THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE IN THE IDEA OF MARILYN MANSON

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ABSTRACT

In Marilyn Manson's world the beautiful needs the ugly as a negative force through which to actualize itself. What is unique is how the saintly co-exists with the sordid, and how images of sexuality conflate with images of saintliness. The result is a dissonant form of ugliness. Manson is asking a simple question: Is anything sacred anymore?

Compared to Durkheim's absolute view of the sacred and the profane, the content of Manson's world is relational; it is a continually evolving chain of signifiers that weaves together elements of perverse sexuality, putrefaction and dirt, household religious icons, and invasive medical procedures. This signifying chain is the source of Marilyn Manson's radical otherness. His form of musical theatrical is a negative force that pushes past shock and tastelessness into some kind of truth, namely, that cultural taboos are not forever. What does it mean, then, to struggle with the negative in order to prove that the truth is the whole – the sacred and the profane together?

In his autobiography, *The Long Hard Road out of Hell*, Marilyn Manson (aka Brian Warner) gets right to the point: "Hell to me was my grandfather's cellar" (Manson 1999: 3). In what follows, Manson presents to the reader a powerful inventory of "grotesque discoveries" in Jack Warner's dingy basement and how these discoveries conflated and manifested themselves into a lifelong artistic interrogation against Christian and right-wing hypocrisy (ibid: 4).

On the one hand, empty paint cans filled with 16-millimeter pornographic films, a stack of black and white bestiality pictures, fetish magazines such as *Water Sports* and *Black Beauty* stashed behind a mirror, as well as a collection of dildos with suction cups on the bottom.

On the other hand, a Friar Tuck figurine that popped a boner when its head was pushed in and a small square window in the basement that looked like stained glass but is actually smeared with grime. Manson recalls cutting out pictures from his grandfather's pornographic magazines and hiding them under the large white rocks that framed his grandmother's gravel driveway. "Years later… they were still there," he writes, "but frayed, deteriorated and covered with earthworms and slugs" (ibid: 5).

In his grandmother's kitchen hung a faded picture of a pope in a cheap brass frame. In the same room hung a large, wooden crucifix, with a gold Jesus on top. Finally, Manson mentions that Grandad Warner had been hospitalized with throat cancer before he was even born and had survived thanks to a tracheotomy. "For as long as I could remember," he writes, "I never heard his actual voice, just the jagged wheezing that he forced through his tracheostromy" (ibid.)

Taken all together, one gets the sense that in Marilyn Manson's world the beautiful needs the ugly as a negative force through which to actualize itself. What is unique about this opening chapter is how the saintly co-exists with the sordid and how images of sexuality conflate with images of saintliness. The result is a dissonant form of ugliness.

Manson is asking a simple question: Is anything sacred anymore? Or is it all filth? In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), Emile Durkheim argues that all known religious beliefs present one common characteristic, namely, the classification of all things, whether real or imagined, into the sacred and the profane (Durkheim 1965: 52). Durkheim believes that the division of the world into these two domains is characteristic of all religious thought. But what are "sacred" things? Surely, human beings are not themselves sacred. "One thinks of himself [sic] as occupying an inferior and dependent position in relation to them," write Durkheim, "and surely this conception is not without some truth" (ibid.).

Clearly, the issue of the sacred is not contingent on the inferiority of human beings, or even degeneration, which is characteristic of the end of all great eras. For Durkheim the sacred and the profane are not only heterogeneous, that is, composed of unrelated or differing parts; no, they stand in an *absolute* relationship to one another. In religion, he writes, "there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another" (ibid: 53).

The heterogeneous content described by Manson in the opening chapter of his book helps us to understand the history of some of his most powerful imagery. Compared to Durkheim's *absolute* view of the sacred and the profane, the content in Manson's world is in fact *relational*; it is a continually evolving chain of signifiers that weaves together elements of perverse sexuality, putrefaction and dirt, household religious icons, and invasive medical procedures.

This signifying chain is the source of Marilyn Manson's radical otherness. His form of musical theatrical is a negative force that pushes past shock and tastelessness into some kind of truth, namely, that cultural taboos are not forever. What does it mean, then, to struggle with the negative in order to prove that the truth is the whole – the sacred *and* the profane together?

What is the position of the artist in the totality of society? In her essay "The Pornographic Imagination" (1967) Susan Sontag argues that there is something called a pornographic imagination that is typically judged by moralists to be a kind of illness (Sontag 1982: 207). She quotes sociologist Paul Goodman, who argues that we live in a pornographic society "so hypocritically and repressively constructed that it must inevitably produce an effusion of pornography as both its logical expression and its subversive, demotic [i.e., popular] antidote" (ibid.).

Sontag frames the problematic relationship between pornography and society as part of a larger issue regarding art and art-making in the twentieth century. For Sontag art-making is "a form of consciousness; the materials of art are the variety of forms of consciousness" (ibid: 212). Aesthetic principles must include "even the extreme forms of consciousness that transcend social personality or psychological individuality" (ibid.).

Given the articulation by Sontag of this radical new position, an artist such as Marilyn Manson, who has also been accused in the past of being a pornographer, is more likely to look and behave differently from other people. While artists have a moral obligation to be sociable, Sontag believes that art-making belongs in an altogether different category. This type of art-making is not without risks, however. When artists venture into the far reaches of human consciousness, they do so at their peril; in fact, they risk their sanity, their humanity, and their ability to interact socially. Artists can also become scapegoat or surrogate victims.

In the twentieth century, art-making has become an autonomous activity because "one of the tasks art has assumed is making forays into and taking up positions at the frontiers of consciousness (very often dangerous to the artist as a person) and reporting back what's there" (ibid.). The artist's vocation now is to create "trophies of his [sic] experiences – *objects and gestures that fascinate and enthrall*, not merely… edify and entertain" (ibid: my emphases).

As artists such as Marilyn Manson enter the furthest reaches of human consciousness, their primary means to fascinate the reader, viewer, or listener "is to advance one step further in the dialectic of outrage" (ibid.). For Sontag the artist "gives what is, or seems to be, *not* wanted" (ibid.). Outrage and repulsion apply equally to the creation of the art-object as well as its reception. Sontag, however, qualifies this passage by adding that "however fierce may be the outrages the artist perpetuates upon his [sic] audience, his [sic] credentials and spiritual authority ultimately depends upon the audience's sense (whether something known or inferred) of the outrages he [sic] commits upon himself [sic]." (ibid: 212-13).

What provokes repulsion in Manson's form of music theatre? Differentiation between human and non-human is usually based on the simple logic of excluding filth (Kristeva 1980: 10-12). Filth is essentially disorder; it offends against order (Douglas 1970: 12). If differentiation is contingent upon disgust, then the distinction between high and low is little more than a distinction between the civilized and the grotesque body, with the latter deeply rooted in Christian notions of sin and natural depravity. As well. because the distinction between the sacred and the profane is not absolute but relational, the individual has to continually negotiate through continual re-definitions of what bourgeois society considers low, dirty, filthy, perverse, or repulsive. Granted, social differentiation may be contingent upon disgust, but disgust itself still "bears the imprint of desire" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 191).

It is the unspoken relation between disgust and desire that informs Marilyn Manson's best work. In Manson's world, love smells like death (Bataille 1985: 13). While Manson`s cousin, Chad McCabe, admitted that the grotesque discoveries in Grandad Warner's basement "redefined our sexuality, for sure," these same elements were processed by young Brian Warner in a completely different way (A&E Biography, 2010). "(Manson's grandad) didn't realize at his age what it did to his psyche," recalled his father, Hugh Warner. "That, and sexuality, stimulated his brain and his mind to go down that path that we all want to go, but that we don't go" (ibid.).

As if being traumatized by the contents of his grandfather's dingy basement were not enough for young Brian Warner, his father, Hugh, also served as an Air Commando during the Vietnam War. There, he took part in covert campaigns to spray Agent Orange, which not only altered the Vietnamese landscape but also to caused disease, birth defects, and poisoned the

food chain. The fear at home was that young Brian might have traces of Agent Orange in his system. As a child, he was tested regularly for chemical poisoning at an Army medical facility. As his father recalls, "(Brian) was subjected to a lot of children who had deformities, missing arms and legs. It was a little traumatic" (ibid.).

During his teenage years, Brian Warner attended Heritage Christian School, a non-denominational private school with a reputation for academic excellence and rigid conformity. "Everything was regimented and ritualistic and no one was allowed to stand out as better than or different from anyone else" (Manson 1999: 23). Rebellion soon set in, followed by humiliation, and then more rebellion. While humiliation may reduce a person into being an object, that knowledge can also become the source of what Raoul Vaneigem calls an "aggressive lucidity," which can lead to the critique of the organization of social life (Vaneigem 2012: 19). And how many revolutions in the past began on a foundation of individual despair?

According to his father, Brian enjoyed Christian private school until his adolescence, when he began to resist attempts by the school to mold his mind toward a certain form of religion. "It scared the bejeezus out of him," recalled his Dad. "He was afraid that he'd come home one day and find everyone dead and buried and gone to Hell" (A&E Biography, 2010). The school had taught students that the coming of the Antichrist and the Rapture were not open to opinion or interpretation but were "an undeniable fact ordained by the Bible" (Manson 1999: 19). Once again, Marilyn Manson, the adult narrator looking back on his adolescent fears, still managed to conflate apocalyptic imagery with perverse humour.

> *What if I had the mark of the beast somewhere on me – underneath my scalp or on my ass where I couldn't see it? What if the Antichrist was me? I was filled with fear and confusion at a time when, even without the influence of the Christian school, I was already in turmoil because I was going through puberty" (ibid.)*

Not surprisingly, the school also viewed heavy metal music (e.g., Black Sabbath, Alice Cooper, Judas Priest, etc.) as a gateway to sexuality, immorality, drugs, and the occult. The school actually conducted seminars on backward masking and hidden messages. To rebellious students such as Manson, these seminars were viewed as little more album recommendations. Manson

understood implicitly that the passion for play was no longer alienating if he could give himself up to it and seek play in every other aspect of life (Vaneigem 2012: 104). While the spirit of play and the Holy Spirit itself may be incompatible, Manson figured that the spirit of play would at least protect him from coercion and hypocrisy. Brian Warner and his friends naturally gravitated toward this type of music as a way to start pushing back against the school's policy of conformity. "Of course," wrote Manson, "the most extreme music with the most satanic messages was exactly what I wanted to listen to, chiefly because it was forbidden" (Manson 1999: 26).

Manson's second album, *Smells Like Children* (1995 Nothing), is a clever example of his passion for play: In between songs such as "Shitty Chicken Gang Bang," "May Cause Discoloration of the Urine or Feces," and "Sympathy for the Parents," Manson inserts spoken word fragments that are at once malicious, creepy, and, ultimately, humorous; taken together, they underline just how strange and horrifying children's stories can sometimes be.

Against such a regimented and ritualistic school context, Manson knew that his immediate response would have to be nothing short of subversive. For Manson the seeds were already sown: taboos were temptingly defined and then held at arm's length. Conformity would have to be met with subversion, which Manson did in spades while at school: selling candy to kids, printing his own comic book, and selling heavy metal cassettes at four times their list price. Manson seemed to understand that the necessity inherent to subversive forms requires that what is low become high, that what is high become low; this is the nature of subversive expression (Bataille 1985: 157). Everything is both contingent and relational.

At school, his only salvation came in the form of creative writing classes, which served him well when his family later moved to Fort Lauderdale in the late Eighties. There, Manson attended Broward Community College in 1990 and began working toward a degree in journalism. He secured himself a job as associate editor of a music and lifestyle magazine called *25th Parallel*. As a journalist, Manson had the opportunity to meet and interview area musicians. However, the experience left him empty and frustrated. "The problem wasn't the magazines or my writing," he explained, "but the musicians themselves. Each successive interview I did, the more disillusioned I became. Nobody had anything to say. I felt like I should have been answering the questions instead of asking them. I wanted to be on the other side of the pen" (Manson 1999: 74).

To counter his disillusionment, Brian Warner needed to create a persona "who, because of his contempt for the world around him and, more so, himself, [would do] everything he [could] to trick people into liking him. And then, once he wins their confidence, he uses it to destroy them" (ibid: 79). "As a performer," he wrote, "I wanted to be the loudest, most persistent alarm clock I could be, because there didn't seem like any other way to snap society out of its Christian- and media-induced coma" (ibid: 80).

Manson realized that the best way to initiate his critical attack against Christian and right-wing hypocrisy would be to get up on stage somewhere and do something. Manson decided to begin reading his poems at an open-mic night: "In the wooden silence/genuflecting fornicators/seek penance and/false-toothed idealists/throw grubsteaks on the offering plate" (ibid: 58). While most in attendance thought his poetry "sucked," they did agree that he had a good voice and that he should start a band (ibid: 80). This reaction confirmed to Manson what he already knew. "All I needed [now] was a few resilient souls to go through hell with me" (ibid.).

Based on advice from fans, Manson definitely found a few willing souls to work with, and his poetry readings quickly transformed themselves into chaotic performance art pieces that resembled "a social experiment" for the doped-up and dumbed-down (A&E Biography, 2010). Manson tapped into Theodor Adorno's notion that the shock of the new represents what has never been and that original shock is what gives art the power to transcend (Adorno 1986: 339). Drawing on his childhood traumas and adolescent frustrations, Manson's poetry articulated a confrontational position relative to American pop culture. What mattered most was creating a total theatrical spectacle based on an idea, or what song writing partner Twiggy Ramirez would later call an "art explosion on stage" (A&E Biography, 2010).

Manson needed to create a secret identity so that he could also write about himself in the magazine, *25th Parallel*. Brian Warner chose the name Marilyn Manson. Not only did it sound to him like an incantation, but it "seemed like an apt symbol for modern-day America" (ibid: 85). Each name seems to defamiliarize and destabilize the other; it presents them in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance a perception of the familiar. As an incantation, the name also invokes the familiar duality between light and dark, and between sex and death. "The balance

between good and evil," writes Manson, "and the choices we make between them, are probably the single most important aspects shaping our personality and humanity" (ibid: 85, 87).

As an incantation, the name Marilyn Manson does not invoke a ritual, but rather ritualized behaviour, or even *ritualistic* behaviour. As a ritualistic incantation, the name points to the kinds of empty gestures often used to describe the behaviour of serial killers before, during, and especially after the act of murder. As an incantation, the first name Marilyn wavers between subservience and submission, while the last name Manson invokes a sense of permanent revolt and nihilism. Nihilist activity accelerates destruction. However, "grounded in compromise and indifference," writes sociologist Raoul Vaneigem, "nihilist *passivity* combines an awareness of the collapse of all values with a deliberate, often self-interested choice to defend one or other such discredited value… 'gratuitously,' for Art's sake. Nothing is true, so a few gestures have virtue" (Vaneigem 2012: 156).

From a position of nihilist passivity, Marilyn Manson's persona as a scapegoat or surrogate victim comes into sharper focus: The individual's absolute rejection of society echoes society's absolute rejection of the individual" (ibid: 157). As he stated in the liner note to his first album *Portrait of an American Family* (1994 Nothing):

> *We are what you have made us. We have grown up watching your television. We are a symptom of your Christian America, the biggest Satan of all. This is your world in which we grow. And we will grow to hate you.*

For Brian Warner the name Marilyn Manson underlines a critical commentary on how popular culture "combines and ultimately creates folk heroes out of people who are either not famous for talent or famous for crime" (A&E Biography, 2010). Manson's formula – a positive female first name plus a negative male last name – applies to the rest of his first band, the Spooky Kids: Daisy Berkowitz, Gidget Gein, Madonna Wayne Gacy, Sara Lee Lucas, and Twiggy Ramirez. For Manson atrocity and black humour have to be mixed in with equal measure. The issue boils down to this: that the inherent goodness of a starlet such as Marilyn Monroe and the explicit evil of a messianic leader such as Charles Manson are somehow elevated by pop culture to the same

level of interest. In this context, fame becomes the great cultural leveller; fame ex-plains (i.e., smoothed out differences, flattened) everything.

In Marilyn Manson's art, music, and videos, the heterogeneous distinction between the sacred and the profane is not absolute, as Emile Durkheim had argued over one hundred years ago, but rather contingent upon each other. The sacred and the profane must be expressed as a totality. One cannot exist dialectically, or be defined, without the other. Cultural categories are part of a complex process which includes religion. Cultural categories such as the human body, psychic forms, geographical spaces even social formations themselves, are constructed using categories of high and low (Stallybrass and White 1986: 2). In this context of high *and* low, we could argue that Marilyn Manson's theatrical impulses is Dionysian, in that it associates itself with the most sublime products of human art; yet, it also reaches back into the most primordial and archaic eras of ancient history (Barrett 1962: 178).

Manson's early albums, especially *Antichrist Superstar* (1996 Nothing) and *Holy Wood* (2000 Nothing) hark back to ancient alchemical imagery of transformation and evolution, arcane knowledge, and the archaic language of symbolism. Mythology, folklore, religious texts, the Kabbalah, and ancient fairy tales; each one of these sources is transformed by Manson into his own unique visual language. Although intellectual questions remain regarding some of Manson's more arcane imagery, such as the self-devouring snake, they fall under general categories, such as Via Doloroso, The Sign of the Cross, and God as the Eye of the Universe.

For one thing, Manson's complex depiction of arcane knowledge parallels the increasingly complex representations of reality in Western literature. In *Mimesis* (1946), Erich Auerbach describes how Liturgical Christian dramas of the twelfth century, for example, offer complex depictions of reality, first by merging a sublime style with a lower one, and then by presenting reality within the framework of a figural interpretation of history that forced readers away from the sensory representation of a character and toward its meaning. By the thirteenth century, the real and the mundane become an essential part of medieval Christian art and drama, and figural interpretations were reformulated to accommodate everyday contemporary reality. In this context, "the realistic and in particular the grotesque and farcical element [become] increasingly current" (Auerbach 1957: 139).

By the late fourteenth century, Dante's *Inferno*, and, later, Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, lead to what Auerbach calls a contingent style, "in which realism and eroticism are linked to elegant verbal formulations" (ibid: 189). The Christian-figural style is gone; instead, the aristocratic language of Christian-figuralism gives way to farcical motifs, irony, and the grotesque. Boccaccio's attitude could hardly be considered Christian, given the blasphemous connotations of a phrase such as *la resurrezion della carne* for a male erection (ibid: 197).

During the fifteenth century, the French courtly literature of Antoine de la Sale represented a "stable class-determined order of life" (ibid: 212). However, his fascination with ritualistic and conventional gestures were actually empty signs of the "late antique period of decadence" (ibid: 213). Such meaningless gestures sought to conceal the brutality and cruelty of everyday life. Le Sale's depiction of knightly ceremonies was nothing less than "creatural," a neologism of the 1920s used to describe the suffering to which human beings are subjected as finite, mortal creatures (ibid: 217). Creatural realism had its roots in Christian figuralism; it took its intellectual and artistic motifs from the Christian tradition. I would argue that Manson presents the listener with a creatural view of reality.

By the late Middle Ages, the creatural realism of Christian literature and drama began to appear in the literature and art of the upper-bourgeois culture of northern France and Burgundy, especially in the latter's emphasis on human beings' submission to suffering and mortality. The peculiar feature of this creatural view of humanity was this: that beneath class or aristocratic designations "there [was] nothing but the flesh, which age and illness will ravage until death and putrefaction destroy it" (ibid: 219). We are all equal before death, before creatural decay, and all actions aimed at the future are devoid of real value or dignity.

As an artistic project driven by the purgative energy of industrial metal, Marilyn Manson is a theatrical presentation of social and political ideas that are designed to shock and disgust, but also to provoke thought. We need to ask ourselves: *Why* do we find this shocking? *What* part of our belief system is being offended here? *Who* is Marilyn Manson, anyway, an idea or a person? For one thing, Brian Warner is a physical person, while Marilyn Manson is a social invention. Are they one and the same? No. When Brian Warner steps inside the Marilyn Manson persona, he is collapsing together two types of bodies: the physical and the social.

In *Natural Symbols*, Mary Douglas argues that the social body mediates how the physical body is viewed by others. “The physical experience of the body,” she writes, “always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society” (Douglas 1973: 93). The social body is also a symbolic body that is articulated by social, cultural, aesthetic, and religious decorum. In and through this articulation, the social body is privileged over the physical. Both kinds of bodies interact and reinforce one another’s social and cultural categories; however, it is the physical body itself that becomes “a highly restricted medium of expression” (ibid.). In other words, because its meaning can only be generated and accessed through cultural categories, the physical body is limited by the social context in which it is experienced. The physical body cannot be articulated or experienced outside of a restricted social dimension. Manson plays with these cultural restrictions on the cover of *Mechanical Animals* (1998 Nothing); there, he is the personification of The Androgyne: a half-man, half-woman creature who balances opposing forces of light and dark, positive and negative.

For Douglas “bodily control is an expression of social control” (Douglas 1973: 99). If this is correct, then a Marilyn Manson “performance” seeks to carnivalize the traditional social articulation of the physical body: the front versus the back; the upper versus the lower; private organic processes versus public; and, lastly, closed bodily orifices versus open (Bakhtin 1984). By reversing these signifiers, Manson is able to ridicule and exaggerate the social articulation of the physical body. Manson’s theatrical presentation seeks to enact a critical inversion of *all* official hierarchies, religious or otherwise. Of course, this inversion is created using carnival laughter, with its profanities, subversive humour, and abusive language. Carnival laughter allows the individual to revive and renew oneself in a constant state of *becoming*.

In both live performances and music videos, Manson carnivalizes his persona through a variety of visual techniques: altering the shape of his body using stilts or elongated arms, contorting his mouth open with medical devices, or wearing fishnet stockings, a corset, make-up, and cod-piece to accentuate a poly-sexual personality. In fact, band members such as Twiggy Ramirez also join in the fun; he typically wears a little girl’s dress, bows in his hair, and combat boots.

As a site of signification, however, Manson's outfits and on-stage behaviour send an abundance of mixed messages. For one thing, the corset was a sign of leisure at the turn of the last century, since a corseted woman was traditionally unable to perform manual labour. Moreover, the corset was also a fashion sign of a female's forced submission and dependence upon the male. As Bryan Turner points out, the corset presents a paradox. A woman who wears a corset signifies that she is not pregnant and could not possibly be pregnant, given the medical evidence that the corset causes injury to the cervix and makes intercourse painful. Thus, "the corset is simultaneously an affirmation of female beauty and a denial of female sexuality" (Turner 1984: 197).

By contorting his body, including his orifices, Manson posits that social control over the physical body should be relinquished as soon as possible, certainly to the extent that the social system needs to relax its control on the individual (Douglas 1973: 110). Regardless of the particular era being discussed, Marilyn Manson's clothing and behaviour are always the embodiment of a spirit of independence and individuality. More important, individuality is not merely a fashion statement; it is also about believing in something because you want to believe in it, not because someone told you to. As Manson himself writes, "I want to be strong and independent, to think for myself and to help others think for themselves" (Manson 1998: 124).

Given the post-AIDS climate of moral panic in the early nineties, the message of social autonomy behind Marilyn Manson's inverted, open, hyper-sexualized male body was clearly lost in translation. Instead of aiming to privilege creative imagination and self-knowledge, Manson instead became the embodiment of Arthur Kroker's notion of the "panic penis" engaged in unsafe, postmodern "panic sex." The postmodern penis – not the social or cultural *phallus*, as we would expect in this context – is no longer the privileged sign of patriarchal power but rather "an emblematic sign of sickness, disease, and waste" (Kroker 1989: 180). The panic penis is only good for one thing, "panic sex," that is, sex that signifies recklessness, discharge, and upheaval" (ibid.). In a postmodern world of AIDS, sexual production leads only to unproductive sex, that is, a sex without secretions (ibid: 181). Here, secretion is replaced with dirt, disorder, and disease.

In *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989), Susan Sontag discusses AIDS as analogous to a number of social and cultural conflicts during the nineteen-eighties. Sontag argues that the medical crisis

known as AIDS spawned a number of metaphors that say more about modern society than about the 'dis-ease' itself. Manson taps into a similar form of aesthetic 'dis-ease,' a discomfort that stems from the cultural climate of dread and contagion described by Sontag. In the late-eighties, AIDS had a twin metaphoric genealogy: as a micro-process, it was an invasive "plague" from elsewhere; as a disease, it was viewed as pollution (Sontag 1989: 17). Compared to AIDS, syphilis, had a "darkly positive association" with the intense or "feverish" mental activities of Romance writers of the late nineteenth century (ibid: 23). With AIDS, on the other hand, there is no moment of literary atonement or compensation. AIDS is the result of what society initially deemed "unsafe" practices. By the mid-eighties, "infectious diseases to which sexual fault [was] attached always inspire[d] fears of easy contagion and bizarre fantasies of transmission by nonvenereal means in public places" (ibid: 27).

Based solely on abject (i.e., hopeless, dejected, cast away) fear, AIDS attacks the already-stigmatized and marginalized. In this context of dread, death, and sexual ambivalence, Manson's song "The Nobodies" seems appropriate: "Today I am dirty/And I want to be pretty/Tomorrow, I know that I'm just dirt/We are the Nobodies/We wanna be somebodies/when we're dead." Because the illness can remain undetected for years, individuals now have to consider human sexual relations in completely new ways. Procreation, for example, as an act that typically looks to the future, now had to be tempered with knowledge of the past. Imagine if all forms of behaviour were linked in the same way to the past? Beware the hypocrite!

As a persona, Marilyn Manson is a social construction designed by Brian Warner to expose Christian and right-wing hypocrisy. The idea was born in the nineteen-eighties in Warner's imagination, and personified a sustained attack against the repressive intellectual climate that he encountered at Heritage Christian School. As he matured, Warner found the same repressive, fundamentalist climate mirrored in American society in general.

Although the American social landscape of the nineteen eighties and nineties was based on an 'open, rational' society,' traditions and institutions of an older 'closed, irrational' society were continually fighting to assert a Christian fundamentalist agenda regarding public policy, law, and political decisions. The struggle between an open or closed society has become a struggle between two very different interpretations of freedom. In an open society, individuals have the

freedom *to* live autonomously; in a closed society, individuals view themselves as free *from* fear and terror. For a fundamentalist the progressive collapse of tradition leaves individuals free to choose what to believe in. In the end, fundamentalists fear freedom itself; it is this fear which then leads to neurosis, anxiety and the kinds of hypocrisy which Marilyn Manson holds up to ridicule.

If this is correct, then Marilyn Manson's behaviour should be interpreted as a response to the social and cultural climate of a given time and place. Granted, ritualistic and symbolic gestures constitute a Marilyn Manson performance; nonetheless, they are still gestures directed against Christian hypocrisy of the nineteen-nineties. Such a performance must be understood in a context of unproductive expenditures, that is, of war, cults, spectacles, or perverse sexual activity, where all such activities have no ends beyond themselves. They are linked to the notion of a symbolic expenditure associated with mimetic ceremonies and spectacles (Bataille 1985: 118-120). Manson's ability to shock and enlightenment is contingent upon the amount of symbolic capital the dominant is willing to spend, "so as to get in touch with the fields of desire which it denie[s] itself as the price paid for its political power." (Stallybrass and White 1986: 201). Manson understands that the act of rediscovery itself, whereby the middle class relishes its own pleasures and desires through the Other, actually constitutes its identity (ibid.). In his role as radical Other, the transgressive impact of Marilyn Manson must be understood in the following social and political context: the financial greed and post-AIDS anxiety of the nineteen-eighties; the rise of religious fundamentalism that led to the Bosnian and Rawandan Genocides, and sarin gas attacks in Tokyo, Japan; and, in the United States, the FBI storming of a cult compound in Waco, Texas, the Oklahoma bombing, and the first attack on the World Trade in 1993.

We argued that the physical body of Brian Warner was socially constructed and socially experienced by us as Marilyn Manson; as a result, it could also be deconstructed by Mr. Warner into something else. However, even as Marilyn Manson was growing tired of being the American *pharmakon*, that is, the surrogate-victim who is the object of scorn and yet surrounded by a quasi-religious aura of veneration, two historical events derailed his dialectic of outrage: the Columbine shootings in 1999 and the Twin Tower attacks in 2001.

On April 20th, 1999, Eric Harrison and Dylan Klebolt opened fire at Columbine High School and murdered twelve students and one teacher. Although their motives remained unclear at the time, their personal journals suggested that they hoped their actions would rival the Oklahoma City bombing, as well as other deadly attacks that occurred in the United States in the nineteen-nineties. Upon hearing about the tragedy while on tour, Marilyn Manson's first words were "I'll probably get blamed for that" (A&E Biography, 2010). From his perspective, this type of behaviour was active nihilism at its worst.

The shootings resulted in an increased emphasis on school security, and a moral panic aimed at goth culture, social outcasts, and gun culture in general. Not surprisingly, the massacre sparked debate over gun control laws, gun violence involving youths, the nature of high school cliques, subcultures and bullying, as well as the influence of violent movies and video games. Blame for the shootings was directed toward a number of metal or 'dark music' bands, such as KMFDM, Rammstein and, of course, Marilyn Manson. After being linked by news outlets with headlines such as "Killers Worshipped Rock Freak Manson" and "Devil-Worshipping Maniac Told Kids To Kill", the media came to believe that Manson's music and imagery were, indeed, Harris and Klebold's sole motivation, despite later reports that the two were not even fans of his music. Even with this new information, the attacks continued.

Marilyn Manson's response was swift: "Everything about my message is quite the opposite. Everything I say is opposing the stupidity of violence and the media's perpetuation to make violent offenders into folk heroes, and putting them on the cover of Time magazine" (ibid.). So distraught was Manson over the shootings that he not only cancelled a show scheduled in Denver the following week, but the remaining five shows left in the tour. Facing death threats and bomb scares, however, Manson returned to Denver two years later to honour his cancelled tour date. As he stated prior to the show, "If I'm willing to say that I live for my art, I have to be willing to die for it." (ibid.)

On May, 1999, Manson clarified his position regarding the accusations leveled at him in an Rolling Stone magazine op-ed piece, "Columbine: Whose Fault Is It?" There, he blamed the resulting moral panic on the news media and their reckless coverage; as well, he attacked America's habit of laying blame on scapegoats in order to escape responsibility. Manson clearly

understood the role of the scapegoat, who unifies individuals culturally against a perceived threat by being put to death. In this particular case, cultural unification was at his expense. As a result, Marilyn Manson went into a self-imposed exile; indeed, he knew American media's response to something like the Columbine tragedy would be exactly what he had predicted in the first place, and he was unwilling to play any part in it.

The second event that I wish to discuss, which is the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, clearly did not implicate Marilyn Manson in any direct or even indirect way. However, I do believe that it seriously changed the artistic and aesthetic spirit of his iconoclastic vision. Unlike the Columbine massacre, into which he was drawn as a potential instigator, Manson released no public statement on the 9/11 attacks. He did not wish to nor want to. In such a highly-charged political climate, Manson knew instinctively that any discussion regarding aesthetic attacks on hypocrisy or religious fundamentalism or hypocrisy would automatically default to an attack on Islam rather than Christianity. In the context of George W. Bush's Manichaean pronouncement that "you're either with us, or against us," Manson knew that his brand of aesthetic terrorism against the "regressive fundamentalist agenda of American morality" would surely be lost in the shrill pronouncements directed against the enemy. (McCormack 2007: 5). Since 2001 and the death of dissent, there is little, if any, cultural room left for the kind of aesthetic terrorism once favoured by artists such as Manson, Joe Coleman, Fred Berger, Boyd Rice, James Mason, or Jonathon Haynes.

So, how does one respond artistically to 9/11? Even Karlheinz Stockhausen was vilified on September 16th by the press when he called the attacks "the greatest work of art in the whole cosmos" (quoted in Hanggi 2011). Whether "das grobst kunstwerk" is translated into "biggest," "greatest," or "ultimate" artwork is irrelevant; what the press willfully neglected was the context in which Stockhausen's words were uttered, which was a discussion regarding his twenty-eight hour mega-project *Licht* (Light) and scenes involving Lucifer's temptation of Eve.

Where does this politically-charged and unreflective cultural landscape leave *provocateurs* such as Marilyn Manson? Safe, at best; irrelevant, at worse. For one thing, his new music is much more personal and reflective, and deals with personal politics rather than outright attacks against cultural or religious targets. He understands explicitly that artists now engaged in aesthetic

terrorism have to carefully rethink strategic attacks against social, political or cultural targets, especially when misunderstanding by the media or the general public might lead to charges of treason, terrorism, or incitement.

According to Theodor Adorno, the aesthetic spirit of art is to do justice to nature which has historically been repressed. That, Marilyn Manson has clearly set out to do in his theatrical pieces, his music, and now his watercolour art. His music is still about autonomy, individuality and self-worth, but it should be understood an end in itself, rather than a means to a greater sense of enlightenment. For Adorno "the chaotic moment and radical spiritualization [of art] coincide in their rejection of shiny comforting notions of what life is all about" (Adorno 1986: 138). Marilyn Manson's art has rarely provided "shiny comforting notions of what life is all about." That has never been his goal. However, he has posed for the listener a rather simple question: Is the role of art to bring chaos to order, or the other way around?

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