still performs a version of femininity. Prominent gender theorist and author of the influential book *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998) Judith "Jack" Halberstam says that Minaj "would

have to handle that dildo more like Lynn Breedlove than Lil Kim" in order to cross into the territory of female masculinity.[6] As such, Minaj certainly presses against the boundaries of normative sexuality by aggressively asserting her sexual desires and linguistically performing from a male, procreative point of view. However, she always maintains just enough of a connection with her femininity to insure she never queers herself in such a way that might negatively affect her career, especially since queer mainstream hip-hop artists are virtually non-existent, and seemingly not altogether welcome in the scene, though Minaj has admitted that she would like to see this trend change.

1.1.3 Lady Gaga

Rihanna and Minaj have maintained enormously successful careers in the popular music industry, and placed well on many of the charts in the U.S. as well as internationally. However, perhaps due to mainstream expectations rooted in racialized ideology which understand performances of sexuality by women of color as uncontrollable, even with their unique performances of powerful, female sexuality, Rihanna and Minaj's music and music videos have not drawn much complaint from conservative cultural critics, such as the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC), Parents Television Council (PTC), or Fox News Network.[7] There is, however, one recent artist who has summoned the wrath of these organizations numerous times: Lady Gaga. Gaga catapulted into the public eye, and the pop charts, in 2008 with the release of her first album *The Fame*, which featured the hit songs "Just Dance," "Poker Face," and

[6] Judith "Jack" Halberstam, personal correspondence with the author, February 9, 2012.
[7] One exception is Rihanna's music video for "Man Down" (2011), which the PTC complained promoted gun-violence and murder.

"Paparazzi" and went multi-platinum in fourteen countries. Many of the songs were also produced as music videos, and Gaga quickly became known for her unique combination of avant-garde fashion, popular culture references, frenetic dance moves, and electronic dance music. Gaga embraced taboo themes in many of her videos for *The Fame*. Particularly, the video for "Paparazzi" (2009),[8] which plays more like a mini-movie, tells the story of an abused lover who returns to claim revenge on the man who tried to kill her—and does so successfully, by poisoning him. The video features shots of women who have been murdered in various ways interspersed with scenes of Gaga erotically dancing on an ornate couch or engaging in a ménage à trois with two men who look like hair-metal musicians from the 1980s. Sex and death—a timeless pairing—are themes that Gaga utilizes in tandem throughout many of her music videos. For instance, "Bad Romance" (2009),[9] from her second album *The Fame Monster* (2009), ends with an animatronic version of Gaga incinerating the man who bought her at what appears to be a sex trafficking operation in an underground bathhouse.

Even while Gaga engages these taboo themes in her music videos, her approach to such discourse always provides a sense of irony to her performances involving sexual abuse and physical violence. In other words, Gaga's transgressive performances are delivered with a coy wink and a nudge, suggesting that she is in on the joke—a joke that relies on racialized stereotypes of the sexual propriety of heterosexual, white women rooted in Victorian ideologies of respectability. Gaga's sexuality is quite different than the sexuality performed by women of color such as Rihanna and Nicki Minaj who enact mainstream conceptions of black female

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[8] Lady Gaga, "Paparazzi," YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/qStFzmQGQNw (accessed February 14, 2012).
[9] Lady Gaga, "Bad Romance," YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/qrO4YZeyl0I (accessed February 14, 2012).

sexuality—a sexuality that has historically been understood through the white patriarchal gaze as aggressive, uncontrollable, and wild. And, since all three women work within the confines of the capitalist, transnational music industry, their performances of sexuality ultimately rely in part on the ability of the industry to achieve a return of capital from such displays. Thus, in the mainstream capitalist market from which the transnational music industry operates, the sexual coyness that Gaga exhibits in her performances would short circuit the cultural legibility of the sexuality of women of color like Rihanna and Minaj. Similarly, Gaga's performances would also fail if she were to embody the racialized, mainstream understandings of black female sexuality.[10]

Up to this point, Gaga's music videos had been well received by the media and the public, particularly "Bad Romance." However, the video for "Telephone" (2010)[11]—framed as a continuation of the story developed in "Paparazzi," as well as directed by the same director (Jonas Åkerlund) in the same dramatic style—was not as popular. The video begins as Gaga arrives at the prison where she will serve her sentence for earlier killing her boyfriend in "Paparazzi." Almost immediately, she is stripped and thrown in a cell, where she angrily jumps up on the bars revealing her genitals (Figure 5), which had recently come into question due to a widespread rumor that Gaga had a penis.[12] Acknowledging the reference, one of the butch security guards who escorted Gaga to her cell comments, "See? I told you she didn't have a dick," to which the other responds, "Too bad." This commentary also solidifies the queer

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[10] Much more can be said about race, gender, and sexuality in relation to these artists and their performances. However, it is ultimately not the primary focus of this particular work.
[11] Lady Gaga, "Telephone," YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/GQ95z6ywcBY (accessed February 14, 2012).
[12] For instance, see: Ryan Tate, "Hermaphrodite Lady Gaga Has Your Publicity Stunt Right Here," Gawker, entry posted August 7, 2009, http://gawker.com/5332485/hermaphrodite-lady-gaga-has-your-publicity-stunt-right-here (accessed February 17, 2012) or Brian Moylan, "Lady Gaga Admits She Has a Penis," Gawker, entry posted February 24, 2010, http://gawker.com/5479161/lady-gaga-admits-she-has-a-penis (accessed February 17, 2012).

discourse of the video, which had already been insinuated visually by the butch, female security guards, as well as the catcalls and suggestive glances from many of the other inmates.

Figure 5. "See? I told you she didn't have a dick." ("Telephone," 2010)
Prison guards in "Telephone" reference rumors surrounding Gaga's genital morphology.

The queer, or perhaps more specifically lesbian, dynamic is continued as Gaga is seen interacting with others in the prison yard, culminating with Gaga erotically kissing another inmate (played by Heather Cassils) which, as Halberstam recognizes, "reminds the viewer that this is a queer sisterhood, a strange sisterhood and one which is not afraid to flirt with some heavy-duty butch-femme, S/M dynamics."[13] And, all of this before the music even begins! While prison often elicits connotations of homoeroticism where, for instance, men may fuck other men

[13] Jack Halberstam, "You Cannot Gaga Gaga," Gaga Stigmata: Critical Writings and Art About Lady Gaga, entry posted April 6, 2010, http://gagajournal.blogspot.com/2010/04/you-cannot-gaga-gaga.html (accessed February 13, 2012).

out of purported necessity due to the absence of women, the opening scenes of "Telephone" present a much queerer representation of sexuality. Gaga and Casills engage in what appears to be mutually consensual eroticism, which challenges the commonly understood notion of the coercive dynamics of same-sex prison relationships, where the "punk" or "bitch" is more often the victim of rape by their aggressor than a consensual member of a queer erotic relationship. Eventually, Gaga is released from the prison and picked up by Beyoncé (Knowles), Gaga's co-star in the video and guest vocalist for the song. They board Beyoncé's monster truck called the "Pussy Wagon"—a reference to Tarentino's *Kill Bill*—and hit the road, only stopping at a diner to eat breakfast and poison Beyoncé's boyfriend, as well as the rest of the patrons at the diner. Following this, the two drive off together, being pursued by the police, to an undisclosed location "far, far away" to never return.

Because of the over-the-top queer rhetoric and murder in the video, "Telephone" received some considerable negative press, particularly from the religious right. For instance, Sandy Rios, president of the Culture Campaign, demanded on Fox News that the video be banned from airplay for what host Megyn Kelly suggests that some critics referred to as "pushing twisted sexual fantasies to young children."[14] Typically, the concern of conservative commentators is the "children," whoever they are, who will certainly come under the intoxicating influence of Gaga's queer allure and possibly become brain washed by a liberal, gay, media machine that preys on unsuspecting Christian children everywhere. Rios states that Gaga is dangerous to these children because "we have to speculate on whether [Gaga] has a male member or not, and whether it's been cut off or not… And, then, of course, they murder. You know, they do a mass-murder at the

[14] Fox News Network, "Lady Gaga Has Gone Too Far?," Fox News Website, streaming video, 0:43, http://video.foxnews.com/v/4106192/lady-gaga-has-gone-too-far/ (accessed February 13, 2012).

end, and then we've got Beyoncé and Gaga, gay lesbian lovers!? I mean, it's disgusting, Megyn."[15] Since sex and murder have been tropes utilized throughout Gaga's entire oeuvre of music videos, the real issue that conservative commentators like Rios have with "Telephone" is its queer content.

Though she has been the target of a number of attacks from conservative critics, Gaga continued to produce music associated with the LGBT community. In fact, she has discussed how she feels that the LGBT community has been more supportive of her music than any other group of people.[16] Because of this, Gaga has publically supported many LGBT issues, the most prominent being the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT),[17] which began shortly after the release of the "Telephone" video. It seems that coinciding with her rise as an LGBT advocate, Gaga's music began to reflect her less than subtle assimilationist queer politics, as well. Alongside her tour delivering speeches at various gay rights events, Gaga hyped her forthcoming album *Born This Way* (2011) as being the most important album she had yet produced—an album with a message.[18] Apparently, the message was that queers too should be allowed to participate in all of the normative activities of American life: joining the military, marriage, adoption. Or, at least the queer Americans who were privileged enough to actually be affected in any meaningful way by these issues. These politics stem from the mainstream neoliberal gay

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[15] Fox News, "Lady Gaga Gone Too Far?," 1:21 (accessed February 13, 2012).
[16] Jocelyn Vena, "Lady Gaga On Success: 'The Turning Point for Me Was the Gay Community,'" MTV News, http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1610781/lady-gaga-on-success-turning-point-me-was-gay-community.jhtml (accessed February 13, 2012).
[17] Seen as a compromise with conservative congressmembers, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was the policy instituted under President Bill Clinton allowing gay and lesbian individuals to serve in the military as long as they did not disclose their sexuality.
[18] James Dihn, "Lady Gaga Says *Born This Way* Will Be 'Greatest Album of This Decade,'" MTV News, http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1653141/lady-gaga-born-this-way-will-be-greatest-album-this-decade.jhtml (accessed February 13, 2012).

rights politics of the '90s, what Lisa Duggan calls the "new homonormativity"—"a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the *possibility* of a demobilized and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Emphasis added).[19] This possibility is central to the neoliberal gay rights argument, as it relies on rhetorics of a co-opted model of "reproductive futurity"—something that will be discussed in more detail later.

Unfortunately, Gaga, and many others seemingly missed the potential of her previous music having an equally important message, one more transgressive than any assimilation politics could offer. Now, rather than making music videos about queers thriving outside of the confines of sexual normativity, Gaga's music performs the rhetoric of her new found political message of assimilating queer citizens into American normative life. While fighting for equal rights is certainly a noble cause, Gaga's insistence on fighting for normative institutions such as the military and marriage problematically only serves a relatively small, though influential, portion of the overall queer makeup of America: wealthy, white, homosexuals. It's no surprise that at the Servicemembers United party celebrating the repeal of DADT Gaga's "Edge of Glory" (2011) was played as the clock struck midnight signaling the end of the ban on openly gay military service. And, while Gaga and so many others celebrated by checking DADT off their list of accomplishments on the road to "Full Equality" (Figure 6)—a term so frequently used by the mainstream gay rights movement—many forgot, as Kate Bornstein points out, that

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[19] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

"[DADT] doesn't apply to [transgender] folks"—the "T" in LGBT—because the government officially considers them "medically unfit to serve" in the military.[20]

Figure 6. "Full Equality"[21] Gaga's celebratory self-portrait following the repeal of DADT

Through this shift in rhetorical focus, Gaga ironically also makes her music, and herself, less queer by becoming more forcefully pro-gay. Queer has always been a difficult term to define, which is part of what makes it so rhetorically powerful for theorists. Common American parlance often uses queer to signify gay and lesbian, which many scholars find problematic. Freya Jarman-Ivens explains that while it is a polysemic term, "it remains the case that if queer contains and effects an antinormative function; indeed, the moment it becomes normative, it stops being queer. It is the case, then, that most subjects simply do not claim queer as a

[20] Kate Bornstein, Twitter, entry posted September 20, 2011, https://twitter.com/#!/katebornstein/status/116292781751803904 (acessed February 17, 2012). Bornstein is an influential gender theorist and trangender activist.
[21] Lady Gaga, "Today I am so proud to be American," Twitpic, JPEG image file (accessed February 13, 2012).

possibility. A subject is not-queer because [he] does not queer; he is not-queer *therefore* he does not queer" (original emphasis).[22] By adopting the neo-liberal homonormative stance, Gaga made herself and her performance reciprocally "not-queer." Further, songs like "Born This Way" seem problematically bio-essentialist in their message—apparently the message that Gaga was so intent on spreading—as well as absent of any gesture toward irony. And, while this is the mainstream, neo-liberal argument of contemporary gay rights advocates in America, one wonders what might have been the outcome if Lady Gaga, with all of her proven media power, had continued creating music videos that suggest possibilities outside of sexually normative ways of living.

Exploring this question requires an unexpected turn away from the type of pop music discussed thus far for a look at the unapologetically controversial side of the American popular conveyed by Marilyn Manson. Though it may not be readily apparent, there are many discursive similarities between the work of Manson and that of Rihanna, Minaj, and Gaga, particularly the Gaga of "Telephone." Manson has consistently presented transgressive musical and visual works that interrupt the rhetorics of heteronormativity constructed and deployed as the progress narratives of "straight time," which "tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life" and "the only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality."[23] Since the early '90s, Manson, like Gaga a decade later, was the subject of relentless attacks from conservatives, as well as some moderate liberals clinging to wholesome, traditional American values. Unlike Gaga, Manson did not upend the central foundation

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[22] Freya Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17.
[23] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 22.

undergirding his musical rhetoric, even if it might have been considered unpopular, possibly unsellable. While his musical aesthetic changed many times, sometimes more subtly than others, Manson maintained an unwavering rhetorical narrative of anti-normative possibility. Manson has espoused themes in his music that are variously anti-religious, -capitalist, -celebrity, -entertainment industry, and—heteronormative—sometimes, of course, ironically. In other words, Manson and his performance remained queer, and critically so, to use Judith Butler's terminology.[24]

Manson's cultural position of resistance makes sense in many ways considering that his celebrity is essentially the antithesis of Gaga's. In other words, even if he wanted to, because his music so explicitly transgresses traditional American ideals, Manson could not have been recuperated as a mainstream celebrity the way that Gaga was during the run-up to the release of *Born This Way*.[25] Gaga played with transgression just enough to get the attention of the media and American populous, but never crossed the line into complete transgression of universal (read: bipartisan, normative) American values the way Manson did so regularly. As such, the only recourse for Manson was to remain a quasi-subcultural celebrity, or, at least reside permanently on the flip side—the dark side?—of American celebrity culture, which he has negotiated to immense success. By remaining in a space of cultural irrecuperability, Manson refused to submit to mainstream American rhetorics of happiness and futurity as the only successful ways of living. Instead, he presented radical alternatives to the normative, capitalist political structure which were then broadcast for others similarly existing outside of the interests

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[24] Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 223-42.
[25] "Recuperation" is Dick Hebdige's term for the appropriation of subcultural style by mainstream culture and is explained in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), 94.

of American political forces to receive, particularly queer citizens, thus creating a space of possibility for realizing other forms of living in a society that often finds anything other than "reproductive futurity" unworthy of recognition.[26]

1.2 METHODOLOGIES: LOCATING QUEER BODIES & FINDING QUEER PERFORMANCE

The primary purpose of this work is to resituate Marilyn Manson's oeuvre as a tool for queer subversion of hetero- and homonormative ideologies, as well as a possible site of new queer subject formation through the understanding that one need not assimilate into the version of queer subjecthood projected by mainstream neo-liberal discourse—homonormativity. To achieve this, I construct an analysis of a selection of the band's music videos utilizing a variety of queer theoretical modes of understanding. Additionally, I contextualize these productions in relation to social and political discursive practices of the United States, particularly by the media from approximately the '90s to the present, which are to be understood as performances of contemporary American values. Beside the examination of the band's recorded output, both sound recordings and music videos, I draw on information that I have gathered from attending Marilyn Manson performances, as well as other post-industrial concerts and music festivals.

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[26] See: Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

My analysis is divided into two chapters and arranged according to the analytic scope of the arguments, from broader to more specific. Both chapters are closely related to one another methodologically, theoretically, and according to the object of analysis. As such, there is considerable overlap between the two chapters. While some of the objects of analysis—the specific music videos—may be the same, the differently focused theoretical thrust of each chapter will bring into sharp focus the multiplicity of nuanced understandings that are possible from a single performance. Additionally, the discourse will demonstrate how each analysis might relate to the other in order to strengthen the theoretical grounding of my overall argument, thus making it accessible and applicable to as many people as possible. While both chapters understand Marilyn Manson's performances as generative of the possibility of non-normative embodiment as a location of erotic desire, each chapter will focus on particular types of embodiment, and explore the complexity of what is at stake politically and socially for those whose material embodiment might be represented through such performances. Additionally—and not without problematizing Manson's situation of relative privilege in relation to those who might be represented in his performances—I will suggest the potential of an expanded public understanding of queer embodiment through the reception of the band's musical and videographic work.

The first chapter, "The Erotics of Prosthesis," examines Marilyn Manson's output as a performance suggestive of posthuman sexuality. Utilizing Donna Haraway's understanding of the cyborg, I suggest that the appearance of numerous prosthetics without any effort to give them the impression of belonging to the "natural" body, causes the bodies represented in Manson's music videos to be projected into the imaginary of the audience's understanding of the embodied public. At times, however, Manson surpasses such cyborgic bodily representations. In lieu of

bodies that transgressively reveal the separation of organic and mechanical body parts, some music videos reveal bodies that, while assertively non-normative, show no signs of division between what might be "real" and that which is artificial. Similarly, these performances represent not the specificity of Haraway's cyborg, but rather an extension into a more general conception of a posthuman embodiment. Rather than appearing as parts juxtaposed with one another, posthuman embodiment presents a body that is almost too real—a simulacrum, or "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal," according to Jean Baudrillard.[27] The representations of posthuman embodiment also challenge viewers' assumptions about what bodies are available to us. While somewhat unbelievable, aspects of these bodies inhabiting Marilyn Manson's music videos are possible, and present in contemporary society, though they may pass by unnoticed.

Watching these performances, the viewer draws connections between the more fantastical embodied representations occurring in Marilyn Manson's music videos with various non-normative embodiments that are present in the everyday lives of the audience as members of an increasingly technologized public. As such, these performances potentially generate easier access for the public to an understanding of what Haraway refers to as "artifactualism" where "organisms are not born; they are made in world-changing techno-scientific practices," thus disturbing the notion that there even exists such a thing as a "natural" or "real" body.[28]

The second chapter, "(Un)Becoming Transgender: Gender Non-Conformity, Embodiment, and Privilege," focuses the argument regarding non-normative embodiment to

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[27] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.
[28] Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: The Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 297.

understand the presence of bodies in Marilyn Manson's performances as representative of transgender embodiment, which involves reframing some of the previously discussed performances. Many of the non-normative bodies presented in the music videos of the band draw attention to genital markers of sex, particularly the breasts and penis. The use of various prosthetics, other bodily modifications, or even gestural signifiers generates a sense of confusion surrounding the gender of the performers, especially Manson himself. At times, these gender-bending apparatuses present purely psychic speculation regarding the performer's gender, while other times the blurring of gender is a corporeal occurrence, dependent upon the presence of a material bodily marker of gender. Either way, these performances allow the viewer to speculate on the various gender presentations of Manson and his band mates.

While I suggest that these rhetorics of transgender embodiment serve as productive starting points for the realization, discussion, and understanding in public discourse of gender non-conforming individuals, it is also important to understand and interrogate how Manson's privilege, if not carefully negotiated, might cause just the opposite affect by objectifying or exoticizing the image of transgender embodiment in the eyes of the American mainstream. As such, I examine the ways that Manson's non-musical discourse as well as his musico-performative rhetoric act together to avoid dangerous rhetorical misunderstandings of his performances. However, I also suggest, as other scholars of critical minority studies have done in the past regarding other performers, that Manson might be able to carry an even more powerful critical weight if he more explicitly addresses the difficulties that transgender Americans face in their daily lives. In doing so, Manson's actions might parallel his explicit public and musical critiques of both religion and capitalism, thus avoiding any ambiguity by the audience regarding

Manson's important critical, transgressive situation in relation to the mainstream politics of the United States.

In each of the bodily formations discussed above—cyborg/posthuman and transgender—the bodies in question are often presented as sexual and erotically charged entities, not so much in an objectifying manner, but in a way that suggests that the characters are in control of the deployment of their sexualities. While such performances may appear transgressive—and certainly are to those holding more traditional ideals regarding gender and sexuality—Manson's work productively functions to reveal actualities that might otherwise be ignored by mainstream culture. Ostensibly, though it may feel uncomfortable to some, Marilyn Manson's performances could be representative of the activities of non-normatively embodied subjects, since humans are, after all, sexual creatures. In other words, just because normative American citizens may not feel comfortable imagining non-normative bodies erotically performing, doesn't mean that it doesn't happen. In fact, I would suggest that through Manson's performative suggestions, audiences may be made more aware of the existence of fellow citizens of non-normative sexualities and embodiments who currently exist in contemporary American society, and the depictions of these bodies in these music videos opens a space for understanding that non-normative does not mean an unintelligible, illegible, and unlivable existence.

1.3 QUEER ARRIVALS: NEGOTIATING MY QUEER MUSICAL, SEXUAL, AND ACADEMIC INTERESTS

This research is the result of the, sometimes accidental, elision of a number of modes of critical cultural analysis with various scholarly as well as personal interests. To fulfill a largely unexplored area of popular music scholarship, this work will primarily utilize intersections of queer and critical theories with popular music and culture studies, drawing on an abiding love of "post-industrial" musics from the 1980s and '90s.[29]

Growing up in the suburbs of Charlotte, North Carolina in the 1980s, I was introduced to punk, hard rock, and heavy metal music through my participation in the local skateboarding scene at an early age. Charlotte, however, was not the first, nor was it the last city I would live in during my adolescence. Before I was eighteen years old, I had lived in four different states—Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Frequent relocations, in addition to an awkward disposition, made building and maintaining friendships difficult. In order to make up for this, music became one of the few cultural constants in my life. Perhaps due to a combination of these things, I developed a deep affective connection with what might be considered outsider music. In the late '80s and early '90s, particularly in suburban culture, this musical style manifested as post-industrial music. Daphne Carr posits, "Before the *trench coat mafia*, there

[29] The term post-industrial refers to the numerous subgenres of rock music that were influenced by the sounds of the successful industrial bands from the mid-1970s such as Throbbing Gristle, SPK, and Einstürzende Neubauten. Marilyn Manson can be aesthetically categorized as industrial metal, which is the most commercially successful form of post-industrial music, featuring bands like Ministry, Nine Inch Nails, and KMFDM. Other groups and subgenres subsumed under the umbrella of post-industrial music include: Skinny Puppy—electro-industrial; Swans—industrial rock; and Coil—ambient industrial.

were other teen scapegoats in the suburbs" (original emphasis).[30] These people included: "Druggies, losers freaks, loners, poor kids, LD kids. Kids who transferred in;… walked too slowly with their heads down, didn't get the joke and made jokes no one else got."[31] She suggests that, tapping into this social abjection, Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails "became a hero and a folk devil" to these teenagers and the mainstream public, respectively—"He did not create teenage angst, but he gave it an early nineties voice and face."[32] I would suggest that by adding "more of industrial's self-reflexivity and goth's camp to [Nine Inch Nails'] themes, with lyrics and a stage show designed to call attention to the power of taboo and provoke public controversy,"[33] Manson—who was a protégé of Reznor and an extremely successful artist on his record label, Nothing Records—performed a similar function to considerably greater, more affectively transgressive ends. This forceful social transgression affectively provided a means of "disidentification"—"the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship"—for those outsider youths, particularly queers, who found some form of community in the escape from the mainstream ideology.[34]

This work is also strongly influenced by, and in many ways is a direct result of, my relationship to queerness, particularly my own queerness. As a young, queer identified person in the '90s who preferred post-industrial music and hardcore punk over top-40 and dance music,

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[30] Daphne Carr, *Nine Inch Nails' Pretty Hate Machine* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 1.
[31] Ibid., 1-2.
[32] Ibid., 2.
[33] Ibid., 4.
[34] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

and completely dressed the part—black trench coat, leather, long black hair, eyeliner, and, for a while, full "corpse paint"—I found significant difficulties making inroads to both the alternative music community and the queer community.[35] I was too queer to be part of the masculine metal and post-hardcore scene, and too alternative to be part of the younger queer scene.[36] Doubly rejected, I began to search for ways of reconciling my apparently divergent interests with my sexual identity. In graduate school, I finally found my answer through my interest in queer theory. This work is the result of my realization that through queer theoretical methodologies, one might be able to construct a powerful political and social critique of normative sexuality and culture through the work of post-industrial musical artists, particularly those, such as Marilyn Manson, who gained wide circulation in the mainstream media. Bringing together contemporary queer theoretical models with the performative aspects of Marilyn Manson's music videos opens up multiple paths to queer critique of normative American culture: musically, visually, socially, and politically. While the rhetoric and performance of Manson's music often elicit the ire of both conservative and liberal normative constituents, I suggest that it also unhinges the ideological yoking of productive life to capitalism, and inherently social, political, and sexual normativity.

Manson's performances, particularly those disseminated televisually, allow for the potential of queer understandings of living to be more possibly realized, particularly in geographies such as the suburban that are understood as exhibiting an overwhelming sense of normativity. Developing the importance of televisual discourse in the queer suburban imaginary,

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[35] "Corpse paint" is a style of makeup popularized by black metal musicians and fans. It is comprised of heavy white face paint and severe, black eye makeup and lip coloring.
[36] Once, I was actually told by an openly gay classmate that there was no way that I could be gay because of the music I listened to and the way I dressed.

Karen Tongson contends that non-normative queer sexualities, "televised and teleported to [the] suburban bedroom, awakened [the] ability to read into and otherwise. Through these late-night assignations with the small screen, [one is] able to 'get it'—'it' referring to the 'exhilarating' and 'terrifying' language of queer innuendo beamed I from the metropole."[37] While Muñoz's theory of disidentification is a complex and variant network of strategies that can manifest in a number of ways, I deploy it here as "the remaking and rewriting of a dominant script" in order to "imagine a remade public sphere in which the minoritarian subject's eyes are no longer marginal."[38] Here, I suggest that Marilyn Manson's music videos invite queer subjects to disidentify by presenting them with productively alternative ways of situating their multiply identified subjectivities in and against the heteronormative rhetorics that protest both the supposed danger of homosexuality in general and Manson's music particularly, as well as the neoliberal rhetoric attempting to marginalize alternative forms of queerness in the concerted effort to present queer Americans as a community of homonormative subjects unquestioningly seeking complete assimilation into normative, capitalist culture.

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[37] Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 22.
[38] Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 23.

2.0 THE EROTICS OF PROSTHESIS

"Cut the head off—grows back hard.
I am the hydra—now you'll see your star."[39]

"We were neurophobic and perfect—the day that we lost our souls.
Maybe we weren't so human—if we cry, we will rust."[40]

Marilyn Manson's song lyrics above represent only a small portion of the references made to various non-normative bodies in his numerous musical productions. These performances often act as a vehicle for visual, textual, and musical discourses used to critique the relationship between the body, sexuality, and power in late capitalist American culture. Through his music videos, Manson positions himself as a strong critic of modern assimilation narratives produced in America which suggest that in order to be a useful citizen each subject must work toward achieving the so-called "American dream." Particularly, Manson challenges the ideologies of capitalism, heteronormativity, and Christianity undergirding this American progress narrative. Since the inception of his band in 1989, Manson has actively produced music videos

[39] Marilyn Manson, "Antichrist Superstar," *Antichrist Superstar*, Nothing Records IND-490086, CD, 1996.
[40] Marilyn Manson, "Mechanical Animals," *Mechanical Animals*, Nothing Records IND-490273, CD, 1998.

incorporating various depictions of eroticized, non-normative bodies. Throughout the band's more than twenty-year career, the types of non-normative bodies that are implemented in these videos have also changed, often coinciding with the creation and production of a new album. Through analysis of Marilyn Manson's music videos, information gathered from watching videos of live performances, as well as attending Marilyn Manson concerts, I will argue that each of the types of non-normative bodies incorporated by Manson, as well as the erotic manner in which they—or he, when Manson himself is the non-normative body—often perform, enacts various modes of queer theoretical and feminist discourse regarding the relationship of the body to culture and modes of power, particularly when situated within the framework of a late capitalist society such as the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As such, these performances place the construction of bodily and medical normativity under the microscope, linking them, as many scholars have done before, to Christian, capitalist, heteronormative institutions of power, all of which have played a significant part in the construction and maintenance of anti-queer rhetoric in America—historically, as well as today.

These three institutions will be referenced together frequently throughout this work. This is not coincidental. While different in many ways, all three intersect around the production of injury to minority, in this case queer, bodies. Christianity has a long and extremely problematic history with minority acceptance. Currently, that minority is, at least most explicitly, queer people. New, liberal strains of Christianity preach acceptance of gays and lesbians. However, as Michael Cobb suggests, there are still many powerful Christian voices, following the lineage of the American jeremiad, declaring that the "new social tolerance of the homosexual agenda, again and again, puts our moral/religious country, our moral/religious families, and *especially* our

moral/religious children at destructive risk" (original emphasis).[41] And, while more liberal wings of the religious community might argue that hate rhetoric from fundamentalists doesn't actually represent Christianity, such rhetoric clearly does not go unnoticed or unsupported. Even though the majority of this rhetoric is conjured from fantasy, those who produce it "are being effectively inventive, fictitious, and rhetorical, with very 'real' consequences that can't be predicted in advance."[42] These real consequences can play out in any number of violent ways. This violence, and the injury endured from such violence, is what implicated capitalism into the rubric of anti-queer institutionalism. In the injury of others, money can be made, primarily by selling the image and story of those subject to injury by others because "the contemporary public sphere thrives on hate, especially when that hate targets minorities' bodies."[43] Heteronormativity is inherently anti-queer by its very nature, but it also interacts with the other two institutions to reciprocate their mutual collective power. In other words, religious rhetoric incites violence against queers; representations of that hatred and the injuries sustained by queers from it are peddled for profit by various branches of the media industry in order to satiate a public who delights in continuously observing the injury of others, especially those who are different from them; and the only way to safely avoid such injury in the first place is to be, or at least appear, heteronormative.

Regarding Marilyn Manson's music videos, there appears to be a discursive parallel between the bodily representations in the performances and the changes in feminist and queer theoretical discourses on the body in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As numerous

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[41] Michael Cobb, *God Hates Fags: The Rhetorics of Religious Violence* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 161.
[42] Ibid., 180.
[43] Ibid., 57.

recent queer theorists have suggested, queer temporalities act as "forms of interruption" and "points of resistance" to the dominant, linear temporal order and "propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others."[44] I suggest that recognizably queer bodies—non-normative bodies—might provide similar interruptions to the dominant, normative conceptions of what a body should or should not be like, or even be. As such, one must always consider that, as Kim Toffoletti discusses regarding posthuman bodies, it is the tension created by these bodies that:

> disrupts traditional understandings of selfhood, identity, the body and reality. It is for this reason that posthuman images can be so appealing. It is because they are contradictory and unstable, not because they transcend the body or offer a better version of human existence.[45]

I argue that through the depiction and engagement with non-normative bodies, Manson's videos create awareness, even if it is abject, of diversity of bodies that exist in contemporary society, even if these depictions are somewhat fantastical. As such, Manson's output provides a strong critique of commonly espoused notions of normativity in the United States, which can be utilized as a "point of resistance" by those who identify with, or as, non-normative bodies and sexualities to "propose other possibilities for living" collectively, even if only psychically, in a culture still largely controlled by heteronormative forces.

Marilyn Manson initially formed under the name Marilyn Manson and the Spooky Kids in 1989 in Southern Florida. The band's first three music videos—all from their first studio

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[44] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xxii.
[45] Kim Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 4.

album *Portrait of an American Family* (1994)—depict stories of the angst associated with being an outsider, as well as sentiments of anti-authority—themes that often recur through most of Manson's music. And, while the music videos for *Portrait of an American Family* indeed suggest an interest in non-normative bodies—campy horror tropes, little people, or various body modifications—it was not until the band released a video for their cover version of Eurythmics' 1983 synth-pop hit "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)"[46] from their second album *Smells Like Children* (1995) that the non-normative body is cast in the forefront of the performative discourse: visually, lyrically, and musically.[47] "Sweet Dreams" presents a drastic, and sudden, shift in the entire aesthetic of the Marilyn Manson's music videos in which these bodies have become highly, and often grotesquely, eroticized. This aesthetic would be utilized throughout the production of the band's second full-length album *Antichrist Superstar* and the music videos that accompanied it. Notably, this is the new aesthetic that would catapult Manson right into the middle of the Culture Wars, and as such, would be successfully cultivated for many years following the release of this video.

2.1 SEXUALIZED GESTURES, SUBVERSIVE EROTICS

Manson's choice of "Sweet Dreams" as the introduction of this new aesthetic—dystopian, post-industrial monstrosity—in many ways acts as an extension of the original Eurythmics video,

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[46] Marilyn Manson, "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)," *Lest We Forget: The Best Of*, CD/DVD (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2004).
[47] Interestingly, *Smells Like Children* consisted solely of cover songs and remixes of songs from their previous and, then, only studio album *Portrait of an American Family*.

which was already known for strongly provoking questions regarding the relationship between gender, power, and technology. Marilyn Manson's video of "Sweet Dreams" evokes Donna Haraway's cyborg theory which challenges the story of original innocence, what she calls "artifactualism," stating that "organisms are not born; they are made in world-changing techno-scientific practices by particular collective actors in particular times and places."[48] The video opens with the sounds of heavily distorted, disembodied childlike voices accompanying a blurred shot of Manson's head, which almost appears to be underwater. Freya Jarman-Ivens argues that because the voice is assumed to always generate from a body, "the detachment of the voice from body renders unstable the signifiers at play here in such a way as to make the voice itself highly productive of queer."[49] She further posits that the voice acts as a floating signifier until the listener can attach it to a body—more specifically, a gendered body. Until such an attachment occurs by the listener, the voice exists in "a kind of 'third space' between the voicer and the listener—and the importance of identification both with and against the voice on the part of the listener… make it a particularly intense site for the emergence of queer."[50] If this is the case, the first sights and sounds we receive from "Sweet Dreams" seem quite queer: a fragile sounding voice, which is not attached to any discernable generative body. Even when Manson sings the first lines of the song's verse, we are still yet to locate an emanating body for the earlier heard vocalities. The resulting feeling might be one of unease, a queer affect.

Throughout the first half of the video, shots alternate between Manson singing in a tattered, dirty wedding dress, replete with veil; a ripped up tutu; and with various, rudimentary prosthetics protruding from his body. These include, at different times, a vintage microphone

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[48] Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters," 297.
[49] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*, 3.
[50] Ibid.

strapped to Manson's chest, live doves, and lit candles. The camera is rarely stationary, frequently panning across the scene only catching glimpses of Manson and his band mates, which invites the gaze to wander. Because nearly all of the camera shots are distorted, the border between the human body and the prosthetics often become blurred. The candles, for instance, appear to have almost melted into the performers' bodies. Additionally, Manson—and, at certain times, his band mates—perform highly stylized and eroticized gestures, some subtler than others, inviting the viewer to gaze at these strange bodies. At one point fairly early in the video, the camera assumes an aerial perspective of Manson, looking down on him. Because of the camera angle, the microphone attached to his chest becomes understandable as a phallus, since the camera's new perspective conceals exactly from which part of Manson's body the prosthesis protrudes (Figure 7). This new phallic imaginary subsequently sexualizes many of the actions Manson later performs with the microphone, for instance, grasping it or touching it to his lips. As Haraway notes, not only is the idea of the connection between gender and nature constructed, but the actual concept of nature is also a construction in which "organisms emerge from a discursive process. Biology is a discourse, not the living world itself."[51]

[51] Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters," 298.

Figure 7. Manson with prosthetic phallus ("Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)," 1995)

In addition to restyling the song as a slow dirge, Manson also alters the lyrics in minute, yet significant ways. At what might be considered the turning point to the second section of the song, Manson follows the original lyrics "some of them want to use you—some of them want to get used by you—some of them want to abuse you—some of them want to be abused" with "I wanna use you—and abuse you—I wanna know what's inside you." By shifting the voice from "them" to "I," Manson claims his agency over the performance, becoming an embodied subject performing the action rather than a passive object being acted upon by the disembodied "them" of the original version. Coinciding with this last lyric segment is a shot of Manson rubbing—almost groping—his stomach which is covered in infamously self-inflicted scars, thus, affirming his position as the subject of the lyrics. And, as if answering his own wish, the video immediately cuts to a montage of new images, almost entirely of Manson, perhaps revealing the psychic monsters hidden inside of him—a lumbering, distorted figure with mechanical stilts for legs; a gaunt cowboy-like personage completely covered in a black substance, riding a giant pig;

and a techno-Medusa character, lit in neon green with clocks at the end of each tendril sprouting from "her" head.

This midpoint of the song also marks a change in vocality, shifting from Manson's low, gravelly melodic style to a higher, shouted vocal delivery, finally erupting with an unmelodic shriek of the word "abused." When the original theme, as it were, returns it is no longer sung in a low, gravelly voice, but delivered in a combination of tense, croaked whispers and fragile falsetto, minimally accompanied by an electronic drum beat and a toy piano or celeste. Using Roland Barthes's theory regarding the "grain of the voice," I imagine these particularly eruptive and fragile vocalities as constantly cycling through various, recurring instances of "jouissance"—the indescribable aspects of immense feelings of pleasure—violent even—including ecstasy, loss and chaos, and often, a sexual connotation of being orgasmic.[52] As Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald remark, regarding the Riot Grrrl scene, screamed vocal timbres "evoke rage, terror, pleasure, and/or primal self-assertion."[53] Jarman-Ivens suggests in her analysis of Barthes's theory, that the "relationships of voices to the grain in particular allow queer meanings to be derived, queer spaces to be felt."[54] Can we not understand Manson's voice here as performing queerness through its varying "third-space" instability, the "grain," and the emasculated, queer body from which this voice originates?

This reading of "Sweet Dreams" reveals a number of the complex ways in which Manson utilizes the non-normative body as a site of erotic lust, which becomes a standard practice in the

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[52] Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image-Music-Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 179-89.
[53] Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock," in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee (New York: Routledge, 2006), 359.
[54] Jarman-Ivens, *Queer Voices*, 7.

band's music videos, and sometimes even live performances. Judith Peraino has noted that in performance, Manson's body is emasculated even though he is aggressive. However, she posits, it still possesses an erotic power as a Foucauldian displacement of the erotic from the genitals to the ears by allowing the overwhelming sonic elements of the music to provide the "phallic penetration that his body, so thoroughly and artistically broken down, cannot."[55] And while she insists that this sonic penetration creates "a space in which to revel in the transgressive erotic pleasure of the emasculated body as an unlikely site of power and resistance," Peraino's conception of aural sex actually evacuates Manson's body of its erotic power by displacing it onto the sound of Marilyn Manson's music.[56] In Manson's performance, the focus seems not to be necessarily on the presence of bodily markers that signify maleness, but rather the absence of those signifying femaleness—the breasts. In *Homosexual Desire*, Guy Hocquenghem argued, "Only the phallus dispenses identity… Seen from behind, we are all women; the anus does not practice sexual discrimination."[57] This also relates to Manson's lightly-muscled physique, which might be described as feminine, even if he is understood to be male. Perhaps because Hocquenghem was simply unconcerned with women, he did not extend his theory past homosexual men. However, it would follow that genital absence might signify identity as well. As such, the signifier of absence forces the gaze away from the genitals in search of alternative bodily sites of sexual identification and erotic pleasure. While I agree with Peraino's suggestion of the physical erotic power of music on the body, I would argue that rather than evacuating the body of its erotic power, the sonic elements of the music act in tandem with Manson's carefully

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[55] Judith A. Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity From Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 243.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1993), 101.

choreographed body to relocate it as the site of erotic pleasure, even if it is in subtle, or subversive ways.[58] And, though she avoids using the term "desire," following Foucault's separation of desire and pleasure, Peraino's argument still appears to engage exactly the term she avoids. Elizabeth Freeman differentiates "desire" from "erotics" by suggesting that desire is the belief that by replacing a lost object, the subject will once again be whole, whereas erotics "traffics less in beliefs than in encounter, less in damaged wholes than in intersections of body parts, less in loss than in novel possibility."[59] Similarly, discussing the intersection of erotics and the body as it relates to transgendered subjectivity, Gayle Salamon, expounding upon Merleau-Ponty's notion of transposition, argues that:

> there is an important ambiguity secured with [the] refusal to name the penis with the encampment of sexuality, an ambiguity that performs an unyoking of bodily parts from bodily pleasures. The join between desire and the body is the location of sexuality, and that join may be a penis, or some other phallus, or some other body part, or a region of the body that is not individuated into a part, or a bodily auxiliary that is not organically attached to the body. This passage asserts that the most important aspect of sexuality is not any particular part—not even the behavior of that part—but the 'general function' which causes that part to be animated, the means through which it is brought into my bodily sense of myself and is incorporated into my self-understanding through a reaching out toward the world.[60]

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[58] The erotics of musical sound has been powerfully and convincingly argued regarding the performance of classical music by Suzanne Cusick in "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight," which Peraino is extending here to analyze Manson's performances. However, I feel that any discussion of Manson's performances should account for his music videos, as well as his live performances. As such, the visual cannot simply be replaced by the aural as Peraino seems to be suggesting, particularly since the erotic nature of Manson's music videos is so potent.

[59] Freeman, *Time Binds*, 13-14.

[60] Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 51.

Whereas Peraino insists on desire replacing Manson's lost bodily phallus with a sonic phallus to penetrate our ears, I am suggesting, following Freeman, Salamon, and Merleau-Ponty, that rather than desire for the phallus being fulfilled by another phallic object, Manson's body, mediated and emasculated as it may be, remains a site of erotics even without a phallic presence—or, in perhaps an even queerer sense, the erotics of Manson's body are realized precisely *because* of the absence of a phallus.

While Manson is generally the central focus of the music videos, other band members also add to the aesthetic of non-normative bodily erotics. For instance, long-time bassist and guitarist Twiggy Ramirez is known for wearing a signature dress during performances, both live and in video. Through a combination of the concealing fit of the dress, as well as hair and make-up styling, Twiggy's gender-bending appearance makes it difficult to determine whether Twiggy is male or female, which appears purposeful on the part of the band. For instance, at one point in "Sweet Dreams" Twiggy lifts up the dress, revealing what appears to be frilly underwear (Figure 8). And while the action is performed in an obviously teasing and erotic manner, the image quality is washed out in such a way that it is impossible to discern any physical markers of biological sex, which draws the viewer's attention to the alluring bodily gesture as the erotic focus, rather than specific parts of the body. Referring to the striptease, Barthes discusses the contradiction of signification he finds in such displays where the body is:

> desexualized at the very moment when [it] is stripped naked. We may therefore say that we are dealing in a sense with a spectacle based on fear, or rather the pretense of fear, as if eroticism here went no further than a sort of delicious terror, whose ritual signs have only to be announced to evoke at once the idea of sex and its conjuration.[61]

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[61] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 84.

Figure 8. Twiggy's ambiguous body ("Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)," 1995)

As such, Twiggy's body and persona also subvert the psychoanalytic model of desire, where the phallic lack would be fulfilled if Twiggy's biological sex were revealed. But, rather than fulfill this lack, we are forced to locate the erotic elsewhere, such as the gesture of Twiggy's unimaginable body. Julia Kristeva calls this a "borderline," which, since humans desire meaning in objects, becomes a site of abjection that "draws [one] to the place where meaning collapses"—in this case, Twiggy's androgynously sexed body.[62] Kristeva posits that further than desire, the abject becomes "inaccessible except through jouissance. It follows that jouissance causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and

[62] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

painfully. A passion."[63] Consequently, the varied, yet enthralled, reactions to the bodies associated with performances by Marilyn Manson become imaginable.

Further suggesting borderlines, the mere imagination of Manson and his band members generate images of non-normative bodies, even for those completely unfamiliar with their corporeal ones. For the first six years of the band's existence—through the recording of *Antichrist Superstar* (1996)—all band members were given pseudonyms formulated by combining the first name of a female superstar, usually an object of erotic pleasure, with the last name of a male serial killer, who are certainly also objects of intense mainstream fascination, and often, subcultural lust. In doing so, the conceptual conflation of Marilyn Monroe and Charles Manson turn Brian Warner's androgynous, emasculated body into a site of mass-mediated, often erotic, obsession—Marilyn Manson. It is this obsession from which Manson obtains his power. Manson's power can be seen in numerous manifestations at any of his concerts, where, for instance, male fans often emulate the band members' appearance with female clothing and makeup. In fact, in the midst of the Culture Wars, this very phenomenon was specifically discussed as being crucial to the case against Manson in the 1997 Senate hearing regarding the espoused connection between music and violence, where it was implied that the mere exposure to Manson's gender-bending fan base might corrupt (read: queer) otherwise normative members of society, particularly young boys.[64]

As previously mentioned, common signifying elements occur throughout many of Manson's music videos from the album *Antichrist Superstar*. For instance, references to medical discourse, particularly from the past, are frequently made in the visual aspects of the videos. As

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[63] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.
[64] Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 245.

Foucault has theorized, modern medical discourse has been, and still is, used as a tool to normalize and control people, where discursive power is exerted through dominant forms of expertise, science, and classification, thus giving the dominant group the ability to hegemonically define reality and establish rules about what can validly be known, controlled, and imagined.[65] In these videos, though, Manson often uses these medical devices to create or amplify the appearance of the non-normative body. Particularly, Manson seems to direct attention to the mouth and lips, an orifice with the ability to both give and receive. Manson usually wears very noticeable lip coloring, but further, he is frequently depicted inserting various objects into his open mouth. Sometimes his own fingers engage the cavity, while other times, such as the video for "The Beautiful People" (1996),[66] various industrial looking mechanical devices interact with his mouth. This fixation with the mouth is still intensified by Manson's own oral gestures, which are often erotic in nature, as well as his proclivity for wearing metal dentures, of various forms.

"The Beautiful People" also features a strong interaction between the text and image. Clearly a critique of heteronormative, Christian, capitalist culture, the video presents an ironic discussion regarding morality. While discussing how "the weak ones are there to justify the strong" and stating that a person's beauty is "all relative to the size of your steeple," he pairs the text, in what Stuart Hall would call an oppositional reading, with an array of people wearing prosthetics, nineteenth-century medical equipment, giant dancing black dolls, and scenes

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[65] See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
[66] Marilyn Manson, "The Beautiful People," *Lest We Forget: The Best Of*, CD/DVD (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2004).

reminiscent of fascist dictatorships. Of particular note is the interaction between the sound and image in the chorus of the song, where Manson asks, "Hey, you! What do you see?" Each time this question is posed, a depiction of some non-normative or distorted body appears on the screen, as Manson answers his own question—"Something beautiful and something free!"—as if advocating for a life outside of the religious, capitalist, heteronormative society through various metaphors of longing for the non-normative body.

These metaphors become much more explicit in the music video for "Tourniquet" (1996),[67] in which Haraway's discussion of technology and sexuality is brought to life by Manson. In "Tourniquet," Manson essentially sings and acts out an erotic romance between himself and a grotesque mannequin/corpse-like creature with a mannequin's pedestal where "her" legs would normally be. The song begins by describing the erotic body as consisting of "hair, and bones, and little teeth," which is subjected to "prosthetic synthesis with butterfly." What eventually becomes apparent is that Manson is the subject that goes through a metamorphosis of prosthetic synthesis finally becoming a bizarre cyborg-dragonfly. As such, Manson becomes the site of the erotic, not the corpse/mannequin, turning the gender-role paradigm on its head. More importantly, this erotic relationship between Manson and the mannequin/corpse exists within the paradigm of technological alteration of the body, but completely outside of notions of heterosexual reproductive futurity.[68] In fact, the video suggests the characters' own futurity through technology over that of the notional child. Futurity, especially reproductive futurity, is the underpinning of both conservative and liberal rhetorics of

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[67] Marilyn Manson, "Tourniquet," *Lest We Forget: The Best Of*, CD/DVD (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2004).

[68] "Reproductive futurity" is Lee Edelman's term from *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) regarding the rhetoric that children are the future of our species, therefore must be protected more than anyone else.

normativity and National belonging, which often use the idea of children—the ability to birth or adopt them—as the key to full American citizenship. Recently, this idea has become particularly pronounced in the rhetoric of many high-profile conservative Republicans, such as Rick Santorum, who insist that the only purpose of sexual intercourse is procreation. Many theorists, particularly queer theorists, have critiqued this idea for its inability to account for productive lives that do not necessarily follow a teleological arch of capitalist success or at any point include child rearing as a means to ensure the continuance of an imagined familial identity. "Tourniquet" brings to mind Haraway's views of technological advancement as affecting social relations of both sexuality and reproduction, and is suspicious of the "close ties of sexuality and instrumentality, of views of the body as a kind of private satisfaction- and utility-maximizing machine."[69] These technologies are utilized to encourage and supposedly enhance the deployment of heteronormative reproductive futurity, but might also take form outside of the heterosexual matrix as queer, non-normatively erotic bodies.

2.2 LUST BEYOND THE REAL

Following *Antichrist Superstar*, Manson released another concept style album featuring a significantly different aesthetic—*Mechanical Animals* (1998). Here Manson presents himself transformed into, as Toffoletti says, "a digital construct—a distended, artificial, and posthuman

[69] Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 19080s," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 211.

body that eschews the natural," rather than a monstrous Other.[70] Although his bodily presence is still exceedingly non-normative, he now appears as a complete blurring of boundaries between organic and inorganic, rather than his previous juxtaposition of the two—a posthuman, rather than a cyborg. As Toffoletti notes, Manson's body is now completely unidentifiable, since,

> the smooth contours of his seamless, plastic flesh betray the familiarity of the organic body. This malleable sheath of rubbery skin stretches firmly, yet comfortably, over a figuration that is neither male nor female, biological nor technological.[71]

Manson still produces himself as a cyborg-like borderline subject—a confusion of the organic and the technological—as well as continues many other themes already established in his earlier work. However, now the outcome appears noticeably less monstrous than his *Antichrist Superstar* image, which has been replaced by a futuristic alien character whose features appear more like shiny plastic than the dirty, industrial mechanics of the previous iteration of Marilyn Manson. Most noticeably, Manson has made his body even more ambiguous than before by suggesting the possibility of certain sex organs—breasts *and* a penis. However, despite clearly suggesting such signifiers,

> 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, course 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.[72]

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[70] Kim Toffoletti, "Catastrophic Subjects: Feminism, the Posthuman, and Difference," *thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory & culture* Vol. 3, no.2 (2004), in first paragraph, http://www.thirdspace.ca/journal/article/view/toffoletti/175 (accessed November 16, 2010).
[71] Ibid., end of first paragraph.
[72] Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls*, 82.

Perhaps the suggestion is only the idea of the breasts and penis. Regardless, Manson's new body further confuses not only the binary dialectic of male and female, human and machine, but brings to the forefront the question of what it means to be human in contemporary, technologized society. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston suggest that the intersection of the body and technology have psychic as well as physical outcomes, that as these intersections alter the body they "permeate and mediate our relations to the 'real': the real is literally unimaginable or only imaginable with a technological society: technology makes the body queer, fragments it, frames it, cuts it, transforms desire…"[73] Further, discussing the posthuman body as moving away from a dialectic binary of the monstrous as Other, they remark that,

> [p]osthuman monstrosity and its bodily forms are recognizable because they occupy the overlap between the now and the then, the here and the always: the annunciation of posthumanity is always both premature and old news.[74]

This overlap is precisely what *Mechanical Animals* represents; a comingling of temporal nodes, simultaneously a future that cannot be realized because we can never escape our current situation of heteronormativity and an urging to exist outside of it, in a negative space of collective possibility.

In the music video for "I Don't Like the Drugs (But the Drugs Like Me)" (1998),[75] Manson and the band members provide numerous representations of these posthuman bodies, as

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[73] Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, "Introduction: Posthuman Bodies," in *Posthuman Bodies*, eds. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 16.
[74] Ibid., 3.

well as a strong ironic critique of Christian, capitalist, and heteronormative ideology. The video opens with a depiction of Manson dressed in a shiny, white, jumpsuit adorned with rhinestones, wearing glam-style makeup, and a platinum blonde, bobbed haircut carrying a cross constructed out of televisions, an obvious reference to the crucifixion story of Jesus Christ. The first verse confirms the undeniably sarcastic tone as Manson sings, "Norm life, baby—we're white and so hetero—and our sex is missionary. Norm life, baby—we're quitters and we're sober—our confessions will be televised." In this opening phrase, Manson cynically critiques the conflation of heteronormativity, Christianity, and capitalism in America. At once, he discusses the notion of normativity as not only inherently white and heterosexual, but also erotically unimaginative. The reference to "missionary" position sex provides a point of slippage between heteronormativity and Christianity, which Manson follows with the image of Christian abstinence—in order to remain pure, one must quit partaking in evil vices such as drugs, alcohol, and sex and devote their life to sobriety of thought and deed. The closing line of the phrase recalls the importance of public confession and repentance in Christianity—this is also true of "twelve-step" recovery programs, which are usually religiously affiliated—while also alluding to televangelists whose sole purpose is making money by exploiting the beliefs of the religious. While this part of the song is occurring, Manson is pursued by a group of headless police officers. Eventually, he throws the cross from his back and flees into what appears to be an abandoned industrial complex. Upon entering the building, it is revealed to be a medical facility where he joins the rest of his band members in a waiting room. The rest of the musicians are similarly dressed as Manson, but each appear to be ailed by some sort of medical condition. Twiggy appears

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[75] Marilyn Manson, "I Don't Like the Drugs (But the Drugs Like Me)," *Lest We Forget: The Best Of*, CD/DVD (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2004).

ambiguously sexed, wearing the signature dress, but now is confined to a wheel chair with smooth stumps for legs. When Manson is admitted into the examination room, the doctors decide to saw his arm off, which, as it turns out, is made of a synthetic material rather than flesh and bone, leaving a smooth nub, rather than a bleeding wound, where his arm used to be.

Intercut throughout the video, are scenes of a "normal family" watching a television program, which appears to resemble a tabloid talk show such as *The Jerry Springer Show*, hosted by a headless "person" dressed in a shiny orange suit. All of the members of this normal family—in fact, all characters in the video who are not members of the band—have enlarged, cartoonish eyes, giving them the appearance of a complete, rapturous fixation upon whatever their gaze focuses, which is further eroticized by some characters aggressively rubbing their bodies at various times throughout the video. Coinciding with the bridge of the song, Manson's one-armed Christ-in-drag character intrudes on the set of the TV show to join its other characters, who also have various bodily modifications, such as a pregnant woman with a video screen implanted in her abdomen, accompanied by the headline "Pregnant With Television." As Manson takes control of the talk show, a fight breaks out between the other guests. However, this is not simply a fistfight, but, almost paradoxically, an exceedingly vicious pillow-fight, complete with all of the symbolism of the stereotypical heterosexual male's erotic fantasy of a sorority slumber party turned lesbian orgy. As feathers fly and guests punch, tackle, and strangle each other, Manson remains positioned at the foreground of the shot, staring directly into the camera—thus directly out at the family of viewers—and seductively dances and licks his lips reminding them over and over again, "There's a hole in the soul that we fill with dope—and we're feeling fine." The climax of the video develops quickly following this as Manson is chased by the police up to a catwalk high above the industrial park, where he jumps to his assumed

death. However, his body appears to still be moving—his odd stump of an arm waving—once it hits the ground. In the final shot, Manson has been replaced by the cross made of televisions, except his image is now being projected—headless, like so many of the other authority figures in this video (police, talk show host)—from the televisions themselves in a bizarre, digital crucifixion. In this queer replaying of the biblical crucifixion story, Manson assumes the role of Jesus who, after being martyred, loses his agency and is subsumed into the narrative of capitalism (the digital image on the television crucifix) where, postmortem, he is transformed into one of the headless authority figures that appear throughout the music video. In this instance, however, it would appear that Manson's deployment as an authority figure is not of his own volition, but rather through the discursive practices of others.

Other notable videos from *Mechanical Animals* include "The Dope Show" (1998)[76], a critical commentary on the entertainment industry's star-system, which features Manson in the posthuman bodysuit discussed earlier, wandering around an unidentifiable deserted landscape. After being captured by masked individuals in uniforms, he is taken to a futuristic medical facility to be experimented on. After receiving his modifications, Manson has been transformed into a bizarre, carnivalesque celebrity who is trotted out and shown off to others by his manager while he sings, "they love you when you're on all the covers—when you're not, they love another." After the lyric stating, "cops and queers make good looking models," the music shifts from a slow, funky shuffle to the more raucous chorus featuring the full band on a raised stage, all dressed in brightly colored, shiny, sequined glam-rock apparel, appearing extremely androgynous, performing to throngs of rabid fans who are restrained by male police officers

[76] Marilyn Manson, "The Dope Show," *Lest We Forget: The Best Of*, CD/DVD (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2004).

dressed in magenta uniforms. Here, the performative gestures of each band member are highly eroticized. Manson positions, grasps, and sings into the microphone as if it were a phallus; Twiggy almost straddles the bass guitar, grasping the neck and rocking back and forth, giving a distinct masturbatory impression; and Madonna Wayne Gacy, the band's keyboardist, appears to be in the throes of orgasmic pleasure, playing sounds that arouse images of a futuristic, mechanical waterfall. Eventually, even the police officers enter the fray and begin dancing erotically and kissing one another. The video closes with Manson destroying a room full of statues of himself by shattering them against one another—destroying his identity, or at least those wishing to clone it in order to cash in on the economic and cultural capital held by such a constructed personality. In "Dope Show," Manson critiques the capitalist production of desire, particularly in the entertainment industries, focusing on the recuperation of transgressive styles by mainstream culture in order to increase capital. Additionally, the video critiques normative constructions—medical, technological, or otherwise—of beauty and the rhetoric of homogenous erotic body image, which Manson literally destroys in the final scene.

In addition to the new visual aesthetic, *Mechanical Animals* also represents a fairly drastic shift in the musical style of the band. The style incorporated in the albums released before *Mechanical Animals* utilized an aggressive, industrial hard rock musical language, such as power chords from distorted guitars paired with similar imagery—crumbling buildings, outdated medical equipment and machinery. With the release of *Mechanical Animals*, Manson presents a much more polished musical language, replete with funky accompaniments reminiscent of disco and synth-pop. Generally, the music "grooves" much more, rather than "rocks" as it did on previous albums. Here, songs rely much more heavily on synthesizers and clean, funky bass lines, as well as backbeat drum rhythms, which changes the emphasis from beats 1 and 3, as it

sounds on *Antichrist Superstar*, to beats 2 and 4 on *Mechanical Animals*. Further, the influence of different musical genres become noticeable in the record. For instance, "I Don't Like the Drugs" makes significant references to funk and gospel music, utilizing an insanely catchy groove and a gospel-style choir to, in an ironic twist, sing the hook of the song—"I don't like the drugs, but the drugs like me"—almost ad nauseam. Because of the divergence of sonic codes from the visual and textual ones, *Mechanical Animals* presents a more complex critique of normative American culture. While it makes sense, historically, that songs explicitly discussing anti-religious themes and the outright rejection of American ideals would originate from the post-industrial music genre, the sonic aesthetic of *Mechanical Animals*, with its departure from Marilyn Manson's previous style, becomes virtually irreconcilable with the visual and textual elements without some understanding of musical irony. Even though many Americans holding mainstream ideals disliked the band, at least it made sense that a post-industrial rock group performed such offensive songs. It becomes more complicated to argue and understand how the music of Marilyn Manson—which was often conceptually folded into the heavy metal genre by critics for the purposes expanding the range of their argument regarding the dangers of certain types of music—is leading to the downfall of moral decency in America when the actual sounds of the music are more similar to something produced on an '80s R&B record. The similarities between the instrumental tracks on *Mechanical Animals* and Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation 1814* (1989), particularly "I Don't Like the Drugs (But the Drugs Like Me)," are startling! This oppositional coding between the sonic elements and the visual and textual devices adds yet another layer of transgression to the performances of Marilyn Manson by appropriating the musicality of an immensely popular, and generally socially innocuous genre, and combining it with the same themes of anti-religion, anti-capitalism, and anti-normativity for which the band

initially became infamous. In fact, every facet of *Mechanical Animals* appears highly produced due to the new, slick aesthetic, though *Antichrist Superstar* was certainly no less produced than the new album. However, the aesthetic shift resulted in a bizarre, futuristic production that was most likely unfamiliar to the band's devoted supporters.[77]

Manson incorporates various signifiers of his change in aesthetic into live performances as well. For instance, during the *Mechanical Animals* tour, the show was divided into two distinct sets. The first set was devoted to the music of *Mechanical Animals*, and the second to previous music, primarily *Antichrist Superstar*. The *Mechanical Animals* set incorporated all-white stage apparatuses and costumes, as well as neon lights, and other futuristic effects reminiscent of Hollywood glamour. The second set utilized an all-black staging with red and black lights illuminating the stage. During this set Manson also performed while wearing mechanical leg and arm extensions, lumbering around the stage on "all fours," or an extension thereof. Additionally, during this set Manson sang many songs from a pulpit, and even tore apart a bible, which he then threw into the crowd to be completely destroyed.

2.3 A NEGATIVE CONFLUENCE

Though there are numerous aesthetic differences between *Antichrist Superstar* and *Mechanical Animals*, many thematic elements can be traced throughout the various phases of Manson's

[77] Regardless of its drastic change in musical and stylistic presentation, which was criticized by many long-term, devoted fans, *Mechanical Animals* debuted at the number one spot in the Billboard 200 charts, and has attained platinum certification, selling over 8 million copies.

musical career. The multiplicity of vocalities can be heard in many of Manson's songs on most of his albums, for instance the utilization of a feminine sounding vocality is present in many songs such as "Sweet Dreams" and "Cryptorchid" from *Antichrist Superstar* and the breathy, higher tessitura delivery of the vocals in "The Dope Show" from *Mechanical Animals.* Perhaps most obvious is the continued critique of Christianity, capitalism, and heteronormativity in Manson's music. Whether this critique is given in a more ironic or direct manner depends on which album each song appears. Either way, they call into question the rhetorics of bodily and sexual normativity by associating them with the institutions of power from which these normativizing forces emanate, as well as suggesting the possibility of alternative ways of being. Additionally, these critiques often manifest as a visual or textual discourse of medicalization—a more Victorian aesthetic from *Antichrist Superstar*, and a more futuristic one from *Mechanical Animals*. Through this continued critique of normativity, particularly heteronormative sexuality, Marilyn Manson seems to refuse to play by the rules of late capitalist culture, and in doing so opens up a space for the imagination of a queer collective negativity that might, as Elizabeth Freeman hopes, "propose other possibilities for living."[78]

[78] Freeman, *Time Binds*, xxii.

3.0 (UN)BECOMING TRANSGENDER: GENDER NON-CONFORMITY, EMBODIMENT, AND PRIVILEGE

Discussing his life in Hollywood during a 1998 interview with Kurt Loder promoting *Mechanical Animals*, Manson answers Loder's half-joking query into whether or not Manson ever goes to the beach by responding in a similar fashion, "Every once in a while, just to, um, check out the, the muscular guys in their bikinis; just to make sure I know what I'm missing."[79] The interview quickly cuts to a shot from Manson's music video for the single "The Dope Show," depicting Manson wearing a body suit, which ambiguously suggests both male and female genitalia. After returning to the interview, Loder follows up by asking Manson if he designed the infamous bodysuit used in the promotion and a number of the music videos for *Mechanical Animals.* Manson casually replies, as if recounting what he ate for lunch that afternoon, "I actually wasn't wearing any sort of body suit… It's all me in one way or another."[80] Though ostensibly made in jest—both Manson and Loder share a laugh, though slightly uncomfortable, after the remark is made—this statement reveals Manson's understanding of the frequent tropes of non-normative embodiment present in *Mechanical Animals*. Particularly, with *Mechanical Animals*, Manson utilizes images of non-normatively

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[79] Marilyn Manson, "Marilyn Manson Interviewed in 1998 for the Mechanical Animals Promotion," YouTube, streaming video, 1:08, http://youtu.be/0go8Sysi11M (accessed November 29, 2011).
[80] Ibid., 1:25 (accessed November 29, 2011).

sexed bodies, and especially allusions to transgendered embodiment, something that has been more subtly referenced in some of his earlier music videos—some of which have already been discussed, and will be resituated for use in this chapter—but now is suddenly brought to the forefront of the imagery, as well music and text of this album. While this move may be understood—and probably was by most of the people involved in the record's production—as the next phase of Manson's already transgressive career and performing identity, it is the qualifying "in one way or another" of Manson's earlier statement that, perhaps unknowingly, reveals and problematizes his own privileged position regarding embodied subjectivity.

Manson, though he often challenges notions of sexuality in his work, is a heterosexual, white, male. In fact, in more of his performances following *Mechanical Animals*, Manson adopted a more explicitly hetero-masculine look, or at least an unambiguously male appearance.[81] One of the privileges of belonging to the dominant group—white, straight men—is plausible deniability regarding any perceived infractions of one's heterosexuality. If you belong to the dominant party, you have the luxury of chalking it up to "messing around," or "making a statement," or "transgressing." Regardless, one inevitably returns to the protection of white, male heterosexuality when it becomes too dangerous to appear otherwise. That being the case, Manson has the ability to freely "play" with modes of embodiment, switching from body to body, like a change of clothes, without any serious consequences. In fact, this body "play" often played a significant role in Manson's appeal and subsequent financial success as a recording and performing artist. Even those who were opposed to him often ended up contributing to Manson's increased fame, as right-wing media critics assailed Manson for the downfall of moral

[81] For example, see music videos: "Arma-goddamn-motherfuckin-geddon," "Heart-Shaped Glasses," "Tainted Love," and "This Is the New Shit."

society and invited him for interviews on their television and radio shows, concerned moderates and liberals listened closely to Manson's songs and scoured his music videos for discourses of violence that might unduly influence their impressionable children.[82] Similar to Manson's flexibility of embodiment, Judith Halberstam has commented on the privilege of gender flexibility in urban, white, middle-class, gay and lesbian youth noting that they can more freely change gender labels, or even discard them altogether becoming "post-gender," whatever that means, while those who rely on identity categories to assert control over themselves do not have that option.[83] I argue that while Manson's apparent allusions to transgender embodiment are problematized by his position of privilege as a heterosexual, white, male, particularly given his silence regarding transgender issues in interviews and other performances of his public persona, his performances might still open a productive space for a transgressive critique of normative ideas of gender and sexuality. That being said, I suggest that the bodily performances by Manson run the risk of propagating—perhaps through Manson's own over determination for a transgressive aesthetic—unfortunate media (mis)representations of trans people, as well as assume the voice of a community to which Manson does not belong, and presumably has no significant or meaningful correspondence with. As such, I will examine how Manson negotiates the politics of his privilege through embodied performance, as well as consider the potential discursive ruptures in hegemonic rhetoric that might be produced by such performances.

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[82] In fact, my father initially confiscated my copy of Manson's *Antichrist Superstar* (1996) only to accompany me to see the *Mechanical Animals* concert when the tour came to Pittsburgh a few years later.

[83] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 19.

3.1 FROM TRANSGRESSIVE TO "TRANSGENDER"

As I have discussed in chapter 1, Marilyn Manson has shown an affinity for various themes of non-normativity in its music, as well as representations of non-normative subjects in its music videos—beginning with *Portrait of an American Family* (1994) which features elements of a campy, horror aesthetic, and followed by *Antichrist Superstar* (1996) which presents a much more aggressive and grotesque vision of corporeal formations. While more explicit tropes of transgender were not utilized until the band's third record *Mechanical Animals*, many of the previous videos dealt in a visual and textual discourse reminiscent of the rhetoric surrounding early scholarship regarding trans issues, particularly discussions of transsexuality.

Although, "Sweet Dreams" primarily focuses on transgressive interactions between the body and medical technologies, Manson also engages in metaphors of gender bending such as cross-dress, which serves to amplify his effete gestural performance and bodily materiality. Further, the combination of monstrosity and medical imagery imagines a sort of pre-trans ethos. Much has been written about the mysterious medical establishments in places such as Casablanca, Morocco where many early transsexuals went to obtain sex reassignment surgery (SRS). Additionally, many who consider sex and gender through dominant Western ideologies thought—and some still think—that the idea of having your corporeal sex changed constituted becoming monstrous.[84] Considering these tropes of trans embodiment, the scene in "Sweet Dreams" discussed earlier where Manson appears topless, with only a vintage microphone strapped to his chest—which is then turned into a phallus (Figure 7) through a perspectival shift—situates Manson's already emasculated body at a place of bodily contradiction. Manson,

[84] For instance, Janice G. Raymond's infamous text: *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979).

whose exposed chest initially suggests normative male embodiment, transgresses gender roles by wearing clothing normally associated with females, and then is seen wearing a prosthetic phallus, thus causing any gendered assumptions to cycle back on themselves further confusing the idea of Manson's gender being stable.

This phallus simultaneously fulfills and contradicts Manson's maleness, as it can be understood as representing his penis, which is only an assumed feature of his body since he never actually reveals it in the video, or it can be read as Manson representing the transition from his "female" form to a "male" body through a rudimentary phalloplasty. Such polysemy produces what might be considered a form of psychic transsexuality, since Manson's imagined female body, and the entirety of his material male body for that matter, are both psychically conceivable by the viewer of the music video. The construction of his pseudonym, Marilyn Manson—the name was initially implemented as part of his performance identity, but has now become his primary public identity as well—reinforces this psychic transsexuality by assigning Manson the first name of female superstar, Marilyn Monroe. Though he usually presents unambiguously as male, in public interactions such as interviews, Manson is often addressed only by his first name, Marilyn. The affect of this psychic transsexuality is often indirectly acknowledged by those involved in public discourse with Manson. For instance, David Letterman, whenever Manson is a guest on his show, consistently appears seemingly titillated by, as well as jokingly skeptical of, simply addressing a male personality by a female name.[85] In a later portion of the "Sweet Dreams" video, Manson suggests body modification by revealing self-inflicted scars on his stomach, while rubbing his hands over them and simulating a cutting

[85] "Marilyn Manson Interviewed by David Letterman (1998), YouTube, streaming video, http://youtu.be/N3Vavqx3mgg (accessed February 13, 2012).

motion, which accompanies the lyrics "I wanna know what's inside you." Consequently, this can be read as self-reflexively referencing pregnancy—normally an occurrence designated only to female bodies—or perhaps the DNA structures that at least scientifically define a person's sex. Though inexplicit, Manson's performance of "Sweet Dreams" calls into question the certainty of his own sexed body. Many of these tropes of technological body modification were used as a point of critique by early feminist scholars' discussions of transsexuality which ranged from skeptical of, to hostile toward, medical interventions into people's gendered materiality.[86]

In "Tourniquet,"[87] Manson develops the idea of extreme transformation on the body and gender non-conforming romance with the robotic corpse mannequin. Even though the robot corpse can be assumed to be female, through various signifiers such as clothing, there are no bodily markers that suggest either of the binary sex positions of male or female. Manson once again appears emasculated, and somewhat androgynously gendered—perhaps even ungendered—like he did in the video for "Sweet Dreams." As the narrative of the video progresses, Manson, perhaps under the control of the robot corpse, literally goes through a bodily transformation, visually referencing the metamorphosis of a caterpillar to a butterfly. However, rather then emerging as a butterfly, Manson becomes a flying, cyborg insect (Figure 9). In his new monstrous, cyborg embodiment, Manson is no longer controlled by the robot corpse, but now appears to be in some sort of decrepit medical institution, attached to his band-mate Twiggy Ramirez by various wires and tubes. Twiggy is wearing a hospital gown and appears to be either

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[86] See, for instance: Bernice Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979).
[87] Manson, "Tourniquet," *Lest We Forget*, DVD.

in a state of recovery from a medical procedure or suffering from some form of psychological trauma.

Figure 9. Manson's metamorphosis into a cyborg ("Tourniquet," 1996)

While the video for "Tourniquet" certainly makes explicit references to the notions of technology and medical control of the body that were so vehemently critiqued by earlier feminist scholars, this video assumes the narrative perspective of the subject whose body is the site of transformation. As such, rather than suggesting that cisgender individuals know what is best for subjects who occupy non-normative material-psychic relationships, as Raymond and Hausman do, "Tourniquet" represents what influential transgender scholars such as Sandy Stone and Susan Stryker suggest in their critiques of feminist polemics against transgendered people. Rather than attempt to completely assimilate into normative society, they advocate that transsexual people should embrace the material differences of their embodiment which, "like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an inassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in

which it must nevertheless exist."[88] Additionally, the video also evokes, and challenges, the necessity of the transgender narrative that must be employed in order to obtain access and permission to undergo a sex change operation. Such narratives dictated that transgendered people must convey a "script" determined by medical practitioners in order to "prove" that they are in fact transgendered, and, in so doing, worthy of receiving sex reassignment. As such, the transgendered subjects subsequently relinquished complete control over both their bodies and identities to the doctors in the medical institutions that were in charge of such procedures. Through its grotesque imagery of bodily transformation and technological integration, "Tourniquet" challenges normative notions of material embodiment, beauty, and sexuality. And, while the music videos for "Sweet Dreams" and "Tourniquet" may not explicitly reference transgendered embodiment, they certainly set the stage for the music videos produced directly afterward.

The scandalous video for Marilyn Manson's song "Long Hard Road Out of Hell" (1997)[89] took a slightly different discursive approach to performing transgressive queer sexuality and embodiment. Rather than analogies to transsexual narrative specifically, this video engages images of the broader range of transgendered embodiment. Specifically, "Long Hard Road" appears to utilize gender ambiguity and transgendered "passing" as its central visual references, as opposed to the allusions to non-normative bodies used in previous music videos which relied heavily on images of medical power and grotesque, monstrous bodies. Unlike the previous videos, "Long Hard Road" features no visible prosthetics or post-industrial set locations. Rather,

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[88] Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamonix: Performing Transgender Rage," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 248.
[89] Marilyn Manson, "Long Hard Road Out of Hell," *Lest We Forget: The Best Of*, CD/DVD (Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records, 2004).

Manson primarily performs the song from what appears to be a lavishly decorated penthouse located in a nondescript, modern, urban environment. Manson spends approximately half of the song performing in an elegant black evening gown, and the other half crouching seductively on an ornate velvet couch, wearing nothing but a pair of black stockings. And, though viewers are ostensibly aware of Manson's public gender identification, Manson presents relatively convincingly as a normatively feminine woman throughout the entire music video (Figure 10). Though Manson's arms are covered in tattoos, given the aesthetic identification with rock and punk scenes, tattoos are nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, one might suggest that it would be unusual not to have them in these scenes. In this instance, perhaps "normal" is a more appropriate description than "normative."

Figure 10. Manson as normative, femme rocker ("Long Hard Road Out of Hell," 1997)

Read through the lens of transgender studies, the lyrics also provide an interesting parallel to the transgender narrative. The chorus "I wanna live—I wanna love—but, it's a long, hard road out of Hell" can easily be read, especially considering Manson's proclivity for incorporating non-normative bodies and sexualities in his music videos, as referring to the transgender narrative of being trapped in the wrong body, and the difficulties one must overcome in order to obtain an embodiment that corresponds with one's gender. However, along with Manson's convincing performance of normative female embodiment, the video is also infused with various signifiers that deny the viewer any certainty of Manson's sex actually being normatively female. After all, it wouldn't be a Marilyn Manson music video without some form of explicit bodily transgression. At several points during the "Long Hard Road" video, Manson's chest is exposed, either because he removes the clothing that is covering it, or simply because he is not wearing any clothing. On his chest are prominent scars, reminiscent of scars left on a post-operative trans person after having "top surgery." These scars also problematize any clear analogy to transsexuality, though. While they draw the viewer's attention to Manson's chest, which ultimately causes his allusion to female normativity to fail, the logic of the chest scars as part of Manson's imaginary transsexual narrative falters. Surgical scars that accompany a flat chest are typically associated with post-operative trans men, not trans women, and Manson, until his cover is blown, passes as a normatively bodied woman, causing Manson's identification to become even more complicated than one might suppose at the beginning of the music video. Should Manson be read as a passing transgender woman? Perhaps a cross-dressing man? Or should this be considered another attempt by Manson to queer our expectations of gender altogether by simultaneously referencing the embodiment of a transgendered woman, who carries the material signifiers typically associated with transsexual men? Regardless of how

"Long Hard Road" is analyzed, it is certainly considerably more explicit in its engagement with transgender representation than any of the music videos by Marilyn Manson that preceded it. Particularly, the issue of transgender visibility works as a specific reference point for "Long Hard Road," rather than the broader themes of non-normative embodiment in general that were already broached by some of the band's earlier work. The shift in themes from images of medical intervention into the body using technology to what might be considered artistic representations of non-normative embodiment follows Ben Singer's discussion of changing public representations of transsexual bodies.[90] Singer observes that early medical representations of transsexual subjects aim to remove the humanity of the subject and create the illusion of an objective truth regarding the subjects under examination. As such, uncritical viewers understand these images as free from social forces and simply present the subjects *just as they are.* The concern for Singer is in the assumption that representational images present any sort of objective truth, which neglects the social practices involved in creating and editing these images. Rather than medically objective representations, these images actually reveal how "early image-making practices have significant social, political and material consequences for those with atypical embodiment. They are not 'merely' representational, but also resonate deeply with the social and material circumstances of life."[91] Consequently, this dehumanizing of transsexual subjects by the medical gaze denies them control over the representations of their bodies, and as such, control over their bodies altogether. An effective way for trans people to regain agency over the representation of transsexual bodies, Singer suggests, is through portraiture, specifically self-

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[90] T. Benjamin Singer, "From the Medical Gaze to *Sublime Mutations*: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-normative Body Images," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 601-20.
[91] Ibid., 602.

portraiture. By removing the subjects from the constructed sterility of the medical gaze, transsexuals are able to dictate how their bodies are represented, in what context their bodies are seen, and to what purposes these images will be used. Consequently, the humanity, once lost to a pathologizing medical agenda, is returned to the subjects being represented in the images by "refut[ing] the Frankenstein logic of medical expertise that puts the doctor and the medical establishment in the role of creator."[92] Culminating with "Long Hard Road Out of Hell," the music videos created by Marilyn Manson construct a similar narrative transitioning from images suggestive of medical control over the body to more aesthetically humanizing, though still transgressive, representations of non-normatively embodied subjects whose agency is restored.

As we have seen, *Mechanical Animals* stylistically diverges significantly from anything Marilyn Manson had produced previously—musically, thematically, and visually. Prominent throughout the album—on the cover and in the photographs for the album-booklet, as well as the new music videos—is the body suit referenced in the interview with Kurt Loder that produces Manson as the gender-bending posthuman who always appears naked, with elongated extremities, ambiguous genitalia, and smooth grey flesh unbroken by any bodily markers signifying humanness, such as hair or nipples (Figure 11).

[92] Singer, "Medical Gaze to *Sublime Mutations*," 606.

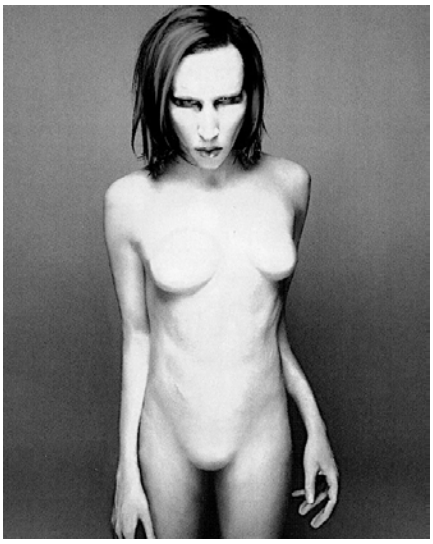

Figure 11. Posthuman Manson appearing on the cover of *Mechanical Animals* (1998)

Still maintaining his penchant for bodily gender transgression, Manson has seemingly amplified the transgressive elements of his embodiment leaving no room for speculation regarding the material arrangement of his new body. The central themes of technology and medical control over the body become significant lyrical and visual tropes throughout the album, as well as scathing critiques of both capitalism and normative standards of beauty. However, one can also understand this work as a commentary on gendered embodiment. The music video for "The Dope Show" (1998)[93] was made to accompany the album's first single, in critiquing the American entertainment industry, reveals the "medical" body modifications to simultaneously reference industry power, physical beauty standards, as well as challenge normative cisgender embodiment. Post-operative Manson appears under the control of an executive in the entertainment industry who outfits him with various prosthetic body modifications, such as a face mask that is attached to each of his breasts which presumably creates a cycle of self-

[93] Manson, "The Dope Show," *Lest We Forget*, DVD.

nourishment (Figure 12), thus inferring that Manson's breasts actively produce milk, a female occurrence after childbirth.

Figure 12. Self-feeding Manson ("The Dope Show," 1998)

It appears that for *Mechanical Animals*, Manson repackaged and combined many of his earlier ideas to create a non-normatively gendered subject who struggles to maintain their agency over their own representation. This time however, instead of only medical institutions, the media industry also plays a significant role in the shaping of normative notions of the body, which elicits a crucial question: what is Manson's role in the representation of gender non-conforming subjects in so many of his music videos?

3.2 PRIVILEGED TRANSGRESSION—TRANSGRESSING PRIVILEGE

While scholars often discursively imagine Western societies as having arrived in an age of "post-" ways of being—for instance: post-racial, post-gender, post-modern, post-colonial, post-human—we are not in fact post- anything. There still exist crucial, structural inequalities that are made less apparent by the assumption of a post- position, since this assumption inherently suggests that these problems have been alleviated, and as such there is no longer a rational purpose for a given society to concern itself with such issues, since it has progressed beyond them. While critical, theoretical utilizations of post- politics are not inherently dangerous, such deployments by scholars are often complexly concomitant with other social forces such as privilege that significantly affect discourse. Often, the danger lies in uncritical re-uses of critical theoretical models of post- politics, which ignore the privilege of those deploying such discourses of post- existence. Rather than simply a transgressive sound bite, those who engage in the rhetoric of post- existence have a responsibility to critically examine how these discursive formulations work to affect the culture in which they are deployed in real and material ways, as well as their shortcomings. Without critical engagement, tropes of post- existence can be turned around to become exactly what they were initially proposed to critique—a tool used to reify, rather than alleviate, an "Otherness" in the subjects of this discourse, thus undercutting the agency those subjects may have had.

To better understand this, I suggest that while Manson runs the risk of becoming a participant in this type of uncritical deployment of post- identity through his transgressive representations of non-normative bodies, he might still be able to negotiate a non-objectifying performance of transgressive gender and sexuality resulting in a powerful and publically accessible critique of the ideological hegemony of normative gender. That being the case, I also

suggest ways that Manson might more clearly signify his understanding of his own privilege as a way to reveal the difficulties that trans people face in even living their daily lives. In other words, while Manson's performances are not unproductive in challenging mainstream conceptions of gender and sexuality, his privilege as a white, heterosexual, male provides him relatively free and uncontested access to such representational images, while his silence regarding the material dangers of those living a non-normative embodiment face in their daily lives make him complicit in the unequal distribution of control over, and subversion of body representation, particularly in contemporary American culture.

Referring to what she understands as exploitation of the transgender community, transgender activist and scholar Riki Anne Wilchins has remarked that

> [a]cademics, shrinks, and feminist theorists have traveled through our lives and problems like tourists on a junket. Picnicking on our identities like flies at a free lunch, they have selected the tastiest tidbits with which to illustrate a theory or push a book. The fact that we are a community under fire, a people at risk, is irrelevant to them. They pursue Science and Theory, and what they produce by mining our lives is neither addressed to us nor recycled within our community.[94]

Wilchins's concern here is that those in a position of privilege who are working under the guise of representing transgendered subjects never produce any return on the investment made by the subjects of study, which further instills the denial of transgendered subjects to speak on their own behalf, without ever acknowledging such an imbalance of discursive power. Manson's performative strategies act similarly, in that while they challenge normative notions of embodiment in certain ways, his own embodiment as a heterosexual, white, male risks

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[94] Riki Anne Wilchins, *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1997), 22.

undercutting the political effectiveness of his work and serves to fold it back into the narrative of mainstream normativity, which relegates the image of the transgender body to an eroticized exotic binary opposition to what a body *should be.* Because Manson is not transgendered, his representations of non-normative bodies could end up having the opposite effect for trans people of what Singer suggests about artistic representative images of the trans body. Rather than rerouting control to the subject of the image, the non-normatively embodied person, Manson might actually recirculate the power to himself, who ultimately represents the normative subject observing these bodies. Consequently, while the music videos draw attention to the visibility of non-normative bodies, the inherent exoticizing of these bodies that occurs acts, similarly to early medical texts regarding transsexuality, to reveal a material "truth," in bio-essentialist terms, about embodiment, which "if your sense of self matches closely to the cultural grid of what you should mean… doesn't come too expensive. For the rest of us, though, it can cost a great deal."[95] Ultimately, Manson's normative embodiment and privilege provide him safety from the material concerns that many transgendered people are faced with on a daily basis. In other words, at the end of the day Manson is able to literally remove his non-normative body and return to the privilege of heterosexual, white, male embodiment while leaving a lasting image of transgressive transsexuals in the public media discourse. As such, those who do not have the ability to disrobe of their non-normativity are further relegated to position of threat to the normative way of life.[96] Even Manson's "passing" transgendered style used in the "Long Hard Road" video retains the

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[95] Riki Anne Wilchins, "What Does It Cost to Tell the Truth?," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 551.

[96] Outside of his music videos, Manson fully participates in normative heterosexual life. He has been married twice and engaged three times. His wedding ceremony with Dita von Teese was performed in an highly stylized gothic, Victorian aesthetic. However, particularly given that many weddings are overly-stylized and generally baroque events, Manson's was ultimately quite normative aside from the decorations and attire of many of the attendees.

truth of Manson's actual embodiment, since he presents as unambiguously male in most public interactions. Critiquing John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Jordy Jones observes that the trouble with creating an effective critique of normativity lies in the constant "return" of the non-trans reality of the actors. When Marilyn Manson is not in the filmic realm of the music video, "the trans bodies of the characters disappear, returning to the 'natural' sexes of the actors. The tropes dissolve."[97] Each time Manson appears in his "natural" embodiment, we are reminded that his musical-performative identity is simply a costume, which carries with it very different circumstances than actual trans people. Further, this assumed non-normative embodiment doesn't even continue through Manson's entire performance career. After *Mechanical Animals*, virtually all tropes of transsexuality or non-normative embodiment were dropped from Marilyn Manson's music videos, which belies the rhetoric of non-normative body as costume even within the oeuvre of Manson's music videos. Once Manson expended these tropes of non-normative embodiment, they were cast aside in favor of a new corporeal representation. Manson's post-*Mechanical Animals* output takes a much more autobiographical approach, usually manifesting as heterosexual romantic fantasies within the narrative of heartbreak based on one of Manson's actual failed relationships. Essentially, Manson literally acts out Judith Butler's assertion that as "various identifications are formed and displaced" they "force a reworking of that logic of non-contradiction by which one identification is always and only purchased at the expense of another."[98] Manson not only discards various assumed identifications with each new aesthetic style he chooses, but also discards his non-normativity

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[97] Jordy Jones, "Gender Without Genitals: Hedwig's Six Inches," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 463.
[98] Judith Butler, "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 118.

every day, over and over again, by presenting it only within the context of the fantasy of Marilyn Manson's music videos, and not in his everyday life.

The circumstances of transgendered people are varied and include representation in multiple realms of lived experience from legal discourse to visibility in the media and entertainment industries. Richard Juang finds a correlation between the media and legal discourse where transgendered people are "systematically misrepresented both within the mass media and within the criminal justice system" resulting in the inability of trans people to access any secure forum for public self-definition.[99] Manson, on the other hand, through his privilege is seemingly afforded an excess of self-definition, so much so that he can literally change the way he defines himself at will without any noticeable detriment to his success, much less his physical well being. Utilizing Althusser's "interpellation," Gayle Salamon argues that trans people are particularly susceptible to the power of being named before they can name themselves. Thinking through interpellation, Salamon suggests, "helps us account for the ways in which we find ourselves labeled, named, and identified prior to any deciding on our part, and why those labels can prove so resistant to our own strategies of revision and recuperation, a fact to which most transpeople can likely attest."[100] Even after transitioning, transsexual people often confront serious challenges to access to the necessities of their daily lives, especially if their transition is made public by themselves or others.

Visibility is obviously a complicated issue in the transgender community, and one that has serious consequences no matter how it is approached. Jamison Green notes that after coming out as a transsexual man, and as he became more publically recognizable as a trans activist and

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[99] Richard M. Juang, "Transgendering the Politics of Recognition," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 714.
[100] Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 123.

expert on trans rights, he risks losing both trans and non-trans friends.[101] Many trans people do not want to be recognized as transsexual, and for good reason. Green's concerns about losing friendships over his visibility as a transsexual seem mild when compared to the risk of bodily harm that many trans people encounter in their lives. Of course, the counter argument is that the only way to gain rights, thus ensuring some modicum of physical safety, is to become visible as rights are only granted based on legible difference. Green also comments on the challenges of interacting with the media as an out trans man. Often the media does not even recognize trans people who convincingly pass, whether or not they are out as trans. It is only after one's transsexual identity is revealed that the media gains interest. Though, "not for my expertise," Green notes, "but for the tingling quizzicality they can enjoy while they stare at me… and wonder how someone so male ever could have been a woman."[102] Green's understanding from his experiences with the media reaffirm that belief that the media industry is only interested in trans people, or probably non-normatively bodied people in general, as representations of spectacular, exotic embodiment against which to bolster normative binary models of gender. Manson's various embodiments function similarly, especially his feminine transgender look in "Long Hard Road." Rather than creating an awareness of various forms of embodiment, Manson erotically manipulates these images which in turn contributes to the visibility dilemma by repeatedly presenting non-normatively bodied characters that affirm the mainstream imaginary of the phantasmagoric transsexual—a medically manipulated monstrous cyborg or an overly sexed tranny prostitute—exactly the images many trans people are afraid of being associated

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[101] Jamison Green, "Look! No, Don't!: The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 502.
[102] Ibid., 503.

with. And while, visibility is an important part of rights discourse, it seems that it becomes most productive when the discourse originates from the community seeking the rights, rather than being narrated for them from an exploitative position of privilege.

While I do not believe that Manson intentionally, or maliciously, misrepresents those with non-normative bodies, his position of privilege affords him the luxury of not having to think about his own material reality, or that of the subjects he is representing. This perhaps becomes most apparent in Manson's non-musical public discourse, where he often speaks of critiquing capitalism, religion, and standards of beauty, but never discusses in earnest queer embodiments or sexualities, other than a few sarcastic remarks, such as the one made to Loder in the interview cited at the beginning of this chapter, which add to the speculation around his own sexuality. In an examination of privilege, Devon Carbado suggests that "those of us who unquestionably accept the racial, gender, and heterosexual privileges we have—those of us who fail to acknowledge our victimless status with respect to racism, sexism, and homophobia—are also perpetrators of discrimination."[103] Following this logic, it would seem that Manson is certainly complicit in the propagation of privileged notions of embodiment, and the deepening of discrimination against those who are perceived as non-normative—bodies which Judith Halberstam suggests "are simply considered 'expendable.'"[104] What is most important here is to examine who is affected by the tropes that Manson utilizes in his videos, and in what ways. He certainly profits in many ways from these productions, both financially and socially. However, those whom Manson seems to be citing, at least indirectly, are left unaffected at best, and at worst are made public and put further in harm's way. Carbado doesn't suggest that people should

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[103] Devon W. Carbado, "Privilege," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 190.
[104] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 3.

give up their privilege, per se, in order to create a more equal society, as he deems this impossible. However, he suggests what he calls "critical acquiescence" as a place to start, or "criticizing, if not rejecting, aspects of our life that are directly linked to our privilege."[105] This does not mean that Manson would necessarily be required to refrain from the use of non-normative bodily imagery in his music videos. However, it would require that he critically examine and discuss, publically or through his oeuvre, what is at stake when he chooses to utilize such representations. While it certainly does not account for all of the inequalities provided by privilege regarding matters of representation, at least it would add a critical voice to the media and entertainment industries' non-stop normalizing machine.

That being said, one wonders if Manson's silence on issues of queer embodiment might not be a productive tool in itself: a critical silence. In remaining silent, might Manson be problematizing his own, and others', cisgender subjectivity? When asked about audience perception regarding authorial intent in his work, Manson usually avoids providing an answer, insisting the irrelevance of any unified understanding of his performances by the public. Might Manson's refusal to speak explicitly on such issues be a way to force the audience to interpret his work on their own? This seems probable, as he has suggested that he would prefer that "everybody takes [his work] for something different. It's entertainment, it's art."[106] While this inherently opens the possibility of what I earlier referred to as (mis)representations of queer embodiment and sexuality, might it also allow for more understandings of the work, since Manson is not providing his own? Salamon suggests a phenomenological approach, which

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[105] Carbado, "Privilege," 209.
[106] "Marilyn Manson Interviewed by David Letterman (1998)," YouTube, streaming video, 3:30, http://youtu.be/N3Vavqx3mgg (accessed February 26, 2012).

> implies not so much that the object is one thing for many people but that it is many things for many people. A real object is a 'complex of all of its appearances,' containing within it the possibility of its own being for and from the perspective of any individual person. In this sense, what constitutes something as real is not its materiality but a horizon of possibility, an openness to all the different experiences that it represents to any given person.[107]

Tavia Nyong'o, in his discussion of socially tenuous art and literature in antebellum America, suggests that if "anxiety is triggered by [a] feared object… its repetition… could produce fantasy as much as phobia."[108] It would seem that the same could be said for Manson's work I have discussed here. This productive "fantasy" that exists on the "horizon of possibility" echoes a number of contemporary queer theorists' ideas about the current situation of queers in America, such as José Muñoz's discussion of queer utopias.[109] Another useful concept is Halberstam's productive queer negativity, which instead of "strand[ing] queerness between two equally unbearable options (futurity and positivity in optimism and nihilism and negation," as in Edelman's negative critique, it suggests "generative models of [normative, capitalist] failure that do not posit two equally bleak alternatives."[110] Therefore, it would appear most useful to remain critical while still allowing for artists such as Manson to create work that opens up as many avenues of understanding as possible to queer embodiments and sexualities, which may, in the end, require that Manson remain silent regarding his intention of these performances, rather than make more explicit his already critical relationship with mainstream American culture.

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[107] Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 91.
[108] Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 30.
[109] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
[110] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 120.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Neo-liberal politics of assimilation have become the pervasive narrative of gay rights discourse in contemporary American culture, garnering strong support from a wide variety of United States citizens. And while it is presented as a rights-based discourse of equality, assimilation rhetoric also produces some seriously problematic outcomes, particularly since much of this discourse is so tightly bound up with capitalist ideology. Since capitalism operates as a mechanism of the infinite deferral of inclusion, it allows those with access to the benefits of capitalist society to integrate into the system, while telling those who are unable to immediately gain entrance—and often never will—that as certain rights are introduced incrementally, full equality will be achieved *in the future.* One just has to wait… and wait… and wait.

The rhetoric of deferral is precisely what plays out in neo-liberal political causes such as Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" campaign, which tells queer youth just to persevere, because someday, in the future, things will be better. Good intentions aside, the problematic ideology that Savage utilizes in his rhetoric, while ostensibly created in order to help queer youth, falls dangerously short on many accounts. Most prominent perhaps is Savage's ignorance of class difference. Savage and many of the contributors to the campaign tacitly assume that the imagined youth toward which the campaign is directed have the luxury of waiting for things to get better. Through this assumption, queers who are not in a situation where they can wait—trapped in an abusive living situation, or homeless, for instance—are forced into rhetorical

liminality, thus out of the imaginary of the American ideal. Rather than insisting that America provide for its citizens a livable existence, Savage thrusts the responsibility onto the neglected and abused, essentially relying on the American, capitalist rhetoric of rugged individualism. Further, and perhaps more troubling, is how "It Gets Better" has provided anyone in power the ability, by paying empty lip service to equality, to easily defer their responsibility in making the structural changes to American cultural policy that will actually make things better for those who need it most. The campaign has thus become, for the most part, an irresponsible tautological exercise of privilege—It got better for me because it gets better, so just wait and will get better for you because it gets better.

This diversion into contemporary neo-liberal politics serves as a way to tease out parallels and contrasts to the different ideological models present in the music discussed throughout this work. As I have suggested, Lady Gaga's later work has adopted the rhetorical position of neo-liberal gay assimilation politics. And while she has actively campaigned for changes to political policy, her rhetorical ideology, which manifests equally in musical and speech performance, imagines American capitalist culture as capable of supporting anything other than normativity, which is highly unlikely. Further, in the United States, capitalism and normativity, as we have seen, are virtually inseparable.

Manson, on the other hand, has consistently provided performative critiques of capitalism, explicitly, as well as, through the deployment of various visual, textual, and musical tropes, powerfully challenged American ideas regarding normative gender and sexuality. Manson's performances urgently call for alternative ways of being outside of capitalist, normative cultures. And, though he has been interrogated many times by interviewers, it is important for him to leave the possibility of interpretation up to his audience. Throughout this

work, I have shown two such interpretations involving non-normative possibilities of queer embodiment: posthuman and transgender. In doing so, I hope to provide productive additions to existing scholarship in (popular) musicology, cultural studies, and performance studies by proposing ways in which these understandings of the performances of Marilyn Manson might assist us in better locating similar themes in contemporary popular music performances. As well, I hope to stimulate further understandings of how such tenuous rhetoric might easily be subsumed into the political agenda of neo-liberalism, such as the case of Lady Gaga's performative work. Importantly, powerful figures such as Gaga hold significant influence globally concerning taste, as well as political ideology. Because of this, they become inherently complicit in the global spread of capitalist and Western (imperialist) rhetorics of neo-liberalism. Given this power, I have suggested that the ideology presented through the work of Marilyn Manson becomes much more productive in creating a space of possibility for queer subjects who are so often relegated to a marginal existence in many cultures. Such spaces of possibility allow for flexible understandings of embodiment, sexuality, and ways of being. Productively, the identification of such alternatives provides a way to more critically understand the hegemonic normative culture of contemporary America, suggesting the importance of engaging in proactive efforts to enact lasting structural changes to our current cultural context, rather than being content in complacently waiting for things to get better in the future, which, for many, may never arrive.

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