

The Charles Manson chicks

Las novias de Charles Manson

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This was the title chosen for a project presenting a series of documents published by Charles Manson from San Quentin State Prison, California, in 1984. Manson was serving a life sentence there, accused of first-degree murder for the death of the actress Sharon Tate and five of her guests in Los Angeles in 1968. The Living Color Magazine and Worldwide Understanding launched a series of publications consisting of letters and poems written by Manson, in which, in a rather sordid fashion, he exposed his complex personality to the world. We must not forget that, since his arrest, Manson had been a “phenomenon” popularised by the information media, who transformed his crime into a myth which was to occupy a place of privilege on the dark side of human existence, where he was attributed no more and no less than the role of “disciple of evil” due to his violent and cruel nature as a wild animal.

A reading of his poems immerses us within a pathological state, where there are allusions to marginal states of paranoia and a powerful charge of sexual content... I decided to tackle the subject from the media-feted “phenomenon” perspective, and from their control over the interpretation of the events that made Manson an omnipresent figure within the cultural framework of those times. “Wall-eyed states of evil” (we deduce from his words) produce an ambiguity applicable to the system we live in, ranging from the nuclear family and the most troubled relationships it involves -between married individuals and their children-, to psychopathic ritual behaviour, amplified by ethical contradictions.

I do not wish to focus on these questions as symptoms of madness, but rather in terms of anxiety.

The priority the media gave to holding on to maximum audience figures was accompanied by a marked impetus towards overvaluing accident-induced catastrophe, generating an almost schizophrenic sense of expectation in their secondary emphasis on anxiety, by inspiring a desire for inclusion. Such positioning vis-à-vis criminal acts spattered with the gore genre is accepted by insatiable spectators, with hypnotic consequences veering between admiration and revulsion, resulting in the adoration and mythologising of the act for its own sake, wrapped in a backcloth of fantasy (due more to the beauty of the images than to their content) or in the proliferation of musical groups with diabolic names -amongst them the notorious Marilyn Manson-, given to appropriating the paraphernalia of Nazi costume (Manson has a swastika tattooed on his forehead) and playing with satanic ritual gestures. To this must be added a spectacular growth of organisations or sects that employ similar methods and attract adepts willing to compete within an astrological apology for a future brimming with uncertainty.

Occultism -with its ritual ambiances of camaraderie and secret pacts- hermetically seals a fervent confrontation with all that surrounds its adherents, reaching the fanatical peaks of a holy brotherhood. Idols and leaders share an exclusive space in the media, on the crime and accident pages and on MTV, where we move at zapping speed, projecting an accumulation of facts and events that trigger an anxiety that cannot be satisfied. The Charles Manson Chicks or Daughters of Charles Man-Son -Father/Son- was made in infrared colour film, using the electrical charges the media give out, with all identifying insignia eradicated, though setting and place can be recognised, while the project is transmitted through the gaze of the person composing the events in his poems. An imaginary context in which his characters wander in a hypnotic state, emptied of content and with clinical identities, bled dry -like the Fu Man Chu girls- or ready to seduce in the case of female Agent 007, possessed by a supposed master on a mission to destabilise. The beings that appear in these photographs are in a narcotic state of hypnosis... a frozen moment, waiting for the committing of the act that might momentarily soothe their angst.

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