
Trans/Affect, Monstrous Masculinities, and the Sublime Art of Lady Gaga
Theresa L. Geller

Gaga is a hypothetical form of feminism, one that lives in between the ‘what’ and the ‘if’: what if we gendered people according to their behavior? What if gender shifted over the course of a lifetime—what if someone began life as a boy but became a boygirl and then a boy/man? What if some males are ladies, some ladies are butch, some butches are women, some women are gay, some gays are feminine, some femmes are straight, and some straight people don’t know what the hell is going on?’¹

Let’s face it; Jo Calderone made all of us doubt our sexuality at one point.²

The Art of Lady Gaga

In *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal*, J. Jack Halberstam presents a manifesto of, and for, millennial feminist and gender politics. In its wide-ranging and eclectic survey of popular culture and the social field it transects, shapes and mediates, Lady Gaga is the figure and figuration to the ground of contemporary gender politics. Indeed, for Halberstam, Gaga is no longer a personal pronoun, but a noun—gaga—describing a set of oppositional, queer gender relations: “the genius of gaga allows Lady Gaga to become the vehicle for performing the very particular arrangements of bodies, genders, desires, communication, race, affect, and flow that we might now want to call gaga feminism.”³ Notably, for Halberstam, this “genius” is exemplified by Gaga’s performance at MTV’s Video Music Awards in 2011, which “Lady Gaga” did not attend; in her place, performing her hit song, “Yoü and I,” and accepting her awards, was Jo Calderone. No doubt, Lady Gaga has certainly pushed at the fault-lines of all sorts of social norms in her meteoric rise to status of fame monster. From meat dresses to egg yolks, her little monsters have stayed loyal throughout. However, at the 2011 VMAs, she took her subversive performance art to the next level, exploding the line between nature and artifice,

authenticity and glamour, boy and girl, “you and I” altogether, with the thoroughly committed incarnation of her alter, Calderone. Halberstam only briefly sketches this particular incarnation, taking it as a paragon of what one might call the cultural logic of gaga feminism, which stands, for the author, as “a form of political expression that masquerades as naïve nonsense but that actually participates in big and meaningful forms of critique.”⁴ Yet, to understand—and amplify—these forms of critique, I want to examine much more closely this exceptional moment in gaga feminism and contemporary popular culture generally.

In line with what Bill Nichols calls the “contemporary moment of cultural study,” we might begin to think of such moments in popular cultural history as loaded with both meaning and affect, that is, popular culture, and even Gaga herself, “comes to be regarded as a socially constructed category serving socially significant ends.”⁵ Lady Gaga is certainly an exemplar of this as a site of much cultural debate while using this position herself to effect political change (for example, fighting for gays in the military or bringing attention to the issue of young women’s HIV risks). And this accrual of social significance has yet to wane, as is apparent in the ways Gaga becomes *gaga*—an adjectival modifier in Halberstam’s new manifesto of millennial feminism. Yet, rather than explain Gaga’s social significance, the argument that follows is shaped by the methodological stakes set out by this moment of cultural study, in which “the goal of providing explanations for cultural forms and social practices loses its appeal in favor of an emphasis on the (preferably thick) interpretation of specific forms, practices and effects.”⁶ While for Halberstam, “gaga” signifies a kind of cognitive map of the larger state of contemporary feminism, with its concomitant play of genders and sexualities, what I will outline is a particular set of coordinates on that map, which I will chart via a thick description of Gaga’s embodiment of Jo Calderone, one delineating a very particular arrangement of genders and their affects.

Affect has a central role here, constituting the longitude in the conceptual grid I want to plot. If gaga is a form of feminism, as Halberstam defines it, “that lives between the ‘what’ and the ‘if,’” then what emerges from this gap or interval is measured or recognized in terms of the affect it generates. “Affect,” according to Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon[...]affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body[...] in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds.”⁷ The intensities of affect that pass from body to body are all the more intensified when those bodies are unstable—are, in fact, transitive themselves. Jo Calderone, in this way, embodies a specific form of affect, identified here as trans/affect—a constellation of affects that refuse to solidify into a stable point but rather reside in the in-between, in the transitive, in the trans body, perpetually sliding between genders, ethnicities, classes, desires, and sexualities.

Although most of the American public was introduced to Jo Calderone at the 2011 VMAs, Calderone actually emerged as a conceptual project in *Vogue Hommes Japan* (Autumn/Winter 2010).⁸ As Gaga herself explains, in *V Magazine*, *Gaga Memorandum #4*, which she cc’d to “intellectuals,” “Ms. Vreeland,” “art historians,” “the world,” and “Jo Calderone”:

My study of gender manipulation, though not a new endeavor in the fields of art and fashion, has been both revealing and terrifying—perhaps my most emotionally challenging performance to date. Beginning as an invention of my mind, Jo Calderone was created with Nick Knight as a mischievous experiment. [...] Given the nature of this *V Magazine* issue, an exploration of “the model,” I felt it appropriate to investigate, in diary form, how the past few months of my work have been a deliberate attack on the “idea” of the “modern model,” or, in

my case, the “modern pop singer.” How can we remodel the model? In a culture that attempts to quantify beauty with a visual paradigm and almost mathematical standard, how can we fuck with the malleable minds of onlookers and shift the world’s perspective on what’s beautiful? I asked myself this question. And the answer? Drag.⁹

According to Gaga, she and Knight omitted gender references and shopped the images out, providing a backstory for Calderone as Gaga’s former lover. This raised some questions in the popular press and the blogosphere, but nothing like Jo’s appearance at the VMAs. Unlike other female performers who flirted with drag in their VMA performances but ultimately resumed their “authentic” femme selves at some point in the performance—Madonna, Britney, and Annie Lennox being the most frequently cited examples—Gaga never appeared before the public. As Gaga describes it: “[I]n the fantasy of performance I imagined (or hoped) the world would weigh both individuals against one another as real people, not as one person playing two. Lady Gaga versus Jo Calderone, not Lady Gaga ‘as.’ That would be the intention of the process, to co-exist with an alternate version of myself—in the same universe.”¹⁰ It was Calderone who was interviewed, Calderone who performed with Queen guitarist Brian May, and most pointedly, Calderone who accepted the award for best *female* performance, on behalf of Gaga, for the video, “Born This Way”. Without the reassuring gesture to an authentic self—the very thing deconstructed in Calderone’s monologue prelude to the performance of “You and I”—the audience appeared to grow increasingly uncomfortable, unsure what to make of Jo’s appropriation of Gaga’s “spotlight”. The media response was equally befuddled; headlines followed which registered quizzical disapproval: “Was it too much?” “Brilliant or creepy?” or, “Did Lady Gaga just end her career with this embarrassing Jo Calderone?” Even die-hard fans

were perplexed, a few outright violent in their online postings. Yet, many followers—Gaga’s “little monsters”—were happy their Mother Monster now had a mate.

So, what about Jo Calderone was so disruptive? Notably, few could explain their reaction to the scenario, though reactions abounded; the cameras caught Brittany Spears, mouth agape and furrowed brow of confusion, and then cut to other confused members of the audience, like Justin Bieber, frowning (possibly disdainful, possibly because he himself might be implicated in such a parodic gender citation).¹¹ A large factor in the response was that this was not just a character assumed for a song (as in the case of Annie Lennox in Elvis drag), it was the embodiment of an alter identity. While this is not unknown in the music industry, most notably, David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust and the Thin White Duke, Garth Brooks releasing an album as Chris Gaines, and the more recent Childish Gambino (Donald Glover), rarely have they assumed identities across gender lines (with the exception of Gaga’s contemporary, Nicki Minaj as Roman Zolanski). Jo Calderone came out on stage and gave a long monologue before performing. Dressed in a dirty t-shirt and suit, greased back pompadour, drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette, Calderone proceeded to open up to the audience about his relationship with Gaga. In a masculine voice and New Jersey accent, Calderone performed an act of public intimacy, sharing with the audience details of his and Gaga’s sex life and ultimate break-up:

Hey. My name is Jo Calderone. And I was an asshole. Gaga? Yeah her—Lady Gaga. She left me. She said it always starts out good. And then the guys (being me, I’m one of the guys), they get crazy. I did; I got crazy. But she’s fucking crazy too right? I mean she is FUCKING CRAZY. For example, she gets out of the bed, puts on the heels, she goes into the bathroom, I hear the water go on, she comes out of the bathroom dripping wet and she still got the heels on. And what’s with the hair? At first it was sexy but now I’m just confused[...] And I think

its great ya know, I think its really fucking great that she's such a star. A big beautiful star in the sky. But how am I supposed to shine? I mean I think I'd be okay with it you know if I found out that she was really[...] And maybe she is, I'm starting to think that's just who she is, maybe that's just who she is. Cause when she gets on that stage she holds nothing back. That spotlight. That big, round, deep, spotlight follows her wherever she goes. [...]I gotta get in there. When she comes, it's like she covers her face cause she doesn't want me to see that she can't stand to have one honest moment when nobody's watching. I want her to be real. But she says "Jo, I'm not real. I'm theater. And you and I—this is just the rehearsal."

Calderone's monologue invited the audience into an intimacy with Gaga, one both utterly fictional and yet, on some level, authentic—and one that Gaga herself never allows. Gaga would later say that her embodiment of Calderone forced her "to excavate what he didn't like about me, or rather, what I struggle with liking about myself. Concurrently, I felt it necessary to imagine what the public expects of me during a performance of this magnitude—the opening of the VMAs—and how I might destroy this expectation in a variety of ways."¹² That Gaga succeeded with her destruction seems of little doubt, but how that destruction was wrought, and the affect generated by that destruction, requires both thick description and nuanced, intersecting interpretive frameworks.¹³

The destruction of the model of the modern pop singer that Jo Calderone signals turns on a constellation of discursive and affective regimes, including but not limited to gender, sexuality, glamour, intimacy, ethnicity, class and even musical genres. What are the conditions that make such destruction possible? I suggest that these conditions are immanent to Gaga's philosophy (and what, following Halberstam, one might call "gaga philosophy")—that of monstrosity. Since her emergence, Gaga has taken the trope of the monster to define her art and her movement. Yet,

this goes beyond a simple catch-all phrase identifying her fanbase—the little monsters she repeatedly references, encourages, and thanks. As Halberstam identifies, “Gaga feminism, or the feminism of the phony, the unreal, and the speculative, is simultaneously a *monstrous* outgrowth of the unstable concept of ‘woman’ in feminist theory, a celebration of the joining of femininity to artifice.”¹⁴ In fact, this monstrous outgrowth comes not just out of feminist theory but is also essential to the discourses Gaga herself produces about her cultural practices and performances and those to whom these particular speech acts are addressed. As she herself insists: “I refuse to draw a distinction between what’s real and what is artifice.” From this refusal, all sorts of monstrosities arise.

What the little monsters celebrate about Gaga is the very thing that makes her monstrous, the repudiation of the divide separating nature from artifice. As Elaine Graham details in her discussion of the post/human,

One of the ways in particular in which the boundaries between humans and almost-humans have been asserted is through the discourse of monstrosity. Monsters serve both to mark the faultlines but also, subversively, to signal the fragility of such boundaries. They are truly ‘monstrous’—as in things shown and displayed—in their simultaneous demonstration and destabilization of the demarcations by which cultures have separated nature from artifice.¹⁵

And, even though Gaga has consistently highlighted the artifice of what she herself identifies as the “modern pop performer,” it was the embodiment of drag king or transman (depending on one’s reading), Jo Calderone, that seemed to wreak such destruction. While meat slabs and Kermit the frog dresses point to the fragility of boundaries, Calderone teetered on the brink of destroying them altogether. The destruction of expectation of which Gaga speaks is key to the structures of feeling evident in the reception of Jo Calderone as *monster*. Lady Gaga’s fashion,

voice, persona, and other markers of feminine masquerade, even female drag, as many have surmised, have led to widespread speculation as to whether Gaga has a penis—a rumor both acknowledged and mocked in the opening of the “Telephone” video, in which women bodybuilders, cast as prison guards, declare its absence as we see Gaga climbing the bars of her jail cell, crime scene tape forming an X to mark the spot of its (supposed) absence.¹⁶ In other words, it is specifically the presence or absence of the penis that mark Gaga at the limits of the human—as monstrosity. So, when Gaga claims an altogether different relationship to the phallus, as Calderone, the line is drawn between artifice as fashion, artifice as speculative, and the monstrous—a line, as Julia Kristeva has theorized, that delineates me from not me, a delineation between the “I” and the abject.¹⁷

Significantly, this is the line that, for many, divides the celebration of femininity as fashion, as artifice, from gender as pure masquerade. Certainly her audiences expect Gaga to fuck with fashion: “when Lady Gaga wears a meat dress or five-inch heels, she does so to call attention to the whimsy of personhood[...]and confuse the relations between surface and depth.”¹⁸ Yet, Calderone does something more monstrous by exposing the tenuous (anti-)foundation of gender that is something more than fashion. What audiences may have been expecting was Gaga’s style but what they got in Calderone was stylization: “the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”¹⁹ In Calderone’s movements, voice, gestures, and general stylization of the body something else is signaled, something no longer in the realm of whimsy but rather in the realm of the monstrous, with all its destructive force. As Kaja Silverman argues, “Dress is one of the most important cultural implements for articulating and territorializing corporeality—

for mapping erotogenic zones and for affixing a sexual identity.”²⁰ Jo Calderone’s realness, however, goes far beyond fashion. For instance, for an audience that did not seem to give a second thought to Katy Perry’s cheese-cube hat, Jo Calderone was outside the range of even Gaga’s avant-garde norm. This is because Jo Calderone, the Jersey-born, Sicilian stock, Jameson swilling, chain-smoking working guy cum rock star signals, in short, the *disarticulation* and *detrterritorialization* of corporeality—at least of feminine corporeality. As Calderone himself says as he accepts the award for “Best Video with a Message”: “Gaga isn’t here.”

Glamorous Femininities and Monstrous Masculinities

So who remains? What sort of embodiment or bodily map does Calderone inhabit? Implicit in Silverman’s definition of fashion is the way fashion works to align sex, gender, bodies, and desire; she insists that “clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity—that in articulating the body, it simultaneously articulates the psyche.”²¹ Yet, inherent in this alignment is a bifurcation between “male” and “female” dress that assumes which bodies wear what styles of fashion: “Female dress[...]has undergone frequent and often dramatic changes[...] These abrupt libidinal displacements[...]make the female body far less stable and localized than its male counterpart.”²² While Gaga’s fans have come to expect dramatic, ironic, even parodic changes in fashion, Calderone signals a destruction of that very expectation by radically altering the relationship of figure (of fashion) to ground (of gender). It might be argued, in fact, that fashion, and its inherent division, are the very grounds of possibility for such as destruction to take place. In other words, not for nothing, has drag been (mis)read and (mis)appropriated from Butler’s *Gender Trouble* as *the* model of gender performativity. As Butler has pointed out, her goal was never to promote drag as some sort of ideal “model for resistance,” but rather “to

combat forms of essentialism which claimed that gender is a truth that is somehow there, interior to the body [...] something which, natural or not, is treated as given.”²³ To this extent, it is important to see beneath the work of drag a radical interrogation, indeed, the conditions of possibility for the deconstruction of gender (essentialism).

Jo Calderone, in other words, is not reducible to Gaga donning male garb.²⁴ Rather, as Twitter user Boygaga avows in the epigraph, Calderone makes us all doubt our sexuality—with the slippery, multiple meanings of this term very much in play. How Calderone throws sexuality into doubt is integrally connected with the function of drag, and the signifying practices that inextricably tie sexuality to gender. Both Butler and Gaga provide evocative, and related, responses to the question: “Why drag?”²⁵ According to Gaga,

The performance of Jo is meant to manipulate the visualization of gender in as many ways as I possibly could. And in a completely different way, sort of do that by creating what seems to be a straight man—a straight and quite relatable American man. I wanted to see how I could take someone who is so approachable and so relatable and press a much more unrelatable issue[...] [I wanted to see] how I could put someone who is challenging all of those things in a very pop culture moment and force people to deal with it no matter how uncomfortable or exciting it may be.²⁶

From the mainstream responses, one might surmise that discomfort was the overriding affective response to this trans incarnation sharing Gaga’s fame, or as Jo puts it, “that big, round, deep, spotlight.” For Butler, too, drag, and the gender trouble it indexes, generates a set of propositions that include: “When one performance of gender is considered real and another false, or when one presentation of gender is considered authentic, and another fake, then we conclude that a certain ontology of gender is conditioning these judgments, an ontology (an account of what gender *is*)

that is also put into crisis by the performance of gender in such a way that these judgments are undermined or become impossible to make.”²⁷ In other words, while all gender is a performance, a *subversive* gender performance is one that throws into crisis hegemonic gender norms and their very conditions of possibility. By putting the ontology of gender into crisis, drag (and transgender) confronts us with the *epistemological* foundations of gender, which reveal gender as a doing as opposed to a being.

Jo Calderone represents a subversive gender performance because of the way he presses on an “unrelatable issue”—indeed, presses on the unreal itself. Of course, Gaga’s gender performance always pushes on the borders of the real, her hyperbolized femininity itself an insistent reminder of the contemporary pop singer as (always already) hyperreal spectacle. So what makes Jo Calderone different from Gaga’s other personae (mermaid, cyborg, and such)? One especially salient reason turns on the question of the real, of authentic; or, as Gaga puts it, Jo is “a straight and quite relatable American man.” Key to my analysis is Gaga’s own insight about the affective response to her turning normative masculinity, a very specific sort of masculinity that MTV struck ratings pay-dirt with in its phenomenally successful *Jersey Shore*, into a drag king performance. Calderone signals a very familiar, assumedly *authentic*, masculinity within its particular moment of popular culture, and the context of MTV. In explicitly referencing a reality show version of masculinity—and a highly profitable one at that—Jo Calderone deploys drag as a critical intervention into the media’s own investments in the discursive (and monetary) claims of the real. A crucial element that grounds this reality is the binary that poses Gaga’s fashion as art/ifice and, say, The Situation as real. If, as Silverman argues, “endless transformations within female clothing construct female sexuality and subjectivity in ways that are at least potentially disruptive, both of gender and of the symbolic order,” than fashion for men works, like the

gender binary itself, “by freezing the male body into phallic rigidity, the uniform of orthodox male dress makes it a rock against which the waves of female fashion crash in vain.”²⁸ In this way, Gaga’s usual VMA drag might have been yet another wave, disruptive but expected; however, Jo Calderone thaws the phallic rigidity of *Jersey Shore* masculinity by drawing attention, via drag, to the “three dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.”²⁹

Calderone drags into consciousness the profoundly performative nature of masculinity by making claims of authenticity while simultaneously foregrounding the significant intervals between these three dimensions of corporeality, in effect, deterritorializing this particular contemporary cultural norm of masculinity in its citation.³⁰ Notably, Calderone disturbs and, for many, is unreadable, because of the claims on and for the real he makes—claims that Gaga’s own performative femininity disallow. This is due in no small part to what Gaga herself identifies as the “model of the pop star” into which she is cast and casts herself. That this model is highly gendered goes without saying; however, it is this very divide that Jo Calderone exposes as a norm of expectation, one which produces, rather than reflects, the effects of gender. To parse the complex and complexly disruptive work of Calderone’s intervention, and the affective responses it generated, a specific historically situated signifying economy must be traced that underscores—or, in effect, produces—the gender divisions drag seeks to reveal. In essence, the question is: what specific conditions make Calderone’s citation of masculinity *in this context* radically defamiliarizing and critically parodic? Certainly, not all gender parody is disruptive, much less subversive. What makes Jo Calderone a subversive, indeed a *deconstructive*, gender performance is its context in which gender *and* performance takes its meaning. Tracing the influence of Jacques Derrida on Butler’s understanding of gender performance, Jeffrey Nealon

explains, “if meaning and identity are always context-bound—if, as Derrida maintains, there is nothing outside of (con)text—then any particular meaning or identity carries with it the necessary, structural possibility of its own subversion by other recontextualizations or reinscriptions.”³¹ It is within the context of reality television, with its particular truth claims, and within the genres of popular music—both the signifying economies that found the MTV VMAs—that Jo Calderone’s gender performance becomes so biting parody (in turn, biting the hand that feeds Gaga in the process).

What MTV and its audiences expected of Lady Gaga was an elaborate production number, lots of dancers, and her (un)usual elaborate (self)fashion(ing).³² What they expected, in short, was glamour. This attribute associated with Lady Gaga must be key to any understanding of gaga feminism and its workings, in large part, to confront the knot of common sense that dismisses Lady Gaga as a pop phenomenon who simply steals from Madonna to line her bank account (despite the fact, as feminist critics Ramona Curry, Pamela Robertson and others have pointed out, that Madonna also stole from pop icons like Marilyn Monroe and Mae West). How glamour *works*, why it sells, demands analysis. Following from the insights of Gabriel Tarde, Nigel Thrift argues, “economies must be engaging, they must generate or scoop up affects and then aggregate and amplify them in order to produce value, and that must involve producing various mechanisms of fascination. The economy is not, and never has been, a dismal science of simple profit and loss.”³³ That Lady Gaga is profitable, for herself and the transnational corporations with whom she is contracted, is often the very grounds on which the political work of gaga feminism is dismissed or disavowed, by the left and the right. Yet, why and how she is profitable remains essentially unexamined. To understand Gaga’s allure, indeed, her *seduction*, we might begin by recognizing Gaga’s ability “to generate a certain kind of secular magic that

can act as a means of willing captivation [which in turn] becomes a key means of producing dividends.”³⁴ The frequent dismissals of Lady Gaga follow from this, ranging from cynical “rip-off” accusations (almost always of Madonna, revealing a generational bias) and Frankfurt School-type criticisms of her collusion with capital to the expected denunciations of her by the right. Lady Gaga’s “kind of magical pleasure” is often regarded “as a fraud and a trap”; I take Thrift’s retort to be instructive: “such an attitude, located somewhere between complex forms of suspicion and simple snobbishness, makes it impossible to understand why this magic has a grip on people’s lives and both overestimates and underestimates capitalism’s magical powers.”³⁵ Rather than dismiss Gaga’s pleasurable performance out of hand, it is necessary to recognize that it is her glamour, a particularly gendered embodiment of glamour, which is the condition of possibility—the ground, if you will—for the subversive resignification that is figured in Jo Calderone.

The context out of which the subversive gender performance that is Jo Calderone emerges involves the resignification of gender qua style. As Butler summarizes, “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*,” however, Lady Gaga’s stylization of the body is anything but “mundane,” always already troubling “the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”³⁶ In some palpable way, Gaga’s gender remains exterior, failing to signify as “natural” or authentic in the ways gender norms usually come to be (mis)interpreted as the internal core or substance of the subject. It is in the emphasis on *style* in the stylization of Gaga’s performance of gender that places the clear emphasis on performance rather than gender and this is due in no small part to a complex and, in the case of Gaga, antagonistic set of technologies—the technologies of gender, on one hand, and

the technologies of glamour, on the other. Under the aegis of the technologies of glamour, the stylization of the body that is/does gender may be disarticulated from gender norms.

As Thrift suggests, the magical qualities that define glamour have to do with style as well: “*Style is a modification of being that produces captivation, in part through our own explorations of it[...]*capitalism captivates by addressing a specific style of allure, namely, *glamour*.”³⁷ Lady Gaga is famous (and profitable) for much more than her music; she is a glamorous celebrity with a huge following. Her glamour is intricately tied to her stylization, associated as it is with *haute couture* fashion (as a muse of the late Alexander McQueen, for example). Yet, her particular incarnation of a glamorous persona is unique in its heightened interactions with the object world that constitutes it. “What is important to understand about glamorous celebrity,” according to Thrift, “is that it revolves around persons who are also things[...]. They become surrounded by an object world that confirms this model but also has its own existence.”³⁸ Unlike other celebrities, Gaga brings attention to this relation, using fashion to comment on the object world on which she draws to heighten her allure, often signifying fashion *as* objects, e.g., Kermit the frog dolls, slabs of meat, plastic bubbles, moving metal rings arranged like the rings of a planet. In themselves these objects do not necessarily register as glamorous; however, by attaching them to the body of a celebrity they are granted the allure of style. Yet, they also, reciprocally, foreground Gaga as object among objects, denaturalizing the allure of celebrity. If “glamorous celebrity is neither person nor thing but something in between, an unobtainable reality, an imaginary friend[...]. something that is at issue in the world,” then Gaga holds out this gap, this in-between longer than most to encourage an exploration of the model of the pop star *qua* object.³⁹ This is evident in the ways Gaga’s style becomes art (meat dress, planetoid costume, frog dress, etc.) in order to present to her audiences an embodied

commentary on the consumption of glamour (meat), on celebrity as object (“star”), and as toy or commodity (frog or plastic bubble).

This context is, of course, crucial as an interpretive grid through which to evaluate the cultural work of Jo Calderone. Calderone figures as an object of glamour in the ways he “gets into that spotlight.” Yet, the spotlight into which he steps is actually a palimpsest, carrying the traces of these previous embodied commentaries (performed at previous VMAs no less). Gaga, through these many incarnations, troubles the glamour with which she is endowed while simultaneously adding to it. Specifically, she refuses to abide by the edict of glamour that its “calculation must go unnoticed. It must appear effortless.”⁴⁰ Her performance of glamour refutes this founding quality precisely because of her rejection of the boundary between reality and artifice. In this way, Thrift’s argument has specific ramifications about the gender of glamour, though he does not pursue this line of argument. His claim that “glamour is selling. It is manipulation. It is seduction. It is a certain form of deception,” cannot be understood apart from the discursive cultural formations that signify femininity. Woman as a figure of deception, manipulation, and seduction has a very long history in Western philosophy and religious discourses. And yet, to the extent that glamour does work in this way, Lady Gaga brings to the fore the machinery of selling and manipulation implicit in celebrity. Her public appearances, especially at the VMAs, pull “performance always toward ‘impersonation’ marked explicitly as such,” and, to this extent, her transformation of glamour into performance art, “constitute[s] the cultural field in which ‘the parodic’ is situated in relation to ‘the authentic’[...] gender trouble[...] accrues from [the] uncertainty about the site of the authentic.”⁴¹ Lady Gaga as star, as slab of meat, and her various other parodic outfits turns fashion away from authenticating gender as some truth about the subject, and instead opts for a mimicry of femininity to challenge its

founding norms. Many have commented on the foregrounding of artifice and performance in Gaga's work, like Alexander Cho: "Lady Gaga makes a very explicit attempt to shrewdly, purposefully—even politically—expose the nature of our fascination with pop icons by making it her mission to foreground the artifice *of her own performance*."⁴² Indeed, for many, this artifice or fakery clearly signals a critique of the very sorts of glamorous femininity associated with the model of the pop star generally. Such gender mimicry situates Gaga squarely within the domain of queer critique: "in mimicry, as in camp, one 'does' ideology in order to undo it, producing knowledge about it: that gender and the heterosexual orientation presumed to anchor it are unnatural and even oppressive."⁴³

Still, this critical queerness sells, and propels Gaga's fame even further with each shocking, stylized performance. This is due in part to that constitutive feature of glamour: seduction. Lady Gaga seduces. The seductive qualities of glamour transcends the effects of Gaga's gender parody by reterritorializing them in terms of fascination. This is possible because, as a cis female performer, artifice is expected, as Jean Baudrillard insists: "in the feminine the very distinction between authenticity and artifice is without foundation."⁴⁴ Baudrillard finds femininity's dissimulation of the authentic to be its de(con)structive force. Lady Gaga's performative femininity is always already a seduction, because seduction refutes nature; as Baudrillard asserts, "seduction never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice—never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals."⁴⁵ In her insistence on artifice without a substantive ground (an authentic subject to anchor it), Gaga seduces (or disturbs those who refuse to be seduced) because her performances deny "things their truth and turn it into a game, the pure play of appearances, and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning," by turning "appearances in on themselves, [...] play[ing] on the body's appearances, rather than on the

depths of desire”—indeed, many of Gaga’s song lyrics directly celebrate this play, epitomized in “Poker Face,” in which she bluffs, and seduces, not just with her face but with her “muffin.”⁴⁶

I suggest it is Gaga’s exceptional powers of seduction that spawn the rumors of her transexuality, that is, the suspicions that she might have a penis. This is because her excessive play on the body’s appearances does more than blur the line between surface and depth (as other glamorous pop stars do), but rather shows a complete “indifference to the authentic and artificial,” and this indifference is at the heart of seduction because, as Baudrillard avows, “*seduction alone is radically opposed to anatomy as destiny*. Seduction alone breaks the distinctive sexualization of bodies and the inevitable phallic economy that results.”⁴⁷ Gaga’s gender performance exposes femininity as hyperreality, undoing the surface of femininity from the supposed depth of anatomy. “Seduction is more intelligent,” according to Baudrillard, because “it knows (this is its secret) that *there is no anatomy*[...]that all signs are reversible. Nothing belongs to it, except appearances.”⁴⁸ Lady Gaga’s extreme gender parodies are anchored not on anatomy but on the technologies of glamour, and therefore are performed as seductions, taking their meaning from the infinite reversibility of signs. Because of this, she is associated with the signs and discourses of the drag queen. Gaga’s “*transubstantiation of sex into signs*” aligns her with the transvestite because, like the transvestite, she appears “obsessed with the games of sex, but obsessed, first of all, with play itself; and if [her life] appear[s] more sexually endowed than our own, it is because [she] make[s] sex into a total, gestural, sensual, and ritual game, an exalted but ironic invocation.”⁴⁹ And, it is Jo Calderone that brings this to our consciousness in his monologue, directly addressing her sexual play (of signs), which only heightens the (mis)perception of Gaga as transvestite—something Calderone himself insinuates in his statement, “I mean I think I’d be okay with it, you know, if I found out that she was

really[...].” the ellipsis here implying, I think, “a man.” If everything with the transvestite “is makeup, theater, and seduction,” isn’t this exactly the point of Calderone’s description of Gaga; or, as Gaga says to her lover, “I’m theater.”⁵⁰

Yet, it is Calderone, on the stage and in the spotlight, who narrates and reveals Gaga’s seduction—who is, in fact, the assumed object of her seduction. Maybe this is why Gaga believes Calderone to be “so approachable and so relatable” (though few seemed to experience him this way), because he can be a proxy for the audiences she aims to seduce. It is, however, in Gaga’s masculine embodiment that her arguably most powerful transvestism is undertaken; in other words, what happens when Calderone is effecting the seduction of Gaga’s audiences? As feminine transvestite, as drag *queen*, Lady Gaga’s seduction is delimited by the supposed facticity of anatomy, by (the projection of) her “real” sex. Like Baudrillard’s assessment of Nico, we might say that Gaga emanates “something more than beauty, something more sublime, a different seduction,” but one undone in the same way, because, like Nico, she is “a false drag queen, a real woman[...]. It is easier for a non-female/female than for a real woman, already legitimated by her sex, to move amongst the signs and take seduction to its limit.”⁵¹ In other words, as much as Gaga’s parodic masquerade of gender pushes on the artifice of femininity, it is transvestism that “play[s] with the indistinctness of the sexes[...].born of sexual vacillation;” it is only as drag *king* that the play of signs that is Gaga’s glamorous seduction finally and irrevocably refuses to “reduplicate biological being,” because, as Jo, “signs are separated from biology, and consequently the sexes no longer exist properly speaking.”⁵² This is due to the fact that the signs are constitutively different—Calderone dissimulates the signs of masculinity as opposed to femininity. In an interview, a journalist asks Gaga if she is afraid the sexual content of her lyrics will somehow undercut the validity of her music; she grows irritated with his line of

questioning, responding that if she were a man, he would not ask these questions, insinuating that sexuality is assumed to be somehow natural to the male rock star but a point of contention for the female pop star. Gaga insists in her retort to the journalist: “You see, if I was a guy and I was sitting here with a cigarette in my hand, grabbing my crotch and talking about how I make music ’cause I love fast cars and fucking girls, you’d call me a rock star. But, when I do it in my music and my videos, because I’m a female, because I make pop music, you’re judgmental, and you say it is distracting. I’m just a rock star.”⁵³ These are, of course, the very signs of masculinity with which Gaga plays as Jo.

Notably, the journalist’s questions imply that a woman’s having sexual desires, a woman as a desiring sexual subject, is inherently disruptive and incongruent with pop music, while Gaga’s response exposes the (musical genre) norms that presume, and produce, the male rock star’s particular performance of masculinity, one anchored the expression of sexual desire and activity, as authentic and, therefore, appropriate to the music (rock as opposed to pop). Such norms (of both gender and genre) go beyond the psychoanalytic claim that the libido is masculine—they turn on the ontological claim that masculinity alone has domain over the authentic, the true. If all signs are indeed reversible, as Baudrillard and Butler might agree, then Jo Calderone effectuates this sudden reversibility and, in doing so, throws into relief not just the model of the (female) pop star but also the model of the (male) rock star. Jo Calderone takes his meaning from the signs generated by *Jersey Shore*; that is, an ethnic, metrosexual masculinity that is often seen “partying” in the form of drinking. On a synchronic level, Jo Calderone evokes these signs of masculinity celebrated by MTV’s hit series, particularly on the ground of its claims to authentic “identity”—their Italian American ethnicity. Of course, Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta (Lady Gaga) is also Italian American, something the press is quick to point

out. And, yet, the way Italian American-ness signifies for The Situation and the men of *Jersey Shore* as opposed to Lady Gaga is significant. Gaga's Italian American femininity is not a ground of authentic identity as much as a part of the constellation of performative signifiers she deploys. For example, her music video, "Summerboy," displays a cacophony of Italian American signs as *literal signs*—from the Italian flag and Vespa scooter to shots of many actual restaurant signs of Italian dishes. The video's saturated colors and pastiche 50s nostalgia, with its caricatured "guido" types miming in the background, foreground Italian American-ness as a cultural imaginary, a chronotope of a specific time (1950s-60s) and place (the outer boroughs of New York City).

Jersey Shore—the name itself evoking a contemporary chronotope—also presents certain cliché forms of masculinity; however, in this case, they are anchored in the reality of the reality show framework and iconography. It is these claims to authenticity that the embodiment of Jo Calderone radically challenges, exposing the authenticating grounds of masculinity the show forwards. Calderone's drag performance cuts both ways, revealing masculinity generally as a copy without origin, particularly East Coast Italian American masculinity (a fetishized masculinity in film and media, one Gaga cites and parodies in "Summerboy") as a transferable set of attributes (as Butler explains as the original insight about gender trouble). Yet, it simultaneously deconstructs (retroactively) the whiteness of Gaga's glamorous persona.⁵⁴ When Calderone asks his audience, "And what's with the hair," he is asking about Gaga's blonde hair while Calderone's equally unreal black pompadour both masks it and draws attention to it as a sign, a particularly fetishized sign of glamorous femininity. Indeed, key technologies of glamour were the invention of hair dye and wigs.⁵⁵ Within film and popular culture, these technologies were used frequently to mask cultural specificity (for example, Rita Hayworth's red hair effaced

her Mexican origins). Yet, blondness specifically is associated with the figure of the seductress and/or femme fatale, dating back to Jean Harlow, Barbara Stanwyk, and, later, Rita Hayworth; these figures (and their blond epigone—Madonna, Sharon Stone, Gaga, etc.) suggest, according to Chris Holmlund, a fetishization of “Female whiteness”: “bleached, tinted, frosted, and dyed blondes are everywhere, in the past as in the present[...]caught up with[...]anxieties regarding racial origins and ethnic lacks.”⁵⁶ However, the excessive spectacle of the bleached blondness of Gaga, particularly in the context of the explicitly fake wigs she wears so often, and then called out as fake by Calderone, asserts a critical relationship to racialized sexuality qua white femininity through her exaggerated, denaturalized whiteness—a hyperbole that highlights whiteness *as* performance, as yet another sort of stylization of the body.

Yet, by invoking Gaga’s regimes of appearance and seduction, Calderone is undone by the relation, by being seduced. Recalling Baudrillard, “it is the feminine as appearance that thwarts masculine depth;” by calling up Gaga’s highly performative femininity (the hair, the phallic shoes, the obscured visage as barred sign of *jouissance*), masculinity is troubled, unmoored. “By idealizing feminine ‘masquerade,’” Bristow points out, “Baudrillard observes how masculinity aggrandizes itself on the dangerous pretense that it ‘possesses unfailing powers of discrimination and absolute criteria for pronouncing the truth.’”⁵⁷ Yet, this is exactly the intervention that is staged with the embodiment of Calderone. Taking the 2009 interview as a key to the invention of the alter Calderone, it seems the drag of Calderone does more than ironize the (un)reality of *Jersey Shore* masculinity. If Jo’s origin predates *Jersey Shore*, there is another Jersey masculinity evoked. The diachronic analysis points to the contrast between Gaga as female pop star (as artifice) and the male rock star (as authentic truth teller). Calderone performs as a real rock star, singing “You and I,” a song that explicitly cites Bruce Springsteen’s multi-

platinum album, *Nebraska*, while parodying the authentic claims of masculine rock with lines like: “I’m a New York woman, born to run you down”. This is at odds with the rock idiom from which it borrows: “This rock idiom (often hailed as ‘pure’ rock) uses a basic rhythm and blues ensemble[...]to accompany lyrics that evoke small (Midwestern) towns and working class perspectives, frustrations of life and love, and escapism into drink, cars, or girls.”⁵⁸ While Calderone appropriates the “authentic” sounds of pure rock, down to the raspy, deep voice and screams of abjection of the rock gods, a critical irony is aimed at these very claims to authenticity and the truth of femininity they tend to describe in their lyrics.

As Judith Peraino makes clear, generally missing from rock ballads of these sorts “is any sense of irony that might turn the surface of these melodramas into a camp critique of gender or sexuality;” rather, in songs such as “Born to Run,” “Bruce Springsteen sings the bombastic lines: “just wrap your legs ’round these velvet rims, and strap your hands ’cross my engines.”⁵⁹ Yet, as Gaga made clear to her interlocutor, Springsteen would never be asked whether the sexual content of the lyrics would detract from the music, which is entirely the point of Gaga’s own version of a rock ballad. In it, she sings, “Muscle cars drove a truck right through my heart/ On my birthday you sang me a heart of gold,” mocking the cliché of the rock star’s “fetish for motor vehicles, and the conflation of engines with masculine (phallic) power,” but, more significantly, she subverts their aggrandizing truth claims by critiquing the male rock star’s “projection of earnestness and [their] avoidance of irony [that] shores up the integrity of masculinity despite the theatrical display of emotion.”⁶⁰

Indeed, Calderone’s monologue foregrounds this theatrical display of emotion, but evokes it as an explicit citation of a gender (rock) norm, which is revealed to be a gender parody in the performance of “You and I,” with its pointedly ironic lyrics: “Something, something about

this place, Something 'bout lonely nights and my lipstick on your face, Something, something about my cool Nebraska guy, Yeah something about, baby, you and I.” Gaga’s Calderone, in this way, “constitutes a subversive repetition within the signifying practices of gender” precisely because s/he reveals the supposedly authentic masculinity of the rock star to be an effect of his theatricality—that very thing for which she is so frequently condemned.⁶¹ In effect, Calderone effects a gender parody of a double order by performing “You and I” as a direct citation of the male rock idiom of earnest vocals and melodramatic intonation, even spiked with the hypermasculine electric guitar solo, only to be undone by lyrics that expose the emptiness, the vacuous content of “something, something about the chase.” This stark contrast, and the critical distance it evokes, prompts “the subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects,” effects revealed, in this case, as a set of gender *and* musical genres norms that produces the illusion of authentic (geographical and classed) masculinity.⁶² The question remains, however, *why* this specific form of gender parody? We have a clue in Calderone’s acceptance speech: “It doesn’t matter who you are. Gay, straight, bi, lesbian, transgender—you were born this way.” Why do men, rock stars, or, as Gaga sums up—straight American men—get to claim any more right to an authentic self (and his experiences as rendered in song), and to those gender codes that humanize him while “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right”?⁶³ The honest abjection of the male rock star (and the women who cite or emulate them) is founded on the authenticity derived from “contrasting qualities of suffering and survival, vulnerability and strength, and even on authenticity and theatricality.”⁶⁴ Jo Calderone shows these to be, in fact, transferable attributes, and reclaims such qualities in the name of those who are systematically abjected out the social body in the name of the human, those who deal with “suffering and survival” on a

daily basis—her little monsters. In an interview with Larry King, Gaga clearly articulates her motives: “I’m more interested in helping my fans to love who they are and helping them to reject prejudice and reject those things that they’re taught from society to not like themselves. To be like freaks.”⁶⁵

Trans/Affect and the Sublime

It is important to remember when evaluating the cultural work of Jo Calderone, the “point of drag is not simply to produce a pleasurable and subversive spectacle but to allegorize the spectacular and consequential ways in which reality is both reproduced and contested.”⁶⁶ While it is true that Jo Calderone certainly evokes a substantial amount of gender trouble, the key to this trouble are affects it produces, which, for many, had little to do with pleasure. For me, what is significant is that Gaga’s pressing on the unrelatable issue of the violation of gender norms produces something between discomfort and excitement; this is what I identify as trans/affect. If Jo Calderone does Butlerian drag, the affect this gender performance generates can be explained by Jean-François Lyotard, who argues, in his reflections on popular culture, that “the only line to follow is to produce in the viewer[...]an effect of uncertainty and trouble[...]the thing to aim at is a certain sort of feeling or sentiment. You can’t introduce concepts, you can’t produce argumentation[...]but you can produce a feeling of disturbance, in hope that this disturbance will be followed by reflection[...]and its up to every artist how to create that disturbance.”⁶⁷ For Lyotard this represents the potential of postmodern aesthetics, which replaces the didactic forms of poetics and rhetoric with the analysis of the addressee’s feelings. He says the question of aesthetics is, “no longer ‘How does one make a work of art?’, but ‘What is it to experience an affect proper to art?’”⁶⁸ For Lyotard, this affect, generated by aesthetic experimentation, is the

result of the experience of the sublime—that experience which evokes a crisis in rationality and conceptualization.

The sublime identifies those aesthetic practices in excess of the viewer's cognitive capacity for reason; it remains obscure to our conceptual powers. In many ways, Gaga's monstrous aesthetics fit well within the category of the sublime, evident in her continual disruption of the boundaries between nature and artifice. Yet, Jo Calderone stands apart because he evokes a very specific sort of sublime response. T. Benjamin Singer turns to the sublime, specifically Dick Hebdige's rereading of the Burkean sublime, in his analysis of photographic representations of non-standard bodies, including transgender and intersex bodies. He develops the concept of the transgender sublime to capture the unexpected nature of transgender complexity that induces disorienting encounters with the sublime, as demonstrated in the self-portraiture of transgender activist and artist, Del LaGrace Volcano, in *Sublime Mutations*. Because the category of the sublime "surpasses bounded meaning and remains resistant to easy interpretation," Singer argues that it describes the affective encounter with transgender subjects.⁶⁹ Jo Calderone's performance of gender, sedimented with the paratext of Gaga's hyperreal fashioning of the female modern pop performer as artifice, indeed, as fashion, elicits the transgender sublime because it points to "the non-binary range of bodies, genders and sexualities."⁷⁰ Trans/affect names the complexity of affective responses evoked by transgender embodiment and therefore can be seen as an expression of the sublime, as it reveals the multiplicity and instability at the heart of gender. As Singer argues, transgender embodiments evoke the sublime because they "confront us with a vision of potentially infinite specific possibilities for being human."⁷¹ One concept that has been used to efface these infinite ways of being human is the category of the monstrous; the sign of the monster may in fact work precisely

to evoke these infinite ways of being human in its very act casting out that which does not abide by the norms of the human as we understand it *today*.

In this way, this analysis has aimed at expanding gaga feminism by undertaking a critical teratology—that is, of course, the study of monsters. The trans body has been and continues to be read as monstrous; as Susan Stryker powerfully sums up: “I am a transsexual and therefore I am a monster.”⁷² Stryker identifies this monstrosity as constituted from without, in the fears generated by the encounter, revealing the very grounds of trans/affect: “To encounter the transsexual body, to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk a revelation of the constructedness of the natural order.”⁷³ Jo Calderone evokes the transgender sublime by “forcing people to confront” this very risk. So, what does it mean to have Lady Gaga (or Nicki Minaj, for that matter) occupy the space of transmen? Some feminist responses have been cynical (while, notably, many trans communities have lauded the performance in the name of trans visibility); yet, as Halberstam points out, this mistrust has a rather long history, dating back to the early twentieth century when “female masculinity was cast by Otto Weininger and others, as simultaneously a sign of the collapse of gender distinctions and, by implication, of civilized society, and a marker of female genius.”⁷⁴ Maybe it is too much to suggest that Jo Calderone is the marker of Gaga’s genius. Yet, in risking the trans/affect *and* trans *effect* of Jo Calderone, who throws all our sexuality into doubt, we also risk the encounter with the sublime. The sublime art of Lady Gaga incites a becoming of sorts, a temporal shift in subjectivity, edging those willing to take the risk a little closer to the monstrous. “By remodeling the ‘model artist,’ ‘model citizen,’ or ‘supermodel,’” Gaga theorizes, “we can liberate the present. The transformation detaches the model from any universal paradigm and allows him or her to reinvent perspective in a pure, unattached moment.”⁷⁵ This Bergsonian insight from Mother

Monster points towards the possibilities of the virtual, and these virtual selves emanate from the subversion of norms, or “models.” The sublime art of Lady Gaga urges its viewer to “use every ounce of potential you have, raise revolution against what people expect of you, and tell the world this is not a rehearsal. This is the real me. And listen up, ’cause it could be the most honest incarnation yet.” Jo Calderone may be the most honest incarnation Gaga has modeled to date precisely because he raises the revolutionary call for little monsters everywhere.

¹ J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press. 8

² BoyGaga, Twitter post, July 18, 2012, 3:15pm.

³ Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, xii. Throughout the book, Halberstam uses “gaga” as an adjective, with a lower-case “g”.

⁴ Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, xxi.

⁵ Bill Nichols, “Film Theory and the Revolt Against Master Narratives,” *Reinventing Film Studies*, Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 36.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 1.

⁸ Heather Duerre Humann discusses the first appearances of Jo Calderone in her chapter, “What a Drag: Lady Gaga, Jo Calderone and the Politics of Representation,” in which she discusses the original photo layout and interview in Japan’s *Vogue Hommes* (2010) and the subsequent media responses. However, Calderone’s reappearance at the VMAs brought him into millions of living rooms, introducing him to a vastly larger audience than his first appearance in the media. See *The Performance Identities of Lady Gaga*, edited by Richard Gray II, North Carolina: McFarland, 2012. 74-84.

⁹ Lady Gaga, “Gaga Memorandum #4,” *V Magazine*, November 2011.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For example, see <http://lesbianswholooklikejustinbieber.tumblr.com/> A great deal of internet and media discourse circulating around Justin Bieber is dedicated to his particular gender embodiment as uncannily similar to a certain style of baby butch lesbianism.

¹² Lady Gaga, “Gaga Memorandum #4.”

¹³ Destruction as anarchic feminist praxis has a long history—one in which I would situate Gaga’s performance art. Halberstam argues for a more extensive lineage for Gaga beyond Madonna and Brittany Spears. Halberstam names Yoko Ono, Valerie Solanas, while Gaga herself cites Grace Jones and Lady Starlight. However, within the context of Gaga as “theater,” her foremothers include Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export and many others; yet, here I am specifically reminded of *Destroy, She Said*, by Marguerite Duras.

¹⁴ Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, xii-xiii, emphasis mine.

¹⁵ Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Pop Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

¹⁶ It could be said that while Gaga is indeed missing the penis, what she does have is the *lesbian phallus*: “When the phallus is lesbian, then it is and is not a masculinist figure of power; the signifier is significantly split, for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled. And insofar as it operates at the site of anatomy, the phallus (re)produces the spectre of the penis only to enact its vanishing, to reiterate and exploit its perpetual vanishing as the very occasion of the phallus,” as Judith Butler has persuasively argued in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*. New York: Routledge, 1993. 89. In this way, what the prison guards do not see, cannot see, the butch prisoner (Marci Beck) in the yard can, because Gaga’s anatomy signifies outside the heteronormative economy of signifiers. For instance, the prototypical phallic signifier in the cinema—the cigarette—is substantively resignified; it is not just split but multiplied and transformed from a singular object of an oral fixation into an apparatus for seeing. Gaga’s smoking cigarette eyeglasses are a metonymy for the lesbian phallus, that “site of desire,” which functions not as a new body part but serves instead as “a displacement of the hegemonic symbolic of (heterosexist) sexual difference”; indeed, I would argue that the women’s prison in *Telephone*, anchored as it is to the lesbian phallic economy, is one possible “alternative imaginary schema...of erotogenic pleasure” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 91).

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

¹⁸ Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, 26.

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York: Routledge, 1999. 191.

²⁰ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1996. 83.

²¹ Silverman 84.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 212.

²⁴ The study of travesty, particularly in Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests*, however, has shown this to be a much more complicated than a simple sartorial choice.

²⁵ Butler, *Undoing Gender*. 213.

²⁶ Interview with Noah Michelson, *The Huffington Post*, September 23, 2011.

²⁷ Butler, *Undoing Gender*. 214.

²⁸ Silverman 84-85.

²⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 187.

³⁰ I have discussed the significance of this interval in gender performance in corporeal feminism elsewhere, particularly in regards to Gilles Deleuze's elaboration of the interval as specific form of time-image. See "The Cinematic Relations of Corporeal Feminism." *The Becoming Deleuzo-guattarian of Queer Studies*, Michael O'Rourke, ed. Special Double Issue of *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 11/12 (Fall 2005/ Spring 2006).

³¹ Jeffrey Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. 21.

³² Van Toffler, President of MTV, suggested that Gaga do "something different, almost counterintuitive, and do a killer intimate version of 'You and I' as opposed to a massive, well-choreographed, full-of-explosions-and-tons-of-dancers kind of performance." Kyle Anderson, "The VMAs' All-Time Wildest Moments," *Entertainment Weekly*, September 14, 2012.

³³ Nigel Thrift, "Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour," in Gregg and Seigworth. 290.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Thrift 308.

³⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*.191.

³⁷ Thrift 297.

³⁸ Thrift 304.

³⁹ Thrift 305.

⁴⁰ Thrift 299.

⁴¹ Eric Savoy, "That Ain't All She Ain't: Doris Day and Queer Performativity." *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, Ellis Hanson, ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. 159-60.

⁴² FlowTV <http://flowtv.org/2009/08/lady-gaga-balls-out-recuperating-queer-performativityalexander-cho-flow-staff/> .

⁴³ Carol-Ann Tyler, "Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag." *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 53

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*. 11.

⁴⁵ Baudrillard 2.

⁴⁶ Baudrillard 8.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard 10.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard 10.

⁴⁹ Baudrillard 13.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard 13.

⁵¹ Baudrillard 13.

⁵² Baudrillard 12.

⁵³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VE4L7SI-SwA> It should be noted that she says to the journalist that the highlight of her success is her gay fans, who don't ask such dumb questions.

⁵⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*. 213.

⁵⁵ Thrift 306.

⁵⁶ Chris Holmlund, *Impossible Bodies: Femininity and Masculinity at the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 2002. 83.

⁵⁷ Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 129.

⁵⁸ Judith Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. 137.

⁵⁹ Peraino 137.

⁶⁰ Ibid. The lyric, "a heart of gold" evokes another notably "authentic" rocker, Neil Young.

⁶¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 199.

⁶² Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 200.

⁶³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 190.

⁶⁴ Peraino 137.

⁶⁵ Larry King, Interview with Lady Gaga, *Larry King Live*, CNN, June 1, 2010.

⁶⁶ Butler, *Undoing Gender* 218.

⁶⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, "Brief Reflections on Popular Culture." *ICA Documents 4*, Lisa Appignanesi, ed. London: ICA, 1986. 203.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ben T. Singer, "Towards a Transgender Sublime: The Politics of Excess in Trans-specific Cultural Production." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: Routledge, 2006. 601-620. 614.

⁷⁰ Singer 616.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." In Stryker and Whittle. 244-256. 246.

⁷³ Stryker 254.

⁷⁴ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 159.

⁷⁵ Lady Gaga, "Gaga Memorandum #4."

Works Cited

- Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Bristow, Joseph. *Sexuality*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- . *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Curry, Ramona. "Madonna from Marilyn to Marlene —Pastiche and/or Parody?" *Journal of Film and Video*. 42.2 (Summer 1990): 15-30.
- Graham, Elaine L. *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Pop Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Halberstam, J. Jack. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.
- . *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2011.
- Haraway, Donna. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others." *Cultural Studies* Eds. Lawrence Grossberg, et al. New York: Routledge, 1992.

- Hebdige, Dick. "The Impossible Object: Towards a Sociology of the Sublime." *New Formations*, vol. 1 (Spring 1987): 47-76.
- Holmlund, Chris. *Impossible Bodies: Femininity and Masculinity at the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Humann, Heather Duerre. "What a Drag: Lady Gaga, Jo Calderone and the Politics of Representation." *The Performance Identities of Lady Gaga*. Edited by Richard Gray II. North Carolina: McFarland, 2012.
- King, Larry. Interview with Lady Gaga. *Larry King Live*, CNN, June 1, 2010.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Lady Gaga, "Gaga Memorandum No. 4." *V Magazine*. November, 2011.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Brief Reflections on Popular Culture." In *ICA Documents 4*, edited by Lisa Appignanesi. London: ICA, 1986.
- Nealon, Jeffrey. *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Nichols, Bill. "Film Theory and the Revolt Against Master Narratives." In *Reinventing Film Studies*. Edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 34-52.
- Peraino, Judith. *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Robertson, Pamela. *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Savoy, Eric. "That Ain't All She Ain't: Doris Day and Queer Performativity." In *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*. Ed. Ellis Hanson. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. 151-182.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Singer, Ben T. "Towards a Transgender Sublime: The Politics of Excess in Trans-specific Cultural Production." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: Routledge, 2006. 601-620.

Stryker, Susan. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." In Stryker and Whittle. 244-256.

Thrift, Nigel. "Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour." In Gregg and Seigworth. 289-308.

Tyler, Carol-Anne. "Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag." In *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 32-70.

Volcano, Del LaGrace. *Sublime Mutations*. Berlin, Germany: Konkursbuchverlag, 2000.