

MICHAEL JACKSON

AS A MYTHICAL HERO

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

ANETA OSTASZEWSKA



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To My Family

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Introduction to the 2020 Edition

Fifteen years ago, when I wrote about the culture of narcissism, I did it primarily from a theoretical viewpoint. References made to the thesis and examples from Christopher Lasch's book *The Culture of Narcissism*¹ (NB, the book was published in 1979) seemed far from the reality in Poland, a post-Soviet country traumatised by its history. The notion of social narcissism was not addressed at numerous scientific debates or discussions in the media; at the time, this topic seemed too abstract and considered a niche even in scientific circles. Social media were still a voice of the future. In 2005, in the Web 2.0 paradigm that had just started at the time, interactivity boiled down mainly to commenting on available content or running one's own website or blog. There was more to the value of Internet comments than just easy accessibility. These statements revealed a need to express oneself and manifest one's views, a need to become noticed. On yet another level, one can talk about a need to participate, to belong, or to be part of a community. Such was my interpretation of comments about Michael Jackson charged with sexual molestation of a minor that appeared at the time.

Internet users in Poland eagerly commented on Jackson's trial. It was not just the idol they discussed when expressing their opinions about him; they also wrote about the culture they participated in (not necessarily aware they were doing so) and which they were co-creating on a daily basis. Jackson's trial was like a trigger that started a process of confronting individual and social values and norms, including the taboo of paedophilia.

Michael Jackson was first charged with child sexual abuse in 1993. Despite great interest of the public, the case had never been brought to court – the parties concluded an agreement. Ten years later, the same theme – Jackson's sexual molestation of a minor – returned and again became widely discussed in the media. Jackson was arrested and charged with numerous acts of indecency against a child below 14 years of age. The trial against him (*People v. Jackson*) commenced in

¹ The Polish translation of Lasch's book was published in 2015.

January 2005 and lasted until June 2005. Ultimately, the jury announced Jackson not guilty of all the charges he was facing.

Four years later, in June 2009, Jackson suddenly died. The interest sparked by the suspicion of child sexual abuse gave room for reports about unclear causes of the idol's death. Above all, his accomplishments in music were recalled – again, and Jackson became ‘the king of pop’ – until 2019, when the documentary *Leaving Neverland* premiered. James Safechuck and Wade Robson who starred in the film, today grown-up men, told in front of the camera what allegedly had happened many years earlier between them and Jackson at the Neverland Ranch. Not only did the film cause a big commotion, but it also raised a number of questions.² These include probably the most important one, namely, who really was Michael Jackson? A paedophile?

In this book, I did not put forward this question explicitly. I analysed beliefs about Jackson. While investigating statements about him, I focused on social reactions he triggered. As in 2005, I still claim today, that Jackson's figure is a metaphorical lens that focuses attention and in which various social beliefs not only converge but are also reflected. These beliefs are traces leading to complex levels of understanding the phenomenon of modern culture and its taboo. This book is an attempt to follow these trails and reflect on them.

² See, among others: *Oprah Winfrey Presents: After Neverland*, Oprah.com, <http://www.oprah.com/own-oprah-winfrey-presents-after-neverland/oprah-winfrey-presents-after-neverland>.

Introduction.

What kind of anthropology do I practice?

We breathe pop culture as we breathe air and, just as air, it is invisible. Pop culture surrounds us like a cocoon; we might make an attempt to free ourselves out of it but always at the cost of marginalisation, for today, to claim the oxygen niche of the so-called higher culture is to be marginalised, indeed. Everyone is pop in one way or another.

(Wojciech J. Burszta¹)

Pop culture is not an autonomous, self-reliant, and solid being. It rather resembles liquid, chaotic sticky mass out of which various forms and constructs may arise. Pop culture bears neither stillness nor solitude. It makes up its own mythologies, creates its own heroes, but it does so with a reference to the more complex cultural wholeness.

The aim of this book is to investigate how traits of a mythical hero are manifested in modern culture and, to be more precise, in social beliefs about the pop culture idol. The said idol is Michael Jackson.

Jackson is one of the most popular figures in modern pop culture. However, it was not only the phenomenon of Jackson's popularity that drew my attention but the emotional reactions, or more precisely, the extreme reactions Jackson used to evoke and still does. Therefore, by choosing Jackson as the subject of my study, I wanted to take a closer look at reactions of the global audience; to examine what they experienced while virtually attending a legal action concerning paedophilia allegation brought against the idol in 2005. With this aim, I decided to analyse online statements published on Polish websites reporting on Jackson's trial. I found these statements a manifestation of a spontaneous need for sharing something, commenting on an important event attended by the public (consciously or not) only via the media. On the example of selected statements, I shall analyse a phenomenon of imposing some traits of a mythical hero onto the idol, which, in my opinion, relates to the phenomenon of the culture of narcissism. While discussing

¹ W.J. Burszta, *NIKE – wybierz styl życia*, "Polonistyka" 2002, no. 1 (391), pp. 9–11.

Internet users' beliefs about Jackson I shall indicate narcissistic sources of modern culture.

This book is divided into three parts. Part One presents the general framework for the study and the methodology, as well as concepts pertaining to narcissism, followed by reflections on the *pop cult* phenomenon. Part Two of this book focuses strictly on a hero – here one can find Jackson's biography and the chronology of the trial the idol faced regarding child sexual molestation allegations. In the subsequent chapters of this part, I discuss the phenomenon of paedophilia. This is followed by my attempt to investigate how a modern concept of a child is constructed. The final chapter of this part is a presentation of online statements, that is, reactions of the public who virtually attended Jackson's trial. The last instalment of this book, Part Three, comprises a presentation of anthropological figures of a trickster, a scapegoat, and a carnival king.

What Kind of Anthropology Do I Practice?

This question arose and accompanied me throughout all stages of my work on this book. In its title, I contained the phrase, 'an anthropological perspective'. What does it exactly mean? In the initial approach, I referred this phrase particularly to the research subject. However, I soon realised that to me, the phrase "an anthropological perspective" means much more than a methodological strategy and a type of a research approach; it is primarily a specific style of practicing reflection and a way of writing. In the subject literature, this perspective has been repeatedly characterised as interpretative anthropology or reflexive anthropology. Hence, I practice anthropology of interpretation. What does it mean?

Not only does anthropology of interpretation deal with describing the image of the world, but it also co-creates it. It taps into the rich heritage of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Analysing cultural phenomena, as Clifford Geertz notices, is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."² Its aim is to ensure "(...) the enlargement of the universe of human discourse."³ Geertz writes, "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape."⁴ Geertz's words determine the direction of the research process described in this book.

² C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York 1973, p. 5.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

This book concerns ways in which Michael Jackson's career was received. I decided to investigate these ways using anthropological figures as the analytic tool. I considered them to be ideal types in Max Weber's understanding. The very assumption of ideal types leaves no room for their abstract image being translated into reality. Consequently, this prevents the application of a quantitative approach and, hence, putting forward the issue of representativeness of the examined traits. It is physically impossible to familiarise oneself with all the statements concerning Jackson available on the Internet, which is by nature a highly instable source. It is impossible to present in quantitative categories the abundance and complexity of opinions (experiences, beliefs, and judgments) about Jackson. Therefore, the best solution to be adopted proved to be the ethnographic approach and qualitative content analysis in which the fundamental meaning is given to the category of understanding.

Hence, my reflection on traits of a mythical hero in popular culture is, above all, about examining cultural contents that appear in statements about the idol. Inspired by Geertz's "thick description" postulate and following Joanna Tokarska-Bakir's example, I wanted to take the road of "thick reading", hermeneutic reading that refers to the way a text is read and interpreted. "Thick reading" of a text, "(...) is intended to preserve for reflection everything that happens to be torn out of an ethnographic text under the cloak of redundancy, marginality, incomprehensibility, low artistic level (in the case of folklore accounts) or obscenity.⁵" Hence, my intent was to cautiously read selected statements and then suggest how they could be interpreted. The tool used for interpreting texts was the method of the hermeneutic circle. Martin Heidegger points out that the hermeneutic circle offers a positive opportunity to cognize the source. At the same time, he stressed that "Whoever is trying to understand a text, always engages in projecting (*Entwerfen*): he/she projects a meaning for the text as soon as some initial meaning comes to the fore.⁶" This means that before we undertake to interpret a text, we already have some belief about it that stems from our belief about the world. Interpretation is a process that resembles a circle – it does not start at zero (the starting point) but is intertwined in a researcher's previous experiences and interpretative processes. Hans-Georg Gadamer claims that it is impossible to interpret a text starting from a neutral position bereft of any expectations. As a part of some culture, a person is embedded in it and shaped by it, which means that s/he has a certain initial belief, the so-called a prejudgment, about a text. These will be confronted in the course of a research process – following the her-

⁵ J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy. Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych*, Universitas, Kraków 2000, pp. 16–17.

⁶ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. and ed. J. Weinsheimer, D.G. Marshall, Crossroad, New York 1989, p. 267.

menetic circle – each time a researcher encounters resistance or difficulty when it comes to understanding the text he is interpreting.

As for my research, such an initial, very general concept (a prejudice) was the concept of an idol, a concept that refers to the pre-modern substrate of the sacred and a cult. My attention was drawn to reactions Michael Jackson evoked among the online public; the ‘heated’ discussion that arose between the expounders. I did not encounter indifference towards Jackson and to me it seemed interesting and worth further examination. While reading statements about him, I found the emotional charge embedded in these comments puzzling. The basic question put forward implicitly which the presented statements answer is, “Who is the idol-Michael Jackson to the public?”. By adopting an ethnographic ‘close reading’ approach – coming from the fundamental question – I will be able to design subsequent models of answer, seek concepts that are increasingly more appropriate, as I follow the hermeneutic circle.

Interpretative anthropology assumes that in a social study one attempts to enter the ‘world’ of the research subjects, to understand how they interpret a given event. Therefore, the aim of my analysis is to arrange explicit content and to attempt to specify and then interpret implicit context in the statements about the pop culture idol. The aim is to examine stabilised complexes of symbolic meanings into which the reception types of Jackson’s figure, as existing on the Internet, can be embedded.

PART I:
THE CULTURE OF NARCISSISM
AS A CULTURAL BACKGROUND
TO THE *POP CULT*

Chapter 1:

The Total Social Fact

(...) Things are not what they seem to be. (...) Social reality turns out to have many layers of meaning. The discovery of each new layer changes the perception of the whole.

(Peter L. Berger)¹

According to Marcel Mauss, a total social fact (French *fait social total*) covers various ways of manifesting what is social.² Perceiving social phenomena in a holistic way is to compare, discover, seek relations and correlations between specific elements of the studied area. This does not pertain, however, to a simple sum of various aspects of some freely selected fact, but to each element be interpreted not separately but in reference to a broader structure of the examined phenomenon. To study the concrete thing – that is wholeness.

Mauss wrote that a total social fact is embodied in an individual experience. We are talking here about two perspectives on this experience; first, it is about an individual story, and second – a total fact is embodied in what Claude Lévi-Strauss calls ‘anthropology’ understood as “a system of interpretation accounting for the aspects of all modes of behaviour simultaneously, physical, physiological, psychical and sociological.”³ A total social fact is hence a concept that arises due to the aspiration to connect society to an individual, that which is social to that which is mental.

Although among many sociologists the social fact postulate is seen as a sociological utopia, the approach proposed by Mauss seems inspiring.⁴ The ‘total’ approach was also pointed out by Anna Wyka in her work on the necessity of multi-stage and multifaceted research. “A research process (or a research subject

¹ P.L. Berger, *An Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, Bantam Doubleday, New York 1963, p. 23.

² C. Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, trans. F. Baker, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1987, pp. 24–30.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁴ J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2004, p. 404.

– an individual, a group) is no longer reduced to a single verbal statement, an approach, a view. The subject is seen in a broader context of one's own life, action, relations with other people."⁵ Hence, it boils down to studying social reality as a certain entirety, tapping into many sources, referring to various research tools and, most of all, not tearing its individual elements (e.g., art and life) apart.

The category proposed by Mauss seems important in studies on the non-hermetic, heterogeneous and ever-changing field that is popular culture.⁶ The 'total' approach is advocated by, among others, Richard Shusterman, who in *Pragmatist Aesthetics* postulates that popular art⁷ should be considered a fragment of an overall social process.⁸ For art is manifested in social reality and not outside of it. Shusterman wishes to see art as an element of social life, 'something' we participate in, although at times, we do so unaware of it. In line with these assumptions, one ought to abandon modernist dogmas that consider art to be an object of some kind (including the division into higher and lower culture) and see it in a holistic, processual way. To see it and examine it as a process that encompasses an artist together with his materials, media and the idea, as well as a work of art and purposes for which an artist can use her/his work of art.⁹ A work of art may be analysed in terms of the aesthetic content or lack; nevertheless, we can obtain a far comprehensive and richer picture when we attempt to reach seemingly invisible, yet multivocal and multi-layered subtleties.¹⁰ This is because, although some-

⁵ A. Wyka, *W poszukiwaniu nowych wzorów badań społecznych*, in: A. Wyka, A. Sułek (eds.), *Poza granicami socjologii ankietowej*, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa 1989, pp. 319–335.

⁶ The phenomenon described as "popular culture" does not constitute a homogeneous stable subject, but a certain variable configuration of various traits and elements that together make up general culture (in anthropological sense), which will ensure global social communication, removing social, economic, technological, logical and semiotic barriers. Its fundamental criterion is popularity, "This culture is then intended for everyone and for each person it is characterised by initiation availability and easily attainable communication skills. It is an open culture and, in some sense, a universal one." See: K. Dmitruk, *Kultura popularna*, in: T. Żabski (ed.), *Słownik literatury popularnej*, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 1997, pp. 197–198.

⁷ Shusterman considers products of popular culture to be works of art; he uses the term "popular culture" to refer to, among others, rock, rap and hip-hop music. On the other hand, he avoids using the term "mass culture", which, contrary to "popular culture" or "popular art", bears more negative connotations (associations evoked by the word 'mass'). For more information on the terminology and popular art as an aesthetic challenge. See: R. Shusterman, *Form and Funk: The Aesthetic Challenge of Popular Art*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 1991, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 203–213, DOI: 10.1093/bjaesthetics/31.3.213.

⁸ A. Chmielewski, *Życie – sztuka – filozofia*, in: R. Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna. Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką*, trans. A. Chmielewski, E. Ignaczak, L. Koczanowicz, Ł. Nysler, A. Orzechowski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1998, p. XVI.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Shusterman gives an example of rock music, which he suggests to consider with due account of its origins. See: R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Blackwell, Oxford 1992.

times perceived as a symbol of kitsch and hence, a threat to the ‘real’ (elite) art, popular art is in fact a carrier of many significant and often implicit meanings.¹¹

Identification of some of these veiled ‘subtleties’ that popular culture carries within is the primary goal of this book. By directing my attention to Michael Jackson’s public image, I am interested in the way in which Jackson, due to media rumours, is perceived in collective awareness. Who is he to the public? To answer this question, I shall investigate the discourse focused on the idol. Therefore, the object of my interest is not that much the fact of Jackson’s popularity itself and child sexual molestation allegations he was faced with¹², but primarily the social reception of the idol, reactions that the former king of pop, now degraded to the position of a self-proclaimed king, evokes among the public worldwide.

Why the Internet?

If we accept the broad definition of a source as all traces of reality¹³, the Internet is one of the most interesting and, seemingly, inexhaustible data sources.

Certainly today no one needs to be persuaded that the Internet serves as an important communication tool. Lev Manovich writes that as the carrier of cultural globalisation, the Internet eliminates cultural differences and, consequently, combines what is new and what is old to form various systems.¹⁴ Hence, cultural forms and contents, national cultural traditions and even emotions become mixed up. The digital space of the Internet is an area of creative tension where – as Manovich emphasises – the most significant threads of human history all come into one.

Online forums and focus groups, the possibility to comment on recent events, ongoing confrontation with opinions of other Internet users are evidence not only of new communication ways and techniques, but also contribute to immediate (spontaneous) expression of one’s own views. They allow each user to leave a trace of one’s own ‘virtual’ presence. Online communication ensures some kind of anonymity in presenting one’s opinions and hence it promotes openness – people seem to reveal more of their personal beliefs and views via the Internet than

¹¹ As Joanna Tokarska-Bakir noted, “Mass culture (...) is an invaluable source of truth about increasingly better veiled world. Mass culture jibber-jabbers but in truth, it just cannot lie; it spills the beans sooner or later. You only have to be patient and listen.” See: J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Osobna pamięć Polaków*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 2001, no. 10.

¹² Michael Jackson was accused of sexual molestation of a minor in November 2003. For more information about the trial, see the chapter *People vs. Jackson: The Trial Day by Day*.

¹³ I accept after Marceli Handelsman that a source is “perpetuated and preserved trace of a thought, an action or, in the most general approach, of human life.” See: M. Handelsman, *Historyka*, 2nd ed., Nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, Warszawa 1928, p. 44.

¹⁴ L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2001.

during a face-to-face meeting. These statements of Internet users can be used as data. It is not dependent on researcher's approach, so we can say that we are dealing here with a comfortable situation – Internet users as study participants (more or less aware of their role) provide us with their data themselves.

In the course of examining comments of Internet users, we cannot avoid the question about their validity. Nonetheless, this is a problem that appears in all social research and the Internet is no exception in this respect. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson point out that "(...) as important as the accuracy or objectivity of an account is what it reveals about the teller's interests, perspectives, presuppositions, and discursive strategies."¹⁵ Falsification is also a significant source of data. A reflexive researcher has to be aware that "(...) all classes of data have their problems, and all are produced socially; none can be treated as 'transparent' representations of 'reality'. The recognition of reflexivity in social research entails such an awareness."¹⁶ Similarly, Dagmara Karcz stresses that, primarily, the very content of statements is evident, where one can notice a mythical outline of human thinking. "Internet entries speak not about the actual relation to social and cultural facts but rather about the way in which the world is perceived, given a meaning and a purpose. (...) These reveal a general human need for a mythical arrangement of our small cosmos."¹⁷ On subsequent pages of this book the reader will find an attempt to arrange and then articulate mythical beliefs about Michael Jackson that are present in online statements.

Internet as a Source of Data

My methodological approach began from reading information and keeping a record of events related first to child sexual abuse allegations against Michael Jackson and then, to the over ten-month long court trial. I gathered information about Jackson's case using various sources, mainly online ones. The news available online served Internet users as topics to be commented on, whereas I was using selected statements made by Internet users to analyse traits of a popular culture hero.

At first glance, it might seem that this book concerns strictly American culture; the theoretical background of considerations in this book is Lasch's 'culture of narcissism'; one of the analytic categories (anthropological figures) is the trickster, a figure from the mythology of North American indigenous people, whereas the research subject is related to Michael Jackson. It is not however, another study

¹⁵ M. Hammersley, P. Atkinson, *Ethnography Principles in practice*, 3rd ed., Routledge, New York 2007, p. 124.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

¹⁷ D. Karcz, [www.anthropologia.com?](http://www.anthropologia.com/), Barbarzyńca, http://www.barbarzynca.pl/Artukuly/6_17.htm.

in the field of North American Studies. The fact that I have made comments published on Polish websites the area of empirical exploitation shows that American culture has long transgressed the US territory and entered a global level. Globalisation, particularly via new technologies, has allowed Internet users to become part of the global (world) culture.

The statements I have collected – comments on news regarding Michael Jackson published on websites such as *gazeta.pl*, *muzyka.onet.pl*, *muzyka.wp.pl* (Wirtualna Polska), and *muzyka.interia.pl* – cover the period from November 2003 (Jackson's arrest) to December 2005¹⁸. I have also undertaken to analyse verbal and graphic comments of fans and haters available on websites (in Polish and English language) 'found' by a search engine.¹⁹ I shall refer to this broad collection of data in general as 'statements'. My aim is to approach the research subject in the most holistic approach possible.

In my analysis, I present only some of these statements. This decision was largely affected by the fact that reading and presenting all statements about Michael Jackson available online is simply impossible. Therefore, I consider the empirical material presented in the book explicitly to constitute examples illustrating the phenomenon of a mythical hero traits of occurring in statements about a pop culture idol.

My intent was not to investigate the highest number of statements but to analyse the content. The primary aim of the reflection I have tasked myself with is to examine cultural contents that appear in statements about Jackson. I am interested in diversity of views and opinions of Internet users – both the regularities that appear and elements that are surprising, odd, etc.

The presented data are generally available. They are characterised by multiple authors²⁰; moreover, these statements often are intimate confessions²¹ one can allow themselves to reveal only in virtual reality, as that does not bear regret-

¹⁸ In order to maintain consistency, I use these websites during writing a chapter about Jackson's trial.

¹⁹ After entering the key phrase 'Michael Jackson' into google.com search engine (22 February 2006), a list of about 17,700,000 websites unfolded. (search time 0.29 second) It is hard to say how many of these websites is dedicated entirely to Jackson and how many of them contain the phrase 'Michael Jackson' sporadically in their content. As Zygmunt Bauman notes, when it comes to seeking information using a search engine, we are often dealing with information overload. As he marked, scanning through such a high number of 'available' data is an impossible task, not to mention acquisition, processing and memorization. See: Z. Bauman, *Życie na przemiał*, trans. T. Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Warszawa 2005, pp. 44–45.

²⁰ An Internet user who makes an entry has a specified selected nick s/he uses as her/his own name; hence, it serves as her/his 'virtual' identity. (In the case of the comments I have analysed, I had no data about a given user's identity, sex, age, education, etc.)

²¹ I consider an intimate confession both 'admitting' to be Jackson's fan (as he was charged with child sexual molestation), as well as all the statements whose authors clearly do not condemn paedophilia.

table consequences for the one who confesses. These statements – which I shall address in the chapters that follow – pertain to a lesser degree one’s relationship to Jackson’s music and more often to changes in his appearance and child sexual abuse allegations. The object of interest were statements concerning the most spectacular moments of Jackson’s trial, such as the moment when the charges were filed and when the verdict was announced. Already at the initial stage of research, I decided not to consider statements that are not directly related to the subject, that is, those pertaining to making music charts (lists of favourite or most hated songs by Jackson), guessing song titles, comments on music and media commercialisation, parenting, sexual experiences, references made to political affairs in Poland, bribery in courts, Americanisation of culture, etc.

The decision to situate the research ‘area’ in the Internet was backed not only by the fact that the Internet is presently one of the basic and highly popular communication media, but also the fact that the statements were caused by a need to make a statement, to speak one’s mind on a given matter. In my opinion, this spontaneity holds the greatest value of this type of a source of knowledge. There is yet another significant reason why I decided to use Internet users’ statements as the source material. This reason is directly related to the subject of this book. The Internet, specifically statements made by its users, tell a lot about a post-modern individual, who not only wants to know more and more, be better informed but also, importantly, wishes to mark her/his ‘self’, wanting to participate, even via virtual reality, in events, celebrations, etc. that s/he finds important.²²

Lev Manovich compares the Internet user to a *flâneur*²³, a ‘saunterer’ and someone of the crowd; a figure described by Charles Baudelaire²⁴ and Walter Benjamin.²⁵ For Manovich, the situation of the Internet user ‘exploring’ the virtual world seems analogous to a *flâneur* strolling and window-shopping at the turn of the 20th century.²⁶ The thing that a *flâneur* has in common with the Internet user is the process of transformation that takes place in the awareness of them both, a transformation of non-virtual reality in a virtual one and *vice versa*. For Manovich, it becomes clear that the world of new media is at present a parallel to a thick urban crowd from the early 20th century. *Flâneur* appears on the street or

²² Assistance, that is, a need for participating in a celebration attended by important figures, as Ryszard Kapuściński notices, has become a significant element of our culture. See: R. Kapuściński, *Lapidaria*. Czytelnik, Warszawa 2004, p. 16.

²³ L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, op. cit., pp. 231–237.

²⁴ C. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Liife*, in: *idem, The Painter of Modern and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. J. Mayne, Phaidon Press, London 1964, pp. 1–40.

²⁵ W. Benjamin, *Paris, Capital of the 19th Century*, in: *idem, The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge–London 1999, pp. 1–27.

²⁶ In turn, Zygmunt Bauman uses the figure of a *flâneur* to describe “our consumerist way of being in the world.” See: Z. Bauman, *Two Sketches on Postmodern Ethics*, Instytut Kultury, Warsaw 1994, p. 23.

in the crowd to observe others and then leaves. Similarly, communication via the Internet can be interrupted or aborted at any moment. Also, it creates many opportunities for self-promotion, since as Manovich puts it, "(...) the virtual flâneur is happiest on the move, clicking from one object to another, traversing room after room, level after level, data volume after data volume."²⁷ To this end, s/he sends messages to discussion groups and forums, eagerly uses her/his right to speak and voice her/his opinions. Others are her/his audience.

Already at the data collection stage it seemed interesting to me that the possibility to comment on pieces of information is employed by Internet users not solely to express their mind but to 'expose them to the public' and thus to confront opinions of others. Often one user's comment gives rise to subsequent statements. It is *sui generis* a conversation (in the written form), an ongoing dialogue that often random Internet users are holding with each other.²⁸ What I am particularly interested in is the subject/object of this conversation, as it generates a construct of beliefs about Jackson that are implicitly and explicitly functioning in the public.

Jackson as a Social Fact

In accordance with the definition of the total social fact I intend to approach Michael Jackson from various, though often interconnected perspectives. This shall be attained by means of anthropologic figures of a trickster, a scapegoat, and a carnival king.

Using the above figures, it is worth taking a closer look not only at the diversity of opinions about Jackson (for some Jackson remains a scapegoat, while for others a deviant), but also the very figure of the idol and his biography. In the latter, one can notice a tragedy of a person subjected to ongoing pressure by both his immediate (family and managers) and more distant environment (the public). Jackson is an entrapped idol drawn to the extreme in some sense, at least in terms of physical appearance. Confessions he shared in an interview with Martin Bashir, "I would have been happier wearing a mask", "Everything can be strange to someone", certainly are not unimportant in the analysis of the 'phenomenon' Jackson has become.²⁹

This book is a voice that neither advocates nor condemns Michael Jackson. I do not intend to take a stance regarding his fault or innocence. The task I choose

²⁷ L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, op. cit., p. 235.

²⁸ Nonetheless, this conversation does not take place in real time; on the contrary, it is characterised by asynchronicity. An entry is not only a comment of a specific piece of information but also a reply, a discussion with previous (already existing) comments.

²⁹ J. Shaw, *Living with Michael Jackson*, Granada Television, 2003.

to challenge myself with is solely to interpret a career of a cultural hero Jackson is an example of. I would like to attempt to make certain stages of this career embedded in the mythical pattern of a biography, well-described by means of the three mentioned anthropological figures. This is obviously related to a certain interpretation which, however, does not aspire to come across as infallible. The starting point of this interpretation is a reflection on the condition of late-modern culture, which I call after Christopher Lasch the 'culture of narcissism'.³⁰

³⁰ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1991.

Chapter 2: The Culture of Narcissism

At bottom, human beings mirror themselves in things; they consider anything beautiful if it casts their image back to them...

(Friedrich Nietzsche¹)

Is it that Michael Jackson's social career attained the form of such a specific phenomenon because we are living in a 'culture of narcissism'? An attempt to answer this question as well as a general discussion on the phenomenon of narcissism are addressed in this chapter. Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* shall serve for describing narcissism as a social phenomenon.

Narcissus and Narcissism

The myth about Narcissus², particularly in Ovid's version³, which was considered to have an exceptionally rich literary aspect, has grown to have important inter-

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*, trans. R. Polt, Hackett, Indianapolis–Cambridge 1997, p. 62.

² 'Narcissus' (*nárkissos* in Ancient Greek) is a term from a group of Greek words that share the root word *narc* (Greek *Narkē* – 'numbness', 'paralysis', 'dread', 'hypnosis'). The word 'narcotic' stems from the very same source words. According to Robert Graves, 'narcissus' (also called *leirion*) in ancient wreaths of Persephone and Demeter, was a lily with three petals or an iris, a flower dedicated to a triple goddess, worn as a scapular when the Erinyes had to be appeased. See: R. Graves, *Discoveries in Greek Mythology*, "The Hudson Review" 1954, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 167–181, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3847166?seq=1>.

³ See: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk III, trans. A.S. Kline, Electronic text, The Ovid Project, University of Virginia, Virginia 2000, <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Ovhome.htm#askline>. According to the myth, Narcissus was a son of Greek river god Cephissus and a nymph named Liriope. Indifferent to all signs of love, he rejected girls who fell in love with him, including a mute nymph Echo. For his reluctance to reciprocate their feelings, the unapproachable lover was punished by goddess Nemesis – he was to spend the rest of his life by a water reservoir staring at his own reflection. He died of longing and after his death he turned into a flower that was named after him.

pretations. The greatest contribution was that of literature⁴ and painting⁵, which made Narcissus the archetype of egocentric love that is vain and miserable, since it is never satisfied. Hence, the notion of narcissism has boiled down to the idea of self-love.

In the early 20th century, narcissism was perceived as a sexual deviation and autoeroticism. Over time, narcissism has become a pejoratively popular category that completely displaced other concepts, such as neuroticism.⁶ Nonetheless, identifying narcissism with all things reprehensible and egoistic flattens its meanings to a considerable extent. This was argued by, among others, Sigmund Freud by introducing the notion of narcissism to psychology.⁷ A frequently overlooked fact is that in its early meaning, narcissism was not considered a state that was solely pathological. Although Freud originally used the term narcissism with regard to individuals who derive erotic satisfaction from looking at their own bodies and their sexual reactions, he soon employed it to explain the phenomena of psychosis and schizophrenia. Freud found the difference between schizophrenia (borderline narcissism) and other personality disorders, such as psychosis, characterised by an impaired reaction with a sexual object, to be lying in the fact that in schizophrenia, *libido* remains completely beyond the object of interest and is focused on the image of one's own self, leading to megalomania. Therefore, the mythical Narcissus was not in love with himself but with his own reflection, his self-image.

According to Freud's theory, there are two sexual objects: oneself and one's beloved person. When it comes to narcissism, the entire *libido* is directed at

⁴ 'Narcissus' has become a theme in European literature at the end of the 11th century. It was a period of medieval fascination with Ovid's works. See: M. Głowiński, *Narcyzy i jego odbicia*, in: *idem*, *Mity przebrane: Dionizos, Narcyz, Prometeusz, Marcholt, Labirynt*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1990. Later, the motif of Narcissus (as a poet, a protagonist desiring to explore his identity) appeared in the literature of symbolism, mainly due to Andre Gide's work *Le traité du Narcisse* (1891) and Paul Valéry's poems. However, the key psychological profile of a Narcissus is considered to be Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

⁵ The best-known paintings with the motif of Narcissus are, among others, John William Waterhouse's *Echo and Narcissus*, Nicolas Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* and the famous work *Narcissus* by Caravaggio.

⁶ See: C. Lasch, *The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time*, in: *idem*, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit. See also: Karen Horney's insight into the notion of narcissism: K. Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, W.W. Norton & Co, New York 1937.

⁷ The term 'narcissistic' / 'Narcissus-like' in reference to self-eroticism was first used by Havelock Ellis; H. Ellis, *Studies in Psychology of Sex*, vol. I and VIII, 1898; cited after: H. Ellis, *The Psychology of Sex: A Manual for Students*, A Mentor Book, New York 1960, pp. 102–104. This was followed by a German translation of the concept 'Narcissus-like' *Narcismus* (translated by Paul Näcke). In 1910, Freud adopted it to create his own concept of narcissism; See: S. Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, in: *idem*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, Hogarth Press, London 1957, pp. 73–102.

one's own *ego*.⁸ Freud assumed that narcissism is the primary state of everyone. Since in early childhood bonds with the external world are still non-existent, an infant cannot differentiate between the 'self' and the 'non-self', and hence his or her *libido* cannot be directed outside one's own *ego*. For a small child, the only reality is the child itself, her/his needs and sensations. Over time, as an individual gains experience, discovers new objects and the reality of 'non-self', s/he gradually transfers her/his primary narcissism onto other external objects and people. (We cannot say that a person is fully mature until s/he is free from narcissism to the greatest extent possible). However, if the object onto whom love is put does not reply positively to this emotion, the strength of *libido* returns to the *ego* and becomes the cause of pathological narcissism, that is, secondary narcissism (among others, personality disorders and, in extreme cases, schizophrenia, which was called narcissistic anxiety by Freud). Freud referred to narcissism as "a necessary intermediate stage between auto-erotism and object-love."⁹ This theory initiated Freud's long years of research on the issue, though it was never completed. This first psychoanalytical concept of narcissism was continued and expanded by subsequent studies by psychoanalysts such as Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg.

In Kohut's view, the 'original self' splits into two planes: the grandiose exhibitionistic and the idealized parents image.¹⁰ The former is a belief of every child that it is the centre of the world and that its entire surroundings solely exist to fulfil all its needs. The latter – the idealized parents image – consists in attributing extraordinary traits and skills to parents, thanks to which the child can feel free of unpleasant emotions and states. Over time, as an individual notices other people and their problems, needs, etc., s/he gradually divests herself/himself of her/his 'original self'. However, it is impossible to become completely free of these two forms of one's own 'self', as they continue to be foundations for a sound and strong personality and proper self-esteem. In his theory, Kohut perceives narcissism as a normal stage of human development.

In turn, Otto Kernberg considers narcissism the reason behind mixing elements concerning evaluating the 'self'.¹¹ He replaces the Freudian *libido* with the notion of drive. He also distinguishes three stages of drive development:

- the genital;
- the pregenital;

⁸ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1961, p. 46.

⁹ A. Richards, *Editor's Note*, in: S. Freud, *The Theory of Psychoanalysis: 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' 'The Ego and the Id' and Other Works*, Penguin, London 1991, pp. 61–62.

¹⁰ See: H. Kohut, *Reflections*, in: A. Goldberg (ed.), *Adventures in Self-Psychology*, International Universities Press, New York 1980 or H. Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, International Universities Press, New York 1971.

¹¹ O. Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*, Aronson, New York 1985.

- the state of pathological condensation of the genital and the pregenital drive (dominated by aggression);

That which blocks development of instincts in a human being leaving him or her at this stage, is ‘narcissistic fixation’. According to Kernberg, this is due to two contradictions that are impossible to overcome, namely, excessive self-centeredness and unrestricted need for praise related to low self-esteem, whereas on the other hand, there is inability to use these complements in coping with low self-esteem. Even well-deserved praise is considered hypocrisy and flattery. Not only does such behaviour hinder any interpersonal contact but also makes it impossible to obtain any therapeutic effect in individuals suffering from narcissism. To describe this state, Kernberg introduced the notion of malignant narcissism, which is an analogy to a malignant tumour that debilitates the organism inside which it grows.¹²

The Narcissistic Personality of Our Times

Theories by Freud, Kohut and Kernberg served as psychoanalytical grounds for Christopher Lasch’s book *The Culture of Narcissism*. In the early 1980s, this book became an important contribution to a discussion and subsequent works on narcissism.¹³ The American social critic and historian analysed American culture, which he referred to as narcissistic. Lasch’s criticism seems an indirect reference to *The Revolt of the Masses*, and somewhat mentally stems from this already classical work on the 20th-century social thought.¹⁴

It is in *The Revolt of the Masses* that José Ortega y Gasset describes the end of a certain era of social life characterised by phenomena such as mental laziness, indulging in every whim and mediocrity, rejecting authorities and, primarily, cutting off ties with tradition. As he wrote, “There are no longer protagonists; there

¹² The comparison of cancer cells to narcissism appeared already in Freud’s work. See: S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, op. cit., p. 46.

¹³ The literature on narcissism is abundant and complemented on an ongoing basis. I restrict myself to referring solely the most popular titles on this topic (according to a ranking by Amazon.com); S. Johnson, *Humanizing the Narcissistic Style*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1987; J. Masterson, *The Narcissistic And Borderline Disorders: An Integrated Developmental Approach*, Brunner-Routledge, Philadelphia 1981; S. Vaknin, L. Rangelovska, *Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited*, Narcissus Publications, Skopje 2005.

¹⁴ J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1932. *The Revolt of the Masses* certainly served as an important inspiration for Christopher Lasch in his work on *The Revolt of the Elites*. See: C. Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1996.

is only the chorus.”¹⁵ Noticeably, the most captivating moment in *The Revolt of the Masses* are the words about historical eradication of the modern individual, “In our culture, which has been so strongly anchored in the past experience, (...) the loss of bond with traditions results in a dissolution of cultural norms developed by many generations. The ‘historical ignorance’ of mass-man threatens everyone with an impoverished, mutilated personality.”¹⁶

Though José Ortega y Gasset does not use the term ‘narcissism’, his ‘masses’ seem to share many traits with the Narcissists depicted by Lasch, such as a sense of emptiness, apathy, extreme self-centeredness and focus on one’s own needs. The issues revolving around a crisis of the so-called high culture that Ortega y Gasset addresses will be recalled and reinterpreted in Lasch’s analysis.

In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch does not spare the Americans and their consumerist lifestyle. However, the aim of this book is not to attack American culture but to attempt to draw attention to changes that took place in the 20th-century social life.¹⁷ Lasch assumed that narcissistic disorders have their causes and therefore, they should be considered as a historical phenomenon: their sources should be found and described. He starts from reflecting on the fleeting sense of historical time. Lasch claims that contemporary times are permeated by a sense of an end, while attempts made by society to extend or improve their lifestyle reflect the growing doubt about the future that seems uncertain. Hence, the desperate care about the present and private survival. People feel a strong need for “saving themselves”, the result of which is a popular cult of conscience, health and personal development. Self-improvement, pressure on being in touch with one’s feelings, self-promotion courses, assertiveness courses, time management courses, etc., they are all intended to help get rid of the sense of an overwhelming void. “Since ‘the society’ has no future, it makes sense to live only for the moment, to fix our eyes on our own ‘private performance,’ to become connoisseurs of our own decadence, to cultivate a ‘transcendental self-attention.’”¹⁸

Just as Lasch, Odo Marquard admits that “we modern human beings live in the ‘nihilistic’ age of the great meaning deficit.”¹⁹ In his view, we have entered the ‘lamentation phase’, “one laments the lack of meaning as the loss of meaning.”²⁰

¹⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁶ M. Janion, *Wobec końca wieku*, in: *eadem*, *Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 1996, p. 49.

¹⁷ Lasch notices that if the 1960s in the USA were a time of great moral and social changes, characterised by an increase in political awareness and civic movements, then the 1970s were their total opposite – attention was drawn away from public matters to the private zone. See: C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁹ O. Marquard, *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991, p. 34.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

What does a deficit of meaning consist in? First of all, at present, a growing concern for experiencing absurd can be observed. Modern society is characterised by wishful thinking – “(...) our present-day society, with its preoccupation with demands, compensates for the deficit of meaning by its expenditure on consumption.”²¹ We turn to surrogates, trying to replace the lost meaning with luxury. “The place of meaning is taken by diversion, money, success, prestige, growth, corpulence in physical, technical, and economic forms: Modern society’s preoccupation with luxuries is the consolation put for its worry about the deficit of meaning. Because the life that one lives is empty, one needs it, and everything in it, at least twice over (...).”²² Marquard points out that experiencing deficits of meaning does not always stem from a shortage of meaning, but it may arise from an excessive expectation of meaning, an excessive demand for meaning. “That is why, in the society that is preoccupied with demands, the demand for meaning, in particular, climbs to giddy heights and beyond any level that can be fulfilled, so that this demand has to be disappointed, and thus inevitably produces the experience of lacking meaning and gives rise to the great lamentations of its loss.”²³ Marquard draws attention to a significant property of meaning. For, as he writes, the notion of meaning functions at present as a cryptonym for happiness, it is something in-between that is used as a nickname for that which is pursued as happiness. These inflated expectations or demands regarding meaning lead to a state where an individual becomes doubtful. Seeking to attain the ‘meaninglessness of perfectionism’, modern people accept only things that are perfect, while discriminate everything that fails to reach this level. However, taking the so-called little meanings aside, it is the individual who condemns her/himself to disappointment and a feeling of emptiness. In Lasch’s work, the deficit of meaning that Marquard mentions becomes both implicitly and explicitly one of the main symptoms of the ‘culture of narcissism’.

The emergence of the ‘culture of narcissism’ stems from specific changes that took place over the 19th and the 20th centuries. In this regard, Lasch lists: the progress of modern industry, the mass production that requires a mass market that would absorb mass-produced products followed by the growth in bureaucratisation, advertising industry and the media, mechanical reproduction of culture – it all affected the emergence of narcissistic disorders. In Lasch’s view, even emancipation of women proved highly apparent in many ways, for the patriarchal authority was replaced by the new paternalism with the role of its entrepreneurs played by, among others, the advertising industry, the media and the so-called

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

therapeutic ideology.²⁴ In turn, liberalisation of sex has led to a discrepancy of sort – although sexual life started being appreciated as a value in itself, sexuality has become another ‘weapon’ in the battle of the sexes. On the one hand, a post-modern people yearn for closeness (tenderness), while on the other, they make demands others cannot fulfil, at the same time giving nothing in return. Despite success in professional life, narcissistic individuals tend to struggle with overcoming a sense of emptiness in their private life. To reduce their dissatisfaction with themselves, they steer clear of closeness in relations (which they miss), keep themselves at a protective distance intended to prevent emotional involvement and, hence, getting hurt. In his or her contacts with others, a narcissist is characteristically “(...) facile at managing the impression he gives to others, ravenous for admiration but contemptuous of those he manipulates into providing it; unappealingly hungry for emotional experiences with which to fill an inner void; terrified of aging and death.”²⁵ Hence, the turn towards new cults and therapies, not as much to free oneself from obsession but to find something worth living for.

What is then *homo narcissus*, like? The image painted by Lasch presents an individual who loses her/his subjectivity – who strives to be in good relations with other people, organises her/his private life in accordance with requirements of big organisations, sells herself/himself as if her/his personality was goods of a specified market value, while neurotically craving for love all the time.²⁶ The metaphor of late-modern society is no longer a 19th-century seller. For Lasch, an example of a contemporary Narcissus is a prostitute. In his view, a prostitute’s lifestyle is the ‘essence’ of narcissism. However, one could hardly agree with this highly simplifying claim. By referring to the metaphor of a prostitute – a person who possesses traits essential for survival in herself-Lasch completely overlooks both the socio-economic foundations of prostitution and the fact that it seldom stems from hedonistic reasons. In my opinion, a hypothesis that seems more adequate is that an individual functions primarily today as a fan – someone who is

²⁴ This term stands for a violent (neurotic) search for a ‘peace of the soul’ in therapeutic offices, awareness awakening movements or by intensifying religious experiences. See: C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., pp. 3–31. Also, see what Philips Rieff writes on the therapeutic aspect of modern culture: P. Rieff, *The Triumph of Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 1987.

²⁵ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., pp. 37–38. When writing this book, I was aware of gender-sensitive language, however, the authors I refer to often used the masculine as the subject of their speech. While quoting them, I left the original spelling. In this way we can investigate how great authors lacked gender-sensitive language. In all these quotes instead of “he” / “his” or “man / men” should also be “she” / “her”.

²⁶ See what Karen Horney wrote about the neurotic need of being loved, characteristic of modern culture: K. Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1937, pp. 102–134.

relentlessly trying to find something/someone worth living for.²⁷ This is because emancipation, the greatest ideal of the modern era, no longer ensures authenticity or happiness; on the contrary, it often aggravates the sense of worthlessness or meaninglessness of one's own life. And a narcissist in search of her/his own 'self' eagerly trades self-awareness for oblivion.

Lasch has built a somewhat pessimistic vision of late-modern society, which due to economic transformations created a type of narcissistic culture – a community of people absorbed solely with themselves. Although he writes that "(...) the practice of equating narcissism with everything selfish and disagreeable militates against historical specificity"²⁸, in *The Culture of Narcissism* he himself focuses primarily on narcissism-pathology disregarding the fact that the concept of narcissism is today deprived of its original meaning and has been extended to encompass all forms of individual vanity and self-admiration.²⁹ However, narcissism is something more than just a metaphor of being self-absorbed.³⁰ After Richard Sennett, Lasch is willing to admit that "narcissism is the very opposite of strong self-love"³¹, a product of a fear of one's own worthlessness, its simple contradiction. The foundation here is a narcissistic wound, a specific emotional experience. Narcissism is a compensation for this experience – it forms when an individual is trying to build a self-image that is significantly different from whom he or she really is. In this context, for modern people narcissism is the only way they know for overcoming anxiety, frustration, and brutality of the surrounding reality. It is a way in which society copes with requirements of bureaucratized existence. Narcissism is an attempt to erase the past, history one does not want to remember. It is an answer to a sense of a social threat. Hence, we reach a general, though a fundamental conclusion, namely, that narcissism is born from suffering caused by the lack of answers to fundamental questions, "who am I?" and "how should I live?"

A narcissist busies himself with the question "who am I", although it often arises primarily from the fear that the constructed self-image will never be fully satisfying. And it will not be satisfying because the ideals a man models himself on and pursues are everchanging. The created self-image is not a result of 'looking inside' the self but is formed based on appreciation and praise of others. For this reason, narcissist cannot draw satisfaction from her/his 'self', as

²⁷ Lasch admits that being a fan is everything an individual today is capable of. The author calls Americans a nation of fans. See: C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

²⁹ Lasch criticises, among others, Erich Fromm's concept, who called narcissism the opposite of love. See: *ibidem*. Cf.: E. Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, Harper & Row, New York 1964.

³⁰ R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1977.

³¹ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 31.

her/his self-esteem is constantly dependent on opinions of others.³² As Anthony Giddens notices, “Narcissism presumes a constant search for self-identity, but this is a search which remains frustrated, because the restless pursuit of ‘who I am’ is an expression of narcissistic absorption rather than a realisable quest.”³³ This ongoing search for identity that has little in common with individualism is called by Stanisław Filipowicz “a great ritual of identity”.³⁴ It can be said that today ‘being oneself’ boils down to constant transformation of (or even borrowing of another’s) identity, putting on subsequent ‘masks’.

We move and are bound to keep moving not so much because of the ‘delay of gratification’, as Max Weber suggested, as because of the impossibility of ever being gratified: the horizon of satisfaction, the finishing line of effort and the moment of restful self-congratulation move faster than the fastest of the runners. Fulfilment is always in the future, and achievements lose their attraction and satisfying potential at the moment of their attainment, if not before. Being modern means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression (...).³⁵

As Zygmunt Bauman notes, at present we are dealing with a situation where an individual’s identity is determined by her/himself. Individuation of a person is to consist in an ongoing, even obligatory self-defining, which consequently boils down to ‘fitting’ into already existing niches or imitating available models. Therefore, the noble postulate of individuation becomes another illusion. Not surprisingly, seeking one’s own identity is of an ‘accidental’ or ‘random’ nature, to use a term employed by Richard Rorty.³⁶ In turn, Allan Bloom notices that the cult of authenticity followed by modern people is linked primarily to an ‘insatiable desire for freedom’, that is, strictly speaking, a specific narcissistic laxity.³⁷

Lasch seeks the origin of this “narcissistic laxity” primarily in the loss of a historical continuum.³⁸ It is the historical continuum that gives meaning to the present, allows an individual to develop trust in the surrounding world; trust that is the basis for a healthy personality. Once this continuum is broken, the only remedy left for the sense of insecurity is a violent (neurotic) search for a ‘peace of the soul’, among others, in therapeutic offices, awareness/consciousness

³² Another issue is, as Zygmunt Bauman writes, the lack of openness to criticism in modern society. See: Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge 2000, p. 28.

³³ A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1991, p. 170.

³⁴ S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, Kraków–Warszawa 1998, pp. 5–12.

³⁵ Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, op. cit., pp. 45–46.

³⁶ R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989.

³⁷ A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1987, p. 84.

³⁸ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

raising movements, or by identifying religious experiences. However, these attempts often prove futile – for the issue is not that these groups busy themselves with handling trivial matters but in that the solutions they provide are too banal – advice to live for the moment bring nothing more than a temporary relief.

Lasch is far from admitting that the thing that hinders an individual is culture and so one ought to free her/himself from its chains at all cost. He seems to claim that the culture we have is the culture we have created for ourselves. In a similar tone, Charles Taylor notices that the ‘culture of narcissism’ has not been anything exceptional over centuries, but the thing is, that phenomena such as emotional distance, self-fulfilment, success cult, etc., have presently become a purpose in itself, a determinant of self-actualisation. “The point is that today many people feel called to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn’t do it.”³⁹

The ‘Culture of Narcissism’ *versus* Pop Culture

Who are those a narcissist admires? Lasch replies, that a narcissist “gains a sense of heightened self-esteem only by attaching himself to strong, admired figures whose acceptance he craves and by whom he needs to be supported.”⁴⁰ S/he attempts to conceal her/his feeling of dissatisfaction or lack of meaning of her/his own life with attachment to those who radiate fame, excellence, charisma, etc. A narcissist admires those whose life seems to evoke unflinching interest. S/he believes that by being perceived as a prominent persona, s/he will experience the meaning of his own existence herself/himself, s/he will thus become happy. S/he falls prey to the illusion that by imitating those ‘strong and admired’ s/he will become one of them herself/himself. However, s/he fails to notice that the images of idols s/he admires resemble rather immortal mythical gods and not real-life figures. In this context, Weber’s thesis about rationalisation of the world failed. The essence of modernity does not lie in demythologising and disenchanting the world.

Walter Benjamin claims that the progressing 20th-century industrialisation did not result in increased rationalisation, but on the contrary, industrial culture generated new mythology. In capitalism an urbanistic-industrial world has emerged that reactivated mythical forces. As Benjamin stated, the myth glances at us from “the toothpaste advertising billboard ‘toothpaste for giants.’”⁴¹ It is

³⁹ C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA–London 2003, p. 17.

⁴⁰ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴¹ S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA–London 1989, p. 254.

not art (as supporters of romanticism claimed) but modern technology that is the source of mythology regeneration. The role of modern producers-manufacturers of collective imagination is played by (less and less anonymous) photographers, designers, architects, journalists, etc. It is them who have become the visionaries who bring “mythical forces”⁴² in industrial world to light. Nonetheless, the force of modern gods is like a “lightning flash”⁴³ – gods pass away and are replaced by the new ones. The new mythology is a **mythology on the move**.

In his considerations, Benjamin adopted a point of view of surrealists who perceived the everchanging nature of the urban-industrial landscape as something mythical and fairy-tale-like in itself, often referring to a metaphor of a dream. An industrial city from the early 20th century seemed an ancient laboratory with endless rows of buildings decorated with colourful posters or an enchanted Arcadia where the Eiffel tower resembles a prehistoric animal. Muses of this new mythology were stars of the screen and the stage, heroes of illustrated magazines, modern stores with plates in English or names and decorations using mythical motifs.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, along with surrealism and modernity came the definitive end of a certain era – what used to be praised was now trivialised. A tragedy was replaced by a comedy and a farce; banal has become commonly recognized as valuable. The turn towards magic manifested itself in, among others, ‘production’ of muses of this new mythology, consumption of tangible goods, architectural projects, keeping up with fashion trends, in short – in everything the ‘awakening’ mass culture brought with itself. It allows us to understand collective phantasies/ imagination, this unconscious dreaming the modern world has slipped into.

Popular culture allows its audience to fall into a dream of the new mythology, whereas its protagonists gain the role of idols. In accordance with what Lasch has written, people today, deprived of authorities and experiencing a sense of an overwhelming emptiness, seek external forces they could draw a model of life from. We are living in a narcissistic society; as Lasch puts it, a “culture of narcissism”, where everyone wants to identify with the ‘winner’.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is easy to grow attached to images of beautiful rich idols of pop culture, content with themselves and sparking common interest, as shown in the media. The status of an idol functions today as a fetish.⁴⁶ In turn, to be a fan is to be ‘part’ of the admired persona,

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 253–262.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 256.

⁴⁴ Louis Aragon, to which the reference was made and with whom Benjamin argued, noted that names of gas stations such as Esso and Stell were borrowed from African tribes that are considered cannibalistic. See: L. Aragon, *Le paysan de Paris*, Paris 1953, p. 145. Cited after: S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 257.

⁴⁵ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴⁶ Michel Houellebecq’s comment on the status of modern idols seems interesting and adequate here. The author points out that beautiful young famous idols who are desired by all women and envied by all men make up the very top of social hierarchy. See: M. Houellebecq, *Atomised*, trans. F. Wynne, Vintage House, London 2001, p. 97.

to share his or her sense of self-actualisation. More so, it is the admired idol who becomes an 'extension' of his or her admirers. By identifying with a group of the admired (idols), individuals who make up the audience manage to reduce their own failures and soothe their feeling of alienation. The relation between an idol and her/his fans resembles, on the one hand, a bond that connects followers with the sacred, and on the other, it takes on characteristics that are typical of theatre. The closeness of the admired and the admiring audience forms an illusion that the fan can participate in the spectacle, experience the opportunity to admire herself/himself in a new role of the performer. Hence, pop culture allows a late-modern narcissist to experience her/his own life as a 'work of art'.

Chapter 3: The *Pop Cult*: Life as a ‘Work of Art’

All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

(Oscar Wilde¹)

“What one can say about Michael Jackson?” With these words Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis begins her preface in the idol’s biography titled *Moonwalk*.² The question Kennedy Onassis put forward leads to a conclusion that unchangeably throughout all these years, we have known about Jackson just as much as we have not known. Due to the rumours in the media, Jackson does not cease to be an object of social interest. What does connect him with the public? What is the thing that determines the strength of an idol’s bond with the audience, in general? In this chapter, I focus on these questions. I am also interested in the status of an idol in the ‘culture of narcissism’.

Models of Aesthetic Life

In today’s reality, the line separating artists-creators from performers-imitators becomes more and more blurred. Often, at the same time, an artist fulfils various overlapping roles in social life, which are then difficult to separate. Hans-Georg Gadamer noted that for a long time now, “(...) artist does not live within a community, but creates for himself a community as is appropriate to his pluralistic situation.”³ The nature of this community is ecumenic and universal. An artist serves an implicit role of a master, a teacher, and authority figure and, lastly, an

¹ O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wordsworth Editions, Ware–Hertfordshire 1992, p. 3.

² M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, Doubleday, New York 1988, p. 12.

³ H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. N. Walker (ed.), R. Bernasconi, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, p. 7.

idol. One may hypothesise that late-modern idols of pop culture have become somewhat moralists of our times, while being ‘infatuated’ with an artist-idol is one of the characteristic traits of the ‘culture of narcissism’.⁴ I refer to this phenomenon – being mesmerized by an idol – as the *pop cult*. Its centre is always taken by an artist who operates not as much as a creator, that is, someone who provides aesthetic experiences, but as an idol who provides experiences beyond the scope of aesthetics. It would seem that the very notion of an ‘artist’ takes on an anachronic meaning. Below is the answer given by musician Jacek Lachowicz to the question, whether there are still artists in the late-modern culture:

Notions such as an ‘artist’ or ‘artistry’ have taken on a skewed character. When you say about someone that he’s an ‘artist’ you get a weird look from others. That’s common when one relishes the media background. But pop culture is something that will always be there, like freshly baked bread. Only time will tell whether there was anything more than just a glitz in it all.⁵

The “glitz” that Lachowicz mentions is a typical boon of popular culture – fame, popularity, presence in the media, etc. Richard Shusterman draws attention to a certain model of aesthetic life that operates particularly clearly in pop culture that creates it. Shusterman claims that the best-known model of this kind is life dedicated to finding joy in beauty represented by the so-called “beautiful people”.⁶ Hence, we are dealing here with a phenomenon in which an artist-creator is replaced by an idol; not as much an object as a subject of beauty. Shusterman calls the phenomenon of ‘enjoying’ beauty the “aestheticization of the ethical”:

It is manifested by our culture’s preoccupation with glamour and gratification, with personal appearance and enrichment. The celebrated figures of our time are not men of valour or women of virtue but those significantly called the “beautiful people”.⁷

By means of reading biographies of famous people, the public has the opportunity to participate in an idol’s world.⁸ Interest in both biographies and all items

⁴ Here, I think primarily about Bono, the leader of the Irish band U2, and Bob Geldof, who were the first rock musicians to participate in G8 meetings of the richest states in 2005. By becoming engaged in a campaign for international support for the poorest countries of the world, among others, by organising a concert tour Live 8 and The One Campaign, Bono and Geldof have contributed to publicising the problem of poverty in the African continent in the media. See: A. Leszczyński, *Wielki show, wielka bieda*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2005, 4 July; *idem*, *Dlaczego Afryce trzeba pomóc*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2005, 10 July.

⁵ This statement comes from my interview with Jacek Lachowicz from 2004.

⁶ R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Blackwell, Oxford 1992, p. 251.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 238.

⁸ Attention should be also drawn to the fact of modelling physical appearance on the admired idols, not only by means of surgical intervention but also ‘changing’ dentition. See: *Możesz mieć uśmiech jak Julia*, “Metro” 2005, 24 March.

related to a famous person points to an admirer's need to escape her/his own world and to enjoy the warm light of her/his idol's glory. Everything that pertains to the admired persona becomes relics, least to mention website auctions that have become highly popular, at which various items that used to belong to famous people (or that are in any way related to them) are sold. During one such auction (in the USA), toasted bread slices with the likeness of Michael Jackson and an inscription 'Not guilty!' were auctioned.⁹ Auctions during which items of idols' clothing are sold are also highly popular.¹⁰

Another way to escape the monotony of one's reality can be found in the post-modernist postulate of self-creation stated by Richard Rorty. Self-creation is to lead one to a belief about the necessity of expanding one's horizons, opening up to new opportunities, experiences and languages by means of which an individual enriches both her/his sensations and herself/himself.¹¹ A late-modern individual, as Rorty states, faces a difficult challenge of self-creating and constructing her/his own identity. Self-creation takes place by means of re-describing – life-long learning and striving for innovation – that ultimately is supposed to direct an individual towards shaping her/his own life as a 'work of art'. However, to what extent is this multidimensional vision of life really an authentic creation, and to what extent is it the construction of borrowed inconsistent narratives, Shusterman asks.¹² Moreover, a question appears as to what extent has the cult of self-realization become (yet another) form of entertainment?

It seems that the postulate of life as a 'work of art' arises from admiration for the status an idol enjoys among the audience, as well as from a desire to share this feeling of uniqueness with her/him. "Artistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition. The artist becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as agent of original self-defini-

⁹ The toasts with the likeness of Michael Jackson appeared on the auction website eBay immediately after the singer received immunity from prosecution for sexual abuse charges. The seller ensured that the image of Jackson's face had appeared on the auctioned toasts before the verdict was announced. "Two toasts popped up – one with Michael's face on it and the other with the line 'Not guilty'. The very same day, he was acquitted." we may read in the description of the auctioned item. See: *Tosty z podobizną Jacksona*, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,60935,2780330.html>.

¹⁰ In October 2005, an auction was organised from which the income was intended to support victims of Hurricane Katrina in the USA. Among the auctioned items there were clothes, i.a., a bra of American singer Britney Spears, which reached 60 thousand dollars. See: *Bogini fetyszystów*, "Forum" 2005, no. 42.

¹¹ R. Rorty, *Freud and Moral Reflection*, in: J.H. Smith, W. Kerrigan (eds.), *Pragmatism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis*, John Hopkins University, Baltimore 1986, pp. 11–15.

¹² R. Schusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, op. cit., p. 246. A similar concern is expressed by Charles Taylor, who noted, "The culture of narcissism lives an ideal that it is systematically falling below". See: C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, op. cit., p. 57.

tion.”¹³ A person’s life is considered a work of its author who wants to see herself/himself, but who would also like to be perceived by others as an artist, a creator: “My self-discovery passes through a creation, the making of something original and new.”¹⁴ It is striking, however, that the artist exceeds her/his work in this very assumption.

Today, the postulate of life as a ‘work of art’ is not as much a search for self-actualisation in the act of creation as an attempt to draw attention to oneself, ‘calling’ for others’ interest or attention. In this case, self-approval is determined by public recognition. “Today men seek the kind of approval that applauds not their actions but their personal attributes. They wish to be not so much esteemed as admired. They crave not fame but the glamour and excitement of *celebrity*.”¹⁵ Today people desire a life that would impress, touch, please but also evoke common jealousy or even envy of others. They want a life that would be a manifestation of the artistic genius of its author.

The Category of Non-Differentiation

Now, in my search for an answer to the question of the idol-fan relationship, I would like to refer to Gadamer’s notion of aesthetic non-differentiation (*Nichtunterscheidung*).¹⁶ Here, however, we are dealing with a specific approach to this category, for it appears in two (extended) forms. The former one pertains solely to the presentation and that which is presented (*signans* and *signatum*), whereas the latter to the relationship between an idol and a fan. An example of the first form of non-differentiation is, among others, identifying an idol with her/his image and *vice versa* – identifying an idol’s image (e.g., a photograph, a poster) with an idol herself/himself or a film (an invented story) with reality.¹⁷ The item and the representing mark become one; the differentiation between the presentation and that

¹³ C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁶ That which Gadamer calls ‘non-differentiation’ is the absence of differentiation between that which is presented in a work of art from the presentation itself (the merging of *signans* and *signatum*). See: H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and the Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. J. Weinsheimer, D.G. Mars, Continuum, London–New York 2004, p. 134.

¹⁷ Such an understanding of non-differentiation is illustrated by the example of Michael Jackson. Jackson was excluded from Jehovah’s Witnesses after he shot the music video *Thriller*, in which he transforms into a werewolf, among others. The role Jackson played was considered a declaration of his worldview (that is, faith in afterlife, vampires, etc. which is in conflict with the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses). The invented story was perceived as a manifestation of the idol’s true worldview. I cite the information about Jackson’s exclusion after: E. Bagiński, *Świadkowie Jehowy od wewnątrz*, Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, Kraków 1999, p. 52.

which is presented becomes blurred – an idol becomes that which s/he creates, i.e., her/his own image (a work of art). An idol operates as a subject of self-creation. Hence, the line between an object (an idol) and its representation (an idol's image) becomes blurred. The second form of non-differentiation transgresses this understanding of Gadamer's category and steps beyond the framework of *mimesis*¹⁸ in its classic understanding. This is because it pertains not as much to *signans* and *signatum*, as to the relationship between an idol and the public. In this case, the differentiation between the object (an idol) and its representation in the audience perception is blurred. It is a relation where the admirer recognises herself/himself in the admired idol. What does this 'recognition' consist in?

The New Mythology

A fan recognises herself/himself in the idol, as the latter is a projection of her/his narcissism, that is, a negation of the worthlessness s/he is experiencing. A certain magical potential is attributed to a pop culture hero. An idol is a reflection of her/his fans' deepest, often unrealised desires. As Feuerbach notes, to eliminate one's own limitation, one invents more and more objects of adoration. "God is nothing other than the archetypal and ideal image of man; what God is and how he is, is what man ought to be or wants to be, or at least hopes to be in the future."¹⁹ Here, we are probably dealing with a kind of cathexis. An idol serves a double function; firstly, s/he is the object of desire, by means of which a fan seeks to fulfil her/his own desires; second, s/he is a subject of identification, someone her/his fan would like to be but cannot due to various reasons.²⁰ However, this 'infatuation' with an idol allows a fan to find the meaning of life, which is the postulate of life as a 'work of art'. By transferring its desires onto the admired persona, the audience thus fulfils its narcissistic needs, and by recognizing themselves in their object of admiration, they gain the possibility to experience the idol's 'power'. I call this narcissistic need for 'clinging' to someone admired, the desire to attain non-differentiation, the *pop cult*. Characteristically of this category, narcissism of the public stems from a lack of basic ontological 'self' (that is, a hunger for identity) on the one hand, while the idol-audience relation is characterised by a mimetic need of the admirer to recognise herself/himself in the admired (literally 'merging' into one) on the other hand.

¹⁸ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and the Method*, op. cit., pp. 112–116.

¹⁹ L. Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Z. Garden, Doubleday, New York 1972, p. 26.

²⁰ Identification with an idol reminds to some extent of a state of being in love as described by Sigmund Freud. See: S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, op. cit.

In the *pop cult*, as in the (post)modernity, there is an inscribed consent to idols' impermanence and mortality. Admired on one day, they become forgotten on the next day, replaced by other "beautiful people". According to Buck-Morss, gods stand out in this modern mythology due to their susceptibility to time, as they are part of the profane, and their power is temporary. Thus, gods are mortal, whereas their strength is transient.²¹ This takes place because modern gods are identified primarily by beauty and physical attractiveness, hence, by this fact itself, traits that deteriorate with time. Idols exist only as "beautiful people". They are products of a mass dream of eternal youth and beauty.²²

According to Lasch, behind the need to expose oneself to "beautiful faces" there is a fear that is somewhat connected to narcissism – not only is it a fear of aging, but also that of the very thought about losing one's physical attractiveness. This fear might stem from two reasons – firstly, it might be due to a realistic assessment of a role played by the elderly in the late-modern society, and secondly, it might originate in irrational panic. "The most obvious sign of this panic is that it appears in people's lives so prematurely."²³ The cult of youth, fascination with appearance stem primarily from the narcissistic cult of the self, for by caring relentlessly about her/his physical attractiveness, a narcissist wants to experience excellence and hence, validate her/his own 'self'. It is the only way known to her/him that allows her/him to reject the sense of emptiness. S/He assesses her/his value by the interest s/he evokes among others. A narcissist "needs to be admired for his beauty, charm, celebrity or power-attributes that usually fade with time. Unable to achieve satisfying sublimations in the form of love and work, he finds that he has little to sustain him when youth passes him by."²⁴ This is why s/he is trying so obsessively to uphold the illusion of youth and seeks to solve the aging-related crises in extending her/his reproductive age, discovering new interests, new ways for spending spare time, keeping up with the trends and, lastly, in the *pop cult*. An idol who changes her/his face becomes an image of the 'self', while being a fan becomes the greatest (pseudo)satisfaction an individual can enjoy living in the culture of narcissism.

To sum up, the culture of narcissism ultimately boils down to a model of life in which clearly dominate two traits: firstly, we are dealing with pseudo-emanicipation that is to lead to shaping one's life as a 'work of art', and secondly, the

²¹ S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 259.

²² Each year in the press and on websites polls for "the most beautiful, the sexiest, the best-dressed people of the show-business" are published. *People* magazine publishes a list of the top "50 most beautiful people in the world", television station E! presents a ranking for "the best bodies of the show-biz" and *Company* magazine suggest voting for "the sexiest man alive".

²³ C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, op. cit., p. 210.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

postulate of the stated apotheosis of individuality in reality boils down to participating in a specific festival of identity. Self-creation consists in that everyone can obtain any identity to hide the burden of her/his sense of insecurity behind. Ultimately, authenticity and self-fulfilment have little in common with the ideal of being loyal to oneself, as Charles Taylor points out. Today, these postulates take on an absurd character – on the one hand, we are dealing here with a situation where people want to discover ‘themselves’ at all cost, while on the other hand, they give in to a subsequent, new form of dependency. In their search for an answer to the question, “Who am I?”, “people insecure in their identities turn to all sorts of self-appointed experts and guides, shrouded with the prestige of science or some exotic spirituality.”²⁵ People seek the answer to the question about their own identity in the easiest-accessible external models, that is, figures of pop culture idols, “beautiful faces” that can be admired via the media. By evoking common interest, idols seem to be fulfilled and happy people. The “beautiful people” or, in fact, the status they enjoy becomes the ideal an individual aspires to. As Stanisław Filipowicz wrote, “Everyone wants to believe that just as celebrities, they can dazzle with the uniqueness of their faces and enrapture with the nuance of their character.”²⁶ Solace is offered by the *pop cult*. By ‘clinging’ to the admired idol, fans impose some expectations onto her/him, equip her/him with specific beliefs – an idol is supposed to be the one owing to whom her/his admirers will be capable of making their own phantasies about being someone unique come true. And, ultimately, they will live their lives as ‘works of art’. Therefore, my thesis is as follows: an idol is someone who co-decides about an individual’s identity, yet, being an object of the pop cult at the same time, s/he exists as a ‘reflection’ of narcissism of fans who admire her/him. In this sense, her/his identity is a construct of the public, a construct of collective awareness and unawareness.

²⁵ C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁶ S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, op. cit., p. 8.

PART II:

RECEPTION OF MICHAEL JACKSON IN COLLECTIVE AWARENESS

Artists (...) seem to be saying, we are just as you have created us, we embody dreams and fears, we are in fact just like you – though you find it difficult to admit, you are hiding your true face behind a uniform of properly tailored suits. Yet bloody orgies, murder and various perversions fascinate you though you fear admitting it openly. This is our culture, of which we are a mere reflection...

(Izabela Kowalczyk¹)

The idol–audience relation is characterised by interdependence: an idol is the one who co-decides about the identity of her/his admiring fans, and s/he herself/himself is a ‘creation’ of her/his fans. Certain beliefs are imposed onto her/him – s/he is supposed to be the one who will allow her/his admirers to live their own life as a ‘work of art’, and hence become someone unique. This phenomenon – the *pop cult* – is rooted in narcissism understood as a contradiction of one’s own worthlessness. A fan, living with the conviction that that her/his value is determined by recognition obtained from others, wants to be uncritically worshipped and admired for her/his excellence. S/He strives to become an artist/idol.

The status of an artist is related to privileges. Izabela Kowalczyk notes that society does not require from an artist (officially) that s/he follows social rules, but they allow her/him to display her/his own ‘self’, to balance on the line between morality and reality.

Artists execute and create phantasies, both their own and those in which their fans participate. They bring into reality that which due to social conventions, good customs and the binding norms cannot be executed. The music business forms a safe space in which even the weirdest ideas can be executed. (...) In their artificial world,

¹ I. Kowalczyk, *Karmieni własnym łękiem i fantazją – estetyka subwersji i przemocy we współczesnej muzyce rockowej*, in: W. Burszta, M. Rychlewski (eds.), *Między duszą a ciałem*, Twój Styl, Warszawa 2003, pp. 202–203.

musicians can allow themselves to go further, they can execute that which is solely a dream for the audience by recreating not only its phantasies but also fears.²

By using, among others, the aesthetics of violence, pop culture idols bring a (symbolic) violation of the system of prohibitions adopted by society. They become a regulator of the social order in a sense – they dare to touch on the taboo, a line that must be transgressed. They serve the role of tricksters, carnival kings, saints. Their social status is always ambivalent – as creators of reality they embody phantasies of the public, triggering fear at the same time, because they destroy the existing order. I assume that at present, the roles of kings-deviants-transgressors are ‘given’ to pop culture idols, who are first worshipped and admired but then become deprived of the idol status. In this context, Michael Jackson is a carnival king tasked by the public with the specific role he is supposed to play. He is also a trickster, that is, someone of an unspecified, problematic body / looks, conduct and sexual orientation. Each of these traits (looks, behaviour and sexual orientation) can also function as stigma (Goffman) or particular traits in designating a scapegoat (Girard). Each of the mentioned traits appeared in the analysed comments of Internet users. These statements were considered to be a social commentary to Jackson’s trial when he was charged with sexual molestation of a child. In the mentioned comments attention is focused on Jackson not only due to the allegations but primarily due to his looks.

² *Ibidem.*

Chapter 1: Michael Jackson's Biography¹

He was the first 'total artist' – on his example we see that everything – compositions, lyrics, singing, arrangements, dancing, concerts, music videos, his book biography, films, studio production, photographic sessions, album cover design, posters, outfits, haircuts, plastic surgeries, eccentricities, TV performances – it all makes up a creation of one product that is not music at all. It is Michael Jackson himself.

(Robert Leszczyński²)

Michael Jackson is one of the most popular idols of the 20th century; a singer, a composer, a dancer, a choreographer, a video producer, a publisher. His activity is not as much an artistic example, as primarily an example of commercial success.³ Jackson is an artist who sold the highest number of albums in the history of phonography – over 700 million⁴, he has the best-selling album of all times on

¹ In terms of the timeframe, the data presented in this chapter are restricted to the upper limit of 2005.

² R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson – biografia*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2003, 19 November.

³ Overlooking artistic value of Jackson's albums and focusing mainly on their commercial success is discussed in the following passage: "(...) The exceptional success of *Thriller* [Jackson's second solo album released in 1982] and the accompanying music videos partially obscured the most important thing – strictly musical valour of this album. *Thriller* is a true compendium of pop music. (...) The exceptionality of this album, considered one of the best if not the best album in the history of pop music, manifests itself in various aspects. The most obvious is the commercial one, as never in history has such a great number of an album been sold, either before or after. It is a world record listed in the Guinness World Records. (...) Not only has *Thriller* catapulted Jackson to the top international celebrities but it has also made him an incredibly wealthy man. That was the artistic and commercial peak of his career." See: M. Garztecki, *Naznaczony kolorem. Tajemnice Michaela Jacksona*, „Rzeczpospolita” 2001, 17–18 January. Robert Sankowski writes about commerciality as the most prominent trait of Jackson's artistic activity as follows: "In the world of music entertainment of the early 1980s, still divided in terms of race and ethnicity, Jackson's massive success was an unprecedented event. The vocalist managed to reach mass white public with music deeply rooted in black traditions". See: R. Sankowski, *Król popu abdykuje*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2005, 1 February.

⁴ The actualised information about the number of Jackson's sold albums and singles is provided at Official Charts, <https://www.officialcharts.com/artist/16519/michael-jackson/>.

his record (*Thriller*, 1982), as well as the highest number of awards to be won by the same artist⁵ and the highest number of concert tours⁶ (with over 15 million spectators in total). He introduced new elements to pop art, such as expanded music videos using cutting-edge special effects and a fast-paced plot.⁷

Both Jackson's popularity and commercial success can be also analysed from a strictly marketing point of view:

Attempts to explain Jackson's popularity cannot be limited to analysing his music. To a considerable extent, Jackson owes his success to using many new technical means and the media The Beatles, Presley or Led Zeppelin did not have. Hence, he exploited the possibilities of recording technology to the limit, he considerably expanded the music video conventions, his music reached listeners around the globe owing to satellite television. He was the first artist to use the promotion machinery and expert staff on such a great scale, which previously have not been used except for presidential campaigns in the USA.⁸

An important role in Jackson's career was played by managers, promoters and advisors⁹.

Unquestionably, he could sing and dance like no one else. But it is also known that no other artist has been supported by such technology: the best recording studios, satellite TV, particularly MTV (...) Jackson worked with the best. He was backed up by numerous promotion and advertising experts. Each detail and each inch of this persona was well thought-through and perfectly designed: the skin colour, the shape of his nose, the hand gesture, the cut of a glove, the lock over his forehead, the move of his foot and the buttons on his waistcoat. A perfectly consistent product was created out of music, lyrics, singing, dancing, concerts, music videos, albums, photos, posters, interviews, books, figurines, decals... Michael is a total product.¹⁰

⁵ The list of Jackson's accomplishments and awards won can be found at: Michael Jackson's Top 10 Career Highlights, <https://www.liveabout.com/michael-jacksons-career-highlights-2851672>.

⁶ I have found the information (in chronological order) about premieres of specific albums and singles, as well as statistical data concerning the number of albums sold, awards won and completed concert tours at Jackson's official website, <http://michaeljackson.com> (the *History* tab).

⁷ "Jackson was one of the first musicians to have understood the power of the new medium. (...) At the same time, he played a great part in elevating a music video to the rank of a new genre of audio-visual art." See: R. Sankowski, *Król popu abdykuje*, op. cit.

⁸ R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson*, "Magazyn", a supplement to "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1996, 26 January.

⁹ Jackson's first manager was his father Joseph Jackson, who directed the career of Jackson's family band. Michael resigned from cooperation with his father once he reached majority. See: M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., pp. 116–117.

¹⁰ M. Wołkowycza, *Michaś z krainy czarów*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1996, 20 September.

For many years, Jackson's name has been often accompanied by the superlative.¹¹ It seems that the usage of the superlative may be considered Jackson's 'gigantism'. In the 1980s and in the early 1990s, these superlatives were related primarily to all the music success Jackson enjoyed (e.g., 'the greatest star of the show-business', Jackson being titled 'the king of pop'), while today it is linked primarily to a status of a dethroned idol. After child sexual abuse allegations, using some phrases proved problematic.¹² This can be exemplified by a fragment of a review of the album *Invincible* (2001):

Less than twenty years ago, Michael Jackson was setting standards for pop music. His new recordings were awaited with high interest and premieres of music videos used to be celebrated in MTV like works of the greatest film directors. Over time, the admired and recognised star has become if not an object of mockery, then at least an object of pity and compassion. The king of pop? You must be kidding me.¹³

It is also worth noting that in the discourse about Jackson terms such as 'a singer/an artist' rarely appear, whereas terms such as 'the star/the king of pop' or simply Michael Jackson are encountered more often. Nonetheless, using the above terms proved problematic after child abuse charges were filed.

What was the course of the depreciation of the persona Jackson used to embody? The answer to this question can be found further in this chapter.

I will commence with a presentation of the idol's biography. My main focus will be to show subsequent stages of his career – from the 'mascot' of Jackson Five to the 'king of pop'.¹⁴ Then, I shall proceed the chronology of the court proceedings the Attorney General of California brought in January 2004 against Jackson who was charged with sexual molestation of a 13-year-old boy.

Michael Jackson's Biography¹⁵

Michael Joseph Jackson was born on 29 August 1958 in a town called Gary, Indiana to Kathrine and Joe Jacksons as the seventh of their nine children. Jackson

¹¹ Robert Leszczyński called Jackson "The most vivid symbol of pop culture. An artist and a product of mass culture, a freak and a provocateur." See: R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

¹² This issue is indicated by, among others, Beata Pawlikowska, who asks, "Who is coming to Poland? A star since childhood? The king of pop? The record-holder in album sales? A man charged with sexual molestation of a small boy?" See: B. Pawlikowska, *Historia. Michael Jackson*, "Machina" 1996.

¹³ W. Radomski, *Harakiri króla popu*, , <http://muzyka.onet.pl/mr,10187,1,recenzje.html>.

¹⁴ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁵ In the course of preparing this chapter I noticed that in texts about Jackson's music career attention is drawn primarily to his commercial successes. Aside from that, listing statistical data regarding, among others, the number of albums sold seems to serve the pur-

himself claims a school play in which he participated at the age of five to be his first public performance.¹⁶ A year later (1964), he was already singing in Jackson Five together with his brothers, a band directed by their father. Jackson mentions that the first years of the group's existence were filled with "hard work", practicing dance moves and vocal rehearsals. "I remember my childhood as mostly work, even though I loved to sing."¹⁷ Their first recordings (*Big Boy* and *We Don't Have To Be Over 21*) were released by Steeltown Records in Gary in 1968.¹⁸ The band systematically performed for the public, first in the family town, then in Chicago and New York.¹⁹ In the very same year, the Jacksons were interviewed at Motown

pose of strengthening the idea that despite the controversies that Jackson evokes, he is still a great artist. This point of view is well covered by Antonio 'LA' Reid (record executive, co-founder of LaFace Records), "There are many, many people who think of Michael as a spectacle, and it's sad. All of it has taken away from our ability to see him for the artist he really is. A world without Michael Jackson would be a very, very different world. And I think we should all feel very blessed that an artist of that caliber came into our lives, because he has enriched our lives". See: A. 'LA' Reid, *Michael Jackson*, "Rolling Stone" 2004, no. 946. In turn, Robert Sankowski writes, "(...) And after all, before he turned into a frustrated freak, he used to be one of the most important and the greatest artists in the world of pop music. In some aspects, he was even the most important." See: R. Sankowski, *Król popu abdykuje*, op. cit. However, the data about Jackson's private life is dominated mainly by the information about his 'difficult' childhood that is said to have had a decisive impact on the singer's mental state: "In the peak period [of Jackson Five career – Author's note], Michael Jackson was already 12 years old. One can only speculate how was his psyche marked by raving crowds of minor admirers." See: M. Garztecki, *Naznaczony kolorem. Tajemnice Michaela Jacksona*, op. cit.

¹⁶ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 9. In his autobiography, Jackson repeatedly recalls his passion for making music of his own unfettered free will. In his stories about childhood he juxtaposes his harsh father demanding total obedience with an idealised image of his mother. "If you messed up, you got hit, sometimes with a belt, sometimes with a switch. My father was real strict with us – real strict. (...) Through all this, my mother was completely supportive. She had been the one who first recognized our talent and she continued to help us realize our potential." See: *ibidem*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Regarding the song *Big Boy*, Jackson recalls, "It was a nice song about a kid who wanted to fall in love with some girl. Of course, in order to get the full picture, you have to imagine a skinny nine-year-old singing this song. The words said I didn't want to hear fairy tales anymore, but in truth I was far too young to grasp the real meanings of most of the words in these songs. I just sang what they gave me. See: *ibidem*, p. 43.

¹⁹ Performances of the nine-year-old Michael and his brothers often took place in night clubs. Jackson recalls 'club' scenes he witnesses: "We worked in more than one club that had strippers in those days. I used to stand in the wings of this one place in Chicago and watch a lady whose name was Mary Rose. I must have been nine or ten. This girl would take off her clothes and her panties and throw them to the audience. The men would pick them up and sniff them and yell. My brothers and I would be watching all this, taking it in, and my father wouldn't mind." See: *ibidem*, p. 38.

Records²⁰, which resulted in their long-term contract and moving to California.²¹ Their first single for Motown *I Want You Back* was released in 1969 and got to the top of the American Billboard music chart. "Owing to this [single], Michael has become the youngest artist in history to have a song on the top of a hit list considered the most important ranking of songs in the US."²² Their subsequent songs – *ABC*, *The Love You Save* and *I'll Be There* also ranked first on American hit lists.²³ By 1976, when they finished their cooperation with Motown, Jackson Five had released 12 albums and completed a world tour in that time. From 1976 they recorded for newly-founded Epic Records (later, a label of Sony Music), which ensured artistic independence for the group.²⁴ However, they had to change the name from Jackson Five, thus becoming The Jacksons. The line-up of the band also changed, as the youngest of the Jackson brothers Randy joined the band, replacing Jermaine, who remained in Motown to continue his solo career. The group officially existed until 1984, when their last studio album *Victory* was released.

In 1978, Michael Jackson was offered to record a solo album and made his debut as an actor playing a scarecrow in the music feature *The Wiz* (directed by Sidney Lumet). On the movie set, he met jazz musician Quincy Jones²⁵, who became the producer of his three solo albums: *Off The Wall* (1979), *Thriller* (1982) and *Bad* (1987).

The album *Off The Wall*, which premiered on 5 August 1979, is considered one of the best pop music albums.²⁶ Four singles from this album were ranked in the

²⁰ Motown – Motown Record Company, also known as Tamla-Motown – a record label founded by Berry Gordy in Detroit (Motown – an abbreviation for "Motor Town") in 1958. From the early 1960s, Motown was considered the key record company promoting music created by African Americans, <http://www.motown.com>.

²¹ "Young Jacksons started cooperating with numerous experts in the fields of music, diction, choreography, savoir-vivre, image and advertising. A group of the best composers in the recording studio prepared their repertoire. The band, including the father, were completely deprived of free will. (...) The show was on: monstrous concert tours in the greatest halls in the USA, show ups at TV shows and TV series; even a cartoon about the Jacksons was created". See: R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

²² Michael Jackson's biography, <https://kultura.onet.pl/michael-jackson>.

²³ The singles *ABC* and *The Love You Save* were a success both in Billboard Hot 100 (the most popular singles) and the Billboard Hot R&B (the most popular R&B singles). See: S.T. Erlewine, *Michael Jackson*, All Music, <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=11:aex1z83ajyv5~T1>.

²⁴ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 117.

²⁵ Jackson writes about the relationship with Quincy Jones, "Our friendship really began to blossom on the set of *The Wiz*, and it developed into a father-and-son relationship." See: *ibidem*, p. 145.

²⁶ On the AMG website we can read about the *Off the Wall* album, "This was a visionary album, a record that found a way to break disco wide open into a new world where the beat was undeniable, but not the primary focus – it was part of a colorful tapestry of lush ballads

top ten of an American hit list. For the song *Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough*²⁷ Jackson earned a Grammy Award for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance.²⁸ In his autobiography, Jackson recalls the period after releasing *Off The Wall* as a breakthrough²⁹, but also an exceptional hardship, mainly due to the growing sense of solitude.³⁰

*Thriller*³¹, Jackson's second solo album, was released on 30 November 1982 and was even a greater success:

The album blew away all previous records and is listed in the Guinness World Records to this day as the best-selling album in the history of show-business. Even American MTV, which previously had not emitted any music videos of black performers, claiming its profile is 'strictly rock'n'roll' had to make an exception and include Michael Jackson's songs to its repertoire, which opened the door for other performers.³²

The album was sold in over 51 million copies worldwide (data from 2005), as marked in the Guinness World Record.³³ It also won the record number of eight Grammy Awards. The album producer Quincy Jones recalled,

I knew it from the first time I heard it ... because the hair stood straight up on my arms. That's a sure sign, and it's never once been wrong. All the brilliance that had been building inside Michael Jackson for twenty-five years just erupted ... That energy was contagious and we had it cranked so high one night that the speakers

and strings, smooth soul and pop, soft rock, and alluring funk." See: S.T. Erlewine, *Michael Jackson. Off the Wall*, <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:g3j20r6ac48n>.

²⁷ "That song means a lot to me because it was the first song I wrote as a whole". See: M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 161.

²⁸ Jackson felt unappreciated by winning just one award. For this reason, he chose not to attend the gala event. "I watched the ceremony on television, and it was nice to win my category, but I was still upset by what I perceived as the rejection of my peers. I just kept thinking, 'Next time, next time'." See: *ibidem*, p. 176.

²⁹ "*Off the Wall* was released in August 1979, the same month I turned twenty-one and took control of my own affairs, and it was definitely one of the major landmarks of my life. It meant a great deal to me because its eventual success proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that a former "child star" could mature into a recording artist with contemporary appeal." See: *ibidem*, p. 179.

³⁰ "Making *Off the Wall* was one of the most difficult periods of my life, despite the eventual success it enjoyed. I had very few close friends at the time and felt very isolated. I was so lonely that I used to walk through my neighbourhood hoping I'd run into somebody I could talk to and perhaps become friends with". See: *ibidem*, p. 164.

³¹ Jackson's aim was to create the best album of all time. "(...) *Thriller* had to do better than *Off the Wall*. I admitted that I wanted this album to be the biggest-selling album of all time. See: *ibidem*, p. 181.

³² B. Pawlikowska, *Historia. Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

³³ Best-selling album, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/70133-best-selling-album>.

in the studio actually overloaded and burst into flames. First time I ever say anything like that in forty years in the business.³⁴

According to critics, the success of *Thriller* helped in overcoming a crisis in the music industry and songs from this album are referred to as milestones in pop music. One of them is the composition *Billie Jean*.³⁵ Jackson performed his song live for the first time during the *Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever* concert emitted by NBS TV station. The performance became famous as one of the most important in both Jackson's entire career and in the history of show-business – it was then that he presented his dance move called 'the moonwalk'.³⁶ In his autobiography Jackson admits that the idea for the performance did not come up until the day preceding the day of the concert.³⁷

The music video created for the song *Billie Jean* was the first music video by an African American artist to be emitted in MTV. The next one, *Beat It*, includes a performance of members of Los Angeles street gangs.³⁸ In the autumn of 1983, almost a year after the release of *Thriller*, the music video for the title song on the album premiered. *Thriller*, expanded to fourteen minutes, was a minifilm of sort. Its plot was associated with a gore film – some scenes take place at a cemetery and Jackson turns into a werewolf who, together with zombies and vampires, performs something of a ritual dance.³⁹ (The music video was inspired by the horror film *An American Werewolf in London* directed by John Landis.) *Thriller* was financed by Jackson himself. The material documenting the shooting of the video – *The*

³⁴ A. Haley, *The Playboy Interview: Quincy Jones*, "Playboy" 1990, July.

³⁵ In 2005, the song *Billy Jean* got to the top of the 500 Greatest Songs Since You Were Born ranking, prepared by the American music magazine *Blender* and in the same year, it was also announced the "best hit of all time" in a poll of VH1 music TV network.

³⁶ Jackson recalled, "On May 16, 1983, I performed 'Billie Jean' on a network telecast in honour of Motown's twenty-fifth anniversary. Almost fifty million people saw that show. After that, many things changed." For more information about the preparation, the performance and reactions to this event. See: M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁷ "I knew I had done my best and felt good, so good. But at the same time I felt disappointed in myself. I had planned to do one really long spin and to stop on my toes, suspended for a moment, but I didn't stay on my toes as long as I wanted. I did the spin and I landed on one toe. I wanted to just stay there, just freeze there, but it didn't work quite as I'd planned." See: *ibidem*, p. 211.

³⁸ Jackson writes that he was contemplating the vision of this music video for a long time. "I had street gangs on my mind when I wrote 'Beat It,' so we rounded up some of the toughest gangs in Los Angeles and put them to work on the video. It turned out to be a good idea, and a great experience for me. We had some rough kids on that set, tough kids, and they hadn't been to wardrobe. Those guys in the pool room in the first scene were serious; they were not actors. That stuff was real." See: M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 203.

³⁹ On one of the websites (http://www.koreus.com/files/200408/lego_thriller.html) a special animated version of the music video was published, with characters and the entire scenery built using Lego blocks.

Making of The Thriller – was released on video cassettes.⁴⁰ The music video earned a Grammy Award for the best music video.

Jackson's next endeavour was the shooting of *We Are The World*⁴¹ (1985). The song, written together with Lionel Richie, for the recording of which Jackson invited over 40 other artists, has become an international anthem and the best-selling single of all time. The income from the single sale was dedicated to supporting US actions for Africa. The song *We Are The World* earned Jackson a Grammy that he received once again, this time for the Best Song of the Year. Soon after (1986), he commenced publishing activities, with his first endeavour being the USD 47.5 million purchase of a music catalogue by ATV with over 4000 songs.⁴² This way, Jackson became the owner of copyrights to over 251 songs of The Beatles. In the same year, together with directors George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola, he shot a 17-minute-long 3-dimensional film *Captain Eo*, which was a highlight in Disney theme parks until 1998. Also, in 1986, a 16-minute-long minifilm *Bad* was shot, in which Jackson once again addressed the topic of violence among teenagers.⁴³ (it was supervised by director Martin Scorsese). The music video was a teaser for the album of the same title, which was released on 31 August 1987. The production of this album took two years and most songs were authored by Jackson.⁴⁴ According to critics, compared to previous albums, *Bad* was more diverse in terms of style.⁴⁵ At that time, Jackson recorded an album that included only hits, which is evidenced by the fact that five of the eleven songs on this

⁴⁰ "The success of *The Making of Thriller* was a bit of a shock to all of us. In its cassette form it sold about a million copies by itself. Even now, it holds the record as the best-selling music video of all time. The 'Thriller' film was ready in late 1983. We released it in February and it made its debut on MTV. Epic released 'Thriller' as a single and sales of the album went crazy. According to statistics, the 'Thriller' film and the release of the single resulted in fourteen million additional album and tape sales within a six-month period. At one point in 1984, we were selling a million records a week. (...) A dream come true." See: M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 225.

⁴¹ Jackson mentions that the song was inspired by a documentary about hungry and starving people of Ethiopia and Sudan he saw on the TV. See: *ibidem*, pp. 185–186.

⁴² For more information on Jackson's investments at that time. See: K.J. Fox, *Michael Jackson. Sekrety rajy utraczonego*, trans. Zespół Wydawnictwa Towarzystwa Zachęty Kultury, Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Zachęty Kultury, Katowice 1996, pp. 143–149.

⁴³ According to Fox, *Bad* is about a boy from a poor neighbourhood who attends a private school and thus is envied by his peers. See: *ibidem*, p. 190.

⁴⁴ In contrast to previous albums, *Bad* included mainly song composed by Jackson himself (nine out of the total eleven), who for the purpose of the new album composed 62 songs. See: B. Pawlikowska, *Historia. Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ "*Bad* has somewhat more edge to it, uses more rock style and synthesisers than the soul-like *Thriller*." See: R. Leszczyński, *Platynowa piątka: Michael Jackson*, "Magazyn", a supplement to "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1996, 20 November.

album got to the top of American music charts.⁴⁶ It went down in music history as the second best-selling album of all time after *Thriller*. Jackson's name appeared in the Guinness World Records also owing to a concert tour promoting this album.⁴⁷ After the tour was completed, in 1988 Jackson's autobiography titled *Moonwalk*.⁴⁸ was published.

In 1991, convinced by the newly employed finance advisor David Geffen, Michael Jackson signed a new 15-year-long contract worth a billion US dollars with Sony Music.⁴⁹ This resulted in the album *Dangerous*, which was released on 26 November 1991. The album was produced by Jackson, thus opting out of cooperation with Quincy Jones.⁵⁰ The album was promoted by the single *Black or White*, to which an 11-minute-long music video was made, directed by John Landis.⁵¹ The album also included the song *Heal the World*, whose title became the name of a foundation Jackson started in 1992.⁵² In the very same year the book

⁴⁶ This information comes from Jackson's official website, <http://www.michaeljackson.com>.

⁴⁷ Jackson's official Polish website (<http://www.michaeljackson.pl/>) claims that *Bad World Tour* took sixteen months. Jackson performed at 123 concerts in 15 countries worldwide, and the show was seen by 4.5 million people. The total gross income exceeded 125 million dollars, which was the record income on one performer's tour.

⁴⁸ The book was complemented by a 94-minute video titled *Moonwalker* (directed by Jerry Kramer and Colin Childers).

⁴⁹ Geffen "(...) dissuaded Michael from the idea to release the album *Decade*, intended as a compilation of the greatest hits, and led him to the signing of a new contract with Sony, under which Jackson was given 18 million dollars in advance for recording a new album." See: B. Pawlikowska, *Historia. Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Among the critics, *Dangerous* is referred to as an album of radical changes. "Firstly, he [Jackson] opted out of Quincy Jones, a producer considered the co-author of his success. His place was taken by Teddy Riley. At that time, rap music was making a career and Riley showed that he knew the rap rhythm better than anyone else." See: R. Leszczyński, *Platynowa piątka*, op. cit. It is also worth to note that in contrast to previous albums, *Dangerous* is more aggressive not only in the musical aspect (rap and rock style), but regarding song lyrics. Jackson did not include in that album any 'love song' – type ballad, which made half of the content on *Off the Wall*, for instance. See: A. Light, *Michael Jackson – Dangerous: Album Review*, "Rolling Stone" 1992, no. 621.

⁵¹ The video premiered on 14 November 1992 and its cost was estimated at four million dollars. I present the plot in the chapter titled *The Trickster*, where I elaborate on Jackson's other music videos.

⁵² "Officially, the Heal the World (HTW) foundation was founded on 30 September 1992 in Bucharest. It is an organisation of an international level aspiring to fix the world, reinstate humanitarian values, improve living conditions for inhabitants of our planet and to ensure children's rights are respected." See: K. Mierzwiak, *Heal The World*, in: M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, IN ROCK, Konin 1996, p. 200. Jackson discussed objectives of the Heal the World foundation at a conference that inaugurated the *Dangerous* concert tour, "I have founded the Heal the World foundation to represent the rights of children – the smallest and the most defenceless beings that often have no say in adults' world." See: *ibidem*.

Dancing the Dream was published, which is a collection of Jackson's stories, essays and drawings. A year later, a TV interview *Michael Jackson Talks... To Oprah*⁵³ was shot; Jackson earned the Special International Artist Award for record sales and humanitarian efforts around the world (in the future, this award was to be named after him – Michael Jackson International Artist Award), awarded as part of the American Music Awards⁵⁴; he also earned a special Grammy Living Legend Award (for his ongoing contributions to the development of entertainment industry). In May 1994, Jackson founded his own music records company MJJ Music.⁵⁵

Jackson's subsequent album was released on 16 June 1995. It was the two-and-a-half-hour-long longplay *HIStory. Past, Present and Future Book I*, comprised of two CDs: a collection of Jackson's 15 greatest hits (remastered) and 15 new songs.⁵⁶ (*HIStory* has become the best-selling double album of all time with nearly 20 million copies sold.⁵⁷) In September 1996, during the *HIStory World Tour Part I*, Michael Jackson visited Poland for the first time. His concert in Warsaw (on 20 September 1996) attracted an audience of 120 thousand people.⁵⁸ A year later,

⁵³ The full title of the interview is *Michael Jackson Talks... to Oprah: 90 Primetime Minutes with the King of Pop*.

⁵⁴ American Music Awards are awarded based on the 'popularity' of a given artist measured in the number of albums/singles sold.

⁵⁵ MJJ Music was part of Epic Records and operated in 1994–1998.

⁵⁶ *HIStory* (the title of the album is a play of words 'history' and 'his' – his history) is a kind of Jackson's response to child abuse allegations. Most songs refer to the charges and slander (*Scream, They Don't Care About Us, This Time Around*), the smear campaign in the media (*Tabloid Junkie, Money*) and a victim's defencelessness (*Childhood, Stranger in Moscow*). It also includes the song *D.S. (Dom Sheldon)*, which is an allusion to Tom Sneddon, district attorney of Santa Barbara County who in 1993 led the investigation against Jackson. According to critics, *HIStory*, an album produced using cutting-edge technology, is both a "monumental accomplishment of the Ego" and Jackson's most personal album; <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:wn59keftkq7m>. The very cover of the album *HIStory* calls for attention, just as the 52-page-long booklet included to the CD. "The album cover is decorated with Jackson's photos with four American presidents, Nelson Mandela and numerous music and film stars. *HIStory* liner notes were written by Elizabeth Taylor and Steven Spielberg. Also, a praising opinion about Jackson of the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was cited." See: G. Brzozowicz, *Powrót króla popu. Nowa płyta Michaela Jacksona*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1995, 19 June.

⁵⁷ See: <https://www.mjworld.net/>.

⁵⁸ Kevin J. Fox writes that both the concert in Warsaw and that in Prague were a new element of Jackson's promotional activity See: K.J. Fox, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit., pp. 158–160. Jackson's concert took place in Warsaw at Bemowo airport. As for the execution of the concert, its spectacular character was emphasised. "Jackson's concert is a spectacle. It is not just a collection of songs (...), but a grand show with all its dramaturgy: the exposition, the rising action, the climax and the grand finale. A spectacle written in the smallest detail (...). Just as strong as Jackson's attachment to music is his attachment to the visual side of performances: appearance, outfits, choreography, lighting, film presentations." See: R. Leszczyński, *Wideoklip na żywo. Wielki koncert Michaela Jacksona w Warszawie*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1996, 21 September.

Jackson visited Poland again – this time, he announced construction of a theme park near Warsaw⁵⁹, he was also interested in purchasing a manor.⁶⁰

In 2001, after several-year-long preparations, the long-awaited album *Invincible*⁶¹ was released. Despite the high cost of the album production (over 20 million dollars), it did not prove a spectacular commercial success⁶² (five million copies sold). The reason for its failure was attributed to child sexual abuse allegations Jackson was facing from the mid-1990s.⁶³

The 'Self-Proclaimed King of Pop'

Jackson draws (or used to draw) attention to himself not only due to his artistic activity, but primarily due to his conduct. Each event, both in his professional and private life, was not only made public but was 'globally' experienced by the audience.

Titled the 'king of pop'⁶⁴ he created an ambience of uniqueness – Jackson was someone of unspecified age and skin colour:

(...) he, his music and his life are one. (...) He was the idol of boys and the 'pin up boyfriend' for girls. He evoked maternal instincts in women and fathers declared they

⁵⁹ Despite Jackson having signed a letter of intent with President of Warsaw Marcin Świącicki, the plan was not been executed, ultimately. Jackson declared he would commence works if he had about 100 hectares of area for his disposal, but the authorities of Warsaw failed to find a terrain that would be fit for a theme park. See: R. Rybarczyk, *Jackson i jego park*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1998, 10 June.

⁶⁰ Jackson's visits to Poland (1997) focused the attention of the media. Rumours about Jackson's investment plans in Poland also involved news bordering on grotesque. "On Wednesday on a school pitch in Lubiąż between an old house and grazing cows – it is here that Michael Jackson has landed. It is said that he wants to arrange his European residence in an old Baroque Cistercian monastery. (...) In front of the gates to the monastery, an orchestra is playing a greeting march. Policemen are holding hands, protecting a car from the crowds. (...) Jackson spent 20 minutes in the abbey. Greeted by children with bread and salt, he visited the premises rapidly..." See: A.K. Wereśniak, *Jackson do klasztoru!*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1997, 30 May.

⁶¹ In-between the albums *HISTORY* and *Invincible* the album *Blood on the Dance Floor* was released (1997) with dance remixed of Jackson's songs.

⁶² W. Radomski, *Harakiri króla popu*, op. cit.

⁶³ M. Ożminkowski, *Jackson w opalach*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1993, 29 August.

⁶⁴ As Pawlikowska writes, in fact, he never had one, since Jackson invented the title of the king of pop for himself. "In November 1991, three American TV stations – MTV, Fox and Black Entertainment Television (BET) – received the rights to broadcast the premiere presentation of the music video *Black or White*. There was one condition, however: they had to refer to Jackson as 'the King of Pop Music'." See: B. Pawlikowska, *Historia. Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

would let their daughter go with him on a date. He was an embodiment of a career from a shoeshine boy to a millionaire, much adored by Americans.⁶⁵

Peter Kane notices that Jackson became an object of collective attention, while his albums (*Thriller* and *Bad*) were a kind of a “music score of life”⁶⁶ for those growing up in the 1980s. In his music videos, Jackson played the role of a superhero who unites people of different races and cultures through music, saves children or the whole world from evil.⁶⁷ Jackson also became the theme of sculptures⁶⁸ and happenings.⁶⁹ He became someone who could be admired, watched on screen but never touched or met in person. As he admitted in his autobiography, “I think my image gets distorted in the public’s mind. They don’t get a clear or full picture of what I’m like, despite the press coverage (...).”⁷⁰

Jackson’s ‘untouchability’ was manifested, among others, in avoidance of all physical contact, hiding his face behind a cosmetic mask that was “(...) a way of concealing just a bit of myself.”⁷¹ However, paradoxically, this inaccessibility strengthened Jackson’s *pop cult*. The idol was literally put on a pedestal – in 1996, as part of the *HIStory* concert tour and album promotion in Prague (the Czech Republic), a 10-metre-tall monument was erected.⁷²

Common attention was drawn to Jackson’s appearance – despite the visible changes in his face, the singer publicly admitted to have undergone only two plastic surgeries, categorically denying rumours about skin whitening.⁷³ In a TV in-

⁶⁵ R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ P. Kane, *Michael Jackson: Invincible*, “Q” 2001, no. 184.

⁶⁷ Jackson played the immortal hero in the autobiographical film *Moonwalker* (1989) and in the 3-dimensional film *Capitan Eo* shot for Disney amusement parks.

⁶⁸ In 1988, Jeff Koons presented a porcelain sculpture *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*. The sculpture depicts Jackson holding a chimpanzee called Bubbles on his knees. The piece was created as part of a project titled *Banality*. The golden polychrome form of the sculpture is intended to symbolise kitsch, while the aureole was a symbol of that which is sacred. In 2002, inspired by Koons’s sculpture, Paul McCarthy presented in the Central Park in New York a sculpture titled *MJBH*. The piece made of bronze (again Jackson holding a chimpanzee on his knees) has a grotesque form: the characters have large heads and their bodies seem little.

⁶⁹ In 2004, during the presentation of the *MJBH* sculpture at the Hamburger Bahnhof Gallery in Berlin, an avantgarde artist Istvan Kantor (AKA Monty Cantsin) tried to throw blood onto the piece. The entire event was recorded. See: *Bid to deface Jackson art fails*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4060919.stm>.

⁷⁰ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 270.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 272.

⁷² “Finally, a weird ad started showing up in TV stations – a scene of the unveiling of a statue of Michael Jackson, several times higher than the Statue of Liberty, filled with pathos. The very same statue was shown on the cover of the album released in mid-June 1995.” See: R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁷³ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 166.

interview he gave on 10 February 1993 for American TV presenter Oprah Winfrey⁷⁴, Jackson admitted that the change of his skin colour was due to hereditary disease (vitiligo) that causes loss of skin pigment. In the course of this conversation, he spoke for the first time publicly about difficult relations with his father and mentioned his painful adolescence. He also confessed that as an adult man (he was 34 at that time) he was attempting to recreate the lost childhood, among others, by play and the companionship of children. Several months later, in August 1993, Jackson was charged with sexual abuse of a 13-year-old boy.⁷⁵ Although the Los Angeles police initiated an investigation, the case never got into court – Jackson entered into an out-of-court agreement with the alleged victim. However, as Robert Sankowski writes:

On a single day, Jackson turned from America's idol to public enemy number one. He was accused of assaulting America's greatest taboo that is a child. The position he had been building for thirty years of his music career was ruined. It was a disenchantment of Jackson's image of an innocent god boy that took many years to be formed.⁷⁶

The attention of the media was drawn away from paedophilia suspicions by Jackson's marriages: the first on with Lisa Maria Presley (April 1994–January 1996), and the second with Debbie Rowe (November 1996–October 1999⁷⁷).

Child sexual abuse charges reappeared in November 2003 following the broadcasting of a TV documentary *Living with Michael Jackson*.⁷⁸ In an interview with British journalist Martin Bashir, Jackson admitted that he saw nothing inappropriate in sharing a bedroom with a child that is not related to him, claiming, "I see God in the face of children. And man, I just love being around that all the time."⁷⁹ The film included Gavin Arvizo, a boy suffering from cancer who together with his family visited Jackson's Neverland in 2003. A few weeks after the film was shot, Gavin Arvizo accused the singer of sexual abuse. In November 2003, the prosecutor's office in Santa Barbara, California, presented ten charges against Jackson, including seven concerning sexual abuse, two concerning serving alcohol to a child and one concerning an attempt to take the victim's family abroad against their will.

⁷⁴ It was Jackson's first interview in fourteen years. The interview took place in Jackson's Neverland.

⁷⁵ M. Oźminkowski, *Jackson w opalach*, op. cit. Cf. also: K.J. Fox, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit., pp. 103–112 and pp. 114–117. Fox points out that charges against Jackson (1993) appeared in the time when codification of the law was disputed. This concerned, in particular, ambiguous specification of what constituted child sexual molestation. See: *ibidem*, pp. 114–116.

⁷⁶ R. Leszczyński, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁷⁷ For more information about Jackson's relationship with Lisa-Mara Presley. See: K.J. Fox, *Michael Jackson*, op. cit., pp. 103–126 and p. 138.

⁷⁸ J. Shaw, *Living with Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

Chapter 2: People vs. Jackson: The Trial Day by Day¹

18 November 2003 – For 14 hours, over 60 police officers were searching the Neverland Ranch owned by Michael Jackson. “The search warrant was issued by the local prosecutor’s office due the singer being charged with sexually molesting a 12-year-old boy. (...) The charges concurred in time with the release of the singer’s recent album *Number Ones* that also includes Jackson’s new song *One More Chance*.”² The prosecutor’s office denied specifying any details regarding the charges. “However, according to the reports in the American media, it concerns a 12-year-old boy, suffering from cancer, who used to be Jackson’s frequent guest at his ranch and whom he supported financially. The mother who grew suspicious took the child to a psychotherapist. And it was the latter who notified the police, lawfully alarmed.”³

19 November 2003 – District attorney Tom Sneddon⁴ of Santa Maria, California, issued Jackson’s arrest warrant.⁵ The singer was charged with repeated sexual molestation of a child below 14 years of age. Jackson pleaded not guilty and considered the allegations an attempt “to torpedo sales of the recently released album with his greatest hits.”⁶ Sneddon denied the rumours about a conspiracy against Jackson. “Neither I nor the sheriff have any interest in this kind of music.

¹ The full title of the trial was *The People of the State of California v. Michael Joseph Jackson*. It was a criminal trial held in Santa Barbara County Superior Court in Santa Maria, California, <https://la.utexas.edu/users/jmciver/357L/Jackson/Michael%20Jackson%20indictment.pdf>.

² *Policja u Michaela Jacksona*, <https://kultura.onet.pl/muzyka/wiadomosci/policja-u-michaela-jacksona/q3bjqtw>. See also: B. Węglarczyk, R. Sankowski, *Hańba króla*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2003, 20 November.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Tom Sneddon had Jackson faced similar charges in the 1993 case. However, at that time, Jackson entered into an agreement with the complainant’s family and thus avoided a court trial. See: *Michael Jackson oskarżony o molestowanie*, <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/metroon/1,0,1785403.html>.

⁵ *Michael Jackson: „Jestem niewinny”*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-jestem-niewinny,nId,1617106>.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

In fact, we don't know it at all. This case has nothing to do with his album or anything else that concerns his life," said the attorney.⁷

20 November 2003 – Jackson gave himself up to the police. Soon after his arrival in California, handcuffed, he arrived at a police station in Santa Barbara. "Jackson, with his hands restrained behind his back, dressed solely in black trousers and a shirt, entered the police station in Santa Barbara accompanied by barristers and guards. In line with the agreement made between the sheriff and Jackson's attorneys, the singer was photographed, searched and informed about the charges. After providing his fingerprints and passport, Jackson submitted a bail of 3 million dollars that would allow him to await the commencement of the trial without being deprived of his liberty."⁸ In a statement issued by the artist's spokesman the accusations were referred to as false, stressing that "Michael would not harm a child in any way."⁹ In turn, "(...) Numerous commentators, including solicitors and barristers, taking a stance in the American television claim to have no doubt as to that Jackson is a paedophile and that he should be held responsible."¹⁰

25 November 2003 – Jackson started a dedicated website mjjsource.com, via which he would communicate with the public. In his statement he announced that "(...) he will prove his innocence at court. 'As you know, the charges I've been recently faced with are exceptionally grave. They are, however, based on a great lie."¹¹ Jackson also referred to statements of his former co-workers published in the media, "We won't make any reference to these speculations. We won't comment on each new report or allegation. Our intent is to solve this case in court, not in the media."¹²

28 November 2003 – Nineteen British radio stations prohibited broadcasting Jackson's new single *One More Chance*.¹³

19 December 2003 – The prosecutor's office in California officially charged Michael Jackson with child molestation.¹⁴ The singer was faced with seven charges

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ B. Węglarczyk, *Michael Jackson aresztowany i uwolniony za kaucją*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2003, 20 November, <https://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,1787545.html>.

⁹ *Michael Jackson: „Jestem niewinny”*, op. cit.

¹⁰ *Michael Jackson wypuszczony za kaucją*, <https://kultura.onet.pl/muzyka/wiadomosci/michael-jackson-wypuszczony-za-kaucja/qrs7e3>.

¹¹ *Michael Jackson odpiera ataki*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-odpiera-ataki,nId,1617167>.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Michael Jackson: Zakaz emisji*, <http://muzyka.onet.pl/mr,834485,wiadomosci.html>.

¹⁴ *Michael Jackson oskarżony*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2003, 19 December, <https://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,1834501.html>.

regarding sexual abuse of a child below 14 years of age and two charges regarding intoxication of a child. The molestation was said to have taken place in the early 2003 at the Neverland Ranch.¹⁵

16 January 2004 – The preliminary hearing commenced in Santa Maria regarding Michael Jackson’s case. The singer was about 20 minutes late for the first hearing and he did not plead guilty. His arrival at the court was accompanied by a happening organised by his fans who gathered in front of the court building shouting Jackson’s name and singing his songs. Jackson “(...) left the court building in a good mood and even climbed the roof of his car to greet the fans who were screaming with joy.”¹⁶ The subsequent court meeting when witnesses were to be heard was planned to take place on 13 February.¹⁷

27 January 2004 – Pursuant to a decision of Santa Barbara district judge Rodney Melville, the documents in the case against Michael Jackson were sealed.¹⁸ The judge prohibited both sides from making any commentaries in the media regarding the trial.

13 February 2004 – Jackson started cooperation with press spokeswoman Raymone Bain (who previously represented, among others, boxer Mike Tyson and tennis players Serena and Venus Williams).¹⁹

26 April 2004 – Lawyers Mark Geragos and Benjamin Brafman are no longer representing Jackson. Now, his key defender is Thomas Mesereau, a criminal law expert.²⁰ According to official information, the decision to no longer cooperate with the former lawyers was caused by “(...) irreconcilable differences. ‘Considering the progress of this trial and having conversed with Michael Jackson’s people it became clear that it would be for the best if Mark and I withdrew,’ Brafman explained, not willing to disclose the reason for discontinuance of legal representation of the musician.”²¹

¹⁵ *Michael Jackson formalnie oskarżony o molestowanie*, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/michael-jackson-formalnie-oskarzony-o-molestowanie/x83vl>.

¹⁶ *Michael Jackson przed sądem*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-przed-sadem,nId,1618049>.

¹⁷ *Michael Jackson: Długi proces?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-dlugi-proces,nId,1618096>.

¹⁸ *Michael Jackson: Utajnione dokumenty*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-utajnione-dokumenty,nId,1618208>.

¹⁹ *Michael Jackson: Nowa rzeczniczka*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-nowa-rzeczniczka,nId,1618474>.

²⁰ *Jackson wymienia adwokatów*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-wymienia-adwokatow,nId,1619458>.

²¹ *Michael Jackson zmienia obrońcę*, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/michael-jackson-zmienia-obronce/wbneb>.

30 April 2004 – During a subsequent hearing, a new indictment was submitted. Jackson was faced with ten charges; apart from those filed in January regarding sexual molestation of a minor and offering him alcohol, the new indictment included an attempt to kidnap the boy and conspiring to violate the law.²²

30 May 2004 – Judge Rodney Mellvine designated the date of commencement of the court proceedings as 13 September, stressing at the same time that this term might be changed on request of attorneys provided they present convincing reasons for delaying the court proceedings.²³

4 June 2004 – The court dismisses charges of an 18-year-old boy from Los Angeles who claimed to have been sexually molested by Jackson in childhood.²⁴

27 June 2004 – Michael Jackson’s lawyers filed a motion to delay the proceedings. They claimed they needed at least several months to familiarise themselves with documents. Moreover, they conclude that “The scope of investigation conducted by the prosecutor’s office is astounding. It is not a regular criminal investigation – it is an attempt to destroy a great star,’ Jackson’s lawyers wrote in a statement. They put forward a request to adjourn the case until the beginning of 2005.”²⁵

27 July 2004 – The case was adjourned from September 2004 to January 2005.²⁶

16 August 2004 – District attorney Tom Sneddon testified in court. The court proceedings were attended by Michael Jackson accompanied by his parents and siblings. “The singer wanted to hear his defender Thomas Mesereau questioning investigation methods that were applied by district attorney Sneddon. In particular, this concerns the warrant to search the Neverland Ranch, the star’s property. According to Jackson’s lawyers, confiscated items (among others, video cassettes, hard discs) had been used improperly by prosecutors. For this reason, they demanded that the court dismissed the indictment against their client.”²⁷

²² *Michael Jackson nie przyznaje się do winy*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/oskarzony-michael-jackson-nie-przyznaje-sie-do-winy-6031675155895425a>.

²³ *Jackson: Proces we wrześniu*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-proces-we-wrzesniu,nId,1619883>.

²⁴ *Kolejni świadkowie w procesie Jacksona*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-kolejni-swiadkowie,nId,1623611>.

²⁵ *Jackson: Opóźnić proces!*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-opoznic-proces,nId,1620633>.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *M. Jackson: Znow w sądzie*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-znow-w-sadzie,nId,1620883>.

21 September 2004 – The media reveal that the persecutor’s office obtained possession of photographs of naked boys, Jackson’s alleged victims. The photographs, found during the search at the Neverland Ranch, were intended to be used as evidence. The defence deny these rumours.²⁸ On the next day (22 September 2004) the opinion about invalidity of these photographs was confirmed by the prosecutor in charge of the investigation.²⁹

2 November 2004 – Michael Jackson’s lawyers halt promotional activities for Raymond Chandler’s book *All That Glitter: The Crime And The Cover-Up*.³⁰

24 November 2004 – A 26-year-old Canadian Adrian Poffley who threatened to kill Jackson was sentenced by the court in Ontario.³¹

3 December 2004 – The police search Jackson’s Neverland Ranch once again.³² The defendant was also asked to provide a DNA sample for the purposes of the investigation.³³

31 December 2004 – Four thousand people declared their willingness to become a jury in Michael Jackson’s trial. The number of volunteers for deciding Jackson’s fate proved to break the record in the history of the American judicial system.³⁴

16 January 2005 – The TV stations E! Entertainment (US) and Sky (UK) decided on a joint production of a TV series about Michael Jackson’s trial that would reflect events in the court room. Each episode would be a 30-minute-long report of the court proceedings with real scenes from the court room recreated by actors.³⁵

²⁸ *M. Jackson: Podejrzone zdjęcia*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-podejrzone-zdjecia,nId,1684622>.

²⁹ *Michael Jackson zaprzecza*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-zaprzecza,nId,1630296>.

³⁰ *Michael Jackson powstrzymuje*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-powstrzymuje,nId,1684697>.

³¹ *Groził Michaelowi Jacksonowi*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-grozil-michaelowi-jacksonowi,nId,1622081>.

³² *Policja u Michaela Jacksona*, <https://kultura.onet.pl/muzyka/wiadomosci/policja-u-michaela-jacksona/q3bjqtw>.

³³ *Michael Jackson i DNA*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-i-dna,nId,1622221>.

³⁴ *M. Jackson: 4 tysiące chętnych*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-4-tysiacze-chetnych,nId,1622501>.

³⁵ *The Michael Jackson Trial*, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0450928/>.

30 January 2005 – The first day of the trial. “Since yesterday, nearly the entire US has been watching the trial that might become the trial of the 21st century. Michael Jackson faces the threat of a 20-year-long imprisonment for sexual molesting a boy who suffers from cancer. This trial is a modern form of lynching a Negro,’ says Jermaine Jackson, one of Michael’s brothers.”³⁶ The trial started with a meeting with jury candidates. Jackson’s defence presented a list of witnesses – 366 people (the list included artists who were Jackson’s friends and his family). Among those summoned to testify there was, among others, actress Elizabeth Taylor, talk-show host Larry King and basketball player Kobe Bryant.³⁷ In turn, the prosecution summoned as a witness, among others, British journalist Martin Bashir, the author of the documentary *Living with Michael Jackson*.³⁸ That day Michael Jackson made a special statement:

In the last few weeks, a large amount of ugly, malicious information has been released into the media about me. Apparently, this information was leaked through transcripts in a grand jury proceeding where neither my lawyers, nor I, ever appeared. The information is disgusting and false. Years ago, I allowed a family to visit and spend some time at Neverland. Neverland is my home. I allowed this family into my home because they told me their son was ill with cancer and needed my help. Through the years, I have helped thousands of children who were ill or in distress. These events have caused a nightmare for my family, my children and me. I never intend to place myself in so vulnerable a position again. I love my community and I have great faith in our justice system. Please keep an open mind and let me have my day in court. I deserve a fair trial like every other American citizen. I will be acquitted and vindicated when the truth is told.³⁹

16 February 2005 – Jackson’s lawyer Thomas Mesereau informed that his client was admitted into a hospital suspected of a severe case of flu. Due to Jackson’s illness, the day of jury selection was adjourned.⁴⁰

22 February 2005 – The jury panel was assigned. “Twenty jury candidates were declined, including three candidates rejected by both the prosecutors and

³⁶ M. Gadziński, *Proces Michaela Jacksona rozpoczęty*, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,2522180.html>.

³⁷ *Gwiazdy bronią Jacksona*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-gwiazdy-bronia-jacksona,nId,1623077>.

³⁸ *Living with Michael Jackson*, originally shot with the intention to help ‘save’ Jackson’s career, in fact contributed to the allegations against the idol. See: R. Sankowski, *Póltorej godziny z Michaelem*, “Gazeta Telewizyjna”, a supplement to “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2004, 16 January.

³⁹ *Michael Jackson’s Trial Statement 2005*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4n1P93iu0xs>.

⁴⁰ *M. Jackson w szpitalu*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-w-szpitalu,nId,1624469>.

Michael Jackson's defenders. Nine individuals were excluded by judge Rodney S. Melville."⁴¹ The Associated Press Agency revealed the 'ethnic' composition of the jury panel – seven Caucasians, four Latinos and one person of Asian origin; four men and eight women.⁴²

28 February 2005 – District attorney Tom Sneddon presented a list of charges against Jackson. He commenced his speech for the prosecution from depicting a situation where Jackson was allegedly showing the victim Gavin Arvizo and Jackson's son Prince Michael I erotic websites for 45 minutes.⁴³ Moreover, results of an analysis of fingerprints taken from pornographic magazines found in Jackson's bedroom during the search of the Neverland Ranch were presented. "According to the prosecutor, fingerprints found on said magazines belonged to the defendant and also to Gavin Arvizo. The indictment also included the following statements: 'In Michael Jackson's private world, instead of fairy tales and conversations about Peter Pan, children get a talk about masturbation for a good night's sleep. One cannot call magazines such as *Hustler* or *Playboy* children's books.'"⁴⁴ Sneddon concluded his speech for the prosecution with the following statement, "These children's lives will be forever tainted. And one person is to be blamed – defendant Michael Joe Jackson."⁴⁵ The district attorney announced that, "(...) the prosecution calls as a witness Gavin Arvizo himself, now at the age of 15 years. These testimonies are to be sensational and reveal the corruption and acts of perversion that allegedly took place in Jackson's Neverland mansion."⁴⁶ In turn, the defence "(...) claim that he [Jackson] fell prey to a scheme concocted by the victim's mother who exploited her sick son to 'hunt' celebrities' money."⁴⁷

4 March 2005 – The Santa Maria court heard the testimony of Davellin Arvizo, sister of Gavin Arvizo. Her testimony was focused around her family's trip with Jackson to Miami. The trip took place during the TV broadcast of the documentary *Living with Michael Jackson*, in which Jackson admitted he allowed boys sleep in his bed. The witness said that on the way back from Miami to Los Angeles, on an airplane Jackson and Gavin "(...) were drinking from one can that contained wine instead of soda."⁴⁸ After their return to the Neverland Ranch, the

⁴¹ *Michael Jackson: Jest ława*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-jest-lawa,nId,1623183>.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *M. Jackson oskarżony*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-oskarzony,nId,1623260>.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Jacko przed sądem*, <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/74034/Jacko-przed-sadem.html>.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Jackson: Zeznania siostry ofiary*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-zeznania-siostry-ofiary,nId,1623304>.

Arvizo family were asked by Jackson's advisor to record a formerly prepared statement in which they would deny the content shown in the film *Living with Michael Jackson*. They were also prohibited from revealing in public what had taken place at Neverland. Davellin Arvizo also testified that after meetings with Jackson, her brother "(...) acted weirdly, he was highly agitated."⁴⁹

7 March 2005 – The court heard the testimony of Star Arvizo, younger brother of the alleged victim. The boy said that the singer showed him and his brother pornographic websites and offered them wine in soda cans. He also testified that he witnessed a scene where his brother was molested by Jackson. "Star told, among others, about a scene he saw in the singer's bedroom. Jackson and Gavin Arvizo were lying together on a bed. The boy was asleep. 'Michael's left hand was under my brother's underpants, and his right under his own. He was satisfying himself,' said Star Arvizo, who saw the event for only a few seconds. According to the witness Jackson insisted that boys never told their parents the specifics of their visits."⁵⁰

8 March 2005 – Thomas Mesereau proved Star Arvizo's testimony to be inconsistent and contradictory. He argued that the boy could have lied, specifying the date of the pornographic magazine Star saw at Jackson's as crucial evidence. The magazine was issued in August 2003, whereas the witness claimed that Jackson showed them the magazine in the spring, several months earlier. Mesereau pointed out that Star Arvizo lied despite having taken an oath during a different court trial. He also tried to prove that the boys, both Gavin Arvizo, the alleged victim, and his brother Star, were free to move around Jackson's property.⁵¹

9 March 2005 – The prosecution called as a witness Gavin Arvizo, the boy who accused Michael Jackson of sexually abusing him. At the beginning of his testimony, the witness admitted that "Michael Jackson was in his belief the 'coolest person in the world' and he considered the singer his 'best friend'. Arvizo also said that parents had nothing against their son staying at the Neverland Ranch."⁵² The boy testified that Jackson asked him to take part in the documentary *Living with Michael Jackson*, and to call him 'daddy' during the shooting. "He told me to call

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Proces Jacksona: Pograżające zeznania*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-pograzajace-zeznania,nId,1623346>.

⁵¹ "The singer allowed the boys to stroll around the entire ranch. When Jackson was absent, the brothers entered his bedroom, flicked through pornographic magazines and drank some wine from the liquor cabinet." *Obrońca Jacksona kontratakuje*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-obronca-jacksona-kontratakuje,nId,1623361>.

⁵² *Proces Jacksona: Pornostrony*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-pornostrony,nId,1623378>.

him ‘daddy’ or ‘daddy Michael’ in front of the camera. ‘I was also told to admit that I cured cancer owing to his help. And he didn’t care for me much when I was ill.’”⁵³

10 March 2005 – The judge issued a warrant to Michael Jackson’s arrest. This was due to the defendant’s absence at the trial. The defence argued that his client was admitted to a hospital due to ‘serious spine issues’.⁵⁴ Jackson appeared in court with an over 60-minute delay. “When the time specified by the judge passed and Jackson failed to attend the court proceedings, judge Rodney Melville issued an arrest warrant and decided to consider forfeiture of the 3-million-dollar bail. However, two minutes later Jackson, with a slightly frightened look, arrived at the court. His hair was somewhat untidy, and he was wearing pyjamas pants. He was walking slowly; guards were supporting him by the arms. He did not forget to greet his fans, nonetheless, who gathered in front of the court building.”⁵⁵ On that day, Gavin Arvizo continued to testify. The boy admitted to have been drinking alcohol with Jackson and revealed details about the events in the singer’s bedroom. He admitted he remembered two moments when he was molested sexually. The first one allegedly took place in February 2003.

‘Michael was telling me about masturbation. He said if I didn’t masturbate, I might rape a girl one day. He told me he watched from a balcony a boy who didn’t do that and had sex with a dog,’ said Arvizo. ‘Later, he put his hand in my underpants and started doing me. It felt weird and he was convincing me that was OK and totally natural.’⁵⁶

The witness also testified that at another meeting with Jackson, the latter offered him alcohol (in emptied diet Coke cans) and insisted that the boy masturbate him.⁵⁷

11 March 2005 – The London radio station Heart FM announced that it would not broadcast Jackson’s songs. This was supported by a concern about hurting their listeners’ feelings.⁵⁸

14 March 2005 – Another hearing of Gavin Arvizo was held. This time, the witness was interrogated by Jackson’s defence. Thomas Mesereau tried to un-

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁴ *M. Jackson: Nakaz aresztowania*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-nakaz-aresztowania,nId,1623392>.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶ *Jackson: Obciążające zeznania*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-obciazajace-zeznania,nId,1623396>.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁸ *Jackson znów zakazany*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-znow-zakazany,nId,1623390>.

dermine the validity of Arvizo's testimony, pointing out inconsistencies in his version of events. Mesereau stated that the boy's allegations against Jackson were invalid and invented by Arvizo, as he felt rejected by the singer.⁵⁹

15 March 2005 – On the next day of hearing, Gavin Arvizo answered questions of district attorney Tom Sneddon. The boy told why he had not revealed the events that allegedly happened at the time of his stay at the Neverland Ranch. "All the kids at school laughed at me that I was raped. I didn't want them to know that was the truth," Arvizo claimed.⁶⁰ In turn, he replied to the attorney's question, what was his opinion about Jackson at the time, "I don't like him anymore and I don't think he deserves respect I used to give him thinking that he was the coolest guy in the world."⁶¹

16 March 2005 – The jury was presented with objects found in Jackson's bedroom which, according to the testimony given by Gavin Arvizo, the defendant allegedly showed to the boy. These included collections of pornographic magazines, books and DVDs.⁶² Three police officers who had searched the Neverland Ranch were heard as witnesses. The officers admitted that the objects owned by the singer were legal. Additionally, it was confirmed that many of them were issued after the day on which the child abuse allegedly happened and thus could not have been seen by Gavin Arvizo.⁶³

21 March 2005 – For the second time in the course of trial proceedings, Michael Jackson was late. The nearly 45-minute-long delay was said to be caused by the defendant's health issues.⁶⁴ The witness heard on that day was Lauren Wallace, a flight attendant working for an airline company Jackson often hired. The witness admitted to have received orders to empty Diet Coke cans before flight

⁵⁹ "Thomas Mesereau Jr. did not miss he opportunity to bring the boy's troubles at school to light. He told the jury that the boy happened to argue with teachers and manifested other instances of insubordination." See: *Proces Michaela Jacksona: Nic złego się nie stało*, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/proces-michaela-jacksona-nic-zlego-sie-nie-stalo/mqrzs>.

⁶⁰ *Oskarżyciel Jacksona obiektem żartów*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-oskarzyciel-jacksona-obiektem-zartow,nId,1623452>.

⁶¹ *Sprawa Jacksona: Arvizo zeznaje czemu kłamał*, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/sprawa-jacksona-arvizo-zeznaje-czemu-klamal/9lfvb>.

⁶² "These magazines included, among others, issues of Barely Legal, Teenage or Penthouse. The vast majority of them included photograph of naked women although also a book titled *Camp Cove, Photos of Sydney Men* was found." See: *Kolekcja Jacksona*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-kolekcja-jacksona,nId,1623467>.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ *M. Jackson znów spóźniony*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-znow-spozniony,nId,1623524>.

and to fill them with white wine.⁶⁵ She confessed that she had never seen children drunk on the place and that she had never seen Jackson offering them alcohol.

22 March 2005 – Louise Palanker, a comedy actress, testified before the court, called by the prosecution. The witness said about a phone call she had in January 2003 with Gavin Arvizo's mother. During that call the boys' mother seemed scared, she was concerned for the safety of her children. Palanker admitted that she had given 20 thousand dollars to the Arvizo family; however, she stressed that the boy's mother had never asked her for money.⁶⁶

23 March 2005 – The judge granted the motion of the defence and dismissed the prosecutor's request that the jury be presented with the content of computer hard discs from the Neverland Ranch.⁶⁷ On that day, however, the jury was presented with 75 pornographic magazines found in Jackson's mansion and the photographs, among others, a photo of Macaulay Culkin, an actor known from the film *Home Alone*.⁶⁸

24 March 2005 – The main topic during the proceedings was the issue of fingerprints found on the pornographic magazines. According to the prosecutor, aside from Jackson's fingerprints, also those of Gavin Arvizo were found there. A dactyloscopy expert confirmed that there were different fingerprints, including some that might belong to younger individuals.⁶⁹

28 March 2005 – Judge Rodney Melville allowed testimonies concerning previous sexual molestation charges the singer was faced with.⁷⁰

29 March 2005 – The court heard the testimony of Jamie Masada, one of Gavin Arvizo's closest friends. It was Masada (an owner of an entertainment centre at Sunset Strip in Hollywood) who contacted the boy with Jackson on the former's explicit request. During the hearing Masada testified that in January 2003, right after the broadcast of the documentary *Living with Michael Jackson*, he

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ *Proces Jacksona: Rozpaczliwy telefon*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-rozpaczliwy-telefon,nId,1623539>.

⁶⁷ *Proces Jacksona: Sędzia zabronił*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-sedzia-zabronil,nId,1623555>.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ *M. Jackson: Podejrzane odciski*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-podejrzane-odciski,nId,1623570>.

⁷⁰ *M. Jackson: Prokurator góra*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-prokurator-gora,nId,1623591>.

received a phone call from the boy's mother. She revealed that her family was held against their will at Neverland.⁷¹

30 March 2005 – The jury panel listened to the testimony of Stan Katz, a psychologist who was the first one to talk to Jackson's alleged victim.

The psychologist admitted that during his 25-year-long work with children, false sexual molestation accusations most often pertained to cases where the claimant was a child in the custody of a replacement parent. Usually it was young girls who would confabulate and accuse their stepfathers of sexual abuse. In turn, it was 'very, very rare', as Katz put it, that false allegations were filed in the case of boys molested by older men. 'That would be completely atypical for a child of male sex at the age of 12, 13, where an older man is being accused,' said Stan Katz.⁷²

1 April 2005 – Jackson's lawyers submitted a motion for invalidating the proceedings due to errors in conduct. According to the defence, some witnesses revealed their testimonies outside the court. On that day, the court was hearing witness Jeff Klapackis, a Santa Barbara police officer who defended the decision on the warrant issued to search the Neverland (November 2003) by 60 officers. Klapackis explained that such a number was necessary for conducting a scrupulous search of Jackson's residence, since the policemen were given only one day to do so.⁷³

4 April 2005 – Testimonies were given by a 24-year-old man, who was allegedly molested by Jackson in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, and his mother, who was working at the Neverland Ranch at the time.⁷⁴

11 April 2005 – The prosecution summoned as a witness June Chandler, the boy's mother who accused Michael Jackson of sexual molestation in the early 1990s. Chandler admitted that Jackson begged her to allow her son to spend a night with him in one bed. When the boy's mother refused, Jackson "(...) wept, cried, trembled and shivered."⁷⁵

14 April 2005 – The witness heard was Janet Arvizo, mother of Gavin Arvizo. The woman testified that in the early 2003 her family was kept against their will

⁷¹ *Jackson: Kolejni świadkowie*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-kolejni-swiadkowie,nId,1623611>.

⁷² *Jackson: Zeznania psychologa*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-zeznania-psychologa,nId,1623625>.

⁷³ *Proces Jacksona unieważniony?*, <http://rozrywka.interia.pl/wydarzenia/news?inf=608917>.

⁷⁴ M. Gadziński, *Prokurator atakuje w procesie piosenkarza Michaela Jacksona*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2005, 7 April.

⁷⁵ *Drżący Michael Jackson*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-drzacy-michael-jackson,nId,1623785>.

at Neverland, and later held captive at a hotel in Los Angeles. The witness said that at that time, Jackson's employees coerced her family into recording a special statement in which they would praise Jackson.⁷⁶

18 April 2005 – On this day, Janet Arvizo testified again. When interrogating Arvizo, Thomas Mesereau presented her as a person who lacked credibility and desired money. During an exchange of opinions with Jackson's defender, the witness accused the singer of a fraud, adding that "He's managed to fool the world and I was just one woman inside of that."⁷⁷ She also used her right to refuse to testify and provided no answer to questions concerning the money received from social services.

19 April 2005 – Maria Venturo, grandmother of Gavin Arvizo, testified. The women said about a change in her grandchildren after their stay at Neverland. She also mentioned that Jackson's employees would bother her with phone calls and threw stones at her house.⁷⁸

26 April 2005 – The witness interrogated in front of the jury was Cynthia Montgomery, an agent of a travel agency that organised trips for Michael Jackson. The witness testified that Jackson's employees booked four one-way tickets to Brazil. Montgomery's testimony (as a witness of the prosecution) was to support the allegations that Jackson allegedly held the Arvizo family captive and then tried to abduct them outside the US borders.⁷⁹

27 April 2005 – The prosecution called as a witness Debbie Rowe, Jackson's former wife and mother of their two children. The witness testified that in the documentary shot as Jackson's response to Martin Bashir's film everything she said about her former husband in front of the camera was true and not coerced.⁸⁰

28 April 2005 – On the second day of interrogation, Debbie Rowe, Jackson's former wife testified that in her opinion, there is no conspiracy against the Arvizo

⁷⁶ *M. Jackson zastraszał?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-zastraszal,nId,1623841>.

⁷⁷ "Janet Arvizo said that the star 'in truth, had no interest in children, only in what he could do with them.'" See: *Jackson ogłupił świat?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-oglupil-swiat,nId,1623871>.

⁷⁸ *M. Jackson: Kamieniami w babcię?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-m-jackson-kamieniami-w-babcie,nId,1623887>.

⁷⁹ *Jackson chciał porwać?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-chcial-porwac,nId,1623974>.

⁸⁰ *Jackson: Zaskakujące zeznania*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-zaskakujace-zeznania,nId,1623992>.

family. However, she admitted that Jackson is a victim of people who work for him; she called them “jackals” who seek opportunity to make money. She testified that Jackson was surrounded by “opportunistic vultures” who took advantage of him.⁸¹

29 April 2005 – The prosecutors presented the jury with albums found in the Neverland mansion with photographs of naked boys playing.⁸² These albums were confiscated during the search conducted by the police in Jackson’s mansion in 1993⁸³. One of the photographs in the album had a note written by Jackson below, saying, “Take a look at the true spirit of happiness and contentment on these boys’ faces. This is the spirit of childhood. The life I never had and always dreamed of. I want to ensure such a life for my children.”⁸⁴

2 May 2005 – The court heard Ross O’Bryan, an accountant who handled Michael Jackson’s finances. In his view, in the early 2003, the singer had an about 230-million-dollar debt. According to the prosecutors, Jackson could not afford a costly amicable agreement with Gavin Arvizo’s family and hence, he decided to imprison them and then coerce into playing in the film intended to present Jackson as their benefactor. The defence rebutted this hypothesis – Thomas Mesereau proved that his client could easily get rid of the debt by selling, among others, the rights to The Beatles catalogue Jackson owned.⁸⁵

5 May 2005 – The court dismissed a motion filed by Jackson’s defence for closing the case due to insufficient inculpatory evidence. On that day, witnesses called by the defence started making their testimonies. The first to be summoned were Wade Robson and Brett Barnes, men who used to visit Jackson’s property as children. Each of them admitted that though they spent many nights together with Jackson in one bed, no attempt at sexual molesting ever happened.⁸⁶

11 May 2005 – The main witness of the defence was actor Macaulay Culkin. He admitted that he had spent numerous nights at Jackson’s Rancho. However,

⁸¹ *Jackson otoczony szakalami*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-otoczony-szakalami,nId,1624010>.

⁸² *Proces Jacksona: Szokujące dowody*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-szokujace-dowody,nId,1624028>.

⁸³ For more information about the 1993 charges see: M. Oźminkowski, *Jackson w opałach*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 1993, 28 August.

⁸⁴ *Proces Jacksona: Szokujące albumy*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-szokujace-albumy,nId,1624031>.

⁸⁵ *Jackson bliski bankrutem?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-bankrutem,nId,1614687>.

⁸⁶ *Jackson: Tylko kobiety*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-tylko-kobiety,nId,1624101>.

he stressed that he had never been molested nor inappropriately touched by the singer.⁸⁷

13 May 2005 – A testimony before the jury panel was given by Mark Geragos, a lawyer, Jackson's first defender in the current trial. "Geragos said that he did warn Michael Jackson against devastating consequences of his behaviour. To prevent false accusations, in 2003 the lawyer even hired a private detective who followed the Arvizo family for six weeks."⁸⁸ The witness defended Jackson by calling the nights the latter spent with children acts of "unconditional love".⁸⁹

16 May 2005 – On that day, Jackson's employees hired at Neverland gave their testimonies. Maria Gomez, working as a housekeeper, and Katie Bernard, an administrative worker at the mansion, told how during his stay at Jackson's property Gavin Arvizo would get drunk and secretly watch pornographic magazines and films with his brother, whereas their mother would use beauty salon services at Jackson's expense. It all happened when the Arvizo family was allegedly held captive in the Neverland mansion against their will.⁹⁰

17 May 2005 – Subsequent witnesses were summoned by the defence to testify – a testimony was given by Simon Jackson, Jackson's cousin and Irene Peters, a social service worker. Simon Jackson told how Gavin and his younger brother had stolen bottles of wine from the kitchen. In turn, Irene Peters admitted that in private conversations with the Arvizo family she only heard them praising Jackson without any coercion.⁹¹

18 May 2005 – Another witness of the defence Rijo Jackson (Jackson's 12-year-old cousin) testified to have seen Gavin Arvizo and his younger brother watching pornographic films during their stay at the Neverland Ranch. The witness admitted that during Jackson's absence, the Arvizo brothers would watch adult films in his bedroom and do "nasty stuff".⁹² He also testified to have seen the Arvizo brothers nicking wine and drinking it.

⁸⁷ *W obronie Jacksona*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-w-obronie-jacksona,nId,1624169>.

⁸⁸ „Bezwarunkowa miłość” Jacksona, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-bezwarunkowa-milosc-jacksona,nId,1624206>.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ *Proces Jacksona: Rodzina muzyka kłamie?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-rodzina-muzyka-klamie,nId,1624227>.

⁹¹ *Proces Jacksona: Podkradali wino*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-podkradali-wino,nId,1624247>.

⁹² *Proces Jacksona: Oglądali porno*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-ogladali-porno,nId,1624266>.

23 May 2005 – During the interrogation of Mercy Manriquez, the social service worker testified that in 2001, Janet Arvizo did not report to acquire the ownership of the money and, thus, she scammed social services. At the time, when she received financial support for medical treatment of Gavin Arvizo, who was suffering from cancer, her bank account balance was 152 thousand dollars. The jury also heard a testimony of Marion Arvizo, sister of Janet Arvizo's husband, who described the boy's mother as a greedy person who would use her son's illness to obtain as much money as possible.⁹³

24 May 2005 – On that day, the final witnesses summoned by the defence testified, among others, Jay Leno, a host of a TV show called *Tonight Show*. Regarding a phone call he got from Gavin Arvizo in 2000, he admitted that during the conversation with the sick boy he had an impression that his words were previously scripted, and he found the boy's behaviour puzzling. However, he could not recreate the exact content of that conversation and he also admitted that the boy did not ask him for financial aid.⁹⁴

26 May 2005 – The prosecution succeeded in convincing judge Rodney Melville to present a video recording from a 2003 police interrogation of Gavin Arvizo.⁹⁵

27 May 2005 – On that day, the jury panel was shown a film with Gavin Arvizo's statement from 2003. At that time, the boy was talking about the events that had allegedly taken place at Neverland. He testified, among others, that he was forced by Jackson to indecency and intoxicated with alcohol. "He put his hands under my pants. He masturbated me. I told him I didn't like that, but he wouldn't stop. He said he had to teach me that, that it was OK and natural," testified Arvizo.⁹⁶ After the police recording of Gavin Arvizo's interrogation was presented, Jackson's defenders chose not to summon any more witnesses or to further debate with the prosecution.⁹⁷

2 June 2005 – The closing arguments were presented. Prosecutor Ron Zonen prepared a special slide presentation intended to convince the jury that Michael

⁹³ *Proces Jacksona: Zarabiała na dziecku*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-zarabiala-na-dziecku,nId,1624324>.

⁹⁴ *Proces Jacksona: Ostatni świadkowie*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-ostatni-swiadkowie,nId,1624344>.

⁹⁵ *Proces Jacksona: Sukces oskarżycieli*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-sukces-oskarzycieli,nId,1624365>.

⁹⁶ *Proces Jacksona: Klęska obrony*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-proces-jacksona-kleska-obrony,nId,1624384>.

⁹⁷ *Obroncy Michaela Jacksona zrezygnowali z walki*, <https://kultura.onet.pl/muzyka/wiadomosci/obroncy-michaela-jacksona-zrezygnowali-z-walki/hf0jpd4>.

Jackson was guilty. The jurors saw, among others, photographs of Jackson and Gavin Arvizo, hugging the singer. Another slide showed the pornographic magazines found at Neverland.

In the course of the four-hour speech, the prosecutor presented the singer as an alcoholic and a paedophile who was using his position and difficult situation of boys invited to his mansion to sexually molest them. (...) ‘Jackson attacked the weakest victims. After all, a lion in the savannah does not hunt the strongest antelopes,’ he would vividly argue before those gathered in the courtroom.⁹⁸

In turn, in his speech, Jackson’s key defender Thomas Mesereau, pointed out the questionable credibility of testimonies given by the alleged victim and the prosecution’s witnesses. He presented Gavin Arvizo’s mother as a greedy person exploiting her son’s disease to obtain money and Jackson as the victim of her greed. Mesereau’s argument also implied that Jackson is a lonely man surrounded by strangers.

13 June 2005 – After over week-long deliberations, the jury arrived at a verdict on Michael Jackson’s case. Jackson was cleaned of all the ten charges he was facing.⁹⁹ “Michael Jackson is a victim of unjustified allegations, the jurors in Santa Maria concluded. Twelve jurors at the Santa Maria court arrived at a decision by unanimity.”¹⁰⁰ He was cleared of seven sexual molestation charges, two charges concerning intoxicating the child with alcohol, and an a charge regarding an attempt to abduct the victim’s family abroad. “We do not know the full details of the over 300-hour-long deliberations (within seven days), but we do know, for instance, that the jurors did not like how Arvizo’s mother behaved at the hearing, waving her finger at them.”¹⁰¹

In their commentaries following the announcement of the verdict, the judges said, “Most likely, Michael Jackson did sexually molest children but not in this specific case. Hence, we could not sentence him.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Jackson to pedofil-alkoholik?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-to-pedofil-alkoholik,nId,1624449>.

⁹⁹ *Jackson niewinny: Analizy i komentarze*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-niewinny-analizy-i-komentarze,nId,1624575>.

¹⁰⁰ M. Gadziński, *Michael Jackson niewinny*, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,2765192.html>.

¹⁰¹ *Jackson uniewinniony*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-jackson-uniewinniony,nId,1624574>.

¹⁰² M. Gadziński, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2005, 14 June.

Chapter 3: 'The King of Pop': The King of Paedophilia

The public does not need (...) what it has already got. What it needs is an object rich enough to see it in; rich enough, even, to, in seeing it, deepen it.

(Clifford Geertz¹)

The Internet users' statements about Michael Jackson are divided into three groups: the condemning ones, the ironic ones and the defending ones. The key questions I put forward discussing these statements are:

- How is Jackson perceived and assessed by Internet users?
- What draws the greatest attention among the authors of the statements about Jackson?
- How have Jackson's looks and child sexual abuse allegations affected the public reception of his persona?

However, before I discuss the comments, I reflect on paedophilia, which Jackson was suspected of since 1993. I focus primarily on the social perspective of this issue.

The Epiphany of the Idol's Fall

When on 20 November 2003 Michael Jackson arrived at the prosecutor's office in Santa Barbara, California, regarding child sexual abuse allegations, what proved most spectacular and repeatedly mentioned in TV reports concerning this event was the very moment of the idol's arrest. The scene with Jackson handcuffed is like an epiphany of the idol's fall.

TV stations were showing shots of the king of pop handcuffed on and on, relentlessly. Jackson, his hands restrained behind his back, dressed only in black trousers and

¹ C. Geertz, *Art as a Cultural System*, in: *idem, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Basic Books, New York 1983, p. 104.

a shirt, exited the Santa Barbara police station surrounded by lawyers and guards. (...) However, shots taken from a helicopter showing Jackson, handcuffed, getting off a police vehicle were shown yesterday endlessly on nearly all TV stations in the US.²

On that day, Jackson, whose conduct had been triggering ambivalent reactions for years, focused on himself not only the attention of the media of numerous countries worldwide, but primarily “(...) all the suspicions, tensions, and reprisals that poisoned those relationships.”³ He was charged with the most socially condemnable act, that is, child sexual abuse.

The phenomenon of child sexual abuse is referred to paedophilia, not solely in colloquial language but also in academic discourse. However, this term predominantly pertains to a psychiatric disorder consisting in experiencing sexual attraction to children. It is strictly a medical term and is found in the ICD-10 (F65.4)⁴ and the DSM-5 (302.2)⁵. It is not a legal term, in contrast to child sexual abuse, which is listed in criminal codes. Paedophilia concerns to a greater degree a condition of a given person (a paedophile) and to a lesser degree a specific activity (acts) of such a person.

Jackson’s trial, his contact with children and interest in boys provoke a discussion on paedophilia. As Stanley Crouch notices, paedophilia has become an element of contemporary culture.

Whether Jackson is guilty or not, there is a basic truth about the entertainment business today: to be the King of Pop is to be the King of Paedophilia. I say that because paedophilia is the essence of the pop music industry, where children are exploited in every possible way by products arriving in the form of lyrics or images or dehumanizing perspectives.⁶

In the course of the trial, an increasingly more common practice was diminishing Jackson’s status as an artist (“Jackson, a quite faint star, has his five minutes”⁷), as well as referring to him as a ‘self-proclaimed king’.⁸ He was presented as an

² B. Węglarczyk, *Michael Jackson aresztowany i uwolniony za kaucją*, op. cit.

³ R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Y. Freccero, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1986, p. 42.

⁴ International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision (ICD-10), <https://icd.who.int/browse10/2010/en#/F65.4>.

⁵ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>.

⁶ S. Crouch, *Jacko’s the sick king of industry that preys on kids*, “New York Daily News” 2003, 24 November.

⁷ G. Rzeczkowski, *Jackson wstać, sąd idzie*, “Metro” 2005, 1 February.

⁸ M. Gadziński, *Ameryka sądzi Jacksona*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 2005, 1 February.

alienated individual with a social phobia syndrome, living in an imaginary world.⁹ He turned from the 'king of pop' into a dethroned idol, he became a paedophile.

Most likely, paedophilia is the last taboo that is observed so strictly in the late-modern era and, simultaneously, so characteristic of these times. Adam Krzemiński notices, "That which today would be considered paedophilia, thirty years ago was perceived as rightly unblocked drives."¹⁰ Kazimierz Imieliński points out that paedophilia has always existed, yet the approach towards it varied over time, as "It used to be strictly prohibited and it was given the rank of a social institution."¹¹ Moreover, the age of consent changed throughout centuries.¹²

Determining the age of consent is one of the basic problems in the addressed topic; the other pertains to harmfulness of sexual exploitation.¹³ The subject of dispute is the line between what is (still) morally acceptable regarding a child and what should (already) be considered paedophilia and must not to be tolerated.¹⁴ Speaking of a 'moral consent', I refer predominantly to social tolerance for phenomena such as 'beauty pageants' of several-year-old girls, child fetishization (the popularity of child actors and actresses, and models). Attention is also drawn to the common presence of the so-called phonographic 'lolitas', "Children singing

⁹ "A fallen angel. Michael Jackson looks as if he couldn't comprehend what is going on around him". See: P. Siemion, *Zjadanie bogów*, "Ozon" 2005, no. 8.

¹⁰ A. Krzemiński, *Wolność w łóżku i wolność w ogóle*, "Niezbędnik Inteligenta", a supplement to "Polityka" 2005, no. 11, pp. 30–33. Krzemiński mentions, among others, controversial experiments conducted in the late 1960s in alternative nursery schools in the West Berlin commune, where "(...) children had no toys, lived in a group, ignored the adults, yet treated each other with tenderness. Each one of them masturbated themselves, scratched themselves until blood was drawn." See: *ibidem*.

¹¹ "In the imperial-era Ancient Rome, sexual acts with children were quite common. In his work titled *Satiricon*, Petronius describes an example of paedophilia and voyeurism in one; it was a scene of an 8-year-old girl's virginity taken by Giton, with older woman Quartilla observing them lustfully through a crack in the door." See: K. Imieliński, *Medycyna i seks. Historia i współczesność*, Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, Warszawa 1987, p. 139.

¹² "Until recently, custom law provided for the possibility to marry a 10-year-old girl; in France, the marriageable age was not shifted from 11 to 13 years of age until the mid-19th century, whereas in England, a custom determining 12-year-old girls as 'marriageable' remained binding until 1929." See: *ibidem*, pp. 139–140.

¹³ Not only is the high diversity of terms regarding the discussed pathological behaviour prove its importance and long-term presence in human awareness, but also points out the complexity of this phenomenon. This complexity stems both from the conventional character of a child's age below which an adult is legally prohibited from any sexual contact with a child, or behaviour comprising sexual exploitation and, primarily, due to consequences that premature involvement of a child into the sphere of an adult's erotic satisfaction has on that child's further development." See: K. Pospiszyl, *Przestępstwa seksualne. Geneza, postacie, resocjalizacja oraz zabezpieczenia przed powrotnością*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 53.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 76. "Usually, the borderline signal of a paedophile's sexual fascination is emergence of secondary sex characteristics, primarily pubic hair." See: *ibidem*, p. 54.

children's songs seem to belong to the past. Adults are no longer satisfied with music videos of increasingly more nude female pop singers. Recently, hit lists have been overtaken by thirteen-year-old girls who are not singing, however, about 'The Wheels On The Bus' and said hits are not children's songs."¹⁵ In turn, Kinga Dunin notes that children, particularly girls, are taught from early childhood to emphasise female sexual attributes:

It only takes one to turn on the TV for a moment to see on some TV station a couple of several-year-olds dressed up as a woman and a man or rather a prostitute and a machoman, flexing their bodies in an erotic dance or singing out loud lyrics that are not at all about teddy bears and dolls, but about a heated search for a partner for lovemaking.¹⁶

Interestingly, this 'moral tolerance' for displaying sexuality pertains to female children. An eroticised image of an underaged girl has become something that triggers adults' protests less and less often; however, this is completely different when it comes to boys' sexuality. On the one hand, it is eagerly addressed in pop culture, particularly the moment of a boy's sexual initiation while, on the other hand, it still remains a taboo, especially when it concerns homosexuals.¹⁷

The Image of a Child

A child's sexuality is a difficult topic.¹⁸ An attempt to break the taboo of leaving the issue of children's sexuality unaddressed was taken by, among others, Sigmund Freud:

¹⁵ N. Budzyńska, *Fonograficzne lolitki*, Opoka.org.pl, http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/P/PK/fonograficzne_lolitki.html. According to studies conducted by Kidprotect.pl website on the interest in online paedophilia in Poland, words *Lolita*, *lolitas*, *lolitka* (functioning as key words) are most often placed in metatags of websites containing child pornography. See: *Zainteresowanie internetową pedofilią w Polsce*, Stoppedofilom.pl, <http://www.stoppedofilom.pl/artykuly/8.html>.

¹⁶ K. Dunin, *Wszyscy jesteśmy pedofilami*, "Wysokie Obcasy" 2004, no. 31.

¹⁷ What is puzzling, for instance, is the popularity enjoyed by a comedy about boys having sex with older women. In the film *Tadpole* (2002), a 15-year-old boy is seduced by a middle-age woman (his own stepmother). As the essayist of *The Village Voice* notices, "None of the reviewers noted that the sex portrayed in the film is a felony. Women who mess with boys have gone to prison, but that doesn't get in the way of this heartwarming fantasy." See: R. Goldstein, *I Believe I Can Open My Fly: Why Michael Jackson Is Damned and R. Kelly Is the Man*, „The Village Voice“ 2004, 14–20 January, <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0402,goldstein,50201,1.html>.

¹⁸ "Studies on children's sexual behaviour encounter significant restrictions. This is not only due to ethical reasons. An equally important obstacle is insecurity whether possible

It is biologically improbable, even absurd, to assume that children have no sexual life – sexual excitements, desires, and some sort of satisfaction – but that they develop it suddenly between the ages of twelve and fourteen. This would be just as improbable from the viewpoint of biology as to say that they were not born with genitals but developed them only in the period of puberty.¹⁹

Freud's studies on human sexual development brought to light the strength of a belief about a child as an asexual being.²⁰ "The child is supposed to be pure and innocent, and whoever says otherwise may be condemned as a shameless blasphemer of the tender and sacred feelings of humanity."²¹ Negation of this 'innocence' is always socially condemned. As Freud put it, the role of society in modern culture is to quench and negate children's sexuality.

One of the most important educational tasks which society must assume is the control, the restriction of the sexual instinct when it breaks forth as an impulse toward reproduction (...) With this intention almost all infantile sex activities are forbidden to the child or made distasteful to him; the ideal goal has been to render the life of the child asexual.²²

An important topic in the discussion on a man's sexuality is related to Alfred Kinsey's reports on Americans' sexual behaviour.²³ According to Kinsey, sexual behaviour such as homosexuality or paedophilia, socially considered to be offences, are in fact socially benign and pose no threat to the public health; their 'harm' is said to lie exclusively in breaking the taboo and offending the public sense of appropriateness.²⁴ James Jones, the author of a book titled *Alfred C. Kinsey*.

actions of this kind are harmless to children." See: K. Szczerba, *W kręgu Erosa i Psyche*, Miryan-Press, Wrocław 1991, p. 7.

¹⁹ S. Freud, *Lecture XX – The Sexual Life of Man. Part. III: General Theory of the Neuroses*, in: *idem, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. G. Stanley Hall, Boni and Liveright, New York 1920, pp. 262–277, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38219/38219-h/38219-h.htm#page_262.

²⁰ The issue of ambivalence in how a child is perceived was addressed by Carl Gustav Jung, who wrote that a child is something deprived of any significance or meaning and something divine at the same time. See: C.G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Child Archetype*, in: *idem, Collected Works*, vol. 9, part 1, 2nd ed., Princeton University Press, Princeton 1968, pp. 151–181.

²¹ S. Freud, *The Sexual Life of Man*, op. cit.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in Human Male*, W.B. Saunders, Philadelphia, PA 1948, and: A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin, P.H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in Human Female*, W.B. Saunders Co., Philadelphia–London 1953.

²⁴ Kinsey opposed the stereotype of combining homosexuality with paedophilia. Homosexuality was defined as a 'lethal' threat predominantly adolescent boys were susceptible to. A stereotypical homosexual is a brute child molester who "(...) is ever seeking for younger victims". See: J.H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Life*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York–London 1997, p. 629.

A Life, quotes statements by both Kinsey himself and his co-workers and critics, according to which the issue of child sexual abuse was considered by Kinsey to be a “heavy load of guilt”.²⁵ Having interviewed individuals sexually molested as children, Kinsey allegedly admitted that although all the respondents condemned paedophilia, only several of them were still feeling hurt due to how they were once treated.²⁶ In his view, paedophilia – as any other taboo focused around the sphere of sexuality – is a threat predominantly to the social moral code; if society did not perceive paedophilia as an offence (a sin), children-victims would not feel harmed.²⁷ This is because, in his view, everything boils down to social judgment of a specific sexual behaviour, whilst trauma is caused by social condemnation: “(...) Sexual activities in themselves rarely do physical damage, but disagreements over significance of sexual behaviour may result in personality conflicts, a loss of social standing, imprisonment, disgrace, and the loss of life itself.”²⁸

Alfred Kinsey described, among others, the case of a paedophile named Mr X (a man molested in childhood by members of his own family) whom Kinsey considered an important and a one-of-a-kind “scientific gem”.²⁹ Although many sexual experiences of Mr X were cases of explicit child sexual abuse, Kinsey, who adopted an uncritical approach to his interviewee, never considered him a perpetrator.³⁰ He was convinced that science needs data regardless of the moral judgment of the source of information.

According to Paul Gebhard, Kinsey’s co-worker, the researcher’s message boiled down to ‘new ethics’, that is, a slogan, “sex is good”.³¹ Kinsey was willing to accept every kind of sexual activity, while disapproved of sexual abstinence. He claimed that a man is pansexual – it is the presence of social norms and a system of control that make people afraid of deriving satisfaction from having sex and stifling lust. For Kinsey, individuals such as Mr X were an example of a modern man liberated from socially imposed restrictions.

The repressive role of society in the constructing of attitudes towards children’s sexuality holds an important place also in the historical study on child-

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 630, and p. 688.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 752–753.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 753.

²⁸ A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in Human Male*, op. cit., p. 386.

²⁹ J.H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Life*, op. cit., pp. 510–511.

³⁰ For more information on the social image of a paedophile see: *ibidem*, pp. 688–689. In a report on women’s sexuality (*Sexual Behavior in Human Female*), Kinsey blames victims for paedophilia. He writes, among others, that in many cases of incest, it is the child (a girl) who initiates additional contact and benefits from early sexual experiences (as adult women, such individuals know how to enjoy a sexual intercourse). See: *Ibidem*, p. 689.

³¹ James Jones’ interview with Paul H. Gebhard (29 October 1971, Indiana University Oral History Project), cited after: *ibidem*, p. 520.

hood conducted by Philippe Ariès.³² The questions he put forward pertain to how a child's position in a family and society was changing through ages and how adults' approach to children evolved.

Ariès starts his study from the Middle Ages, when, as he writes, there was virtually no place for childhood. It was not until the 17th century that the first precise dictionary use of the term 'child' appeared.³³ The medieval interest in a child was related primarily to the development of art – since the 14th century, a child has become an attribute of art – it has not been presented anymore as a miniaturised adult. Three child types appear then, namely, an angel, Christ Child and a nude child. Since then, also the attitude to childhood has changed in collective awareness – a completely new iconography of children's scenes appears, and two new types of how a child is represented, namely, a portrait and a *putto*. Particular attention should be paid to the attitude to a child's sexuality. Ariès writes, "One of the unwritten laws of contemporary morality, the strictest and best respected of all, requires adults to avoid any reference, above all, any humorous reference, to sexual matters in the presence of children. This notion was entirely foreign to the society of old."³⁴ In a journal of a royal physician Heroard (who noted events in the life of young Louis XIII), cited by Ariès, one may read that child's first erections evoke merriment.³⁵ At that time, children were allowed to make gestures that over time became considered forbidden.

In the first place the child under the age of puberty was believed to be unaware of or indifferent to sex. Thus gestures and allusions had no meaning for him. (...) Secondly, the idea did not yet exist that references to sexual matters, even when virtually devoid of dubious meanings, could soil childish innocence, either in fact or in the opinion people had of it: nobody thought that this innocence really existed.³⁶

Also, sleeping in one bed was commonly practiced in all social classes.³⁷ This situation changed at the end of the 16th century, when an idea was born that books (classic works in censored versions) should be published for children. According to Ariès, "This was a very important stage, which may be regarded as marking

³² P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. R. Baldick, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1962.

³³ "Child' is also a term of friendship used to greet or flatter someone or to induce him to do something." See: *ibidem*, p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 104. Cf. also: N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. E. Jephcott, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2000, pp. 242–273, particularly pp. 242–261.

³⁵ P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, op. cit., p. 101.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

³⁷ Cf.: N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, op. cit., pp. 229–241, particularly p. 234.

the beginning of respect for childhood. This attitude was to be found among both Catholics and Protestants, in France and England.”³⁸

In turn, the notion of “innocence of childhood” was adopted in the 17th century. Since then, a child has been considered a helpless being, and the said helplessness was associated with innocence (understood as a reflection of divine purity.) The adoption of the moral concept of childhood³⁹ is related to a new challenge for adults, specifically, “towards childhood: firstly, safeguarding it against pollution, by life, and particularly by the sexuality tolerated if not approved of among adults; and secondly, strengthening it by developing character and reason.”⁴⁰ Therefore, when a child’s world is distinguished from the world of adults, upbringing become one of the most important obligations and objectives of society.

The matter of upbringing can be considered part of the civilizational process. Due to this process, which is an ongoing series of changes (resulting from unintended human actions), control over drives becomes more rigorous and intimate at the same time. As a result, the stifling, socio-cultural obligations and prohibitions become internalised and over time, they start operating as social norms and become a part of individuals’ awareness.⁴¹ Just as in the case of acquisition of social norms, rules of behaviour or morality, the attitude towards sex forms gradually and is ever-altered just like these norms and models do. Norbert Elias writes:

The formation of feelings of shame and revulsion and advances in the threshold of repugnance are both at once natural and historical processes. These forms of feeling are manifestations of human nature under specific social conditions, and they react in their turn on the socio-historical process as one of its elements.⁴²

An example of a category that is transformed in the civilizational process is shyness. The feeling of shame is a specific excitation, a kind of anxiety which is automatically reproduced in the individual on certain occasions by force of habit.”⁴³ Shyness in the context of sexual relationships has not become the prevailing standard until the end of the 19th century. “In the civilizing process,

³⁸ P. Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood*, op. cit., p. 112.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

⁴¹ Elias takes it as an obvious truth that requires no detailed analysis of convergence of his theory and Sigmund Freud’s concept of the socio-genic origin of the superego. It is worth mentioning that Freud linked modern civilisation to the so-called civilized sexual morality. This is manifested in, among others, increased neurotic disorders that stem from unsatisfied, stifled sexual needs. See: S. Freud, *‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness*, Read Books, Redditch 2014.

⁴² N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 414–415.

sexuality, too, has been increasingly removed behind the scenes of social life and enclosed in a particular enclave, the nuclear family, likewise, the relations between the sexes have been hemmed in, placed behind walls in consciousness."⁴⁴ Elias continues to mark, "An aura of embarrassment, the expression of a socio-genetic fear, came to surround this sphere of life. Even among adults it was referred to officially only with caution and circumlocutions. And with children, particularly girls, such things were, as far as possible, nor referred to at all."⁴⁵ According to Elias, this manifestation of shyness turns into internal compulsion that orders adults around, since:

As in the course of the civilizing process the sexual drive, like many others, has been subjected to ever stricter control and re-modelling, the problem it poses changes. The pressure placed on adults to privatize all their impulses (particularly sexual ones), the 'conspiracy of silence', the socially generated restrictions on speech, the emotionally charged character of most words relating to sexual urges—all this builds a thick wall of secrecy around the growing child.⁴⁶

A different stance is that presented by Lasch. In his view, the Elias' "internal compulsion" cannot be implied in contemporary culture, as it would enforce obedience to social norms, thus leading to increasing self-control and stifling of drives. That which characterises late-modern culture is the growing 'slackening' of morals, that is, pursuing immediate satisfaction of one's own needs followed by a consent to child's sexualisation. However, Lasch fails to notice that this 'slackening' of morals (in his opinion, manifested primarily as brief sexual relations) is only partial. In the attitude towards child's sexuality one can also notice social repulsion to paedophilia. This antinomy of mutually exclusive child's sexualisation and repulsion towards paedophilia can be explained by referring to Odo Marquard's concept of reversed totemism.⁴⁷

Reversed Totemism

The phenomenon of reversed totemism consists in a shift in society's approach towards a specific issue. The starting point is Freud's concept of totemism. According to Freud, the murder (and consumption) of the pre-father (the leader of an original horde) by his sons ended with establishing a cult of him. It was a way

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 152.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

⁴⁷ O. Marquard, *Farewell To Matters Of Principle: Philosophical Studies*, trans. R.M. Wallace, Oxford University Press, New York–Oxford 1989, p. 9. Marquard calls reversed totemism a "deferred disobedience".

of putting aside the feeling of guilt and showing their repentance for disobedience to the father.⁴⁸ Therefore, since totemism is a kind of delayed obedience, then reversed totemism is a delayed reaction to guilt after rebelling that in fact never happened. As Joanna Tokarska-Bakir writes, it is a moral inversion by means of which “people protect themselves against guilt that torments them, because they have changed their views and only recently have they come to understand the evil they committed or that to which they failed to respond in time.”⁴⁹ For Marquard, reversed totemism manifested in, among others, Germany at the time of war, where objection to fascism was very strongly manifested:

(...) The revolt against the dictator (the father of the ‘fatherless society’), which largely failed to take place between 1933 and 1945, was symbolically made up for in the rebellion against what had taken the place of the dictatorship after 1945. This is why precisely the ‘totems’ now were slaughtered and eaten, and the ‘taboos’ broken.⁵⁰

According to Marquard, after 1945 the democratic system became the ‘substitutive’ objective.

When it comes to paedophilia, reversed totemism would consist in social condemnation and stigmatisation of sexual behaviour towards children and taboo-ising issue related to child’s sexuality. Hence, we would be dealing with guilt (possibly also shame), i.e. delayed response to social changes the ‘culture of narcissism’ has led to. The repulsion to paedophilia and paedophiles would be both the result and the reversal of sexual emancipation, one of the key postulates preached by contemporary culture.

Paedophilia is an extremely sensitive issue as it concerns the most intimate sphere of a child’s life. At the same time, it is difficult to determine the extent to which paedophilia is actually spreading today (among others, by means of the Internet⁵¹) and that to which it is a hot topic emphasised by the media.⁵² Slavoj Žižek claims, for example, that in liberal society, indignation and condemnation

⁴⁸ S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill, Moffat, Yard & Co, New York 1918.

⁴⁹ J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Energia odpadków*, in: M. Douglas, *Czystość i zmaza. Analiza pojęć nieczystości i tabu*, trans. M. Bucholc, PIW, Warszawa 2007.

⁵⁰ O. Marquard, *Farewell To Matters Of Principle*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵¹ See article *Zainteresowanie internetową pedofilią w Polsce*, op. cit. According to statistics provided in this study, within one month, specifically from 14 May 2004 to 15 June 2004, search entries “(...) concerning paedophilic content constituted 4.1% of all the search entries about erotic content in the search engine. On 19 June 2004 of all 27,254 search entries about erotic content, 1,123 pertained to paedophilia and child pornography.”

⁵² An example from Poland is the popularity in the media of Andrzej S., a psychologist charged with molesting his minor autistic patients. Within only three months Andrzej S. became the main figure in TVN *Uwaga TV* reports. See: *Znany psycholog pedofilem?*, 29 June 2004; *Psycholog zaczął chłopców na Centralnym?*, 26 July 2004; *Andrzej S. poczytalny?*, 2 September 2004. His personal details and face were revealed in the press. See: “Fakt” 2005, 28 June.

regarding paedophilia operates as a fetish, that is, a manifestation of a lie used for maintaining truth that we see as unbearable.⁵³ Does it mean that the condemnation of paedophilia is false? If so, where do the causes of (moral) incoherence lie?

According to Alasdair MacIntyre, culture that rejected values such as virtue and a sense of community failed to develop a coherent theory of morality. This culture is characterised by emotivism. Both the opting out of the classic tradition, particularly the theory of virtue by Aristoteles, and the discontinuance of the Enlightenment project that attempted to root moral principles in reason (Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy) led to general moral chaos and a shift in the meaning of applied concepts or moral arguments. According to MacIntyre, "What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions."⁵⁴ The late-modern ethics employs moral concepts that are worded in a similar way but bear a different meaning, and thus, all morality discourse is doomed to cause endless disputes and undecidability. Moral arbitrariness has become a common element of daily discourse, while an individual was granted the right to make autonomous moral choices, which he cannot handle. Ultimately, this leads to emotivism.

"Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character."⁵⁵ As MacIntyre observes, at present, we are using value moral expressions, as if they were driven by objective and impersonal criteria, while these criteria are absent, elusive. What is the social content of emotivism? "What is the key to the social content of emotivism? It is the fact that emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations?"⁵⁶ This is particularly visible in three moral figures that embody emotivist modes of manipulative behaviour and which are called by MacIntyre 'characters': the aesthete, the manager and the therapist. The role and the personality of each of these characters become one, making them carriers of moral values of their own culture.⁵⁷ These 'characters' determine a given culture in terms of its morality, serving as the focus of important social and moral disputes, or providing specific cultural ideals. One of the most vivid values that they (particularly a manager

⁵³ See: S. Žižek, *Perspektywy polityki radykalnej*, trans. A. Mazur, "Krytyka Polityczna" 2004, no. 5, pp. 76–78.

⁵⁴ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 2007, p. 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 68–69.

and a therapist) praise is efficiency. All their activities boil down mainly to powers of persuasion and manipulation skills, whereas moral judgments become tools for exerting influence on attitudes of others are sometimes limited to expressing approval or disapproval of a given action, attitude, etc. According to MacIntyre a situation like that proves that the idea of *fronesis* is disappearing.

It might be considered that emotivism is manifested in comments of Internet users – they are an expression of a subjective judgment of their authors on the behaviour or statement made by the judged individual. In this context, moral judgments such as ‘good’/‘bad’ are founded primarily on emotions a given author of a comment associated with a specific type of an act to be judged. Here, the categories of truth and falsity are disregarded. Behaviours considered ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘acceptable’ or ‘inappropriate’ are those that evoke specific emotions, namely, that of acceptance (or only permission) or, in contrast, the feeling of repulsion or disapproval. However, using an expression of an emotive meaning bears not only an emotional reaction but also leads to adoption of a relevant moral stance.⁵⁸

In his conversation with journalist Martin Bashir, not only did Michael Jackson admit to have had children unrelated to him in his bedroom, but also that he did not see anything inappropriate in being with them in one bed. “Why can’t you share your bed? The most loving thing to do, is to share your bed with someone. (...) When you say bed, you’re thinking sexual, they make that sexual, it’s not sexual.”⁵⁹

The statement triggered an immediate reaction – mainly, that of indignation and condemnation towards Jackson. His confession to sharing a bedroom / a bed with children who visited him was considered a manifestation of paedophilic tendencies. Jackson’s condemnation resulted from paedophilia being condemned as a socially prohibited and forbidden act; an act that evokes repulsion, and hence, a negative moral judgment.

In his reflection on the changeability of rules concerning incest, Georges Bataille wrote, “Such and such a thing is obscene if this or that person thinks it is and says so; it is not exactly an object, but a relationship between an object and the mind of a person.”⁶⁰ This conclusion also refers to the situation analysed in this book; Jackson’s statement about sharing a bed with children was considered obscene, as at present, “(...) a bed and a body have become terrifying and dangerous zones, and consequently, sharing a bed with someone who is not part of a family is out of question.”⁶¹ The very word ‘bedroom’ is associated with ‘inti-

⁵⁸ C. Stevenson, *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms*, “Mind” 1937, no. XLVI, and: *idem*, *Persuasive Definitions*, “Mind” 1938, no. XLVI.

⁵⁹ J. Shaw, *Living with Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁶⁰ G. Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. M. Dalwood, City Lights Books, San Francisco 1986, p. 115.

⁶¹ M. Janion, *Rozmowa druga: o współczesnej mediokracji*, in: M. Janion, S. Rosiek (eds.), *Galernicy wrażliwości*, Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdańsk 1981, p. 374.

macy', and that area of life is not openly discussed. It is the kind of a situation in which particular moral split described by Elias becomes clear. Society imposes the obligation of openness or transparency on the adult-child relation.

Times, occasions and people are marked off in this way: every aspect of sexuality is obscene in this place, or in these circumstances, or in the presence of these people. The different aspects, just like the places, times and persons, are variable and always arbitrarily defined. Thus nakedness is not obscene in itself.⁶²

To paraphrase Bataille's terminology, a child is a restricted person, a subject of sexual prohibition. Everything that violates this image of a child shall be considered 'obscene'.

Indignation always appears when an attempt to break a taboo is made. Every subsequent breaking of a taboo bears the threat of infringing the very foundation of culture in which it occurs. As Mary Douglas stresses, a taboo "reduces intellectual and social disorder."⁶³ As the foundation of social order, a taboo serves as a tool for organising the structure of the local world and the entire universe.⁶⁴ Society needs a system of rules that would facilitate differentiating that which is pure from that which is not. That which is impure is considered to be a threat to the social consensus and becomes an anomaly.⁶⁵ The condition for maintaining order is isolation or removal of items, people, etc. that pose a threat to the order. One of the ways for handling an anomaly is to control it, among others, by means of using a specific language that would allow one to classify a specific act or a statement as transgression of the binding paradigm, as 'impure', 'obscene', 'hideous', etc. At the same time, a language that protects a taboo is capable of 'erasing' certain words, categories or even individuals. That which could break the taboo becomes veiled with a 'conspiracy of silence' or is identified directly with the threat.

It seems that not only did Jackson infringe in his statement the rule concerning the adult-child relation, but also stepped beyond the taboo of not speaking about these rules. Hence, his statement soon contributed to Jackson being

⁶² G. Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., p. 216.

⁶³ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge, London 2002, p. xi.

⁶⁴ See what Joanna Tokarska-Bakir writes in this matter; J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Energia odpadków*, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Zygmunt Bauman writes, "The opposite of 'purity' – the dirt, the filth, 'polluting agents' – are things 'out of place'. It is not the intrinsic quality of things which makes them into 'dirt', but solely their location; more precisely, their location in the order of things envisaged by the purity-seekers." See: Z. Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1997, p. 6.

formally charged with sexually molesting a minor, as well as an investigation and a trial conducted against him.

Online Statements

For words may project a vision of the world; not solely describe it but create it.

(Wojciech J. Burszta⁶⁶)

I will commence the presentation of online statements with presenting verbal comments. These are characterised by a high degree of aggressiveness and prejudices towards Jackson. Authors of these comments openly condemn both paedophilia and Jackson charged with sexually molesting a minor. The first comments to be cited are those in which there are references to antisemitism:

Put the paedophile to a gas chamber, no trial needed.

[karol, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003 wp.pl]⁶⁷

gas that trash! ! !

[marek, *Jackson: Decydujące stracie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

MJ gas him!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[roocko, *Michael Jackson: Niewinny!*, 14 June 2005, wp.pl]

Michael Jackson!!!yuuuuuuck gross gas the man!! He's only good for scaring children anyway!!!

[paula, *Jacko ubiera się jak clown i ma twarz mumii*, 17 August 2005, wp.pl]

He's clearly a q***r and should be gassed just for his looks and acts. Moron

[Rudolf, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl]

The expression such as 'gas him' used by the authors indicates presence of prejudices based on stereotypisation. Here, Jackson becomes a symbolic Jew 'sentenced' to a 'gas chamber', hence, a type of a death sentence that provokes associations with the Holocaust. In the case of these comments, we are dealing with a transference of an antisemitic discourse.

⁶⁶ W.J. Burszta, *My zmieniamy świat albo magia dzisiaj*, in: *idem, Asteriks w Disneylandzie. Zapiski antropologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2001, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Comments have been translated from Polish to English. However, an attempt was made to maintain their original expression tone (including punctuation marks or curses and swearing). In the square brackets, I first put the author's nick, followed by the title of the article that is commented on, the date of the comment and the source (the website from which a given statement was obtained): [nick, article title, date, source].

Prejudices caused by stereotypes are also visible among other comments. Jehovah's witnesses and Muslims are the attacked religious groups.

Nothing left for him but to convert to Islam and go in the footsteps of the paedophile from Mecca.

[samsone, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 14 June 2005, 22:06, gazeta.pl]

MJ the paedophile should be thanking his Jehovah from dawn to dusk that he got away:))) NOT GUILTY:)) hahahahhah (for those who don't know English, NOT GUILTY doesn't mean INNOCENT)

[321.bk, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 14 June 2005, gazeta.pl]

Also, comments that reveal racial prejudices appear:

f..k the bleached ni**er... a q...r that's all he is..

[czesiu, *Przerażony Michael Jackson ofiarą spisku?*, 2 June 2005, wp.pl]

Even a black paedophile can be whitened in the US for cash!!!

Repulsive albino ni**ershi*!!!

[B-52, *Jacko ubiera się jak clown i ma twarz mumii*, 17 August 2005, wp.pl]

There are comments that refer to the anti-homosexual discourse:

he's a f***t I mean a homosexual welcome

[Ilona, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl]

michael is a weirdo with no nose-queer that's all:P

[ONR, *„Zdziś” - urodziny Michaela Jacksona*, 29 August 2005, wp.pl]

now black-and-white mickey jackson will be free to enjoy himself until he drops.... :) but now not with innocent kids but with smelly beanpoles, but that's surely no difference to such a q***r.

[SPAT, *Rozpoczął się proces Michaela Jacksona*, 1 February 2005, gazeta.pl]

I also included in the group of statements that condemn Jackson those whose authors openly demanded that the idol be punished immediately. In these statements, Jackson is blamed primarily for his intervention in his appearance:

he should be locked up for his face if you can call it a face.... don't you think??

[ktos z chełma, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

Justice is done... Paedophiles must be punished, especially those with noses that are falling off and who are scaring people (kids) with their hellish looks (like Jackson).

[Gierek, *Michael Jackson opuścił szpital*, 6 September 2005, onet.pl]

guilty 100% - his holding on to his crotch at concerts, statements like, 'sharing bed with a kid is the greatest proof of love' leave no doubt to me (though I admit those are no evidence of guilt)

[pawel_z_melb, *Michael Jackson: Wciąż bez werdyktu*, 11 June 2005, onet.pl]

they wanna destroy Michael! Wanna destroy Michael ?? And who's that Michael mate?? Some Nelson Mandela?? A Kennedy? Or the pope? Does the man tear down systems, authority??? He's just a regular comedian. He's made a ton of money. He had sick childhood and that's why his psyche is totally wrecked. A normal man doesn't wilfully put himself in the place he is. There are many artists who are great, they live a normal life, contribute to charity and play no drama queen, for instance Sting or Bono. I watched a film about him. The man's just sick. How does he treat his children??? He makes them wear masks. That's madness. The man may not be fit for prison but he definitely does need a shrink. But it's too late for that I guess.

[morfeusz, *Cela dla M. Jacksona gotowa*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

good he's earned it i don't like someone whitening himself up like that and acting like a chick and all

[sikor, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl]

THAT'S A STRONG NO FOR PAEDOPHILES !!! bite the dust monster!

[Ocek, *Michael Jackson opuścił szpital*, 6 September 2005, onet.pl]

In his writing about identity, Anthony Giddens notices that, "We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves."⁶⁸ Today, looks function as the key element of the reflective project of the 'self'. This has been also noticed by Slavoj Žižek, who writes, "we suspend our knowledge of what actually exists beneath the skin (glands, flesh...) and conceive the surface (of a face, for example) as directly expressing the 'soul'.⁶⁹ In turn, Stanisław Filipowicz in his reference to Rousseau's thought points out that truth is 'realised' in a person's face. "We may learn what s/he is like only when instead of discursive practices we choose moral practices, when we conclude that a judgment on reality ought to be founded on a matrix of direct experience."⁷⁰ It seems that Jackson is indeed judged for 'what he did to his face'. His physique is of fundamental significance in the judgment of the entire person. Not only does his appearance (face with make-up, plastic surgeries, etc.) serve as a filter for judging his conduct but also for punishing him for how he looks. This fact is illustrated in these comments:

⁶⁸ A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age...*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁶⁹ S. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, Verso, London–New York 1997, p. 134.

⁷⁰ S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, op. cit., p. 48.

Personally, I don't believe in his innocence. For me, the bloke's sort of a 'black and white' freak with a lipstick and makeup on, and somehow, I can't believe he had nothing to do with it.

[bialas4, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

looking at him, I am simply afraid and I don't trust him even a bit... what has he done to himself

[motab, *Przysięgli: Zarzutów wobec Jacksona nie udowodniono*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

How a man who changed his own skin colour can be considered a normal person and treated as equal to others?? Guilty as hell.

[martika_884@vp.pl, *Cela dla M. Jacksona gotowa*, 12 June 2005, onet.pl]

Apes like him should be locked up with no sentence!!!

[rambo21, *Cela dla M. Jacksona gotowa*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

In the comments, Jackson's appearance is identified with insanity, animality or even monstrosity:

He's an ape after plastic surgery and not one for that matter! He is either a fu*ked up paedophile or he wanted to get attention (as always) and he scre*ed it:))) Lock him up in a Polish jail and write up on his forehead he's a nonce:))) inmates from the cell will take care of poor jackson

[BoRutA, *Jackson: Decydujące starcie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

People, how can you have pity on someone like him?? He's clearly insane !!Masks, an oxygen capsule, fear of germs, paedophilia- it all makes up a trully terrifying picture. He must get a harsh punishment.

[Oburzony, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

i hope he gets sentenced he just was a little bad in the head, no other words for someone who changes his skin colour and transforms himself into a monster, but that wasn't his key disorder but the 'love' for children. paedophiles should be isolated from them, better yet castrated. I hope the king will spend looong years but not on a throne but in prison

[ofolk, *Michael Jackson: Wyrok za kilka dni?*, 1 June 2005, onet.pl]

Can a man who looks like that be N O R M A L???!!!

[Ula, *Michael Jackson opuścił szpital*, 6 June 2005, onet.pl]

King of pop my a**! how can you call this 'thing'a king? It neither black nor white, the nose's falling off, it grasps on its junk when it's singing and squeaking. People het your s**t together!

[Zdebeliusz, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

According to René Girard, it is in a monster that the physical and moral aspects are inseparable – therefore, a monster cannot be innocent.⁷¹ Jackson's face determines that he is perceived as someone capable of committing the crimes he was charged with. Thus, the thing that prejudices his 'guilt' is his own face. Jackson is judged on his looks. His face is considered to be a mask that provokes specific beliefs. He is what his body presents; it might be said that he himself has become a 'work of art'.

Identifying Jackson's face with a monster appears not solely in verbal comments. There are numerous websites dedicated to Jackson's looks. One of them, called The Wacko Jacko Mask, presents a hand-made Halloween 'mask' depicting Michael Jackson's face.⁷²

It seems that in Jackson's case we may speak both of a literal mask and a metaphor of a mask. Jackson is the person who made total self-transformation. He is what his face represents. And that face operates as a mask. The question is, what does it show and hide?

A mask is considered something that expresses on the outside everything that belongs to the inside and, hence, it expresses that which is hidden beneath it. Elias Canetti writes,

The true mask is something which never changes, but remains permanently and unmistakably itself, a constant in the continual flux of metamorphosis. Part of the strength of its effect is due to the fact that it reveals nothing of what is behind it. The mask is perfect because it stands alone, leaving everything behind it in shadow; the more distinct it is, the darker everything else.⁷³

In turn, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, it is not what a mask presents but what it transforms that serves as its purpose; its meaning lies in that against which (or instead of which) it manifests. A mask simultaneously states and negates, just as a myth does. As Lévi-Strauss remarks, what is shown by a mask (or what it intends to show) is just as important as what it excludes.⁷⁴ In contrast, Stanisław Filipowicz writes about a mask as a symbol of a narcissist who seeks ways to exhibit her/his 'self'. For a narcissist, a mask becomes a mark of identity, an anthropological imperative that determines the way of existence. "It is a mark of belongingness, it allows one to participate in the order of original embodiment."⁷⁵

The late-modern narcissist perceives herself/himself and her/his body as something s/he herself/himself designs, or 'styles' on an ongoing basis. From

⁷¹ R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁷² The Wacko Jacko Mask, <http://www.i-mockery.com/halloween/bag/wacko-jacko.php>.

⁷³ E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. C. Stewart, Continuum, New York 1978, p. 377.

⁷⁴ C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks*, trans. S. Modelski, University of Washington Press, Seattle 1982.

⁷⁵ S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, op. cit., p. 54.

this point of view, identity is an artefact, while the space of mutual contact reminds of a stage on which an individual is both an actor and the spectator, s/he herself/himself evaluates, and s/he is evaluated by others. Spectators' approval determines whether one is content with her/his 'self' or not. In the 'culture of narcissism' the postulate of self-creation boils down to ongoing confirmation of one's self-esteem by gaining others' acceptance.

Neither the external appearance nor how one carries himself cannot be left alone in post-traditional conditions of highly developed modernity. The principle of active construing of identity pertains quite directly also to the body. Regimes linked directly to sensuality models that a body is subject to are the basic mechanism of cultivation and even creation of the body on which the institutional reflexivity of modernity is centred on.⁷⁶

Jackson's intervention in his looks might be analysed as narcissistic attempts to attain the identification result.

The motif of a mask appears as the key theme on websites dedicated to Jackson. I classify these websites to the group of ironic statements or even those that ridicule Jackson. One of such websites is HisTory of Michael Jackson's Face, a kind of a collage that presents the history of changes in Jackson's looks that occurred in the years 1979–2004.⁷⁷ The photographs on that site were published in chronological order with additional comments added, mostly a mockery (their titles are, among others, Alcoholic Wife, Mr Potato Head, The Flying Monkey Looks). For a comical effect, also photographs of famous cartoon and science-fiction film characters were added and compared to Jackson's face.

Yet another website dedicated to Jackson, MJ Age Progression⁷⁸, focuses on recreating Jackson's hypothetical appearance if he had not undergone plastic surgeries. On the website three photographs were published – the first one is his likeness from childhood, the second one shows Jackson's hypothetical appearance at the age of 45, while the third one presents him as an elderly.⁷⁹

Websites dedicated to Michael Jackson's appearance form a certain typology; Jackson is made the object of interest due to his nose, skin colour and plastic surgeries. The most numerous category is that of websites dedicated to Jackson's nose.⁸⁰ One of websites published a special quiz that consists in matching the

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁷⁷ The link to HisTory of Michael Jackson's Face is no longer active, <http://www.anomalies-unlimited.com/Jackson.html>.

⁷⁸ MJ Age Progression, <http://www.forartist.com/forensic/modification/mj/jackson.htm>.

⁷⁹ This effect was obtained by using a special software that can predict how appearance may change over time based on childhood photographs.

⁸⁰ After entering the search phrase 'Michael Jackson's nose' into the google.com search engine, a list of 264,000 websites corresponding to the searched phrase appears, mostly blogs and press articles (October 2005).

right shape of a nose to Jackson's likeness. In turn, a website titled Does Michael Jackson Really Have Vitiligo?⁸¹ focuses exclusively on the idol's skin colour. Aside from opinions issued by physicians who specialise in vitiligo (a disease characterised by gradual loss of pigment), Jackson's photographs from various stages of his career were published. Also, a poll in which every Internet user may express his or her opinion on Jackson's skin colour can be found on the website.

A separate category of statements about Jackson consists of playful comments. Their authors also focus on the idol's appearance:

This monster-star (as some used to call him here) should have been long gone from the stage. The bloke's a regular cripple, poor thing was born too black :(Me, I can listen to the guy once in a while – but I don't wanna see him – gross... yuck. Now he can shoot that video of his with corpses with no makeup on.

[ble, ble..., *Obrońcy Michaela Jacksona zrezygnowali z walki*, 28 May 2005, onet.pl]

Shame the boy whitened himself up like that. ME, personally I liked him better when he was all chocolate. now he looks like a deadman, pale face, skeleton thin and that upturned nose...-but how, but why, damnnn...

[putativus, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 16 June 2005, gazeta.pl]

i wonder if he's gonna make his makeup in prison:

[ania, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005]

I'm curious does Jackson take that spiky nose off for bedtime?

[nie fanka, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 10 June 2005]

guilty or not, I'd pull him by the nose.....

[wolski, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

Why do they treat Michael in the US like a black man. The guy's white

[gulgul, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 13 June 2005]

I remmber those moves he got when dancing in his music vids:D hahah :D that was cool :P but now he cant dance cuz he's all falling apart :P darn why the man had those cra**y surgeries done ...

[n them say, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

A nosey nose collapses in the tertiary stage of syphilis

[malleus maleficarum, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

Due to all the stress Jackson's nose and ear party fell off! Shucks these paedophilia trials are stressful! They should be banned!

[normalny inaczej, *Wydano wyrok w sprawie Michaela Jacksona*, 13 June 2005, onet.pl]

⁸¹ Does Michael Jackson really have vitiligo?, <http://itsb.ucsf.edu/~vcr/Freeze2.html>.

Authors of these comments notice and explore primarily playful elements in Jackson's appearance. Also, paedophilia and child sexual abuse allegations are being trivialised here:

But when did the guy mention having sex with children? I thought he spoke only about marriage =/

[ot co, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

To show my solidarity with MJ I am now no longer sleeping with boys that's enough i'm going after the ladies now!

[bobiC, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

For many years it's been well known children are best roasted with truffles!

[smakosz, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

Please make comments to support paedophiles! Out with paedophobia! Michael! You're the paedophilia martyr!

[prof. Flaszka, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

i'd let him pop my cherry anytime :D mmmm

[Michałek pedałek 121, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

I don't get this, who makes rights that say you can't do it with children???

[Antykler, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

Jackson is considered someone infantile and deprived of the capacity to reflect on his own behaviour. He is a caricature of a man. Both allegations and the trial are a trace in the comments to make jokes about Jackson:⁸²

i told u he's got nothing to rape with because as the saying goes, what u see is what u get

[barbi, *Wydano wyrok w sprawie Michaela Jacksona*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

With 8 women as jurors Jackson can kiss freedom goodbye poor chap.

[jacko, *Michael Jackson: Wyrok za kilka dni?*, 1 June 2006, onet.pl]

Be more tolerant Equality Parade for Michael J.

[wtorek, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

⁸² In 2004, Michael Jackson was parodied in a music video for the song *Just Lose It* by American rapper Eminem. In the video, the rapper dressed up as Jackson loses his nose, among others. Eminem was also shown vomiting on Jackson and putting the latter's head into a toilet. Also, an allusion is made to children being sexually molested by Jackson. See: O. Burkeman, *Michael Jackson threatens to sue over mocking video by Eminem*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/14/usa.michaeljacksontrial>.

And I think that Michael is sexy rawr i'd eat him whole he's so gorgeous but i might be too old for him, I'm 18 already and Ima girl, shucks

[Kasiulek18, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

A tender for a place in his cell was announced. The price went up to 10 grand. All the cool guys want to be his companion in his misery. They're hornamorous already.

[marco, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

Michel!!! Polish fans got your back!!!! Not only the metalheads. Also Polish Indians support you!!!! Indians from around the globe let's join forces and smoke a pipe for the White Face!!!

[Pierdzący Bizon, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

What did he do now? He's rich and he's said to allegedly molest a regular a** boy? If he wanted he'd buy the entire city and molest it all. And besides, judges are probably not fond of him too so they'll sentence Michael. With NO EVIDENCE!!! Only "testimonies"

[T, *Jackson: Decydujące starcie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

Ironic elements can be found in press reports in which Jackson's child sexual abuse trial was documented as a stage play.⁸³ Its aim was to entertain the public.⁸⁴ The fact of a 'spectacle' was supported by the following elements:

- commenting on Jackson's image (much interest was given to, among others, his white outfit that symbolised innocence and Jackson's appearance in the court in pyjamas bottoms. There were also numerous mentions of his jewellery or makeup⁸⁵);
- focusing on the very moment of arrest, repeatedly broadcasting the scene that took place in front of the police station – Jackson handcuffed (an epiphany of the idol's fall);
- engagement of the media (installing cameras on the airplane, recording Jackson's private conversations with his lawyer, journalists chasing Jackson's car);
- using phrases such as "a modern-day lynching".⁸⁶

⁸³ "Michael Jackson's trial that has just commenced is already called the greatest show of the early 21st century. Will it cast a shadow on the musical accomplishments of the artist who used to be called the most famous man of the 1980s?". See: R. Sankowski, *Król popu abdykuje*, op. cit.

⁸⁴ Not only did the reports from the trial contain information about the proceedings in the courtroom but also on Jackson's behaviour, appearance, and outfits.

⁸⁵ "On Monday, having heard the verdict Jackson, moving like a sleepy mummy covered in white dust, supported on all sides by security guards and relatives, left directly to his car. Someone moved his arm so that is gave an impression he was waving at his fans. No smile, no relief; no traces of emotion on a pale-white face covered in talk." See: M. Gadziński, *Michael Jackson niewinny*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ This phrase was used by Jermaine Jackson (Michael Jackson's brother) during the interview for BET. See: *Jermaine Jackson says brother Michael's trial was 'lynching'*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7UxUAalBqU.

The phrase “a modern-day lynching” can be found in the comments of Jackson’s fans (admirers). I classify these statements as those that ‘defend’ the idol.⁸⁷ Authors of these comments act primarily as Jackson’s defenders – they object allegations and justify his conduct, among others, by his ‘difficult’ childhood. Jackson is seen as a victim of a conspiracy by his fans. They explain child sexual abuse charges by the complainants’ greed and envy. Their comments are characterised by recalling Jackson’s position as an artist, referring to his past and the status of ‘the king of pop’.

FANS SIGN UP!!! MICHAEL IS INNOCENT!!! In just a few days this nightmare will be over for Michael!! He’ll be announced not guilty 1000%!!! WE LOVE YOU MICHAEL!!! Shout out to all the fans!

[Liberian Girl, *Michael Jackson: Wyrok za kilka dni?*, 1 June 2005, onet.pl]

MICHAEL WE’RE WITH YOU FOR GOOD AND THE BAD TIMES!!! All will be fine fingers crossed!!

[Kasia, *Jackson: Decydujące starcie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

we can’t remember anymore can we? Jackson is a great talent; his songs have no equal. This is why envious people wanna tear him down. He helped children because he himself had no childhood.. Some people want to force him to pay. Take it but don’t lock him up. People!

[Neutralna, *Jackson: Decydujące starcie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

want to destroy Michael! Thats too much! no court judgment is sight but the prison cell is ready! Its all a game-to sentence michael! That’s not fair! But I believe that truth will triumph now or later! I don’t know if u know but ppl who sing and dedicate their life to others have good hearts and love ppl-that’s what Michael is like!!! I admire him!!!He’s the king!!! Just like Usher said-who took part in the concert for Jackson-he sang with him on stage-!!!Fabulous!!!

[AGNIESZKA W., *Cela dla M. Jacksona gotowa*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

I knew he was innocent!!!! People would sell their soul for money.... not mention accusing Jackson.... I believe he’s innocent...It’s so easy to accuse a man...

[starsza pani, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

MJ is the King of POP and no swindler won’t take his throne away. Michael is the king of Pop music, without question. He worked hard to get it. And now here’s a nasty

⁸⁷ Among the statements there were also some whose authors (declared as non-fans) expressed their recognition for Jackson as an artist and also their grief due to the charges against him. This is exemplified by the following comment: “What has Michael done to himself, what were all those surgeries for?? I have some regret that he had those surgeries and I don’t like him because of that. But I do admire him for what he used to do in his youth, meaning his trademark dance moves. That was incredible and I admire him for that.” See: Bartho, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl.

hag doing everything to hustle the highest compensation possible from him at the expense of his career. The court clearly stated Jackson's innocent and dismissed all allegations. And does anyone know the story of that boy's mother-I suggest you go and seek and think again about the allegations against Jackson

[Mario, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

What is characteristic of this group of comments is the very way in which fans express themselves, treating their own entries as a public manifestation of solidarity with Jackson. In the course of the trial, Jackson's fan websites were calling fans to be ready to support the idol. Jackson's trial was compared to a war and the fans were to be his soldiers:

I call to all Michael Jackson's fans and people who oppose the unjust manner in which the investigation is carried out! My name is Aneta and I am one of the people who supported Michael in Las Vegas at an international candle holding. This action was carried out to show the world that not only will Michael's fans support him but also fight for an ethical and just approach to the trial. Michael's at war and we're his soldiers.⁸⁸

Statements of fans clearly reveal existence of the *pop cult*, that is, narcissistic admiration of Jackson. The most visible manifestation of the *pop cult* is making oneself a physical resemblance of an idol.⁸⁹ By making themselves look like Jackson, his fans want to identify with him both by means of copying his appearance and the way he conducts himself or speaks. Jackson's Polish impersonator is Majkel Dżekson. Asked why she impersonates Michael Jackson also in her private life, she replies:

There's definitely a part of Michael's that's inside me. Obviously, there's no way I'd go around the house in Michael's outfit and makeup. (...) I heard that when I'm speaking English I sound like Michael. Probably, I don't know. But very often, at home, for instance, I happen to be doing something and suddenly I use a phrase Michael used in his film, a music video or an interview. And that's extraordinary, because it's as if Michael was waking up inside me.⁹⁰

The above statement is an example of a relation where a fan recognises herself in the admired idol and, more so, she 'becomes' Jackson. Non-differentiation

⁸⁸ MJJPolishTeam.Pl, <http://www.mjpolishteam.pl/newsy.php?pos=100>. This website is no longer active.

⁸⁹ One of the most famous Jackson's impersonators is Edward Moss, an actor who played Jackson in a TV series broadcasted by *E! Entertainment* and *Sky*.

⁹⁰ The official Polish impersonator of Jackson is Majkel Dżekson, <http://www.majkel4michael.pl/majkel.html>.

can be evidenced also by the nicknames of Jackson's fans (seen under comments and listed in fan clubs). They are for most part derivatives of Michael Jackson's name (for example, 'Mike', 'Mickey', 'MJJ') or inspired by titles of his songs (e.g. *Liberian Girl*).

Another manifestation of the *pop cult* is creating fan clubs and launching private websites dedicated to Jackson.⁹¹ Most of them present copied but oftentimes very detailed information about Jackson (among others, personal details of his life).⁹² These websites are divided into specific subsites: biography, discography, song lyrics, quotes/interviews, trivia, photographs and news. Some of them also publish fragments of Jackson's songs and music videos. Also, information on authors of these websites is out there, together with their poems, drawings and discussion forums where Internet users can talk to other fans or share personal stories about Michael Jackson, including intimate confessions⁹³:

It's my music, my passion, my hobby, my lifestyle, my retreat from the grey everyday life, that which fills the void, soothes the pain, my fascination, my joy. (...) He's been present in my life virtually since the very beginning. (...) The secret lies in the exceptional sensitivity of his music, a great emotional load that it carries. He touches upon the most hidden and inaccessible parts of human unconsciousness... This way Michael Jackson has somewhat become 'my personal friend'. Someone who has reached parts no other 'living being' could access. Since then, he's always been with me. In moments of my greatest joy and grief. I've grown fascinated with his moves, dance, charismatic personality, I've been hypnotised by his voice. Nonetheless, the most important is that which Michael has taught me... Thanks to him I've learned that being an 'adult' doesn't have to mean 'depriving' the world of beautiful colours, spontaneous reactions, the ability to enjoy each day that comes.

[Luiza, *Michael I Ja, Czyli Cala Prawda O Jego Niezwykłej Magii*, JacksonWorld.Pl: http://www.yfw24.de/userdaten/87529382/html/historyjki_fanow/michael_i_ja_czyli.htm⁹⁴]

⁹¹ After entering a search term "Michael Jackson's fan site" into the google.com search engine, I got the result of 636,000 websites (found in 0.40 seconds on 9 May 2006). Therefore, I limit my analysis to a general characteristic of these sites. Presenting specific websites would make no sense not only due to the great number of said sites but also because they mostly are quite alike in terms of content.

⁹² On a private website of a fan called Genius Michael Jackson (<http://www.genius-michaeljackson.com/>) one may find information, among others, on Jackson's height, shoe size, favourite holidays ("Jewish Sabbath") or house chores ("vacuum cleaning").

⁹³ One of the biggest and most popular forums for Jackson's fans is the website called MJJForum (<http://www.mjjforum.com>), where aside from basic information about Jackson one may find talk-radio, a store, a gallery with fans' photos, online games etc.

⁹⁴ The website is no longer active. Fan statements have been translated from Polish to English.

Dear Readers, I'd like to present on this website a story, a true story of a girl whose life was filled with sad incidents. That girl felt somewhat betrayed by fate ...it was only due to a certain quite short man of modest look, an unmatched soft voice and warm piercing glance that she started seeing the world in completely different colours. I'd lie if I claimed that her outlook on reality has been completely improved. No, it's just that the life she used to live has become more colourful and optimistic. [Anara, *Jej Historia...3 Podejscia...Rozczarowanie...Bol*, JacksonWorld.Pl: http://www.yfw24.de/userdaten/87529382/html/historyjki_fanow/jej_historia.htm]

(...) I have dedicated all my life to the greatest treasure in the world, that is, Michael Jackson, and I have no regrets !!! For me, he's something like a god because I adore him , I respect him and I believe in him and in what he does !! I'm very proud to be one of so many people who love and adore him, his fans worldwide !!! (...) He did a lot for me, too, because his music gives me meaning, joy, happiness and faith that there's someone just in this world, someone who's interested in injustice, suffering, love for other people, races, someone of pure conscience and a heart so beautiful that it's incomparable to anyone else's !!! (...) I am grateful to him for all that and for being with us and loving us. I don't know what would I do in this world if not for Michael ! He's helped me understand many things, even change my life! I follow his footsteps because he is a worthy ideal and a model to follow !!!

[Darek, *Być fanem Michaela Jacksona*, JacksonWorld.Pl: http://www.yfw24.de/userdaten/87529382/html/historyjki_fanow/byc_fanem_michaela_jacksona.htm]

There was no sign of one of many evenings at my grandparents' would be different to others and that it will be a breakthrough moment in my life ... but it happened. (...) Who is Michael Jackson to me !? To me, Michael is, most of all, the greatest musical, artistic talent of this world. His music, each bass and each voice tone give me shivers and extraordinary emotions. There's no song I wouldn't like performed by him. (...) MJ is also my biggest friend. With all my love for MJ work, I'll never be truly unhappy and given my other love that is sports... I think to myself that I must be the happiest man on earth. Michael has always been mobilising me, relaxing me and always served me as the best remedy for any problem. (...) In short MICHAEL JACKSON is my life and that's that.

[Mazi 2300, *Michael Jackson w moim życiu*, JacksonWorld.Pl: http://www.yfw24.de/userdaten/87529382/html/historyjki_fanow/michael_w_moim_zyciu.htm]

In these fragments, Jackson's fans described their first contact with his music, which they refer to as something extraordinary, even a break-through, something that has changed their lives. Jackson is called 'a god', 'a friend', someone who is fascinating. Because he is unique and "touches on the most hidden and inaccessible parts of human unconsciousness", he was "allowed access" to areas "no living being could access". For Jackson's fans, listening to his music is not only an aesthetic experience, as by means of this music they 'enter' the idol's world,

they feel that they are experiencing his sensitivity. Owing to him, they may “see the world in completely different colours”, they change, and, finally, they find the meaning of life. His music is a “remedy”, uplifts or “gives meaning to life”. Jackson is seen as an “ideal and a model to follow”. All these phrases point out that in the beliefs of his fans, Jackson operates as an important part of their identity. On the one hand, the presented fragments of statements confirm narcissistic admiration characteristic of a fan-idol relation, while on the other hand, they also serve as evidence of narcissism in these fans, as they experience the “meaning of life” through Jackson’s music and his art, thus becoming unique themselves.

Another example of the *pop cult* can be analysed through the memories and experiences of fans “meeting” their idol.⁹⁵ One of the websites dedicated to Jackson published a fan’s story about her experience of attending the idol’s concerts. She describes, among others, an event that took place during the singer’s visit to Prague in 1996:

I positioned myself in the second row by the barrier. It started pouring with rain and I couldn’t get on a raincoat in the thick crowd in which you couldn’t make a move. Somehow, I managed to wrap the coat on my head but it was so cold I couldn’t stand it. I retreated and when I left the crowd, they started shouting. It was Michael. I rushed forward to steal just a glimpse of him on a car roof. It was raining cats and dogs. People were running, jumping, colliding. In all this chaos, I managed to see only Michael’s head and arms for a second. Michael approached his fans for a moment at a place covered from rain. The hysteria was so incomparable, people were jumping on cars. Right before my feet people fell down, brutally shoved off of a car roof by the police. It was terrifying, but after a few seconds it all ended.⁹⁶

At the moment of Jackson’s arrival, the crowd becomes a ‘baiting crowd’ that is formed due to a quickly-accessible specific goal.⁹⁷ In this case, the goal was to meet Michael Jackson, even to touch him or to just see him from a small distance. It might be said that Jackson himself was the goal. The crowd concentrates at the moment the idol appears. In that time, people are trying to get as close as possible to the object of their admiration, disregarding others. As the fan recalls in the quoted fragment, “People were running, jumping, colliding.” The crowd is overtaken by chaos and hysteria that do not cease until the idol disappears. His fans unite with a common goal – to see Jackson in person. Once the goal is attained

⁹⁵ I have put the word “meeting” in quotation marks because this does not pertain to a direct face-to-face meeting but a situation where fans could see Jackson live, among others, at concerts, airports or when waiting for the idol in front of a hotel he was staying at.

⁹⁶ The website MJ Wizard Pl (<http://www.republika.pl/malgowiz/Mjkim/swiat/praga96.shtml>) is no longer active. Fan’s statement has been translated from Polish to English.

⁹⁷ E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, op. cit., pp. 49–50.

and Jackson finally appears, the crowd begins to disperse. Although the fans who gathered still share the same goal, each one of them is thinking about himself or herself only, and about meeting Jackson in person. It is only after he disappears that everything comes back to the primary state, that is, the fans reunite in their admiration for the idol sharing their experiences.

On the basis of the presented statements, the traits of the mythical hero in contemporary culture will be discussed in the following part of the book.

PART III: ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIGURES

I want to speak about bodies changed into new forms. You, gods, since you are the ones who alter these, and all other things, inspire my attempt, and spin out a continuous thread of words, from the world's first origins to my own time.

(Ovid¹)

This part is devoted to the analysis of three anthropological figures of trickster, scapegoat and carnival king. I will start by discussing the trickster. The key question is: how do characteristics attributed to the trickster manifest in the case of Michael Jackson?

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk III, trans. A.S. Kline, Electronic text, The Ovid Project, University of Virginia, Virginia 2000, <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Ovhome.htm#askline>.

Chapter 1: The Trickster

The figure of a trickster appears in many mythologies, among others, European myths (the Greek Hermes¹), the African myths (Eshu²), Buddhist beliefs (Drukpa Kunley³). A trickster is called a fool, a clown, a jester, a demiurge, a devil. In this chapter, I shall focus on the figure of a trickster based on the anthropological study of Paul Radin⁴, which pertains to the mythology of North American Indians, particularly the Winnebago tribe⁵, where a trickster, as Radin puts it, serves as “a figure foreshadowing the shape of man”⁶ – he is a metaphor of a man in his relation with himself and the world.

The Winnebago call a trickster by the name of Wakdjunkaga.⁷ Myths about him comprise an entire series of stories about trickster’s wanderings and the process of transformation.⁸ Wandering across the world, Wakdjunkaga learns about himself, above all. He does not have any values, has no clue what morality is, “He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites

¹ K. Kerényi, *The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology*, in: P. Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, Schocken Books, New York 1972.

² E. Davis, *Trickster at the Crossroads: West Africa’s God of Messages, Sex and Deceit*, “Gnosis” 1991, no. 19, pp. 37–45.

³ Drukpa Kunley is a 16th-century Tibetan saint called the Crazy Madman. See: K. Dowman, *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*, Dawn Horse Press, Middletown 1998.

⁴ Radin collected myths during his field studies he conducted in 1912. For more information about the origin of the myth see: P. Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., pp. 111–112.

⁵ The Winnebago are a group of Indians speaking in Siouan. Originally, these tribes inhabited lands along the Mississippi River (at present, mainly the central part of the state of Wisconsin and eastern Nebraska). Winnebago (today’s areas in the vicinity of Green Bay, Wisconsin) was first reached by a French expedition in 1634. Archaeological studies confirm that the Winnebago used to inhabit the area of Green Bay from around 1400. For more information on the history and culture of the Winnebago see: *ibidem*, pp. 112–117.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. XXIV.

⁷ Radin translates the name Wakdjunkaga as ‘the tricky one’. See: *ibidem*, p. 132.

⁸ Wandering theme often occurs in myths about a trickster. A trickster is someone ‘on the road’, where a road serves as a symbol of a journey within oneself. See: L. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischievous, Myth, and Art*, North Point Press, New York 1999, p. 6.

(...).”⁹ However, with time and the road passed, he slowly creates a universe of values, showing on his own example what serves a human being and what does not. He oftentimes alters the surrounding reality.

A trickster’s activity consists in ‘executing changes’. The category of a transformation is the basic trait of this figure. Elias Canetti refers to a trickster as the master of transformation who can take on any form.

His power depends on the countless shapes he can assume. Whatever he does is surprising; he appears and disappears unexpectedly; he snatches things or gets hold of them in extraordinary ways and only lets himself be caught if he knows he can escape again. The essential faculty which enables him to perform his astounding feats is transformation.¹⁰

Identifying the ‘true nature’ of a trickster is a challenge. More so, is a trickster deprived of his own identity and masks that by imitating others and taking on various forms, or is his identity composed of numerous layers (masks) and constitutes a sum of various contrasting traits? Lewis Hyde argues that a trickster’s transgressive nature, his ability to imitate others stems from the fact that as an individual, a trickster “(...) has no way.”¹¹ Without any crystallised identity, he can have many of them and, consequently, he can be independent, as not bound by a single form. He may take on various forms, he is unlimited in his imitation. He easily adopts to the surroundings and his flexibility allows him to adapt swiftly.

A trickster operates in mythology primarily as a certain symbol. He is defined by ambivalent properties. It is a figure that captures contrasting behaviours and traits into one system. The good and the evil are his attributes at the same time. Sometimes, within a single mythology, he is considered a deity, a hero, a demiurge, or a spirit of dead ancestors. He embodies a state where there is no clear distinction between sacred and profane, the humane and the animalistic. His unrestrained appetite, sex and constant wandering are traits that does not belong explicitly to a deity or a human. A trickster has both elements characteristic of deities, humans and animals. It is sometimes identified with a specific animal (a totem), such as a raven, a hare, a coyote, and a spider. (Here, it is worth to note that opposite traits are attributed to these animals; on the one hand, these are cunningness and wits, while on the other hand, it is recklessness and foolishness.)

In the myths of the Winnebago, a trickster is presented as a being driven by instincts who is not in the habit of pondering and reflecting on consequences of his own actions. Thus, he is considered a being incapable of reflection, who acts impulsively. He is erratic, perverse and his presence is a foreshadowing of may-

⁹ P Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., p. XXIII.

¹⁰ E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, op. cit., p. 381.

¹¹ L. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, op. cit., p. 43.

hem and chaos. Called a prankster, he often falls prey to his own pranks. Although he can afford good conduct, he deceives and is deceived just as often.

The element of attitude that is most typical of a trickster is provocation. Just as Paul Radin, Lewis Hyde points out that a trickster is a provocateur who explicitly transgresses social boundaries, makes them blurry, yet implicitly establishes and solidifies them at the same time. By breaking a taboo with his behaviour and deeds he shows what belongs to the forbidden sphere. Zenon W. Dudek mentions a trickster as a mediator between two realities, that is, the world of order and the world of chaos. He writes, “the figure of a Trickster protects traditional reality from growing aware of the necessity of a radical change. A community may gradually grow accustomed to the new truth and for some time, their approach to a Trickster is light-hearted and not serious.”¹² As a result of a trickster’s (not necessarily intended) attitude, “(...) the value of that which is weak, ill, unnoticed, left in the shadows of daily life”¹³ becomes unveiled. However, he does so primarily in the form of a paradox and a joke, since otherwise he would become a scapegoat.¹⁴

A trickster is a figure not bound by any morality – he is neither moral nor immoral; “He embodies and enacts that large portion of our experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined. He represents the paradoxical category of sacred amorality.”¹⁵ Due to the above, traits of a fool and a clown (and thereby figures that are allowed to provoke and breach social norms) are attributed to a trickster. He can provoke, because his behaviour is perceived in the category of a prank, a joke and play. With the comical traits of his attitude accentuated, the figure becomes reduced to a harmless entertainment. Thus, a trickster is seen as someone who entertains the public and makes it laugh.

The Myths about a Trickster

In this part selected myths about a trickster using primarily Paul Radin’s study and comments made by Karl Kerényi¹⁶ and Carl G. Jung will be presented and discussed.¹⁷ I assume that the fundamental traits of this figure, on which the story about a trickster is focused, include mainly three traits: capacity to transform, an

¹² Z.W. Dudek, *Symbolika Trickstera a duchowość chrześcijańska*, “Albo Albo. Problemy psychologii i kultury”, issue no. 4/98 – 1–4/99, p. 13.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Z.W. Dudek, *Wymiary i funkcje figury Trickstera*, “Albo Albo. Problemy psychologii i kultury”, issue no. 4/98 – 1–4/99, p. 35. I shall return to the topic of transforming trickster into a scapegoat further in the book.

¹⁵ L. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁶ K. Kerényi, *The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology*, op. cit., pp. 173–188.

¹⁷ C.G. Jung, *On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure*, in: P. Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., pp. 195–211.

ambivalent moral attitude and problematic sexuality. A significant theme in the myths is dedicated to a trickster's transformation process symbolised by a motif of wandering across the world. In the summary below I present episodes of a trickster's journey that tell about the hero's transformation. I shall begin with myths where a trickster says his name out loud for the first time, thus becoming empowered.¹⁸

Wakdjunkaga meets a buffalo on his way. He deceives it and kills it, and then takes off his hide. He does it all only with his one right hand. Once his left hand reaches for the bison meat, the right hand immediately tries to pluck it out. "Give that back to me, it is mine!"¹⁹ shouts Wakdjunkaga. "I will cut you to use my knife on you!"²⁰ he threatens himself, more specifically, his left hand. Both hands start arguing and plucking the meat out of each other. In some moment, the right hand wounds the left arm. Only once the arm starts bleeding does the trickster notice that it was him who delivered the pain to himself. Then, he only musters a cry, "Oh, oh! Why did I do this?"²¹

The trickster visits a man, a father of four. He learns from him that the children are fed in a specific way and only at specific hours. If any of these rules is broken, the children die. The trickster manages to make the man agree (by referring to him as a "brother"²²) to let him take care of two of his offspring. He then takes the children away with him to continue his journey. He knows though, that if he breaks the rules of attending to the children, their father will hunt him down and kill him. As a result of his gluttony, the trickster forgets to observe the rules – he feeds the children at an inappropriate time. The children die. He manages to escape their father's revenge only by jumping into the ocean. For a few days, he swims around looking for a shore. When he asks some fish that swim past him about the shore, he receives the same answer trice – the shore is not far. The trickster fails to realize that he has been swimming along the shore all this time.

Once he gets on the shore, he notices a shadow on the other side. He takes it for a living creature who points at him with its finger. "Say, my younger brother, what are you pointing at?"²³ he asks. Since he can hear no reply, he decides to copy the posture of the mysterious object. He challenges it: who will stand still in one pose for the longest time. After a few hours, overtaken by hunger and fatigue, he withdraws from the pointless bet. He approaches the unknown object only to realise that what he took for a man was a tree trunk with a branch. He says

¹⁸ In Winnebago's though a being does not officially exist until he is given a name. See: P. Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., pp. 134–135.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 8, episode 5.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Wakdjunkaga refers to the objects and individuals met on his way 'brother' or 'sister'.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 13, episode 11.

to himself then, “Indeed, it is on this account that the people call me the Foolish One.”²⁴

Wakdjunkaga feels hungry. He notices a flock of ducks by a lake and decides to hunt them. To lure the ducks close, he makes a small package he takes on his back. His endeavour is observed by the birds who grew interested. They ask the trickster three times, “What are you carrying on your back?”²⁵ It was not until they asked him for the fourth time that he replies,

(...) I am carrying songs. My stomach is full of bad songs. Some of these my stomach could not hold and that is why I am carrying them on my back. It is a long time since I sang any of them. Just now there are a large number in me. I have met no people on my journey who would dance for me and let me sing some for them. And I have, in consequence, not sung any for a long time.²⁶

The ducks agree to dance to his song. Wakdjunkaga starts singing. As the birds are dancing with their eyes closed (closed eyes are supposed to protect them from becoming red), the trickster snatches and strangles them. One of them, hearing the quacking sound, opens her eyes to see the trickster strangling another duck. She screams to warn the others. Sadly, only few of them successfully flee, while the rest die impaled on sticks, roasting in the ashes. Waiting for the meat to be ready, Wakdjunkaga falls asleep. He tasks his own anus with watching over the roasting ducks. But he fails to fulfil the task he was entrusted with. Nearby foxes steal the meat and hide the sticks on which the ducks were being roasted back in the ash, so that the trickster does not notice anything. And he does not notice it at first. However, when he discovers the truth, he punishes his own anus by roasting it on burning coals. Once he can no longer stand the pain, he cries, “Is it not for such things that they call me Trickster?”²⁷ The trickster asks himself the same question several times more during his journey.

Further on his road, Wakdjunkaga notices pieces of fat behind him. He picks them up and eats them. To his surprise, he discovers that the thing he was eating was his own flesh, specifically, a piece of intestine. For after he burnt his anus, some of his bowels separated from the rest of his body. The trickster recalls, “Correctly, indeed, am I named Foolish One, Trickster! By their calling me thus, they have at last actually turned me into a Foolish One, a Trickster!”²⁸

As the above episodes show, the trickster grows self-aware gradually. His transformation begins with total unawareness of his own body. At first, the trick-

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 14–15, episode 12.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 18, episode 14.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

ster does not identify with his body, he seems deprived of any identity, he does not know who he is. He then slowly learns that both his right hand and left hand belong to him; he discovers that the anus is part of his body too and it cannot be treated as something separate. Lastly, he learns why he was named Wakdjunkaga. This is an important moment of self-awareness. The thing the trickster still fails to do is to bear responsibility for his own actions. He still believes that he has no agency, and that it is the world and other beings who decide on his behaviour.

In the myths collected by Radin, the trickster is presented as a creature of great unrestrained appetite oriented primarily at satiating its physiological hunger. He is someone who is hungry and greedy all the time. His existence focuses on basic physiological needs. However, trickster's unrestrained appetite seems to be hiding something more, for this hunger reveals his need for ongoing multiplication and growth. A trickster is never fully satisfied.

Interestingly, until this moment there is no information about trickster's appearance. This is most likely because it is only now that a trickster literally feels he has a form. When he 'notices' his own body, that body starts taking on a form similar of that of a human. Also, it is not until now that a trickster's genitals and sexuality are first mentioned.

It is Wakdjunkaga's practice to wear his penis on his back in a special box. At first, he is aware of neither his own sex nor sexuality. He comments on reactions of his own body in one of the episodes, "That's always happening to me."²⁹ It seems that for the trickster, sexuality is a sensitive topic.

In another episode, the trickster notices the chief's daughter swimming in a lake nearby. He decides then, "'Now,' exclaimed Trickster, 'is the opportune time: now I am going to have intercourse.'"³⁰ He sends his penis under water to the young woman. Yet the genitals scare the girls accompanying the chief's daughter off. Immediately, an older woman appears (most likely a nanny of the chief's daughter) who prevents him from having intercourse with the girl using a stitching awl.

The issue of gender and sexuality is one of the most significant motifs in the stories about the trickster. In one of the episodes, the trickster changes his gender/sex. On his journey, once winter falls and there is no food left, Wakdjunkaga goes to a village as a woman. To find shelter from cold and hunger, he marries a son of the local chief and then gives birth to his children. According to Radin, the subject of gender/sex change also appears in other mythologies of North American Indians and is interpreted in various ways. A gender/sex change is often seen as a joke and a prank that a trickster is allowed to do because 'he' is someone who by definition has no specific form, gender or sex. (However, in the

²⁹ P. Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., pp. 18–19, episode 15.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 19–20, episode 16.

myths cited by Radin, the trickster appears as a male figure.) It is also a trick that shows how far a trickster can go in his transgression of social and moral norms. However, the trickster's transformation into a woman and the marriage with the chief's son may be considered revenge on people for insults he experienced on his journey. In this specific myth, the key motif for which the trickster becomes a woman is his desire to get food and to survive winter.

In Radin's view, a gender/sex transformation is an important part of the trickster's sex education. Until now, the trickster has been a creature of not completely defined form and sexuality. He lived as if each part of his body was functioning separately and independently of each other. Only now does he realise the differences between the sexes and the purpose of genitals.³¹

Karl Kerényi interprets episodes concerning the trickster's sexuality as a foreshadowing of his emancipation. He compares the trickster to Greek god Hermes, who is often presented as a phallus. Both when it comes to Hermes and the trickster, "The phallus is Trickster's double and alter ego."³² Hermes is related to a trickster also due to other traits such as the tendency to deceive and play tricks around. The trickster misleads and ridicules others, but he himself gets misled at the same time. This can be exemplified, for instance, by an incident with an elk.

The trickster arrives in a valley. He can hear an odd sound, as if someone was drumming. He decides to see where this noise comes from. Suddenly, he notices an elk skull lying nearby. He observes it diligently until he notices that the sound he is fascinated with comes from the inside of the skull. The elk skull is filled with flies that make noise flying into and out of the skull. The trickster decides to join the flies. He asks one of them how he could get inside the skull. As a reply, he hears that he would have to go through the neck of the elk skull and he could do that if he calls the neck, "Neck, become large!"³³ And so he does – he sticks his head inside the skull. However, once all the flies fly outside, the inlet to the skull becomes small again. The trickster cannot remove his head out of the skull. He goes to a riverside where he blankets himself with a racoon hide. In the morning, when a woman from a nearby village comes to fetch some water, the trickster introduces himself to her as the ghost of the elk that has a gift of blessing others. He orders the woman to go to the village and bring an axe to split the skull apart. In return, she will be free to take whatever she finds inside the skull and use it as healing medicine. The woman follows his orders. She returns to the river with other villagers. One of them splits the skull apart. To their surprise, they see the trickster, amused by the incident.³⁴

³¹ For more information on female tricksters see: L. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, op. cit., p. 8.

³² K. Kerényi, *The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology*, op. cit., p. 182.

³³ P. Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., pp. 32–34, episode 32.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 34–35, episode 33.

Of all the functions that myths about a trickster play I have mentioned only entertainment. Nonetheless, these myths could be also regarded as a morality play. Such is the tone of the final episode in the series of stories quoted by Radin. This time the trickster assumes the role of a divine messenger who is sent to Earth to prepare the world for human beings.

After long years spent in the village, the trickster decides to roam the world once again. He says, "I was not created for what I am doing here."³⁵ He recalls what the purpose he was sent to Earth was – on his way along the Mississippi River he eliminates all obstacles he encounters, kills and eats animals that could be a threat to a human. Once he reaches a place with an enormous waterfall, he orders it, "Remove yourself to some other location for the people are going to inhabit this place and you will annoy them."³⁶ The waterfall refuses to change its location. The trickster sprinkles its water onto a nearby ground. He claims proudly, "I came to this earth to rearrange it."³⁷ He then decides, "Now for the last time I will eat a meal on earth."³⁸ He sits on the top of a rock and after his dinner he submerges into the ocean and ascends to heaven.

This episode can be interpreted twofold. These interpretations are related to the impact Christianity had on the beliefs of Indians of the Winnebago tribe. According to a conservative stance of traditionalist (non-Christian) Indians, Wakdjunkaga was created as a friendly and well-meaning creature, and it is owing to him that earth has taken on the present-day shape. Sometimes he was also assigned as a chief. At the same time, the trickster was the wrongdoer in the world: he taught people to act in deceitful ways, to steal, to exploit others, to lie, etc. However, in this interpretation, the trickster has never gone on the path of war. He has never participated in any war and so he cannot be referred to as a destroyer. The trickster-Wakdjunkaga simply represented the reality that surrounded him. Once he completed a task the creator entrusted him with – prepared the earth for humans and became useless – he left this world. The above interpretation is contrasted with the view of Christian Indians, for whom stories about the trickster are primarily of moral value. The trickster is identified with Satan, or a fallen deity.³⁹

Connotations between the trickster and the devil are analysed by Carl G. Jung. He points out that in the European medieval depictions, the devil was referred to as a 'simia dei', a 'simpleton', a nasty creature who is 'fooled' but also eager to play tricks on people.⁴⁰ Jung finds the motif of a trickster in medieval carnivals.⁴¹

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 52, episode 47.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, episode 48.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

⁴⁰ C.G. Jung, *on the Psychology of the Trickster Figure*, op. cit., pp. 194–195.

⁴¹ I will return to the topic of medieval carnivals in the chapter dedicated to the figure of a carnival king.

He recalls two examples, namely, *festum stultorum* and *festum asinorum*. On the first day of the new year the Feast of Fools (*festum stultorum*) was celebrated in French churches, attended by children, clergymen and deacons. A Fools' Pope was elected from among them who, dressed in a pontifical robe, would pay an official visit to the archbishops' palace. This custom turned into a festival of fools at the end of the 12th century. Another festival, the Feast of the Ass (*festum asinorum*) was also celebrated in medieval France.⁴² A procession with a donkey would pass through the church. Upon the end of every part of a mass, a congregation of the faithful would make the sound of a donkey.⁴³

The phenomenon of a trickster can be discussed also in the context of modern times. According to Jung, attributing vicious intentions to objects or talking about 'goblins' or *faux-pas* are all trickster motifs. Likewise, Paul Radin claims that myths about a trickster can be translated into the present day. These myths can be re-read and reinterpreted.

This constitutes his universal and persistent attraction. And so, he became and remained everything to every man – god, animal, human being, hero, buffoon, he who was before good and evil, denier, affirmer, destroyer and creator. If we laugh at him, he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us.⁴⁴

In turn, Lewis Hyde finds remains of the trickster figure in biographies of popular artists, as well as those of literary and film characters.⁴⁵ In his view, attributes specific to a trickster are embodied by villains (rouges, thieves, thugs, etc.).

Michael Jackson: the Figure of a Trickster

I shall now try to 'transfer' the figure of a trickster into the area of pop culture. The trickster's traits, such as his ability to transform (changeability), his ambivalent morality and ambiguous sexuality, seem to be characteristic of Michael Jackson. I analyse them in this chapter. However, I am aware that these traits are intertwined and therefore it would be difficult to distinguish them as separate categories. I shall begin from the changeability, which I consider the main trait characteristic of the figure embodied by Michael Jackson. My focus will be put

⁴² The festival was considered in the memory of the escape of the Holy Family to Egypt. Jung also recalls that the Jewish god used to be vulgarly presented as a donkey. See: *ibidem*, p. 198.

⁴³ "At the end of the mass, instead of the words 'Ite missa est', the priest shall bray three times (ter hinhamabit), and instead of the words 'Deo gratias', the congregation shall answer 'Y-a' (hinham) three times". See: *ibidem*.

⁴⁴ P. Radin, *The Trickster*, op. cit., pp. 168–169.

⁴⁵ L. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, op. cit., p. 53.

on analysing changes that occurred in Jackson's appearance at specific stages of his career. I will make an attempt to describe how the trait of changeability was manifested in his music videos. I will also present statements of Internet users commenting on changes in Jackson's looks.

Here, I overlook reflections on the general status of an artist and the category of a transformation as an explicitly artistic means. My goal is to draw attention to a pop culture idol whose identity 'is' a result of collective imagination.⁴⁶ The pop culture idol 'is' a set of various images, s/he embodies the narcissism of fans who admire her/him. Idol's identity arises from beliefs of the public, according to which an idol is supposed to embody the type of an ideal idol. In the 'culture of narcissism' the smallest inconsistency with the ideal will be perceived as a flaw and can be treated as a trace that justifies persecution. Due to the mass media, particularly the Internet that allows users to comment on and exchange information, an idol is subject of ongoing observation, attention and criticism.⁴⁷ In my research the focus is on the statements that comment on Michael Jackson. Particularly, I am interested now in the comments on the change in appearance (self-creation) Jackson performed to unify his identity. In the beginning, I undertake to analyse Jackson's official images. Here, I shall refer the trickster's ability to transform himself mainly to the transformation that has taken place in Jackson's physical appearance.

For each album premiere Jackson presented a new, different image and new looks. As for the first solo album of (adult) Jackson titled *Off the Wall* (1979), one of the key attributes of his image was his young boyish appearance. A photograph used for the album cover shows Jackson smiling, dressed in a classic chic outfit.

The cover shows Michael, all pampered and smiling, dressed in a tuxedo and shiny white socks. The idea for the photograph was invented by his manager at that time Ron Weisner, who wanted to change Michael's image in his fans' awareness. It is no longer the well-known kid but an elegant young man who has something to say.⁴⁸

It presents the idol's smiling face and part of his body/silhouette. Comparing subsequent albums and their covers one may notice changes that occurred in Jackson's looks, namely, the skin colour seems brighter and the shape of his nose is changed. The most visible alterations in his looks can be noticed when comparing album covers for *Off the Wall* (1979) and *Bad* (1987). One should also notice

⁴⁶ I wrote about it in the chapter *The Pop Cult: Life as a 'Work of Art'*.

⁴⁷ Robert Sankowski writes, "The public image of people on front pages of magazines is supervised by a number of experts. There are more and more websites whose authors focus their whole energy on seeking cracks in the image of celebrities and their world promoted in the media." See: R. Sankowski, *Gwiazdy gasną w internecie*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2006, 2 February.

⁴⁸ B. Pawlikowska, *Historia. Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

the makeup look in the photograph for *Bad* cover is especially harsh. Jackson's face and his postures draw attention primarily on the covers of albums published in 1979, 1982 and 1991. He is either in a standing or a semi-recumbent position. Particularly, *Off the Wall* cover seems least posed. Jackson is smiling, which accentuates his youth and innocence. He adopts a more serious facial expression on subsequent photos used as album covers. As for *Bad* cover, Jackson's face seems androgynous, with male or female traits difficult to determine; the border between genders is blurry due to his haircut and makeup.

According to Elias Canetti, a standing pose is central; it is a pose of a winner that expresses power and independence. Canetti writes, "Our pride in standing consists in feeling independent and needing no support."⁴⁹ The pose Jackson adopts seems an important element of his image as 'the king of pop', another one is the outfit. The transformation of Jackson's style was gradual, from a classic chic outfit (*Off the Wall*) to an extravagant one intended to emphasise his individuality and uniqueness.

Dangerous, *HIStory* and *Invincible* covers do not show Jackson's photography anymore; they are digital designs. In the case of the cover of *Dangerous*, Jackson's face is hidden under a mask with only the eyes (highlighted with makeup) and a lock of hair visible. The mask that conceals Jackson's face is decorated and appears to be a gate of a monstrous size.⁵⁰ In turn, the cover of *Invincible* album shows the idol's face in close-up, computer imaging was employed to give it a metallic look⁵¹, whereas *HIStory* cover presents Jackson's monument-statue (again, a standing pose). If one took a closer look at the outfit, s/he would notice that it is similar to a military uniform.

After the release of the album *Thriller* (1982) and in the 1990s, Jackson used to accentuate traits characteristic of power in his clothing – his outfits imitated military uniforms and were decorated with orders, medals, flags and ribbons (worn as jewellery⁵²). The prevailing colours in his outfits were red, golden, white and black. Attention was drawn to a band Jackson was wearing on his right forearm.

⁴⁹ E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, op. cit., p. 387.

⁵⁰ The album cover is monochromatic, exceptionally richly ornamented and abundant in details/symbols (such as an eye over the door on the right, a red star over the main entrance). There are animals holding insignia of power (such as spears and a sceptre), there is a naked child holding an animal skull and a dwarf pointing the direction to the inner side of a 'mask'. One may also notice monuments, sculptures, angels. The cover was designed by artist painter Mark Ryden. See: <http://www.markryden.com>.

⁵¹ The album was released in five colour options: metallic, blue, red, green, and orange.

⁵² During his stay in Poland, Jackson was said to have been interested in purchasing a uniform of an attendant of the Main School of Fire Service: "Michael Jackson will not buy a fire service uniform, unless he becomes a Pole, presents his *matura* exam certificate and joins the fire service. (...). A TV journalist reported that the singer, delighted by the beauty of ceremo-

Other attributes of his outfits included a hat, a glove (worn on one hand) and a protective face mask. Jackson's style of dress was unique; it was consciously planned so that it would draw attention. However in his biography, Jackson claims his style formed spontaneously:

I had been wearing a single glove for years before *Thriller*. I felt that one glove was cool. Wearing two gloves seemed so ordinary, but a single glove was different and was definitely a look. But I've long believed that thinking too much about your look is one of the biggest mistakes you can make, because an artist should let his style evolve naturally, spontaneously.⁵³

Jackson clearly changed his style of dress during the court trial regarding a child sexual abuse; though he continued wearing an armband and jewellery, there was less glamour and glitter to his outfits. The colour palette of his clothing was subdued (black, white), often it was a suit, and classic style was dominant. It can be assumed that the change in Jackson's status from the 'king of pop' to an idol charged with child sexual abuse also affected his external image.⁵⁴

In Jackson's case it was not only his style of dress that has changed over his career; the key shift concerned his face.⁵⁵ During the trial, these changes have become one of the main topics discussed by Internet users. Jackson is perceived as someone who has carried out a total intervention in his appearance. Below are some examples.

Shame the boy whitened himself up like that. ME, persnally I liked him better when he was all chocolate. now he looks like a deadman, pale face, skeleton thin and that upturned nose...-but how, but why, damnnn...
[putativus, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 16 June 2005, gazeta.pl]

Due to all the stress Jackson's nose and ear party fell off! Shucks these paedophilia trials are stressful! They should be banned
[normalny inaczej, *Wydano wyrok w sprawie Michaela Jacksona*, 13 June 2005, onet.pl]

nial uniforms ordered an identical one for himself." See: *Jemu nie damy*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1997, 31 May.

⁵³ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 217.

⁵⁴ Attention should be also paid to the characteristic titles of Jackson's albums: *Bad*, *Dangerous*, *Invincible*. These titles seem a kind of magic spells. In the course of the court trial, media reports often referred to titles of his songs taken literally. "In one of his greatest hits, Michael Jackson sang, 'I'm bad, I'm bad'". Now, threatened with a 20-year-long prison sentence for paedophilia, it seems less and less likely it was just a song." See: J. Mielnik, *Upuścić króla popu*, "Przekrój" 2005, no. 9.

⁵⁵ One website published a compilation of photos in the form of a video titled *Michael Jackson Face Transformation*, showing how Jackson's appearance has changed from the time when he was a child until 2005. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ri611BfMBu0>.

each time i see his photos his FACE is different shape. maybe the sun's melting it off?
[mada, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

The authors of the above statements draw attention not only to the very 'fact' of Jackson's facial alterations, but also the continuity and multiple stages of the occurring changes. The visible transformations are considered a process that took place and/or is taking place in Jackson's appearance. Here, the main points of criticism were his skin colour and the shape of his nose.

In Jackson's case, the category of transformation can be traced also by analysing his music videos called 'short films'. In the videos Jackson used high-tech special effects and computer imaging. However, his key contribution was modernisation of a music video by introducing a complex plot and elements that were previously used only in film art. The 14-minute-long expanded version of the mini film *Thriller* (1983) is considered one of the most important in his career. The world presented in the video is unrealistic, filled with zombies, vampires, corpses; hence, creatures and scenery typical of a horror film. The character played by Jackson turns into a werewolf. One should stress that Jackson "(...) played the entire part of the werewolf transformation himself. Subsequent layers of makeup were put on his own face and no stuntmen participated in that scene."⁵⁶ The plot of this video brings a horror film to mind. In the evening, having left a cinema, a teenage boy walks his girlfriend back to her home. On their way back he turns into a werewolf: slowly fangs, fur and claws grow out on his body. His appearance and behaviour change: the boy-werewolf joins zombies who rose from the dead and then dances with them to the absolute horror of the girl who accompanies him. The woman screams and tries to run away from the werewolf.

The motif of a protagonist's transformation presented in the video can be translated in to the story about a trickster: Jackson changes his physique and conduct (he becomes a beast); he transforms from a good boy into a werewolf attacking a girl/victim.

Jackson's transformation – who played protagonists of his music videos – also appears in other videos for his songs, among others, *Ghosts* (1997⁵⁷), *Remember the Time* (1992) and *Black or White* (1992). As for the music video *Ghosts*, not only does Jackson turn himself into a monster, but also rips his skin off and 'becomes' a dancing skeleton. In turn, in *Remember the Time* (the story of the mini-film takes place in Ancient Egypt), he appears dressed as a monk. Suddenly he disappears to

⁵⁶ See: Film enthusiasts' website <https://film.org.pl/a/zestawienie/najlepsze-teledyski-krola-popu-60-urodziny-michaela-jacksona-173538/>. The site also provides access to photographs and information regarding the shooting of the music video.

⁵⁷ The music video was part of a 38-minute film *Ghosts* shot according to Jackson's idea (who himself played five different roles). The screenplay was co-authored by writer Steven King and the picture was directed by Stan Winston.

then rise from the ashes that turn into liquid gold. In the final scene, he takes on the form of a black cat.

A type of a mini-film is also the music video for the song *Black or White*. It comprises several sequences. In the opening scene, an American family is shown: parents busy reading a newspaper and watching TV and a son (played by Macaulay Culkin) listening to loud rock music. The father orders the son to turn the music down, but the latter turns it on to the limit. As a result, the power of music ‘blasts’ the father off into space. In the next scene, the father returns to Earth and finds himself on the set of Jackson’s music video, who dances with representatives of various cultures, singing “If you wanna be my brother, it don’t matter if you’re black or white”. Owing to computer imaging, faces of people of various ethnicity and skin colour change from one into another and ultimately merge into one.⁵⁸

In the case of this music video, there are two issues that call for attention. Firstly, Jackson aspires here to the role of a hero who unites people of different cultures and traditions. Secondly, the video includes auto-eroticism.

The music video for the song *Black or White* was created in two versions – the long one (11 minutes) includes a sequence titled the ‘black panther sequence’ (with a commentary at the end, saying “Ignorance is prejudice”). This sequence involves only sound effects and no music – Jackson attacks a car and breaks windows with racist slurs written on them. During his expressive dance, he makes gestures that bring masturbation to mind. Then, having ripped his shirt off, he turns into a black panther.

With the ‘black panther sequence’ Jackson introduced to his dance elements of auto-eroticism that have since become an important part of his stage image.⁵⁹ In music videos (such as *In the Closet* and the above-mentioned *Black or White*) Jackson’s dance involves sexual gestures that can be associated with masturbation. In a TV interview with Oprah Winfrey (1993), he replied to her question, “Why do you always grab your crotch?” by saying, “I’m a slave to the rhythm.”⁶⁰ Then, when asked, “are you a virgin?”, he covered his face with his hand and, clearly embarrassed, refused to give an answer. However, in his autobiography

⁵⁸ The song was created as Jackson’s commentary to skin whitening accusations. Jackson declared in the song lyrics, “I’m not gonna spend my life being a color.”

⁵⁹ The music video for *Black or White* provoked comments in the press for adolescents, for instance, the *Bravo* magazine that published article titled *Czy Michael Jackson zdradził swoje prawdziwe „ja”?* [Has Michael Jackson betrayed his true ‘self’? – Translator’s note]. Below is a fragment of the article. “Parents of Michael’s young American fans received his recent video *Black or White* with terror, accusing him of ‘glorifying violence and masturbating himself shamelessly’. In contrast, many fans are delighted, and they state directly, ‘For us, it is wonderful to see Michael going the distance for once’. The article was concluded with a statement that by shooting the video, Jackson “(...) wanted to get rid of the image of a good boy.” See: *Czy Michael Jackson zdradził swoje prawdziwe „ja”?*, “Bravo” 1992, no. 2.

⁶⁰ *Michael Jackson Talks... to Oprah: 90 Primetime Minutes with the King of Pop.*

he admitted he was shy in contact with women. “There were girls I thought were cute, but I found it so difficult to approach them. I was too embarrassed – I don’t know why – it was just crazy. There was one girl who was a good friend to me. I liked her, but I was too embarrassed to tell her.”⁶¹

In the case of Jackson’s image, ambivalence – another trait characteristic of the figure of a trickster – can be observed in his varying attitudes towards sexuality. Apart from auto-eroticism that has become one of the key elements of Jackson’s image in music videos and when dancing, attention is also drawn to his androgynous appearance. In turn, his statements and conduct often reveal naivety or even recklessness.⁶² This is exemplified by, for instance, an interview Jackson gave for Martin Bashir, in which he admitted to have slept in one bed with a child unrelated to him. This statement gave rise to allegations regarding sexual molestation of a child.

In online comments, the interpretation of Jackson’s attitude is twofold. In the statements I classify as ironic, Jackson is considered an immature and infantile person. His behaviour was treated as irresponsible and naïve:

i told u he’s got nothing to rape with because as the saying goes, what u see is what u get
[barbi, *Wydano wyrok w sprawie Michaela Jacksona*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

Here, Jackson is attributed with the attitude of a trickster who, on the one hand, provokes and breaks a taboo, and on the other, is a fool incapable of critically assessing his own behaviour. In turn, in the comments I determined as condemning, Jackson’s statement was explicitly criticised and condemned:

guilty 100% - his holding onto his crotch at concerts, statements like, ‘sharing bed with a kid is the greatest proof of love’ leave no doubt to me (though I admit those are no evidence of guilt)
[pawel_z_melb, *Michael Jackson: Wciąż bez werdyktu*, 11 June 2005, onet.pl]

The online statements I classify as condemning are characterised by psychologization of Jackson’s conduct – he is suspected of paedophilia, since his appearance and image are considered as an externalisation of that which is inside.

⁶¹ M. Jackson, *Moonwalk*, op. cit., p. 165.

⁶² In his autobiography Jackson admitted that he found recording the song *The Lady In My Life* (the album *Thriller*), a ballad of an explicitly erotic undertone, to be most troublesome. “We were used to doing a lot of takes in order to get a vocal as nearly perfect as possible, but Quincy wasn’t satisfied with my work on that song, even after literally dozens of takes. Finally, he took me aside late one session and told me he wanted me to beg. That’s what he said. He wanted me to go back to the studio and literally beg for it. So I went back in and had them turn off the studio lights and close the curtain between the studio and the control room so I wouldn’t feel self-conscious. Q started the tape and I begged. The result is what you hear in the grooves.” See: *ibidem*, p. 197.

In his reflections on a trickster, Lewis Hyde notes that his ability to transform himself depends primarily on altering his looks, and hence, it is related to a 'purely' physical change, a trait that can be observed externally. Hyde referred to the Greek tradition where the capacity to change one's looks (mainly skin colour) was regarded not only as a way to mask or to dress up, but it was also considered a reflection of the soul and a manifestation of inner life.⁶³ Hence, that which is internal is manifested externally. The change in appearance (skin colour, body shape) was linked to the issue of identity.

In statements about Jackson, both auto-eroticism and his appearance were combined into a causal link. That which is visible (his appearance, dance moves) was interpreted as the inner image of his persona.

A trickster, characterised by the ability to transform himself, puts different masks on: he may be a carnival king and/or a scapegoat. Since he appears as a provocateur and a destroyer of the existing order, he often becomes a scapegoat. In his reflection on the social role of a trickster, Zenon Dudek writes:

(...) reality may turn against him. By entering into conflict with a king or a crowd, in this situation the Trickster-clown becomes a scapegoat, innocent and guilty at the same time. His innocence lies in his honesty and clear intentions, whereas guilt – in speaking openly about that which is dangerous rather from a social than psychological point of view.⁶⁴

Trickster's predispositions to transform himself into a scapegoat are also indicated by René Girard, who considers a trickster primarily as a god playing mean tricks:

Apart from the gods who do evil unwittingly and the gods who are forced irresistibly to do evil, there is inevitably a third solution, the god who enjoys doing evil and is amused by it. Although he always helps in the end, he is delighted when things go badly and continues to enjoy it. He is known for his games. He pushes his playfulness so far that he loses control of the consequences.⁶⁵

Girard stresses that what prejudices a trickster's guilt is his ambivalent attitude, is very difficult to accept for society.⁶⁶

⁶³ L. Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁶⁴ Z.W. Dudek, *Wymiary i funkcje figury Trickstera*, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶⁵ See: R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, op. cit., p. 84.

⁶⁶ A trickster is seen either as a malicious creature or, on the contrary, as a fool who fulfils his role clumsily. See: Girard's examples of tricksters, *ibidem*, p. 67 and pp. 84–86.

Chapter 2: The Scapegoat

It is difficult to form a correct estimate of the significance of contemporary events, and the danger that our judgement will remain caught in subjectivity is great.

(Carl G. Jung¹)

The mechanism of a scapegoat by René Girard seems an interesting proposition of a reply to the question about the meaning of violence.² However, it is not my intent to discuss controversies concerning Girard's concept. I will only reflect on the extent to which the scapegoat mechanism is applicable to analysis the online statements about Michael Jackson.

The Scapegoat Mechanism

The starting point for Girard's concept is the mimetic desire, which he considers to be a tendency to imitate the others. He assumes that human behaviour is driven by a dynamic unrestricted instinct of *mimesis*. In his opinion,

Once his basic needs are satisfied (indeed, sometimes even before), man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that

¹ C.G. Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1978, p. 5.

² Here, it seems necessary to note that the concept of a scapegoat is a significant element in socio-psychological theories of prejudice. The most important, as one of the first, is Gordon Allport's theory. His book *Nature of Prejudice* (1979) served as the foundation for the psychology of prejudice. Allport drew attention to the role of projection of one's own frustration onto an alien group. This is an analogy to the biblical scapegoat onto which people's sins were symbolically transferred so that a community could be free from guilt. Although according to Allport there is no such thing as a 'full-time' scapegoat (we may be talking solely about an occasional scapegoat), some groups are undoubtedly closer to that 'position' than others (such as Jews, for instance). Characteristically, the victim always provokes more animosity than could be rationally explained.

he desires being, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being.³

According to Girard, to imitate is to desire an object that belongs to another person who becomes a rival from that moment on. When two individuals want the same thing, they start competing, while the every object of disagreement is lost from sight and becomes replaced by aggression and mutual hostility that over time become uncontrollable and transfer onto other individuals. It is then that violence takes place.⁴

Just as Sigmund Freud, Girard claims that violence is the foundation of all societies. He assumes that in distant past in time of some threatening conflict, a certain spontaneous mechanism must have been triggered, which consists in feelings of hatred harboured mimetically by everyone towards everyone. When everyone were fighting against everyone, the fear of mutual destruction has led to the birth of a mechanism Girard calls the scapegoat mechanism.⁵ To drive away the ghost of annihilation, a community has to 'localise' the source of a crisis that has been troubling them. The propensity to blame anyone but oneself for misfortune leads to a victim being selected.

A scapegoat is selected based on a magical causal link, that is, irrational factors – no attempt is made to determine the actual cause of a crisis. Once a community selects the one to blame, it discards the latter. "The collective violence is no longer arbitrary in the most obvious sense of the term. It is actually sanctioning the deed it purports to sanction."⁶ This is because "Strong in their righteousness, and convinced that their victim is truly guilty, persecutors have no reason to be troubled."⁷ The expulsion or murder is intended to restore order in accordance with a belief that by removing the source of a crisis, that is, the scapegoat, evil becomes eliminated. The restoration of peaceful state is attributed to the victim that since that moment combines criminal and benevolent traits.⁸

³ R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore–London 1989, p. 146.

⁴ According to Girard, violence is a process in which two or more individuals using various ways are trying to prevent one another from acquiring a thing they all desire. See: *ibidem*, p. 79.

⁵ "Scapegoat indicates both the innocence of the victims, the collective polarization in opposition to them, and the collective end result of that polarization." See: R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, op. cit., p. 39.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

⁸ However, the very way in which conflict is interpreted gives rise to questions; members of a community often believe that the victim death was actually his or her choice or a sacrifice

René Girard sees a conciliatory murder of a victim as the foundation of all religions established by humans; *ipso facto*, he claims that communities that managed to survive are those who found the one guilty of their crisis and hence avoided self-annihilation. Therefore, the essence of this solution lies in a fight of everyone against everyone, a struggle of everyone against everyone. According to Girard, this model repeats itself again and again each time when a given community is hit by a crisis. It works also today, but in a different form and it does not give the expected conciliation, which is due to the fact that the scapegoat mechanism has been already unmasked. This occurred in the evangelical description of Jesus's Passion, when by means of the persecutory structure being revealed, the scapegoat ritual was deprived of its effect. Girard claims that only a complete unawareness of how the scapegoat mechanism works ensures effectiveness. This issue in Girard's concept provokes the most criticism. I would like to return to it further in the chapter to give it more attention.

Girard does not ask whether a scapegoat is actually guilty of the crimes s/he is charged with. From the view of the crowd who accuses the scapegoat, the key matter is that the community believes the victim to be guilty. It is the crowd who, driven by mimetic desire, selects the scapegoat.

In the time of a crisis that hits a community the fact that is best visible is the total decomposition of the social structure. The thing that Girard calls the rule of differences and which determines social order is no longer binding. Due to the absence of differences all behaviour is identical, which in turn leads to confusion and total lack of differentiation. The lack of differentiation is the first persecutory stereotype of all that constitutes the scapegoat ritual. It is characterised by a general crisis of social relations leading to another stereotype, that is, emergence of crimes that "eliminate differences". Here, Girard points to crimes committed on a king, a father, a symbol of the highest authority and on those who are the most vulnerable, that is, children. Another category of crimes are sexual ones, such as rape, incest, and sodomy. The final category is religion-related crimes, such as profanation of the host. Girard concludes, "All these crimes seem to be fundamental. They attack the very foundation of cultural order, the family and the hierarchical differences without which there would be no social order."⁹

The third persecutory stereotype, according to Girard, are signs of a victim. These determine the selection of a victim, that is, indicate the scapegoat. In a crisis-ridden society, an individual who bears scapegoat signs is dangerous in the eyes of her/his persecutors. Girard notes that there are universal traits of selection; that it is not always the case that crimes attributed to victims play the key

made for the good of the entire community. Hence, they reject the feeling of guilt for their violence against the scapegoat.

⁹ R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, op. cit., p. 15.

role in choosing the scapegoat: "(...) the persecutors choose their victims because they belong to a class that is particularly susceptible to persecution rather than because of the crimes they have committed."¹⁰ Hostile feelings focus primarily on ethnic and religious minorities.

Another signs are purely physical criteria: these might be deformations and disabilities of various kind, visible symptoms of diseases, mutilations.¹¹ Persecutions are also provoked by social anomalies that constitute yet another category of scapegoat signs. "The further one is from normal social status of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution."¹² Girard explains:

Extreme characteristics ultimately attract collective destruction at some time or other, extremes not just of wealth or poverty, but also of success and failure, beauty and ugliness, vice and virtue, the ability to please and to displease. The weakness of women, children, and old people, as well as the strength of the most powerful, becomes weakness in the face of the crowd. Crowds commonly turn on those who originally held exceptional power over them.¹³

Being different is considered weakness in the context of mediocrity. Girard also points out that, "Those who make up the crowd are always potential persecutors, for they dream of purging the community of the impure elements that corrupt it, the traitors who undermine it."¹⁴ The impure element will be every person perceived as the 'other', someone belonging to a minority group and/or with a physical flaw or distanced from the status of the majority in any other way. That 'other' is someone incapable of respecting 'true' differences, that is, the differences binding in the community, someone who has no proper habits, taste, opinions, etc. As Girard states, "It is not the other *nomos* that is seen in the other, but anomaly, nor is it another norm but abnormality."¹⁵ Therefore, it is not as much a matter of a difference that occurs between the community and the other but the actual absence of the 'proper' difference:

The various kinds of victims seem predisposed to crimes that eliminate differences. Religious, ethnic, or national minorities are never actually reproached for their difference, but for not being as different as expected; and in the end for not differing at all. Foreigners are incapable of respecting 'real' differences; they are lacking in culture or in taste, as the case may be. They have difficulty in perceiving exactly what is different. (...) persecutors are never obsessed by difference but rather by its unutterable contrary, the lack of difference.¹⁶

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

This difference is defined by community, since it is the collective that determines who belongs to the category of the other.

Girard seeks scapegoat's signs mainly in myths, which he sees as told from the point of view of the collective; therefore, they present a 'persecutory illusion'. He claims that myths are subject to ongoing transformations and their aim is to soothe the truth about the victims' innocence that is dangerous for the collective and about the guilt of the community. A text that does not hide the 'brutal' truth about collective violence are the Gospels, particularly the description of Jesus's Passion. According to Girard, this is the first text in which the scapegoat mechanism is revealed. This happens because it is told from the viewpoint of a victim. Girard claims that words said by Jesus dying on the cross ("Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"¹⁷) are the greatest proof of the unawareness of the persecutory crowd. They also indicate that Jesus's participation in the scapegoat mechanism was voluntary.

The understanding of Jesus's Passion by Girard anticipates a new meaning of the concept of *mimesis*. The message of the gospel ends a stage of this *mimesis* that leads to hatred and violence. Now, *mimesis* has taken on a 'positive' meaning: the faithful will be called to imitate merciful Jesus. Hence, Girard understands Jesus's death as his sacrifice to reveal to the world and to disprove once for all the persecutory model. And thus, violence is over, the rule of violence comes to an end.

Although Girard's argument cannot be clearly dismissed and the entire concept is unquestionably interesting, it does require more reflection on numerous matters it addresses.¹⁸ It seems that the greatest weakness of this concept is the solution itself: has Jesus's Passion actually led to the renunciation of violence? The history is filled with examples of communities that blamed individuals who stood out, were sick, crippled, etc. Thus, are we dealing with a scapegoat mechanism that is universal across all cultures? Does Girard's concept assume that the role of a 'hypothetical' scapegoat can be played by everyone? Besides, this model seems fallible when we are trying to tell which group or individual will become a scapegoat. If the occurrence of the scapegoat mechanism can be indicated only by past events, it means that it pertains solely to persecutory tendencies of specific individuals or groups.

Despite the questions above, I will try to apply Girard's concept to the analysis of online statements, the examples of contemporary culture texts.¹⁹ Grażyna Woroniecka suggests that the persecutory model should be considered an inter-

¹⁷ Luke 23:34, *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Biblica, Colorado Springs, CO 2011.

¹⁸ As noted by Grażyna Woroniecka, see: G. Woroniecka, *Kozioł ofiarny: René Girarda w perspektywie poststrukturalnej*, "Kultura Współczesna" 2002, no. 1–2 (31–32), pp. 37–45.

¹⁹ As Maciej Kociuba notes, Girard makes no attempt to "(...) make his concept up-to-date. On the contrary, he always stresses that his vision of anthropogenesis, views on the role of violence and imitation in the process of the forming of the sacred and culture stem

pretative key for analysing the media discourse or press communication.²⁰ As she notices, it is most useful as a tool that allows a researcher to discover “hidden” socio-creative dimensions of messages directed to the so-called ‘general public’.²¹ In her opinion, the greatest strength of the persecutory model is:

the transverse, intertextual nature of the subject of a hermeneutic study. (...) For under the rules of the trade, the presence of a ‘scapegoat syndrome’ is not formed in a single text but in a fragment of cultural discourse specified by the researcher.²²

Inspired by Woroniecka’s idea, I assume that online space can be an example of the area in which the persecutory model is applied.

The Internet, which is a construct of technological-utilitarian culture, exists owing to communication and is in fact communication.²³ All the interactions that take place online are semiotic interactions, “As in myths and utopias, a word appropriately used determines a power system of being either a partner or a recluse.”²⁴ Therefore, I consider the Internet to be a discursive field where Michael Jackson’s symbolic court trial took place virtually. While commenting the trial and expressing their views, Internet users adopted roles of either Jackson’s persecution or his defence.²⁵ The fundamental question is, is it possible to give examples of statements showing what the operating principle of the scapegoat mechanism is? Which signs of victim selection appear in this case? Yet another question also concerns authors of the presented comments – is it possible to determine whose perspective is adopted in these statements? In the following chapter I will try to answer these questions.

Online Statements as a Symbolic Judgment

In terms of the scapegoat mechanism, the statements can be divided into two prevailing groups: comments that condemn Jackson and those that defend him. Condemnation statements show the line of reasoning of the prosecution (‘crowd’) and the statements of Jackson’s defence are written from the victim’s perspec-

from interpretations of texts important for our civilisation.” See: M. Kociuba, *Znamię Kaina*, in: J. Mizińska, M. Kociuba (eds.), *Przemoc i filozofia*, op. cit., p. 204.

²⁰ G. Woroniecka, *Kozioł ofiarny: René Girarda w perspektywie poststrukturalnej*, op. cit.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 49.

²³ B. Dziedzic, *Kultura społeczności sieciowej*, in: W. Strykowski, W. Skrzydlewski (eds.), *Media i edukacja w dobie integracji*, „eMPI2”, Poznań 2002.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

²⁵ Among these comments there are also statements whose authors did not take either side.

tive. Here, the terms ‘victim’ and ‘crowd’ are only in their symbolic sense. The term ‘crowd’ does not refer to the quantitative superiority of statements that are comments condemning Jackson, but primarily to the nature of these comments in which I will be seeking persecutory traces responsible for selecting a scapegoat. I include condemning and ironic statements in this group. My aim is to reconstruct the logic of these statements: Michael Jackson is charged with sexual molestation of a minor – child sexual abuse is a despicable act – Jackson should be condemned.

This group of statements is characterised by their authors’ conviction that Jackson is guilty – the allegations of child sexual molestation are tantamount to the actual commission of the act. Attention is drawn to the language used in these remarks, which are off-hand and informal. Authors of these comments disregard canons of linguistic correctness, their statements seem spontaneous, as evidenced by, among others, a high number of spelling errors. They are also characterised by verbal aggression and presence of vulgarisms.

The first persecutory stereotype I would like to present is affiliation with minority groups. According to Girard, being a member of these groups (religious, ethnic, national) is one of the fundamental and most important victim’s signs. Among the analysed statements, there are examples showing that stereotypical prejudices related to specific minority groups were transferred onto Jackson. An antisemitic discourse is present here – Jackson is identified as a Jew, that is, a group ‘susceptible’ to playing the part of a scapegoat.²⁶ This is evidenced in the following statements:

gas that trash! ! !

[marek, *Jackson: Decydujące stracie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

MJ gas him!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[roocko, *Michael Jackson: Niewinny!*, 14 June 2005, wp.pl]

He’s clearly a q***r and should be gassed just for his looks and acts. Moron

[Rudolf, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl²⁷]

There are even more racial prejudices:

f...k the bleached ni**er... a q...r that’s all he is..

[czesiu, *Przerażony Michael Jackson ofiarą spisku?*, 2 June 2005, wp.pl]

²⁶ In the course of the trial and also after it ended, when Jackson left the US and moved to Bahrain, he was suspected of having converted to Islam. See: *Michael Jackson przejdzie na islam?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-przejdzie-na-islam,nId,1627869> and of antisemitism *Michael Jackson antysemitą?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-antysemita,nId,1626714>.

²⁷ As for this comment, we are dealing with accumulation of several victim’s signs; I will present the analysis of this statement further in the chapter.

As for religious prejudices, the stigmatised groups are the Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims:

Nothing left for him but to convert to islam and go in the footsteps of the paedophile from Mecca.

[samson, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 14 June 2005, 22:06, gazeta.pl]

Hostility towards Jackson is evidenced by numerous vulgarisms used freely in the comment. This confirms the existence of social approval for expressing verbal violence towards people and groups considered deviant. The authors of these sentences found Jackson's sexual identity to be troublesome. Child sexual molestation allegations evoke stereotypical suspicions of paedophilia as well as homosexuality:

hes a f***t I mean a homosexual welcome

[Ilona, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl]

Jackson's ambiguous sexual identity does not fit within the heterosexual norms:

now black-and-white mickey jackson will be free to enjoy himself until he drops.... :) but now not with innocent kids but with smelly beanpoles, but that's surely no difference to such a q***r.

[SPAT, *Rozpoczął się proces Michaela Jacksona*, 1 February 2005, gazeta.pl]

In the case of the above statements, homosexualisation and paedophilisation of Jackson occur simultaneously. Both these groups, that is, homosexuals and paedophiles, are related by hostile traits: they are considered immoral, with a history of 'degrading' sexual practices. These groups are also regarded as people who have an uncontrollable sexual drive.²⁸

Another important persecutory trace is appearance. Girard classifies appearance as victim's signs; appearance may provoke persecutory attitudes.²⁹ Signs of disability or any visible deformities or changes in looks are considered an anomaly. Looks or any specific easily noticeable physical feature may strengthen aversion towards the one who carries this feature. In Jackson's case, it seems that appearance has played an important role in how he was received by public. In the online statements, Jackson's appearance is openly identified with 'abnormality'. Jackson is criticised and condemned primarily for intervening in his own looks. It

²⁸ Kinga Dunin writes that homosexuals are suspected of favouring or practicing paedophilia. See: K. Dunin, *Pedofilizacja przedmiotu nienawiści*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2006, 15 June.

²⁹ Girard analyses appearance as a stigma on the example of the myth about Oedipus. See: R. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, op. cit., pp. 25–28.

is Jackson's appearance that authors of these statements find to be the reason for punishing him:

he should be locked up for his face if you can call it a face.... don't you think??
[ktos z chełma, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

Michael Jackson!!!!yuuuuuuck gross gas the man!!He's only good for scaring children anyway!!!
[paula, *Jacko ubiera się jak clown i ma twarz mumii*, 17 August 2005, wp.pl]

In Jackson's case, appearance has become both a deterring and a depreciating trait; it has become his stigma.

Looks as a Stigma

"The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier."³⁰ In Erving Goffman's view, any attribute that discredits the person (its carrier) can be a stigma; however, at the same time, a stigma refers to a type of a relationship that takes place between the carrier and the "normals".³¹ A stigma is revealed and its carrier becomes discredited in social situations, for it is in these situations that each otherness becomes important. In a social situation, an attribute that makes the carrier stand out may come to light, making him or her feel less socially wanted. "(...) When a stranger comes into our presence, then, first appearances are likely to enable us to anticipate his category and attributes, his 'social identity' (...)." ³² At such a meeting, it is assumed that the 'real' identity is the category that stands out and that to which a person is classified due to their affiliation with specific social groups or their background. Then, an ideology is constructed around an individual who bears a stigma, intended to confirm the danger and the threat that person represents, and justify any possible aversion or hatred towards him or her. Goffman remarks:

We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning. We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of

³⁰ E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1963, p. 1.

³¹ 'Normals' is a neologism used by Goffman to refer to individuals who bear no specific stigma. See: *ibidem*, p. 5.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

the original one, and at the same time to impute some desirable but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast, such as 'sixth sense,' or 'understanding'.³³

This is because a stigma that is easily noticeable, such as a flaw in appearance, infects the entire being of its carrier, affecting his other traits. If appearance is considered in the category of a law, it hence equips the carrier with attributes that are considered unsafe. A flaw becomes a threat, a shortcoming and thus, a reason for the carrier's shame or disgrace. In Jackson's case, it was revealed that his face is associated with a suspicion of monstrosity, followed by an association with paedophilia:

Personally, I don't believe in his innocence. For me, the bloke's sort of a 'black and white' freak with a lipstick and makeup on, and somehow, I can't believe he had nothing to do with it.

[bialas4, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

Justice is done... Paedophiles must be punished, especially those with noses that are falling off and who are scaring people (kids) with their hellish looks (like Jackson).

[Gierek, *Michael Jackson opuścił szpital*, 6 September 2005, onet.pl]

Associating physical traits with criminal offence charges implies stereotypical associations between an external flaw (in Jackson's case, it is skin colour and the shape of his nose) with danger or 'abnormalcy'. Authors of these comments justify their aversion towards Jackson with his looks:

looking at him, I am simply afraid and I don't trust him even a bit... what has he done to himself

[motab, *Przysięgli: Zarzutów wobec Jacksona nie udowodniono*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

good he's earned it i don't like someone whitening himself up like that and acting like a chick and all

[sikor, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl]

Jackson becomes an 'anomaly' that is opposed by the social 'normalcy'. His stigma contaminates his entire persona, making everything around him suspicious and dangerous. Due to the stigma, Jackson has become a threat to others, particularly children:

now black-and-white mickey jackson will be free to enjoy himself until he drops.... :) but now not with innocent kids but with smelly beanpoles, but that's surely no difference to such a q***r.

[SPAT, *Rozpoczął się proces Michaela Jacksona*, 1 February 2005, gazeta.pl]

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 5. In Jackson's case, stigmatising names that appear in online comments include, among others, 'moron', 'nigger', 'albino niggershit', 'faggot', 'queer'.

Goffman writes that given the threat of a carrier's stigma, a need for building a collective sense of safety emerges. Although there is social permission to improve beauty (plastic surgery, beauty treatments, etc.), intervening in one's looks (as a total change) as Jackson has is considered 'abnormal' and prohibited. Below are examples of comments that support this hypothesis:

Shame the boy whitened himself up like that. ME, persnally I liked him better when he was all chocolate. now he looks like a deadman, pale face, skeleton thin and that upturned nose...-but how, but why, damnnn...

[putativus, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 16 June 2005, gazeta.pl]

People, how can you have pity for someone like him?? He's clearly insane !!Masks, an oxygen capsule, fear of germs, paedophilia- it all makesup a truely terrifying picture. He must get a harsh punishment.

[Oburzony, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

The criticism and condemnation Jackson had to deal with for intervening in his looks seem a punishment for a failed (though total) realization of the self-creation postulate. Jackson has created himself with no consideration for the social category of 'normalcy'. The condemnation he was faced with not only is an expression of the social belief about 'normalcy'³⁴ but at the same time, it strengthens the belief that already exists in society.

A question arises, how does Jackson cope with the stigma? A stigmatised person defines herself/himself simultaneously as someone who is not different than others and someone who is different. This internally experienced conflict brings discomfort to the carrier of a stigma, which s/he will attempt to handle by creating and then observing specific management strategies. Thus, a specific code emerges intended to serve as a kind of a guideline on how to treat others and oneself. Most often, codes pertain to the key issues, such as:

- suggesting the desired model for revealing and covering the stigma;
- suggesting how an individual should cope in sensitive situations;
- determining how an individual should ensure support for his/her group;
- recommending proper ways for fraternising with 'normals';
- teaching how to face the fact that one is different;

Social codes warn a stigmatised person against undertaking attempts to completely disregard the stigma and to fully accept and absorb others' negative approach to herself/himself; they also warn against "minstrelization" (playing the

³⁴ However, the very belief about 'normalcy' is not something stable and requires ongoing care, training and focus on controlling all behaviours (even manners of the body) that comprise this illusory feeling.

role of a fool) and “deminstrumentalization” (denying one’s own otherness).³⁵ Goffman distinguishes two ways for managing a stigma: assimilation (silent adaptation) and separation (rejecting the assimilative model).

Due to the lack of acceptance of a stigma carrier and her/his social identity remaining unrecognised, s/he makes an attempt to correct that which is considered the objective foundation of his/her disability. As Goffman puts it:

How does the stigmatized person respond to his situation? In some cases it will be possible for him to make a direct attempt to correct what he sees as the objective basis of his failing, as when a physically deformed person undergoes plastic surgery, a blind person eye treatment, an illiterate remedial education, a homosexual psychotherapy. (Where such repair is possible, what often results is not the acquisition of fully normal status, but a transformation of self from someone with a particular blemish into someone with a record of having corrected a particular blemish.)³⁶

Therefore, Jackson’s intervention in his looks (skin whitening treatments and plastic surgeries) can be considered an attempt to remove the stigma, physical signs of his affiliation with African American group of origin. However, Jackson’s altered appearance did not make him ‘white’, hence, he did not acquire the status of a ‘normals’.

According to Goffman, when an attempt to remove a stigma fails, “(...) the very notion of shameful differences assumes a similarity in regard to crucial beliefs, those regarding identity.”³⁷ In Jackson’s case, his attempts to assimilate with ‘normals’ seem to have failed, since neither his intervention in his looks nor his commercial success allowed him to get rid of the ‘Black Artist’ label. Separation has become a way to cope with the stigma, understood both as passing voluntarily from public life and identifying oneself with a minority group, in this case, references to the African American background.

Goffman points out that (a person) “(...) insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human.”³⁸ By not sharing the social belief about himself, Jackson was free to perceive himself as a ‘stigmatised’ person.³⁹ In his statements regarding children at interviews and public appear-

³⁵ E. Goffman, *Stigma*, op. cit., pp. 110.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁹ See: the chapter titled *People vs. Jackson: The Trial Day By Day*, 25 November 2003. Jackson called the allegations against him a “great lie”, expressing his feelings of being unjustly denigrated and humiliated.

ances he used to refer to the figure of Jesus⁴⁰, quote the New Testament⁴¹, while supporting his approach to children by his faith in God.⁴² For him, the statement about sharing one bedroom with a child is appropriate, whereas child sexual molestation charges are an attempt to stigmatise him.

Victim's Signs

Before a scapegoat is condemned, it goes through a period when it is popular. What determines an idol's demise might be the fact that s/he falls from grace of society.

Prior to the submission of charges regarding child sexual molestation, Michael Jackson enjoyed the status of the most famous artist of the late 20th century; he was titled 'the king of pop', while his albums were sold in million copies. At the time when the charges were submitted, he was deprived of the title of 'the king of pop'. This fact is depicted in online comments:

King of pop my a**! how can you call this 'thing' a king? It neither black nor white, the nose's falling off, it grasps on its junk when it's singing and squeaking. People het your s**t together!

[Zdebeliusz, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

This element of the persecutory model is noticeably unmasked in statements that defend Jackson and, hence, written by his fans mainly. Jackson's defenders act here as a group that is compassionate towards the stigma carrier. By defending Jackson, they put themselves into the spotlight of suspicion about supporting paedophiles. The logic of such comments is as follows: Michael Jackson is my idol – Michael Jackson is 'the king of pop'. He loves children – My idol, 'the king of pop', would never be a paedophile. Therefore, the allegations are an attempt to bring 'the king of pop' down, a conspiracy of envious people:

want to destroy Michael! Thats too much! no court judgment is sight but the prison cell is ready! Its all a game-to sentence michael! Thats not fair! But I believe that truth will triumph now or later! I don't know if u know but ppl who sing and dedicate their life to others have good hearts and love ppl-thats what Michael is like!!! I admire

⁴⁰ J. Shaw, *Living With Michael Jackson*, op. cit.

⁴¹ *Michael Jackson Statement Live From Neverland 1993*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QubCz_N196w.

⁴² "God has always been in my heart and a part of my life and my family's lives," Jackson claimed at a meeting with children and adolescents at the First AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church of Los Angeles (16 August 2004).

him!!!!He's the king!!! Just like Usher said-who took part in the concert for Jackson-he sang with him on stage-!!!Fabulous!!!

[AGNIESZKA W., *Cela dla M. Jacksona gotowa*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

Comments from this group involve direct references to Jackson as a victim (of a conspiracy):

MJ is the King of POP and no swindler won't take his throne away. Michael is the king of Pop music, without question. He worked hard to get it. And now here's a nasty hag doing everything to hustle the highest compensation possible from him at the expense of his career. The court clearly stated Jackson's innocent and dismissed all allegations. And does anyone know the story of that boy's mother-I suggest you go and seek and think again about the allegations against Jackson

[Mario, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

I knew he was innocent!!!! People would sell their soul for money.... not to mention accusing Jackson.... I believe he's innocent...It's so easy to accuse a man...

[starsza pani, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

Fans believe uncritically that their idol is not guilty. In their statements, they draw attention to the lack of evidence that would confirm the child was sexually molested by Jackson and also refer to his position as 'the king of pop', mentioning his past artistic and commercial successes:

we can't remember anymore can we? Jackson is a great talent; his songs have no equal. This is why envious people wanna tear him down. He helped children because he himself had no childhood. Some people want to force him to pay. Take it but don't lock him up. People!

[Neutralna, *Jackson: Decydujące starcie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

References made to the status of 'the king of pop' pertain not solely to the figure of a scapegoat, but also to the figure of a carnival king. I will try to present this figure on the example of statements I classified as ironic; however, I shall also recall comments that condemn or defend Jackson. As an introduction to the analysis of the figure of a carnival king, I present a comment that entails persecutory traces listed by Girard:

He's clearly a q***r and should be gassed just for his looks and acts. Moron

[Rudolf, *Aresztowanie Jacksona: Koniec kariery Króla Popu?*, 20 November 2003, wp.pl]

The term "a q***r" used in this comment proves that a racist and anti-homosexual discourse is transferred onto Jackson. The term 'queer' was not written explicitly, whereas the expression "should be gassed" is directly linked to anti-semitism. The author of the comment demands that Jackson be punished for his

appearance and conduct. Expressions like these prevail in the group of statements I classify as condemning. However, here, a term ‘moron’ appears, which does not occur in condemning statements and is more characteristic of ironic comments. Jackson is seen by the author of the statement as a ‘moron’, that is, someone who behaves foolishly, whose mental growth has been inhibited.⁴³ The term ‘moron’ is used as an insult, revilement.⁴⁴ By using this term, the author of this statement somewhat suggests that Jackson is infantile, someone incapable of self-reflection, who has no dignity; he is a fool. The term ‘moron’ evokes direct connotations with foolishness and thoughtlessness, thus it can be linked to the figure of a ‘fool’.⁴⁵

⁴³ See the term ‘moron’ as defined at *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/moron>

⁴⁴ The term also denotes, “a person affected with mild intellectual disability.” See: *ibidem*.

⁴⁵ The term ‘fool’ is defined, among others, as “a person lacking in judgment or prudence”. See: *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fool>.

Chapter 3: The Carnival King

Thus carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life.

(Mikhail Bakhtin¹)

A fool is a figure deeply rooted in the folklore imagination. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, it is related to the medieval culture of laughter – the spacetime of the people's square and travelling comedy troupes. A fool's mask is related to parody and mockery, associated with merriment and playfulness. However, a fool also represents traits such as puzzlement, simplicity, naivety or lack of understanding. In this chapter I will try to answer the question based on online statements, to what extent Michael Jackson is a figure that exhibits traits of a fool? The subject of my analysis are primarily the comments I classified as ironic. Their baseline characteristic is laughter – the attribute of the figures I am investigating, that is, a fool and a carnival king. I present the category of laughter using Bakhtin's study on François Rabelais's oeuvre. In Bakhtin's view, it was in Rabelais's works that laughter culminated.² To what extent can this laughter be found in the online statements about Jackson? That is the question I am interested in now.

Laughter in the Carnival Culture

Bakhtin writes that the key attribute of laughter is ambivalence. "(...) it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival."³ In the literature of the Medieval and the Renaissance periods, particularly in Rabelais's works, laughter

¹ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1984, p. 8.

² *Ibidem*, p. 174.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

is ambiguous: admiration and dethronement, mockery and apology. Laughter is free and universal:

Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naivete and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality.⁴

In the Middle Ages, laughter was found beyond the official culture, which according to Bakhtin was characterised by seriousness that, being related to the ideology of the Church, led to the rejected content being expelled outside its boundaries. What was related to seriousness in the official culture, in the unofficial culture was ridiculed, degraded to the level of a joke. Parody would go unpunished provided that it had a merry foolish tone to it. Hence, aside from the canon forms of cult in the medieval culture also parallel forms of laughter were formed – such was the nature of the medieval feast of fools and the feast of the ass. The key role was played by laughter and grotesque degradation of various Church rituals and symbols.⁵ Subsequent forms of these feast days have become one of the variants of a carnival.⁶

Bakhtin emphasises that at a carnival, the element of laughter breaks festive rituals free from the religious and Church dogmas and prohibitions, thus depriving them of piety. Nonetheless, a carnival belongs to a different sphere of life than that of the Church – sometimes a parody of the Church cult, it is related primarily to the element of playfulness, artistic forms, especially the form of a stage act and a spectacle. In Bakhtin's view, carnival rituals exist on the line between life and art, formed in accordance with a specific model of playfulness.

Laughter is related to playfulness⁷, it belongs to the nature of a *fête*:

The feast was a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom. The very brevity of this freedom increased its fantastic nature and utopian radicalism, born in the festive atmosphere of images.⁸

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁵ See: J. Heers, *Fêtes des fous et carnivals au Moyen Age*, Fayard, Paris 1983.

⁶ A carnival is a phenomenon that is neither simple nor unambiguous, as Bakhtin remarks. "But when carnival developed in the narrow sense of the word and became the centre of all popular forms of amusement, it diminished all the other feasts and deprived them of almost every free and utopian folk element (...) Carnival became the symbol and incarnation of the true folk festival, completely independent of Church and State but tolerated by them. See: M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 220.

⁷ Johan Huizinga writes more about the relation between a *fête* and a celebration. See: J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Beacon Press, Boston 1955; particularly the chapter titled *Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon*, pp. 1–27.

⁸ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 89.

A fantasy, exaggeration, blurry lines between that which is scary and that which is merry, it all forms the nature of a carnival that in the medieval folk culture was, as any festive form, “(...) the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance.”⁹ Thus, when Bakhtin speaks of a carnival, he speaks of an ‘inverted world’, a world governed by playfulness, laughter and joy.

Later in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, the key place permeated by the atmosphere of freedom, sincerity and familiarity was a marketplace – serious notes were abandoned at a dining table and at market stalls. It was there that contents rejected from the official language emerged, for laughter gave right to another language that was free and familiar. Original and abundant in symbols, the familiar marketplace language was characterised by a large number of offensive words and expressions. Vulgarisms, obscenity or curses were allowed as forms of speech, as they supported the bond necessary for a carnival.¹⁰ Although they infringed the binding linguistic convention, they overturned norms, courtesy and verbal seriousness that were in force in the official culture; they were legal and permeated all festive forms. This language was characterised by a direct shift from praise to insults. Bakhtin notes that the amalgamation of a praise and an insult within one word and image was based on the belief that the world is something permanently unprepared, something that is born and dies at the same time; “as if it were two bodies”.¹¹ It makes no room for pure abstract negation. As Bakhtin puts it, “The passing from excessive praise to excessive invective is characteristic, and the change from the one to the other is perfectly legitimate. Praise and abuse are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin.”¹² This bi-tonal model that connects a praise to an insult seeks to encapsulate the moment of a change, the shifting from the old to the new (from death to birth); it is a simultaneous enthronement and dethronement.

Enthronement and Dethronement

Curses and insults as symbolic acts were directed primarily towards that which is higher, hence, the authority and the king. I shall now mention the examples of degradation kings and claimants to the throne were subjected to. I will begin with Canetti’s anthropological report who refers to the enthronement of African rulers:

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Originally, curses were fulfilling magical functions. See: *ibidem*, pp. 16–17.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 166.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 165–166.

It happened that Njogoni, a good friend of my own, was elected. The choice fell on him, in part because he came of a good family, but chiefly because he was a favourite of the people and could get the most votes. I do not think that Njogoni had the slightest suspicion of his elevation. As he was walking on the shore on the morning of the seventh day he was suddenly set upon by the entire populace, who proceeded to a ceremony which is preliminary to the crowning (...) They surrounded him in a dense crowd, and then began to heap upon him every manner of abuse that the worst of mobs could imagine. (...) for every few minutes some fellow, administering an especially severe blow or kick, would shout out, 'You are not our King yet; for a little while we will do what we please with you. By-and-by we shall have to do your will.'¹³

According to Canetti's depiction, the moment of insulting the newly elected king used to take place before his official coronation ceremony. The act of abasement was performed by the entire village community – hence, we are dealing here with collective persecution. Later, the same people would become subjects obedient to their ruler. Canetti writes, "He was then dressed in a red gown, and received the greatest marks of respect from all who had just now abused him."¹⁴ From then on, a king would enjoy absolute power, among others, the power of fertility and the right to accumulate wealth. Canetti lists characteristic traits of African kings. He remarks that uniqueness, loneliness, distance, and preciousness may be distinguished at first glance. However, what seems most important are traits related to king's greatness (fame) and possession. This does not pertain solely to the fact of accumulating anything, but ongoing multiplication of both king's greatness and his tangible goods. For a king is someone who imposes new records of growth.¹⁵ The permanent quest for possessing and multiplying, purchasing and generous giving characterise a royal gesture, a grand gesture. As Canetti continues to note, king's entire existence is focused on multiplying. And once a king proves himself as a ruler, upon the end of his rule he is then killed.¹⁶ Death of a king is closely related to magical properties that are assigned to him:

If the king begins to age his magical strength is threatened; it may grow weaker, or disappear, or evil powers may turn it into its opposite. Therefore, the ageing king's life must be taken and his magical strength transferred to his successor. (...) The smallest defect renders the king suspect to his subjects, for it means he may lose some of the substance entrusted to him and so endanger the welfare of his people. The constitution of these kingdoms is the physical constitution of the king himself. He is sworn in on condition, as it were, of his strength and health. A king who shows

¹³ E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, op. cit., pp. 411–412.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 412.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 404.

¹⁶ The time of one king's rule was not always predetermined.

grey hairs, whose eyesight deteriorates, who loses his teeth, or becomes impotent, is killed, or must commit suicide; he takes poison or is strangled.¹⁷

A king is thus killed before he grows old, that is, loses his royal power. This is because the figure of a king is attributed with a static nature; a king must not age. “He has to remain so much the same that he is not even supposed to age but must always be a man in the full maturity of health and strength. Indeed, as soon as the first traces of age show-grey hairs or a decrease in virility-he is often killed.”¹⁸ Canetti concludes that a ruler and his subjects are in a certain kind of an agreement – a king knows that upon the end of his rule, he shall sacrifice his life. “The insults and blows he is subjected to before entering his office are an intimation of what awaits him in the end. As he submits to them, so he will submit to his ultimate fate.”¹⁹

The ritual of a king’s dethronement is recreated at a carnival. He becomes degraded. The seriousness a ruler is approached with in the official culture gives way to reckless mockery. The roles are reversed – the king who was chosen by the people becomes ridiculed and overthrown. He becomes the fool. A king, as Bakhtin writes, is the fool in the folk festive system.

He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people. He is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over (...) The clown was first disguised as a king, but once his reign had come to an end his costume was changed, ‘travestied,’ to turn him once more into a clown. The abuse and thrashing are equivalent to a change of costume, to a metamorphosis. Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king’s uncrowning.²⁰

The ritual of royal dethronement also used to take place during the Saturnalia celebration, which was a Roman festival in honour of the deity of Saturn.²¹ James Frazer analyses similarities between a carnival and Saturnalia. This similarity is strengthened by one of the key carnival characters, the figure that is the very embodiment of a festive time, the fool. Frazer writes,

(...) this grotesque personage is no other than a direct successor of the old King of the Saturnalia, the master of the revels, the real man who personated Saturn and,

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 418.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 382.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 418.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

²¹ As Frazer notes, “This famous festival fell in December, the last month of the Roman year, and was popularly supposed to commemorate the merry reign of Saturn, the god of sowing and of husbandry, who lived on earth long ago as a righteous and beneficent king of Italy.” See: J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, Macmillan, London 1957, p. 513a, <https://www.templeofearth.com/books/goldenbough.pdf>.

when the revels were over, suffered a real death in his assumed character. The King of the Bean on Twelfth Night and the mediaeval Bishop of Fools, Abbot of Unreason, or Lord of Misrule are figures of the same sort and may perhaps have had a similar origin.²²

According to Frazer, such a probable source could be the ritual of killing a man-deity. Usually it also involved the practice of using the deity embodied as a scapegoat. Therefore, as Frazer notes, we are dealing here with a combination of two customs, in truth,

(...) On the one hand, we have seen that it has been customary to kill the human or animal god in order to save his divine life from being weakened by the inroads of age. On the other hand, we have seen that it has been customary to have a general expulsion of evils and sins once a year.²³

For that time, a man-deity would become a public scapegoat onto whom sins and misery that had been tormenting the people throughout the former year were transferred. This periodical custom of expelling evil spirits (cleansing oneself from sin) preceded a period of general freedom during which, as Frazer claims, "the ordinary restraints of society are thrown aside, and all offences, short of the gravest, are allowed to pass unpunished."²⁴ Saturnalia serve as an example of such a festive celebration.

(...) Feasting and revelry and all the mad pursuit of pleasure are the features that seem to have especially marked this carnival of antiquity, as it went on for seven days in the streets and public squares and houses of ancient Rome from the seventeenth to the twenty-third of December.²⁵

The festival also included competition for the title of the King of Saturnalia:

Thirty days before the festival they chose by lot from amongst themselves a young and handsome man, who was then clothed in royal attire to resemble Saturn. Thus arrayed and attended by a multitude of soldiers he went about in public with full license to indulge his passions and to taste of every pleasure, however base and shameful. But if his reign was merry, it was short and ended tragically (...).²⁶

Although dethronement involved a symbolic death, in the carnival culture system it heralded also a rebirth; that which was being ridiculed used to be an

²² *Ibidem*, p. 516a.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 507a.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 506b.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 513a-b.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 514a.

embodiment of authority that now leaves, making room for the new one. Hence, as Frazer emphasises, there was a general atmosphere of joy and merriment. The public ritual of sacrificing a king (a scapegoat) was related to breaking free from the past, thus allowing his people to be (symbolically) reborn.

The Contemporary Forms of Carnival

In Mikhail Bakhtin view, the medieval festivity did not die but only became transformed and narrowed down. The basic world-view of a carnival has been preserved to the present day. "The feast is a primary, indestructible ingredient of human civilization; it may become sterile and even degenerate, but it cannot vanish."²⁷ At present, the carnival aspect is best manifested in the sphere of awareness.

In this new combination medieval laughter was destined to change. Its wide popular character, its radicalism and freedom, soberness and materiality were transferred from an almost elemental condition to a state of artistic awareness and purposefulness.²⁸

Today people desire to live their life in an artistic way, making it a work of art. The need for creating various images is fulfilled primarily by manipulating identity, which is facilitated by new technologies including the Internet. Just like a carnival, virtual space has become a 'festive area', a world where both putting on masks and putting them off is allowed, just as being completely bare. Here, dressing up or pretending someone you are not outside the virtual reality is allowed. A mask is the basic prop. The virtual space hence reveals the main postulates of the culture of narcissism: the need for self-creation and self-fulfilment.

Beata Dziejcz notes that in the case of the Internet, we are dealing with culture that creates its own language. Online communication has become another type of social practice.²⁹ Forums and discussion groups allow users not only to participate passively but also to comment on current events and manage their self-image, thus allowing them to practice the culture of laughter. Its characteristic trait is the freedom of thought and word. As Bakhtin writes, "Thought and word were searching for a new reality beyond the visible horizon of official philosophy."³⁰ The language and words that appear in the non-official culture allow one

²⁷ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 276.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

²⁹ A significant role of social exchange is played here by exchanging signals and gestures. The signals have the form of verbal language, that is, words and nonverbal in written form, that is, onomatopoeia (e.g. 'mwahahaha' – laughter). In turn, icons-signs appear in the role of visual gestures that seem to play the role that strengthens expression of emotions and thoughts. See: *ibidem*.

³⁰ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 272.

“(...) to discover what they were actually hiding, what was that other side.”³¹ The area of non-official culture that is the Internet facilitates free unofficial language of communication. The language of the Internet users seems free and familiar, and also characterised by a great emotional charge at the same time. Here, the linguistic ethics and prohibitions are weaker, abandonment of linguistic norms and customs is noticeable. Also, swear words appear along with expressions (and images) that are deemed indecent. Here, parody becomes mixed with profanity and the motif of degradation is combined with images of symbolic dethronement. Hence, the Internet is the present-day fair, a market where the culture of laughter is practiced, where mocking and laughing at others is allowed.

Michael Jackson as a Grotesque Figure

I consider insults, jokes and obscenities that appear in online entries about Michael Jackson a manifestation of the carnival culture. Jackson makes the public laugh with his looks and behaviour, provides Internet users with topics they can comment on, ridicule and mock. He becomes the subject of jokes, comic strips, and animations, as well as verbal jokes. Examples of such comments are presented below.

I'm curious if he'll be doing his makeup in jail:
[ania, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

Shame the boy whitened himself up like that. ME, personally I liked him better when he was all chocolate. now he looks like a deadman, pale face, skeleton thin and that upturned nose...-but how, but why, damnnn...
[putativus, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 16 June 2005, gazeta.pl]

The thing that triggers laughter is mainly Jackson's looks:

I'm curious does Jackson take that spiky nose off for bedtime?
[nie fanka, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

guilty or not, I'd pull him by the nose.....
[wolski, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

In these comments, attention is drawn to two distinct elements, first of which is anatomisation of the body, and the second is ambivalent merriment. Jackson is funny because his appearance makes people laugh. He himself provokes laughter.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

The laughter present in these statements seems grotesque. And in line with Bakhtin's assumptions, laughter reveals its nature primarily in grotesque, exaggerated hyperboles that refer to the corporal aspect. (Carnival) laughter is linked directly to the human corporality – it pertains to reproductive organs, facial expressions, gestures, and behaviour (including sexual behaviour), freeing the language and the body. According to Bakhtin, "(...) The grotesque concept of the body lived especially in the familiar and colloquial forms of the language."³² Grotesque laughter vividly manifests itself in curses and obscenities. In the colloquial language these elements are focused, among others, on specific aspects of the human body. We encounter primarily hyperbolisation of specific body parts: the abdomen, the womb and the *phallus*. Bakhtin writes,

Wherever men laugh and curse, particularly in a familiar environment, their speech is filled with bodily images. The body copulates, defecates, overeats, and men's speech is flooded with genitals, bellies, defecations, urine, disease, noses, mouths, and dismembered parts.³³

In the cited online statements, grotesque laughter is joined by exaggeration of specific traits of Jackson's appearance. Here, hyperboles serve for presenting the idol's image in a clearly caricatured manner. He is perceived fragmentarily, by means of specific body parts, such as the nose³⁴, but also skin colour. The Internet users pay particular attention to his face, giving it characteristics of a mask, 'abnormality' and 'monstrosity'. Jackson's looks are exaggerated to an unlikely state – not only he is compared to cartoon characters, but he becomes a 'monster'.

According to Bakhtin, monstrosity is a significant aspect of grotesque. The aesthetics of grotesque is also the aesthetics of monstrosity. In the condemning and ironic statements, grotesque is manifested in, among others, attributing to Jackson traits referred to as 'monstrous' or even inhuman:

This monster-star (as some used to call him here) should have been long gone from the stage. The bloke's a regular cripple, poor thing was born too black :(Me, I can listen to the guy once in a while – but I don't wanna see him – gross... yuck. Now he can shoot that video of his with corpses with no makeup on.

[ble, ble..., *Obrońcy Michaela Jacksona zrezygnowali z walki*, 28 May 2005, onet.pl]

³² *Ibidem*, p. 341.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 319.

³⁴ Bakhtin notes that the motif of a nose is one of the most common grotesque motifs in the literature; it exists in the general human database of insulting and demeaning gestures. (In the context of grotesque images, a nose constitutes a substitute of a *phallus*). See: *ibidem*, pp. 316–317.

Shame the boy whitened himself up like that. ME, personally I liked him better when he was all chocolate. now he looks like a deadman, pale face, skeleton thin and that upturned nose...-but how, but why, damnnn...

[putativus, *Jak niewinny jest Michael Jackson?*, 16 June 2005, gazeta.pl]

each time i see his photos his FACE is different shape. maybe the sun's melting it off?
[mada, *Michael Jackson nie będzie spał z chłopcami*, 15 June 2005, onet.pl]

In the ironic statements, in contrast to the condemning ones, there are no comments that would involve prevailing moral assessments. This does not mean, however, that there are no prejudices regarding Jackson. Here, the fear and concern about the subject are concealed. The condemnation of Jackson, typical of statements from the group of condemning statements, is replaced by irony, joke or even mockery. Jackson is perceived as a grotesque figure. The question is, what is hiding behind this laughter?

A grotesque laughter, as Bakhtin writes, combines what is scary with what is funny, that is, evokes merriment. Mocking an object that triggers fear intends to make what is unknown, terrifying and inhuman less threatening. Hence, laughter serves as a means to free oneself from fear.

In the case of the analysed statements, one can indicate two hypothetical causes of fear. First, the fear is related to Jackson's appearance. This appearance may be considered the result of a failed attempt to execute the postulate about self-creation. Secondly, the grotesque laughter stands in opposition to paedophilia as a taboo binding in the official culture, particularly the taboo of speaking about paedophilia in a joking and silly manner. Here, it is worth reflecting on the role of exaggeration used in grotesque images: is it not that real traits become unnoticeable in caricatured hyperboles because of being presented as exaggerated? And is it not the case that that exaggeration facilitates expression of emotions? A medieval person found a victory over fear in laughter – over natural forces, divine and human power, authorities, hell, but primarily, over moral fear, over that which is sacred and forbidden. According to Bakhtin,

(...) the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying: it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright. All that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities.³⁵

What earlier seemed threatening or dangerous is laughed at during a carnival. The carnival laughter liberates one from repression and censorship, and the fear that was overcome remains merely in imagination, for instance, "(...) presented in a droll and monstrous form, the symbols of power and violence turned inside

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

out, the comic images of death and bodies gaily rent asunder.”³⁶ Moreover, human and animal forms become transferred – the subject of fear becomes a “ludicrous monstrosity”. In the analysed statements, Jackson seems to be such a “ludicrous monstrosity”; his face is considered a mask, and Jackson himself is called “a monkey after plastic surgery and not one for that matter”.³⁷ As for the statements presented here, it is revealing that formulations related to ‘insanity’ or ‘monstrosity’ are focused on Jackson’s face. The following comments serve as examples:

Me, I can listen to the guy once in a while – but I don’t wanna see him – gross... yuck. Now he can shoot that video of his with corpses with no makeup on.
[ble, ble..., *Obrońcy Michaela Jacksona zrezygnowali z walki*, 28 May 2005, onet.pl]

i hope they sentence him he simply was thick in the head, what other name would u call sb who changes his skin colour and turns himself in to a monster, but that wasn’t his main deviation, his ‘love’ for children is. pedophiles should be isolated from them even castrated at best. I hope the king will go away form a looong time but not to a castle, to prison
[ofolk, *Michael Jackson: Wyrok za kilka dni?*, 1 June 2005, onet.pl]

According to the authors of these statements, Jackson is ‘insane’, because he changed his skin colour, performed a total self-creation; and by intervening in his appearance, he turned into a ‘monster’. In the second of the two quoted comments we can read that Jackson’s ‘deviation’ contaminates (is reflected in) his behaviour: for his “‘love’ for children” is abnormal. Thus, he is met with the fate of a carnival king, who after the coronation is laughed at and dethroned.

Michael Jackson as a Carnival King

I will begin embedding Michael Jackson’s social career into the model of a carnival king’s biography with the thesis I have formulated in the chapter *The Pop Cult: Life as a ‘Work of Art’*. In that chapter, I wrote that in the culture of narcissism an idol is the one who co-decides on a person’s identity and, at the same time, exists as a ‘reflection’ of the narcissism of her/his admiring fans. I refer to this phenomenon as the *pop cult*. I consider ‘idols’ to be the so-called beautiful people, that is, celebrities admired by means of the media. The ‘beautiful people’ who spark interest and hence seem to be models of attractive and happy people, are equipped by the public with specific beliefs; namely, an idol is supposed to be a person who will allow her/his admirers to make their fantasies about being exceptional true.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

³⁷ I quote more statements in the chapter *Online Statements*.

The most obvious element of this model is the desire to be someone similar to the idol, hence, to be a 'pretty face'. However, physical attractiveness is a trait subject to the passing time and, therefore, the medial impermanence must be inscribed into the biography of modern idols. Enthronement is related to a consent to be dethroned – an idol who is admired on one day is replaced by another 'pretty face' on the next.

Jackson's dethronement is related directly to the allegations of child sexual abuse, as evidenced by online comments. The moment of dethronement was preceded by Jackson's career as the king of pop. Jackson enjoyed the status of one of the most popular artists of the 20th century. Numerous statistics, such as the greatest number of albums ever sold, awards won, distinctions, titles, etc., not only served for strengthening his popularity but primarily served as a manifestation of his power as the king of pop.

This 'royal power' is visible in defending statements. In his fans' comments, Jackson is still referred to as 'the king of pop'. The allegations did not hinder Jackson's position as the king, but on the contrary, they made it even stronger:

we can't remember anymore can we? Jackson is a great talent; his songs have no equal. This is why envious people wanna tear him down. He helped children because he himself had no childhood.. Some people want to force him to pay. Take it but don't lock him up. People!

[Neutralna, *Jackson: Decydujące starcie*, 1 June 2005, interia.pl]

MJ is the King of POP and no swindler won't take his throne away. Michael is the king of Pop music, without question. He worked hard to get it. And now here's a nasty hag doing everything to hustle the highest compensation possible from him at the expense of his career. The court clearly stated Jackson's innocent and dismissed all allegations. And does anyone know the story of that boy's mother-I suggest you go and seek and think again about the allegations against Jackson

[Mario, *Jackson niewinny – przysięgli o werdykcie*, 14 June 2005, onet.pl]

It is also worth noting that in the case of Jackson's social career, we are also dealing here with a symbolic crowning. On 15 February 1992, during his visit to Africa, Michael Jackson was crowned the king of the Agu tribe on the Ivory Coast, "In a town named Krinjabo Michael was crowned the king. The ceremony was attended by other kings of the tribe, a choir of shamans was singing songs and local topless beauties were fanning Jackson, sitting on a throne with a crown on his head."³⁸

Therefore, Jackson's popularity and fame can be considered as attributes that belong to the figure of a king. It is also possible to indicate Jackson's permanent (as Canetti writes, characteristic of a king) pursuit of owning and multiplying –

³⁸ E. Kot, *Jaki naprawdę jest Michael Jackson?*, "TIM" 1993, no. 42/43, p. 5.

his activity was focused on breaking new records, both regarding album sales and popularity. His (royal) gesture of greatness is evidenced by his relentless purchase of items (among others, the Neverland Rancho), as well as publishing activity and charity. Jackson's gesture of greatness is noticed also by authors of defending comments:

want to destroy Michael! That's too much! no court judgment is passed but the prison cell is ready! It's all a game-to sentence michael! That's not fair! But I believe that truth will triumph now or later! I don't know if u know but people who sing and dedicate their life to others have good hearts and love people-that's what Michael is like!!! I admire him!!!He's the king!!! Just like Usher said-who took part in the concert for Jackson-he sang with him on stage-!!!Fabulous!!!

[AGNIESZKA W., *Cela dla M. Jacksona gotowa*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

Other attributes characteristic of a king are, among others, uniqueness and isolation. Jackson's image as a pop culture idol was based on stressing his uniqueness. It was made up by several elements; first, the fact that from his early childhood he had been performing on stage and enjoyed popularity; secondly, his uniqueness was directly related to his commercial success. Moreover, it is worth noting that in the music videos promoting Jackson's albums he used to play the role of a superhero, that is, someone extraordinary, someone unique. Isolation, in turn, is evidenced by his avoidance of contact with the audience or hiding his face behind a cosmetic mask and sunglasses. Jackson was someone who could be admired while being watched on the screen or on stage, but never to be met in person. He had an aura of mystery to him – Jackson was someone of unspecified gender, age and skin colour. His altering looks called for everyone's attention.

Canetti assumed that the status of a king also involves motionlessness evidenced in the fact that, among others, a king is not allowed to grow old. A king as a man-deity cannot be affected by time, and hence all marks of old age should be concealed. He should be characterised by physical perfection. The ideal of perfection ascribed to a king is similar to that which all modern idols must pursue. Self-creation modelled on a work of art is intended to drive a person towards a state of utopian perfection. However, in Jackson's case, intervening with his looks neither prevented the ageing process nor made him closer to the ideal. Self-creation – a requirement of the narcissistic culture – has led Jackson explicitly to a situation where his looks are feared and ridiculed. All attempts to alter appearance are considered by the commenting Internet users as exaggerated and Jackson himself is perceived as a clown and a fool.³⁹

³⁹ Cf. online news: *Najglupszy Michael Jackson*, <https://kultura.onet.pl/muzyka/gatunki/pop/najglupszy-michael-jackson/6xmn4c9> and: *Michael Jackson jak zombie*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/wiadomosci/news-michael-jackson-jak-zombie,nId,1624692>.

At present, in the key trait that has been preserved in the figure of a fool is the negative element of degradation, whereas the elements of freedom, liberty or cheerfulness, with which foolishness used to be associated in festive folk culture, have been lost in folk culture.

Bakhtin writes that foolishness is a kind of an “inverted truth⁴⁰”, which constitutes the inverted side and the bottom side of the officially binding truth.

Folly is the opposite of wisdom-inverted wisdom, inverted truth. It is the other side, the lower stratum of official laws and conventions, derived from them. Folly is a form of gay festive wisdom, free from all laws and restrictions, as well as from preoccupations and seriousness.⁴¹

The figure of a fool, as Bakhtin claims, gives the right to an unofficial (carnival) point of view and hence a fool, just like a clown, is the carrier of carnival rules in the daily world. A clown and a fool stand “(...) between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors.”⁴² A clown participates in life on specific terms, since being a clown may involve the privilege of impunity. However, a clown’s position is always ambivalent; though he is allowed to transgress the adopted social norms, it is he who most often becomes the scapegoat. Also, it is the fool who claims the title of the carnival king.

Jackson perceived as a fool and a clown is someone who brings chaos, provokes and incites comments both regarding himself and child sexual abuse he was accused of. He mocks by his behaviour which is perceived as clown-like and thus inadequate, not aligned with the binding custom. He rejects rules that the external world must follow, that is, the official world. He fails to understand laws of this world and thus his statement about sharing one bed with a child seems appropriate to him. Lastly, to repeat the above quote by Bakhtin, Jackson publicly exposes an area of life that is specifically non-public – he speaks openly about sharing his bedroom with a child. Nonetheless, in the case of ironic opinions, the taboo-isation of paedophilia does not take the form of categorically condemning judgments but that of a ridicule of both Jackson and paedophilia itself:

And where did he mention sex with children? It seems to me that he was talking only about marriage =/

[ot co, *Cela dla Michaela Jacksona*, 9 June 2005, onet.pl]

For many years it’s been well known children are best roasted with truffles

[smakosz, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

⁴⁰ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 260.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 8.

Please make comments to support paedophiles! Out with paedophobia! Michael!
 You're the paedophilia martyr!
 [prof. Flaszka, *Michael Jackson: Napięcie wzrasta*, 10 June 2005, onet.pl]

The above comments involve a trace of ambivalent laughter that is cheerful and teasing at the same time. As Bakhtin emphasises, such laughter knows no prohibitions or restrictions. It brings to the light that which was hidden. The freedom of carnival forms is related to loud common openness to everything and everyone. It expresses that which is non-existent in the official culture, that which is not discussed or that which has no place in the canon of the correctness of language and everyday life of the binding worldview.

I find in the presented online statements the need for a carnival, that is, breaking free from the 'seriousness of life', an escape from reality, fear or social prohibitions. Ironic comments stem from the transgressive logic of the 'inverse' characteristic of a carnival. They reveal remains of ambivalent carnival laughter – a tangible-corporal aspect that involves a positive element of grotesque. In turn, condemning opinions indicate that Jackson's behaviour, particularly his intervention in his looks, is considered in the moral category: changes become an overkill and the appearance itself – a caricature. Laughter, characteristic of a carnival, becomes distorted by an abstract-semantic tendency.

According to Bakhtin, the transformation of medieval folk culture occurred on several levels – over time, the positive and joyful sounds of laughter have become cameral and miniaturised. What persists is the negative element – that which is funny has become 'low', silly, insignificant. Laughter and joy have lost their positive quality. Grotesque has been narrowed down to a purely negative satire. The notion of cheerfulness is now associated with that which is unimportant, bereft of seriousness and dignity, which belongs to the negative order; obscenities related to the tangible-corporal aspect have turned into erotic frivolity and are often associated with pornography. Bakhtin also writes about the new corporal canon,

All attributes of the unfinished world' are carefully removed, as well as all the signs of its inner life. The verbal norms of official and literary language, determined by the canon, prohibit all that is linked with fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth. There is a sharp line of division between familiar speech and 'correct' language.⁴³

The line between the familiar language and the official language in speaking about paedophilia can be observed in the statements about Jackson. Based on these statements, I believe that the main postulate of late-modern culture – self-creation – cannot be successfully obtained. An ongoing creation of one's life modelled on a work of art is impossible, as shown by beliefs of Internet users

⁴³ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, op. cit., p. 320.

about Jackson. The idol's attempts to alter his looks led him to a state of resembling a 'monster'. Despite his attempts, he failed to erase signs of imperfection of his (own) body. Therefore, the literal execution of the postulate of self-creation eliminates his fate. I conclude that the condemnation and ridicule of Jackson results from a failed attempt to make this postulate reality. Jackson's example shows that ongoing creation eliminates the attainment of the ideal wholeness. Thus, Jackson serves as an example of a breakdown of the postulate of self-creation. It reveals a crack in the modern narcissistic culture.

Conclusion

The unconscious is outside, not hidden in any unfathomable depths – or, to quote the X Files motto: ‘The truth is there, outside’.

(Slavoj Žižek¹)

The task for me in this book was to investigate the traits of a mythical hero manifested in late-modern culture, more specifically, in social beliefs regarding a pop culture idol. To reach these beliefs I based my analysis on online statements concerning Michael Jackson that appeared at the time when he was facing a child sexual molestation allegations. The focus was on the reactions evoked among the global public by Jackson, once the king of pop, now degraded to the position of a self-proclaimed king.

The choice of online comments as data source was supported by the assumption that the Internet facilitates uninhibited unofficial language of communication. I considered these statements to be an expression of a spontaneous need for expressing one’s opinion on a given subject (in this case, about Jackson). My starting point in a reflection on the state of late-modern culture was the category of ‘culture of narcissism’. I concluded that ultimately, this culture boils down to two conditions, namely, authenticity and self-fulfilment. However, postulates of the culture of narcissism have little in common with emancipation or the ideal of remaining loyal to oneself. Today, they take on a compulsive nature – trying to discover ‘themselves’ at all cost, people fall prey to different forms of dependency. This is what I have attempted to show on the example of Michael Jackson’s career. Jackson’s identity as a pop culture idol proved to be created by the public, the media and his fans. I have classified beliefs about Jackson into three anthropological figures – a trickster, a scapegoat, and a carnival king.

I have found their traces in online statements concerning Jackson. I have classified all these statements into three groups: condemning, ironic and defending. Each of these groups has become a category for organising a specific anthropological figure.

¹ S. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, op. cit., p. 3.

My book merely touched upon some of the important questions that still require an in-depth reflection. In this sense, I consider it to be explicitly an introduction to further studies on late-modern culture and its participants. The question pertains, among others, to the phenomenon of a pop culture idol Michael Jackson – a figure interesting as he evokes extremely emotional and different reactions.

Jackson's example shows ambivalence that accompanies social reception of popular personas. It reveals the narcissism of contemporary culture, ongoing uneasiness and instability of tastes, opinions or even values of its participants. This example shows that popular culture, despite the commercial component that is undoubtedly significant, bears a strong emotional charge. Is it also an area where the mythical sources of culture expose themselves. Can pop culture be considered an attempt to return to the order assigned to the mythical world? This question is yet to be answered.

Another important matter pertains to authors of online statements. One of the objectives of this book was to draw attention to transformations that take place in the relation between an idol and the public. Here, the very relation is intriguing, as it seems permeated by emotions and specific intimacy. The public is no longer satiated by the possibility to watch and admire the idol. A desire to experience the very thing the idol experiences, to seek direct closeness, appears and often prevails. A participant of pop culture seems to be a 'sponge' that absorbs her/his idol and the creator at the same time. The public takes on the role of a constructor, a conscience and, lastly, a god. Those taking stance on the subject of Michael Jackson expressed views not only regarding the persona embodied by Jackson or the issue of paedophilia the idol was suspected of. They revealed their private opinions, prejudices and biases they most likely are driven by in the virtual reality and outside of it. Speaking about Jackson, particularly when assessing his looks and behaviour, they are speaking in fact of their own way of perceiving and experiencing the world. By creating an ambiance of anonymity, the Internet has allowed users to reveal often intimate information. Hence, these statements are important as much as they contain 'some' sociologically significant truth about the world but rather because they reveal the authors themselves, their way of understanding this world. They are valuable primarily owing to the fact that they unveil a need for a mythical arrangement of the private cosmos that is difficult to put in words but nonetheless exists, and it seems it is not hidden that deep. A world where popular culture takes increasingly important place, and in one's own opinion – the only one that exists.

Afterword

1 June 2009

What will (not) happen in London at O2 Arena on 13 July 2009?

It has been three years since the end of Michael Jackson's trial. What has happened over that time, what has changed? In early March 2009, at a conference held specifically to this end, Michael Jackson's concert tour was announced under the illustrative title *This Is It!*. The show, referred to as the final show in the idol's career, was to take place in July this year in London.

What is the sense hidden behind the words *This Is It!*? Does it really mean "it's over"? Are these the last concerts in Jackson's career? The title of the announced concerts (*This Is It!*) seems provocatively modest compared to the live conference transmitted online via Jackson's website (www.michaeljacksonlive.com¹). The entire 'endeavour' lasted several minutes. Jackson walked on the stage in intense black colour wearing one of his characteristic outfits that resembles a uniform with abundance of decorations, and a shiny band on his arm; he was also wearing sunglasses. Before walking up to the microphone, with a smile on his face, he made several of his hallmark gestures, such as the 'victory'. He then greeted the gathered audience ("I love you so much") and ceremonially declared the title of the London concerts, stressing that, "*This Is It!* really means this is it!"²

Following Jackson's conference, speculations regarding his deteriorating health appeared immediately in the media. Surprisingly, the idol's very lean body had been ignored until that moment. References were made to opinions of physicians and psychologists, who were allegedly concerned about Jackson's health and suspecting him of suffering from anorexia. Doubts arose due to his health condition, leading to a number of questions whether the king of pop would actually make it through the announced concerts. Will these performances really take place? He completed the last tour over ten years ago, that is, long before his

¹ The site also involves the conference video and an interview with concert directors.

² *Michael Jackson announces his UK gigs at the O2 this summer*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=11&v=SMIEe0EjHAQ&feature=emb_logo. Cf.: R. Sankowski, *Nieudany powrót Michaela Jacksona*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 2009, 6 March, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,6352531,Nieudany_po-wrot_Michaela_Jacksona.html.

exhausting court trial regarding child sexual molestation. Nonetheless, regarding the news about Jackson, my greatest interest was drawn to statements made by Internet users. Reading through comments below the news about the planned summer concerts, I had the impression that the idol, despite the time that has passed, still evokes emotional and, at the same time, extreme reactions of the public. The statements show a clear distinction into his fans and haters. Interestingly, it seems that these beliefs about Jackson do not change. Again, suspicions of paedophilia are made – some of these comments involve satirical and offensive statements, while others take the form of a joke. There are also numerous confessions of fans who often verbally attack their adversaries to protect their idol. Nonetheless, the prevailing statements are those about Jackson's looks, particularly about his face and, most specifically, his nose. Hence, there is something about Michael Jackson's face that makes the public unable to remain indifferent.

In the culture of narcissism, a person expresses herself/himself by means of her/his appearance, and thus, also by means of her/his face. The entire truth about one's face seems hidden in its nakedness. Since the face is always bare, it speaks. As Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche³ write, the face is both the most intimate and the most exposed part of a individual, directly subjected to the strongest public assessment and requirements. What if the face cannot be seen or when it resembles a mask? In such cases the face, and by means of the face the entire person herself/himself becomes not only inaccessible, but also 'unreadable'. The identity becomes mysterious. That which cannot be seen creates ambiguity, evokes various assumptions and also suspicion. Of what? Suspicion of fault, insincerity or, at least, accusation of attempting to hide something from the eyes of the public (a stare is not neutral). A question arises, whether by hiding his face, Jackson fears exposure, confrontation with social reception of his persona?

Popular culture leaves less and less room for assumptions. This culture demands its heroes to be transparent, completely open to the point of obscenity (everything has to be shown, the public must see everything). Is that not by any chance coercing or even tyrannically forcing the postulate of authenticity onto someone? Here, it is also worth reflecting on the phenomenon of the Internet, which serves both as a source of information and a communication tool that facilitates 'taking a peek' into others' lives (or often stalking them), and then revealing and forwarding pieces of information that are often confidential to a wide group of recipients.

Pop culture hates silence – silence becomes unbearable. Not only is it a sign of boredom but also that of indifference. If Michael Jackson is silent and/or hides his face behind the mask, then perhaps it is his strategy for avoiding the

³ J.-J. Courtine, C. Haroche, *Haroche, Histoire du visage. Exprimer et taire ses émotions (XVIe – début XIXe siècle)*, Payot et Rivages, Paris 2007.

controlling stare of the public. By covering the face one can consciously refuse others the right to observe it, to 'read' it and to evaluate it. At the same time, however, the mystery becomes even greater, just as the interest in what the face might be hiding increases.

I've watched again Michael Jackson's concert from the year 1992 from a tour promoting the album *Dangerous*. Michael suddenly appears on stage, catapulted. He is standing still for over two minutes, his fists clenched. He is watching the public through sunglasses. For a moment, it is him who is the observer of the spectacle. Then, he takes off the glasses very slowly, and casts them aside rapidly. The show takes off.

What will happen in London at O2 Arena on 13 July 2009? I do not know the answer to this question yet.

Post scriptum

25 June 2009

Michael Jackson will not perform on 13 July at O2 Arena in London. He will not perform, not on that day, not on any other. *This Is It!* – now this title takes on a symbolic meaning, a sense I have been reflecting upon for several weeks.

It was not on 13 July, but on 25 June 2009 that something happened, unquestionably; something came to an end. A disbelief and a shock, these words appear in numerous reactions to the news about Michael Jackson's death.

Looking back at the online statements from several weeks and months ago, or even years that have passed since Jackson's trial ended, they often involve a thread about the idol's increasing physical vulnerability. News titled *Michael Jackson is dying*¹ showed up already by the end of 2008. Why is it then so hard to believe in the idol's death today?

The media culture would not exist if not for people like Jackson. It was due to the media that Michael Jackson's life became a pop culture show – perhaps the greatest of all time. Sadly, also his death is part of this spectacle. Photographs of Jackson, fragments of his music videos, reports from Los Angeles where the idol died and where crowds gathered, among others, at the UCLA hospital and in front of his house; numerous comments of his fans (and also their tears), statements made by journalists, co-workers and well-known show-business personas – it all adds up to an impression that death (at least in this case) ceases to be a private, intimate event. Due to the media, Michael Jackson's death, similarly to his life, became an event that was experienced globally by the public worldwide. On 26 June this year, TV stations (including news channels) shared news only about the tragic death of the king of pop. The media repeatedly showed last photographs of Jackson, the road via which the unconscious man was transported from his home to hospital, a video showing a helicopter landing with the idol's body to be taken to a morgue, as well a record of a phone call to the emergency services. One could hear Jackson's songs, music videos were recalled. There were numerous reports from different locations worldwide showing people's reactions after the king of pop's death. Jackson, specifically, his death, was the most impor-

¹ See: *Michael Jackson umiera?*, <https://muzyka.interia.pl/pop/news-michael-jackson-umiera,nId,1640677>.

tant topic that day in the media – both on the Internet and on television. I wonder if this is solely due to the idol's fame?

When I was writing this book, particularly while reading Internet users' comments about Jackson, I often had the impression that everyone is an expert on this matter; everyone has an opinion about Jackson. Now it seems that not only did he become – in various ways – an important part of our common social life, but also our private worlds.

The work on the publication of this book was completed in June 2009. We received the sad news about Michael Jackson's death shortly after the *Afterword* was finished. We decided not to make any changes. At the same time, we would like to note that the numbers of Jackson's sold albums specified in this book are outdated (June 2009).

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The aim of this book is to investigate how traits of a mythical hero are manifested in modern culture and, to be more precise, in social beliefs about Michael Jackson. These beliefs are traces leading to complex levels of understanding the phenomenon of pop culture and its taboo. Pop culture makes up its own mythologies and creates its own heroes, but it does so with a reference to the more complex cultural wholeness. This book is an attempt to follow these references and reflect on them.