

## ***You and I: Lady GaGa's Performative Disidentification of Social Normalcy***

**Jaime Guzmán**

*The purpose of this paper is to analyze Lady GaGa's image, music, and "spectacle" as it is being projected to the media through public screens. I argue that in our age of information overload, GaGa presents a counter-hegemonic discourse of Otherness in order to combat the normalcy of the language present in our society and create an alterreality of disidentification for social monsters. Lady GaGa is argued to be the ideal body of difference and in order to rhetorically analyze her actions the concepts of the power of bodies and performativity by Judith Butler are used. Lady GaGa's performance(s) are viewed through the public screen (as described by Kevin Michael DeLuca & Jennifer Peeples) and are analyzed through Kenneth Burke's concepts of terministic screens and identification along with José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification. The spectacle that is Lady GaGa has helped create a place for counter-hegemonic discourse in the hegemonic sphere of popular (pop) culture. Her performance(s) opens up a platform or "stage" to "act-out" and take liberty in participating in a utopian performance of resistance. Her spectacular image in concerts, music videos, interviews, fashion attire, and political activism have been strategically used to present a message to the public through the public screen and also have a following of social monsters that they themselves perpetuate through performativity of resistance. This paper concludes with the realization that GaGa talks about the "Other" and also explains how and why the Other is to be discussed. The significance of these findings points to pop culture as a possible sight of resistance; they combat the notions that mass media is an ineffective form of communication to mobilize a people and create a movement of change.*

*"I want to break free,  
I want to break free,  
I want to break free from your lies  
You're so self satisfied I don't need you;*

*I've got to break free.*

*God knows, God knows I want to break free."* (Deacon, 1984, p. 6)

Stadiums around the world play the role of ideal sites for Lady GaGa to perform in front of a multitude of fans<sup>1</sup> (monsters) who have paid admission and are now standing in anticipation of the music, the words, the lights, the pyrotechnics – the “spectacle” of the “public screen”<sup>2</sup> to begin. These monsters (fans) have come out of their normative homes, dressed not to “fit in” but to participate. These bodies are not “fans” by nature, no body was born into a social relation; every body has gone through the process of interpellation. Interpellation can be associated with “hailing” or being called upon by others. When someone is interpellated, they are brought into social relations by language. In essence, when hailed the body is placed in a position within the social ideology of the time. Essentially, “any language... is part of social relations and that in communicating with someone we are reproducing social relationships” (Fiske, 1992, p. 284). These bodies are thus hailed as fans through the performative discourse that Lady GaGa presents. One interpellation that is always inherently alive in society is the interpellation of Otherness.

Social, hegemonic, heteronormative structures label a body with the term Other when that body cannot be defined under the umbrella of the hegemonic, heteronormative structures that dominate social order – in this case these queer bodies are labeled as such in order to identify the social amalgamations of gender/sexuality roles/expectations/restrictions. This label is the “name calling” of society and although name calling can, for most of the time, be traced back to past memories of playground mockery and taunts by school bullies, Judith Butler believes that name calling does not always have to be bad. “Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language” (J. Butler, 1997, p. 2). The subject that is in a sense created through interpellation comes to reside within the body and only that particular body can “produce an unexpected and enabling response” to the

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<sup>1</sup> Since her rise to fame, Lady GaGa has used the term *little monsters* to refer to her fans and followers. In this paper, I will address this group of people by using the terms “fans,” “monsters,” and “little monsters” interchangeably. Furthermore, in this paper I want to point out that the reason why these fans are labeled “monsters” is due to their social positionality in the margins. Their discourse and identity are a strict violation of heteronormative laws that prescribe their bodies as socially stigmatized, as belonging to the realm of the monstrosity, the unholy being that threatens the actions of the normal everyday life.

<sup>2</sup> This term is used as defined by DeLuca and Peeples (2002).

hailer (p. 2).<sup>3</sup> One such response can be found in the discursive articulations that are projected through the body of Lady GaGa. Although she can be associated with the dominant hegemonic, heteronormative culture in society, a White and predominantly Heterosexual female, she also uses her body as a means to propel and instill counter-narratives that undermine the choking grip that the dominant heteronormative ideologies have on the bodies under its power.

The focus of this paper is the way in which subaltern disidentities (identities that cannot be associated with the dominant hegemonic identity of society) use the public screen as a means to present their message to the public. However, it should be noted that DeLuca and Peebles claim that the public screen create a “distraction” that is “a necessary form of perception when immersed in the technologically induced torrent of images and information that constitutes public discourse...” (DeLuca & Peebles, 2002, p. 135). Furthermore, distraction is making “real life...indistinguishable from the movies...the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film...they are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, pp. 126 – 127). Labeled the eccentric female pop star of our time, GaGa is the body that holds the performances of “difference.” I argue that in our age of information overload,<sup>4</sup> GaGa presents a counter-hegemonic discourse of Otherness in order to combat the normalcy of the language present in our society and create an alterreality of *disidentification* for social ‘Monsters.’

This essay is structured as follows: first, I advance an argument for why a focus on the performance(s) of Lady GaGa is relevant in the age of public screens. Second, I offer a discussion of the power of bodies in performance. Third, I present a discussion on identification and *disidentification*. Fourth, Lady GaGa and her performance(s) will be analyzed. Fifth and finally, I present some implications for the study of performance, sex/gender identity, rhetoric, and cultural studies.

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<sup>3</sup> See Mowry (2011). I ran across this video during the writing process of this paper. Although through the process of interpellation this individual is mocked and deemed worthless to society, this body is now in the process of presenting a response to the social relationship he was placed in by others.

<sup>4</sup> The term “information overload” might sound like a very liberating concept; however, this overload of information is produced by the dominant culture of society. It is a term that I associate with Public Screens and the subordination of the projection of all that information.

### The Public GaGa-esque Screened Spectacle

*"Here in my place and time, and here in my own skin, I can finally begin. Let the century pass me by, standing under the night sky, tomorrow means nothing."* (W. Butler, 2010, p. 12)

Lady GaGa is the ideal body of "difference" and so her image needs to be closely analyzed when it is projected to the public. It cannot be denied that people will either appreciate GaGa's musical artistry or hate her nonmusical talent.<sup>5</sup> Critics claim that GaGa's artistic strategy is "to reflect the light directed at her in many different directions simultaneously, creating a glittering and multifaceted display" (2010 Idiot's Box Awards, 2011). Critiques like these want to take a stab at their disapproval of GaGa, but on the contrary, these critiques highlight the reason why she needs to be analyzed, especially in the age of the public screen. DeLuca and Peebles (2002) claim that "the most important, public discussions take place via 'screens' – televisions, computer, and the front page of newspapers" (p. 131). Furthermore, the public screens are ideal for the "spectacle," or the flash of visuals and entertainment, in order to form public opinion through the performance of image events (p. 134). Going further than this definition, public screens are only important to analyze when there is a viewer consumption of the discourse. Therefore, public screens are not only spectacles that create public opinion but also framed social moments of public viewing/participation and viewership consumption.

As a woman in pop culture with power, GaGa uses the attention she gets for being an artist in order to point out the issues in society that need to be addressed. Power in pop culture can be identified by three subcategories: exposure, followings, and economic value. There are four reasons why GaGa is ideal for a critical performative analysis: her level of exposure, her role as an activist, the music she creates, and the label of being an "eccentric" artist.

GaGa is in a very peculiar position in society, because not only is she an artist that gets to create a living in a very artistic fashion, she is also a highly exposed superstar. The media is watching her every move and so the public is privy to her life and her actions. Furthermore, Forbes Magazine published their "Top 100 Celebrities List" in which Lady GaGa received the number one spot. It wasn't just the fact that GaGa had earned a lot of money (a whopping \$90 million on her "Monster" tour alone), she also dominated on social media and according to Forbes Magazine, celebrities on their list "rose to the top by

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<sup>5</sup> I believe that one of the reasons why there is always a clash of musical taste is because of the mentality of "high" and "low" culture.

garnering influence” (Pomerantz, 2011, para. 1). GaGa has over 32 million fans on FaceBook and Twitter. She also has a staggering 16, 634, 588 followers (GaGa, 2011e), which is six million more followers since May 2011.<sup>6</sup> Her followers’ use of social media and the internet have also made GaGa’s videos the most watched videos on the Internet, as well as “1 million digital downloads of her...single ‘Born This Way’ in only five days” (Pomerantz, 2011, para. 2). Her recently released music video also received massive viewership. As GaGa (2011e) tweeted, “Marry The Night” received “more than 5 million views in less than 48 hrs” (GaGa, 2011e). In fact, pick any GaGa music video and when it comes to viewership GaGa can deliver unlike any other artist. Yet, it is also important to listen to what these songs represent.

Lady GaGa’s music is placed as a stage for activism and resistance and open to counter-narration. Lyrics like, “I’m beautiful in my way cuz God makes no mistakes, I’m on the right track baby I was born this way!” (GaGa, 2011b) and “I don’t speak your, I don’t speak your language, Oh no. I don’t speak your, I won’t speak your Jesus Cristo” (GaGa, 2011a) directly target social counter-narratives that identify bodies that are labeled social Monsters, or bodies GaGa refers to as The Little Monsters. Furthermore, Lady GaGa uses her musical platform to project her activism against social constructions that hinder Others from their expression. There are two specific examples of such activism that are relevant to discuss, her stance on gay rights in America and her statements about laws that try to define a body’s legality.

GaGa was a guest speaker at the Equality March Rally in 2009 and in that speech she declared, “Obama I know that you are listening. ARE YOU LISTENING? We will continue to push you and your administration to make your words of promise into a reality” (GaGa, 2009b, 1:59). Further, she brings her argument about “equality” back to her field of music, as she declares, “As a woman in pop music I refuse to accept any misogynistic and homophobic behavior in music, lyrics, or actions in the music industry” (GaGa, 2009b, 1:59). Along with being a guest speaker at rallies she also takes time during her concert to present her position on restrictive laws: “I want you to reject any person...any law that has ever made you feel like you don’t belong” (GaGa, 2010b, 0:04). Throughout her musical career, GaGa has been labeled “eccentric” and I believe that this label is vital to analyze in the justification for this paper.

GaGa is an “eccentric” artist, which is essential in confronting hegemonic, heteronormative social values. In our daily activities, we are bombarded with

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<sup>6</sup> When the Top 100 Celebrities List was published, GaGa had “10 million followers” (Pomerantz, 2011, para 2).

hegemonic, heteronormative principles and values. Stuart Hall (1977) defines hegemony as the dominant social ideology that, “sets the limits – mental and structural – within which subordinate classes ‘live’ and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them” (qtd. in Lull, 2000, p. 50). In essence, since we are born into a system that values only the lifestyle that reiterate the principles of heteronormativity, we are at times exposed to performances that exist beyond the borders of this normalcy mindset. When performances cannot be identified within this socially constructed umbrella, society calls the perform/ance/er “eccentric,” unconventional, or strange. This label, tries to push these performances away from critical analysis, yet these labels highlight the performance(s) that are vital for critical discussion that can have vital implications about social knowledge.

When talking about the way that GaGa combats the hegemonic, heteronormative ideology of society, it is necessary to focus the discussion on how she performs this *disidentification* with the restrictive structure. Thus, after the discussion of theories, the analysis of GaGa’s performance(s) will focus on the HBO television network special documenting the complete Monster Ball concert in Madison Square Garden, New York, an incorporation of multiple videos found on YouTube from the fans’ perspective during shows and/or videos that show GaGa speaking outside of her concert shows, GaGa’s music videos (“Marry The Night,” “Born This Way,” “Alejandro,” and “You & I”), and address the fashion statements GaGa makes at public events. These visual representations are GaGa’s way of bringing the media’s attention to the lives and struggles of the disenfranchised. In the context of sex/gender, there is a focus/acclimation for heterosexual values: for example, boys equate to the color blue, and girls equate to pink. However, what GaGa does through her music, appearances, and visual representations is that she tries to make people *disidentify* with the normative—to create a shift in discourse “away from the grand perspective...[to make a] shift in attention that can be, in some ways, resistant to master narratives, master plans, and events of mastery” (Schneider, 2006, p. 28), and focus on the repressed values, the identities that don’t fit the normalcy of society—the rainbow prism of Otherness.

### **The Language Divide – Identification and the “Utopian” *Disidentification***

*“One constructs his notion of the universe...[and in the process] he singles out certain functions or relationships as either friendly or unfriendly...[and label them with names.] These names shape our relations with our fellows.”* (Burke, 1984, pp. 3-4)

Inherent in the language we use to present our thoughts and messages is a relational division. Our language helps us understand the world around us and more importantly who we “are.” By identifying as this we identify as not-that. Kenneth Burke (1966) states that humans must use terms (terministic screens) to “embody choices between the principle of continuity and the principle of discontinuity” (p. 50). As the language divides and separates people through terms, it is clear that many people will be disenfranchised—robbed of agency that is given to some but not all. Burke (1953) states that “experience” is born from “a relationship between an organism and its environment” (p. 150). So, the experience of the people that live within the marginality of social life are hushed, ignored, shadowed, and labeled void or ill-mannered.

However, with this life on the margins of society comes the *disidentification* of the disenfranchised. Muñoz (1999) defines *disidentification* as a “mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it...this ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within” (p. 11). This *disidentification* modality can be viewed in GaGa’s lyrical and visual representation of her song “Marry the Night.” In the title itself, there is a sense of identification and *disidentification* with the Other. Burke (1966) claims that humans fear the “darkness,” the opposition to “light”—night (p. 6). In the video, GaGa is seen transforming into this other persona, a body that embraces the “night” or discourse of the disenfranchised. J. Butler (1993) claims that “although the political discourses that mobilize identity categorizes tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of *disidentification* is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestations” (Butler, p. 4). Butler echoes Schneider’s statement about shifting focus from the master narrative when she talks about the persistence of *disidentification* as performance as critical. Further, in the music video “Alejandro,” GaGa presents the performance of shifting the discourse away from the master narrative of heterosexual ideologies. This video presents the bodies of homosexual men in the military. These men, wearing fishnet stockings and erotically dancing with other men, present the performance of Others that cannot be represented under the heteronormative values of society.

Della Pollock (2006) presents two components of *disidentification*: “differentiation, or the delineation of identity boundaries, and misrecognition, or the dialectics of identity play and replay” (p. 91). She goes on to define differentiation as “the familiar becoming strange, here...tuned to the strangeness of sudden familiarity” and misrecognition as “seeing one’s self in a

kind of funhouse mirror—with painful clarity and/or pleasurable curiosity” (pp. 91-92). Therefore, *disidentification* is a lens from which a disenfranchised body views his/her-queer self in the context of heteronormativity—the not-recognition and the not-not-recognition of self. There can never be a society with no *disidentification*. Our language is constructed to accept some while rejecting others, and *disidentification* comes from the rejections, since “A well-rounded frame of acceptance involves constant discrimination” (Burke, 1984, p. 33). It is important to view these rejected performances of *disidentification* because they highlight where society draws the line of tolerance and conformity.

Muñoz continues on to explain that *disidentification* is “the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other culture field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such representational hierarchy” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 25). In this sense, it is ideal to focus on the counter-hegemonic performances that Lady GaGa presents while under the spotlight of mass media (pop culture). The fact that the disempowered bodies in society are the bodies that perform the decoding of cultural fields in a hierarchal society connects the idea of *disidentification* to Muñoz’s conceptions of the utopian performative.

### **The Performative Bodies in Performance and the Power of Performativity**

*“The experience now made into expression is presented in the world; it occupies time, space, and public reality. Experience made into expression brings forth reader, observer, listener, village, community, and audience.”* (Madison, 2005, p. 151)

Two concepts that are relevant to place side by side are the powers of bodies, in this case the bodies of the disempowered and marginalized, and the power of performance, because bodies are the organisms that create performance—through the bodies, performance is birthed and in a sense the body can only be lived through performance. Muñoz (2006) defines the utopian performative as “a manifestation of a ‘doing’ that is in the horizon, a mode of possibility” (p. 10). Utopian performativity “is imbued with a sense of potentiality” (p. 10).<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> “Potentiality” echoes the ideology that is prevalent in the concept of the “Carnival.” Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) claims that the carnival “offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man and of human relations; [the Carnival] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year” (p. 6). The carnival, essentially, created a stage for these disenfranchised bodies to frolic and express/feel/live their *queer* performance as their bodies articulate it.



utopian performance gives birth to possibilities of representation. Muñoz echoes and extends the statements of Mikhail Bakhtin when he states that “utopia is an ideal, something that should mobilize us, push us forward...it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema” (p. 9). When Muñoz speaks of “utopia” he doesn’t mean the concept of a perfect society in which nothing is flawed, because if it were defined as such Muñoz would be relating to a hegemonic principle. The utopian performative exists in the realm of the concert Lady GaGa staged to promote her album *The Fame Monster*. The concert was called “The Monster Ball” and it was a way for fans to dress up, act out, and be liberated from the shackles of normalcy. Lady GaGa declares, “the Monster Ball will set you free!” (GaGa, 2011c). This allows the monsters to become “spectActors”<sup>8</sup> and live (at least for a moment) in a realm of acceptance.

Muñoz associates the utopia as the place where hegemonic structures have no existence, and all citizens can frolic and enjoy empowerment at an equal level with everyone else; an ideal that replaces the thou shalt not’s with the all-encompassing shalt. As Muñoz (2006) states, “it is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a then and a there that could be and indeed should be” (p. 9). GaGa is an advocate for a utopia to exist in the status quo; she claims, “Lets remind the world that the zeitgeist continues to beckon for equality+change. The relevancy of freedom, the ying yang of hatred+love” (GaGa, 2012). In association with this stage of a utopian concept of equality is the performance of those equalities and identities that are muffled or trampled when in contact with the hegemonic, heteronormative values of society.

The utopian performative begins to address the triad at the center of this discussion: performance (an action with meaning), performative (a ‘doing’ of something not just descriptive but ‘doing’), and performativity (the meaning derived from the repetition of action). It is important to view these three key points of analysis with three conceptions of performance as being critical: reflective (all performances involve a recalling, a remembering and telling of past experiences), reflexive (all performances involve some sort of seeing the self), and refractive (presenting some form of argumentation). It is important to outline what theorists have to say about these three components in order to understand the role the disenfranchised body plays when interacting in one of these three ways.

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<sup>8</sup> This term is used as defined by Boal (1979).

But first, why focus our attention to the sexualized body? Butler presents her argument regarding focus on the sexualized body in her book, *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), claiming that

The category of "sex" is, from the start, normative, it is what Foucault has called a "regulatory ideal." In this sense, then, "sex" not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that I, whose regulatory forces is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus "sex" is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. (J. Butler, 1993, p. 1)

Since social convention views "sex" as the "regulatory practice" that creates the "bodies it governs," it is vital that the attention on performance focus on these bodies labeled with "functions as a norm" or lack thereof.

On performance Elin Diamond (1996) claims that "performance is always a doing and a thing done...performance describes embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self)...it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a preexisting discursive field" (p. 1). GaGa starts her music video for "Marry the Night" with a narrative about the flux of the past and the realities of memories. She claims,

When I look back on my life, its not that I don't want to see things exactly as they happened, its just that I prefer to remember them in an artistic way. ...memories are not recycled like atoms and particles in quantum physics they can be lost forever. It's like my past is an unfinished painting and as the artist of that painting, I must fill in all the ugly holes and make it beautiful again. Its not that I've been dishonest, its just that I loathe reality." (GaGa, 2011d)

In her video, she presents her actions that lead to a record label deal. At first, she tries to perform what others are performing. This can be seen through her ballet performance. However, when she begins to concoct her persona "Lady GaGa," she begins the act of "doing" something. A different "doing" has already been "done" by the marginalized—the monsters.

As alluded to in the discussion of the utopian performative, J. Butler (1993) claims that an act is performative "inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and

contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification" (Butler, 1993, p. 30). D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (2006) reiterate the term and claim that "performativity is the interconnected triad of identity, experience and social relations—encompassing the admixture of class, race, sex, geography, religion, and so forth" (p. xix). The performativity of Lady GaGa can be viewed in the visually artistic imagery of her video "You and I." In this video, there is a one-second frame shot of GaGa's heels and they are damaging her ankle. The heel can be symbolic for the heteronormative, hegemonic social structures that impose a certain image for women. This image and/or image restriction ails GaGa's physical health.

Performativity can be defined as a "stylized repetition of acts" which, according to a Derridean explanation, "[is] always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms...[the] act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene" (Diamond, 1996, pp. 4-6). Thus, it can be stated that this repetition of acts can in a sense be seen as citations or rather citationality (Butler, 1993, pp. 12-13). Since performativity is the rearticulation of the same reiteration of the same performance it can be stated that the power of agency can only be attained through the repetition of the performance—performativity is anything but an accident when used as a critical mode of performance. "Accidents, it seems, don't happen twice, are not subject to repetition. Strange, in fact, how a second time renders a first time purposeful, as if it were the second that came first, or as if the second orchestrated the first from a past that has not yet occurred" (Schneider, 2006, p. 22). Lady GaGa is not the first public figure in pop culture that has paved their career on performative *disidentification*. However, GaGa is a current figure that is performing the performativity of *disidentification*. It not only presents an alterreality (another way of living) for current monsters lost in the hegemonic, heteronormative lifestyles of society. GaGa also rearticulates the past articulations of counter-hegemonic discourses and once again opens the stage for the performativity of the social monsters to represent their bodies, their performance, and their socially shunned identities.

Kristen Langellier (1999) justifies the study of performativity (the specific reiterating the narrative of the whole) when she declares,

In performativity, narrator and listener(s) are themselves constituted ('I will tell you a story'), as is experience ('a story about what happened to me'). Identity and experience are symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded...[studying performativity as in performance] is especially crucial to those

communities left out of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense. (Langellier, 1999, p. 129).

### **Mother Monster and The Kingdom of the Monsters**

*"After all, there is no such thing as experience outside of embodiment in signs. It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around—expression organizes experience. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction."* (Conquergood, 1986, p. 85)

Experiences need to be expressed; as a body there is a need to perform self and thus perform one's narrative/story/history. Through her performance, GaGa ripples the normalcy setting of society to create her queerness stage of resistance. This stage is something that the normalcy of society wants removed as Muñoz (2006) states that society labels the act of queerness as a "stage" or "a developmental hiccup, a moment of misalignment that will hopefully correct itself" (p. 10). Even when GaGa performs a spectacularized rendition of her struggle to succeed in the music industry, she creates a ripple in the normalcy of conformity of telling a history. In the concert, GaGa takes a moment to announce the purpose of the event when she claims, "I created it so that my fans can have a place to go, a place where all the 'freaks' are outside and I locked the fucking doors" (GaGa, 2011c). In this sense, GaGa alludes to the "stage" that Muñoz is talking about. The amalgamations of sex/gender roles beyond the scope of normalcy are labeled as a "stage," something that teens will "move-out-of;" however, this "stage" becomes a lifestyle and on this literal stage of a concert, these bodies occupy a "space" and make it a "place" of empowerment, resistance, and self-actualization.

In the context of performative spectacles, the key to garner attention and thus exposure is to present the "perfect" show: "the more dramatic you can make it, the more controversial it is, the more publicity you will get...The drama translates into exposure. Then you tie the message into that exposure and fire it into the brains of millions of people in the process" (GaGa, qtd. in Scarce, 1990, p. 104). In this sense, GaGa creates a stage of queerness that is governed and ruled by the bodies defined as queer or in this case "monster." Select any video or appearance and the fact that GaGa is performing on a stage of spectacle is not too difficult to find. In fact, before her release of her single "Born This Way" (2011b), GaGa presented a spectacle of "difference." At the 2011 Grammy Award Ceremony, she was in a cocoon while six men carried her along the red carpet. This caused a spectacle; everyone was curious to find out what her

performance would be like. Through that performative spectacle she was able to deliver her message found within the text of the song. Further, in her music video of the same song, her body is digitally and cosmetically altered to seem “monster” like. Her face is altered with bumps and her body is riddled with horn-esque shapes beneath her skin that try to defy what a human body should look like. She literally is “different” and through her difference she is then able to project her message to the millions of fans and audience members.

Victor Turner (1982) states that social performances are “cultural performances. Social performances are the ordinary day-by-day interactions of individuals and the consequences of these interactions as they move through social life” (Turner, 1982, pp. 32-33). In order to perform a culture, and that is exactly what GaGa is doing when she creates an image all her own and the narrative of the disenfranchised, it can be evident that the performance needs to meet certain criteria to be able to project the argument of the act. Anthropologist Milton Singer (1959) defines the term “cultural performance” as a performance that encompasses a “limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion” (p. xiii). GaGa exemplifies this “cultural performance” when she is a keynote speaker at a gay rights rally in Washington, D.C. Towards the end of her speech she states, “we are putting more than pressure on this grass. Today, this grass is ours!” (GaGa, 2009b, 2:35). In this statement she appropriates the lawns of Washington, D.C. to the cause of gay rights. Her performances exist in a moment of time, (re)defining the space into a place of discussion and resistance. On that grass, GaGa presents the “cultural performance” of counter-hegemonic, heteronormative discourse.

In her video “Born This Way,” GaGa (2011b) performs a monologue in which she thinks up an alternative world of acceptance, “the beginning of the new race: a race within the race of humanity, a race which bears no prejudice, no judgment but boundless freedom.” By performing the queerness of monsters she is practicing this act of performing an Other’s story—the story that feels foreign in her own heterosexual, white-Anglo, female body yet feels somewhat familiar in a sense to her own past histories of rejection, neglect, and feelings of being “unfit” in the eyes of the “normal.”<sup>9</sup>

When in the spotlight, GaGa performs the Monster narratives of Others, people she can understand but cannot associate with—the deviants, the illegal

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<sup>9</sup> In this sense, I am also taking on this task of performing the queerness of an Other’s body when writing this paper, by presenting the performance of a female and also by analyzing a “her” performance through a “his” lens.

bodies, the homosexuals, the Others. However, her performance of Otherness is not in vain, for she presents an understanding of tolerance and acceptance; something that the social constructs of hegemonic heteronormativity cannot seem to find a way to do. In this sense, “the ‘I’ [GaGa] who becomes “you” [monster], who is “not-not-me,” trembles at the shimmering horizon of all that “I” don’t know about “you”; the “I” I become in telling your story is one who doesn’t and can’t possibly—in any kind of full or total sense—know you, who learns the limits of representation—and begins to enjoy and to remember the selves that emerge within those limits nonetheless or maybe “so much more” (Pollock, 2006, p. 93). This is exactly what GaGa performs in her video “Alejandro.” As she is first typecast as an observer/spectator, she sees the gay men interact from afar. Yet, she then begins to interact with the men and although she doesn’t fit in with the culture, she has a better understanding of the differences and similarities between her and the men.

Lady GaGa’s performance of difference and its reiteration, when taken within the multitude of disenfranchised monster bodies, all relate to the concept/power of hope, which Muñoz (2006) claims “is the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence” (p. 10). As Miranda Joseph claims, “performance is the kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses and that the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging” (qtd. in Muñoz, 2006, p. 10). GaGa offers an invitation for the monsters to play participatory roles in the counter-hegemonic discourse of Otherness. (And, in all seriousness, the counter-hegemonic discourse of Otherness has existed in the communities of the marginal before Lady GaGa came around; however, GaGa is vital to this performance because she is the image in which this message can be presented through the pop culture public screen.) Using a concert stage to “act out” against society or figuratively taking to the streets to perform and dance an identity, GaGa does not “do” it alone.

#### **Paws Up, “We’re all born Superstars!”**

*“The best performances don’t disappear, but instead linger in our memory, haunt our present, and illuminate our future.” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 13)*

Have you ever been at a concert? The pulsating lights beating to the sounds of the music emitting from the speakers allocated all over the stage; their trance, fixating the masses into a dance of acculturation (union between the self and

the community of the people within the borders of the concert). Towards the end of the show, the artists give their final encore and with that the lights cease to give us any light, the pyrotechnics end their sparkle, the speakers stand dark and ominous in the silence of the stage, but for a moment after everything has stopped our minds still see the lingering image of the show that once “is” and now “was.” Lady GaGa has created and continues to present the performance of Otherness through the action of her body. She propels her image to the masses, watching her every move, and while every body is privy to her actions, GaGa also does something else—she exposes herself to us. Unlike other artists, GaGa bares her discourse to her audience—figuratively and literally. But even in the literal sense, there is a sense of performance to her exposure on music videos. There are no gimmicks to her spectacle or her appearance(s); they are mere tools in her arsenal that are used to attract attention.

bell hooks (1990) claims, “I am waiting for them to stop talking about the ‘Other,’ to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak” (qtd. in Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 2002, p. 241). This is exactly what GaGa does; she not only speaks about the Other, she shows the public how to speak against heteronormative, hegemonic structures and why to speak about these issues through discourse within the parameters of “the show” and out in the lawns of the nation’s capital city. In an interview, a Norwegian reporter asked GaGa if her sexuality distracted her from her music, to which GaGa replied,

if I was a guy, and I was sitting here with a cigarette in my hand, grabbing my crotch talking about how I make music because I like fast cars and fucking girls, you’d call me a rock-star. But when I do it in my music and in my videos, because I am a female, because I make pop music, you are judgmental and you say that it is distracting. I’m just a rock-star...you asked me if my music is distracted by my sexuality, its not. (GaGa, 2009a)

As a strong female pop icon, GaGa is not afraid to present her discourse and she does so through her pop melodies and choruses. In fact, Lady GaGa is famously known to have worn a dress made out of fresh meat. Although animal rights activist groups criticized her for her actions, the meat that was used to cover her body symbolically represented what her body would be like if she uttered no discourse against the hegemonic, heteronormative structures. She states, “I am not a piece of meat!” (Barrett, 2010, para. 3). GaGa is the ideal body of

“difference” and through her performance, she is able to present her articulate discourse of Otherness through the pop culture public screen.

Through this paper I present the vital implications of analyzing pop culture. While it is an area that many scholars try to ignore or deem unworthy of scholarship, I present the arguments of why this area begs to be analyzed. Through the lens of performance studies, I am able to see where society draws the line of normalcy—what should be included in everyday life and the performances that need to be regarded as “bad,” “dangerous,” and “eccentric.” Although Lady GaGa presents this discourse of Otherness in a commercial, capitalistic field for profits, I believe that her performances still try to combat the hegemonic, heteronormative structures in society.

In this research there were two limitations. First, there was a limit of accessibility. By focusing on Lady GaGa’s Monster Ball tour, I had to rely on the accessibility the internet granted my research. Since I didn’t personally attend the concert I had to rely on the filming of the performance, and since I do not have access to HBO, I had to search the internet for fan video recording and blogs that posted the concert in fragments or in its entirety. Second, since the research is surrounding Lady GaGa’s performance(s), my artifact description was heavily tailored towards the videos that presented GaGa in action. This meant that I had to provide the reader with links to a plethora of videos they needed to watch in order to understand the analysis found in this research.

This study begs for two areas of further research. First, there needs to be research that solely focuses on the performativity of GaGa’s discourse through the bodies of the little monsters. Why is it that they choose to “dress-up” for this concert? How do they perform their queer identities? And most importantly, do they feel like GaGa’s performance(s) are paving the way to effectively combating hegemonic, heteronormative ideologies in society? Second, it is clear that GaGa has created a ripple effect in the music industry. Artists like Katy Perry and Pink have also used their music to address issues of sex/gender identities. It is vital to look at the overall industry and try and find out if there are any positive ramifications for talking about sex/gender identities in mainstream media.

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