

Lady Gaga as (dis)simulacrum of Deleuzian monstrosity

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Abstract

Lady Gaga's celebrity DNA revolves around the notion of monstrosity, an extensively and multifariously researched concept in post-modern cultural studies. This study draws on biographical and archival visual data relating to the Gaga phenomenon with a focus on the relatively underexplored live-show, with view to elucidating what is really monstrous about Lady Gaga. The argumentation that is put forward by drawing largely on Deleuze & Guattari's notion of monstrosity, as well as on their approach to the study of sign-systems that was deployed *Thousand Plateaus*, is supportive of the position that monstrosity as sign seeks to appropriate the horizon of unlimited semiosis as radical alterity and openness to signifying possibilities. In this context it is argued that Gaga is a simulacrum of herself (supreme signifier) and at the same time a (dis)simulacrum or dissimulative (feigned) simulacrum. Gaga is monstrous *for* her community insofar as she demands of her fans to project their semiotic horizon onto her as simulacrum of infinite semiosis, albeit a simulacrum that, in (the) reality (principle), may only be evinced dissimulatively in a feigned manner as (dis)simulacrum. Pursuant to an extensive analysis of the linguistically unarticulated, yet multimodally considerably more insightful imagery from seminal live shows during 2011-2012, Gaga's presumed monstrosity is ultimately rendered as more akin to hyperdifferentiation.

Keywords: monstrosity, sign systems, flows of intensity, territorialization, Lady Gaga

1. Introduction: Lady Gaga, the world's most influential artist

Time magazine nominated Lady Gaga among the 100 most influential people in the world and as the most influential artist in the world. Despite the fact that this nomination is misleading on at least two grounds, first due to Gaga's explicit abnegation of partaking of the human race and second due to the ascription of the pejorative term 'people' to her and regardless of whether she is in fact member of a new race whose mission is to free humanity from bad stylistic choices and awful taste in music, the 6 (or 7) zero figures that accompany her record sales and related merchandise, combined with an indubitably loyal fandom and consistently sold-out live shows are at least inviting in terms of getting to grips with the identity of this cultural phenomenon that rose to stardom considerably faster than is allowed in a sector that is second most tolerant to longevity to the fast food industry. In an interview with Gaultier (2013), Lady Gaga expressed her deeply felt honor for having been recognized for her cultural contribution from Time. So the initial and most blatantly obvious question that springs to mind is what is this unique cultural contribution Lady Gaga has made to the pop hall of fame, a feat that is unquestionably not to be belittled given that Gaga had to compete for mindshare and share-of-hearts alongside behemoths such as Madonna, Beyonce and other chart-topping 'monsters'.

The Gaga-related press literature thrives with explanations about her rise to stardom. Some analysts (e.g., Guschwan 2012, Bennett 2013; also see Jenkins 1992 on fandom) attribute her success to the creation and meticulous management of a core consumer franchise, what Lady Gaga calls her 'little monsters' (both on her website and repeatedly during her live shows). Others attribute her success to various key performance indicators (see Anderson et al. 2013), such as the creation of a virtual network of trusted associates (Haus of Gaga) on various fields of music production and marketing expertise, a sort of goldmine of human resources which she leverages in order to fuel her artistic engine; the implementation of a balanced online/offline sales/promotions mix;

or even her sheer entrepreneurial mindset which has been praised by biographers and columnists alike.

In this paper I draw on a different interpretive avenue that seeks to distill the ideological, so to speak, vein of Lady Gaga's cultural highness, viz., the creation and active promotion of a culture of monstrosity. By drawing on the multimodal imagery that is employed in her live shows and specifically on two successful (in terms of audience participation, i.e., sold out) live shows from her Monster Ball (2011) and Born this way Ball (2012) tours, on a seminal interview she gave to the famous designer and ex-Eurotrash co-host Jean Paul Gaultier, on communications that are deployed on Gaga's official fan-website, and on various biographical sources, I immerse myself into Gaga's psychotic universe (not to be perceived pejoratively from a schizoanalytic¹ point of view and certainly not derogatorily based on the size of her bank account), armed with determination to unlock the mysteries of cultural monstrosity.

2. Is Lady Gaga, the mother monster, really monstrous?

This paper has been boiling for almost a year now. In between extensive and most diverse literature reviews in an attempt to identify the optimum entry point to the hermeneutic circle of Lady Gaga I ventured into all sorts of remotely related territories prior to crystallizing on the Deleuzian (& Guattarian) concept of monstrosity as most pertinent for understanding the ideology of Gagaism, or, rather, for demonstrating what would amount to a truly monstrous ideology (or, rather, culturological paradigm). I must admit that initially I approached this interpretive endeavor with utmost reluctance if not agonizing skepticism in the face of an often encountered phenomenon in cultural analysis, that of applying off-the-shelf, ready-made conceptual solutions to cultural phenomena. But the more I immersed myself into the Gaga phenomenon (including signing up to the Little Monsters fan-club and reading the regular updates that members have the privilege of receiving for about a year), the more it became clearer that Deleuze

¹ "Schizoanalysis, rather than moving in the direction of reductionist modelizations which simplify the complex, will work towards its complexification, its processual enrichment, toward the consistency of its virtual lines of bifurcation and differentiation, in short towards its ontological heterogeneity" (Genosko 2002: 24).

& Guattari's (henceforth D&G) approach to monstrosity is a most pertinent interpretive blueprint, certainly not due to some sort of naïve nominal contiguity, as will be shown throughout this paper.

Gaga's artistic vision, should one opt for framing it in this manner, is edified on the concept of monstrosity. Her most concise manifesto (see Appendix I) which is interestingly numbered after (I) even if there is no sequel (or has been to date), and which is almost religiously replayed in vivo in her live shows, is addressed to her little monsters. Her official fan-club website is called littlemonsters.com (see Appendix II), her identity is performatively constructed in her live-shows in utterances such as "my little monsters, you have created me" (let this be called an inversion of the Wagnerian conception of the construction of an audience as projection of the composer, albeit, obviously, as a dissimulatory tactic that inverts the originary *force* of the enunciator). A similar strategy of transposing the mirror from artist to audience is encountered in Gaga's posts on littlemonsters.com. Indicatively I am citing one such post by Gaga that was sent soon after having undergone an operation:

"Monsters, You really gave me a lot of strength today. Everything happened so fast, but when it came time to face it I reflected on the many stories and experiences you've shared with me about your lives. Meeting you backstage, reading your letters, watching you communicate with fans from around the globe to form a community that supports one another--You have completely blown my mind. As they wheeled me into surgery today, I thought about all of your pain and perseverance, your unique family situations, school environments, health issues, homelessness, identity struggles -- sometimes you are so brave that it terrifies me. I wonder how it's even possible. So I thought to myself, I'm alive, I'm living my dream, and this is just a bump in the road. I'm grateful because this is temporary, and for some it is not. You have changed my life. I love you and am proud to be a part of your lives. If you can do it, I can do it too, and if we stick together we can get through anything. Love, Gaga" (<http://uk.eonline.com/news/390287/lady-gaga-posts-letter-thanking-fans-for-strength-during-her-surgery>)

So if monstrosity constitutes the very culturological underpinning of Gaga's artistic vision, we are summoned to delve into its tenets. Surely it wouldn't be expected of Gaga to provide us with a treatise on monstrosity and judging from the manifesto such a treatise is not likely to materialize some time soon. Hence, at least we can try to provide an account of the meaning of monstrosity in Gaga's terms (which may also be linked to the evoked 'theory of perception' in the manifesto).

In common parlance someone is called a monster due to the display of outrageously deviant behavior which may or may not involve criminal acts. Hence, a monstrous personality is likely to evince traits that are either ethically or legally (or both) frowned upon. The semantic nucleus of monstrosity contains the element of excess and/or transgression. The frame of reference, again, may be a cultural norm or a clause of the penal code. Rapists are called monsters inasmuch as geniuses. There is a professional recruitment agency under the name monster.co.uk, but also an energy drink called Monster. Monsters have been an integral part of the popular imaginary since time immemorial, either in the form of dragons that inhabit lagoons and terrorize unwary villagers or deformed humans (aka Frankenstein) who have lost their 'humanity' due to some sort of genetic (and/or cultural) anomaly.

The function of a monster in the setting of a certain community, at its most basic, is to demarcate its boundaries by posing a physical/behavioral limit, that is by delimiting the imaginary and/or symbolic (ideational) contours of a community, while infusing the community's ethos with schemata of transgression. The schema of monstrosity and its multifarious manifestations serve to propagate, most fundamentally, the same old Same/Other dialectic and to enforce on the inverse feelings of belongingness among members of a community by pointing to instances of transgression of its ideational limits (cf. Davisson 2013: 47-48). The schema of monstrosity is stronger than mere difference, while functioning as a limit metaphor of radical (or, more praxiologically speaking, intolerable) alterity. If, as Massumi (1996: 93) contends, "normality is the degree zero of monstrosity", then monstrosity is a metaphorical schema that transposes us to the limit of normality.

It may be observed that at first sight Gaga's employment of this highly (ab)used concept does not deviate from the common vernacular, were it not for the semantic distance and magnitude between monstrosity and difference. Gaga repeatedly urges her audience during live shows to be themselves, she reflects herself in this maxim by praising her achievements publicly as the outcome of her monstrous (to be qualified) personality. When Oprah asked Lady Gaga what she really wanted for her fans, she said, "I want them to free themselves, and I want them to be proud of who they are... I want them to celebrate all the things they don't like about themselves the way that I did, and to be truly happy from the inside" (Davisson 2013). She is far from repelled at the idea of using 'strong language' when referring to how her actions and 'eccentric' behavior may be perceived by the 'general public' when she employs expressions in live shows like "I don't fuckin' care what they think of me..." and suchlike intersubstitutable attitudinal and emotive markers. The chiasmic entwining of the audience's cheerful response with such thymically overloaded proclamations may be perceived as an attestation of the performative utterance's illocutionary force. Gaga offers herself as mirror/exemplar to her little monsters in a more elaborate manner by going through her personal experiences in becoming mother monster, that is in recalibrating expectations based on her anomalous climbing to stardom. Once there, any eccentricity is allowed and in the case of Gaga such eccentricity is the norm. Yet, this eccentricity is largely evinced at a stylistic, rather than axiological level. Or, when it is evinced at an axiological level, this occurs in other than linguistic modes, mostly visual, but also gestural, as will be shown in due course.

Gaga appears in an interview with Jean Paul Gaultier (Lady Gaga 2013) as regretful in the light of past drug-usage, obviously her physical shape and stamina are indicative of a far from booze-dependent lifestyle, while she even pledged allegiance to traditional family values and her utmost respect for the father figure: "I care so much about what my father thinks, I am very old-fashioned Italian in this way". So where is that monstrous line of flight or transgressive fissure in the above statement that affirms the legitimacy of the pinnacle of the Symbolic Order (cf. Žižek 1992: 124: "The symbolic order [the Big Other] and enjoyment are radically incompatible")? Is there anything left in Lady

Gaga's articulated discourse that is even remotely reminiscent of monstrosity, other than a far from subaltern march for the rights of the gay movement? Are queer theory and Gaga's avowal of her bisexuality the limits of her perception of monstrosity? As will be shown in due course, monstrosity in the multimodal semiotic edifice of Lady Gaga is evinced in the less articulated moments in the deployment of her artistic narrative. The relatively under-explored (compared to biographical data, official videos and lyrics) modes of multimodal textual formation of live-shows presents a significant opportunity for gaining access to the function of monstrosity in less explicitly articulated modes (also see Prieto-Arranz's [2012] examination of Madonna's performative aspects by recourse to semiotic concepts). It is about signs that hang together disjunctively (or diabolically, in Deleuze's terms, merely echoing the etymology of diabolus that is *dia-balein* or a disparaging force that sets apart, that spreads conflict, rather than unison), not oppositionally, but separately against a chaotic back(un)ground. This mode of propagation of monstrosity within the semioscape of Lady Gaga as simulacrum or self-referential discourse that maintains the centre of the heterogeneous signs that make up its iconic self-sameness through stylistic excess, posits a limit metaphor for the popular imaginary of what would be a strange attractor, even if, at the end of the day, this is a clear case of feigned estrangement, of the imposition of an axiological nexus that demands to be danced to, rather than be comprehended. This reading of Gaga's brand DNA which does not rush to celebrate, in line with post-modern readings, openness and semiotic playfulness (Varriale 2012), will allow for re-entering the hermeneutic circle of mother-monster as (dis)simulacrum, that is as dissimulative simulacrum that posits self-referentially a limit metaphor for the popular imaginary of what would be a strange attractor only to feed parasitically on the limit of radical alterity in a mundane, representationalist discourse.

3. Gaga is fake monstrosity, long live monster Gaga

The above introductory remarks should at least point to the shaky foundation of Gaga's claims to monstrosity. But how can we tell the difference between what is

'really' monstrous and what amounts to faking monstrosity? If a schema of monstrosity is always in need of visible signs for its demarcation and if what is visible in an otherwise limit metaphor of radical monstrosity implies recognition on behalf of members of a linguistic community, then by default the monstrous depends on 'its' re-presentation for its constitution as such. Hence, by definition the monstrous is simulacral insofar as it is an image of itself, a self-subsistent discourse that resembles nothing but itself and that depends on its iconography for its recognition. This is the paradoxical nature of monstrosity insofar as if it did function as limit metaphor, it should be capable of incorporating in its representational armory not only what lies within the scope of the assimilable, but also what lies beyond 'its' boundary. Otherwise, the schema is quasi-monstrous, as it encapsulates only what is assimilable. The only way out of the partial assimilation impasse would be to constantly renew the recognizable and legitimate manifestations of monstrosity. This is indeed what has been happening over the centuries, albeit to the very detriment of what is actually the mission of the schema of monstrosity, that is to point to the limits of tolerable difference. In short, what is recognized in, for example, a visual sign of monstrosity as monstrous is a spatio-temporally situated representation of an ideal limit or an open horizon of semiosis that exceeds what is engraved in 'its' manifestation. The sign appropriates the horizon of unlimited semiosis as radical alterity and openness to signifying possibilities as simulacrum of itself and at the same time as (dis)simulacrum or dissimulative (feigned) simulacrum. Gaga is monstrous *for* her community *in* the performance of the speech act 'be what you want to be' insofar as she demands of her fans to project their semiotic horizon onto her as simulacrum of infinite semiosis, albeit a simulacrum that, in (the) reality (principle), may only be evinced dissimulatively in a feigned manner as (dis)simulacrum.

The pseudo-openness of Gaga as monstrous semiotic horizon assumes 'real' argumentative currency once it is evinced as an extension of a forcefully habitual pattern to its limits (compared to how average consumers of her target audience may fantasize about limits), such as the over-consumption of designer clothes. Especially for a teen market with scarce financial resources and high level of dependency on parents, for example, the frantic rate of stylistic

transformations through which Gaga undergoes functions as an ideational metaphor for the limit of becoming. At the same time, Gaga is a very cost-effective test-bed for gauging the range of stylistic choices that her target group considers to be exhaustive of its possibilities for becoming other. Abundant examples of this not too far from the 'source' (or polar attractor) range of stylistic choices that are made by Gaga's fans may be gauged by attending to how Gaga's fans lay claim to their stylistic singularity. Despite Gaga's repeated pleas to her fans, and contrary to what is pretty much standard practice among a predominantly narcissistic star-system (Pinsky & Young 2009), not to emulate her style, but to claim their singularity, in practice the apple does not fall that far from the tree². This may also be conceived as a great experiment in the degrees of deviation (freedom) from a polar attractor towards which fans are likely to stretch. In fact, Gaga's overt legitimation of fantasy (defined as limitless consumption of designer clothes in her interview with Gaultier) as constitutive of *her* reality principle (what could, for some, be tagged as psychosis) is a sheer enactment of Lacan's formula for phantasy, viz., $\$ \leftrightarrow [\text{diamond}] \text{ petit objet a } (\$ \diamond a)$ or the fetishistic/imaginary string of small other objects (or partial objects, in Lacanian lingo) as designer clothes. In this manner, designer clothes function as inscriptions of the other side of the split subject or the Other that is appropriated through the fetish, albeit always already incompletely, thus rekindling the desire for consuming more designer clothes.

The central term of the formula, the *poignon* [my note: diamond], fuses the logical symbols of conjunction and disjunction, indicating both inclusion and exclusion, both necessity and contingency, both implication and impossibility. The objet a is the point at which the subject assumes a certain paradoxical consistency precisely by virtue of marking the impossibility of coincidence of the subject with itself. (Boothby 2002: 161)

² Fans' pictures may be found at <http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2071415,00.html>

“Objet a is a kind of remainder, a scrap or residue inassimilable by either the imaginary or the symbolic” (Boothby 2002: 161; also see Rossolatos and Hogg 2013). However, stylistic clothing choices are only part of Gaga’s semiotic edifice, as will be shown in a while. For the time being, let us revert to the problematic (should there be one) between real and feigned monstrosity by attending to how the concept has been conceptualized by D&G. D&G’s aversion to this closed loop (from objet a to Other and back again through the barred subject) that is a fundamental tenet in Lacanian psychoanalysis (cf. Boothby 2002, Smith 2004) in favor of mapping trajectories of pure becoming as opening to absolute and non-assimilable exteriority (which is, in a sense, precluded by the Lacanian formula that re-inscribes the *raison d’être* of the fetish in the Other as its Being, even *in absentia* and as *impossible* or *irrecuperable object*) is more faithful to the function of monstrosity, as will be shown in the ensuing Section, but also liberating from the negativity of the Other that feeds parasitically on its inscriptions, and affirmative of non-instantiating trajectories of becoming. Indeed, as Gaga’s sung pun in her live performance that is coupled with a visual of the artist being levitated against the background of an infolding/enveloping unto itself matrixial structure (Figure 1) suggests: “I’m a freak...free”. Whether this is “a singular path of freakish becoming” (Massumi 2001: 94) remains to be seen.

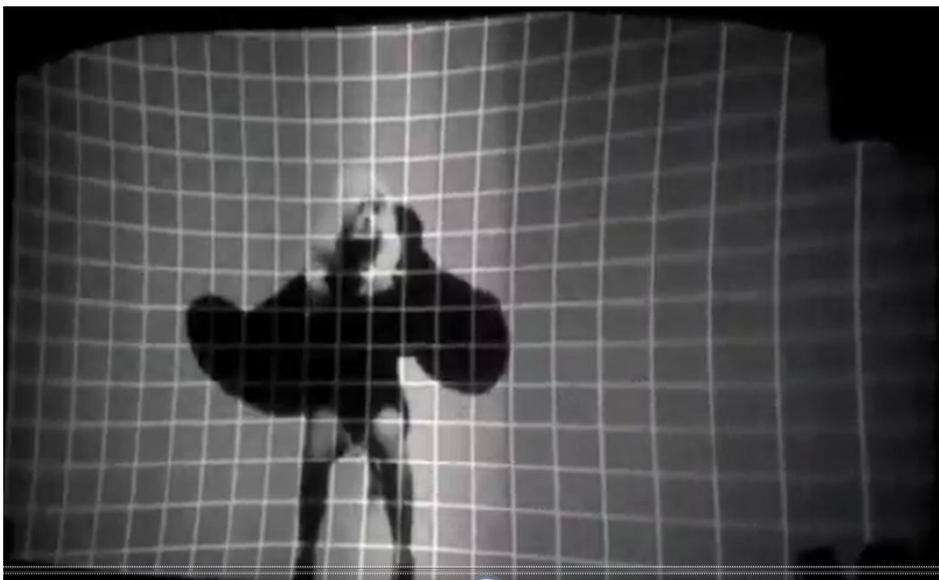


Figure 1- “I’m a freak...free” (Lady Gaga 2011: 00:00:58³).



Figure- “What is the Monster ball all about? The monster ball will set you free” (Lady Gaga 2011: 00:16;36).

“Becoming, in its simplest expression, is a tension between modes of desire plotting a vector of transformation between two molar coordinates” (Massumi 2001: 94). These coordinates are not given, as in the spatial form of a map, and hence are not intent on re-tracing what is part of a universe of knowledge. The irreducible singularity of such a desiring mechanism rests with a fusion of potential relations or, as put by Massumi, by a mutant trajectory never before travelled. Gaga’s constant stylistic shifts in the form of a transformational relationship with *haute couture* is not intent on making a ‘fashion statement’ (tout court), a statement that might be reinscribed in a trajectory of cyclic repetition of mapped out constellations, but to endorse hyperdifferentiation and its instantiation in novel fusions. Gaga certainly resembles none other than herself or herself as her artistic vision, however these notions of vision and selfhood have not been adequately addressed. The self-sameness of Gaga, her notoriously clandestine attitude towards any frivolous attempt at enforcing a degree zero of non-stardom and a trajectory of becoming star as successive

³ References to Gaga’s live-shows feature date (e.g., 2011) and time-point (e.g., 0hrs, 0mins, 58secs).

deviations towards becoming monstrous is equivalent to a propagation of hyperdifferentiation as *modus vivendi* that transcends the frail and superimposed distinction between degree zero (of everydayness) and extraordinary ec-centric stardom.

4. On the multiple regimes of Lady Gaga as sign system

Hard as it may be to preclude outright any influence of Deleuzian philosophy on Gaga's image-makers, it is inevitable that such highly abstract concepts as monstrosity are occasionally mutilated once decontextualized from their theoretical contours and blended with intuitive ordinary discourse. In such instances, abstract schematic concepts, rather than entering the process of scholarly elucidation, recede into greater oblivion through their ossification into a vague rhetoric. In this sense, Gaga's very employment of a rhetoric of magnitude (Big monster vs. little monsters) should be in any case alarming as to the faithful employment of the term monstrosity. By definition, there can be no continuum of monstrosity, either something is monstrous or it is not. A continuum implies the prevalence of analogical thinking and the predominance of proportions: John is as monstrous as Jane, but less than Gaga, which is simply absurd. Gaga as maternal lieu of monstrosity is plausible (again, within the conceptualization of monstrosity as *dissimulacrum*, as above delineated), but what kind of evidence do we have in order to lay claim to Gaga's effective functioning as mother monster or what kind of symptoms/signs that could potentially make up Gaga's discourse as semiotic system merit (even retroactively) ascribing to her the 'role' of mother monster? Moreover, could this kind of monstrosity be contained within the explanans of a 'subcultural trend' (as suggested by Corona 2011) in the face of the far-reaching effects and wide proportions that the Gaga phenomenon has assumed?

According to D&G (1987) any formalization of expression constitutes a regime of signs. "A regime of signs constitutes a semiotic system" (D&G 1987: 111). Each signifying regime is characterized by eight principles (D&G 1987: 117):

(1) the sign refers to another sign, ad infinitum (the limitlessness of signifi-ance, which deterritorializes the sign); (2) the sign is brought back by other signs and never ceases to return (the circularity of the deterritorialized sign); (3) the sign jumps from circle to circle and constantly displaces the center at the same time as it ties into it (the metaphor or hysteria of signs); (4) the expansion of the circles is assured by interpretations that impart signified and reimp-art signifier; (5) the infinite set of signs refers to a supreme Signifier presenting itself as both lack and excess (the despotic signifier, the limit of the system's deterritorialization); (6) the form of the signifier has a substance, or the signifier has a body, namely, the Face; (7) the system's line of flight is assigned a negative value, condemned as that which exceeds the signifying regime's power of deterritorialization (the principle of the scapegoat); (8) the regime is one of universal deception in its jumps, in the regulated circles, in the seer's regulation of interpretations, in the publicness of the facialized center, and in the treatment of the line of flight.

In my view, the central principle, based on D&G's postulates, that should be posited as starting point for unraveling the reel of an eccentrically centralized semiotic system, such as Lady Gaga, is (5), viz., the necessity of a Supreme (despotic) Signifier that presents itself as both lack and excess and that delimits the system's deterritorialization. By resuming the analysis that was deployed in the previous Section concerning the function of monstrosity as limit metaphor, instantiated in a name and in a face, viz., Lady Gaga, we may infer that Lady Gaga as name (first and foremost) constitutes the archi-signifier (the despotic mother figure) of her sign system, the blind and omnipresent spot in a matrixial structure that regulates the extent of multimodal signs' territorialization within the contours of the Gagaist semioscape. At the same time, Gaga is the archi-signifier to which all the rest signs that are produced by her colleagues refer, e.g., the utterance "this is so Gaga" in the face of a choreographic fragment that features multiple dancers and kinesic patterns. And if Gaga is the supreme

signifier of her semiotic space, then she is the Phallus that regulates entry into her imaginary/symbolic semiotic space. Thus spoke Gaga (2011: 00:32:10): “I don’t know if you’ve heard, but I have a pretty tremendous dick...Welcome to the monster ball, now dance you motherfuckers”. Was this an ironic answer to rumors that were circulating at that period about her presumed hermaphroditism? I hope so, as otherwise Gaga would have to pay royalties to Lacan! (also see Benton 2010). Thus, Lady Gaga functions as polar attractor for the production (and termination) of the flow of signs within the contours of the artist’s semioscape. Why is Gaga as archi-signifier ‘lacking’ from her system? Simply due to her functioning as monstrous signifier that delimits the potentiality of becoming, as circular re- and deterritorializations of the signs that make up this sign system. Insofar as, based on our earlier analysis, the monstrous signifier safeguards the integrity of an ‘inside’ against a threatening (with radical alterity) ‘outside’, the monstrous signifier may not be pinned down within the semiotic system. It is both within and without. This also justifies D&G’s ascription not only of lack, but also of excess to the supreme signifier. Principle 8 (‘universal deception’) lends further credence to the propounded dissimulative dimension of the Gaga’s simulacrum. This is not due to a ‘will to deceive’, that is to mask ‘truth’, but to a recognition of the excessive function of the monstrous signifier as both inside and outside the semiotic system, and hence as not restricted by any sort of truth conditionals that aim at upholding the truth value of a linguistic community. The truth of the supreme signifier is the affirmation of untruth as condition for the inbound/outbound flows of signs within/without a semiotic system (whence stems the function of the archi-signifier as despot and regulator: “A place where all the freaks are outside and I am at the fucking doors”, Lady Gaga 2011: 00:17:20-00:18:20). In the mother monster’s own words: “I hate the truth; I prefer a giant dose of bullshit every day over the truth” (Lady Gaga 2011: 01:27:21). Notice that Gaga does not display a preference for lies, but for bullshit, that is unnecessary information, where necessity is deemed as such by a mainstream media agenda as to what constitutes important news (also see Meyers 2009, Deighton and Cornfeld 2010 regarding media-ted truth about stars).

Gaga's preference for the frivolous is not so much a statement about the suppressed importance of frivolous news, as an affirmation of the irreducibly important differential territorialization of signs within a semiotic system that is not regulated by the Symbolic Order. In the light of this remark, it is of little wonder that D&G assign the principle of scapegoatism as constitutive factor of a semiotic system. Once again, the scapegoat as monstrous representation, is affirmative of the role it performs in upholding the limits of the Same and delimiting the boundaries of tolerable transgression. In the 2012 Born this Way Ball Tour Gaga's dancers march while holding flags with the inscription G.O.A.T., obviously as a statement that refers to more than a symbol of fertility or even to some sort of Luciferian doctrine, viz., to the equation of Gagaism with scapegoatism. Gaga's flag-holding dancers constitute a parade of signifiers that celebrate their monstrous and despotic signifier's provi(de)nce: In the name of Gaga, the (scape)G.O.A.T. But Gaga also does not refrain from intentionally acting as a scapegoat on stage apropos bourgeois closet morality. Behold, Gaga the 'stagegoat', fingering her behind (Figure 2) and engaging (dissimulatively) in lesbian sex (Figure 3) on a bike:



Figure 2- Gaga fingering (Lady Gaga 2012: 1:02:00).



Figure 3- Lesbian sex on a bike (Lady Gaga 2012: 00:59:39).

However, one might argue, are these visual signs sufficient representations for justifying Gaga's role as mother monster? Hardly so. Similar signs abound in the performative repertoire of major artists, such as Madonna. Madonna was flirting with such representations probably before Gaga was born (this way). What is different, though, is that Gaga's signs are embedded in a semioscape that is not constrained by a master-signified as ideologeme(s). More concretely, whereas Madonna's open promotion of lesbianism surfaced in her *Erotica* period, that is in the context of the ideologeme of sexual liberation and polymorphous perversity (if this Freudian term is still allowed) that underpinned and permeated as master signified the stage-setting, the lyrical orientation, the rhythmic sections and any other signs that were part and parcel of the ethos that was definitive of Madonna at that historical juncture (inasmuch as similar constraints on the signified were placed on the semiotic systems of Meredith Brooks, Britney Spears, Kylie Minogue, Samantha Fox), and which was preceded (and succeeded) by other master-signifieds, the Gagaist hyperspace is not sustained by a master signified, but by intersections of flows of intensity that happen to give rise to determinate signifieds at the same time, at the same place. Signifieds in Gagaist space protrude randomly from and over a pre-semiotic flow of intensities. "The question is not yet what a given sign signifies but to which other signs it refers, or which signs add themselves to it to form a network

without beginning or end that projects its shadow onto an amorphous atmospheric continuum.” (D&G 1987: 112). Signifieds in Gagaist space just happen to be there. This position is quite strikingly evinced in the neon-lit pseudo-ideologemes that make up the depth structure, so to speak, of Gaga’s (2011) front-stage performance (Figures 4-7).





Figures 4-7- Neon-lit pseudo-ideologemes (signifieds) projected onto an amorphous atmospheric continuum (Lady Gaga 2011).

Gaga's live-show semiotic universe is indeed perfused with signs, albeit signs that hang together disjunctively not as parts of oppositional structures (as is the case with classical structuralism), but as protrusions from a vague semantic depth that gives birth (territorializes) and death (deterritorializes and reinstates in a nomadic trajectory) without taking into account any ideological repercussions. It is hardly arguable that the signs 'liquor' and 'drugs' in the above collage shelter ideologemes and maxims such as 'Drink' and 'Take drugs'. Such an interpretation implies a latent hierarchy in the syntagmatic ordering of 'old teeth', 'implants' and all the rest amply lit signs that make up the semantic depth

of the show that is enacted on the front stage. Could this be part of an unknown psychological experiment? Personally I am not in possession of such information. Is this a case of forming random vectors between front stage signifiers and background signifieds? If so, then it is unlikely that any sustainable salient patterns will emerge (unless the 75.000 participants in Lady Gaga 2012 were all equipped with tachistometers and cameras that recorded what they saw per millisecond; but still, this implies some sort of pre-validation of the meaning of the featured signs prior to the exercise, as well as a method for tracking behavioral changes during the post-event exposure). At the same time, I find explanations offered by some cultural analysts of celebrity fashion, such as “in explaining this interest in celebrity fashion, the work of Turner is useful, as it associates the appeal of celebrity with a wider cultural shift ‘that privileges the momentary, the visual and the sensational over the enduring, the written, and the rational” (Hewer and Hamilton 2012: 413) as unfortunate idyllic and nostalgic re-marks of a presumably neutral, achromatic and disinterested Barthesian degree zero of morality (molarity, in Deleuzian terms, as overcoding or the “imposition of an absolute identity grid” [Massumi 2001: 124]). In fact, the random disjunctive juxtaposition of signs (Figures 4-7) as feigned and affirmatively untruthful semantic depth of Gaga as dissimulacrum is an after-shock of the death-blow that has been conferred to the oppositionally disjunctive paradigm that preceded D&G’s *AntiOedipus* and that fueled the lyrical overtones of ‘enduring rationality’.

But Gaga gets even more monstrous when she openly challenges striated state space, while exclaiming in *Stade de France* (Lady Gaga 2012) ‘France is shit’, obviously in continuation of her ‘Government Hooker’ epic which opened the shows in the *Born this way* tour, a statement that was not at all in marked opposition with her later (non-apologetic) appreciation of French culture, designers, etc. “I am not a woman; I am not an alien; I am not a man. I am not human. I am not a creature of your government. I am you. I am everything you love about this universe and, France, I am everything that you despise” (Lady Gaga 2012: 00:34:15). In this case France might as well be any other geographical territory that has been spatialized by a state mechanism which posits stringent a priori criteria as to the inflows/outflows of signs in its

semioscape or (at least) that regulates closely such outbound/inbound movements. Furthermore, Gaga's explicit admission of her quasi-allegiance (in the context of a post-ideological pot-pourri, as above noted, without any prevalent or transcendental signified, save for ephemeral 'protrusions') to post-humanism is attested visually through her appearance in cyborg attire during the opening of Lady Gaga (2012) and her subsequent engagement in virtual oral sex with one of her dancers (Figures 8-9). The strategic placement in the flow of the show of the virtual oral sex scene also affords to effect a regress to her audience towards Gaga as originary locus (monstrous gatekeeper) or a khoric space (third realm) that gives birth and cancels at will representations, a 'brand promise' that is rendered visually immediately thereafter (Figure 10). The coupling of the visual sign of Gaga as birth-machine with the verbatim "I am not a prisoner, they will not define me" is a sharp corroboration of the impossibility of pinning down, in concrete representations, the mother-monster. The monster cannot be defined, as it delimits the very definitional scope of her semioscape.



Figure 8- Cyborg Gaga (Lady Gaga 2012: 00:06:38).



Figure 9- Virtual oral sex with cyborg fellow dancer (Lady Gaga 2012: 00:06:38).

Does Gaga as cyborg enhance the validity of our claims about her monstrous function within her semioscape? On the contrary, cyborgs, a by now trite representation of what would amount to being non-human, maintains an oppositional relationship with monstrosity and hence antedates and is hypotactic to monstrosity as uber-representational schema. Gaga flirts with representations of post-humanism, as territorialized and re-cognizable ideologemes, with the same ease as she transforms into a heavy metal fan in the following song. She stabilizes provisionally on one of the multiple signifying plateaus that make up her sign system, without subscribing to any of them as wannabe revelations of her truth, thus affirming, for once more, the core *essence* of monstrosity as non-assimilable becoming-other which is by definition not amenable to a re-presentationalist logic.



Figure 10- Gaga's gigantic vagina giving birth to little monsters (Lady Gaga 2012: 00:10:20-24).

5. Conclusions: Hyperdifferentiation is not monstrosity

Up until now and predominantly in the previous Section, the interpretive orientation may have emitted the impression that Gaga really delivers on the monstrosity promise. This is hardly the case. Gaga's presumed monstrosity may be more pertinently encapsulated with the employment of the term hyperdifferentiation. The more rapid shifts from constellation of signifiers to constellation, the ironic play with the idea of a transcendental signified as temporary fixation of the semantic depth of the parade of signifiers, the representational gimmicks that enrich the popular imaginary about monstrosity (e.g., cyborgs) and the proliferation of ephemeral assemblages among outworn modes of being that refuse to die (Massumi 2001), such as borrowed representations from cabaret performances mixed with heavy metal (despite the fact that the underground thrives with considerably wackier hybridic experimentations) speak for Gaga's indubitably creative imagination, and for a greater proclivity towards giving in to pure play, devoid of any ideological

orientation. However, this logic of hyperdifferentiation is not equivalent to monstrosity. Caution should be exercised in terms of interpreting Gaga's moves along monstrous lines. First, repetition and hence a mapped trajectory of becoming are clearly part and parcel of Gaga's deliverables. Each live show in a tour follows a particular plot, songs appear pretty much in the same order, the scenery is invariable throughout shows. Her fans resort to expressive outlets that constitute far from flirtatious gestures with haute couture, while consisting occasionally in replicating Gaga's stylistic aspects (contrary to the above-noted anti-narcissistic posture adopted by Gaga in this respect). Furthermore, as already argued, something cannot be more monstrous than something else. Certainly Gaga may be more open to differentiation in terms of an increased playfulness with elements from different genres, however the proliferation of territorializations is not the function of a monster. Gaga rightly claims that she is the gatekeeper of her semioscape and surely she does abide by the Deleuzian principle of the supreme signifier in this respect. However this supremacy is not of the same plateau as the radical indeterminacy of the monster whose sole purpose is to regulate the flows of intensity between the inside and the outside.

In conclusion, Gaga does afford to delimit ideationally her space and to function as polar attractor, however any claims to monstrosity are undercut by the sheer limits that are embedded in any representationalist approach that might sufficiently engulf the schema of monstrosity. Monstrosity may only be sensed through a dissimulatory gaze and the Gaga spectacle offers such a dissimulacrum.

Appendix I- Lady Gaga's original manifesto of little monsters

(Source:

http://images4.wikia.nocookie.net/_cb20100610135415/ladygaga/images/1/1b/Manifesto-of-little-monsters.png)

I. Manifesto of Little Monsters

There's something heroic about the way my fans operate their cameras. So precisely and intricately, so proudly, and so methodically. Like Kings writing the history of their people.

It's their prolific nature that both creates and procures what will later be perceived as the "kingdom."

So, the real truth about Lady Gaga fans lies in this sentiment: They are the kings. They are the queens. They write the history of the kingdom, while I am something of a devoted Jester.

It is in the theory of perception that we have established our bond. Or, the lie, I should say, for which we kill. We are nothing without our image. Without our projection. Without the spiritual hologram of who we perceive ourselves to be, or to become, in the future.

When you're

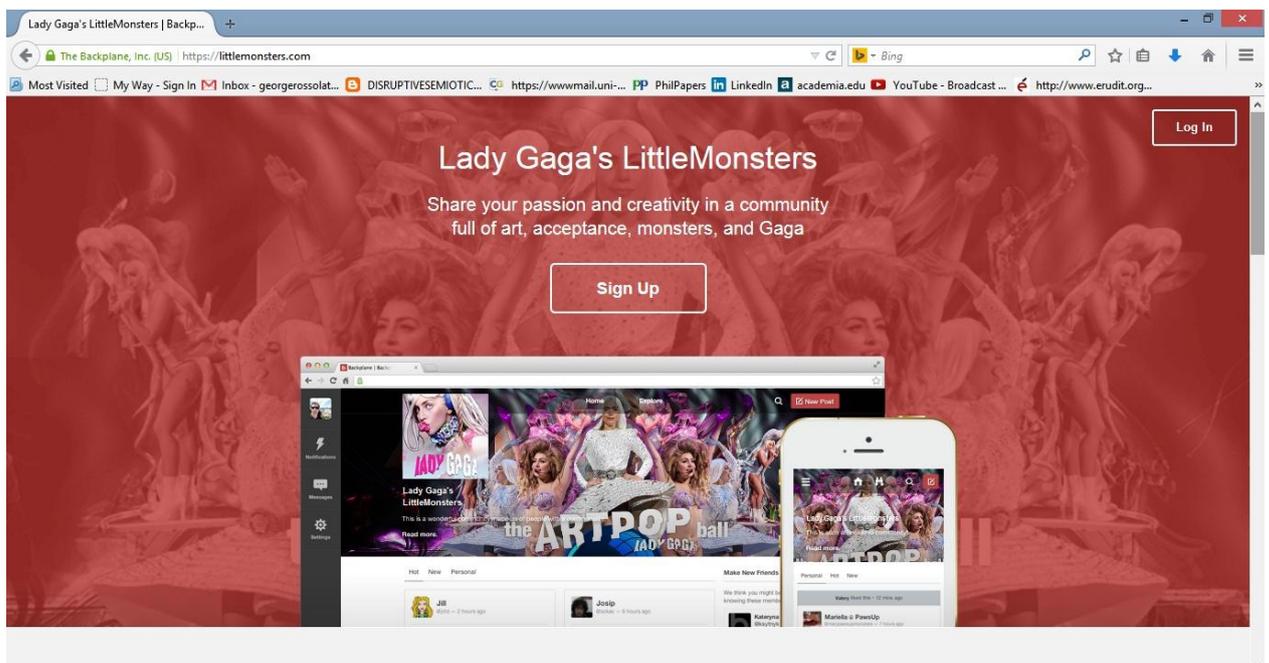
lonely,

I'll be lonely too,

And this is the fame.



Appendix II- Screenshot of littlemonsters.com



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Bio note

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