Simulated Identity and Virtual Self—
The Madonna-image and the Popular Icon

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> *May I have your attention, please?*
> *Will the real Slim Shady please stand up?*
> *I repeat, will the real Slim Shady please stand up?*
> *We're gonna have a problem here…*
> —Marshall Mathers, *The Marshall Mathers LP*

By the end of the 20th century, the production of popular music had reached an ecstatic stage of its development. It had never been more dependent on the commercial interests of all the parties involved in the making and consumption of the available music scores, and this considerably changed those strategies that the musical icon, the popular "star," now had to follow to keep up with ever growing competition in order to make a profit and follow a professional and long-term career. In the 1960s and early 70s, the United States and Great Britain saw the rise of an abundance of pop-music bands, some of them now famous for only one song (Steppenwolf), some of them starting a long-lasting musical career (The Beatles, The Who). The promotion of these popular icons was mainly dependent on the direct form of the frontal, but distanced mega-concerts,[1] while the 1980s introduced the more sophisticated electronic mass distribution of music under the cover of video clips.[2] Parallel to this, the sellout of the minor and major paraphernalia of the industry, such as signature music instruments, garments, lighters etc., was an additional, indirect form of marketing besides the concerts. In addition, the fierce competition brought about the significant modification of the marketing strategies the music industry had to employ to propel the popular icon to the top of the billboard. The production of stars became a profitable business, and the numerous boards of advisors came up with ever more versatile and marginal behavior-patterns that the star had to act out.

In order to create a musical icon that sells well and therefore dominates the musical scene,[3] the iconic sign (the performer or "star") can basically follow two tactics: the image may remain stable for a longer period, or it may change from time to time. In the first instance, the profitability of the music and the surrounding musical characteristics are acquired by selling music to fans of a specific age group (Bon Jovi) or one particular style (country music). It is the tactics of stability that seems to be working well if the music fans are great in number, but this strategy, at the same time, excludes those who do not belong to any of the two age groups or those who prefer a particular style. In

order to secure the highest number of fans (customers), the mass music industry has put a more aggressive strategy into practice. This extremely successful profit-making tactic is based on the regular modification of the image of the icon and the music itself, and the strategy of mutation is further enhanced by the MTV phenomenon, the commercial self-asserting form of iconicity. As a result, the continuous change of the image results in a new kind of self-formation of the icon, whose identity becomes diffused. The icon secures its dominant position by its high-degree versatility, whereby the shift from one image to another becomes dominant instead of one specific image layout. In order to show the results of this process, Madonna's MTV commercial, the cover song of the recent James Bond movie, *Die Another Day*, is going to be more closely analyzed from the vantage point of simulated identity.

The Ecstasy of Popular Music

The clear distinction between high and low culture has been outdated by the post-modern concept of mass culture, within which the elements of high culture are combined and contaminated by low culture components. "This dislocation and re-engagement between 'high-art' and 'popular culture' is of central importance to aesthetic and cultural practices within the postmodern" (Docherty 143). Analogously, the erosion of the boundaries between the formerly clear categories of high and low culture is one of the major characteristics of the musical scene, while the transgression of boundaries constitutes the hallmark of the mass icon and its hybrid self.

The question as to whether mass culture should be understood as equal with popular culture or not is not going to be discussed here in detail. For the sake of simplicity, any music that is sold in quantities and advertised on a broad scale is evaluated as popular; the aesthetic and cultural distinction between an artifact drawing on popular cultural elements (like Andy Warhol's Pop Art) and the electronic and easy-access technology that makes any type of music available to the masses are not a question of study here. However, it has to be emphasized that the distinction between mass music and popular music is erased by the postindustrial consumer society, where practically any music that is circulated by the media is suitable for mass production and consumption. This hypothesis also includes the electronically reproduced forms of high culture, where vulgarized and popularized high culture elements mix with the mass or popular culture characteristics. A recent example of such a transgression is the record *S/M*, a joint-venture strategy employed by the 1980s and 1990s trend-setting metal band Metallica and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Conductor Michal Kamen orchestrated twenty-one Metallica songs that were performed by the band and the orchestra live at the Berkeley Community Theater in Berkeley, California, on 21-22 April, 1999. The double compact disc of the live performance quickly became one of the best examples of the liquid boundaries between high and mass forms of music, where the distorted guitar-sound and the arpeggio on two hundred strings mark a specific equilibrium of two formerly distinct realms of music.

Popular music at the end of the 20th century applies a technique that characterizes most of the artifacts labeled as postmodern. This strategy is operated by the interplay of centrality and marginality. The modernist notion of the center includes a homogeneous concept of the world, where the distinguished vantage point focuses on the activities within the dominant, while the postmodern assumption promotes multiple and heterogeneous viewpoints, so the resulting emphasis on marginality rearranges the formerly clear distinctions between dominant and marginal, elite and subordinate, central and peripheral. The structure of the broadcasting networks provides the main allegory of such a system. Since Marshall McLuhan has formulated the notion of "the global village," it seems to be self-evident that the electronic flow of information has created a worldwide network which can be shared by viewers and listeners from even the remotest areas of the world (McLuhan 232). This phenomenon is especially characteristic of those regions where the electronic circulation of information is the most developed, namely the postindustrial societies. The centerless broadcasting mechanism has a rhizome-like structure, where the metaphoric concept of the deep-structure is deconstructed and substituted by metonymic shallowness. The rhizome grows just underneath the surface and proliferates to such an extent that the area of its dispersal is much larger than in the case of the genetic axis of the root of a tree (Smyth 101). Similar to the rhizome, which does not have a definite center, the networks of satellites, broadcasting stations, transmitters and receivers constitute the system of peripheries, where the position of the center is unstable and hardly definable in modernist terms.

The popular music industry is in the state of what could be called globalized marginality. It is the peripheral voice that sells, and it paradoxically speaks from a quickly shifting central position. Michael Jackson's fading popularity is due to his bleached image, as opposed to the marginal position of The Jackson Five or the Jackson of the mid-1980s (the album *Bad)*, where the band that consisted of Afro-American brothers and later the solo-singer represented a unique marginal voice.[4] As Steven Connor argues, "marginality and centrality have somersaulted into exact inversion, as the alleged outsider becomes the representative 'spokesperson for society'" (189).[5] The marginal speaker seems to be expressing the global or dominant opinion, but the ecstatic nature of communication only provides the icon with the ominous fifteen minutes of fame, when a new marginal voice replaces an older one. As a result, the dominant center position has to be reassessed: it is not a defined and stable central place any longer, but a locus that is perpetually dislocated. In the hyperspace of the media, the central and the marginal are not stable categories, but processes, and so the dominant is defined by the categories of instability and a never-ending flux. The dominant is characterized by constant mutation and it is the shifting nature of the marginal that substitutes for the stability of the center.

If the dominant is characterized by ceaseless change and produces extraordinary profit, the musical icon and the back-up network of stylists, investors, record companies and others will necessarily thrive on the need for more shocking, newer forms of

identity and speedier mutations of the image.[6] In order to keep the icon in a constant limelight, more and more shifts are needed, which create an ecstatic consumption that worships the cult of the "new." As a result, such simulacra like the "New" Old Spice, a hundred-year-old refreshed product can be marketed, advertised and made a commercial success. This is not only relevant to inanimate commodity objects, but seemingly animate products as well, such as the popular icon, which is performed by a flesh-and-blood figure. However, the icon is not alive, for what the viewers perceive as an image does not equate with the electronically or analogously simulated image.[7] Nothing remains of the real, and the image becomes hyperreal, an authentic, but unoriginal surface that masquerades in versatile forms of representation.

Popular music seems to be following the (ob)scenery of the ecstatic change within the dominant. The results are summarized by Connor in the following passage, which circumscribes the two most important factors that govern popular music.

> Most accounts or celebrations of postmodern rock or popular music stress two related factors: firstly, its capacity to articulate alternative or plural cultural identities, of groups belonging to the margins of national or dominant cultures, and secondly (often, though not invariably, related to this), the celebration of the principles of parody, stylistic multiplicity and generic mobility. (186)

The first factor is concerned with the cultural identity of the icon, which does not leave the simulated image intact. The marginal cultural identities become multiple, fragmented and alternative, and the identity of the icon also bears traces of such a process. The ecstatic nature of communication enhances a more and more rapid change to newer forms of identity, while the icon masquerades itself in versatile and perpetually mutating masks which seemingly give the viewer more profound and complete insight into the character of the icon. However, the viewer experiences the surface, the icon, and not the network that produces the image. Therefore the icon is merely a mask, skin or avatar that can be altered infinitely. Sometimes this mutation gets so intense that the mask is not remodeled once or twice during the career of the icon, but record by record or, in special cases, the skin may change several times during one video-clip. Whitney Houston's clip from the 1980s, "I Wanna Dance with Somebody," is one of the plainest examples of the ecstatic modification of the image, as the performer changes clothes approximately fifteen times to secure a five-minute male-gaze.

Connor's second factor describes the new ways music takes by parody, pastiche, stylistic multiplicity and heterogeneity of style. The death of the subject brought along the end of individualism, which appears in several forms characterized by intertextuality, bricolage, collage, simulation and the crossing of generic boundaries. Although the interrelation between the two factors is vague in Connor's argument, the notions of the second factor are connected to the first one. The emergence of the plural and mostly marginal cultural identity is emphasized by stylistic particulars that

express the plurality of the mutating and rhizomatic attributes of the marginal music icon. The most recent examples of this change are expressive snapshots of a "world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum" (Jameson, *Consumer* 196). Such a technique is apparent in Dream Theater's concept album, *Scenes From a Memory* (1999), where the music and the words are orchestrated and arranged to create the mask of a drama about reincarnation. Movies are also frequent visitors to the scene of popular music, Destiny's Child performs "Independent Women" to cover up the remake of *Charlie's Angels*, and Madonna carries out her own version of the recent James Bond movie, *Die Another Day*. In addition to stylistic changes, Connor also places emphasis on the technological nature of popular music:

> The present cult of 'sampling,' the use by musicians of audio technology to appropriate and manipulate recordings by and performances of other musicians, provides the clearest exemplification of the postmodernist aesthetic of the fragment, as well as showing rock music's willingness to live off its own history and forms. (186)

The now easily available computer technology and the paradigmatic change from analogue music to electronic data retrieval systems enables DJs, MCs and even enthusiastic amateurs to write their own music. What they use as material is no longer sounds and notes, but ready-made measures pre-written by other, more or less skilled musicians, so the amount of music produced has multiplied since the CD ROM burners appeared. This inevitable step towards sampling at home is not new to practicing musicians, who know that most of the music written and performed is based on ready-made patterns, harmonies and rhythms.

The technical nature of music is not the scope of this study, but a closer look will be taken at the characteristics of the new forms of identity into which the musical icon is dressed. This new strategy of the avatar is first and foremost determined by the ecstatic visibility and interchangeability of the masks, which are characterized by obscenity.

> [...] today there is a whole pornography of information and communication, that is to say, of circuits and networks, a pornography of all functions and objects in their readability, their fluidity, their availability, their regulation, in their forced signification, in their performativity, in their branching, in their polyvalence, in their free expression... (Baudrillard 131)

The image of the popular music icon is visible and audible, as its main role is to make profit, sell records and related commodities. The video clip is originally a means of advertisement, "in fact, a better name for rock videos is really 'rock promos,' since

they are widely seen as promotional tools for the record companies" (Kaplan 13). Although Ann Kaplan made this statement at the end of the 1980s, her findings are still tenable as regards the commercial status of rock videos. Most of the commercials utilize the pornographic strategy of ecstasy, as a profound insight into the qualities of the product makes the goods marketable. Advertisements, on the other hand, have a peculiar signifying structure and are mobilized by a special mode of representation, because a new type of representational kit, floating signifiers, "which have no relation to the product, are set in play; images and words that convey desirable or undesirable states of being are portrayed in a manner that optimizes the viewer's attention" (Poster 63). Therefore, the popular music icon, as a product, becomes overwhelmed by the floating signifiers that, through the linguistic and iconic creation of the form and image, turn the representation of the musical icon into a representational structure organized by hyperreality.

The assumed reality of the image of the popular icon is best characterized by its very designation, which reveals the imaginary status of the icon. The image is hyperreal, or, in other words, more real than the real. The spontaneity of the image is lost when hyperreality processes it into the state of an artifact, an artificial avatar that is premeditated and created by the models of commercial networks. Within the field of hyperreality, the former Saussurean notions of signifiers and signifieds that build up the meaning become outdated. "The all-important link between sign and referent is shattered in what Henri Lefebvre, Baudrillard's mentor, called 'the decline of the referentials'" (Poster 62). The imaginary identity of the icon is a simulacrum, a hyperreal commodity object dependent on its own models. The image is the result of a prearranged simulation that

> is characterized by a *precession of the model*, of all models around the merest fact—the models come first. [...] Facts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of the models; a single fact may even be engendered by all the models at once. (Baudrillard 175)

The simulacrum gives a fake impression of the original, although it has purely authentic characteristics. In the environment of simulation, the popular icon and its fake identity are only seemingly identical with the performer who acts out the image.

The dominant mode of marginality, or the continuous shift from one mask to another, is defined by the ecstatic character of the image, which is a floating signifier. This floating excludes stability and only allows for a superficial saturation, while the signifiers (icons) associated with certain traits, notions and ideologies are quickly eroded into the same icon carrying occasionally opposite meanings. In such a system, where shallowness governs the construction of the meanings, the signifiers temporarily get permeated by certain referents in order to convey a message, but the endless shift quickly empties out these referents and disguises them into new and marketable ones. It is not the nature of the image that changes, only the mask that is mod-

ified or swapped for another, and therefore the salability of the icon remains untouched by the depthless content that saturates the image for a while. Taking this into consideration, there is not any significant quality distinction between the masks; only the ecstatic shift between the images remains untouched as the dominant mode of marketing and commerce. This leads to different musical styles and images that sometimes change from song to song and from video to video. The ecstatic restlessness around the icons is further intensified by the abundance of the information aired by the media: personal details, *paparazzo* photos, fake stories all surround the icon as a peritext. All the chunks of data are relevant in the ecstasy of communication, as every minor piece of information has to be grasped before the icon moves into the next phase of its shift from one mask to the other.

Identities Die Another Day

While Whitney Houston's maniac redressing in "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" is a rudimentary method of changing the avatar, a more sophisticated form of the modification of the image is the Madonna-phenomenon, which can be divided into clearly distinguishable periods at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. The teenage-star "sluttish girl" of "Holiday" turns into the bleach-blonde *femme fatale* of "Material Girl," who "embodies the new postmodern feminist heroine in her odd combination of seductiveness and a gutsy sort of independence" (Kaplan 117). The diva is quickly altered into the gamin-image of "Papa don't Preach," which touches upon feminist issues and blurs the line between sexual and asexual traits. The sacred and the secular mix in the heavily critiqued "Like a Prayer," where the religious and the suppressed sexual motifs of Christianity are juxtaposed in the female protagonist's figure. As the process of the shifting of the image is accelerated, the mid-1990s support a more sophisticated image-factory that provides Madonna with more versatile, specialized and marginal skins. However, the sado-masochist, the Hispanic, the heterosexual, the diva and the hippy-groovy Madonna style can still be distinguished, although following this ecstatic course of changes renders this effort even more articulated. By the end of the second millenium, Madonna's shift from one image to the other strikingly resembles a more than one thousand year old concept of the avatar familiar from Greek mythology.

Proteus, the son of Poseidon and Naida, was able to change his shape from lion to dragon, from fire to flood etc. When constrained until returning to his true shape, Proteus would answer questions. Therefore it is Proteus who could be taken as the first figure with many avatars, whose self is rather defined by a process than a designated and unmodified form. The icon of mass music is necessarily protean; in order to secure the profitability of the music industry, the masks of the icon have to be changed in an ecstatic way similar to the process Madonna has gone through many images over the last fifteen years. The alteration of the avatars constitute an interminable series of experiments and explorations, each of which can be abandoned and

swapped for another or revisited. This pattern resembles what Erik Erikson has called identity diffusion or identity confusion when he worked out the psychopathology of the phases in human life (qtd. in Lifton 126). It seems that the problems of seeking identity and the denial of the available models in a teenager's life can be applied to recent patterns in the iconic formation of popular music.[8] The refusal of the available forms of identity can be dangerous in a twelve- to eighteen-year-old teenager's case, but it is a natural strategy governing the musical icon's shift of images. Madonna's recent video clip, "Die Another Day," is a proper example of how the image juxtaposes many avatars at the same time.

The song is a minimalist techno-pop project reminiscent of Madonna's former hit "Music" co-written and co-produced by Mirwais Ahmadzai, a French techno-artist. The traditional diva vocals and orchestration of the James Bond themes are swapped for the earlier groovy hippy style of the 1988 album, *Ray of Light*. The video clip is produced by the directing team Traktor; it is a traditional high-quality Madonna piece, but this time the North Korean torture-chamber from the recent James Bond movie serves as the background. Throughout the clip, Madonna plays a secret agent who is tortured in several ways: she is strapped into an electric chair or has her head held under icy water, but she resists the pain and keeps the secret information. This struggle is depicted as an inner struggle of the self, with the customary Bond weapons taken from various James Bond movies: for example Harold Sakata's nephew from *Goldfinger* flings his deadly bowler hat at Madonna in a moment that resembles the relevant scene from the 1964 Sean Connery version. The inner fight is depicted as a duel between two identical Madonna figures, one dressed in white (good), the other dressed in black (bad). The scene also refers to Madonna's role as a fencing instructor in the recent movie. The bricolage of different Bond themes combined with the antagonistic pair of democratic and totalitarian rule, feminist issues, the Hebrew icons (ab)used for the consumer society's purposes and the obvious intertextuality, altogether seem to offer a wide range of possible interpretations, but the clip also provides excellent ground for investigating into the nature of the self, the popular icon's identity and the mutation of the masks.

The wholesale broadcast of the clip has caused an uproar in Jewish religious circles, as the application of Hebrew elements in "Die Another Day" becomes more articulated and more provocative than in her 1988 gothic clip "Frozen." In the scene where Madonna is strapped and electrocuted in vain, a burning Hebrew word can be read on the seat of the electric chair with the characters of a lamed, an alef and a vav. These three letters mean "No" and can be read as a disapproval of capital punishment. The three signs may also form a sequence from the spiritual tool called "the 72 names of God," where three-letter icons stand for each of the names of God. In another scene, Madonna has Hebrew letters "tattooed" on her arm and is fastened by the teffilin, a prayer-strap that is traditionally an instrument whose use is restricted to males only. The usage of Hebrew images evoked various opinions about the video. Orthodox Jewish circles protested, while others were more indulgent. Rabbi Michael

Berg, member of the Los Angeles Kabbalah Center and Rabbi Sue Fendrick, managing director of MyJewishLearning.com agree that many, especially Orthodox Jews, may find it offensive if a non-Jewish person abuses the Hebrew symbols for the purpose of entertainment. Those who were opposed to the video were deceived by the simulacrum of the electronic image, which is a hyperreal disguise based on pre-existing models and therefore seems to be authentic. Within the realm of simulation it is harder to distinguish between the fake and the original, as the simulacrum blurs the boundaries between the simulated and the real.[9] In the realm of simulation the authenticity of such an ideological interpretation is irrelevant, as the visual text camouflages itself as real.

The hyperreality or actuality of religion or any ideology is less relevant than the way how the self of the icon is modified by the (ab)use of such an ideology. The popular icon is similar to the actor, who is torn between the roles to be played. The polymorphous versatility, Freud's well-known phrase for diffusely inclusive and infantile sexuality, is a characteristic of the actor that enables him to act out what he is not.

> Thus political and religious movements, as they confront Protean man, are likely to have much less difficulty convincing him to alter previous convictions than they do providing him with a set of beliefs which can command his allegiance for more than a brief experimental interlude. (Lifton 128)

The ideology covering up the icon is therefore nothing other than a role to be played, consequently it cannot be interpreted in the traditional way. There is no point in looking for the deep structure and the meaning where only a superficial and simulated saturation is visible. As Lifton argues, "just as elements of the self can be experimented with and readily altered, so can idea systems and ideologies be embraced, modified, let go of and reembraced, all with a new ease that stands in sharp contrast to the inner struggle we have in the past associated with these shifts" (128). The lyrics of the song, "Sigmund Freud/Analyze this," mock this controversy and the impossibility of interpretation by invoking Freud's reading technique that aimed at the interpretation of dreams. As only the virtual icon speaks, it is useless to look for the subconscious or the Superego, Ego and Id triad, since merely an appearance, a superficial mask covers the multiple and fragmented self, which temporarily identifies with the embraced ideology, squeezes out its content, takes it on as a mask and finally discards it to live up to the expectations of the ecstatic shift that secures the dominance on the market. This strategy is mirrored in the words Madonna is singing when she straps up her arm with the teffillin: "I think I'll find another way/There's so much more to know/I guess I'll die another day/It's not my time to go." Naturally, it could be asserted that the analysis of the simulated identity of the music icon is based on the distinction between an underlying or "deep" structure and the superficial or visible image. One could argue that the present interpretation is based on this very differentiation, and the simulacrum of the image

is merely the effect of a presupposed deep structure. On the other hand, this observation is grounded on the basic phenomenological duality of idea (*nous*) and the visible object, which has haunted Western metaphysics since Plato. The simulacrum, however, is a copy without the original that has disappeared for one reason or another. In the case of the music icon, the backup of the technical "deep" structure, the entangled network of managers, stylists, advertisement experts etc. does not leave space to any analysis that aims at the discovery of the hidden, background mechanisms and the resulting meanings. The supporting crew behind the Madonna image is rhizomatic, its isolated units work independently and invisibly. As any effort to find the underlying, meaning-making structure is in vain, only the visible icon's superficial qualities offer an adequate ground for interpretation.

The superficiality of the image is secured by the constant shift of the masks that enable the icon to parade in new, fluid, confusing and inconsistent identities. The ecstasy of masks has a strategy similar to the rhetorical figure of prosopopeia "that must not be confused with personification, apostrophe or dialogism, which however do almost always occur with it, consist in staging, as it were, absent, dead, supernatural or even inanimate beings. They are made to act, speak, answer as is our wont" (Fontanier 404). This face-giving or masking strategy causes the erosion of the boundaries within the self, when it liquefies the differentiation of the conscious and the subconscious, the Freudian Superego-Ego-Id triad and the Jungian Self-Ego diad, and paves the way for the definition of a new identity based on transgression, simulation, virtuality and rhizomicity.

> Far from inviting visualization, let alone sensory perception, prosopopeia in most cases merely lends a voice to a voiceless always, or now silent, entity by a mere convention: "voice" says De Man, "assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poein,* to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)." (Riffaterre 110)

The actor's face behind the popular icon is never to be seen in the simulated and ecstatic change of masks, and one could question its existence without hesitation. The virtual image of the screen is hyperreal, while the actor's original figure, the "deep structure" is never encountered by most of the fans whose credit revolves the music industry.[10] As a result of the ecstatic change of the masks, the popular icon inevitably reaches the state of schizophrenia, the "experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence," where the lack of stability, the constant shift is the only unchanging factor (Jameson 119). Accordingly, Madonna's multiple images of the last fifteen years fail to build up a coherent system; the history of the selves is fragmented, with only the developmental stages being observed while the catalyzers of the changes remain unseen.

The catalyzing network that projects the Madonna icon stays hidden, as the music industry is concealed by the superficiality of the screen. The simulacrum of the

Madonna image cannot be analyzed from traditional viewpoints, as the failure of the many feminist attempts show. Andrea Fábry, among others, concludes that the catalyzing, background network is "a mechanism that prevents women from defining their own identities, creating their own subcultures by setting up their own lifestyles and consumption patterns" (96). Apparently, this argument is based on the signifer-signified binary, as it condemns Madonna for slipping into "pre-defined character types and images that were originally created by patriarchal society," but the feminist concerns are not sufficient to give an account of the hyperreal image, as it does not differentiate between feminine and masculine. The simulacrum of the image handles the patriarchal patterns just as another pre-fabricated model that the icon may juggle around with. The virtual icon that the fans know as Madonna is neither feminine nor masculine; rather, its qualities resemble the cyborg, which "is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour or other seduction to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (Haraway 605). The cyborg is "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence" (Haraway 605). As the music icon is obscenely hyperreal, it is based on a multitude of preexisting models, the phallogocentric one is just a mask to be put on. Therefore the attempt to give a reading of the Madonna image that is committed to one particular ideology has to fail, along with psychoanalytic, structural models too, since it is only the unilateral representation model of the virtual reality that can handle the music icon's visble avatar.

Conclusion: Shattered Mirror

To conclude, the electrocution scene is merely a simulation. Madonna's image cannot be eradicated—as the words say, "I've come to work, I've come to play." Only the screen can be switched off. And so the Hebrew "No" on the seat of the electric chair is not a denial of God, but the refusal of a homogeneous driving force or a distinguished identity that could control the change of the image. The "No" refers to the unified and consistent self, and the void behind the self is filled by an ecstatic modification of masks and their interplay, which allows the manipulation of Hebrew imagery as a temporary tattoo that can be washed off and replaced by other masks. As a result, the identity of the icon becomes a simulated surface governed by premeditated models. The depth is superseded by the superficial network of the rhizome; in this way the image becomes self-referential, and any attempt to interpret its workings fails sooner or later. The following emblematic moment of "Die Another Day" summarizes the main strategy of the ever-changing masks the musical icon has to employ to remain in the spotlight: Madonna looks into a shattered glass and finds her fragmented mirror-image and her antagonistic white and black figures fighting for their simulacrum-lives. She sweeps away the mirror with one stroke of her bare hand, and the fans, having no other choice, have to assist in this. The ecstasy that infiltrates

the hybrid, fragmented and multiple character of the identity of the popular icon forces the remodeling of a web of new masks.

Notes

[1] Probably the best examples of this wholesale marketing are the Woodstock festival or the (in)famous American Tour of the Beatles that took place in the largest baseball stadia, where the fans, whose number sometimes exceeded eighty thousand, could only see the band, but the rudimentary amplification hindered them from hearing the music.

[2] The most significant indirect form of the distribution of music, the radio broadcasting and the records themselves, is not elaborated on here. While the concerts enable the building up and enhancing of the image of the performer, songs broadcast via radio or records do not have a major effect on the avatar of the star as they merely influence the musical image, which is primarily established by audible and not visible effects.

[3] As I have argued in an earlier essay ("Simulated Images and Words: The Identity of the Popular Icon." *Democracy and Popular Culture*. Ed. Matthew Sweney and Michal Peprník. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackeho, 2004. 149-61), which analyzed the very same Madonna video from the vantage point of democratic patterns in the music industry, the question of domination in the music scene is similar to that of the democratic conventions insofar as it is based on the paradoxical notion of the "rule by the ruled," where the choice is seemingly free but it is always based on the available models (parties, ideologies or pre-designed schemes).

[4] As Jackson's defiant critics have aptly noted, he became a white woman from a black man.

[5] Hans Bertens' supplement pursues the notion of alienation: "In fact, the mainstream is doubly alienated, on this account. It is not simply alienated from itself; it is also worried by its inability to trace the causes of its alienation" (102).

[6] As Frederic Jameson notes, the character of multinational capitalism necessarily promotes the new postmodern methods, and the patronage of the multinational business expands and develops contemporaneously with the postmodern forms of expression (3-5).

[7] In this sense, Marilyn Monroe has no connection with Norma Jean and consequently Madonna is merely the popular icon acted out by Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone, the third of eight children born in Bay City, Michigan. Nevertheless, the strategy of simulation goes further: the icon may simulate other icons, as it can be seen in Madonna's video clip, "Material Girl," where Madonna imitates Monroe's "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friends" number from the movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

[8] Erik Erikson's fifth phase of psychosocial development applies to teenagers from the age of twelve to eighteen. The phase is termed adolescence, the basic conflict is between the formation of identity and the roles the teenager should act out to enter the next stage, young adulthood. In the phase of adolescence, the teenager must achieve a sense of identity in occupation, sex roles, politics and religion by trying to

integrate many roles (child, student, worker etc.) into a self-image under various role models and peer pressure (qtd. in Carver 293-96).

[9] Gilles Deleuze offers an alternative model of signification, he argues that the virtual is not counterpointed by the real but the actual, as the virtual (the simulacrum) is completely real (208). The efficacy of this argument lies in the innovative differentiation between the actual (existing, factual) and the virtual (simulated) instead of the traditional binary of the real (original) and imagined (copy, fictional, represented). As both signifying systems imply that the authentic is only *seemingly* original, I do not go into details.

[10] Popularity is one of the biggest risks that the icons may take. As a protection against the fans, intriguing questions, intrusions on their privacy etc., they are surrounded by bodyguards, fences and distance, so they achieve almost complete virtuality for most of the fans.

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