

“Playing with Art and Artifice: Religious Satanism as Total Environment”

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Introduction

“The essence of any magical working is a *complete* evocation. It is more important to experience total emotional response to one’s environment than all the ‘occult’ knowledge in the world.”

– Anton Szandor LaVey²

Anton Szandor LaVey’s (1930-1997) founding of the Church of Satan (CoS) in 1966 was a significant shift in satanic discourse. LaVey is arguably the originator of modern Satanism as a cohesive, codified religion, but there is a long history of how the figure of Satan has been interpreted and reinterpreted by theologians, artists, and philosophers alike. The Hebraic *ha-satan* in the Book of Job translates as “the Satan,” a designation meaning “the Adversary” or “the Accuser” (Job 1:6 NRSV).³ The Satan is not opposed to God; he is among God’s messengers (*mal’ k*), a servant in the divine court.⁴ Under Christian theological interpretations, an accusation of being “satanic” becomes a rhetorical tool to denigrate heretics, pagans, and Jews as the perceived enemies of Christianity.⁵ In the Enlightenment, Satan’s narrative is reinterpreted yet again, as artists, philosophers, and writers portray satanic figures as a symbol of intellectual non-conformity and sexual liberation, as suavely challenging conventions and the status quo.⁶ Satan has

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² Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1992), 77.

³ The Hebrew text translates as: “One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them”; Job 1:6. The New Oxford Annotated Bible NRSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 728.

⁴ Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan: How Christians Demonized Jews, Pagans, Heretics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *xix*.

⁶ Ruben Van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 114.

always held fascination as both a titillating and repellent figure, and LaVey, in turn, absorbs this discourse on the “satanic” and reintroduces Satan as a symbol of a distinct religion with ritual and dogma. After Satanism becomes a separate religion beyond heretical accusation, satanic discourse evolves further into a broad “satanic milieu,”⁷ that is, a loose collection of individuals and groups that centralize the figure of Satan (either symbolically or literally)⁸ that are influenced by LaVey’s ideas but also incorporate ideas from pagan, new age, and esoteric circles.

LaVey’s contribution to satanic discourse, however, frequently eclipses LaVey’s contribution to *magical* discourse.⁹ LaVey scorned theism: there is no god or devil; humans are solely carnal animals. Ritual magic is an “intellectual decompression chamber” designed to purge oneself of negative emotions and gain psychological control over any particular situation.¹⁰ His ideas on magic thus reject communion with an outside force (be it demon, deity, or other), and are instead rooted in the performance of one’s own body and emotional fortitude.¹¹ In the early days of the Church of Satan, LaVey staged several theatrical events to promote his newly founded religion. Media reports at the time presented LaVey and the Church of Satan as titillating entertainment. His treatment of ritual magic attracts derision from scholars and magicians alike; he is presented as a huckster,¹² performing “crude” sex magic,¹³ esoterically void,¹⁴ with “feeble pretensions of wickedness,” and his church a “poor terminus” for the rich literary history of satanic discourse.¹⁵ The tendency to dismiss the theatrical elements of LaVey’s CoS as a mere carnival show or promotional display is certainly a delegitimizing tactic by LaVey’s critics,¹⁶ however, this paper centralizes that very theatricality. LaVey rejected mandates for esoteric paraphernalia and elaborate directions for ritual magic, and instead presented a magician’s emotions as the primary factor for ritual effectiveness, using “occult” objects as stimuli. Dramatic emotive responses prompted by highly idiosyncratic material items (that varies by individual) are

⁷ A phrase coined by Jesper Aa. Petersen, referencing Colin Campbell’s “cultic milieu”; Colin Campbell, “The Cult, The Cultic Milieu, and Secularization,” in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, eds. Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002 [1972]), 138 – 152.

⁸ Scholars tend to divide between atheistic/metaphorical and theistic/spiritual Satanism, yet the lines between them are at times blurry.

⁹ Carl Abrahamsson, “Anton LaVey, Magical Innovator,” in *The Fenris Wolf*, n. 7, Carl Abrahamsson, ed. (Stockholm: Edda Publishing, 2014), 190.

¹⁰ Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2005 [1969]), 119.

¹¹ Cimminnee Holt, “Death and Dying in the Satanic Worldview,” *Journal of Religion and Culture*, 22.1 (2011): 37.

¹² James R. Lewis, *Satanism Today: An Encyclopedia of Religion, Folklore, and Popular Culture* (Denver: ABC CLIO, 2001), xiv.

¹³ Francis King, *The Rites of Modern Occult Magic* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 149.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Satanism Today*, 256.

¹⁵ Chris Mathews, *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2009), 59.

¹⁶ Abrahamsson, “Anton LaVey,” 200.

the crux of magic. By focusing on drama itself, rejecting spiritualism and theism of all kinds, and explicitly ridiculing prescriptive detailed instructions for ritual magic, he alienates contemporary mainstream and countercultures alike. LaVey “sanitizes” the esoteric and “esotericizes” the secular.¹⁷ That is, he filters esoteric and occult ideas and re-presents them under a psychological and biological framework: “Satanism not only re-orientes traditional Devil worship, but also re-negotiates two influential contemporary alternatives of occult counterculture and self-help psychology.”¹⁸

Despite this tenuous position within esoteric circles, LaVey’s framing of magic present some unique, often-overlooked elements: as LaVey filters and reinterprets historical treatises on magic, he also introduces innovative concepts that contribute to magical discourse. Discourse on satanic ritual magic is heavily informed by and responding to historical occult discourses. Under the umbrella category of “Western esotericism,” contemporary scholars affirm that this is not a natural term but an “artificial category applied retrospectively to a range of currents and ideas that were known by other names at least prior to the end of the eighteenth century.”¹⁹ Thus, academic pursuits that fall under the banner of Western esotericism are a relatively modern phenomenon, incorporating astrology to demonology, necromancy to magic, Kabbalah to Gnosticism, among others. The study of “magic” as a topic has longstanding and continued presence in academia, but has often been relegated to medieval philosophers, writers, and folk practices, which separates between “elite” and “vernacular” traditions.²⁰ Scholars in this area most often ignore contemporary magical practices, and reinforce the notion that magic has an “elite” history: “the elite bias becomes particularly problematic when recognizing that contemporary esotericism is intimately, and increasingly, connected with popular culture and new media.”²¹ Present-day academics challenge the ostensible separation between “elite” and “popular” as it pertains to its cousins: the dubious distinctions between spiritual/material; mind/body; male/female gender; high and low culture; theology/magic; philosophy/ritual; theory/praxis; and any system that reinforces a binary schema. Gender studies, queer theory, feminism, and post-colonial critiques are all academic disciplines that have disputed constructed dichotomies in an attempt to review and re-examine the underlying assumptions of the academy. The premise of this essay, then, is to centralize the material objects when studying magic, not relegating them to (an implied lesser) afterthought, in order to confront the neglected study of material culture in academic analyses of religion.

¹⁷ Jesper Aa. Petersen, “The Seeds of Satan: Conceptions of Magic in Contemporary Satanist,” *Aries* 12 (2012): 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3.

²⁰ Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, “Introduction,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Bristol, Conn.: Equinox Pub, 2013), 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

Given this, Church of Satan ritual as enacted by its members is perhaps a unique opportunity to discuss materiality as mediating religion, as Satanism is a self-identified materialist religion that practices magic, and, as will be demonstrated, Satanism makes no grand claims to cosmic or spiritual realities beyond human understanding, fully embracing aesthetics as important for meaning-making in Satanists' individualized, microcosmic satanic worldview. This essay: firstly, presents the material aspects of Greater Magic, as defined by LaVey and practiced by members of the Church of Satan; secondly, concentrates on LaVey's concept of Total Environments— a mandate for personalized, theatrical insular spaces; and finally, posits that these ideas can be used as a theoretical framework for studying the worldview of members of the Church of Satan as a whole.

Greater Magic: Materiality

“Magic is never totally scientifically explainable, but science has always been, at one time or another, considered magic.”

– Anton Szandor LaVey²²

Greater Magic (GM, or ritual magic), as defined and outlined by LaVey in *The Satanic Bible* (TSB), is a rite designed for an emotional and cathartic response provoked by idiosyncratic materials used during ritual, in order to purge oneself of anxiety, and gain psychological control. He defines magic as, “The change in situations or events in accordance with one's will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangeable.”²³ *The Satanic Bible* contains suggestive, not prescriptive instructions. Practitioners create individualized ritual spaces that correspond to their emotional triggers (photos of a loved one, evocative music, personalized symbols of success, etc.). LaVey claims that humanity has an “inherent need for emotionalizing through dogma. Man needs ceremony and ritual, fantasy and enchantment.”²⁴ Satanic Greater Magic wilfully engages in suspension of disbelief, acting as if Satan is real within ritual. This imagery is a tool to recognizing Satanist's power over their own life, as “Satan” is a metaphor for one's “true” nature and ultimate desires. Greater Magic is thus a rite of autonomy. It is, at once, an act of defiance to spiritual and theistic religions that relinquish authority, and a claim to independence.

For members of LaVey's Church of Satan,²⁵ GM is considered optional, yet officials stress its importance. Rituals reaffirm the connection to their chosen symbol (Satan, and as we shall see, sometimes other rebel-heroes), as well as to

²² LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 110.

²³ *Ibid*, 110.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

²⁵ Self-identifying Satanists either reject or alter LaVey's ideas, and have multiple interpretations for ritual magic. This essay focuses on the Church of Satan, anticipating my PhD thesis (Holt, *Forthcoming*).

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their selves: as their own gods, rituals are meant to be a powerful communion with the self, through fervent purgation stimulated by highly sensorial objects and accouterments. As magical rituals are mostly individual in nature, adapted to the singular practitioner, stimulating emotions is achieved by using the senses (sight, sound, scent, and touch) via various media. The material objects mediate with a Satanist’s innate desires; they act as a bridge to one’s own psyche. Allow LaVey to elaborate:

The formalized beginning and end of the ceremony acts as a dogmatic, anti-intellectual device, the purpose of which is to disassociate the activities and frame of reference of the outside world from that of the ritual chamber, where the whole will must be employed. This facet of the ceremony is *most* important to the intellectual, as he *especially* requires the “decompression chamber” effect of the chants, bells, candles, and other trappings, before he can put his pure and willful desires to work for himself, in projection and utilization of his imagery.²⁶

LaVey calls this approach to ritual a “contrived ignorance,” wherein the practitioner wilfully engages with the concept of a powerful arcane tradition of magic, but that also recognizes it as a fabrication.²⁷ The strategic use of esoteric ethos is a highly effective and “excellent prop.”²⁸

Ritual Adaptation: Engaging the Senses

As Satanists adapt the Greater Magic suggested script to personal aesthetics, this section examines the multisensory aspect of ritual materials. The objects function to mediate and reflect a Satanists’ emotional desires. LaVey’s premise for choosing objects of an idiosyncratic nature is that it is far easier to prompt a cathartic emotional experience via the physicality of the carnal. Hence, the ritual objects function as extensions of the individual magician’s will.

Scripts and Words

During GM rituals, instructions are for celebrants to write down their desires, speak them out loud, and then burn the paper.²⁹ Satanists modify: formal cursive or even stylized printed fonts; on parchment, rice paper, or special stationary; written with fountain pens or calligraphy instruments, which all lend a romantic

²⁶ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 120

²⁷ *Ibid*, 120.

²⁸ Per Faxneld, “Secret Lineages and de Facto Satanists: Anton LaVey’s Use of Esoteric Tradition,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Bristol, Conn.: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2013), 87.

²⁹ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 134.

hint to the objects. Some create custom covers of smooth leather for *The Satanic Bible*, enhancing the tangible aspects of the words within, or have separate copies each for ritual and annotation. The aesthetics of the scripts function as word-images, beyond their literal meaning. Runes, alchemical characters, and Kabbalistic writings are considered to communicate magical properties; they are visual objects *experienced* before their semantic meaning is understood. When Satanists adapt their scripts so as to be more aesthetically pleasing they are emphasizing the experiential aspect of the word-image; they are meant to be visually enjoyed as well as maintain their ritual function as proclamations of the will. The spoken assertion to close a ritual, “So it is done!” is a performative utterance, a proclamation of fact. When this phrase is pronounced in satanic rituals it does not merely *describe* the actions, it *is* the action. It is another form of wilfully engaging in suspension of disbelief; you act *as if* your desire has already been fulfilled. Here, it is not word-image, but word-action. In the esoteric tradition, the power of words usually stems from Western occultists’ interpretation of Kabbalistic *gematria* – that is, a numerical value assigned to words produces a separate, hidden meaning. Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) claimed that magicians could use the secret divine Hebrew to invoke angels and have communication with God. Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) wrote extensively on gematria and the magical properties of numerical words.³⁰ John Dee’s (1527-1608) Enochian language (based on the revealed language of angels via scrying) has been reinterpreted by LaVey with satanic meanings.³¹ Scripts and words thus function as literal statements, but also echo arcane ideas about the concealed meanings within languages.

Imagery

Within Greater Magic, images are an important “magical ingredient.”³² LaVey suggests a Sigil of Baphomet³³ hung over an altar, and encourages other visual stimuli: photographs, drawings, paintings, sculptures, or tableaux depicting your desires; clothing of an intended paramour; objects of wealth or other material needs; or the portrait of an enemy that you destroy in effigy.³⁴ LaVey explains:

Imagery is a constant reminder, an intellect-saving device, a working substitute for the real thing. Imagery can be manipulated, set up, modified, and created, all according

³⁰ Aleister Crowley, “Chapter 0: The Magical Theory of the Universe,” in *Magick in Theory and Practice* (New York: Castle Books Kindle Edition), 16-21.

³¹ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 153-272.

³² *Ibid*, 124.

³³ The official copyrighted (1972) sigil of the Church of Satan, and registered trademark (1983), is an inverted pentagram with a goat’s head within, encircled by Hebrew script spelling “Leviathan.”

³⁴ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 125.

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to the will of the magician, and the very blueprint that is created by imagery becomes the formula which leads to reality.³⁵

The visceral provocation of images has historically been suspect. Within Western monotheistic religions, warnings towards idols and “false” depictions of the divine are consistent, compounded by the denouncement of visual sexual arousal. The incited emotions are viewed as wild and uncontrollable (and thus undesirable), and as rooted in base reactions of the body in conflict to loftier, intellectual ideals. Satanists subvert this and seek the instinctual experience of images as “a carnal way of knowing.”³⁶

Sound

Peggy Nadramia (current High Priestess of the Church of Satan) (n.d.) states that music sets the tone, pace, and timing of a ritual, and suggests recorded sounds of thunderstorms, or soundtracks that naturally have a dramatic arc.³⁷ She describes a ritual wherein a pianist improvised, feeding off the vibe and pace of the other celebrants, synching rhythms, heartbeats, mood, and atmosphere. Satanists use everything from Gregorian chants to hard rock depending on need. Nadramia claims that most people are naturally attuned to the evocative and magical effects of music. When someone is home alone “rocking out” to favourite tunes, playing air guitar or singing along in a hairbrush, they are still performing a “working.” You “immerse yourself” and therefore it is “no less a working than a big fancy ceremony.”³⁸

Music has properties as a “discrete material object.”³⁹ The materiality of sound itself is of interest here. Sound emanations are affected by material surroundings: temperature, weather patterns, bodies in the room, and physical structure.⁴⁰ Simply because sound is invisible and transitory in nature, does not mean it should be denounced as immaterial; it is, in fact, directly affecting its environment, and altering that which it encounters.⁴¹

LaVey, a lifelong musician, often discussed the evocative effects of music (both in terms of physiological sound waves and emotive qualities) and how to use them for ritual magic. He champions music that compels people to “listen, rather than

³⁵ Ibid, 125.

³⁶ David Morgan, “Image,” in *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 97.

³⁷ Adam P. Campbell, “Greater Magic discussion with Magistra Peggy Nadramia and Citizen Nanaya Asema,” in *9Sense Podcast* Oct. 28, 2013, accessed April 24, 2014. <http://9sensepodcast.com/mp3/xlvii/october/28octoberxlviiias.mp3>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Isaac Weiner, “Sound,” *Material Religion*, 7.1 (2011): 110.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

merely hear,”⁴² emphasizing tempo and dynamism. For Greater Magic he prefers classical music: Puccini’s *Turandot* (1926), Handel’s Largo from *Xerxes* (1738), and Berlioz’ *Funeral and Triumphant Symphony* (1840).⁴³ The current High Priest of the Church of Satan, Peter H. Gilmore (1958–), who holds a Master’s degree in music composition from New York University, offers his own downloadable classical music compositions to CoS members. Gilmore has written about his love of bombastic symphony music that creates “grand emotional expression.”⁴⁴ Framing sound as integral to the study of material culture is inherently communal and intersubjective, as this approach attends to both the “physical properties and to the historically specific processes through which broadcasters and receivers invest sounds with significance.”⁴⁵

Mediating Magic via Material Tools

Other ritual adaptations include seeking specialized objects: if *The Satanic Bible* suggests a knife, a member could obtain one owned by a family member in the military. One Reverend has a silver chalice he engraved with the Sigil of Baphomet; another, a human skull and a Tibetan *kapala* (a human skull cap) and martial blades; yet another, an entire human skeleton named “Bianca.”⁴⁶ In the “Satanic Funeral Rite” outlined by Gilmore, a main Shrine Altar is used for memorial objects, items dear to the deceased, as well as their remains.⁴⁷ If these are not available a real or replicate skull may be used to represent them. In Magister Michael Rose’s *Rites of Spring* (2001), prancing nymphs stir Pan’s lust from winter slumber.⁴⁸ They “added some real bump and grind stripper music to bridge from the solemnity of the organ music and the ritual formalities into the dance performed by the nymphs,” after which they had a “sumptuous banquet” of food and drink.⁴⁹ One Warlock uses the mythology figures from different legends, such as the, “man eating raven fiends of First Nations mask dances, or generally, surprising transformations and reversals... or the pagan gods who oversee tragedy and destruction (such as Dionysus and Shiva).”⁵⁰ Nadramia notes that Satanists respond to qualities associated with invoked infernal names, such as she does with the female goddess Ishtar, a great

⁴² Anton Szandor LaVey, *Satan Speaks!* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1998), 60.

⁴³ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 81.

⁴⁴ Peter H. Gilmore, *The Satanic Scriptures* (Baltimore, MD: Scapegoat Publishing, 2007), 112.

⁴⁵ Weiner, “Sound,” 110.

⁴⁶ Cimminnee Holt, “Death and Dying in the Satanic Worldview,” *Journal of Religion and Culture*, 22.1 (2011): 48.

⁴⁷ Gilmore, *Scriptures*, 254.

⁴⁸ Douglas E. Cowan, “Evangelical Christian Countercult Movement,” in *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America: African Diaspora Tradition and Other Innovations*, eds. Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), 160.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Holt, “Death and Dying,” 49.

mothering entity that is “ready to destroy you if crossed.”⁵¹ Magister Nemo (n.d.), in his book *The Fire From Within* (2007), outlines a humorous mobster themed Destruction ritual, “Invocation to Da Don.”⁵² Within this rite, language, dress, and imagery is borrowed from the film noir gangster era; a smartly dressed celebrant invokes the infernal names “John Dillinger! Bugsy Moran! Frank Nitti! Bonnie & Clyde! Ma Barker! Babyface Nelson!” and finally, “Al Capone!” It demonstrates the immense versatility of satanic ritual imagery and materials. Within ritual confines, iconic North American hoodlums are the emblematic power being tapped into. “Bugsy,” not Satan, is heralded, and the participants close their ritual with “Hail to Da Don!”

Nadramia warns that practitioners not get “caught up” on the quality of their ritual tools (suggesting that some unnecessarily seek out special “occult” objects, at exorbitant prices). She states: “What’s important is how important it is to you.”⁵³ She cautions that the objects are just that—objects— as no amount of ritual paraphernalia will help with an insincere working. Do not put so much stock in items that it becomes a hindrance. She counsels: “they’re tools.” Your will is paramount. Material items are necessary to engage in suspension of disbelief, but have no power beyond the singular magicians’ emotional extension.

Material objects mediate religious practice between human subjects and their environments, “including the constructed environments of social life and even the environment of our own bodies.”⁵⁴ That is, these forms of mediation aid us to understand, relate, and create our human condition. We are the subject and the mediation itself; everything communicated to others and ourselves is via the materiality of our senses. Ritual objects are thus polyvalent: words are multisensual, as they are tactile, verbal, and aesthetic all at once;⁵⁵ images are “intertwined” with an experiential body that reacts to their emotive qualities;⁵⁶ sound is intersubjective with its material surroundings.⁵⁷ All denote that specific media have multidimensional properties, as they are vehicles for cultural and personal understanding. To challenge the ostensible dichotomy between theory and practice scholars focus on ritual as a “strategic way of acting.”⁵⁸ That is, that ritual is a thought-action, communicating ways of being in the world through socially constructed symbols and meanings.

Nadramia addresses similar concerns regarding (high) theory and (low) practice: when asked about whether the Church of Satan’s notion of magic was “just going through the motions” – suggesting that the Church of Satan’s magical ideas are sterile (a fairly common accusation within the satanic milieu) – she

⁵¹ Campbell, “Greater Magic.”

⁵² Magister Nemo, *The Fire From Within*, Vol. One. (U.S.A.: CoS Emporium, 2007), 20.

⁵³ Campbell, “Greater Magic.”

⁵⁴ Jeremy Stolow, “Technology,” in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, David Morgan, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 188.

⁵⁵ Brent S. Plate, “Words,” *Material Religion: The Journal of Art, Objects, and Belief*, 7.1 (2011): 158.

⁵⁶ Morgan, “Image,” 97.

⁵⁷ Weiner, “Sound,” 110.

⁵⁸ Catherine Bell, *Ritual theory, Ritual Practice* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

responds with a contestation to the word “just”: expressing the full intent of your will in ritual is never “just” by rote.⁵⁹ The material objects are extensions and reflections of the will housed in the body. By doing, you are, in fact, creating.

LaVey writes: “ALL religions of a spiritual nature are inventions of man. He has created an entire system of gods with nothing more than his carnal brain. Just because he has an ego, and cannot accept it, he has to externalize it into some great spiritual device which he calls ‘God’.”⁶⁰ Satanists recognize that this externalization is a natural tendency, and use it to their advantage. LaVey states, “Inasmuch as ritual magic is dependent upon emotional intensity for success, all manner of emotion producing devices must be employed in its practice.”⁶¹ The objects used within satanic ritual connect with the broad historical threads of magical discourse and popular imagination, but mediated via idiosyncratic particular objects.

Total Environments: A Treatment for Misanthropy

LaVey withdrew from public life in the mid-1970s. Official statements were disseminated from the anonymous Council of Nine, which eased the transfer of authority.⁶² His later writings focus less on formal ritual and more on the concept of creating insular spaces for evocative effects. One of his innovations in that regards is his concept of Total Environments, part of a document titled: “Pentagonal Revisionism: A Five-Point Program” (1988),⁶³ which outlines five pro-active mandates for members of the Church of Satan. For the purposes of this essay, I focus on number five, which reads:

The opportunity for anyone to live within a total environment of his or her choice, with a mandatory adherence to the aesthetic and behavioral standards of the same privately owned, operated and controlled environments as an alternative to homogenized and polyglot ones. The freedom to insularize oneself within a social milieu of personal well-being, an opportunity to feel, see, and hear that which is most aesthetically pleasing, without interference from those who would pollute or detract from that option.⁶⁴

That is, a Total Environment (TE) is a controlled space, possessing aesthetics aligned with the highly idiosyncratic whims of the individual. It is a space designed

⁵⁹ Campbell, “Greater Magic.”

⁶⁰ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 44.

⁶¹ Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), 15.

⁶² Maxwell Davies, “Self-Conscious Routinization and the Post-Charismatic Fate of the Church of Satan from 1997 to the Present,” in *Contemporary Religious Satanism*, ed. Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 77.

⁶³ Anton Szandor LaVey, “Pentagonal Revisionism: A Five-Point Program” (1988), *Church of Satan: The Official Web Site*, Peter H. Gilmore ed., accessed Nov. 6, 2010. <http://www.churchofsatan.com/pentagonal-revisionism.php>

⁶⁴ LaVey, “Pentagonal.”

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to produce a particular *experience*, an experience rooted in nostalgia, stimulated by sensorial pleasure. LaVey suggests different types of Total Environments: romanticized 1950s lifestyle; Wild West frontier town and medieval Castle communities; gay communities, such as a Boy’s Town with measuring posts and a Girl’s Town with tattoo parlours; and a Satan City, with “emphasis on the grotesque and bizarre architecture and landscaping.”⁶⁵ These idealized, constructed places are devised for complete immersion. They transport the individual to different eras and parallel spaces – the experiences are wholly separate from everyday life, much like ritual space.

Total Environments are not simply aesthetic representations of personal desire, but also deliberate architecture meant to stimulate the uncanny. LaVey celebrated the properties of “haunted houses” and their ability to ease people into feeling unnerved.⁶⁶ Beyond warped mirrors, haunted houses can have geometric irregularities invisible to the naked eye, but register discomfort with the brain. LaVey is drawn to these spaces of unease. He writes: “Angles are space-planes that provoke anxiety– that is, those not harmonious with natural visual orientation– will engender aberrant behaviour,” and that the most compelling places were, “where murders and suicides were frequent, uninhabitable but seemingly innocuous areas and buildings, abodes of consistent failure to dwellers or occupants whose lives had previously been tranquil.”⁶⁷ Total Environments can be orchestrated to cause this kind of cerebral disquiet, which enhances the visceral potency; its lasting effect cannot be considered mundane. It is this evocative influence that prompts LaVey’s interest in TE: their power to draw and repel, as they at once titillate and disgust. Much like satanic imagery itself.

In order to fully understand LaVey’s treatise on Total Environments, allow me to unpack the context from which it emerges and the underlying factors. In the mid 1960s, LaVey engaged in public performances, wrote columns and newsletters, and was otherwise actively involved as the prime Church of Satan spokesperson. By the mid-1970s, though, he retreated from public life, and his subsequent writings favoured sequestration from the public and immersion in private retreats. In an interview in 1986, a journalist depicts LaVey’s increasing seclusion as a process of disillusionment; at the height of his popular arc, LaVey cavorted with movie stars, consulted on films, appeared in hundreds of television, radio, and print media, and generally capitalized on his status as an infamous black magician. The success brought unwanted fringe attention:

But the weirdness also began. The church was popular with Hell’s Angels, Nazis and sex-starved men. There were death threats against LaVey, and his daughter was harassed at school. Suddenly, the Satanic circus was no fun anymore. So in the ‘70s, LaVey

⁶⁵ LaVey, *Satan Speaks!* 152-4.

⁶⁶ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 112.

⁶⁷ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 112-3.

went underground, stopped all public ceremonies, recast his church as a secret society– and pushed deeper into his private world of “madness and mystery.”⁶⁸

LaVey’s pre-existing disdain for perceived blind obedience to popular fads and conformist behaviour became pronounced by the increased interest of unstable and dangerous undesirable persons attracted to him and his church.

In LaVey’s definition of TE, he claims that they are an alternative to homogeny – those bland, mass produced, and mundane spaces – which he considers not only unappealing, but a “pollutant.” To LaVey, the collective space is a corruptive space, catering to the lowest common denominator, as it is not only void of personality, but also poisonous to creativity itself. Its generic properties represent an aesthetic “herd conformity.”⁶⁹ LaVey’s nightmare is ordinary environments full of either dull or taxing people, whom LaVey defines as “psychic vampires,” a person that continually demands unreciprocated attention and care.⁷⁰

LaVey’s premise for existence appears to be that humans are quickly-multiplying parasites, whose lives have no special inherent meaning. When elaborating on Total Environments, LaVey even suggests that space exploration will have an added benefit of creating habitable locations to send the dismal, herd-like “locusts” of humanity into “space ghettos,” and thus freeing up earth for creative individualism to thrive.⁷¹ To enter a LaVeyan Total Environment, then, is both a withdrawal from a wearisome, corruptive world (of boring spaces and tedious people), and immersion in a measured construction of an energizing, creative world.

Erotic Crystallization Inertia (ECI) And Artificial Human Companions (AHC)

Two of LaVey’s magical innovations informing his ideas on TE are: early psychological imprints for sexual proclivities, that LaVey called Erotica Crystallization Inertia (ECI); and the development of androids as Artificial Human Companions (AHCs).⁷²

An ECI is the moment that fetishes imprint on the brain, based on early arousal experiences. LaVey contends humans are visually-oriented animals, and as such, a sexual response “establishes standards of visual attractiveness of an inflexible nature.”⁷³ That is, once arousal triggers are set, they remain indefinitely. LaVey

⁶⁸ Walt Harrington, “Anton LaVey– America’s Satanic Master of Devils, Magic, Music and Madness,” *The Washington Post Magazine*, Feb. 23. (1986), *ChurchofSatan.com*, accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.churchofsatan.com/interview-washington-post-magazine.php>

⁶⁹ Anton Szandor LaVey, “Nine Satanic Sins” (1987), *ChurchofSatan.com*, accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.churchofsatan.com/nine-satanic-sins.php>

⁷⁰ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 75.

⁷¹ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 95-6.

⁷² Abrahamsson, “Anton LaVey,” 195.

⁷³ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 72.

linked vitality itself to the moments when people considered themselves their most sexually attractive and active (usually in youth), and that replicating the aesthetics of that time is a source of magical energy.⁷⁴ LaVey likens retirement homes to invigorating Total Environments: recently admitted patients leave a world that has grown alien to them, to be immersed among people with a collective nostalgia for similar aesthetics, music, and films of their past.⁷⁵ The elderly see their experiences reflected in others, reminiscing about youthful vigor. Nostalgia – that is, indulging in one’s Erotic Crystallization Inertia – invigorates by its very stagnant nature: “unchanging environments exist as hubs of longevity.”⁷⁶ Harnessing the rejuvenating properties of Total Environments with Erotic Crystallization Inertia is thus a magical act: it transforms perspective and renders time eternal.

One of LaVey’s affinities is for robotic humanoids, that is, Artificial Human Companions (AHC). His early creations made from mannequin parts and clothes developed into a marked obsession with creating Total Environments. In his infamous Black House in San Francisco,⁷⁷ he created a “Den of Inequity” in the cellar, which was a seedy bar of ill repute, complete with mannequins of an inebriated woman slumping on a stool, garters exposed; a sailor gawking at her; a woman in slightly more prim attire gazes on; a cabbie beside her. A journalist interviewing LaVey in 1986 explains:

The Den of Iniquity is not real– at least not real enough that you can walk in off a foggy street and buy a shot of Ten High. No, Gwen, and Steve, Bonita and Fritz are LaVey’s creations– polyurethane manikins molded with his own hands on his own kitchen floor. Down to the clothing, the jewelry, the posters and the Rock-ola jukebox, the Den of Iniquity is LaVey’s magical warp in time, circa 1944. His basement tavern, he says, is more Satanic than a black mass.⁷⁸

The above last line is noteworthy for LaVey’s consideration of TE and their magical properties. For LaVey, successful magic is always evocative, and immersion in a self-designed TE is more effective than ritualizing with “satanic” accouterments or ostensible “occult” paraphernalia.

LaVey claims that being surrounded by inanimate objects is far from an isolating experience, as he considers Artificial Human Companions blanks slates into which one can inject their ego. He prefers this to the “teeming,

⁷⁴ Abrahamsson, “Anton LaVey,” 192.

⁷⁵ Research shows that Alzheimer’s patients fare better in environments designed to stimulate nostalgic memories; Tim Adams, “Look Back In Joy,” Nov. 9 (2014), accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/09/look-back-in-joy-the-power-of-nostalgia>; Tracy McLaughlin, “Retirement Home Turns Back the Clock for Dementia Patients,” May 17 (2015), accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.torontosun.com/2015/05/17/retirement-home-turns-back-the-clock-for-dementia-patients>.

⁷⁶ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 73.

⁷⁷ An on Victorian home painted black on the outside.

⁷⁸ Harrington, “Anton LaVey.”

huddled masses” of humanity.⁷⁹ Quoting H.L. Mencken (1880-1956), LaVey states, “I reserve the right to be a lonely man,” to illustrate his disdain for most human interaction. He eschewed companionship, as friendship is rarely an equal exchange, “It is only pull, and they do the pulling.”⁸⁰ He instead prefers animals, relics, and mannequins. LaVey’s fascination for mannequins enhances creativity, “by their very stimulation in accordance with my tailored ideals, they provide me with not only entertainment, but food for thought.” An AHC can be moulded according to one’s desires (a most satanic mandate), and manifest as an extension of the will. His Den of Inequity is thus a physical immersion in self-indulgent aesthetic preferences, and a refuge from the world.

In the essay, “A Primer for Fledgling Mithanropologists,” Gilmore writes, “We try to minimize our contact with those gullible denizens whom we call ‘the herd.’ Human life, in and of itself, is *not* considered valuable; it is the worth of *particular* humans that matters to the Satanist.”⁸¹ Artificial Human Companions can conceivably alleviate the lack of suitable company, or even quell sexual desires. It is perhaps not the goal of each Satanist to own an android, however, few would dispute that time spent alone is preferred over ignorant or bland company.

For LaVey, then, a Total Environment straddles the line between reality and hyper reality because of its transformative qualities: it rejuvenates, arouses, and entertains, as it warps cognition, displaces space, and collapses time itself. It should not, however, be dismissed as “artificial.” For LaVey, artificiality itself is a magical tool. A TE is not *merely* a reproduction, it is a vehicle in which to manifest and expand one’s true desires. They are bastions of inspiration, wherein one can access and revel in magical experiences. LaVey writes: “Only when one can fully accept artificiality as a natural and often superior development of intelligent life can one have and hold a powerful magical ability.”⁸² Emotional satisfaction is a creative process in which you “infuse the unreal” with the real.⁸³

The magical properties of artificiality relate to LaVey’s premise for Greater Magic itself: by virtue of the body’s enactment, the invocations uttered, and the emotional response experienced within a rite, Satanists are generating stimuli through psychodrama that corresponds with their innermost desires. They are creating new realities, imprinting the preferred outcome on the psyche, surrounded by materials extended from their ego. A Total Environment based on a nostalgic era has rejuvenating power, as it stimulates vitality and “freezes” time. Within these spaces, the ostensible line between art and artificiality is obliterated. Allow LaVey to elaborate: “Oscar Wilde was astute when he proclaimed his famous reversal, ‘Life follows art.’ He only went halfway though. People imitate a life which is an art form,

⁷⁹ LaVey, *Devil’s*, 95.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 139.

⁸¹ Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 45.

⁸² LaVey, *Devil’s*, 130.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 130.

an artificiality, to begin with. In short, they are imitations of a fabrication. Human redundancies.”⁸⁴ For LaVey, a Total Environment is always magical, and Greater Magic is always performed in a Total Environment, whether under the confines of specific “ritual” or not. The aesthetics of a TE encourages the imagination, where anything and everything is possible. These possibilities are the goal of creating Total Environments, certainly within magical ritual, but also of enhancing life experience overall.

Total Environments: A Theoretical Approach

Within religious studies there is a tendency to frame religious experience as separate from everyday life: data is presented on a binary spiritual/material, sacred/mundane, or heavenly/earth axis. In this paradigm, religious behaviour is always separate from non-religious behaviour.⁸⁵ This type of theoretical approach would limit a study on of the Church of Satan, as it forces the scholar to demarcate what is and is not “religiously” satanic. Rituals, scriptural understandings, the occasional gathering, and the ethical statements (“The Eleven Satanic Rules of Earth,” 1967)⁸⁶ certainly fit within what could be considered religious behaviour. It is not, however, a *neat* fit, as the Church of Satan claims that ritual activity is voluntary. Neither is there scriptural worship; though *The Satanic Bible* is the prime text, its words are not considered of divine (or demonic) inspiration, and the book has no special properties in and of itself (unlike like other holy books, which must be treated with reverence).⁸⁷ Satanists gather for barbecues more than rituals, and official events are rife with booze, burlesque, food, and music. Satanists consider sex, ambition, success, vengeance, and revelry as equally “satanic.”

The satanic worldview is holistic: members of the Church of Satan are expected to accept Satanism (as defined by LaVey) completely or not at all. Picking and choosing which elements to adopt or reject, or altering components to fit an alternative view, is strongly discouraged, and may result in expulsion.⁸⁸ This is complicated by equivocal elements of LaVey’s texts, as members easily interpret ambiguities according to their own interests, resulting in drastically different applications of Satanism. Even behaviours considered mistakes (the so-

⁸⁴ Ibid, 48.

⁸⁵ This (somewhat outdated) binary view of religious life has been challenged in recent scholarship, which instead posits that religious behaviour is enacted in multiple ways in everyday life.

⁸⁶ Anton Szandor LaVey, “Eleven Satanic Rules of Earth” (1967), *ChurchofSatan.com*, accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.churchofsatan.com/eleven-rules-of-earth.php>

⁸⁷ Members of the Church of Satan view *The Satanic Bible* as important, yet mistreatment of the book itself carries no repercussions. Monotheistic religions mandate appropriate methods of disposal, usually by burying (never burning) unwanted copies.

⁸⁸ This is the entire premise for the Church of Satan’s attempt at controlling the definition of religious Satanism. Other individuals and groups in the satanic milieu consider that alternative versions are actually *more* satanic.

called “Satanic Sins”), are viewed as learning opportunities, points to recognize one’s own weaknesses and adjust accordingly. The important factor is that, not only is there no cosmic retribution for these “sins,” but the Church of Satan itself remains neutral about the individual choices of their members. Satanism provides dogma, but it is up to members to apply it, or not.

Considering these factors, I posit that studying the Church of Satan is perhaps best served by using one of LaVey’s own conceptual frameworks– that of Total Environments. That is, examine the worldview of members of the Church of Satan as a Total Environment; creating a realm according to their own desires. Under this schema, everything a Satanist does is by virtue satanic, and thus considered manifesting Satanism both domestically and in the world. Applied Satanism *is* a Total Environment.

Magistra Templi Rex Blanche Barton (1961–)⁸⁹ claims, “Your job as a Satanist is to identify and pursue your own happiness.”⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that one commonly debated topic is the *optional* need for ritualization. The CoS website claims that, while it is not required, they encourage members to approach ritual as a tool for self-improvement and discovery. Nadramia writes: “Magic...works because of YOU. And if you understand and utilize that, then you’ll ultimately evolve your most effective strategies for the use of magic and enrich your life.”⁹¹ Again, we see that, while the CoS has a collective worldview that accords with LaVey’s unambiguous dogma, entrenched within this worldview is a mandate encouraging members to develop and achieve their goals, and that the power for success, however defined, lies with the individual, not the CoS, and certainly not an external divine force.

Beyond ritual space, one obvious example of a distinct satanic Total Environment comes from Priestess Marilyn Mansfield (n.d.), who has over five hundred dolls (including a human-sized doll named “Ellie Stephanie Mansfield”) and refers to her pink and animal print covered home as the “Dollhouse.”⁹² Mansfield’s long-standing affinity for dolls began as a child. As an adult with her own family, she still enjoys bathing and dressing the figures, and taking them out for walks in strollers. She now fabricates and sells her own extremely life-like baby dolls, even donating one to an Alzheimer’s facility. Mansfield reports that one particularly aggressive patient was calmed after holding the doll, and able to visit with his daughter without incident.⁹³ “Holding these dolls is so calming and relaxing– the experience is very absorbing,” Mansfield continues, “When your own kids are babies, it’s a special time. Having a reborn doll is like having that all

⁸⁹ Barton was LaVey’s companion at the time of his death.

⁹⁰ Blanche Barton, “LaVey’s Five Point Plan Revisited,” *The Cloven Hoof* #133 (2013), accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.churchofsatan.com/five-point-plan-revisited.php>.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² The Doctors, “Woman Owns Hundreds of Dolls,” Nov. 4 (2014), *CBS*, accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.thedoctorstv.com/videos/woman-owns-hundreds-of-dolls#.VF10sDeawuU.facebook>

⁹³ *Ibid.*

of the time.”⁹⁴ For Mansfield, her chosen TE is the Dollhouse, but she emphasizes the *effect* of her TE, the stress-relieving aspect of caressing the life-like baby dolls. Again, we see that the TE is meant to provoke a particular experience that alters one’s perception and outlook– in Mansfield’s case, an often-therapeutic practice. Her dolls are Artificial Human Companions, which she surrounds herself with in her Total Environment Dollhouse, all of which she uses as a magical tool for transformative effect.

Members express their ideal Total Environment in a variety of ways.⁹⁵ A common theme is artistic and creative expression: art studios, musical performances, and sewing rooms all function as cathartic spaces. The aesthetics of popular culture also feature, with themes such as technoire/retro-futurism, 70s psychedelic music, cozy libraries, seedy bars, the Addams Family, Art Deco, Viking village, and television shows Star Trek and Mad Men. One member heralds Gilmore and Nadramia’s home in upstate New York as the ideal Total Environment, which is a colourfully painted old Victorian, with esoteric décor throughout, and a Tiki bar. Other members consider physical activity as cathartic Total Environments: martial arts, hiking, camping, and experiencing the splendour of nature heightens emotions and pushes the body to its limits just like a “magical working.”

Satanists consider their entire lives as “magical” in the sense that they actively seek to achieve their goals via various means in everyday life. Recall LaVey’s mandate that Total Environments insulate from the corruptive complacency of society. One’s “lair” or domestic place of residence is a sanctuary, an extension of the self. The explicit misanthropy of the need for Total Environments is an unapologetic judgment of humanity, which ultimately stems from a disappointment in people. The model Satanist, sensitive to the world, creates a bubble to indulge in their true selves, their individual cosmos.

Spreading even beyond the microcosmic world of the individual Satanists, there are social implications for the “Age of Fire,” as LaVey named the current time after the founding of the CoS in 1966.⁹⁶ LaVey’s refocus on changes “in accordance with one’s will,” to magical acts *outside* the ritual chamber were broader in nature, reflecting political and social concerns, advocating for: the separation of church and state and strict taxation of all churches; social stratification and meritocracies; stricter punishments for crimes (*lex talionis*); as well as openly encouraging advancements for Artificial Human Companions and Total Environments.⁹⁷ Despite its claims to being apolitical, the Church of Satan adheres to LaVey’s Pentagonal Revisionism and its clear socio-political agenda.

⁹⁴ The Daily Mail, “A demon toddler in a black crib was always my fantasy,” July 17 (2012), accessed August 13, 2015. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2174845/Marilyn-Mansfield-The-woman-500-life-like-horror-dolls-treats-like-real-babies.html#ixzz3ii7qpzEX>.

⁹⁵ The data in this section is taken from a survey circulated to members of the Church of Satan as part of my (as yet unpublished) PhD dissertation. All ethics requirements for informant participation have been met.

⁹⁶ LaVey, *Bible*, 46.

⁹⁷ LaVey, “Pentagonal.”

It is not, however, attached to specific parties or ideologies, and allows members to affiliate as they see fit in accordance with their private politics. In this way, it is not unlikely for two members to have drastically opposite political opinions, as each advocate for a society that directly affect their lives (if at all). Both are equally considered “satanic.” Thus, even if the desires and goals of individual Satanists conflict, the common thread is their application of satanic principle: identify and pursue your objectives, extend your will into the world. The “ideal” satanic society is not one that conforms to the lowest common denominator, but one that allows for individual freedoms without *interference* from the lowest common denominator.

Conclusion

“Satanists are born, not made.”

– Anton Szandor LaVey (Occultist, 1930-1997 C.E.)⁹⁸

“Men are made, not born, Christians.”

– Tertullian (Christian Apologist, ca. 160-235 C.E.)⁹⁹

When Anton Szandor LaVey makes his declarative statement that, “Satanists are born, not made,” he is responding to two discourses: it is a challenge to Christian paradigms as well as a proclamation for autonomy. First, it is a direct inversion of early Christian theologian Tertullian’s claim that Christians “are made, not born.” Tertullian addresses that one has to learn how to act as a Christian in the world– Christianity is something that is taught, understood, assumed, and then enacted. LaVey, by inverting this proclamation, responds with an exaltation of the sovereign self– drastic changes are not required to be a Satanist. What you are, how you behave, your natural tendencies and predispositions, are all that is needed to live satanically in the world. You do not have to *learn* to be a Satanist: you were born that way. Despite LaVey’s claim that Satanism resonates with one’s pre-existing dispositions, he also distinguishes that Satanism is natural to only a select few. “We are looking for a few outstanding individuals,” claims the Church of Satan website,¹⁰⁰ an “alien elite” of outsiders, iconoclasts, and radicals, that resonate with the symbol of the original rebel-hero, Satan.

As members of the Church of Satan consider themselves naturally inclined to satanic ideas and practices, they view the entirety of their lives as Satanism in

⁹⁸ Blanche Barton, *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Unauthorized Biography of Anton LaVey* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1992), 15.

⁹⁹ Tertullian, *Apologeticus xviii* (197 C.E.), accessed September 19, 2017. http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-05.htm#P334_131093.

¹⁰⁰ An older version of the Church of Satan’s welcome page had this phrase, though the site has since been redesigned. See Wayback Machine, March 15, 2007, accessed September 19, 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070315112052/http://churchofsatan.com:80>

action; there is no distinction between theory and practice, ideal and reality, art and artificiality, satanic and *un-satanic*. Satanism is considered a lived religion, where everyday life is a new opportunity to achieve their goals, maximize potential, and enjoy life’s pleasures. The Church of Satan is born within and responds to both secular and religious discourses in Western culture, as it self-identifies as religious, yet also critiques traditional religious values and institutions. Their distinctive approach to religious identity reflects the shifting demands of contemporary society— at once echoing modern discourses, yet interpreting them in a particular manner.

Though Satanists may be “born, not made,” Satanism itself is constructed from the inside out: the ideal Satanist proactively creates their own world, and has their desires mirrored and manifest in the sensorial experience. It is a mandate for building a physical as well as social ecosystem: the chosen aesthetics are simply an extension of one’s worldview. One of the ways to achieve this is to emphasize creating a total environment of their choosing: it is a reflection of what is considered their “true nature,” and this nature, by default is considered “satanic.” Satanism claims that life in and of itself is meaningless, but it rejects nihilism as for the boring and uncreative. Hence, Satanists may be born, but *meaning* is certainly made.

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