

SPEAKING IN RHYME AND RIDDLE: HYBRIDITY IN BILLY CORGAN'S *MACHINA*

by

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(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

The present study examines *MACHINA*, a hybrid multimedia narrative composed and performed by Billy Corgan and the Smashing Pumpkins. Through a disjunctive use of media to tell the story of a fractured, hybrid hero named GLASS, Corgan reveals himself to be an inheritor of William Blake's attitudes toward creative media as evidenced in his experiments in illuminated engraving. GLASS, the focus of the chords of narrative and performance, represents one variant of Joseph Campbell's hero as suited to the needs of Corgan's disaffected audience. In the act of co-creating the narrative with Corgan, his audience helps to enter themselves into a liminal state and a sense of *communitas* as developed by anthropologist Victor Turner, again with variations made to suit the fractured, conflicted nature of Billy Corgan's audience. More than a concept album, *MACHINA* reworks a number of existing notions about religious responses to narrative and performance.

INDEX WORDS: Hybridity, Billy Corgan, William Blake, Hero Journey, Joseph Campbell, Victor Turner, *communitas*

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, Andy Joe Ware, who inspired in me a love of ideas which can never be satisfied. At each keystroke in the development of this project, his presence was never far from me. I hope that he is proud of what he has given me the strength to become. I love him and miss him dearly, and I fear I will never meet another man like him.

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INTRODUCTION

In *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley comments that “every human group, from a family to a nation, is but a society of island universes, for while we can share our perceptions of experience, we can never share in the experiences themselves.”¹ It is with great care, then, that humankind has undertaken the symbolic encoding of these experiential perceptions; the very existence of shared culture depends upon agreements on such perceptions. The most sacred of cultural experiences have, historically, received the most deliberate of symbolic expressions and the highest-fidelity media through which to transmit them. Color, sound, gesture, speech, and text all become media vested with special significance. In sharing these experiences and these understandings of symbol sets, we draw the lines of belonging and exile, of community and isolation, of “self” and “other.”

With the advent of the Information Age the rate of exchange at which cultures interact with one another has increased exponentially. Callers to customer care lines find themselves speaking with a representative halfway around the globe. Photographs, video, and monetary value can traverse the globe in fractions of a second. This speed increase in communication has resulted in a quickening of cultural interaction worldwide. As the pace of human life quickens, finer and finer distinctions of community are demanded from cultural participants. As information flows more freely in more ways to more people, symbols slowly lose their ability to accurately preserve meaning; meaning, it seems, always changes faster than the symbols that preserve and transmit it.

¹ Huxley, Aldous. “Heaven and Hell.” *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954. 17.

As the pace of communication quickens to a din, the symbols of communication lose their power. Their users become desensitized to them and search instead for reinvigorated assertions of self and community. With their audiences numbed more and more by the symbols impinging on their senses, communicators seek stronger and stronger expressions that veer further and further away from the meaning conveyed. To view the awkward consequences of the expression escalation, one need look no further than the use of the word “extreme,” which presently is used to modify everything from violent fundamentalism to the scent of deodorant. With increased application, symbols of mass media see decreased utility. In the wake of this information barrage, those desensitized to the symbol sets used in the metanarratives of culture are faced with a quandary. How can we trust symbols to express the untrustworthiness of symbols? How does one communicate an exhaustion of communication? To paraphrase humorist Mitch Hedberg, how does one demonstrate an opposition to picketing?

The answer lies in the repurposing of those media and symbol sets. By reemploying traditional media and by taking advantage of new media, those who find themselves at the borders of community are able to divest metanarratives and the media used to promulgate them of calcified meaninglessness and to reinvigorate them. As the opportunities for more precise expression arise, communities are able to realign and reorient in new, hybrid forms to better suit the hybridities of their participants. These new hybrid selves and communities demand new, hybrid narratives that more accurately reflect their users’ needs. In “Rocket Radio,” William Gibson remarks that “the street finds its own uses for things.”² With an increased ability to represent the complexity of experience through combining and reworking media, “the street” finds itself making

² William Gibson, “Rocket Radio” in *Rolling Stone* (June 15, 1989).

sacred numerous expressions overused into numb profanity. As systems of assessment become dinosaurs of poor utility, new systems and system makers arise, synthetically orchestrating media to achieve an effect greater than any simpler expression.

More and more often, these new systems of meaning possess a complexity suiting that of the people whose lives the systems hope to narrate. No longer bound by traditional media-based divisiveness, artists are transcending with greater frequency the borders of sense media. Hoping to more accurately reflect the fractured nature of their audiences' experiences, these system makers are responsible for a growing trend in popular culture that leaves traditional titles like "musician," "poet," and "painter" behind. No longer tethered to titles that fence them in, the expressers of culture are finding an increased freedom to more faithfully represent the complexities of the world and the people around them.

In the following paper I propose to demonstrate that musician Billy Corgan is a prime example of such a "system maker" and that his band, the seminal 90s alternative rock outfit The Smashing Pumpkins, sow the seeds for such a hybrid expression on their fifth studio album, 2000's *MACHINA/The Machines of God*. Released on February 29th of that year, *MACHINA* is a marked departure for the band even as it was hailed as a return to styles first championed in the band's earlier days. Even a cursory examination of the physical product of the album, however, reveals the inadequacy of any descriptors that limit Corgan and his compatriots to retreads of previously charted territory, ultimately distancing them even from the title "musician."

Instead, the fractiousness of the *MACHINA* project locates Corgan's creation in a creative space beyond any one label. Cited vaguely in reviews as a "concept album,

albeit loosely,”³ *MACHINA* chronicles the success, demise and resolution of Glass, a musician charged by a mystical encounter with the responsibility of changing the world. Told in nonlinear fashion, the narrative spans the album’s Grammy-nominated packaging, which includes the lyrics to each song, engraved prints designed by Russian artist Vasily Kafanov, and an excerpt from a narrative text referred to only as *GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD*, whose narrator claims an audience of “those who wished to be spoken to.” Transcending the media of visual art and of the text of the liner notes, the album’s production quality also factors significantly in the narrative being told, as does the band’s concomitant world tour of concert performances. During the band’s final tour, significantly titled “The Sacred + Profane Tour,” the Smashing Pumpkins’ website played a crucial role in the development of *MACHINA* as a hypertext narrative, becoming a contact point for the community developing around the story’s varied pieces as well as an entry point for other elements of the narrative, including six textual missives intended to follow up the excerpt originally included with *MACHINA*’s liner notes and a series of tour diary entries dubbed “the chards [sic] of GLASS”

Upon its arrival in the hands of its audience, *MACHINA* appears inscrutable, defying seekers of its meaning and placing the responsibility of sense-making squarely on the shoulders of fans. In this way, I contend, Corgan positions himself not as a progenitor of an utterly new phenomenon, but as an inheritor of a hybridizing tradition traceable back to the experiments in illuminated printing conducted by British pre-Romantic William Blake. Through his illuminated experiments, Blake combines method and content in a way that demands participation from his audience in the arena of meaning-making, disjointedly combining sense media in a way that precipitates what

³ *Rolling Stone*, March 2000.

Blake critic David Erdman calls an “imaginative leap in the dark.”⁴ Similarly, Corgan combines sense media traditionally considered to be the province of the “concept album” to demand more from his audience, ultimately involving them in the essential acts of narrative composition. Through its method of production, *MACHINA* exudes a fractiousness that reinvigorates symbolic communication for the desensitized community to and for whom Corgan speaks.

The nature of *MACHINA*’s narrative content, however deliberately obscured by its method of preservation and transmission, also points to this collective fractiousness and hybridity. In my second chapter, I intend to demonstrate that nuanced understandings of the protagonist/antagonist Glass (sometimes also referred to as Zero or Zero/Glass) can benefit from application of work conducted by Joseph Campbell regarding the cultural ubiquity of what he calls “the journey of the hero.”⁵ I argue that in many ways Glass represents a contemporary incarnation of Campbell’s hero. Ultimately, however, the ways in which Glass approaches the archetype of Campbell’s hero tells us less about the community for whom he functions as a character than those ways in which he diverges from Campbell’s summation. It is in these ways, these divergences from Campbell’s monomyth, that the particulars of Corgan’s community and his narrative preserve their uniqueness. The similarities dealt with in Campbell’s conception of the heroic monomyth, however hopeful in their assessment of a human mythopoetic substrate, ultimately prove themselves unable to cope with the varieties of human experience. When these breakdowns of mythic base structure occur, such as at the

⁴ Erdman, David. “America: New Expanses.” *Blake’s Visionary Forms Dramatic*. Eds. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970. 92-103, 109-111.

⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. New York: Princeton-Bollingen, 1978.

fringes and borders created by carving communities into the “global village” envisioned by proponents of globalized culture and commerce, the agency and event of local narratives supersede Campbell’s hero in their ability to speak for their communities.

As a mechanism for reinvigorating mass media with a sensitivity long denied to the disaffected flock Corgan tends and as a reassessor of a once-obsolete mythic structure, *MACHINA* becomes a generator of community in the hands of its audience. I intend to contextualize Corgan’s creation in terms of its reception utilizing the work of social and symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner. In the ways that *MACHINA* speaks to an audience whose commonality lies in their shared sense of alienation and disaffect, the hypertext narrative of *MACHINA* provides an opportunity for that audience to participate in the generation of a new sense of what Turner calls *communitas*, an egalitarian state entered into as one leaves the structures and role-prescriptions of society. By participating in this expression of *anomie*, Corgan’s audience is permitted the opportunity to share alienation. Through their awakened sensitivity to media and shared expression, these frayed edges are sewn into a new sociocultural tapestry whose brilliance lies in its variety. If once the individuals of Corgan’s audience felt themselves isolated and alone, through participating in the narrative construction of *MACHINA* they participate in a new “community of the disaffected.” They are, oxymoronically and in a sense that suits Turner’s anti-structure, alone together.

**CHAPTER ONE:
“Impersonal Technologies and Personal Cause”: Blake and the Machines of God**

Upon its release in February of 2000, the Smashing Pumpkins' fifth studio album *MACHINA/The Machines of God* debuted at number three on the Billboard 200 and sold upward of 165,000 copies in its first week.⁶ Inasmuch as it marked the return of critically acclaimed original drummer Jimmy Chamberlin to the group, *MACHINA* also held the promise of a return to the band's signature sound, a deft blend of psychedelia and hard rock that had netted the group multiple platinum albums. In the months prior to the album's release, the band had drummed up support for the project through “The Arising!” and “Resume the Pose” tours. The album's first track, “The Everlasting Gaze,” received considerable radio play as well during this time and its opening line (and therefore the opening line of the album), “you know I'm not dead,” elicited quips from rock journalists nationwide regarding the supposed resurrection of a sound that had so dominated the previous decade. Fans arriving at record stores on the liminal release date of February 29th, however, were afforded a return neither to the electronic minimalism of 1998's *Adore* nor to the orchestral grandeur of 1995's *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, though traces of both albums are present. If it presents the record of a band resurrected, *MACHINA* also presents the record of a band transformed.

What exactly the band had been transformed *into*, however, is a more difficult matter to ascertain. Sounding neither electronic nor orchestral, the songs on *MACHINA* echo hazily, the melodies present but imprecise, the vocals muffled even as they soar. Though still fraught with the spiders, wires, hearts, gauze, and other distinctly Corganesque lyrical turns, the lyrics of *MACHINA* seem at once optimistically earnest and

⁶ Statistics retrieved from <http://www.billboard.com> on March 10, 2007.

devastatingly snarling. If this collection of songs has a significance beyond its individual components, that significance appears incomplete or indeterminate.

MACHINA, however, can hardly be said to exist solely in the songs that the album contains. The richness, variety, and multivalence of the other media that accompany the actual songs must also be engaged if one wishes to succeed in identifying the “concept” guiding Corgan’s “concept album.” The album’s liner notes, which earned the group a Grammy nomination in the category of Best Album Packaging, do little to clarify Corgan’s message. In all, *MACHINA* can be said to encompass fifteen recorded songs, their accompanying printed lyrics (whose incongruity with Billy’s sung lyrics demands they be engaged as a separate medium), sixteen engraved paintings designed and executed by artist Vasily Kafanov especially for the *MACHINA* project, and an obscure two-page tract included near the end of the liner notes titled “an excerpt from GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD.” Choked with alchemical symbols, Kafanov’s engraved plates seem to hopelessly obscure any information they might contain. The lyrics are printed as if to resemble a red-letter edition of the Bible, with select phrases and words highlighted. With language at once inclusive and obscure the tract seems to address the inscrutable import of the album and its attendant packaging, beginning “...and as it was with all things, we spoke in rhyme and riddle, not for fears of detection, for that had happened a long time ago, but so that those who secretly wished to be spoken to were....”⁷

The concept binding the various media of *MACHINA* is not limited solely to the medium of the album itself. Unlike the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*,

⁷ This and all subsequent quotations from “GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD” retrieved from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/index.html>.

Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, or David Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, the conceptual impetus behind *MACHINA* transcends the bounds of the concept album as a singular medium. Following its release, Corgan continued to develop whatever story might be present between the lyrics and lines of the album itself by posting subsequent media installments to the band's website, <http://www.smashingpumpkins.com>. To the original combination of media that is *MACHINA* Corgan added six more textual excerpts generally attributed to the same author as the one included with the album itself, a series of tour diary entries titled "chards [sic] of GLASS," and another entire album and 3 EP's worth of music, titled *MACHINA II/The Friends & Enemies of Modern Music*, distributed entirely free over the internet. Corgan also composed a series of short Macromedia Flash animations which married clips from various songs to animated versions of the plates included with *MACHINA*.

What awaits listeners and viewers who give *MACHINA* a spin, then, is a whirling vortex of media at whose center lies a narrative or imparted moral, though the disjointed nature of the vortex has left that narrative or moral detonated to a point of seeming incognizance. Any apparent linearity between two songs, two engravings, or any other pairing falters under the pressure of contrary evidence in some other pairing of media. More than incompleteness or indeterminacy, the media used to convey *MACHINA* seem to offer up deliberate defiance of those who would seek a singular, linear narrative out of the text.

Though he published a brief explanation of the *MACHINA* story via the band's website, Billy had added numerous other media, topically unrelated to the story itself,

which seem to better elucidate elements of his intent. Included among these postings is a series of engravings by British critical enigma William Blake. Against the confounding din of multitudinous media already competing for the attention of his meaning-seeking audience, the Blake postings seemed to be a shot out of left field. In what way do these plates, taken from Blake's experiments in illuminated printing including "Europe: A Prophecy," "the first book of Urizen," and "Jerusalem" modify or clarify the meanings presented in Corgan's own work? I intend to argue that *MACHINA* reveals Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins to be an inheritor of the attitudes toward the creative use of media celebrated in Blake's illuminated experiments. By fracturing his vision across multiple disparate media, Corgan calls his audience to what Blake critic David Erdman calls "an imaginative leap in the dark," an anti-structural moment in which the bounds of "artist" and "audience" dissolve.

In the ways it addresses commonalities that exist between the songs, lyrics, and engravings that accompany it, the excerpt from "GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD" serves as an access point to invigorate the meanings that evade casual discernment. Through this speaker we are able to meet GLASS, whom the speaker inclusively calls "our hero," leader of the MACHINES of GOD and JUNE, described by the speaker as "our angel who has waited so long." With the language of a devotee the speaker recounts their first encounter:

*frozen to witness, one can walk around and survey this moment as close to perfection as any that have ever been, to see the joy, the exalt, the arrogance...with its sheer violence of embrace and release slowly offering teeth-gritting awareness, the song ends, the lovers arc, and in this bliss there is hope, expectation, and yes, pure and indivisible love...*⁸

⁸ *MACHINA/The Machines of God*. Liner Notes. Released February 29, 2000.

The speaker continues by intimating that the fates of GLASS and JUNE “had intertwined long before they were lovers”⁹ and that “their moment [extends] back before a time their eyes first met.”¹⁰ Our speaker, who has reconciled us to him or herself, claims omniscience in describing their union, adding to the visual and tactile warmth of the album a tone of mercy and optimism. From the union of GLASS and JUNE, our speaker then moves from love to an expression of antinomian faith, claiming “it is with faith and faith only that one justifies the reach, with little to confirm but glimmer and awe, ritual and circumstance.”¹¹ As the missive concludes, the speaker acknowledges GLASS’ doubts in himself and “his message,” but engenders solidarity in the reader with a salutation “in sadness and in love, in faith and movement alive.”¹²

In time, Billy would come to post six more missives to the band’s site. Though each was titled differently, the language and tone of each seems to indicate a single speaker. Additionally each was given a number so as to indicate some kind of continuity. That continuity, however, is largely absent from the texts themselves, for while the first text focuses largely on the fated union of GLASS and JUNE, “our apex and conclusion,” subsequent installments of narrative text point toward other aspects of the world in which GLASS and JUNE move. As part II begins, the narrator even goes so far as to taunt the audience with information he seems to claim: “eyes were being scratched and tattoos applied, but no one... would ever hear the full secrets of glass.”¹³ The speaker’s hero, it seems, currently awaits “an order that may never come” from an agent who comes to be

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD pt. II” retrieved from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/glass2.shtml> on March 12, 2007.

recognized as “the I of the Radio” in the plates and songs of *MACHINA* and who is responsible for having vested GLASS with his message of revolution. At this feverish time in his life, GLASS documents his state of mind in by keeping a journal, “but [keeps] losing the pages.”¹⁴ At around this time, the so-called “chards [sic] of GLASS” appeared at the band’s website in the form of Billy’s tour diary, which the text encourages us to interpret as the first-person words of GLASS. Armed with this information, we can infer that the record itself is a record of the MACHINES of GOD and not the Smashing Pumpkins and that it is the MACHINES who are touring in support of it.

Between the various text fragments, the narrative of GLASS, his audience (whom the author apophatically describes as being “without focus, without generation, [and] without peer” at the outset of chapter three), the author seems to trade textual metaphors. At times, GLASS’ message of revolutionary love and his audience’s call to respond are framed in militant terms: “GLASS was like a general leading them all into a war they knew they could not win.”¹⁵ At other times, the tone takes on a kind of fevered evangelism, where the war becomes one over the souls of those who might be saved by GLASS’ message of love. The sixth chapter, handed out physically at the Summersault festival in Toronto, speaks from this understanding of what GLASS and his message represent to those with ears to hear. In all capital letters, the missive begins “DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR SAVIOR IS?”¹⁶ By the end of this sixth chapter, however, the author’s tone changes in ways that elicit the audience’s concern regarding his motives. As hopefully evangelical as the bulk of the text reads, the author points to the horizon of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “GLASS and the SYNTHETIC ARMY pt. III” retrieved from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/archives/glass3.shtml> on March 12, 2007.

¹⁶ “DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR SAVIOR IS???” retrieved from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/archives/glass6.shtml> on March 12, 2007.

the next chapter by claiming that there the audience will find information concerning “today’s youth...their dreams, hopes, and how to control them.”¹⁷ But as ambivalent as the audience may be with regard to the narrator’s motives in telling GLASS’ story, participants have no choice but to listen.

The fifth chapter, titled “the story of June (so far)” and intended for release with the online-only *MACHINA II*, further muddies the author’s story in the way that it seems to invert the whole of the first chapter. As with the excerpt accompanying *MACHINA*, the author concerns him- or herself with the relationship of GLASS and JUNE. Here, “our angel” seethes with the drug-numbed complacency only fame can afford: “restless with praise/resentful of penetrating worship...she often resembled a statue in a museum.”¹⁸ Trading the baroque obscurity of the original excerpt for a listless ramble that suits his subjects, here the narrator speaks like the fame and drug addicts that GLASS and JUNE have become. GLASS, “our hero” once consumed by a revolutionary message of love, now speaks to “no one in particular.” Instead of “shak[ing] voltage,” the MACHINES of GOD now seem to make music only perfunctorily: “somewhere someone somehow struck a note.” Further complicating our understanding of what GLASS is to the narrator, the fourth of the seven excerpts has never been released, placing the narrative even farther from cohesion and prompting seekers of meaning to include the rest of the album in the scope of their searches.

The collection of materials laid before the audience, then, is a kind of scrapbook containing the varied pieces and chards, the “shrapnel of a teenage atom bomb,” that compose GLASS. In the ways that we come to identify with the speaker, his hero

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “The Story of JUNE (so far)”, retrieved from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/archives/glass1.shtml> on March 12, 2007.

becomes *our* hero, his scrapbook becomes *our* scrapbook and his memories become *our* memories. The physical stuff of *MACHINA* itself serves as the medium through which this transformation occurs for both the band and its audience, a designation made covertly on the album's cover, where the title of the album splits the "real" band name, The Smashing Pumpkins, and "fictive" band, the Machines of GOD, responsible for the sounds heard therein. But like memories, the information encoded in the pages and tracks of *MACHINA* is indistinct, imprecise, and heavily impressioned. According to Vasily Kafanov, the fifteen plates inside the liner notes are intended to mirror the fifteen songs on the album, though the pairings, if permanent pairings even exist, are never disclosed. Though numerous arguments can be and have been made regarding possible options for pairing the plates with either their companion songs or segments of the written text, none of those arguments has been immune to evidence to the contrary elsewhere, either in another print, lyric, or passage.

That is not to say, however, that the plates are utterly occult; our understandings of who GLASS and JUNE are, gleaned from the text, seem to indicate that the union described in chapter one also is referenced in plate V, titled "Desire Holds the Moment Still." Elsewhere, in plates VII and VIII, "Peering Deep into a Mirror Untrue" and "So Empowered, the Lovers Negate the Blinding Brilliance of Love," Kafanov combines with his images lyrics from the songs "Raindrops+Sunshowers" and "The Crying Tree of Mercury," respectively. Other plates seem to point to the alchemical nature of the union of GLASS and JUNE. A brief search at Adam McLean's superb website on the subject of alchemy, located at <http://www.levity.com/alchemy> reveals legitimate alchemical antecedents for imagery used in nearly all the plates, plates II, IV, XII, and XIV in

particular.¹⁹ Gregory Sylvester of VSA Partners, the design firm responsible for implementing Billy's plan for the presentation of the album, affirms this apparent focus on the Western Esoteric tradition in the visual of the album: "the client approached us with the idea of a worn alchemical journal," he says on the company's website.²⁰ This glut of symbols serves to alert the reader to possible referent meanings even as it disorients them through its seeming inscrutability. If the text and the art fit together on *MACHINA*, the fit is incomplete, with some pieces missing and others overlapping or contradictory.

This disorienting sense of contradictory incompleteness finds expression as well in the performances of the songs on the disc itself. For the task of making *MACHINA* a performative reality Corgan enlisted the help of Flood, who last produced the Smashing Pumpkins on the 1995 opus *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, the best-selling album of the nineties, thanks in no small part to the vast orchestral brutality which Flood captured. *MACHINA*, however, seems at times dense and incoherent, its melodies masked by the gauze of echoing sustains and bass-heavy drums. On *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, Flood demonstrates his ability to polish the numerous facets of the band's sound. On *MACHINA*, the sound appears to have been scratched to a haze; Flood's intent for the record, it seems, was to sonically match the mnemonic haze visually and textually represented elsewhere on the album. As the narrator remembers GLASS through impenetrable fogs of diction and the engraved plates obscure their remembrances with symbolic intermediaries, the audience also is afforded impressioned memories of GLASS firsthand via the album's production quality.

¹⁹ <http://www.levity.com/alchemy> accessed February 20, 2007.

²⁰ <http://www.vsapartners.com> accessed March 15, 2007.

The red-lettering of the liner notes, however, complicates the proposition that on *MACHINA* the audience hears GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD and not the Smashing Pumpkins. If the singer is GLASS, why aren't *all* the lyrics printed in red? Some of the songs on the album seem to function more fully in the narrative if attributed to other characters, namely "Stand Inside Your Love" as the voice of JUNE and "The Imploding Voice" as the voice of the I of the Radio, directing GLASS' prophetic posture.

Ultimately, the various and disparate chards of *MACHINA* all point, however indeterminately, to the shattered person of GLASS and his unifying message of love. An informed understanding of what this means, however, is unavailable without considerable effort on the part of the audience at discerning the possible ways in which the images, texts, and sounds of *MACHINA* fit together. Each image, each song, each lyric contains unique information that may or may not be reflected elsewhere in *MACHINA*. The engraved plates do not accurately illustrate the lyrics and the lyrics do not accurately describe the visual content of the engraved plates. Several of the songs were recorded in multiple versions, some of which alter the moods and themes of the released versions entirely. Even individual media deny seekers a cohesive narrative: none of the media used in *MACHINA* carry the entire story alone. Charged with approaching the idea of GLASS across this archipelago of media, the audience finds his identity in refractions of pieces left behind. By shattering conventional linkages between the media used in the narrative, Corgan's audience helps construct a narrative that, properly conceived, doesn't exist directly in any of the media used to point to it.

In 2001 Billy Corgan posted over a dozen illuminated prints by British Romantic William Blake to the band's website, arguably with the intent of contextualizing

MACHINA as the inheritor of a number of Blake's attitudes toward the uses of media in the creative process. The alienation and disaffection on which Corgan lights in his communicative methodology are not problems unique to the audiences of the Information Age. At even their earliest stages of industrialization, mass media have been deformed, detonated, and repurposed by those who have sought to repersonalize the tools of communication and to reconnect with their audiences in more legitimate ways. Through his experiments in illuminated printing, Blake deliberately mismatches text and image in an attempt to circumvent the limitations of his working medium.

To his detriment, Blake is known principally as a poet, more specifically as the first of six dead white men commonly grouped together as the British Romantics. In this respect, Blake's skill is widely lauded: though arguably less popular than his fellow Romantics, Blake is the most anthologized poet in the English language and "the Tyger," from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, is his most anthologized poem. The illustrations that accompany the words of these much-celebrated texts, along with later illuminations *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the prophecies *America* and *Europe*, and others largely are disregarded.

More often than not, William Blake is considered a poet who developed illustrations to supplement his text. Such an understanding of Blake's work has historically been the province of English literary criticism and is presently the primary avenue for engaging Blake's revolutionary ideas. More often than not, this mode of critical inquiry results in a general disregard for Blake's art; few of those immediately familiar with "the Tyger" can recall with equal ease the image of which the poem is a component part, and many may never have even seen it. As often as his poetry is

reproduced, his art rarely accompanies it into publication. In general, conventional art critics have found little use for Blake's words, just as more conventional literary critics find little of value in Blake's images. As critic Morris Eaves says, "Blake's doubleness [is] a kind of duplicity, an indigestible alliance, like a dessert combined with an entrée."²¹

The problem with primarily artistic or primarily verbal approaches to Blake's work, then, is that information necessary to understanding Blake's meaning comes in forms both visual and verbal. Blake may find so little understanding at the hands of conventional critics because neither he nor his message was conventional. Through a unique juxtaposition of visual and textual elements, Blake affords his audience the opportunity to participate actively in making meaning of the plates laid before them. Readers familiar only with Blake's poetry are largely unaware of this mismatch and are often surprised by the images that accompany his texts. Simply put, the images do not so much reflect the meaning of the text as they refract it, ultimately revealing both media to be insufficient conveyors of imaginative meaning.

"The Tyger" stands as a prime exemplar of this disjunction of symbolic expression. Those familiar with the text "the Tyger" can recall the ominous incantation describing a sinewy, powerful beast, forged in the mind of a hephaestian forge-god: "and what the anvil/and what the chain/in what furnace was your brain?"²² By the poem's end, the fearsome majesty of the "tyger" and its creator approach inconceivability: "What immortal hand or eye," reads the final line, "dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"²³ Upon

²¹ Eaves, Morris. "Blake as Conceived: Lessons in Endurance." Foreword. S. Foster Damon. *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988. xi.

²² This and all subsequent quotations of Blake's poetry are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman. New York: Anchor Books, 1988.

²³ Ibid.

consultation of Blake's accompanying illumination, however, such fear yields to confusion and a confrontation of that incongruity between text and image. In soft lines, standing beneath a tree more appropriate for the pastoral entries in Blake's *Songs*, stands what is arguably the cutest tiger ever envisioned. With a round face and large, bright eyes, Blake's image of a "tyger" seems to violate the very schemata established in his text.

Further, Blake complicates the whole process by producing multiple copies of the piece, each of which varies widely from the others in its coloration and shading. Paradoxically, Blake's method of illuminated printing affords him the opportunity to quickly reproduce *different* copies of each work. Arguments for interpreting Blake's work simply cannot be built on individual copies of his illuminated works, as the tone of each plate changes with its colors. Even the "tyger's" expression changes from the sly smile to a sick, fretful expression as well as a blank stare. Ferocity never appears among Blake's visual concerns for the piece though, as an accomplished professional engraver, his artistry was certainly capable of affording his subject ferocity.

Likewise, Corgan produces for *MACHINA* and *MACHINA II* multiple versions of several of the project's songs. "If There is a God," "Heavy Metal Machine, and "Glass' Theme" all receive multiple treatments, each with its own particular take on the song's content and tone. "If There is a God," which captures Glass' doubts in the validity of his message, transforms from a swirling, ringing rock ballad to an introverted, vulnerable prayer sung against a solo piano. "Try, Try, Try," whose video by Jonas Åkerlund was banned by MTV for its graphic portrayal of a day in the life of a young homeless couple, also appears on *MACHINA II* in an altered form.

If 3-D goggles induce binocular disparities for which the mind must compensate, it may be said that Blake's illuminations function to generate bisensory disparities. Forced to reconcile the notion that both the text and the image succeed in describing a tiger, the viewer's mind ultimately points to its own categorical understandings of the concept "tyger" and what qualities constitute membership in that class of things. Whereas Blake's text and his image are merely sense media, they prompt the audience to engage him at a level of imagination, where "the Tyger" is *both* ferocious and felicitous. As David Erdman remarks in "America: New Expanses, "the text is not there to help us follow the pictures, nor the pictures to help us visualize the text; both lead us to an imaginative leap in the dark..."²⁴ that Blake implores us to make with his experiments in illuminated printing. As Aldous Huxley says in *Heaven and Hell*, "Blake never produced such an image [as he describes]."²⁵

Instead, Blake proposes a quantum leap in imaginative communication. Rather than preservers of meanings themselves, the sense media Blake employs serve as signposts toward a creative moment controlled by neither medium alone, but concomitant with the audience's contemplation of Blake's intended disparities. It is this desire to supersede the limitations of mass media that Billy Corgan shares with Blake. In developing a method of engraving that proved laborious and time-consuming, Blake seemed to thumb his nose at the push toward the efficient, expedient reproductions of an industrialized engraving industry. Similarly, Corgan flexes the muscles of the media

²⁴ Erdman, David V.. "America: New Expanses." *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*. Eds. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970. 92-103, 109-111.

²⁵ Huxley, Aldous. "Heaven and Hell." *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954. 120-132.

available to him; what he presents to his audience is less a rock album than a toolbox of mismatched and incomplete story fragments. By choosing to piece together the shards of GLASS that compose *MACHINA*, Corgan's audience answers a call to those disenchanted by and distrustful of the "progress" of mass media and information technology. To those who, disenchanted with the industrialization of "pop" as an aesthetic, would say "rock is dead", *MACHINA* seems to counter that its broken pieces might be reconstituted and made new. What *MACHINA* accomplishes is the establishment of a cocreated conversation, between Billy Corgan and each of his participants, that paradoxically takes as its communal conversational center a sense of disaffect, detachment, and alienation.

If culture changes with the exchanges of its individual constituents, then the speed to which information technology has quickened human exchange is leaving in its wake a community of people numbed by the pace. As the metanarratives of the "global village" seek to homogenize the varieties of human experience, more and more people find themselves no longer "spoken to" by expressions geared for a worldwide audience. Instead, they are forced to the borders and the edges of society by the onward march of a cultural narrative that, in its breadth, cannot possibly tolerate the nuances of locality, either of place or of self. The compulsion to restory, to reorient oneself in time and space, is fundamentally a concern of the spiritual mind: "the spiritual imagination," writes Erik Davis in the introduction to *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Information Age*, "seizes information technology for its own purposes. In this sense, technologies of communication are always, at least potentially, technologies of the

sacred....”²⁶ The compiler of *MACHINA* certainly seems to vest his efforts at gathering and communicating his witness to GLASS with sacred import, claiming in the first excerpt that “these lights rise to search the heavens, straining to be recognized in sanctity, purity, and insolence...to hopefully catch the gaze of a supreme intelligence, watching us quietly and nodding a silent approval...”²⁷

The extent to which Corgan succeeds in disseminating a narrative that demands so much from his audience is an issue that demands consideration. Though the album sold 165,000 copies in its first week, by October 2005 *MACHINA* had sold only 582,000 copies, failing to earn the album any sales certification beyond “gold.”²⁸ In contrast, 1991’s *Gish*, 1993’s *Siamese Dream*, 1995’s *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, and 1998’s *Adore* all were certified as “platinum,” indicating that each has sold over 1,000,000 copies.²⁹ In an age where digital media outlets like YouTube can help anyone with a digital camera reach an audience of millions almost instantly, less than 600,000 copies in seven years hardly seems like a success.

Considering the nature of the narrative he intended to construct and the way in which it was constructed, however, I think it is an erroneous assertion to consider *MACHINA* a failure. Through his language, the narrator indicates that this narrative is for “those who wished to be spoken to.” Through his denial of any explanation either of the engraved plates or the red-lettered lyrics, he beckons those who feel so compelled to piece them together. Moreover, most of the *MACHINA* narrative ultimately is released via the band’s site. More of the narrative’s songs occur on *MACHINA II*, which was

²⁶ Davis, Erik. *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information*. New York: Harmony Books, 1998. 8.

²⁷ *MACHINA/The Machines of God*. Liner Notes.

²⁸ Statistic retrieved from <http://www.mtv.com> March 9, 2007.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

released online, than on the conventionally released *MACHINA*. At all turns, the success of the *MACHINA* project consists in the cocreative response of its audience, not in the size of that audience.

Like Blake, Billy Corgan trades in the paradoxes associated with using a mass industrialized medium to engage his audience in a profoundly personal way. By catching the audience's senses off guard with a deliberate discord between multiple media, both Blake and Corgan generate a kind of stereoscopic imagination. In the way it patches together scraps of media to present a fractured narrative of a shattered hero, *MACHINA* speaks to the fracture of its audience just as Blake intended his illuminations to speak to the "finite organical perceptions" of his sensually-imprisoned audience who, like Corgan's audience, are rightly described as "infinitely varied and alike in their infinite variety." *MACHINA* is a narrative, like the community that uses it, "sewn of old cloth" and made new and whole.

**CHAPTER TWO:
“Shattering Fast/Shattering Glass”: Campbell’s Hero Refracted**

In the occluded, obtuse way the narrator of *MACHINA* relates the mysteries of GLASS, he demands a response from the reader. If that reader should feel him or herself “spoken to” by the arcane inscrutability laid before her, by her own volition they choose to become an audience. This choice, in an age of advertising bombardment, speaks to many as a welcome change, as a reinvigoration of sense and self-awareness, and as a sanctification of the profane. In the *poesis* of the senses, one *becomes*. By choosing to participate, Corgan’s audience constitutes itself when everywhere there are advocates of apathy, of slack-jawed consumerism. Staring into the chards of *MACHINA*, participants respond to reflections, however refracted, of themselves. It is around the person of GLASS that this community develops.

With each supplement to the hodgepodge of *MACHINA*, Billy Corgan reveals greater depths, complexities, and contradictions all pointing to the center of the story, the character of GLASS. In his rise and fall, however discordant and nonlinear, an audience “without focus, without generation, without peer” sees its own becoming and unbecoming. At all turns, GLASS is a self in flux, a self in process. As he performed the role of GLASS on the “Sacred + Profane” tour that accompanied *MACHINA*’s initial release, Billy alternated between black, white, and silver tunics, placing himself symbolically into a space of alchemical process, of dissolution and coagulation, of fusing and shattering.

If we are to believe the author of GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD that GLASS ought to be referred to as “our hero,” then the flux and process he endures are of critical value to the audience. Through the audience’s initial choice to respond, they are

passed into a narrative space in which GLASS' rise and fall speaks to each of them deeply and intimately. "You're all a part of me now,"³⁰ he says in the song "the Sacred + Profane," the effect is one of vicarious participation; GLASS' audience rises with him, but it shatters with him as well. The legitimacy of this vicarious participation is predicated on a seeming universality to which the narrator alludes on multiple occasions. As the voice tells GLASS in excerpt one, "you are one of many more to come," a speaker to some deeper commonly experienced reality. "His story is the same story, and as with all without ending," writes the narrator in excerpt one. As the growth and development of the *MACHINA* saga drew to a close, Billy Corgan capped his hybrid narrative with "GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD: A Modern Fable," in which he outlines in conversational English the narrative arc refracted by the various other media composing *MACHINA*. Though it sums up the forces and characters in his work, Corgan's fable explains less new material than it confirms what his audience/community had already surmised from his disparate media.

Through the din of his disjointed media, Corgan's GLASS reflects and refracts elements of each individual counted among his audience. As his rise, climax, shattering, and denouement reflect the *agon* experienced by each of his respondents, GLASS becomes a hero whose story exemplifies the rites of passage as delineated by Joseph Campbell in his enormously influential 1949 text *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* and elaborated upon in *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space, Myths to Live By*, and other later works. Moreover, I intend to argue that Corgan's *MACHINA* distorts, detonates, and otherwise modifies the hero in ways that signify the needs of his disaffected, alienated audience. In particular, I hope to demonstrate that, unlike Campbell, Corgan brings his

³⁰ "The Sacred + Profane", from *MACHINA/The Machines of God*.

community together around the very varieties and differences that had relegated them to a space of marginality in more calcified, static forms of Campbell's hero journey. By shattering it then cloaking its universality in the alchemical tongues of dissolution and coagulation, Corgan is able to reinvigorate Campbell's cycle of separation, initiation, and return distrusted by his audience with a sanctified relevance which constitutes the grounds on which they feel themselves "spoken to."

"This is About the Similarities": Campbell's Monomyth

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell takes as his principal project the construction or, rather, the illumination of what he calls the *monomyth*, a term which first appears in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.³¹ Campbell employs the word to name a deep structural pattern underlying the varieties of ways communities and cultures worldwide narrate themselves, their values, and the dramatic passage rites that serve to cement both in the minds of the coproducers of culture. As he catalogues "the numerous strange rituals"³² of various cultures from various epochs in human history, the similarities which they share rise to the surface and become apparent. Drawing on psychoanalytic work by Freud and Jung who, in turn, draw on Nietzsche and others, Campbell cites the "modern science of reading dreams"³³ as the most suitable line of approach to this deep structure, disregarding for the moment the varied topographies of the myths he engages.

At all turns, Campbell works to illustrate the universality of each of a number of mythic dramas and rites. The mechanisms that make each myth profitable for the

³¹ <http://www.merriamwebster.com>.

³² Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Princeton Bollingen, 1968. 10.

³³ *Ibid* 8.

interpretive audience lie deeper in the base structure of the human mind. For Campbell, these myths seem to have little meaning apart from the structural muscles they flex. Disparities, it appears, are the result merely of cultural circumstance and are negligible with regard to the task at hand. “There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind,” Campbell writes in the preface, “but this is a book about similarities; and once these are understood, the differences will be much less than is popularly (or politically) supposed.”³⁴ As I apply Campbell’s monomythic structure to the narrative topography of *GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD*, I intend to demonstrate that while Corgan utilizes the deep structural elements of the monomyth, the differences are not “less than is...supposed,” but rather contribute integrally to the significance and particularity of the narrative and the needs of its audience. To accomplish this, an exploration of each of Campbell’s stages, and the ways in which each does or does not find accurate reflection in Corgan’s own work, is necessary.

“I Disconnect the Me in Me:” The Hero Departs

The first general stage of the monomythic deep structure as outlined by Campbell is that of Separation. Here, the hero experiences a series of events that lead him from the surface or superstructure back into what Campbell calls in Freudian fashion the “nursery vignettes”³⁵ of his or her particular locality; that is, some combination of events, however extraordinary or mundane, serves to compel the hero away from his or her day-to-day experiences and toward the adventure which will ultimately transform him or her. First among these propellant experiences is the “Call to Adventure,” which acts as the initial

³⁴ Ibid *viii*.

³⁵ Ibid 49.

stimulus to which our hero responds; in this response, the hero is compelled take up a new mantle of identity.³⁶ In all cases, though this call may appear either portentous or coincidental, Campbell draws on Freud to conclude that no such event is ever *really* happenstance, coincidence, or blunder; rather, such events are ripples across the surface of life caused by deeper, suppressed desires and conflicts.³⁷

Campbell differentiates between the actual call to adventure, the event or interaction itself which leads to the hero's departure, and the caller, or "herald," who makes that call. Utilizing Grimm's "Frog King" as his guiding example, Campbell asserts that the frog itself is the herald, while his appearance at the well is the princess' call to adventure. The herald's summons, he claims, can be to any number of actions: to live, to die, to seek religious illumination, or to complete "some high historical undertaking" may all appear as summonses of the herald. According to Corgan's explanatory "fable" GLASS, the voice heard on both *MACHINA* and *MACHINA II*, was once known as "zero [sic]," leader of the Smashing Pumpkins; in concert, then, the band is at once performer *and* performance. In this way, it might be argued that the entire Pumpkins' catalog prior to the release of *MACHINA* serves as a record of this previous, remembered self. The realization that accompanies this argument is that *MACHINA* is a narrative begun *in medeas res*, with roots reaching far back into the Smashing Pumpkins' catalog.

Just as the audience might remember GLASS by listening to his recordings, so too is the audience permitted an audience with zero. Just as he performs GLASS in the tracks and tours surrounding *MACHINA*, he adopts in some sense the performance of

³⁶ Ibid 50.

³⁷ Ibid 51. Here, Campbell is engaging claims made in Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 1901.

zero as well in videos and performances. First in the music video for “Bullet with Butterfly Wings” and later on the “Infinite Sadness” tour, Corgan performs this zero-self visibly, performing in a long-sleeved black tee shirt emblazoned with the word “ZERO” in metallic silver across his chest. Zero’s title track, as it were, appears as the fourth track (on the band’s fourth LP release) on 1995’s *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*. In the ways it captures a base state of the persona who will in five years’ time become “our hero, thrice blessed”³⁸, the lyrics of “Zero” warrant quotation at length:

*My reflection, dirty mirror
Is no connection to myself
I’m your lover, I’m your zero
I’m the face in your dreams of GLASS
So save your prayers
For when we’re really going to need them
Throw out all your cares and fly
Want to go for a ride?
She’s the one for me
She’s all I really need, oh yeah
She’s the one for me
Emptiness is loneliness
And loneliness is cleanliness
And cleanliness is godliness
And god is empty, just like me
Intoxicated with the madness
I’m in love with my sadness
Bullshit fakirs, enchanted kingdoms
The fashion victims chew their charcoal teeth
I never let on that I was on a sinking ship
I never let on that I was down
You blame yourself for what you can’t ignore
You blame yourself for wanting more and more
She’s the one for me
She’s all I really need, oh yeah
She’s the one for me
She’s my one and only³⁹*

³⁸ The narrator’s designation of GLASS as “thrice blessed” in excerpt one calls to mind notions of Hermes Trismegistus, “thrice-great Hermes” who serves as an allegorical progenitor for hermetic wisdom traditions.

³⁹ *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, released October 24, 1995.

It is without God and without love, but with a glut of material success, that “our hero” encounters such a herald and such a call to adventure as Campbell describes in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. With respect to the narrative arc of *MACHINA*, this cycle-starting call occurs prior to the release/utterance of *MACHINA/the MACHINES of GOD*, though we are offered a fleeting account of zero’s call to adventure in the narrator’s first excerpt: “amongst [the trappings of fame] our hero dies zero and finds a dead station moving static code....the voice says you are one of many more to come.”⁴⁰ As Corgan later explains in the “fable,” zero’s call to adventure arrives in the form a voice, taken by zero to be the voice of god, speaking “slowly and clearly” to him and calling him to prophecy. This hero’s herald is none other than God him/her/itself. The commands of this voice, dubbed by GLASS “the I of the Radio,” are preserved in the ninth track of *MACHINA*, “The Imploding Voice”: “your love must always be true/your love must always be you.” At all turns, the prophetic role to which zero is called is tied inextricably to his person: “all you have to do,” sings the I of the Radio, “is play the part of who you are.”⁴¹

That this voice is called “the I of the Radio” also alludes to the notion that zero’s self is ultimately identical to the voice of God speaking through the radio to him. As Corgan explains, “it was the voice he had heard in his head since he was a child, only now it spoke thru [sic] the radio.”⁴² Zero’s destiny, he realizes as he listens, is to transcend the trappings of material successes and, in so doing, speak to a deeper yearning in both himself and his audience. Fulfilling the next essential sub-phase of Campbell’s

⁴⁰ *MACHINA/The Machines of God*. Liner Notes.

⁴¹ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org> January 9 2007.

⁴² *GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD: A Summary*. Retrieved from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/glass7.shtml> on March 12, 2007.

hero journey, he accepts the call; the effect is transformative. Rather than the valueless, loveless, godless self pointed to by the term zero, “our hero” is now allied, indeed identified, with God. Vested with the responsibility of speaking on God’s behalf,⁴³ of serving as a figurative “filter of light” between God and his audience, zero changes his name to GLASS to reflect his new station. To reflect the band’s new role as his support in this Campbellian adventure in prophecy, GLASS changes the name of the band to “the aptly titled MACHINES of GOD.”

According to Campbell, the hero’s acceptance of the herald’s call to adventure is sometimes preceded by an initial refusal or deferral to depart into the journey. In *GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD*, no such refusal is readily available as a distinct phase of our protagonist’s journey. Many of the Greek heroes and fairytale characters Campbell cites are useful to Freud, Jung, and other psychoanalysts for the ways they reduce and condense the moral interests they represent. GLASS, rather than exhibiting a singular distinctive refusal phase, carries his refusal with him throughout the narrative. Internalized as a persistent doubt, GLASS’ internal conflict of refusal and acceptance of what the I of the Radio tells him torques his character and produces his ultimate dissolution. Rather than an initial refusal which accedes to acceptance of the call, GLASS both accepts *and* rejects the call at once. The narrator/compiler indicates as much in the first excerpt, wondering on behalf of both the audience and GLASS himself, “...but were the sounds his?” Torn between self-conceptions as prophet and as madman, GLASS’ voices his own doubts on *MACHINA*’s tenth track, “GLASS + The Ghost Children.” At the center of the nine minute, fifty-four second song, the music fades into

⁴³ *Pro phêtes*: Gr. “to speak for.” Literally, GLASS is a prophet.

hazy obscurity and leaves the scratched distorted voice of GLASS describing his fast-shattering mental state against a solo piano:

So, it's all very obtuse because it's all like, like, I don't know...so, like, I started thinking that everything I operate on is based on what I believe God was telling me to do...God could be my intuition or whatever, but I always assume--I always assume that the voice I hear is the voice of God. Then I started thinking, "what if I'm insane?" So I'm operating on the premise that I'm hearing the voice of God or what I perceive to be God speaking to me--or through me--but maybe I'm completely in--so all my... demagoguery in my life about me thinking that my life has importance--my, my--thinking that my life has importance--my, my, my thought of it, and the fact that I believe that I'm following my intuition, which in and of itself may be completely false, so then I started freaking out thinking--of itself may be completely false, and again this creature that believes that he's acting upon heavenly intuition, but meanwhile he's totally rampant... and I started thinking maybe this is the cause of all the negativity against--and I started thinking maybe this is the cause of all the negativity against--and I started thinking maybe this is the cause of all the negativity against--

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The repeated phrases in this transcription represent points at which the recording seems to skip or rewind, playing with GLASS' sense of self in interesting ways. His refusal is always with him in the form of this internal doubt, causing stress on his character and coloring or transforming other phases of the journey he will endure. He proceeds through the changing of his name and the name of his band, but never seems to fully devote his faith, trust, and loyalty to the validity of the message he transmits.

Though conflicted internally, GLASS and the MACHINES OF GOD return to the public sphere and to an audience who had last known them as zero and the Smashing Pumpkins. For both GLASS and his audience, the return to performance and the release of *MACHINA* mark what Campbell calls the "threshold," a discrete point at which the adventure has begun. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, *MACHINA*'s role as the

⁴⁴ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org> March 20, 2007.

adventure-threshold is represented visually on the album's cover, where the title appears as follows:

THE SMASHING PUMPKINS/*MACHINA*/ the machines of God

Textually, the name *MACHINA* serves as an engine of transformation. Where the album was typically referred to in music criticism and music stores as “*MACHINA/the machines of God*,” it seems more profitable to understand the artistic performance as *MACHINA* and the band performing it as The MACHINES of GOD. The album also serves as a threshold which draws the individuals of Corgan's audience in as GLASS' companions on his adventure. The first line of the album, “you know I'm not dead,” seems less profitably understood as a return of the Smashing Pumpkins than as a resurrected and transformed GLASS speaking to his audience. When Billy Corgan follows the first line with the next, “now you know where I've been,” he speaks not as a returned rock star, but as a transfigured prophet. Visually and sonically, Corgan establishes the album's release as a distinct demarcation in the story. The first threshold has been crossed.

After crossing the first threshold, Campbell claims, the hero is then plunged into the world-womb symbolized by the “belly of the whale.”⁴⁵ A dangerous space, this is the first proving ground for the hero, as he must traverse this initial dangerous environment as a kind of fire-test of his fortitude. In the case of GLASS, I contend that his very return to the public gaze constitutes the first real threat to his journey and his message. To an audience he had last left as zero, full of angst and vitriol, GLASS and his message of “Real Love” constitute quite a punch in the gut. For those who make their trade in sadness and despair, tropes of the nineties' “grunge scene,” an attempt to approach

⁴⁵ Campbell 70.

legitimacy would have been a clarion call. Like the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, GLASS begins knowing that few will listen and that even fewer will understand, but for those with “only a little dust” in their eyes, he must continue. With the court of public opinion as his dangerous space, GLASS and the MACHINES “shakes [sic] voltage”, their lights “ris[ing] to search the heavens.” The adventure is begun.

“Who Wouldn’t Stand Inside Your Love?” The Hero’s Initiation

Now on tour, GLASS’ road of trials has begun. His changed outlook and message have jarred numerous among his fans, who cry aloud that zero has betrayed them. Each performance becomes a trial for both GLASS and his audience. “GLASS disintegrates it all for your entertainment,” the narrator proclaims in the third excerpt, titled “GLASS and the SYNTHETIC ARMY pt. III.” At once guided by “love, the constant signal that heals and promotes” and racked by doubt, his changed message alienates the more casual among his audience and causes them to desert GLASS. Those that remain are directed “to the center of the earth/or anywhere God decides.”⁴⁶

For Campbell as well as for Corgan, this directs the hero to a search for his *anima*, his feminine other, called “our angel who has waited so long” by the narrator/compiler. He had long searched for her and called her by many names in his sonic communiqués, but her presence had so far evaded him. The reconciliation of the hero to his goddess, of “a boy and a girl, simple yes but eternal always,”⁴⁷ is “the ultimate adventure,” Campbell claims in the outset of his remarks on the meeting of the goddess. The narrator describes her and her links to GLASS in excerpt one:

⁴⁶ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org> March 1, 2007.

⁴⁷ GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD, excerpt 1.

*the girl, his love, the light that would transform any story into the moon and it's [sic] sister stars...she had no faith but that which destroys, and had only known herself in coarse mirrors, giving over and unto whatever moved her...opium eyed and gouge mouthed, she stalked a barren trail because she believed that all that was good had died long before she was named...she the reflection in glass, he in her that which he could not claim, her in him that which she so desperately needed, forever breaking...she had chased black holes of silence to find peace, and in turn that darkness swept into her a fever that was unshakable...their fates had intertwined long before they were lovers, their moment extending back before a time their eyes first met, and that bond was eternal, thru[sic] fire and chard to meet again and again until this moment, our apex and conclusion...*⁴⁸

In the experience of meeting her, chronicled visually in plate V, titled “Desire Holds the Moment Still,” GLASS comes to learn what Campbell claims all heroes learn when meeting their goddesses: “the totality of what can be known.” Allied with GOD and allied with JUNE, GLASS for the first time is complete. As June embodies everything he is not, she is an integral part of his own identity. Corgan reflects this sentiment in an interview given to promote the narrative on Sony’s now-defunct Screenblast service. “June in the story, really embodies, you know, the female essence against GLASS’ male energy, but GLASS is sort of an androgynous figure and in some ways, the feminine JUNE has some male characteristics,”⁴⁹ Corgan claims in explicating the project.

Their meeting, for Campbell, is “the crisis at the nadir, the zenith, or at the uttermost edge of the earth, at the central point of the cosmos, in the tabernacle of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart.”⁵⁰ For GLASS and JUNE, their union occurs at all these points and all in between; it is, for our narrator/compiler, “our apex and conclusion,” though he/she intimates this in what comes

⁴⁸ *MACHINA/The Machines of God*. Liner notes.

⁴⁹ Billy Corgan. Interview retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com> on March 19, 2007.

⁵⁰ Campbell 109.

to be the first tenth of the story. “She is,” Campbell writes, “the incarnation of the promise of perfection.”⁵¹

One necessary aspect critical to an appreciation of JUNE as GLASS’ anima, as his goddess-other, is the notion that she stands not only as the birth of everything that lives, but also, as Campbell says, “the death of everything that dies.”⁵² If GLASS is, at once and at all times, both an acceptor of the call and a refuser of the call, JUNE is at once GLASS’ goddess even as she is his temptress, the next stage in Campbell’s path of initiation. Even as JUNE serves as the prime enabler for GLASS’ prophetic mission, she draws life from him by tethering him to material success. “GLASS finds himself torn between his new love and his calling as a messenger,” Corgan explains in the “fable.” Unable to capably handle the freedom and power brought by GLASS’ hedonistic message of “Real Love,” JUNE allows herself to spiral into a drug addiction fueled by GLASS’ fame and the money it brings. While Campbell claims the temptress’ temptations may be deliberate, in the case of GLASS and JUNE all actions seem tied inextricably to the core of their actors; that is, JUNE’s temptation of GLASS is less a desire of hers to derail GLASS than it is merely who she is and his response to her. Nevertheless, she is his desire for liberation incarnate, a station which plunges her into a druggy haze. Torn between her world of material excess and the message he feels compelled to broadcast, GLASS explains to JUNE that all he does is prompted by mystical interaction with GOD. One might interpret the previously-quoted passage from “GLASS + the Ghost Children” as his confession to JUNE, whom he is sure is too

⁵¹ Ibid 111.

⁵² Campbell 114.

incoherent to have understood either his confession that GOD is directing his action or that he doubts that very confession and instead may be “totally rampant.”

Choosing to dedicate himself to his message and, by doing so, save JUNE and everyone else around him, GLASS commits totally to his message of healing. As he does this, GLASS atones himself with the father-figure of his journey, GOD himself. As Corgan notes in the “fable,” however, this abandonment of doubt, of the subtly ubiquitous refusal of his mission, ultimately is his undoing. While he attempts to save everyone around him, indeed everyone with ears to hear the voltage shaken by the MACHINES of GOD, “he has forgotten to save himself.” As he commits single-mindedly to his prophetic pose, GLASS casts off all the other parts of himself, leaving his life little more than a rote exercise in perfunctory stardom. Committed to his mission to the exclusion of all other parts of his selfhood, GLASS artificially constructs his own Campbellian apotheosis, the subphase which follows the hero’s atonement with the father figure.

In Apotheosis, GLASS fully becomes both prophet and deceiver and elevates to a godlike status. This elevation of GLASS beyond and in spite of any doubts he might have had is evidenced in the sixth excerpt. Calling the sixth missive an “excerpt,” however, is not an entirely accurate designation. Rather, the sixth textual installment of the GLASS narrative was released in person, by hand, at the Summersault festival in Toronto in the summer of 2000. Those lucky enough to have received a paper copy were instructed to post theirs online, interweaving locality and metalocality in the narrative. In addition, the text missive handed out appears not as the voice of the omniscient narrator, but as one who has witnessed GLASS’ apotheosis. “DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR

SAVIOR IS???” begins the text, continuing to describe the I of the Radio as a clear and present savior. The certainty of the speaker, however, seems unnerving and paranoid, especially toward the end of the missive where the speaker catalogs items to be covered in the next issue, including “the Children of Today: their dreams, wishes, and how to control them.”⁵³

This witness echoes GLASS’ own paranoia, which seemingly results from his denial of doubt. It is at this time that *MACHINA II* is released within the narrative arc of the story, and a very different GLASS appears, full of ego, certainty, and a brashness not seen in the sincerity of his earlier recordings. “You say I’m beautiful? Well, I can’t help it,”⁵⁴ he snarls self-satisfyingly on “Dross”, the album’s third track. Seemingly given completely over to fate, GLASS no longer sees the need for his own actions in the fulfillment of his destiny. In “GLASS’ THEME,” which might arguably stand against “Zero” as an encapsulation of its character, GLASS instructs his listeners to “hold all my calls/’cause I’ll be by the pool/playing with my guns/’cause there’s nowhere to run.”⁵⁵ As GLASS increases in his certainty regarding his fate, he seems more inclined toward the temptations symbolized by JUNE’s drug habits. This hypocrisy lies only thinly veiled and prompts all of his new work to ring hollow, empty of the promise and import of GLASS’ first album. Love, it seems, has been replaced by money in the topography of GLASS’ values.

This hollowness of message and of messenger can be found in several sonic cues planted in the album. In particular, the chorus of “GLASS’ theme” borrows the lines “we’re coming to your town/we’ll help you party down/we’re an American band” from

⁵³ Retrived from <http://blamo.org/sp/news/glass6.shtml> March 19, 2007.

⁵⁴ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

“We’re an American Band” by Grand Funk Railroad. However, while the original is a testament to light-hearted hedonism, on “GLASS’ theme” its felicity has been cast off in favor of metallic menace, giving the listener no reason to anticipate the arrival of GLASS and his voltage-shaking MACHINES. One of the most particular instances of similar character is on the performance of “Soul Power,” originally recorded by James Brown and the Famous Flames. If GLASS’ original project was to reinvigorate zero’s metal stardom with a sincerity and earnestness precipitated by love, these sentiments are nowhere to be found on “Soul Power.” Loud, brash, and incendiary, the one thing curiously lacking from GLASS’ cover of James Brown is the “soul power” that earns the track its name. With *MACHINA II*, everything the audience holds dear has been hollowed out and sold. What made GLASS a meaningful prophet was that he was *not* a God. As he is deified in the public sphere for his bullish adoption of the prophetic pose, however, his meaning seems gone.

The results of this commodification of prophecy are immediately visible. Treating him like the commodity he has made himself to be, the fans leave him behind. Moreover, JUNE decides as well that she no longer needs him. After a final spat, she leaves and is killed when her car slides off the road. Blaming GOD, the father with whom he had atoned for this disaster, GLASS overcorrects from absolute certainty to absolute doubt, denying any validity from the perceptual filters he has constructed. In a moment of rash decision, he claims in a radio interview that the *MACHINES* will play one final show.

The night before the show, GLASS receives his Campbellian boon, which Campbell claims is often realized in the meeting of an indestructible “other.” The notion

of this indestructible other, Campbell claims, is ubiquitous. “An external soul not afflicted by the losses and injuries of the present body, but existing safely in some place removed.”⁵⁶ It is just such an indestructible other whom GLASS meets in the form of a dream. In his dream, GLASS realizes that he is a soldier in a war, wandering empty streets with gun in hand, looking for either friend *or* foe. In a darkened stairwell he meets another soldier, one without a face, who leads him into the deepest basements of a bombed-out building. Though no speech is exchanged between them, they communicate by being near one another, beneath the stark bulb-light of this decrepit shelter. His identification with this faceless soldier, this indestructible other, becomes his boon: “he is just an animal, seeking shelter, warmth, food, and love,” writes Corgan in the explanatory “fable.” With this knowledge of his own humanity and humility, GLASS plays the final show with the *MACHINES* then retreats from the public sphere. With all of his posturing “shattered,” he is reduced to zero and is, for the first time in years, totally and utterly alone.

“I’m Never Alone”: The Hero Returns

Paradoxically, GLASS’ boon is his nadir; it is his reception of special knowledge about himself, and consequently about the world in which he moves, that cauterizes his being, casting off the dross of pretense. Worse, he is forgotten by the public, an act of communal rejection of memory that stands directly opposite GLASS’ plays for sympathy. “Funny how this revolution was televised and everybody got bored and changed the channel,” muses the author of “GLASS and the SYNTHETIC ARMY, pt. III” to no one in particular.

⁵⁶ Campbell 119.

A quality typical among the varied examples used by Joseph Campbell to illustrate his hero's journey is that, upon receiving the boon, the hero refuses his return, choosing instead to remain in the center of his bliss and enlightenment. In GLASS' case such a refusal seems impossible: his bliss and enlightenment are inextricably linked to his return to his former self. Indeed, it seems the only way they can be accessed at all is by returning to zero. In blaming God for the death of JUNE, he loses them both. As Corgan says, "now all the things that gave him strength, focus, and identity are gone...he faces his own doubt and mortality for the first time." He does this not where GLASS and zero had plied their trade, in the public gaze, but in solitude, walking the streets only at dawn, when the chances of human interaction are minimized.

As he meditates on his own mortal nature, GLASS/zero forgives and accepts the things that have happened to him in his rise and fall, seizing on an inner peace that comes with realizing that, rather than a wholly external agent, GOD speaks to him without the need for other media. Instead, he finds that his own agency is distinct yet inseparable from the sacred ultimate which he had sought his whole life: if one wished to include ZWAN, Billy's post-Pumpkins band, in his greater narrative arc, one might find the emancipated zero singing "God and Heaven are all my own"⁵⁷ on their debut album, *Mary/Star of the Sea*. Armed with this empowerment, zero finds himself able to "empathize with others without fear of consequence," acting and reacting naturally and without pretense.

Here in these genuine, reified human interactions, zero finds his "rescue from without," as Campbell calls it. This rescue often is attributed to a *deus ex machina* or to some superhuman agency; in *MACHINA*, however, it is distinctly human: frail,

⁵⁷ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org>.

impressionable, rash, vulnerable, and, as zero comes to realize, true, good, and beautiful. With these interactions, zero crosses the threshold of return, coming back into the light of public gaze, but armed with the knowledge that “only love can win,” as he initially prophesied. In this exalted innocence, he realizes that even at his lowest, he was never alone. Experiencing a discernment of what and who God is, zero realizes God and love had never come *or* gone; it was he who had changed and transformed and was now in a position to embrace his God and himself. Having mastered worlds both sacred and profane, he “fulfills his destiny, both for himself and for GOD.” The cycle, however disjointed in its execution, is complete. Zero’s destiny is fulfilled and to paraphrase the author of excerpt II, chaos has become order of the highest degree.

“And so Beats the Final Coda”: Conclusion(s)

In selectively disjointing the universals that comprise the Journey of the Hero as outlined by Joseph Campbell, Billy Corgan presents a hero that is more uniquely suited to an audience distrustful of universals, having experienced the exclusion of particularism themselves. By compelling them toward a version that is suited to their own disjunctions, by performing a hero as fractured as his audience, Corgan reveals the shifts and stresses in our own cultural tectonics. As the pace of life quickens, old tropes die more and more quickly. They must not be replaced with the utterly new, however, as our predicaments are never truly new. They must be refashioned, remade. The mirrors of myth and symbol must be shattered and replaced until the audience sees its own image reflected back.

Just as zero/GLASS comes to discern God's revelation in his own actions, he is directed outward, toward social interaction "without fear of consequence." Likewise, by piecing GLASS and his message together, the audience is directed toward one another, as GLASS exists only in their memories held in common. The albums are but records of his voice; other media are devotionals or testimonials to his significance. The community that arises around these *sensa* is an entity unto itself, one whose shared experience gives rise to the performance of GLASS and the sharing of this social interaction. On multiple occasions, the narrator/compiler gives the audience glimpses into the performances in which GLASS prophesies. By attending concert performances physically, emotionally, and intellectually, the ritualized awareness of what the *MACHINA* narrative becomes evident. In performance GLASS, not unlike Peter Frampton, "comes alive." More importantly, his audience comes alive as well.

**CHAPTER THREE:
“You’re All a Part of Me Now”: MACHINA as Ritual Anti-Structure**

“Communicating to another human being is probably the hardest thing in the world to do, especially when it comes to the truth.”⁵⁸

In his work among the Ndembu of Zambia, symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner made a number of meaningful observations which affected the future development of his research. Particularly, his observations on the inheritance and embrace of and transition between status-incumbencies, and the rites of passage which confer those inheritances, led him to reject that form of anthropology on which he had been intellectually raised: structural-functionalism. First pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and later embraced by Emile Durkheim and Erich Fromm, structural-functionalism posits that rituals and the symbols used to execute them are directly linked to structural institutions and status roles of social culture. For the structural-functionalists, rituals act principally to reify the social order and instill in the producers of culture faith in those status roles through which they act in society.

What Turner observed in the performed rituals of the Ndembu, however, flies in the face of the integrative approach fielded by the structural-functionalists. “Radcliffe-Brown’s theory was not enough. He saw culture merely as a derivative of social structure,” writes Edith Turner, Victor’s wife and companion in ethnography, in the introduction to *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*.⁵⁹ According to his mentors, Turner first had to understand the structural forces at play in Ndembu society

⁵⁸ Billy Corgan, speaking on the VH1 program *Storytellers*, recorded August 24th, 2000, about the second track on *MACHINA*, titled “Raindrops+Sunshowers.”

⁵⁹ Turner, Victor. *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. Ed. Edith L.B. Turner. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985. 3.

before any meaningful assertions could be made about their rituals. As he and Edith observed these varied rituals, “the theory of functionalism...began to look inadequate.”⁶⁰ Put simply, if expression or reflection of social structure is the principal impetus for the development of ritual performance, what social structures find reference in the wildly complex variety of rituals being observed?

Turner’s work among the Ndembu ultimately contributed to his dissertation and earliest ethnography, *Schism and Continuity in African Society*, first published in 1957. Turning structural-functionalism on its head, Turner asserts in *Schism* that, rather than merely reflecting structural elements present elsewhere in Ndembu society, rituals seem instead to serve as interstices brought to the surface during moments of social conflict, when roles and systems bump against one another. These conflicts are resolved through the performance of what Turner calls “social dramas,” performances which exist alongside societal structures under an umbrella of “culture” and serve producers of culture by helping them negotiate the meanings that compose the very essence of shared culture. Though the idea of “social drama” smacks of functionalism, Turner’s focus on its processual elements prevent these dramas from receding into stasis. At the center of negotiated meaning, these dramas are ever in flux.

In these interstices, Turner asserts, the structures of society can be reworked or abandoned altogether as the identities of social actors are separated and reintegrated into those roles and statuses they are granted or that they inherit. For Turner, these dramas generally break down into four phases: the first of these is a *break*, in which the agents or actors are rent from their social roles and responsibilities and the structures that typically

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

govern their behaviors and interactions. According to Turner, this break is distinct, “overt” and “public.” After this initial break, a phase of *crisis* drives the parties in negotiation even farther from their antecedent social attachments. This phase is characterized by a state of liminality, of being on-the-threshold. Once freed of structural markers and identifiers, a phase of *redressive action* begins, in which the mechanisms of renegotiation or reformation act upon the actors. Finally, a phase of *reintegration* occurs, bringing the actors in the disturbed system back into the fold of topical social structure, albeit bearing the marks and changes of having been redressed.

In his development of this four-stage model, Turner witnesses to the enormous influence on him by folklorist Arthur van Gennep, whose *Rites of Passage* highlights the necessity of *liminality* as a characteristic of transformative passage rites. From van Gennep’s three-stage model of separation, of liminality (or threshold), and of reaggregation, Turner developed over the rest of his career a refined articulation of the inability of structural-functionalism to account for the mechanisms and agencies of ritualized performance. Rather than reflecting social structure, ritual stands alongside it and at times diametrically opposes it. This quality of opposition led Turner to describe the spaces inhabited during ritual transformation as *anti-structure*. In *The Ritual Process*, Turner elaborates on the nature of anti-structure and two particular dimensions it possesses, those of *liminality* and *communitas*, a term Turner uses to get at the egalitarian “leveling” that occurs when one enters from the liminal threshold into ritual redress.

After returning to America in the early 1960s, Turner found that liminal events are diminished or neglected in “modern”, industrial societies. Existing more primarily in

“primitive” groups like the Ndembu, liminal events find analogs in complex industrial societies in the form of “liminoid” events, “quasi-liminal cultural performances.”⁶¹

In the present study I intend to demonstrate that an examination of Billy Corgan’s *MACHINA* benefits from Turner’s anti-structural liminoid model. In the ways its audience abandons previously held social incumbencies through willing participation and in the ways they respond to and participate in the culminating ritual of concert performance of the social drama that is *MACHINA*, I contend *MACHINA* presents its audience with an opportunity to cross such a liminal threshold and to experience a leveling akin to Turner’s *communitas* that is suited to Corgan’s audience’s own marginal nature.

For Turner, “anti-structure” does not necessarily imply a reversal or inversion of structure; such a perfect negation would seem to actually preserve the stability of the structures of society. Instead, the rituals and rites of passage of a particular group exist astride the interstices of social statuses and are employed in response to the tectonic crises implicit in moving from one social station to another. Rather than serving as storage systems for codified structure, they separate the aspirant or neophyte from any traditionally conceived referents of self and place him or her into a space of liminality, freed from constraints of time and space, where meaningful reassertions of self, or the acquisition of new and special knowledge which alter the self, might occur. For its audience, *MACHINA* serves the audience as a mechanism of separation, that initial phase in van Gennep’s process which dislodges the participant from his previously held social roles and stations.

⁶¹Deflem, Mathieu. 1991. “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30(1):1-25.

“The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the group either from an earlier point in the fixed social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both,”⁶² Turner writes in *The Ritual Process*. In its visual, textual, and sonic capacities, *MACHINA* serves to detach the audience by assuming a kind of identity duplicity. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the album’s titling demonstrates that the *MACHINA* project is transformative for the band as well. In performing the album, the Smashing Pumpkins refashion themselves as the MACHINES of GOD, giving their actions and choices a dual significance. When Billy inaugurates the album with the words “you know I’m not dead/now you know where I’ve been,” he speaks to the audience both as Billy *and* as GLASS, as performer *and* the performance itself. The “now” that he refers to paradoxically exists in two different points in the developments of two different selves: those who find themselves listening to Billy Corgan and those who find themselves listening to GLASS.

This dual temporality exists in the textual disjunction between the album’s lyrics and the narrator/compiler’s excerpt. As GLASS, Billy speaks to the audience in the first person and the present tense; the compiler’s vantage point and confident designation of “our conclusion”, however, indicate that GLASS and his message have already come and gone by the time of his performances. By acknowledging this temporal duplicity and the dual responsibilities attendant with the development of a cocreated, stereoscopic vision for the *MACHINA* narrative, both the audience and Corgan detach from structure and assume a transitional space, a space of constant becoming, as center. According to Turner, Billy’s nonlinear performance of GLASS and his audience’s willing discernment

⁶² Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969. 94.

of that performance leave them with a status of “no longer/not yet,” of straddling the borders of being.

As Mathieu Deflem states in “Ritual, Anti-Structure and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis,” “the symbols exhibited express that the ‘liminal personae’ are neither living nor dead and both living and dead.”⁶³ As Turner states in *The Ritual Process*, liminars “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned or arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”⁶⁴ The narrator/compiler acknowledges this “in-betweenness” in numerous ways. In particular, the choices he/she makes when beginning each missive illustrate the detached otherness of the group for whom he speaks, which, through participation, the audience implicitly joins. Using the inclusive “we,” the narrator states that those who wish to be spoken to do so “secretly,” constituting the group through willed participation without reference to the structures they might inhabit. Elsewhere, at the outset of “GLASS & the SYNTHETIC ARMY pt. III,” the first modification to the title, itself an allusion to the more militant motif in GLASS’ ritual of revolution, is the apophatic catalog “without focus, without generation, without peer.”

Stripping each participant of his or her previously held statuses and denying any kind of replacement seems distinctly liminal: standing neither as fans of Billy Corgan’s Smashing Pumpkins nor GLASS’ MACHINES of GOD, the audience finds itself astride the border between the two states, out of space and out of time. The positional meaning of the symbols of *MACHINA*, one of three meanings outlined by Turner in *The Forest of Symbols*, reflects this hybrid sentiment in the fractured nature of its contents. The person

⁶³ Deflem, Mathieu. 1991. “Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30(1):1-25.

⁶⁴ Turner, 95.

of GLASS becomes a hero to his audience because he, like they, is himself contradictory, refractory, and polysemous in an age of information onslaught. Because of this onslaught, and in response to the ways an excess of communication deadens its utility, Corgan seems compelled to construct a hero whose very selfhood might be construed as possessing symbolic multivocality. This multivocality in self and symbol speaks to the “alienation” and “distance and inequality” symptomatic of his audience’s conflict with the statuses they occupy in structure.⁶⁵

In obtaining Turner’s exegetical meaning for a ritualized symbolic expression, one must ask an informant, one who is familiar with the symbols as either a ritual specialist or a layman. Through the person of the narrator/compiler and the choices he/she has made in compiling the alchemical memorial that is *MACHINA* as well as the willing dichotomization of self implicit in participation, one is afforded both. In the very act of being spoken to, one finds that these symbols *are* indeed indigenous to that audience which they seek, even if that audience doesn’t know its own indigenoussness.

Refashioned as liminars in the pages of *MACHINA*, Corgan’s audience finds itself addressed as “Ghost Children”, outside the unidirectional and conventional station of rock fanship, alters of themselves. The agents within *MACHINA* that effect this alterity account for the varied qualities experienced by the neophyte in Turner’s liminal phase. As our first official guide into the liminoid, the narrator/compiler executes the first of three dimensions which Turner identified in *The Forest of Symbols*, his processual analysis of the liminal transition, the communication of the sacra, an exhibition of sacred materials before the neophyte.⁶⁶ As a codex, *MACHINA* contains visual, textual, and

⁶⁵ Victor Turner, *Dramas Fields and Metaphors*. 272 and 260.

⁶⁶ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 99-108.

sonic contributions to that exhibition for the viewer/listener. GLASS himself is a kind of sacrum inasmuch as he is a performed self whose performance contributes to the process of transformation.

At this point it might be observed that the narrator's compilation is his or her attempt to organize or to structuralize cognitive sentiments and that, as such, they should be removed from structure as they are implicit mythologies. Turner makes an important distinction here that prevents him from receding back into structuralism. Exegesis, Turner asserts, is part of ritual. Commentaries on ritual, however, are part of structure and deserve to be evaluated as such. What the compiler affords his audience is an exegesis of GLASS' own narrative arc. Rather than merely explaining GLASS and the symbols sets related to him in the *MACHINA* gestalt, the narrator's codex reads out from the recordings, from the performed person of GLASS, the multivocalities to which his person and message point.

These sacra are "what is shown" to an audience of neophytes; in trotting out the disparate media of *MACHINA*, these sacred articles conceal the symbols that permeate them inasmuch as they go unnoticed by the masses who see one more communiqué among the dozens already stifling their senses. The multivocality of these referents finds life in the response of their audience. Awash in the *sensa* concomitant with a complex culture experiencing an age of information, the audience that chooses to redefine itself against the sacredness with which it is presented finds itself at once *nowhere* special and *somewhere* special. The secrets are being whispered even as they are being broadcast.

The audience responds cocreatively by choosing to work through the *sensa* with which they are presented. As the band launches into the "Sacred + Profane Tour" in

support of the album, the event is treated by the structural institutions in its midst as a principally commercial endeavor, one which points toward the album the promotion of it. To those who have found themselves “spoken to,” this cocreation inaugurates the second quality Turner attributes to liminality and liminoid phenomena: that of action or of “what is done.” In his work among the Ndembu, Turner cites dancing as a primary quality of the actions undertaken to intimate the neophytes as to the nature of the world they have just entered. For the Ghost Children, the “Sacred + Profane Tour” becomes more than a rock tour or even a rock opera performance. It is, as the tour’s name implies, a nexus at which the synergistic union of prophet and audience hold the promise of transcendence.

The song that shares the title of the tour, *MACHINA*’s fifth track, verbalizes GLASS’ address of his audience in a way that lends itself especially well to the ritual space established in the performer/audience conflation of concert performance. In it, Corgan speaks of his audience’s disaffected liminality as well as the union with him permitted by their willing audience. From “The Sacred + Profane”:

*Give me tears, give me love
Let me rest, lord above
Send the bored, your restless,
The feedback-scarred, devotionless*

*you're all a part of me now
and if I fall
you're all a part of me now
in the sun
you're all a part of me now
you're all a part of me now⁶⁷*

Alchemically speaking, GLASS himself becomes a vessel of transformation into which Corgan’s audience can place themselves. To show them the transformation the

⁶⁷ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org>.

experience vicariously through the “scrapnel [sic] of a teenage atom bomb” who “detonates it all for your enjoyment,” Corgan dons an alchemically progressive series of tunics in the “Sacred + Profane Tour” performances, beginning first with the shiny black tunic first seen in the music video for “The Everlasting Gaze;”⁶⁸ by the time of the band’s farewell performance, held December 2, 2000 at Chicago’s Metro (not coincidentally, the site of the first Smashing Pumpkins performance), Corgan had progressed to a metallic quicksilver tunic, witnessing to the dissolution and coagulation which his audience experiences with him. “Every light I find/Is every light that’s shining down on me/I’m never alone,” he affirms in “With Every Light.”

In the moment of concert performance, Corgan and his band illuminate the characters and narrative arc in which they participate. Through the audience’s willing participation in the search for meanings to the symbols which “in all things...reign supreme,”⁶⁹ they illuminate a third dimension of the functionality of the limenoid event in industrial society, the revelation of “that which is said.” Discerning the purposes and employments of the various symbols and the ways in which concert performance brings those symbols to life, the audience educates itself in the mythical history of the Ghost Children.

That discernment largely is left up to the needs of the audience; after all, GLASS’ story is, in a significant way, *their* story. To it, they must bring their own perspective; indeed, in the ways they recombine the shattered elements of *MACHINA*, the perspective of the informed audience becomes crucial in supporting a second dimension of Turner’s processual analysis, that of the ludic “play” at work in reworking and recombining the

⁶⁸ Smashing Pumpkins 1988-2000 music video DVD.

⁶⁹ *MACHINA/the Machines of God*. Liner Notes.

symbols that constitute the group of liminars. In the alchemical journal laid before them, the audience finds itself vested with the responsibility of relating to the material, of bringing it to life through the particulars of understanding. The varied individuals who answer the call bring a variety of interpretations to the table. For many, the strictures of an increasingly complex information-age culture result in equally oppressive and dissectional structure; freed from these bonds and responsibilities in the limen, they are given the capability of manipulating the configurations of narrative, rather than having them prescribed by other social agents.

The ludic element exists as well in the sonic and production choices Corgan and Flood exhibit in the recordings of *MACHINA* and *MACHINA II*. In his perversions of James Brown's "Soul Power" and the Grand Funk Railroad lyrics used in "Glass' Theme," Billy's GLASS challenges his audience to re-recognize their structure and culture,⁷⁰ to improvise and cobble together meanings of and relationships to the changing referents in the music. The narrative of *MACHINA* is strewn disjointedly across the music, videos, notes, and other materials of the album and the community around it. In the ways it stutter-steps, dead-ends, and presents incongruities of self and motive in the characters it concerns, *MACHINA* encourages this deconstructive/reconstructive play in its audience. Rather than being talked at, they are engaged in a dialogic creation, respected as whole people attending wholly. Demanding this wholeness, *MACHINA* prompts its audience to reflect not only on who they are, but the divisiveness which they left behind to enter into the limen. Here, the whole of the cosmos and all its qualities are points of contention in which Billy Corgan yields to the cocreated will of his audience. His creation is no longer his. In the hands of the audience, the idea of *MACHINA* is

⁷⁰ Deflem 12.

liberated from the structural constraint of any one point of view. It comes to exist mimetically, with each node in the sea of information production and consumption constituting a new opportunity for its meanings to be distorted and realigned.

The third dimension of Turner's processual analysis involves a simplification of the relationships underlying overwrought social structure. As was stated previously, the limen is not utterly without structure, though in all ways it stands to counter structure. Utter chaos, for Turner, does not constitute liminality. Instead, all superfluous and consequential structures are sloughed off like so much dross, leaving the raw gestalt of relation unsullied. What remains for Turner is a distillation, a purification of these relationships, particularly between the ritual instructor and those who have, by participating, become adepts. This attitude of reduced relationship finds echoes throughout *MACHINA*, particularly in the militant and evangelical interpretations of GLASS and the Ghost Children that appear in excerpts three and six of the textual missives.

In this reduction, all unnecessary qualities and surface structures are revealed for what they are: illegitimate. Though the audience helps to develop the stereoscopic imagination necessary for illuminating the *MACHINA* story, in the moments of concert performance GLASS serves a beacon of orientation that leads them "all through the broken glass/that's everywhere [they] are."⁷¹ This fundamental relationship is all that remains in the fastened core of the limen, and in many ways even it points to a more fundamentally Wachian master/disciple relationship: GLASS' name draws on the notion that he represents principally a filter of light between the God who has spoken to him and his willing and informed audience. In chapter six, this relationship is acknowledged by

⁷¹ Lyrics retrieved from <http://www.spfc.org>.

the feverish composer of the missive: “DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR SAVIOR IS???” he compels the reader to ask him or herself. Rather than speaking of GLASS, he speaks of the agent of whom GLASS himself also speaks: the I of the Radio, the voice to which GLASS initially responded and for whom he now prophetically speaks.

Before the I of the Radio, even GLASS joins his audience in the disappearance of all but the most essential relational understandings. Replacing these obsolete social scaffoldings is a sensation of legitimate and penetrating unity, an air of genuine and utter equality. First empirically observed by Turner during his stint as a non-combatant soldier serving in World War II, this “leveling” quality that engenders sameness finds itself highlighted and reified in the liminal space and among the marginal personae inhabiting that space. The ways Corgan draws on Blake’s illuminations in his production method also seem to affect this notion of sameness, which Saree Makdisi indicates as a central element in understanding Blake’s message of liberation, particularly as it appears in *America: A Prophecy*: commonly misconstrued as an intellectual ally of the forces in London advocating the newly-developed concept of individual sovereignty, Blake instead contends that the sovereign individual is a concept doomed by the same oppressive structures it is intended to mollify.⁷² Rather, what is needed is a “fierce rushing” of humanity in which the individual constituents are known principally by the way they are related to the undulating whole. This, for Paine, Burke, and others, smacked of a mob mentality from which they hoped to distance themselves by denigrating the sentiment as an attempt at “leveling” the people. This leveling carries with it the dissolution of the

⁷²Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

social statuses and incumbencies of which Turner speaks in his analysis of the liminal and the liminoid.

For Turner, this sameness came to be refined as one of his greatest contributions to ritual studies: *communitas*. Borrowing the term from Paul Goodman, who had used the term to understand styles of city planning that focus on lines of community, Turner sought to identify through the use of the word “communitas” that quality of egalitarian comradeship which he had observed in the liminal and transitive states of the Ndembu. In *communitas*, there are no stratified hierarchies: all elements of *MACHINA* point toward the person of GLASS as symbol, signifier, and signified, but before the I of the Radio even he is leveled with his audience. Turner seems to indicate on several occasions that, in addition to opposing structure, *communitas* is ever in flux with it: when structure subsides or finds itself weakened under its own weight, *communitas* breaks through. When the *communitas* of liminality has served its purpose, it inevitably harkens a “decline back into structure and law.”⁷³ While in *communitas*, however, the prescriptions of structure have no claim. They are both no longer and not yet applicable to those participants cast into the limen.

For Turner, *communitas* can be broken down into a number of phases that, like the greater flux between *communitas* and structure, can change and morph into one another. The first distinction Turner made within *communitas* is “spontaneous *communitas*,” an event against structure which happens, as the name might imply, without any expressed antecedent cause. Characterized by its break with structure, this first phase comes immediately. In *MACHINA*, the audience finds itself spoken to inclusively both by the narrator/compiler as well as GLASS himself. By initially allying

⁷³ *The Ritual Process*, 132.

oneself with the narrator, structure is subverted. At this point, the audience hardly knows who “we” might constitute; instead, all that is known is that the speaker and the spoken to constitute “we.” As this individual instance happens again and again as each operator opens *MACHINA*, they are first initiated into the “humankindedness” of which Turner speaks.

Quoting Blake, Turner characterizes spontaneous communitas in *The Ritual Process* as “the winged moment as it flies,” indicating the generative joy fueling the spontaneity of direct egalitarian contact.⁷⁴ For Corgan’s audience, this spontaneous element finds itself in the hearts and minds of a community of hybrid, idiosyncratic individuals. For what feels like the first time, rather than being talked at, they are spoken to with a seeming knowledge of the awkward consequences of progress that are their lives. In this immediate, almost subconscious agreement to respond, the audience finds itself part of the “Heavy Metal Machine” of which GLASS speaks in the album’s seventh track. Here, the call-and-response relationship of rock and roll is given serious credence as a modality of salvation: “let me die for rock and roll/let me die to save my soul,” Corgan pines in the chorus. His audience responds in kind, giving legs to the Heavy Metal Machine: on bootleg recordings of a concert from the Sacred + Profane Tour held May 13, 2000 in Atlanta, Georgia, one can hear the audience clearly above Billy’s voice as he repeats a grunt of “heavy metal/heavy metal machine” into the microphone. Over his soft snarl, the audience’s voice registers with a single-mindedness that is intent on participation. Shortly thereafter, the band explodes into the song’s raucous finish, binding the audience’s release from the structural bounds left outside the arena.

⁷⁴ *The Ritual Process* 131.

According to Turner, from this initial germ of spontaneous or existential *communitas* arises “normative *communitas*,” in which the needs of the group for mobilized resources and articulation of negotiated meanings are organized into a system which, ideally, preserves the initial spontaneity of *communitas* intact. After the ludic deconstruction and reconstruction of the social roles and relationships that occur after finding oneself in the *limen*, and of experiencing the *communitas* with others experiencing similarly ludic operation, the normative *communitas* that develops serves to orient the gestalt of the group, relating the various accounts and experiences of the aspirants into a viable whole. By and large, this organization occurs largely via the band’s website, <http://www.smashingpumpkins.com>, where fans and other interested parties congregated to share information and understandings of the symbol sets laid before them.

Consensus understandings of the individually-experienced components of spontaneous *communitas* arise in the normative phase, permitting the group the elements necessary to the pursuit of their goals. In this normative phase, the Ghost Children begin self-applying their moniker and identifying with mentions of “the Synthetic Army” as mentioned in part three of the textual component of *MACHINA*, with the definitive apophasis “without focus, without generation, without peer” emblazoned across the backs of t-shirts sold in conjunction with the album and its accompanying tour. As a recognized force of generative *communitas* the Ghost Children/Synthetic Army find themselves organized in support of the claim that first appears in *MACHINA*’s eighth track, “This Time,” that “only love can win.”

In defiance of the band's flagging sales of a largely misunderstood record, the community based virtually at the Smashing Pumpkins' website then enters into Turner's final phase of *communitas*, that of "ideological *communitas*." Here, complete systems of thought arise in the hope that all, even those lodged in structure, might experience the same essence of *communitas* first experienced by the marginals who partook in the spontaneous phase. As Turner notes, this phase often finds itself too close to the structures it originally sought to deconstruct or to subvert and, because of the pressured fluxion of structure and *communitas*, ultimately declines back into regressive forms of structure. It is in this sense that much of GLASS' sentiments as expressed on *MACHINA II* might be best understood.

With his inversions of "Soul Power" and "We're an American Band," as well as the decadence expressed via tracks like "GLASS' theme" and "Dross" ("you say I'm beautiful/well I can't help it/you say I'm acting/we all know I'm full of shit"), GLASS' message of love becomes itself a commodity. In this sense, the "Heavy Metal Machine" becomes its own worst enemy, a sentiment echoed both in the lyrics ("If I were dead/would my records sell?/could you even tell?/is it just as well?") as well as in the plate titled "Torn Inside Machines of Light," which captures GLASS and JUNE as they are trapped behind the machinery of the structure against which they struggle.

As the message originally instilled in GLASS by the I of the Radio reaches beyond him, it takes on a life of its own at the hands of the I of the Radio Ministries, an evangelical group responsible for the sixth textual missive, originally handed out at the Summersault festival. The absolutism with which the speaker speaks, even in his analogies ("the I of the Radio will always play your favorite songs!"), gives the missive a

feverish air of illegitimacy. In keeping with Turner's indicated debacle into structure, the speaker seems guilty of the sins he rails against. In speaking of the ways dark forces seek to control the minds of youth, the speaker apparently misses the notion that his own absolution comes across as a form of control. For those responding to an initial, spontaneous *communitas*, the rigor and fervor with which the sixth missive conducts itself appears disturbing. The debacle of the *MACHINA* narrative seems imminent.

Indeed, GLASS (as exemplar for his audience) ultimately finds that, to continue the experience first ascertained against the dead static of his radio, he must ultimately leave behind the *communitas* that has denatured into oppressive structure. Only in returning to the world is he able to return to the spontaneous *communitas* of interacting with others "without fear of consequence." This rejection of ideological *communitas* also finds a home in Turner's theory: "wisdom is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and *communitas* under the given circumstances of time and place," he writes in *Liminality and Communitas*, "to accept each modality when it is paramount without rejecting the other, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent."

So empowered by the example set by GLASS, his audience finds the capacity to return to structure armed with the experienced gained in the liminoid of the *MACHINA* narrative and the process of *communitas* that engages their imaginative and participatory capacities through willing enthusiasm and physical response. Fractured and compartmentalized by the onward march of numbingly meaningless communication, Corgan's audience finds in GLASS and in their construction of him a communiqué that reinvigorates communication itself. From the crisis point of structural traction, *MACHINA* breaks through as a moment of liminoid *communitas* which his audience of

marginals so desperately needs. Returning to structure like GLASS himself, they are, in shattering, whole again.

CONCLUSION:

“Destination Unknown”: Communicating and Community at the Fringes

“Where do we go from here? Which is the way that’s clear?”

The world in which we live and operate is a world of awkward consequence. There has, perhaps, never been a generational chiasm greater than that between those born before the dawn of the information age and those born after it. For generations, the American Dream was lodged firmly in the minds of those who desired it: make a better life for your children, own your own property, and work hard to make both the first two realities. Few were prepared, however, for any of these things to happen. In the baby boom, the space age, and the other rush developments following World War II, these things became real and graspable for the first time. The hard work of generations began to pay off in the conveniences of “civilized” life. TV dinners, mass communication, and the ever-present promise of “better living through chemistry” seemed to sound the death knell for hard work, for striving, for deprivation.

No one, however, was prepared for the awkward consequences generated by the possibility of an end to want and suffering. If the hope of that possibility becomes a centering mechanism, as it has, what becomes of those decentered by the achievement of ending inconvenience? In the vacuum following the decline of the Soviet Union, America found itself atop the heap as the only remaining superpower, disbelieving in the achievement that, by all accounts it seems, no one actually thought would occur for centuries. In a world free of inconvenience and want, what is left to fight for? To work for? To feel for? To die for? These are the questions the new generation, the aptly titled “Generation X” (as if no one had thought we would even make it this many generations

as a people) had to answer for themselves. Atop a world of convenience and success, where are the mechanisms that drove the generations that came before.

Into this vacuum of success enter a generation confronted with the quandary of an obsolete emphasis on hard work coupled with obscene conveniences such as the world had never known. As Billy Corgan asks on *MACHINA*, “could you believe in heaven if heaven was all you had?” The dream of generations of Americans, it seems, has left a generation of numb, rudderless, devotionless youth in its wake. Moreover, the part of the dream our progenitors achieved for us simply did not eradicate suffering; rather it metamorphosed suffering to suit the new successes originally intended to defeat it. With information technology, physical distances that once governed the possibility of communication became moot. With the variety of services and conveniences available to new consumers, one can have anything he wants, whenever he wants it. Yet this has not ended suffering.

How, then, can we story ourselves with reference both to the obscene conveniences of information and access we experience as well as the newfound heartaches, sorrows, and deprivations concomitant with that access? How can we articulate the dark isolation that mirrors the triumph of a sovereign individual? The old stories, the old orientations, no longer work; they simply do not address the world and circumstances in which our generation has found itself. We find ourselves de-storied. As a result, those meanings whose negotiations constitute community are dissolved. The “sovereign individual,” as it approaches full implication, draws dangerously close to Aldous Huxley’s “island universes.”

Yet we persist. Put through the other side of the postmodernization of the individual, groups everywhere are sorting through the pieces and shards left to them by the cultures and statuses they inherit, hoping to find a glimmer of reflection in a heap of obsolete rubble. Cobbled together from scraps, new stories and new communities arise. In the old husk of the metanarrative that is the American Dream, outsiders take shelter where they find it. As Liz Locke states, ““the non-athletes, the readers, the musicians, the skate rats, the gamers, the geeks, the metal-heads, the ravers, the stoners, the net-heads, the writers, the outcasts, the refugees – we find a way to create communities.””⁷⁵

At these fringes, meaning is unstable. Armed with the speed of information access provided by the internet, the speed at which communities bump up against and transcend their borders now occurs in negligibly unreal time. The material objects and implements we use to give ourselves orientation are no longer suitable receptacles of meaning. Information itself, in binaries of one and none, of acceptance and rejection, of self and other, simply moves too fast. Campbell claims his hero journey is about similarities; in the face of the differences experienced across the globe, however, these similarities appear quaint or antiquated in the face of the forces in our world motivated by difference. I concur that Campbell’s hero journey speaks to something deep within the human sense of self; that people respond to that base kernel in such a blinding variety of ways, however, seems to indicate that difference, not similarity, is a presence that demands critical attention in the (post-) modern world.

Billy Corgan’s *MACHINA* is a remarkably complex indicator of the varieties of ways in which individuals strive for community and belonging. Like its audience, *MACHINA* is borne of hybridity, composed of interdependent refractory parts, sometimes

⁷⁵ Locke, Liz. “Don’t Dream it, Be it.” *New Directions in Folklore* 3:May-July 1999, 1-3.

steeling itself and sometimes languishing in contradiction. Like Blake before him, Corgan uses the media and tools at his disposal to subvert their own efficacies, deliberately obscuring his message in disjunctive media combinations whose irreconcilability demands a sense-making agency from his audience. By dis-organizing his audience, he undermines the hegemonic forces of metanarratological, industrially-produced media. “Efficacy,” writes Arthur Kleinman, “is a cultural construct.”⁷⁶ To an audience numbed by convenience and external assurances of self, Corgan’s *MACHINA* presents a challenge whose goal is nothing less than the identification of the self that so often seems lost “in a world of impersonal technologies and personal cause.”⁷⁷ Where Blake dissolved and coagulated the referent/descriptive relationships of word and text in his illuminated printings, Corgan applies the same calculus to the wild variety of media available to the information age poet. Fundamentally, as a musician Corgan’s base media are his lyrics and the sounds he engineers for their accompaniment. Adopting the trope of the concept album, Corgan adds to his repertoire the visual imagery of the album medium and the interactive potential of the internet, producing a hypertextual variation on Blake’s original calculus.

Corgan employs this hybrid methodology to narrate into agency an equally hybrid, fractured narrative with a hybrid, fractured hero at its center. *GLASS*, like the media used to tell his story, is a self conflicted and divided internally. Unlike the seemingly solid states of the various heroes Campbell cites in delineating the journal of the hero, *GLASS* is uncertain and equivocal, serving at once as his own salvation and

⁷⁶ Napier, David A. *Foreign Bodies: Performance, Art, and Symbolic Anthropology*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1992. 143.

⁷⁷ *GLASS and the MACHINES of GOD* (summary).

damnation. Even as he is presented to the reader/viewer/listener as a hero, his doubts are introduced as quickly. To an audience which confronts its own doubts about the world in which it moves at every turn, every decision made and communicated, GLASS represents heroism that is as real as they are. As Sue Monk Kidd observes in *The Secret Life of Bees*, “everybody needs a God who looks like them.”⁷⁸ In GLASS, a disaffected, shattered generation gets just that: a disaffected, shattered hero.

According to Victor Turner, *communitas* arises in moments of crisis, when previously held notions installed in structure no longer suit the needs of the operators of that structure. For an audience boxed in both by gluts of communication and the awkward consequences of a valorized sovereign individual, the need for community, and for *communitas*, is stronger than ever. The quandary is apparent, however: how does one symbolically communicate a distrust of symbolic communication? Corgan’s *MACHINA* provides his audience with an opportunity to reopen and reinvigorate channels of communication, breathing life back into the traction of structure to dissolve it. Freed from the constraints of structural prescription, his audience is capable for once of finding its own uses for the tools at hand. For the listless in Billy Corgan’s audience, *MACHINA* is something wholly different than “the Smashing Pumpkins’ fifth album.” In its hybridity, *MACHINA* represents the hope of all those who have found themselves “without focus, without generation, [and] without peer” to reach out and bond with the others who are so disaffected. In that outreach, recentering, re-storying, and community are possible. If once the Ghost Children were alone, in *MACHINA* they are alone together.

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