

MARILYN MANSON: THE LIMITS OF CHALLENGE

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Rock, Lawrence Grossberg writes, "rarely challenges the political and economic institutions of society (and when it does, it is usually either marginal, utopian or hypocritical)" (1994: 51). He further laments that while pretending to be romantically outside the conditions limiting ordinary life, rock actually lies smugly in "the privileged space of everyday life" (51). This is stigmatised as boring and stultifying by rock musicians who actually do little to significantly alter it. Grossberg's mourning of rock's inability to challenge established discourses in the 1990s is in itself part of a well-established discourse based on the opposition between Romantic art and capitalist commerce. A minority of professional and amateur *connoisseurs* still demand from artists of all kinds that they prove the authenticity of their aesthetic and political message by resisting the material lure of the mainstream. In rock, commercial success and the artist's access to a large audience are still tainted with the suspicion of artistic debasement. The rise to stardom of rock performer Marilyn Manson illustrates this opposition between art and business. His success is based on his attempt to recapture rock's lost challenging spirit but he is deeply suspect of exploiting challenge for 'mere' commercial ends.

The 1990s have marked a turning point in the world of rock. British 'indie' and American 'alternative' bands have made it into the mainstream, openly acknowledging their lack of an underground vocation. Nirvana and other bands in the grunge scene have marked a new path, forcing their romantically-oriented fans to see that in the savage multinational capitalistic world of the 1990s it makes little sense not to aim at world-wide success. Rock, however, is still exceptional. Few would lament a sudden increase of readers for literary fiction writers or of spectators for quality film directors. But many rock fans abandon their idols the moment they reach a much wider audience. Popularity, they argue, inevitably deprives rock stars of their authenticity, making the seriousness of their aesthetic project or personal political message suspect of being mercenary. Essential discourses, as Grossberg hints, can be only challenged by rock artists from a position of marginality, utopianism or hypocrisy, the last being the most questionable stance. Precisely, many rock critics have found in Marilyn Manson's challenge to the world of rock a great deal of hypocrisy posing as transgression.

Marilyn Manson, the name of both the rock band and its controversial leader - previously plain Brian Warner - started challenging conservative cultural discourses from a position of marginality¹. Nine Inch Nails' leader Trent Reznor signed them to his own record company Nothing expecting Marilyn Manson to become just "a minor cult novelty on the industrial circuit" (Lowe 1999: 68). Instead, they unexpectedly took America by

storm in 1996 with their album *Antichrist Superstar* and its presentation tour. Their commercial success was accompanied by critical acclaim, but also elicited the first accusations of hypocrisy from the band's early fans. Frontman Manson claimed right after the release of the album that:

"The thing is, I've only gotten more dangerous and closer to the edge. I haven't changed what I'm about. I've always wanted a lot of people to hear what I have to say. I've always wanted to be a rock star. It wasn't something that I was trying to avoid because I think people need an anti-hero to come along and show them the other side. And the more people that hear that, the better" (Plummer 1996).

Despite the obscurity of the record's lyrics and the darkness of its turbulent music, Marilyn Manson entered the mainstream thanks to the outstanding sales of the album, which is in itself a remarkable phenomenon and, certainly, proof that "ultimately, the recording industry cannot 'control' or 'determine' what is going to be commercially successful" (Negus 1992: 152).

Much less successful, though, is Manson's ambitious and ambiguous attempt to alter the mainstream from within, as he claims to be doing. Manson understands well that, in the words of a record company marketing director, "being a pop star is not just about making records. Popular culture is about media manipulation. It's about how you present yourself" (in Negus: 63). Media manipulation, however, may backfire, for media exposure needn't lead to artistic credibility, especially if, as Manson does, an artist claims to be preaching a significant subversive message against the cultural mainstream while gleefully enjoying the material rewards of stardom. The frivolous life style that Manson is currently enjoying in his Hollywood home has undermined the credibility of his self-avowed challenge to the system, which was already suspect because of his exploitation of concepts as problematic as monstrosity and Satanism. This flaunting of materialism has also further enraged his conservative opponents who argue that Manson's newly found wealth results from the exploitation of misguided young people.

Manson has challenged the world of rock through two main strategies of self-presentation that follow from the aggressive conjunction of all-American physical beauty (Marilyn Monroe) and moral deformity (Charles Manson) in his artistic name. One is his extremely shocking personal image; the other his positioning as the 1990s Antichrist. "Goths," James Hannahan writes, "have dealt with their feelings of alienation from society by reinventing themselves as 'monsters'" (1999: 83), and this is what Manson has done at both a physical and a moral level. Manson's ghastly Goth image is an essential aspect of *Antichrist Superstar*². For this album Manson distilled the essence of his original Goth look into an ugliness so compact that it is simultaneously fascinating. A mask-like, white-skinned face with mismatched eyes, shaven eyebrows and smeared dark lipstick framed by straight, long black hair; an impossibly long-limbed, skinny, hairless body covered in tattoos and scars. A bizarre dress style mixing punk torn tights and dog collars, S&M black leather items, old-fashioned corsets, prosthetics, vintage-leather aviator helmets with black business suits and red shirts. And a faint suggestion of dirt and bodily fluids all over him.

Meant to alienate, this image has ironically turned him into a minority Goth sex symbol, much to his own puzzlement - he has often claimed that there is something seriously wrong with people who feel attracted to him. His freakish physical appearance has challenged many either in his incarnation as the Goth Antichrist or the new glam-rock star Omega of *Mechanical Animals*³, but ultimately his own fans have commodified it and pre-empted it of its original threat to convention. Manson's changing looks are perceived now as an interesting gimmick adapted to the needs of each record rather than as an essential part of his personality, which they seemed to be in *Antichrist Superstar*. His subversiveness is, in that sense, much less prominent than it used to be.

Manson's monstrous moral persona is more problematic. Like many other metal bands inspired by Gothic literature, Marilyn Manson used a heady blend of Nietzschean, satanic and biblical images for their *Antichrist* record and tour. But Manson also insisted that he himself is a secular Antichrist leading a free-thinking crusade to liberate the young of America through the medium of popular music. "The Antichrist", Manson has declared, "isn't so much a person as it is everyone's increasing, collective disbelief in God" ("Resident Evil" 1996). The links between rock and religion should be by now quite obvious: rock musicians are idols worshipped through the ritual of live performance; they have followers who literally believe in them and who maintain their cults even after death. John Lennon created a minor scandal when he claimed that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. In his autobiography, Manson follows this path, musing in a bout of megalomania about

"What happens someday if more people own my record than the bible? Will that make me god because more people believe in me than him? Because it's just about popularity. There are plenty of people in the world who have never heard of Jesus, while in America he's taken for granted. The key to changing the way people think is to change what's popular. That's why rather than submit to the mainstream you have to become it - and then overcome it" (Manson with Strauss 1998: 249).

The mainstream becomes from this point of view an avenue for political and religious change rather than the quintessential expression of passivity: popularity and high sales mean the chance to spread a message of resistance against the moral minority to a very wide audience; precisely, the traditional notion of resistance understood as a minority position in front of the conservative majority is questioned and rejected.

Manson's arrogance leaves many indifferent, but has deeply offended self-appointed moral guardians who have taken these *boutades* seriously and who have added him to the black list in their own crusade to defend the censorship of popular culture. Manson's aspiration to redeem the world by offering himself as a sacrificial scapegoat - an Anti-Christ - to be hated by the moral gatekeepers may seem plain silly⁴. Yet he has defended a sensible, solid position of resistance against the moral minority of America throughout his career with conviction and sound arguments. This should place him at a more creditable level than predecessors Alice Cooper and Ozzy Osbourne, whose bloody theatrical shows had no other intention but to entertain. Unfortunately for Manson, his credibility was badly affected by his much publicised acceptance of the honorific title of

Reverend from the late Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan. Manson seems to have rejected LaVey's ceremonial antics, but he found other affinities with him. "Like LaVey," Manson writes, "I had also discovered what happens when you say something powerful that makes people think. They become afraid of you, and they neutralise your message by giving you a label that is not open to interpretation - as a fascist, a devil worshipper or an advocate of rape and violence" (Manson with Strauss: 175). Manson calls himself satanic, but his Satanism has nothing to do with worshipping the Devil. It is, rather, a secular philosophy that preaches self-confidence, autonomous thinking and the building of a Nietzschean strong will for each individual. His less enlightened followers and conservative parents concerned about how far independent thinking can lead their children have taken Manson's Satanism literally. For those who doubted his message from the beginning the whiff of brimstone has definitively justified them to brand the band as just a silly act.

The lyrics of *Antichrist Superstar*, a morality play about a metamorphic satanic rock star very much like Manson, soon attracted the anger of moral guardians William Bennett, Sen. Joseph Lieberman and C. DeLores Tucker, and a good deal of media hype. The reaction against the tour *Dead to the World* was even worse, possibly because the sale of the records cannot be stopped but the live performance can be banned. Bizarre false rumours about the band's show flooded the media and the Internet⁵; evidently fake sworn affidavits by fans who had not even attended Manson's gigs were bandied about by diverse religious groups. Throughout the attacks the wildest fantasies of Manson's opponents flourished and they created an anti-show that makes the real thing pale by comparison. The issue at stake, according to the Christian fundamentalists, was the defence of the innocent children that follow Marilyn Manson, labelled a modern Hamelin pied piper. The website of the Christian Family Network from Ohio, Manson's home state, explains that "Satan, through Marilyn Manson, is gathering our young people by convincing them that it's OK to love themselves since no one else loves them," offering to worried parents the lyrics of the bands' songs, conveniently edited, as proof of Manson's satanic intentions. Leaving aside the questions of actually how many children buy Manson's records - for children are always used by moral minorities when they, simply, want to enforce some type of censorship - or of what exactly is wrong about loving yourself, few of Manson's detractors are considering why Manson communicates better with American children than their parents. An exception, William Mueller, writes that "it's easy to see why kids are listening to Marilyn Manson. He knows his audience and their questions" (Mueller 1998). Mueller is nonetheless worried that Manson's is a very negative influence that cannot be controlled. On the side of Manson's fandom, Paula O'Keefe observes that "his classic line, 'Raise your kids right or Marilyn Manson will raise them for you,' has always sounded to me more like a plea than a threat to steal babies. Why wouldn't you want to raise your kids right?" (O'Keefe 1997).

Manson's intention to challenge is expressed through a diversity of sub-texts that constitute the total multimedia text he and his band are. Beyond the opinions vented by others and himself in the media, he is an artist that expresses his views and feelings through

his texts. One of these texts is a book, the autobiography Manson co-authored with Neil Strauss, *The Long Road out of Hell*, which covers the period up to 1997, including the *Dead to the World* tour. Very little is said in this otherwise revealing book about the hard intellectual work behind the making of a record. There is a general pretence in the writings about rock in general - surely not among professionals - that music is born out of the chaos of drugs, sex and rock'n'roll spiced by scandal. This is why when reading *The Long Road out of Hell* and listening to the CD *Antichrist Superstar*, important gaps emerge in the construction of Marilyn Manson as a challenging rock artist.

In the book Manson claims that the album arose out of a very dark night of the soul that crippled his band for months, plunging them into a downward spiral of drug abuse, broken relationships and plain laziness. The album is, in contrast, a very well-crafted product with an interesting mixture of Goth rock, hard-core industrial and death metal sounds, supporting lyrics that could easily be turned into rock opera because of their narrative cohesion. Inspired by Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* whereby by presenting himself "as a mythically mega-famous icon [Bowie] actually became one" (Lowe: 68), Manson recreated himself as the quintessential rock star in *Antichrist Superstar* right before becoming one. It might well be that the coherence of the album should be credited to some of Manson's collaborators - Trent Reznor, David Ogilvie or Sean Beavan as producers, apart from band members Twiggy Ramirez, Madonna Wayne Gacy and Ginger Fish. But Manson is the kind of artist who keeps a tight grip on his work. The query is, therefore, why the creative, artistic process leading to the release of the record is represented in the book as an unstable alliance between chaos, abuse and isolated moments of lucidity. A possible answer is that part of the Romantic rock star myth still requires inspiration to be the source of creation rather than, in Thomas A. Edison's famous phrase, perspiration. Fans who worship the idol prefer to keep the distance from the working musician so as not to spoil his myth with the unglamorous - for them - tale of how music is actually made.

In the sceptical 1990s, "the very idea of myth has been drained of its significance" (de Curtis 1999: 31) at least as regards contemporary performers. Manson is trying to construct himself into a heroic Romantic myth, but he is clashing against those who see myth as a process that envelops some stars even despite themselves and not as a process an artist may freely start. Arrogance like that of Madonna, Prince or U2 led these performers to stardom in the 1980s, but today's atmosphere is different. Talented performers are quickly elevated to the heights of popularity, with no time to really consolidate their achievement, only to be immediately thrown overboard when they do not respond to the expectations others raised about them or to the vague concept of authenticity. The idea of the artist as myth survives mainly to "validate the fans' sense of autonomy" (Weinstein 1999: 64), but usually wanes when the artist crosses over to the mainstream, with few exceptions. Manson's case is intriguing because he himself has undermined his artistic credibility with the strategy of satanic mythical self-presentation he has chosen. He has been intelligent enough to use the resistance he elicits to his advantage, but has failed to reinforce his artistic credentials, which, ultimately, are the ones that should consolidate his career. It is unclear whether this position is a chosen stance, his way of underlining the banality of rock; but he has embraced the most frivolous aspects of rock - the drug abuse,

the fan abuse - seemingly to deny that his artistic intentions go beyond achieving the Warholian 15 minutes of fame.

Manson, who was a music journalist for a while and claims that writing was his first vocation, recruited *Rolling Stone* journalist Neil Strauss to do the actual writing in *The Long Road out of Hell*. This may have been due to Manson's inability to write or to his wish to make his book respectable by engaging the pen of Strauss, a reputable rock journalist. Strauss's collaboration with Manson has been deemed unethical by other music journalists on several grounds: Strauss never corroborated the truth of the stories narrated by Manson, he lent undue credibility to the book by presenting himself as a *New York Times* and *Rolling Stone* journalist on the book jacket and he published a number of pieces presenting Manson as a champion of free speech before and, what is more significant, after publishing the book (De Rogatis 1998). "Maintaining the myth of the opposition of art and commerce, and seemingly siding with the artist," Deena Weeinstein notes, "allows rock journalists to maintain the aura of art critics, rather than appearing to be members of the hype machine" (Weeinstein: 67). In this case, Strauss has used his prestige as a rock critic to challenge his colleagues' view that committed rock journalists should be apart from the hype machine. He has openly defended his right to benefit from his commercial association with Manson, but this has ironically short-circuited the respectability his name should have lent to Manson's autobiography. This may have been, though, a move anticipated and actively sought after by Manson.

The book has sold remarkably well possibly thanks to its entertaining content: "There were so many anecdotes about drug sniffing, groupie banging, overdosing, devil worshipping and attempted murder, in fact, that many critics wondered if Manson and Strauss hadn't sat down with a bag of coke and a couple of bottles of booze and fabricated the whole thing over a few sleepless nights" (Wiederhorn 1998). With its mixture of fact and fiction, Manson and Strauss's book little clarifies the process by which this apparently normal, average American boy became today's controversial rock star nor the creative process that lies behind his public image. Manson insists that he is what he is today thanks to his miseducation at the Heritage Christian School of Canton, Ohio - where he was born - and his later attending a public school in Florida, where he moved with his lower middle-class family. He seems to have been a rather naive boy easily impressed by the fanatical preaching of some of his school teachers - the school itself was nondenominational - his own Bible reading, and the music he learned to appreciate thanks to his school's seminars on backmasking⁶: Alice Cooper, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath. On the whole, Brian Warner's formative years contain the habitual mixture of gross teenage anecdotes and adventures but hardly anything that foretells the birth of Marilyn Manson. The Anti-Christ, Manson's message seems to be, could be just any American boy.

The concept, however, was in the making since his teenage years. In college, Manson read journalism and theatre - a good preparation for his later professional career. This began with a frustrating spell as a rock journalist: "Each successive interview I did, the more disillusioned I became. Nobody had anything to say. I felt like I should be answering the questions instead of asking them. I wanted to be on the other side of the pen" (Manson

and Strauss: 74). The passage to the other side of the pen began in 1989, when he was told he had a good voice - a point he never discusses just as he ignores the question of whether he is a good musician at all - and should start a band. "I had a concept but no musical skills whatsoever," he confesses. (84). Once he took the name of Marilyn Manson, he constructed himself as a rock star long before he achieved any kind of success: "That was lesson number one in music-industry manipulation: If you act like a rock star, you will be treated like one" (91). From then on, the book chronicles his drug experimentation, the relationship with other members of the band and diverse girlfriends, and the changing conditions of their performance live. The only chapter that clarifies aspects of the business practices the band was involved in is Chapter 10, an interview. "What nobody understood then is this," Manson tells Sara Fim, "The only way that you achieve what you want and fulfil your dreams and become great is by demanding that sort of attention. You have to make it happen" (175).

The album which made it happen, *Antichrist Superstar*, is structured in three cycles: The Heirophant, Inauguration of the Worm and Disintegrator Rising, narrating the birth, rise and disillusion of the Anti-Christ as rock star⁷. Manson's autobiography has the same structure, with some of the chapters sharing the titles with some of the songs in the album or lines from them. The book layout, designed like the album's artwork by P.R. Brown of Bauda Design Lab, strengthens the obvious links between CD and book. This suggests that the Antichrist is Manson himself. "Manson," a fan writes, "is probably the first named Antichrist to have so named himself and to consciously speak for the role" (O'Keefe 1997). Yet, one thing is speaking for the role and quite another is having the charisma and the biographical credentials to sustain the claim. Manson is possibly an Antichrist in the same metaphorical sense that Romantic poet Percy Shelley proclaimed that poets like himself were the legislators of the world. But Manson lacks both the tragic biography and the intellectual capacity to be made into a neo-Romantic myth as Shelley was. Manson's way of deconstructing these shortcomings is to split myth into two, blurring the lines of division: the Anti-Christ of the album is the truly mythical, Romantic Manson and the creation where his artistic energies converge; the Manson of the co-authored autobiography - flaunting the foolish incidents of his life, masking any hint of intellectual interest - resists the fans' mythification for fear of becoming a dead rock star. Better vilified than dead as long as they buy the records might be his motto.

This fear is not to be taken lightly. Rumours that Manson would commit suicide on stage were widely circulated in 1997. He seems to be suffering from the celebrity syndrome by which artists court fame to publicise their work and obtain high material rewards but feel crushed under the pressure of the devouring crowd out there. This is why Manson presents himself in the book as a star who feels alienated from his fans. Instead of glamorising his life and person, Manson exposes the trivial life of Brian Warner and the seamier side of Marilyn Manson. He uses a great deal of the book to tell the reader how he has been harassed by his psychotic followers, especially some women. The chapters devoted to his groupies and to the fans he and other tour members physically and psychologically abused are the most controversial. Fans lured backstage would be tied up and invited to confess their darkest sins to Manson and his crew. "Little did we know," he writes, "just how dark

and disturbing the lives of our fans really were" (Manson and Strauss: 180). Compared to his followers, Manson concludes, "I've had an easy life" (183).

Manson chooses that very chapter about abuse to explain that the songs in *Antichrist Superstar* deal with "a dark, twisted, vitiated creature's evolution from a childhood spent living in fear to an adulthood spent sowing fear, from a weakling to a megalomaniac, from a shit-eater to shit-kicker, from a worm to a world-destroyer" (189). The self-abuse that according to Manson inspired the record seems strangely to make-up for the lack of any significant real abuse in his life and is, somehow, meant to tell the really abused fans he understands them. Manson is here the closest he has ever got to being a Christ-like figure for his fans rather than an Anti-Christ. He has actually become a mirror for many deprived younger people who take him as a father figure he refuses to be. And the album dramatises this hesitation between wanting to hear and heal, and refusing to involve himself. The book mocks this impulse by warning fans he is nothing but an ordinary man, *just* a performing artist. The hypocritical attempt to shock the world of narrow-minded America is thus grounded on the artist's fear of being destroyed by the myth of the romantic artist. Out of rational thinking or irrational feeling, Manson constantly deconstructs himself and his act. The only protection for his own mental stability before the harassment of the crowd lies in triviality; but, inevitably, the price to be paid for this safety is having many consider him just a banal performer challenging minor limits.

Manson has touched on a very sore point of American society. Whether his intentions are genuinely to awaken young people to a sense of their own autonomy or to, plainly, make a profit out of their defencelessness and their parents' neglect is another matter - he possibly aims at doing both things, which shows how amoral rather than immoral his stance is. He has succeeded in making himself into an Anti-Christ for the right wing minority that harasses him, but the satanic overtones make this an embarrassing position that few defenders of the freedom of speech are ready to side with. When anti-Manson hysteria resurfaced in relation to the Columbine High School massacre⁸ Manson issued a statement absolving himself of any responsibility in the killings. He cancelled, though, the gig planned for a few days later, as a "mark of respect" (*NME* 1999: 3)⁹. His fans defended him, being specially active in the Internet. But, perhaps in the belief that he probably enjoyed this situation, few liberal intellectuals dared shield Manson from this unacceptable conservative harassment. And rock cannot be truly challenging without the support of those who challenge the politics and the ideology of the moral minority.

One of Manson's perceptive fans writes that "perhaps the most astonishing thing about Marilyn Manson is the fact that his existence in the music industry and his tremendous popularity, does nothing but enforce his view that our society is lacking and void of many things" (Kemmerer 1996). He triumphs because he finds nobody to truly judge and resist his monstrosity. Inspired by Manson's slogan "I am something that America has created out of its own fear" (Plummer 1996), this fan further argues that the monster cannot be escaped because Americans cannot escape themselves (Kemmerer 1996). Instead of combative fans, though, Manson seems to be creating self-defeating followers who, while still loving Manson's outrageousness, find themselves ethically

unable to defend him before the right-wing gatekeepers. Writing in 1992, Lawrence Grossberg showed his perplexity at why the continuous right-wing attacks against rock music in the 1990s "have become so publicly acceptable, even commonsensical" (1992: 8). The answer might well be in this generalised surrender to the idea that being as tolerant as to accept the likes of Manson cannot ultimately be a positive stance. This leads to an isolated, irrational resistance to the politics of the right-wing, which may not necessarily be as passive as Grossberg thinks. The attacks are not contested because there is no point in arguing with people who will not listen: you just buy the record or attend the concert they criticise. Seen from this perspective, the mainstream does become indeed a place from which the pressure of minority right-wing thinking can be effectively resisted by the usually silent majority. This entails the paradoxical defence of the 'freedom' of choice in the market from a left-wing liberal position against conservative attempts to curb it. Resistance has shifted from the Romantic notion of the marginal artist to the mainstream and this is something that Manson knows how to exploit.

The resistance that Manson elicits is harder to explain from a European perspective. "In the contact with the fans I see little difference," Manson declared, "but the media in the rest of the world treats us different than in America. Especially in Europe people can look at America with the same sarcastic look as I. The way in which I analyse the American society as an outsider, people do understand" (Van Schaick 1998). This is partly true, but Manson may be deceiving himself; for most Europeans, the deep America he opposes is a faraway country. In Britain, where, alone among its European peers, the conservative tabloid press has taken Manson's message seriously, music journalists have steadily declined to enter the debate. The *NME* of 1 May 1999 carried Manson's photo on the cover with a caption reading "Not Guilty!" in reference to the Denver killings. But the article by Steve Sutherland in that issue leaves no room for doubt. Sutherland is against Manson's lucrative, expert exploitation of "the phobias of Middle America" (1999: 23), noting that this strategy is hardly valid for Europe. "The real tragedy in all this," he concludes, "is that there are still parts of America that are so uptight that a berk dressed in drag banging on about Satan should actually prove a threat to society and a titillation to those who would rebel against it rather than the tawdry glam side-show we think he is over here" (24). Many would subscribe to this view.

The vagaries of the music market make any prediction as to Manson's future practically impossible. As to his past achievements, it seems inevitable to conclude that whatever intention to truly shock America out of its complacency Manson may have had has been depleted - or is just about to be depleted - by his rise to stardom. The difference between Manson and previous rock stars is that even though he may not have lowered his standards - *Mechanical Animals* remains a record as remarkable as *Antichrist Superstar*, though different in essence - he is working within a consumerist environment which commodifies challenge. Rock itself has become a means of artistic expression often contested by the moral minority rather than a site of contest. Only a handful of fanatical bigots are assessing Manson's message in favour of personal, autonomous thinking; for the rock critics appalled by Manson's success the message is hypocritical, Manson nothing but a dishonest artist. The rest, his large mainstream audience possibly use Manson's figure to

vicariously experiment excesses out of their reach. The validity of Manson's attempt to challenge the discourse of moral America may well fail to stand the test of time. But he has pointed out the limits of challenge for rock music in the late 1990s and forced many to consider whether the challenge of rock is dead for ever. It might well be.

Notes

1. For an introduction to the band's history and discography see the Internet music guides *Wall of Sound* (URL: <http://wallofsound.go.com>), All Music (URL: <http://www.allmusic.com>), or Ultimate List Band (URL: <http://www.url.com>). Marilyn Manson (Florida, 1989) released their first record, *Portrait of an American Family* in 1994. A cover of the Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams" secured them MTV fame, plenty of airplay and media attention before the *Antichrist Superstar* boom (1996). The tour *Dead to the World* followed in 1997. *Mechanical Animals* in 1998.
2. His image, though, depends on a tightly bound team: art designer P.R. Brown, diverse music video directors such as Dean Karr, photographers such as Joseph Cultice and Karr himself, and make-up artists.
3. Some US record stores refused to stock *Mechanical Animals* on the grounds that its cover, featuring Manson as the androgynous alien star Omega, is offensive.
4. See among the anti-Marilyn Manson the websites *Anti-Crap Superstar* run by Eric Lander (<http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Towers/4432/mnrant.htm>) or *The Anti-Manson FAN Mafia* (<http://www.shadows.mortado/mafia.htm>).
5. Allegedly, Manson performed sex acts on stage alone or with other members of the band, forced members of the audience to abuse or rape each other, had animals killed and dismembered on stage, etc.
6. Backmasking refers to the practice of hiding satanic messages in rock records, which can only be heard if the record is played backwards. There is actually no proof that rock stars use backmasking at all, but some have found themselves in court defending themselves from accusations launched by the religious groups who claimed to have unmasked this practice.
7. The first contains the songs "Irresponsible Hate Anthem," "The Beautiful People," "Dried Up, Tied And Dead To The World," and "Tourniquet." The second cycle contains "Little Horn," "Cryptorchid," "Deformography," "Wormboy," "Mister Superstar," "Angel With The Scabbed Wings," and "Kinderfeld." The last cycle contains "Antichrist Superstar," "1996," "Minute Of Decay," "The Reflecting God," "Man That You Fear." The book's main sections are: I: When I was a worm, II: Deformography (song 7 of AS), III: How I got my wings. Out of the 16 chapters, three refer back to songs: I: The Man that you Fear (song 16 AS), 14: The Reflecting God (song 15 AS), 15: Antichrist superstar (song 12 AS); others echo lines from the lyrics: 5: I wasn't born with enough middle fingers, 7: Dirty rock star.
8. Dylan Klebold, 17, and Eric Harris, 18, massacred 13 people and killed themselves at this school, near Denver. CDs by Manson, Rammstein and other metal bands were found and seized by the police from the boys' homes.
9. The mayor of Denver actually banned the national meeting of Charlton Heston's National Rifle Association which was to have taken place right after Manson's gig; Heston refused to cancel it. (*NME* 1999: 3)

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