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外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班 碩士論文

“Express Your Women Kind”:

Lady Gaga and the Reconstruction of the Female Body

and Subjectivity

「女性宣言」:

女神卡卡與女性身體及主體性之重建

研究生：范慈紋

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摘要

本論文以陰性書寫的觀點來探討女神卡卡對於女性身體的重建與再現。旨在於了解女神卡卡如何在其音樂展演中展現女性身體的流動性與多重性，並藉由女神卡卡的例子，進而證明陰性書寫的可實性；另一方面，探討此女性身體流動、多重的展現解構父權主義下的二元對立，並挑戰性、性別、種族與階級的限制。

本論文共分為四章。第一章為緒論，包括陰性書寫理論，以及略述女神卡卡的背景與另外兩位具爭議性女性，瑪丹娜與梅蕙絲的關係。第二章為女神卡卡歌詞的文本式分析，並討論其歌詞中陰性書寫的實踐。第三章著重於女神卡卡的女性身體表現，從音樂錄影帶、服裝，以及現場表演來作分析。第四章是結論，總結全文重點，點出為何女神卡卡，相較於瑪丹娜與梅蕙絲，更能代表陰性書寫的實踐，兼論女神卡卡身為一位具有自我意識的女性主義者與社會運動者對社會的貢獻。

關鍵詞：陰性書寫、女神卡卡、女性身體、性別、表演

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ABSTRACT

This thesis applies the concept of *écriture féminine* to explore Lady Gaga’s representation and reconstruction of the female body. I argue that Lady Gaga uses her body to exemplify the fluidity and plurality of the female body. Although *écriture féminine*, espoused by French feminists, is questioned and disapproved for being idealist and essentialist, I believe, with the example of Lady Gaga, the concept of *écriture féminine* will prove to be feasible. In addition, Lady Gaga’s demonstration of the fluidity and plurality of the female body deconstructs any kind of binary oppositions and pushes the boundaries not only about gender, sexuality, but also about race and class.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter theorizes the idea of *écriture féminine* and provides the introduction of the three transgressive female figures, Mae West, Madonna, and Lady Gaga. The second chapter offers a textual analysis of Lady Gaga’s song lyrics. I elaborate on the relation between Lady Gaga’s sexuality and speech to the practice of *écriture féminine*. The third centers on the representations of the female body in Lady Gaga’s *music videos*, her costumes in terms of the grotesque with regard to the female body, and her performances. I analyze the narratives in her music videos and examine the ways in which she employs the female body as a vehicle to circumvent the masculinist discourse and empower others. Lastly, the concluding chapter offers a comparison and contrast among Mae West, Madonna and Lady Gaga to explain why Lady Gaga employs the strategy of *écriture féminine* and look into the role of Lady Gaga as a social activist.

Keywords: *écriture féminine*, Lady Gaga, female body, gender, performance

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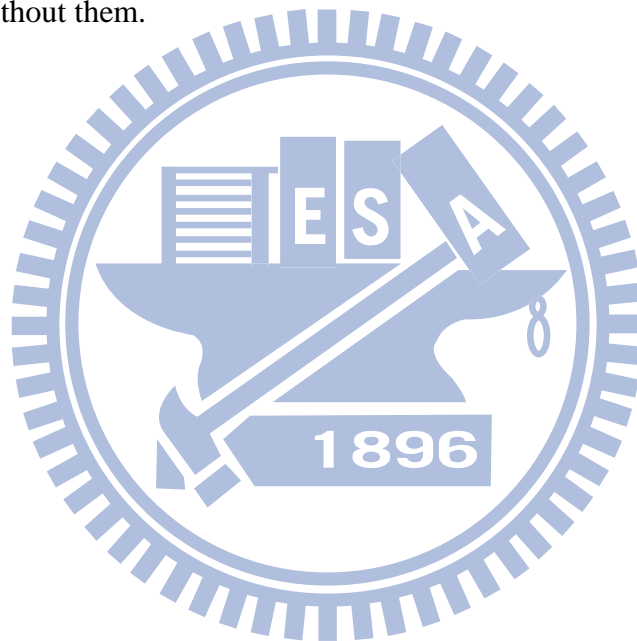


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“Express Your Women Kind”¹:

Lady Gaga and the Reconstruction of the Female Body and Subjectivity

Chapter 1

Introduction

For centuries, the female body has been usually reduced to be male possession, and constructed based on the dichotomy in which women’s body, as opposite to that of men’s, are associated with passivity, dependence and subordination. As male possession, the female body, apart from being a site for procreation, has been required to conform to patriarchal expectations and fulfill male desire; moreover, women and their bodies have been controlled by patriarchal power, partly because men fear that women’s rebellion would lead to the dwindling of masculine power. Margaret Atwood’s short prose, “Female Body,” presents a concrete example. In “Female Body,” Atwood elaborates how women live their lives under dominance and constraints, and their bodies are “used” to fulfill the domestic duty of housewives and mothers. The speaker states, “[t]he Female Body has many uses. It’s been used as a door-knocker, a bottle-opener, as a clock with a ticking belly, as something to hold up lampshades, as a nutcracker, just squeeze the brass legs together and out comes your nut” (491-92). Furthermore, at the end of this short prose, the speaker exclaims, “Catch it. Put it in a pumpkin, in a high tower, in a compound, in a chamber, in a house, in a room. Quick, stick a leash on it, a lock, a chain, some pain, settle it down, so it can never get away from you again” (493). Through the allusions to fairy tales, Atwood demonstrates that patriarchal men not only try to impose a fantasy of their ideal woman on society, i.e. a weak, mild, and submissive princess, but they also relentlessly and brutally try to dominate women and keep them from escaping patriarchy.

Judged from this example, it is evident that stereotypical images of women built by

¹ Taken from Lady Gaga’s song “Scheiße.”

patriarchy are not only predominant in the fields of religion and literature, but also are solidified in the mass media;² if some women refuse to comply with patriarchy and try to overthrow the stereotype of a feminine angel in the house through exposing themselves as well as their bodies in public, harsh criticism and denunciation always come along. In the 1930s, when Mae West, an actress and a playwright on broadcast radio and in cinema, played with the boundaries of sex, and advocated feminine pleasure and copulation, American society had such a negative reaction that West had been criticized as a notorious vamp that threatened to contaminate people's souls.

Likewise, the controversies caused by Madonna in the 1970s were no less fierce than those by Mae West, as Madonna disrupted the stereotypical image of a blonde and used her body to challenge the patriarchal expectations of women and transcend the social order. Almost thirty years after Madonna, another controversial figure, Lady Gaga, strikes the world with a more progressive and aggressive female image than Mae West and Madonna. The controversies surrounding Lady Gaga are quite unprecedented; in a way, it can be said that she keeps on provoking the patriarchal wrath.

Lady Gaga, a pop icon of the twentieth-first century, has been a contentiously popular figure ever since she launched her career in 2005. As her music is relatively catchy and consequently widely popular and loved, Lady Gaga is greatly admired and adored by her fans because she encourages them to embrace their sexuality and love themselves for who they are, which gains her the reputation of gay friendliness. Yet, Lady Gaga has been seriously criticized by people who believe that she has blasphemed Catholicism and consider her overt exposure of her body to be obscene and vulgar, not to mention her exaggerative and weird outfits are quite offensive. While most people pay attention to her oddity and her image as a pop idol, I contend that they fail to perceive the latent meaning of Lady Gaga's music,

² See Gayle Tuchman's "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media," in Tuchman, Gayle, A.K. Daniels, and J. Benet ed. *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978) 3-45.

costumes, her body, and performances, even though they recognize her outspokenness for the benefits of those who are non-heterosexual.

Seen in this light, in my thesis I want to analyze Lady Gaga's song lyrics, music videos, performances, and costumes as an embodiment of *écriture féminine*. On the one hand, I argue that Lady Gaga uses her body to exemplify the fluidity and plurality of the female body. On the other hand, I believe that although *écriture féminine*, espoused by French feminists, is questioned and disapproved for being idealist and essentialist, with the example of Lady Gaga, the concept of *écriture féminine* will prove to be feasible. In addition, Lady Gaga's demonstration of the fluidity and multiplicity of the female body deconstructs any kind of binary oppositions and pushes the boundaries not only about gender, sexuality, but also about race and class. By demonstrating female subjectivity, she challenges and upsets patriarchy and its normative regulations regarding how a proper woman should act. Moreover, she shows how powerful a female body can be.

In this thesis, I will first theorize the ideas of *écriture féminine* via French feminists' reading of the female body. Then I will briefly explore Lady Gaga's background along with that of Mae West, Madonna, for the three of them share some similarities. What follows will be analyses of Lady Gaga's lyrics, videos, costumes, and performances to discuss her sexual politics as well as her impact on society. Some people posit that Lady Gaga's music and performances cannot be taken seriously; for them, she is nothing but a manipulator of the consumer market. However, as I wish to demystify the stereotype that associates female performances in pop culture with shallowness, I argue that when Lady Gaga writes or performs her songs, she is also constructing her identity. Hence, I will examine the relation between identity and performance in order to support my argument.

Theorizing *L'écriture Féminine*

Write! Writing if for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.

(Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” 245)

In the early 1970s, even though the women’s movement in France had been active for decades, French feminists reckoned the phallogocentric thoughts imbued the society and women’s experiences have not been properly valued. Hence, French feminists propose the idea of *écriture féminine*, which attacks the dichotomy and phallogocentric language in the Symbolic Order, and suggests recourse to a revolutionary language that embraces feminine voice and desire, as well as a text in rapport to the body. Through *écriture féminine*, French feminists aspire to find another possibility of reconstructing language system and building a feminine economy. Among them, the most outspoken promoters of *écriture féminine* are Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva.

In 1975, Hélène Cixous first presented the concept of *écriture féminine* in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” a short essay in which she encourages women to write and not to be afraid to speak up for their bodies and desires. Cixous’s argument is controversial for she flatly rejects and criticizes the norms in Western culture, and the psychoanalytic theories by Freud Sigmund and Jacques Lacan. Ever since antiquity, the Western way of thinking has been founded on dualism which is hierarchal and favors phallogocentrism. According to Cixous, dualism may appear to be neutral, which accounts for its being taken for granted, but in effect it implies a closed language system in which women are often regarded as inferior and passive. She criticizes the concept that only when women are submitted to and affiliated with men will their lives have any kind of meaning. Hence, Cixous opts for another language system that bonds the female body and experience with writing so that no gender will be suppressed by the other.

Cixous also denounces psychoanalytic theories, particularly those by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan; for Cixous, their theories fall into the trap of dualism and revolve around the phallus to explain the formations of human beings in the sign system. For instance, Freud incurs some feminists’ discontent for his 1912 and 1924 theory that “anatomy is

destiny.”³ While some feminists accuse Freud of embracing biological determinism, other feminists, like Toril Moi, defend him by claiming that this statement cannot be comprehended literally and its significant should be meticulously examined as it is a derivative of Napoleon’s statement (“Is Anatomy Destiny?” 75-76).⁴ Despite of Moi’s defense, Cixous concludes that Freud “came to support the formidable thesis of a ‘natural,’ anatomical determination of sexual difference-opposition” (“Sorties” 81). Moreover, Freud’s theories rest upon the sight of the phallus to delineate human sexuality and behaviors, from which Lacan extrapolates the phallus as “the transcendental signifier” (Cixous, “Sorties” 82). Since psychoanalysis revolves around the phallus, a symbolic organ which woman lack, Freud’s question to ask what women want suggests that they want nothing, which in turn leads Lacan to contend that women “cannot speak of her pleasure” (45). Hence, in this Symbolic Order, a woman will lose her own voice, her sexuality, her autonomy, and her body, and become the embodiment of male fantasy.

To counteract this masculine libidinal economy and phallogocentric language system, Cixous exhorts women to resort to *écriture féminine* as well as to speak and write the body, in which case a feminine rhetorical discourse and economy will be fostered. Here we need to clarify that Cixous’s use of the word “feminine” does not contain anatomical denotation, nor is it caught in the dichotomy between culture and nature. To put it differently, *écriture*

³ This sentence first appeared in Freud’s 1912 piece, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love,” in which he discusses love and psychical impotence. According to Freud, love, in normal condition, can be fulfilled by the fusion of the affectionate and the sensual, which respectively refer to anaclysis toward family members and sexual desire (180). However, this complete satisfaction in love can scarcely be reached because of the prohibition of incest. What’s important is that this theory mainly applies to men as Freud declares that “[a]natomy is destiny” to suggest the genital differences result in different psychological developments (189). Freud mentioned this idea again in another 1924 piece, “The Dissolution of the Oedipal Complex,” as he explained the child’s sexual development in relation to the Oedipal complex. Likewise, this explanation applied to boys only, since girls do not have a penis.

⁴ In *Whose Freud*, Toril Moi points out that Freud’s statement is in fact an allusion to Napoleon, who states that “politics is destiny” when he conversed with Goethe in 1808 (75). Being the greatest man in 19th-century Europe, Napoleon did not believe in destiny; he reckoned that he was the one who were in charge of his own life, his own destiny, not the Christian God. Hence, Napoleon’s statement is fundamentally ironic, and Freud might apply this irony to suggest it is not anatomy that determines human sexuality and psychic, but “human civilization, the fact that every known human society socializes its children, that makes such psychic conflict inevitable” (Moi, 78). Moi’s argument here explicitly indicates that Freud is not a biological determinist and feminists who accuse him of that fail to grasp the subtle meaning of Freud’s words.

féminine does not suggest that the writer is a woman; a woman may write with phallogocentric language without noticing it, whereas a man may recognize the limits of masculine writing and represents femininity in writing. Cixous, for instance, indicates that the writings of Jean Genet and James Joyce are in fact examples of *écriture féminine*.

As Cixous advocates *écriture féminine* in her famous article, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” the significance of the mythological figure, Medusa, and the connection between her and *écriture féminine* need to be examined. In Greek mythology, in which patriarchy pervades, the Medusa, whose hair comprises of serpents, is described as a monster who can turn people into stone if their eyes meet hers. Freud thusly sees the Medusa as a symbol of castration and the serpents as the phallus. However, Cixous reverses Freud’s assumption about the Medusa and turns this mythical figure into someone who can invigorate women. Cixous states, “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 255). Contrary to the patriarchal assumption of the female body as the dark continent, the Medusa and her laughter serve as a metaphor for women to praise their sexuality and the female body. Accordingly, the serpents on Medusa’s head symbolize the plurality and multiplicity of female sexuality and body, through which women can enter feminine rhetorical structure.

For Cixous’s *écriture féminine*, one of the important characteristics is that writing is bisexual, and Cixous points out two kinds of bisexuality: one is the traditional concept of bisexuality, and the other is what she called, “the other bisexuality” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 254). Since writing in patriarchy is normally aligned with the worship of the phallus and rests on dichotomy, Cixous criticizes the former as “‘neuter’ because, as such, it would aim at warding off castration” and differentiation is effaced (“Sorties” 84). This bisexuality of patriarchy seemingly includes both sexes but in fact eliminates femininity. On the contrary, “the other bisexuality” in *écriture féminine* embraces differentiation and identify with different subjects. To be more specific, the other bisexuality includes both

sexes, which are manifested differently on individuals, but none of the difference is excluded. In this case, Cixous favors “the other bisexuality on which every subject not enclosed in the false theater of phallogentric representationalism has bounded his/her erotic universe” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 254). She also contends that this “other bisexuality” is tightly associated with femininity, because woman does not endeavor to suppress bisexuality as man does. In other words, bisexuality occurs more in women’s writing than in men’s writing. Women’s plurality is henceforth manifested.

To explore women and their potentials, Cixous asserts the necessity for women to write about themselves and genuinely re-discover their female body so that they can acclaim their desires and sexuality. Only through writing about themselves will women be able to form a genuine feminine libidinal economy and formulate the feminine rhetoric. On the one hand, to write herself is to speak; while in the symbolic, filled with phallogentric discourse, women are coerced into silence and dumbness, feminine writing enables them to resume the power to speak about their thoughts, desires, and the demand to be heard. Women can express themselves and the feminine rhetoric will be fulfilled. This concept of *écriture féminine* entails women’s self-identification and self-fashioning through writing. On the other hand, when writing themselves, women constantly “return to the body” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 250). Women will not be afraid to reclaim their bodies and praise the female *jouissance*, which is not merely restricted to sexual orgasm, but also refers to maternity. More significantly, when women reclaim the female body and are thus able to voice their desire, the expression of their lived experience will be represented for “she signifies it with her body” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 251). In other words, when women start to write about themselves, they also begin to reconstruct their female subjectivity.

As Cixous aspires to subvert patriarchy by way of *écriture féminine*, she resorts to motherhood and emphasizes the importance of the relationship between mother and daughter. “Mother” here is not just limited to the maternal role or her biological function; instead,

“mother” is regarded as a metaphor in *écriture féminine*. In a way, it can be associated with motherland, mother language, and even mother nature, since Cixous likes to link the mother figure with the sea, suggesting that the female body, like the sea, nurtures this planet with the symbolic power of the endless flow. Now women can reconnect with the mother via writing about the body with her milk, and the female body is made to be pure and prolific. As a result, the feminine libidinal economy will be constructed. In such a feminine libidinal economy, women will form strong sisterhood since in their writing, they will write in the first person and the second person; in other words, the subjects they use will be “I,” “we,” or “you.” This usage of these subjects not only suggests that the other⁵ would not be excluded any more, but is also the very opposite to patriarchal language that employs imperative tone. Affirming the other, *écriture féminine* is therefore heterogeneous.

Luce Irigaray, as does Cixous, figures that those “prestigious” philosophers since ancient Greek have excluded and suppressed the feminine, and criticizes Freud’s and Lacan’s analyses of the female subject through the phallus. Reviewing the history of philosophy, Irigaray, as a female philosopher, points out that male philosophers have been centering on “the same” against which anything different would be reduced. She states, “But wherever I turn, whether to philosophy, science, or religion, I find that this underlying and increasingly insistent question remains silent” (“Sexual Difference” 45). To reduce the different to the same or “the logic of sameness,” as Pam Morris argues, suggests an androcentric society and other gender specificities submit to him as “one and the same” (*Literature and Feminism* 114). Hence, the logic of the same embedded in phallogocentrism and logocentrism contributes to the effacement of sexual difference.

Objecting to the situation that woman’s position is subordinate to man in the Symbolic

⁵ The other here is different from Lacan’s concept of “the little other.” In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” the other refers more to the different, “the other woman,” as the opposite of the self, the same.

Order, Irigaray applies Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*,⁶ and puts emphasis on sexual difference to provide new possibilities in feminine economy which does not exclude the masculine or the feminine so that both men and women are able to define their subjectivity not in accordance to the anatomical differences. Nevertheless, sexual difference will not be possible within the Symbolic system; hence, Irigaray argues for the necessity to launch a "revolution in thought and ethics" ("Sexual Difference" 166). To make the revolution take place requires a new language. Hence, Irigaray sets the proposition of "*parler femme*," which aims to disrupt and undermine the phallogocentric parameters.

Irigaray's *parler femme*, as the word "parler" means to speak or converse in French, hopes to provide a new discourse other than the familiar masculine one. *Parler femme*, for her, is "not a matter of producing a discourse of which woman would be the object, or the subject (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 135); rather, she posits "the necessity of 'reopening' the figures of philosophical discourse—idea, substance, subject, transcendental subjectivity, absolute knowledge—in order to pry out of them what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make them 'render' and give back what they owe the feminine" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 74). In other words, woman is assigned the role of predicate in language,⁷ always being auxiliary to the male subject (Whitford 45-46). Margaret Whitford therefore maintains that what Irigaray's *parler femme* attempts to do is to place woman in the position to "speak as a subject of énonciation," instead of *énoncé*,⁸ which means "the content of the statement" (39&42). Speaking as a subject, woman will finally be able to assert her

⁶ Jacques Derrida indicates that the system of binary oppositions has been the base for Western philosophical thinking, stating that "in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. Thus, overthrowing this phallic, dichotomical thought, Derrida coins the term "*différance*," and aims to "foreground his notion of *différance* (a word he coins to produce a fusion of *différer*—deferral or delay—with the idea of difference) to suggest the unfixed, unstable nature of meaning" (Morris, *Literature and Feminism* 117).

⁷ For more explanation about woman as predicate, see Teresa de Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Smiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

⁸ The difference between enunciation and *énoncé* is of great importance in Lacan's theory of the subject. Lacan avers that when speaking, the subject is actually split into enunciation and *énoncé*. He gives the fullest explanation about enunciation and *énoncé* in two articles, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," and "Analysis and Truth or the Closure of the Unconscious."

social and cultural positions in the language system.

Irigaray further supports *parler femme* via envisaging the double syntax, through which a woman regains her self-affection. Double syntax, as Margaret Whitford explains in her introduction to the second part of the book *The Irigaray Reader*, refers to “a possible articulation between conscious and unconscious, male and female” and is one of the crucial characteristics of Irigaray’s sexual difference (77). Irigaray opposes to the masculine syntax as the one and only in the patriarchal discourse, and criticizes the ways in which men erase feminine syntax and imposes the masculine one on society because of the need to achieve masculine self-affection and self-expression. It is important to note that Irigaray does not attempt to promote another new theory about women, but instead she aims to renovate “the economy of the logos” (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 78). Therefore, as “double” suggests masculine and feminine, being in the economy characterized by double syntax allows woman to express self-love and love for the other to reach feminine self-affection without any reference to the phallus; for a woman, unlike a man, has “two lips” (emphasis added), and hence can “touch herself ‘within herself,’ in advance of any recourse to instruments” (133). That is, a woman manifests autonomous female sexuality, and appreciates sexual difference through double syntax. In this sense, a woman can speak up for her desire, acclaims her sexuality, and achieves autoeroticism, without conforming to the patriarchal fantasy.

As sex and language are closely intertwined, the “two lips” in Irigaray’s works are of great importance. The two lips can refer to both human lips and labium. In the eponymous article “This Sex Which Is Not One,” she assertively elaborates on the two lips and women’s sexuality:

A woman “touches herself” constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which embrace continually. Thus, within herself she is already two—but not divisible into ones—who stimulate each other. (100)

In a way, “to touch herself” echos the self-affection in the double syntax, stressing a woman’s autonomous pleasure or *jouissance*. A woman, unlike a man, does not need any mediation as her two lips touch themselves already, in which case the penetration of the penis and the phallogocentric words can only be intrusive. Also, the image of the two lips symbolizes the plurality of the female body, sexuality, and hence language. It is pivotal to bear in mind that when Irigaray speaks of two lips, she actually refers to more than two, which points to a woman’s multiple sexuality. Also, this plurality of female sexuality demonstrates the symbolic ubiquity of feminine pleasure; the pleasure not only comes from the vagina, but also from the breasts, the vulva, the lips, etc. Strictly speaking, a woman “experiences pleasure almost everywhere” (103).

Fluidity is another crucial characteristic of the female body that Irigaray praises. Renouncing the sameness/oneness of the phallus, she affirms the fluidity inside a woman, and anticipates her to explore the overflowing potentials of the female body. This emphasis on the fluidity of the female body significantly reflects Irigaray’s effort to restore the close bond with the mother in the pre-Oedipal phase. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it, Irigaray’s emphasis on the fluidity of the female body purposely represents the “polymorphous multiplicity of the pre-Oedipal which underlies and precedes it,” through which, it can be proved that the fluidity of the maternal pleasure in the pre-Oedipal exists “in any adult sexual pleasure (men’s as well as women’s)” (*Sexual Subversion* 117). It needs to be re-discovered so that we can reconnect with the mother. With regard to the multiplicity and fluidity of the female body and sexuality, it renders the feminine subject impossible to be defined and determined in that her body overflows when she speaks. In this case, any attempt to define her will be fruitless and inappropriate.

As she aims to resuscitate the access to the pre-Oedipal, Irigaray re-affirms the mother-daughter relationship and calls upon the assertion of maternal genealogy. In the patriarchal context, mother enacts the role of a castrated mother and is always restricted to the

reproduction of child-bearing and nurturing. She leads a life fully dependent on men and is thus trapped in the exchange among men.⁹ Under these circumstances, the mother is never a subject, nor can she claim herself as a woman for she lacks identity and autonomy. That the mother is unable to affirm her identity as an autonomous woman results in the daughter's having "no access to the woman-mother" and "no woman with whom to identify with" (Grosz, *Sexual Subversion* 122-23). It is a vicious cycle in which women will always depend on men unless they break ties with the patriarchal language. Seen in this light, in "When Our Lips Speak Together" in which she utilizes the subjects, such as "you" and "I," to express the mother-daughter relationship, Irigaray states that "I love you who are neither mother (pardon me, mother, for I prefer a woman) nor sister, neither daughter nor son" (72). To get away from these roles and functions inscribed on women by patriarchy allows them to reconstruct a new bond between the mother and the daughter as well as to espouse feminine libidinal economy where women can speak with "an active subject-to-subject relation" (Grosz, *Sexual Subversion* 124). In this respect, the maternal genealogy will thence be established.

Along with Cixous and Irigaray, Julia Kristeva's name is associated with *écriture féminine* as well, even though she is known for her controversial criticism of feminism. Yet, she also points out the blind-spots of psychoanalysis and introduces a discourse other than the symbolic as the only language system. Sharing Irigaray's critique, Kristeva also criticizes Freud and Lacan for failing to recognize the significance of the pre-Oedipal phase, and the exclusion of femininity throughout the Western philosophical thoughts. She comments, "Our philosophies of language, embodiment of the idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs" (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 13). Within this context, she applies the notions of structuralism and psychoanalysis to put

⁹ Gayle Rubin delineates the exchange of women by men based on Marx's class theory in her essay entitled "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex."

forward “the semiotic” as to counter-balance the symbolic. In accordance with Irigaray, Kristeva assigns the symbolic to the Lacanian context; the individual enters the symbolic and becomes the speaking subject to perform his or her social roles in the process of acquiring language. Before so, it is of necessity to go through the mirror stage and the Oedipal complex, which designates the split from the mother and the repression of the pre-Oedipal or the pre-signifying in Kristeva’s terms. For her, the pre-Oedipal or the pre-signifying is the semiotic which the symbolic cannot fully repress.

Significantly, though they both focus on the pre-Oedipal stage, what distinguishes Kristeva from Irigaray lies in their attitudes toward the symbolic. Irigaray seems to flatly deny the symbolic and aspire to replace it with a sign system that espouses sexual difference. Conversely, Kristeva asserts the indispensability of the symbolic and argues that the symbolic and the semiotic are “inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language” (“*Revolution in Poetic Language*” 92). She proceeds to explain, “[b]ecause the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both” (93). Nevertheless, even though Kristeva reclaims the symbolic, it does not suggest that she accepts it. She is inclined to fulfill the potentials of the semiotic and attest to “its ability of transgressing and renewing linguistic theory and, consequently, also subjectivity” (Cetorelli 31). According to Kristeva, the symbolic centers around signification; in the symbolic domain, there is the law that regulates ideologies and language to ensure everything in accordance with the signifier/signified, and the subject is obligated to conform to the law to abstain the logos from collapsing. The semiotic, on the other hand, exists prior to the individual breaking away from the mother and involves the subject formation; in her sense, the semiotic is prerequisite to the symbolic (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 68).

One crucial theme in Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic is the subject-in-process. The

symbolic contains unitary, stable subjectivity and binary signification, and therefore she insists on the need to “move out of the enclosure of language in order to grasp what is going on in the genetic temporality which logically precedes the constitution of the symbolic function” (“The Subject in Process” 140). Unlike that in the symbolic, the subject formation in the semiotic is always in motion. As Kristeva puts it, the semiotic features “not only the *facilitation* and the structuring *disposition* of drives, but also the so-called *primary processes* which displace and condense both energies and their inscription” (“Revolution in Poetic Language” 93). In this case, the subject formation demonstrates overflowing energies and drives, and the subject can never be fixated, suggesting the flexibility and the heterogeneity of language in the semiotic realm. To put it from another angle, the subject-in-process in Kristeva’s term corresponds to the fluid and multiple subjectivity, one characteristic of *écriture féminine*.

In order to further elaborate on the semiotic, Kristeva applies the “*chora*,” a term she borrows from Plato’s *Timaeus*, to conceptualize the subject-in-process. The *chora* is “a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their states in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated” (“Revolution in Poetic Language” 93). That is to say, the *chora* embodies the mobility of the subject formation and resists to be situated. On the one hand, the semiotic *chora* is the site of polymorphous drives which are in various forms and representation so as to stress heterogeneity (Grosz, *Sexual Subversion* 44). On the other hand, Kristeva notes that the drives are destructive and dubious. Thence, the semiotic *chora*, repressed as residues, acts to challenge and disrupt the symbolic. What is more, the semiotic *chora* functions to enable the speaking subject to return to the mother, the nourishing origin. Since the mother, in Freudian and Lacanian accounts, is marginalized and suppressed, the semiotic and the *chora*, involving the pre-Oedipal and pre-signifying phase, are “maternal and feminine” (49). In this case, the return to the mother represents the speaking subject’s identification with the femininity, and suggests the possibility to regain the

primal desire and *jouissance* in the close bond with the mother.

As to the necessity to reconnect with the mother, Kristeva puts forward the concept of the abject to explain the process of separation from the maternal. When entering the phallic social order, the newborn child has to separate itself from the mother and recognize the distinction between self and other, subject and object, through which the individual is subsequently constructed. Whatever is related to the maternal body is cast off, which Kristeva describes as the process of abjection. Since the maternal cannot be expelled in the social order in all respects, the abject appears in the form of unspeakable horror, vomit or bodily fluids. By doing away with these, the child assumes that he maintains the cleanliness of his body, and “constitutes his own territory, edged by the abject” (*Powers of Horror* 6). Kristeva uses the corpse to explain the notion of the abject. Since the corpse is terrifying, and it needs to be jettisoned, not because of the death but because it is the dead body which threatens the living and the society, for the corpse is no longer a subject in the society. Consequently, “[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (*Powers of Horror* 4). To put it differently, these bodily reactions result from that which threatens and challenges our boundaries in the Symbolic Order. Yet, for Kristeva, the abject can be manifested through art, which symbolizes that the bond with the maternal body would be revived and not regulated by the patriarchal codes.

Albeit their contentions seem to be different, the central idea of *écriture féminine* permeates throughout these three French feminists' works; Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva all dwell on the linguistic aspect and assert the importance of the female body in posing a threat to patriarchy and constructing the female subjectivity. This emphasis on the female body, however, incites a great deal of questions and criticism. Some critics attack *écriture féminine* as being overly ideal and utopian and criticize the espousal of the female body as

attributed to biological determinism. For instance, Ann Rosalind Jones is suspicious of the direct, intact association of the body with writing, and the extent to which the female body can dismantle the patriarchal forces that have deprived women of their autonomies for centuries (“Writing the Body” 255). Jones proceeds to critique that the advocacy of *écriture féminine* fails to take the differences among women into account, and she highlights the importance to “understand and respect the diversity in our concrete social situations” (257). As women become undifferentiated in terms of different races, classes, and cultures, *écriture féminine* will efface women’s various lived experiences, and return to the homogeneous sameness in the patriarchal thoughts, which is against the primary aim of feminists.

Gayatri Spivak, like Jones, criticizes French feminists for essentialist praxis and Eurocentric arguments on women. Sarcastically calling it “French High Feminism,” she disagrees with Kristeva and Cixous for essentializing the female body and attempting to apply Western psychoanalysis to all women. Spivak criticizes that the Kristeva’s arguments about Chinese women may appear to concern about the other but in fact is “obsessively self-centered” (“French Feminism in an International Frame” 158). She further questions Kristeva and Cixous’s praise of men of the avant-garde and points out their failure to expound how “man” can be “woman” as to *écriture féminine*.

Likewise, Irigaray’s theory of *parler femme* is also controversial in the respect of the female body and its reconnection with the maternal. Margaret Whitford contends that Irigaray’s privileging of the mother-daughter relationship in the pre-Oedipal phase and a new language system suggests her failure to look at political and social aspects in a society. Her criticism may correspond to Jones’s complaint of Cixous’s exaggerated glorification of motherhood. Toril Moi points out that even though Irigaray tries to avoid falling into essentialism, her theory of femininity nonetheless turns out to be an essentialist practice (*Sexual/Textual Politics* 142). Moreover, Irigaray’s association of women’s sexuality with fluidity, as Moi asserts, indicates her theory is still based on biological determinism and only

reproduces the sameness in patriarchal society.

These criticisms notwithstanding, I am inclined to examine the arguments of the supporters of the French feminism as I consider *écriture féminine* as a useful way to theorize about Lady Gaga. Pamela Banting disagrees with the accusation of essentialism and idealism against French feminists, and claims that they fail to truly grasp *écriture féminine*. Banting argues that the relation between the female body and language rests upon “a fluctuating process of intersemiotic translation” rather than an anatomical representation (230). She applies linguistic concepts to show Cixous’s effort to deconstruct binary oppositions, and concludes that the idea of *écriture féminine* suggests an intertwining of speech, writing and the body.

Barbara Freeman holds similar arguments on *écriture féminine* as Banting does. Pointing to the misconception of *écriture féminine* that body and language are two separated entities, Freeman contends that in French feminism these two are correlated. To be more specific, the body is defined textually and language corporeally, which she regards as a contribution to asserting sexual difference (62). Significantly, the intermingling of the textualized body and corporealized text also indicates the connection between female sexuality with speech, which not only poses a threat to patriarchy, but manifests the political function of *écriture féminine*. According to Freeman, “[t]he political and feminist force of Cixous’s position arises from the fact that it disturbs the masculinist conception of the feminine body as site of either plenitude or lack, and thereby undoes the binaristic thinking” (66). It is important to point out that the French feminists are in fact aware of women in other parts of the world. Cixous, as Anu Aneja points out, in her recent works which the critics fail to include in their analysis is dedicated to exploring the socio-political situations of women in the third world, for instance, Cambodia and India, and expresses “a widening interest in the story of the other, rather than a focus on the self” (23). Furthermore, we need to see the female body and motherhood as metaphors in the symbolic discourse, and

understand that the body and the text are culturally intertwined. All in all, the efforts of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva to reverse what have been coerced and provoke awareness of sexual difference provide us with a powerful way to fight against patriarchy and reclaim femininity as well as female subjectivity.

Following the lead of Aneja's and Freeman's arguments that *écriture féminine* is feasible, I submit that Lady Gaga embodies the notions of *écriture féminine* and serves as an example of how polymorphous and fluid the female body can be. The next section will give a brief introduction of Lady Gaga and the idea of why she is the embodiment of writing the body.

The Advent of Monster(s)

When Lady Gaga gained international success for her first full-length album *The Fame* in January 2009, the censorship in the music industry and Western society was changed hereafter. Being a pop star writing catchy music, Lady Gaga is famous for her bizarre, out-of-proportion dressing, over-exposure of her body, and the contentious issues in the lyrics of her music. Yet, being someone who disturbs social, cultural values, Lady Gaga is not the first one to trigger such criticism in the history of Western popular culture. Mae West in the first half of the twentieth century and Madonna in the 1980s can be regarded as her predecessors.

Mae West challenged the patriarchal norms and showcased women's sexuality through her comic performance. West's performances directed people's attention to sex; not only did she encourage active, even aggressive sexuality for women on the radio, but she also ridiculed male ego and played with the moral standards and regulations on Broadway or in movies at her time. June Sochen describes West as a performer-reformer. According to her, it is difficult for a female star to be both an entertainer and a reformer at the same time because "[r]arely did women's roles break completely with expected conventions, thereby

attesting to the persistence of traditional cultural views” (12). West, by contrast, shattered this stereotype of women and cleverly wrote her female roles to turn over a new leaf of women along with her mockery of male-center views. Her performance appealed to both men and women, even though there were endless controversies about her. From this view, West, as a famous star, successfully raised people’s awareness and instilled new thoughts into society, epitomizing “the outrageous Eve” (Sochen 61).

While West’s career and impact spanned more than five decades, Madonna started her career as a singer in 1976 and has acquired popularity and fame through exercising sexual and sensational images in her music since the 1980s. Generally speaking, when Madonna first came to the mainstream music scene, people would associate her with Marilyn Monroe in that they shared the similar image as sexy blondes. Nevertheless, there are marked differences between Madonna and Marilyn Monroe; while Marilyn Monroe represents the blonde dream girl for American society, Madonna breaks this stereotype, and uses her body to challenge the patriarchal fantasy about women and transgress against the social order. Although Marilyn Monroe had posted nude before she became famous, she did so because of poverty, not because she wanted to overturn the embodied image of woman. Madonna is the opposite of Monroe.

On account of her confronting the traditional perceptions about sex, gender, and sexuality in her performance and music, she had to face both admiration and harsh criticism. Steve Allen, a comedian, asserts that the reason why Madonna has become famous and successful is “her willingness—even eagerness—to resort to the grossest sort of vulgarity” (6). Another critic Ray Kerrison compares her with Marilyn Monroe, criticizing that “[w]here Monroe was subtle, Madonna is coarse” (6). For example, during her MDNA tour in Europe in 2012, Madonna deliberately stripped down her bra and exposed one of her nipples during her Istanbul performance; in another show in Rome, again, she showed her buttocks at the audience, for which she is labeled “slut” afterwards. Accordingly, these two

criticisms reflect men's anxiety about the collapse of the stereotype of the ideal women and their body in the traditional context. By contrast, E. Ann Kaplan and Susan McClay praise and appreciate Madonna's refusal to be defined by patriarchy and her conscious subversion of the woman image in Hollywood (Bordo 273).

Lady Gaga strikes the world with an even more progressive image than Madonna, although she also appears on the stage with the image of a blonde. She holds an aggressively liberal attitude toward sex and her body, claiming she is bisexual and enjoys heterosexuality and autoeroticism. Also, as aforementioned, Lady Gaga pushes the limit and plays with the boundary about sex and gender in her music, and her exaggerated costumes demonstrates her manipulation of her body which transgresses against the common bodily concept. Moreover, her performances and actions are highly suggestive and almost explicit about sexuality as she once put a "thing" in her genital area, making it appear like a penis and successfully inciting people's sensational and outrageous terror.

Interestingly, Lady Gaga is known for running a "monster" family; her fans are called "Little Monsters" and herself "Mother Monster." Lady Gaga first called her fans "Little Monsters" in a show when they were excited, sweaty, and waving their hands. She later is called "Mother Monster" by her fans out of their appreciation and admiration of her. The term "monster," to some extent, befittingly characterizes many of Lady Gaga's fans who are outcasts or those who are unwilling to comply with social norms. It also describes Lady Gaga herself as well. Since a great number of people disapprove of her, she is always censored with harsh words, one of which is monster. In this case, Lady Gaga's application of the word "monster" not only reverses the criticism and mocks people's mediocrity and lack of defining characteristics, but suggests the appreciation of a monster's uniqueness and specificity. Overall, Lady Gaga draws the public attention to the tabooed issues of sexuality, gender, as well as race, and deconstructs the binaries through textualizing the body. To me, this interrelation between textuality and corporeality embodies Lady Gaga's practice of

écriture féminine.

An Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is mainly divided into four chapters. The first chapter tries to theorize the idea of *écriture féminine* and briefly discuss the three transgressive female figures, Mae West, Madonna, and Lady Gaga. Even since Lady Gaga launched her career, the accusation of her imitating Madonna and the thinking of her as another Mae West have never stopped. These three figures indeed share distinguishing similarities; they are credited with the endeavor to confront the male-dominated society, and the female body plays a pivotal role in their art works. However, one cannot conclude that they all embody the theme of *écriture féminine*. Unlike West and Madonna, Lady Gaga showcases more aggressive sexual politics and how she represents her female body in her artistry is also fiercer. I will come back to the comparison of the three women at the end of the thesis in order to argue that the ways in which Lady Gaga is the most subversive of them all.

The second chapter will offer a textual analysis of Lady Gaga's song lyrics. I will elaborate on the relation between Lady Gaga's sexuality and speech to the practice of *écriture féminine*. It is noteworthy that Lady Gaga not only writes or co-writes every single song of hers, but brings her body into full play. In this sense, when writing her songs, she involves her bodily experiences in the lyrics, and manifests her enjoyment toward writing herself. Therefore, to delve into her lyrics will give an understanding of the textualization of her lived experiences and the inscription of the body in the text.

The third chapter centers on the representations of the female body in Lady Gaga's music videos, her costumes in terms of the grotesque with regard to the female body, and her performances. I will analyze the narratives in her music videos and examine the ways in which she employs the female body as a vehicle to circumvent the masculinist discourse and empower others. Since it is evident that Lady Gaga goes through some changes in her

music, I will also inspect her transformation from a pop star to Mother Monster, the significance behind this transformation, along with its relation to *écriture féminine*. Then the focus of this chapter will turn to her costumes. Usually, people are used to pinning women shots down to the image of a Barbie, who has a curvaceous figure and always dresses like a princess, and they tend to judge a female singer first by her appearance rather than her talent. Lady Gaga, being aware of this stereotype placed on women, always shows up in formless and outrageous costumes to upset how we should dress. Whilst people detect nothing but oddity, Lady Gaga's costumes are in fact a practice of the grotesque and serve to counteract the masculine dualism and views on women's bodies. In addition, Lady Gaga's female body in grotesque costumes presents a new form of femininity that cannot be defined in accordance with social norms. Furthermore, since Lady Gaga claims herself as Mother Monster and her fans Little Monsters, I want to link the notion of monstrosity with the grotesque. In other words, Lady Gaga's recourse to the monstrosity makes the female body not only a monstrous body but also a grotesque one, which is protrusive, plural and always changing. The significance of the grotesque body therefore corresponds to the idea of *écriture féminine*.

Also, I will elaborate on what grotesque is before presenting a close reading of significance embedded in her costumes, since critics are at odds with the definition of the grotesque. For example, Noel Carroll argues that to define the grotesque, "a structural account" should be taken into consideration before the "functional account" (295). Contrary to Carroll, Wolfgang Kayser claims that the experience of the grotesque occurs to the observer when our sense of the world is transformed and defamiliarized by abysmal farces. That is to say, he stresses the importance of the "act of reception" (180). Seen in the light, the grotesque costumes and Lady Gaga's female body are powerful entities, through which she deconstructs our perception about the connection among identity, social roles, and costumes as embodied in the caricature of femininity envisioned by patriarchy.

As Lady Gaga always wears eccentric and tantalizing costumes during her performances, the last part of the third chapter will be the analysis of performative acts. As is known to all, Lady Gaga never disguises her stance as a supporter of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual rights, and aside from her songs, she delivers this message in relation to the sex issues in her music videos and during her live performances. To be more specific, Lady Gaga's artistry reflects her sexual politics. As Judith Halberstam contends in an interview with Jeffrey Williams, Lady Gaga's sexual politics is quite open; when people suspect whether she is a hermaphrodite, she chose to remain silent and tactically directed their attention to gay rights (William 379-80). What further overwhelms the public is her refiguring Jo Calderone performing her song at VMAs 2011. This highlights her playing with the sexual boundaries to mock patriarchy and praising the polymorphous female body. The impact of Lady Gaga's sexual politics will be inspected in like manner.

The final chapter will offer a comparison and contrast among Mae West, Madonna and Lady Gaga to explain why Lady Gaga employs the strategy of writing about the female body that goes much further than West and Madonna do, hence representing the idea of *écriture féminine*. Also, as she has been engaged in a wide range of non-profit organizations to raise awareness and fight for equality for everyone, I will look into the role of Lady Gaga as a social activist.

Chapter 2

Writing the Female Body: From a Pop Star to Mother Monster

Active in the pop music scene since 2008 and praised by many critics for her musical achievements, Lady Gaga has, nevertheless, contributed to the debates regarding the art of women's performances and the female body. As Lady Gaga is a strong supporter for stopping bullying and an advocate of LGBT rights, Lady Gaga's fans regard her as an inspiration and are not ashamed to dress like her. With her eccentric and bold exertion of her body in her music, it is no surprise that this daring playing with her body comes with much criticism. Regardless of the critical acclaim and criticism, the female body plays such an important role in Lady Gaga's music that I regard her music as a version of *écriture féminine*. In this chapter, I will analyze Lady Gaga's song lyrics to demonstrate how she represents the idea of *écriture féminine*. Also, as there is a change in Lady Gaga's music and style since her second album *The Fame Monster*, I will discuss the significance of such transformation along with my textual analysis.

Practicing *Écriture Féminine* in Lady Gaga's Song Lyrics

Up to 2012, Lady Gaga has released three self-authored albums, *The Fame*, *The Fame Monster*, and *Born This Way*. These three albums mark her effort to write from her body and deconstruct the social norms. Ann Rosalind Jones's description of *écriture féminine* can best characterize Lady Gaga and her music: "to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing, a powerful alternate discourse seems possible: to write from the body is to recreate the world" (252). To write from the body, as Cixous notes, is to explore the undiscovered and the repressed, "about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 256). To assert the link between Lady Gaga and *écriture féminine*, however, does not suggest that she engages the practice of writing from the body in all three albums. While the first album

involves both her struggle against patriarchy and the beginning of her self-discovery, Lady Gaga makes the process of self-discovery and the practice of *écriture féminine* most explicit in the following two albums.

The Fame, released in 2008, is Lady Gaga's first album and explicitly explores sexuality, love, violence, and power. According to Lady Gaga herself, this album, embellished in dance pop, "is about how anyone can feel famous... Pop culture is art. It doesn't make you cool to hate pop culture, so I embraced it and you hear it all over *The Fame*. But it's a sharable fame: I want to invite you all to the party, I want people to feel a part of this lifestyle" (qtd. in Herbert 91). Aside from this claim, *The Fame*, in an actual fact, represents Lady Gaga's interrogation of the phases where a woman expresses the ambiguity toward her sexuality and patriarchy, and where she comes to liberation and celebration of the female power. These can be perceived, if we pay attention to the lyrics.

While *The Fame* celebrates being famous and clubbing, Lady Gaga manifests the conflicts between female submissiveness and the assertion of female empowerment in the lyrics of this album. For instance, "LoveGame," released as the album's third single, well reflects this conflict; it expresses both a woman's obedience to a man and active female sexuality. Addressing the issues of love, sex, and desire in a provocative way, this song is reflective of pop music which features sex and desire within phallogentric contexts. In this song, the first-person "I," while associating love and sex with games, repeatedly declares, "I wanna take a ride on your disco stick" (2). It is evident that this "disco stick" symbolizes a penis, as Lady Gaga herself states that it is "a metaphor for a cock" (qtd. in Herbert 84). In one regard, this declaration implies a woman's sexual need. As the lyrics of "LoveGame" carry sexual connotations and the title suggests an interrelation between love, sex, fun, and man, it appears that women rely on men to enjoy fun and even pleasure. Hence in an interview with a Norwegian journalist in 2009, it is reported that Lady Gaga made a

statement, “I’m not a feminist. I hail men, I love men” (qtd. in Woodruff 28).¹⁰ This statement shows not only her need of men but also the stereotypical association of feminism with hatred for men, as she seems to distance herself from feminism. Other lines of “LoveGame” lyrics also indicate a woman’s passivity in sexuality; for instance, the “I” announces, “Got my ass squeezed by sexy Cupid/ Guess he wants to play/ Wants to play/ A LOVEGAME” (9-12). While the passive sentence structure suggests the “I” is in a passive condition, to put “love” and “game” together means that the man takes a frivolous attitude toward love and regards women as playthings and possessions. This woman’s passiveness in relation to men is further enhanced:

You’ve indicated your interest

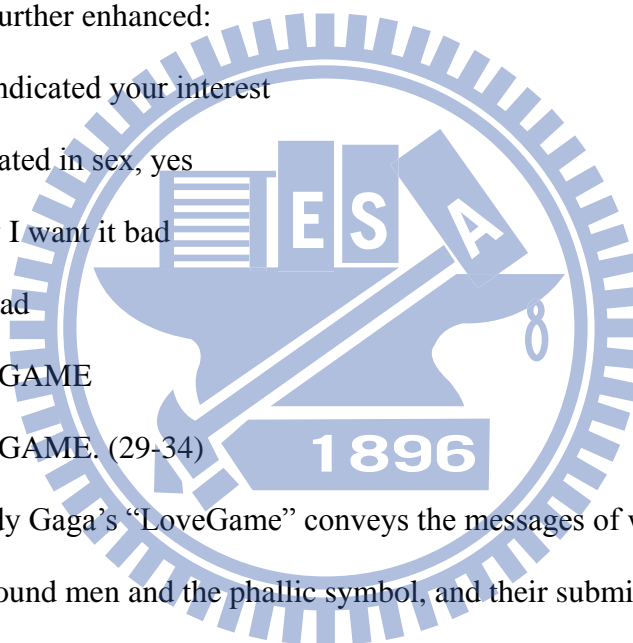
I’m educated in sex, yes

And now I want it bad

Want it bad

A LOVEGAME

A LOVEGAME. (29-34)



Seen in this light, Lady Gaga’s “LoveGame” conveys the messages of women’s sexuality and pleasure revolving around men and the phallic symbol, and their submission to and dependency on men, which echo Luce Irigaray’s notion that “[f]emale sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters” (“This Sex Which Is Not One” 99).

However, instead of sexual passivity, I believe through her songs Lady Gaga attests to active female sexuality which contradicts the passiveness in “LoveGame.” As discussed above, the declaration “I wanna take a ride on your disco stick” expresses her desire of a man’s penis, but it also shows the woman’s dominance over the man. While she boldly demands sex, the verb “ride,” referring to the position of a woman on top during intercourse,

¹⁰ As Abbie Woodruff points out in her dissertation, *Lady Gaga, Social Media, and Performing An Identity*, this statement has been quoted quite often on the Internet, but the interview video on YOUTUBE was removed and the original video is nowhere to be found (28).

can be interpreted how she treats the penis as an object and relocates the dichotomy between the male and the female, activeness and passiveness. The pre-choruses are indicative of Lady Gaga's active sexuality as well: "Hold me and love me/ Just wanna touch for a minute/ Maybe three seconds is enough for my heart to quit it" (14-16). Usually, an imperative sentence situates the announcer in a position of authority, which hints that the "I" in "LoveGame" does not subject to any men. Nor is she a man's possession because three seconds is enough for her to quit; even if she is playing a game, she declares her independence and active attitude toward her sexuality. In this sense, the outspokenness and autonomy of female sexuality, as well as the submission to the male, not only in "LoveGame" but the whole album form a stark ambiguity explaining Lady Gaga's conflicts about women and feminism.

Aside from "LoveGame," Lady Gaga also presents the patriarchal scheme of female passivity in "Paparazzi," the last single of the debut album which focuses upon Lady Gaga's struggles about love and fame. The word "paparazzi" is of Italian origin and usually describes photographers who stalk celebrities and prominent people so as to take photos of them and reveal them to the public for personal profits, and thus the paparazzi and their targets form a relation between the chaser and the chased, the gazer and the gazed. In Lady Gaga's song, the word "paparazzi" works as a two-fold metaphor; as this song is about love and fame, "paparazzi," on the one hand, sticks with the literal meaning, and on the other hand is metaphorized as Lady Gaga herself. Suggested by the theme of *The Fame*, "Paparazzi" articulates Lady Gaga's desire for fame, which contributes to her craving for love from paparazzi, i.e. the attention. On the whole, paparazzi play a pivotal and necessary role within the celebrity culture, because to be stalked means you are a celebrity. Therefore, Lady Gaga attempts to win the attention from paparazzi to become famous by staging herself "to satisfy our exaggerated expectation of human greatness" (Boorstin 58). To put it in Lady Gaga's words, the central idea is "the media-whoring" (qtd. in Herbert 164).

It is noteworthy to point out that while Lady Gaga longs for the attention of paparazzi, i.e. to be followed and watched by paparazzi, she assumes the role of the gazed and paparazzi represent the male gaze. Notably paparazzi are almost always men and the male gaze is inherent in their photographs, which mirror a form of patriarchal scopophilia. Laura Mulvey elaborates upon the male gaze and scopophilia in her article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” and proposes the oppositions “between active/male and passive/female” (19). According to her, behind the camera are always heterosexual men who project their fantasies onto women. Hence, through the male gaze, women epitome men’s desire and their bodies are displayed as sexual objects. In this sense, Lady Gaga’s desire to be gazed by paparazzi exemplifies Mulvey’s explanation of how the male gaze presents the female figure erotically to satisfy patriarchy’s pleasure in looking. Moreover, as Lady Gaga uses the word “media-whoring” to depict her way of luring paparazzi, which corresponds to Daniel Boorstin’s notion of celebrity,¹¹ it implies women’s subjugation to the male gaze and further reinforces the notion of the female body as the means to fulfill men’s fantasies, for “whoring” suggests prostitution and depreciation of women to an extreme extent.

From a different but more straightforward perspective, “Paparazzi” also discusses Lady Gaga’s love for a man and she compares the relationship between her and her lover to that between paparazzi and celebrities. Just like in the first-person narrator in “LoveGame,” the “I” in “Paparazzi” shows her love for her lover and hopes to be loved in return in the first verse,¹² as she says, “Got my flash on, it’s true/ Need that picture of you/ It’s so magical/

¹¹ In *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, Daniel Boorstin compares the celebrity with the classic hero and contends that celebrity is “known for his well-knownness” (57). He argues that because of the Graphic Revolution in the media, the greatness that characterizes the hero has come to be replaced by shallowness. That is, today the celebrity does not have significant qualities and the fame is built on an illusion; the media is both made and unmade by the media. The span of the celebrity’s fame is quite short; as Boorstin states, “the celebrity even in his lifetime becomes passé” (63). Hence, to be famous is to keep the media interested in you, the newspaper, magazines, television, etc. Boorstin’s explanation of the celebrity reflects how nowadays people will do anything to become a celebrity, even to pose nude, like Kim Kardashian, and thus echoes Lady Gaga’s usage of “media whoring.”

¹² A verse is the part that is prior to the chorus, and typically, there are two verses in a song.

We'd be so fantastic" (3-6). Paparazzi being a metaphor of Lady Gaga, the "picture" thereby represents the lover's love returned to Lady Gaga since to take revealing photographs is the primary goal for paparazzi. In fact, the metaphor of Lady Gaga as paparazzi presupposes that she reverses Mulvey's idea of the dichotomy of male/active and female/passive in the media. When Lady Gaga assumes the role of paparazzi to follow her lover, she is not passive anymore; she appropriates the position of the gazer, the chaser, and significantly transforms the male gaze to a form of female gaze. However, although she asserts the female gaze, Lady Gaga falls short to construct her female subjectivity as her female gaze identifies with masculinity: "I'm your biggest fan/ I'll follow until you love me/ Papa,/ Paparazzi" (13-16). The chorus of "Paparazzi" evidently demonstrates the female figure's submissiveness to her male lover. Additionally, Lady Gaga's activeness revolves around the want of a man's love, which diminishes her individuality. What is more significant is that she repeats the word "papa" several times throughout the song. Kevin Gaffney suggests that she is singing to her father: "I will not stop until you love me, papa (her real dad)" (31). The "papa" can also mean that her boyfriend represents a paternal figure. Whether it means her father or her boyfriend, "Paparazzi" reflects a kind of fixation on paternal love. Seen in this regard, whether "paparazzi" refers to Lady Gaga or the stalking photographers, the song "Paparazzi" is still composed within the masculine parameters.

As argued earlier, *The Fame* symbolizes Lady Gaga's self-discovery; she continues the conflicts in patriarchal societies in another song from the album, "Poker Face," where her exploration of female sexuality is communicated. Generally speaking, poker face means a person void of emotions on the face and represents a shield. Lady Gaga employs the word as a shield of her sexuality against patriarchy. Like other songs from *The Fame*, in the narrative discourse of "Poker Face" lies her struggle with respect to a man, and the lyrics of this song show a sadomasochistic relationship between Lady Gaga and her lover. In the first verse, the singer sings, "Fold em' let em' hit me raise it baby stay with me/ (I love it)" (4-5).

This description of a violent sex can also be discovered in the second verse, “And baby when it’s love if it’s not rough it isn’t fun, fun” (28). Apparently, the sadomasochistic love and banality of the lyrics reflect the woman’s shallowness; yet, the chorus provides an important subtext of this song, “Can’t read my,/ Can’t read my/ No he can’t read my POKER FACE/ (She’s got me like nobody)” (12-15). Although the lyrics in both verses express a female figure’s masochistic tendency toward men, the chorus suggests that Lady Gaga’s sexuality is more complicated and goes on to critique how women are censored by patriarchy only based on the surface, in which case the poker face is her protection from the patriarchal norms. Moreover, the chorus hints at Lady Gaga’s love for a woman, because “she’s got me like nobody.” Lady Gaga’s bisexuality can also be detected in other lines of the lyrics as well, “Cause I’m bluffing my muffin” (35). “My muffin” can be understood as her female lover, and “bluffing my muffin” will thusly be having coitus with her. In addition, “muffin” can refer to her vagina and is indicative of female autoeroticism. As Emily Herbert puts it, Lady Gaga explained to her fans that “this song is actually about a woman who is with a man, but fantasizes about being with a woman—hence the man has to read her ‘poker face’” (83). In this regard, the poker face is what Lady Gaga adopts to disguise her bisexuality, which explains why the verses and chorus form a contrast and indicates her struggle about her sexuality.

When Lady Gaga release her second album, *The Fame Monster*,¹³ the focus shifts; the struggles with patriarchy and her self-identification which fuel the first album give way to the realization of empowering female subjectivity via writing the female body, thusly a form of *écriture féminine*. *The Fame Monster* champions the female body as plural and fluid to challenge patriarchy and re-inscribes the feminine discourse in the masculine social-cultural economy. Also, given the title, the second album can be viewed as a response to *The Fame*.

¹³ *The Fame Monster* was released as a deluxe album that contains eight new songs and the first album *The Fame*. It might be regarded as an extended play of the first album, but in this thesis, I consider it to be Lady Gaga’s second album.

Suggested by the title, *The Fame Monster*, monstrosity is an important theme in this album. During an interview with Ann Powers from the *Los Angeles Times*, Lady Gaga states, “Celebrity life and media culture are probably the most overbearing pop-cultural conditions that we as young people have to deal with because it forces us to judge ourselves. I guess what I am trying to do is take the monster and turn the monster into a fairy tale” (“Frank Talk with Lady Gaga”). Victor Corona, in his essay “Memory, Monster, and Lady Gaga,” comments on Lady Gaga’s association of monsters with her artistry:

By celebrating the “monster,” the “freak,” or the “misfit” in multiple expressions—not “fitting in” at school or being gay— she is able to build a sense of subcultural membership among fans while the catch-all liveliness of her music works to sustain appeal. (2)

Hence, the concept of Lady Gaga’s monstrosity not only entails the celebration of difference, otherness, nonconformity, but also insinuates the female powerfulness to circumvent patriarchy.

The most straightforward elaboration on the monster concept in *The Fame Monster* is the song titled “Monster” which, told from a woman’s point of view, describes the brutal, sadistic side of her love interest, and compares him to a monster. On the whole, the monstrous, always connected with vampires, demons, werewolves, and alike, refers to the deformed and the abnormal that do not fit the standards of societies. As Margrit Shildrick argues, “monsters can signify both the binary opposition between the natural and the non-natural, where the primary term confers value, and also the disruption within that destabilizes the standard of the same. In other words, they speak to both the radical otherness that constitutes an outside and to the difference that inhabits identity itself” (11).

Following this lead, it can be inferred that the monster in Lady Gaga’s “Monster” embodies this concept of the monstrous. In this song, the man appears to be violent and abusive, and the woman voices his animalistic demeanors and his control over her: “That boy

is bad, and honesty/ He's a wolf in disguise" (10-11), and "He tore my clothes right off" (46). Hence, she metaphorically employs the monster to describe him: "That boy is a monster" (18), and "He ate my heart then he ate my brain" (47). Notwithstanding this brutality, the woman still shows her fascination with him by declaring "But I can't stop staring in those evil eyes" (13). It is ostensible that "Monster" illustrates men's manipulation of women, and accordingly Brigitta Abrahamsson maintains that the concept of the monster in Lady Gaga's music works is ambiguous because the woman in this song is depicted as passive and submissive (15). However, she fails to examine the lyrics in its entirety. I argue that "Monster" is actually Lady Gaga's way to criticize patriarchy. Notice that the first lines of "Monster" lyrics are "Don't call me Gaga/ I've never seen one like that before" (1-2), which means Lady Gaga distances her authorship from the first-person woman narrator in this song. Doing so allows her to be an observer and objectively present how men coerce women and dominate their bodies and sexuality. What's more, to compare a man to a monster helps to reverse women's status in societies. Since women have long been positioned as the other by patriarchy and monsters are also considered to be the other, the monstrous metaphor significantly *other-izes* men; the man is dehumanized and turned into a complete otherness, implying a ridicule of the male-centered standards.

Whilst for Lady Gaga the monster in the song "Monster" refers to a man, the image of monsters is generally associated with women. In patriarchal societies based on dichotomy, women are forced to take the position of the other, which is akin to monsters that represent the otherness as opposed to civilization. What lies inside the binary oppositions is the fear of the power of the other; as human beings are scared of monsters, the unknown kind, men regard women as the embodiment of danger that will sabotage social codes and structures. As Shildrick puts it, "[f]or all our cultural and technological sophistication, we have inherited, in western countries, an ideological burden that explicitly associates women with danger, particular in the spheres of sexuality and maternity" (30). Consequently, to keep the

masculine socio-cultural economy intact, men control women and make them comply with the man-made rules and orders. If some women disturb the masculine expectation of women by demonstrating active sexuality, they would be labeled monsters, like witches or vampires. When Bram Dijkstra discusses women, demons, and vampires in his book, *Evil Sisters*, for instance he contends that “racial, sexual, and political prejudices converged during this period to make the sexual woman into one of the most terrifying human monsters of all time” (253).

If we review the Western history, the classic example of a monstrous woman would be Medusa, who serves as a symbol of female sexuality. Once a beautiful woman, Medusa was raped and turned into a monster, who had serpents on her head and whose gaze would turn whoever looks at her into a stone. Susan Bowers contends that Medusa “provokes such a violent defense because she represents such intense female erotic power and strength, and she shares these characteristics with millions of women executed as witches, who, like Medusa, provided a focus for woman-hating in a male-dominated society” (225). In this sense, this juxtaposition of beauty and horror reflects male anxiety towards female sexuality and how women are victimized and subdued.

Objecting to the victimization of women and female sexuality, feminists, like Cixous, overthrow the negative association with Medusa and argue that she is an icon of female power that will liberate women from the coercion of patriarchy and allow them to reclaim the female body and sexuality. As discussed in the first chapter, Cixous uses Medusa to encourage women to redefine, embrace femininity and write to glorify the female body so that the feminine libidinal economy will be constructed, for women have been reduced to the same for too long. Shildrick mentions a tradition from Pythagorean Table in which “the masculine has been associated with limit, the feminine with limitless, where the latter implies a failure of the proper, an unaccountability beyond the grasp of instrumental consciousness” (31). The association with the limitless recalls Cixous’s argument that the female body is

infinite and women should explore what has been repressed and prohibited, for instance, female desires, pleasure, sexuality, etc. This is exactly the theme of Lady Gaga's song "So Happy I Could Die" from *The Fame Monster*.

Full of sensual language, "So Happy I Could Die" focuses on exploring female autoeroticism and exemplifies the female body as a site of knowledge to assert subjectivity. For French feminists, desire is of great significance in the practice of *écriture féminine*. Cixous emphasizes the necessity that women should re-appropriate the female body from patriarchy and discover their desires and pleasure. By doing so, women can write, reclaim what's been suppressed, and thereby construct feminine social-cultural economy that embraces otherness. Irigaray also points to the connection between female desire and language, and highlights the case of female masturbation as an example to showcase the female body as plural. This significance of female sexuality is what Lady Gaga attempts to delve into throughout "So Happy I Could Die." In this song, there is a first-person woman addressing to another woman, whom Lady Gaga refers to as "that lavender blonde" (5). The woman's love with the blonde is meaningful. Typically, in Western countries, blondes epitomize male fantasy of ideal women and are commonly seen as sex objects. A woman's love with a blonde, consequently, suggests a lesbian relationship and disturbs the male-centered expectation, which also mirrors the lack of men in this song.

It should be noted that "So Happy I Could Die" is the only song on *The Fame Monster* that features women only; in other words, other than these two women, there is no male character in the song. Since it honors female sexuality, the lack of men signifies that women assert their autonomy, and do not depend on them to experience sexual pleasure, suggesting that Lady Gaga aims to prove female sexuality is autonomous. This is reflective of Irigaray's claim that "a woman touches herself by and within herself directly, without any mediation, and before any distinction between activity and passivity is possible" ("This Sex Which Is Not One" 100). No distinction between the active and the passive means that

there is no one who is more superior than the other, and further implies a bonding between women. At the beginning of the song, the “I” expresses her love to the woman, “I love that lavender blonde/ The way she moves the way she walks” (5-6). Here it is overly simplistic to assume that the “I” is a lesbian who is wooing another woman through her demand of friendship, “Be your best friend/ Yeah I’ll love you forever” (17-18). To be more specific, this song does not concern about a pair of female lovers; rather, their love is indicative of a woman’s love for the other and a close female bond that counterbalances patriarchy.

Apart from desiring the love of the blonde, “So Happy I Could Die” focuses more on the pleasure of the female body. After she expresses her love for the blond woman, the “I” immediately announces the delight in touching herself:

I touch myself can’t get enough
 And in the silence of the night
 Through all the tears and all the lies
 I touch myself and it’s alright. (7-10)

Women have been censored and discouraged from active sexuality because virginity was highly valued by men. Given this harsh criticism, women could only masturbate secretly and feel guilty about it simultaneously, making their lives full of “tears” and “lies.”

Defending women’s sexuality and bodily autonomy, Lady Gaga celebrates autoeroticism to urge that women should not be ashamed of their sexuality and bodies via the “I” declaring her pleasure. The “I” goes on to state:

I am vain as I allow I do my hair
 I gloss my eyes I touch myself all through the night
 And when something falls out of place
 I take my time I put it back
 I touch myself ‘til I’m on track. (25-29)

Reaffirming the importance of touching herself, the “I” suggests that only when women fully

embrace female sexuality will they be able to claim their selfhood and keep their integrity as womanly beings. She can do her hair and gloss her eyes to honorably touch herself, as contrast to living in the tears and lies. This point corresponds to Cixous's idea that "To write. An act which not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her good, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 250).

It is clear that the focus of the narrative in this song alternates between the woman's address to the blonde and her monologue of the joy of touching herself. The meaning of alternating between her address and monologue lies in the fact that she invites the blonde to join her to reclaim her body and experience pleasures. The "I" incites her, "Just give in don't give up baby/ Open your heart and your mind to me" (30-31). By the woman staging female masturbation and inviting the lavender blonde to accept her love and sexuality, the "I" demonstrates how women discover the female body as a site of knowledge which requires to be explored, and through which women can transgress masculine discourse and construct the female identities based on the bodily experience. Thus, the title of this song "So Happy I Could Die" does not only mean the joy of love, but also that of reconnecting with the female body.

Another crucial theme of *The Fame Monster* is the concept of bitch. The Fame Monster contains eight songs, and Lady Gaga's declaration, "I'm a free bitch," shows up in "Bad Romance," "Teeth," and "Dance in the Dark," rendering the meaning of bitch and its significance worth examining. Generally speaking, "bitch" is a pejorative word used to describe women. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the word can refer to "the female of the dog," and "strictly a lewd or sensual woman" (qtd. in Gross 147). The word "bitch" in fact has a long history; it originally means sexual, promiscuous women and then is suggestive of evil-minded, competitive, or powerful women in modern times. Regardless of

the slight changes in its meaning, just as Beverly Gross points out in her eponymous article “Bitch,” this word is “‘the most offensive appellation’ the English language provides to hurl at women” (147). Noticing that the significance of “bitch” is more important and powerful than its literal meaning, Gross attests that what lies behind the meaning of this word is the fear of women’s power. She concludes that a “bitch means to men whatever they find threatening in a woman and it means to women whatever they particularly dislike about themselves. In either case, the word functions as a misogynistic club” (148). For this reason, societies label women as bitches to diminish the power in them and assure men’s supremacy over them.

Another critic, Miriam Meyerhoff, contends that the repeated use of words with negative and scornful connotations have helped naturalize the social-cultural hierarchies insofar as the subjugated ones will even identify with the hierarchies (64), and this is the case for “bitch.” Even though language mirrors social relations, she argues that the hierarchies are not always stable and can be altered by “reclaiming what was previously perceived a negative term and redefining it in positive ways” (64). This is exactly the strategy Lady Gaga employs. By claiming “I’m a free bitch,” Lady Gaga reverses “bitch” to a powerful image to circumvent negative attitudes toward women and diminish men’s privileged position as authority. Yet, Brigitt Abrahamsson holds a different opinion. Focusing on the pronunciation of the word in the song, she argues that “Lady Gaga is censoring herself to please the American media” (8). Considering Lady Gaga is aware of the stereotype of women in the media, her use of “bitch” should be examined within this context, i.e. a free bitch, which is also pointed out by Woodruff. Woodruff maintains that “Gaga takes a word normally used with damaging intent and combines it with the word ‘free,’ turning it into a positive descriptor” (33). In this case, “free” reinforces the idea of “bitch” as female empowerment and indicates Lady Gaga’s resolution to recreate the image of women and the female body in patriarchal societies.

Among the three songs that include the “bitch” word, in “Dance in the Dark,” Lady Gaga further probes the representation of women and the perceptions of the female body. Through exploring the interaction between a girl and her boyfriend, this song exposes women’s self-doubt and patriarchal criticism of the female body. During an interview, Lady Gaga discussed the meaning of “Dance in the Dark,” stating:

This record is about a girl who likes to have with the lights off, because she’s embarrassed about her body. She doesn’t want her man to see her naked. She will be free, and she will let her inner animal out, but only when the lights are out. She doesn’t feel free without the moon. These lyrics are a way for me to talk about how I believe women and some men feel innately insecure about themselves all the time. (Powers, “Gaga Wisdom: Words from Lady, Part 2)

The lack of confidence in one’s self and the body is resultant from the distorted standards rooted in the masculine socio-cultural economy, as the verses of this song illustrate. In the first verse, the girl’s boyfriend judges her even though she looks beautiful:

She looks good
 But her boyfriend says she’s a mess
 She’s a mess
 She’s a mess
 Now the girl is stressed
 She’s a mess. (7-12)

Again, in the second verse, he calls her “a tramp” (25), a phrase that has also been repeated several times. The girl’s identity is constructed based on her boyfriend and the repetition of the derogatory words corresponds to Meyerhoff’s aforementioned argument, and emphasizes men’s oppression of women.

As the relation between the girl and her boyfriend can be interpreted to be the epitome of that between women and men, Lady Gaga overturns this image imposed upon women and

redefine it to affirm the female power. The proud announcement “I’m a free bitch” at the beginning forms a stark contrast to words such as “mess” and “tramp.” While the girl’s identity is defined by a man, Lady Gaga’s “I” assumes the autonomy of herself, her sexuality and the female body. She furthers this female empowerment in the bridge section with these lines:¹⁴

Marilyn

Judy

Sylvia

Tellem’ how you feel girls!

Work your blonde (Jean) Benet Ramsey

We’ll haunt like Liberace

Find your freedom in the music

Find your Jesus

Find your Kubrick

You will never fall apart

Diana, you’re still in our hearts

Never let you fall apart

Together we’ll dance in the dark. (41-53)

Here Lady Gaga respectively addresses five women: Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland, Sylvia Plath, JonBenét Ramsey, and Diana, Princess of Wales.¹⁵ All died tragically, these five female figures represent different types of womanhood, but all are exposed to the male gaze and embody the image of a victim suppressed by patriarchy. Kevin Gaffney argues that

¹⁴ In a song, a bridge is the part which follows the chorus after it is repeated twice.

¹⁵ Except for the well-known ones, i.e. Monroe, Plath, and Princess Diana, Judy Garland was an American singer and actress in the mid-twentieth century who was a gay icon for her fans in the gay communities, and JonBenét Ramsey was a six-year-old child beauty pageant queen with blond hair in the 1990s in America. She was abducted and murdered, and her parents were once the suspects of the murder and indicted by a grand jury over JonBenét’s death. However, prosecutors never pressed charges.

Lady Gaga alludes to these women because she identifies with their tragic ends and even predict that like them, she would die alone (33). However, realizing that it is always men who seize power, Lady Gaga intends to point out that the patriarchal oppression is the true cause behind these tragic deaths. Their deaths implies they are free from oppression, and accordingly by conversing with these five women Lady Gaga reconnects with them and redefines them as icons of liberation to restore female empowerment. All of these women but JonBenét are “celebrated as powerful women who expressed themselves, both personally and/or sexually, in a way that did not conform to oppressive misogynist ideals” (Woodruff 36).

Form another angle, Marilyn, Judy, Sylvia, and Diana can be interpreted as mother figures for Lady Gaga. Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva have stressed the importance to reconcile with the mother in the practice of *écriture féminine* since the bond with her has been severed by patriarchy. Thus, when the “I” asks them to talk about their feelings, Lady Gaga is inviting these mother figures to pass on the lived experience to their “daughters,” which means a symbolic maternal genealogy. The passing-on of experience is meaningful in that it suggests women are active subjects who can speak their thoughts without any patriarchal interference, and the rekindling mother-daughter relation dismantles societal hierarchies. Furthermore, the change from the singular “I” to a plural “we” symbolizes female solidarity. As mentioned, “the dark” is a reference to the female body as the dark continent, so the solidarity helps women to fearlessly re-appropriate and explore the female body and sexuality that are plural and fluid. Albeit the importance of “summoning” these women, Woodruff nonetheless notices that Lady Gaga fails to see the variations in race since all the women mentioned above are Caucasian (35), which is similar to the criticism against *écriture féminine*. In fact, Lady Gaga appears to be aware of this problem, which I will discuss later in this chapter. All in all, “Dance in the Dark” demonstrates Lady Gaga’s endeavor to advocate women’s freedom of sexuality, celebrate the power of the female body,

as well as call upon the idea of female solidarity.

As *The Fame Monster* is a response to *The Fame*, *Born This Way*, released in 2011, is a continuity of Lady Gaga's practice of *écriture féminine* from the second album. She proceeds with the exploration of the female body and self-empowerment along with the themes that characterize *The Fame Monster*. In addition, this album symbolizes a significant step in the evolution of Lady Gaga's feminism. Among all the songs, the most representative of encompassing Lady Gaga's feminist discourse is the eponymous single, "Born This Way."

The first single from the album, "Born This Way" represents Lady Gaga's beliefs, the messages of which empower women and LGBT communities. She articulated the meaning of this song in this interview with *Billboard*:

The nexus of "Born This Way" and the soul of the record reside in this idea that you were not necessarily born in one moment. You have your entire life to birth yourself into becoming the ultimate potential vision that you see for you. Who you are when you come out of your mother's womb is not necessarily who you will become. "Born This Way" says your birth is not finite, your birth is infinite. (Werde)

In this case, through the first-person women addressing the world, Lady Gaga contends that everyone, regardless of their races and sexual orientations, should appreciate their individual value and be proud to be different.

Since she calls her fans "Little Monsters," Lady Gaga again employs the image of monsters to honor otherness in "Born This Way." At the beginning of this song, the "I" enunciates, "It doesn't matter if you love him, or capital H-I-M/ Just put your paws up/ 'Cause you were born this way, baby" (1-3). Noticeably, these "paws" are the synecdoche for monsters. Abrahamsson interprets the paws as those of wolves and dogs, and thinks that the outsiders alluded to in this song, especially lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered

people, are presented as seeking social approval because the image of paws raising is akin to “that of a well-trained dog putting its paw to get candy”¹⁶ (17). As Abrahamsson attempts to present those people’s longing for acceptance, the analogy between them and dogs is inappropriate. When a dog normally wants food or toys, it has to do what its owner asks for and get its rewards. Abrahamsson’s analogy appears to suggest that those who have different sexual preferences would have to conform to the normative social codes in order to “get candy.” This only puts them in a submissive position in societies. Also discussing the non-human themes in music, Ken McLeod has a different opinion. In the article, “Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism, and Meaning in Popular Music,” he concludes:

To be different, or alien, is a significant and familiar cultural metaphor marking the boundaries of social identity. In general, rock, pop, dance and hip-hop music’s use of futuristic space and alien themes denotes a related alienation from traditionally dominant cultural structures, subverting the often racist and heterosexist values of these genres themselves. (353)

Likewise, Woodruff contends that the allusion to the monster in this song is to shield Lady Gaga and her fans from prejudice and judgment concerning race, sexuality, and religion (56-57). From this point of view, to put the paws up is not to seek approval from societies. Rather, it is a demonstration of power and fearlessness to showcase one’s monstrous difference. The image highlighted by the phrase “born this way” also conveys Lady Gaga’s message about the importance of self-recognition. From a different point of view, Lady Gaga’s application of monstrosity significantly corresponds to Kristeva’s idea of the abject. As discussed in Chapter 1, the abject for Kristeva refers to what is excluded and disturbs the Symbolic Order and symbolizes a kind of protection. Similarly, Lady Gaga’s trope of monstrosity challenges fixed rules and borders, and works as a shield for her and Little

¹⁶ Abrahamsson might have misused the idea of candy, since dogs do not eat candy. Yet, the candy represents what a dog desires.

Monster from biases and judgments, just like the abject which Kristeva refers as her safeguard (*Power of Horror 2*).

Whereas Woodruff sees this song as a religious text (57), to me “Born This Way” is more of a social text. Indeed, on account of Lady Gaga’s background, the song is full of religious references. From the very beginning, the “I” quotes her mother’s words that since we are made in the image of God, we are all perfect in the first verse, “‘There’s nothin’ wrong with lovin’ who you are’/ She said, ‘ ’cause he made you perfect, babe’” (8-9). The most ostensible allusion to God is in the chorus, “I’m beautiful in my way/ ‘Cause God makes no mistakes/ I’m on the right track, baby/ I was born this way” (12-15). With mother’s words and the God references, it appears that Lady Gaga is preaching to her fans, Little Monsters. The Gaga religion is significant because she foregrounds the importance of accepting who you are and loving yourself. This is a strong belief for her fans, which establishes her role as Mother Monster and explains Woodruff’s point of this song as a religious text. To put it differently, “Born This Way,” in the form of religious text, concerns more about the social aspects, which are explicit in the bridge of the song.

The particular bridge delivers a direct message of inclusivity and diversity as Lady Gaga specifies her addressees:

Don't be a drag, just be a queen
 Whether you're broke or evergreen
 You're black, white, beige, chola descent
 You're Lebanese, you're orient...
 No matter gay, straight, or bi,
 Lesbian, transgendered life,
 I'm on the right track baby... (39-49).

Here, “drag” and “queen” are metaphors. As George-Claude Guilbert manifests, a drag is the embodiment of the ideal woman and present the superficial, artificial concept of

femininity in societies (118). Lady Gaga objects to this image of women and expect women to be queens. On the other hand, drag queens are known for the heavy makeup and fake breasts, and therefore what they embody is actually a kind of disguise. By contrast, queens are always associated with pride and power. In this regard, not to be a drag but a queen means to get rid of your disguise and be as confident and powerful as a queen for who you are, no matter what your ethnicity and sexual orientation are.

While reinforcing the concept of self-love, the bridge also manifests Lady Gaga's multicultural practice by alluding to different races, sexual preferences, and the socially marginalized, suggesting the "vitalization of the other, of otherness in its entirety" (Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation" 50). Even if the words she uses are controversial and orientalist, for instance, chola and orient, her effort to promote and raise awareness of socio-cultural issues cannot be denied (Woodruff 64). For Abrahamsson, the repetition of "born this way" and the references to God seem problematic, for the connotation that one's sexuality is inborn and natural, rendering the lyrics essentialist (17). This criticism is reflective of the critique against *écriture féminine* as well. Nevertheless, based on Lady Gaga's explanation of this song mentioned above, "born this way" does not mean that your sexuality is biological determined. Instead, the message is that you are what you have become and should embrace it whether that makes you different or not. What's more, since Lady Gaga discusses different cultural identities with regard to sex, gender, ethnicity, she is constructing a feminine socio-cultural economy that entails cultural hybridity to counteract mainstream values.

Much like "Born This Way," "Scheiße" is another song that contains explicit feminist connotations from *Born This Way*. A German word meaning shit, "Scheiße" presents how women are subjugated and wants to convey a straightforward message of female empowerment. The song begins with the first-person woman's attestation that "I don't speak German/ But I can if you like" (1-2), followed by several made-up words that sound

like German. Then there is a dominating man supposedly having a date with the “I.”

I'll take you out tonight

Do whatever you like

Scheiße Scheiße be mine...

Put on a show tonight

Do whatever you like

Scheiße Scheiße be mine,

Scheiße be mine. (5-12)

Here the lyrics show that the woman tries to please the man and yet at the same time she is reluctant to do, so she has to “put on a show.” The second verse strengthens the fact of male dominance: “Love is objectified by what men say is right/ Scheiße Scheiße be mine” (27-28). In “Scheiße,” German language is of much importance; Lady Gaga appears to embed the meaning of ideal women for patriarchy in German language, reflected by the German gibberish and scheiße. The attestation at the beginning implies that the “I” is not the ideal woman, and even taunts this image of a woman through the German gibberish. She can pretend to be one to satisfy men but it is essentially meaningless and ridiculous. Woodruff also reminds us that this German gibberish is Lady Gaga’s reaction to patriarchal perceptions of strong women; it is “what she hears when people interfere with her strength as a woman” (38-39). The reiteration of “Scheiße be mine” enhances Lady Gaga’s disdain for the stereotype of perfect women. When the “I” tries to be the ideal woman, she becomes “scheiße.” This play with English and Germany can thusly be interpreted as a kind of subversion of language as she uses language to reinvent her own words and meanings to counteract the established meanings and the ideology behind them, suggesting a digression from orthodox.

While rejecting male dominance and the “perfect woman” image, Lady Gaga encourages women to subvert patriarchal norms and voices their desires through

communicating with them. She says, “When I’m on a mission/ I rebuke my condition/ If you’re a strong woman/ You don’t need permission” (13-16). As the “condition” means to be a docile, obedient woman, Lady Gaga clearly proposes the concept of women’s autonomy. She further declares, “Blonde high-heeled feminist enlisting femmes for this/ Express your women kind fight for your life” (29-30). “Femmes” here not only means women and can also refer to an exaggerated expression of femininity that is transgressive and subverting enough to challenge patriarchy (Woodruff 39-40). In this sense, the “femmes” in the lyrics ridicules male impression of femininity and is congruous with “blonde high-heeled feminist,” who is Lady Gaga herself as she always shows up in high heels and with blond hair. In other words, Lady Gaga asserts her stance as a feminist, and the blonde high-heeled feminist enlisting women is indicative of female solidarity.

“Express your women kind” harkens back to the three aforementioned French feminist emphasis on the importance that women write and speak via the female body. Both Irigaray and Cixous highlight the female body as the vehicle and site through which women are to discover what has been censored and ground their female experience. In a similar way, Kristeva pinpoints language in a feminine libidinal economy so that the speaking subject can enjoy *jourssance* and assert subjectivity. Women kind, seen in this light, not only responds to “femmes,” the critique of femininity in patriarchal parameters, but also alludes to desires, women’s lived experience, pleasure, and female subjectivity. Overall, “Scheiße” criticizes the ways women are treated, and hails “female agency and empowerment through ideas of reclamation, collectivity, and subversive identities” (Woodruff 40).

Through delving into the song lyrics of *The Fame*, *The Fame Monster*, and *Born This Way*, I have demonstrated how Lady Gaga’s works have come to embody *écriture féminine*. Some may question the authenticity of Lady Gaga and her music. Yet, as Victor Corona contends, her life is thoroughly occupied by the mechanic of performing and she constantly affirms that “she *is* the persona she inhabits on stage, in which case, Lady Gaga has tactically

eschewed the problem of authenticity (10). The first album may deal with gender ambiguities, but it marks the dawn of her self-discovery, and the two following albums are imbued with concepts of self-empowerment and urges women to explore female sexuality and take the role of speaking as subject. Hence one may conclude that Lady Gaga's artistry significantly posits a close bond between the female body and writing practice.



Chapter 3

The Monstrous and the Grotesque: Lady Gaga's Representation of the Female Body

Since her first album's release in 2008, the female body has played a pivotal role in Lady Gaga's works. As I have discussed her practice of *écriture féminine* in writing the song lyrics in the second chapter, it is noteworthy that Lady Gaga has taken up an enthusiastic and provocative way to showcase the female body in her music videos and through her costumes and performances. Hence, this chapter will focus on Lady Gaga's music videos, costumes, and performances to illustrate her representation of the female body. I will first examine some of the most popular music videos of the three albums and then turn to discuss her provocative costumes and performances. Given that she tends to employ the trope of the monstrous and metaphorize her body, her wearing outlandish costumes is congruous with the concept of the grotesque body. Through the analyses of her videos, costumes, and performances, I argue that Lady Gaga's works embody the fluidity and plurality of the female body to disrupt and subvert heteropatriarchy.

Lady Gaga's Body in Music Videos

Hinted by the title "The Fame," Lady Gaga's first album is characterized by music videos that revolve around partying and achieving fame, among which, the most distinguished is that of "Paparazzi." An approximately eight-minute mini movie, the "Paparazzi" video focuses on a female star with a murderous plot line, and casts a bleak reflection of a female celebrity in male-centered societies. The music video opens with a shot of a luxurious villa where Lady Gaga and her boyfriend kiss and cuddle in bed. Then the scene moves to the balcony, and Lady Gaga is pushed off the balcony by the boyfriend, after she finds out he sets the paparazzi to photograph them. The shot of Lady Gaga falling down is clearly a reference to Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. As she is presumably dead, the scene abruptly turns into a scene in which Lady Gaga is coming out of a limousine and

dancing in wheelchairs and on a couch. As the song proceeds, the dancing scenes are intertwined with cuts of dead model's bodies interspersing among the villa. When the song hits the line "Loving you is cherry pie," the scene shows that Lady Gaga is making out with three blondes in rock costume, a reference to the song "Cherry Pie" by the American band Warrant (Kaufman). In the next scene, she is seen back with her boyfriend and takes revenge by poisoning a drink she fetches for him. She is then arrested and again chased by the paparazzi. The music video ends with Lady Gaga posing for her police mugshots like a super star.

In essence, the "Paparazzi" video functions to critique patriarchal perceptions of female celebrities and the female body in the media. As the violent, sexual imagery permeates this video, Lady Gaga intends to demonstrate how the media, being male-centered, suppresses women and casts patriarchal expectations onto women. In an interview with *The Canadian Press*, Lady Gaga stated, "The video explores ideas about sort of hyperbolic situations that people will go to in order to be famous. Most specifically, pornography and murder. These are some of the major themes in the video" (Patch). In pornography and murder, women tend to be victimized, which is exhibited in the first murder scene in "Paparazzi." Before her boyfriend carries Lady Gaga out to the balcony, he takes off her robe, exposing her near-naked body. When she is thrown over the balcony and lying in her blood, the paparazzi move close enough to shoot the body in spite of the blood. It reveals the media's pathological obsession with nudity of the female body and female celebrities to satisfy a social need for sensation. The death of a female celebrity caused by paparazzi is evidently a reference to Princess Diana's case; for Lady Gaga, Princess Diana is "the most icon martyr of fame" (Vera). This reference and the murder scene thusly act as a direct and strong critique of paparazzi.

"Cherry Pie," a reference to Warrant's song, is important as well. In the band Warrant's music video of "Cherry Pie," while the guys are performing, a blonde who has a

curvaceous figure dresses and dances in a coquettish, seductive way. This music video is typical of rock music, masculine and full of patriarchal ideologies, as shown by the mannish band members. The blonde is a desired object that fits the Western stereotype of women. On the contrary, Lady Gaga and the three blonds in “Paparazzi” do not submit to the objectification of women, as they are making out on the couch without any man’s intervention. To put it differently, Lady Gaga the trio do not merely challenge the stereotypical image of a blonde, but present women’s multiple sexuality and control of their own bodies.

On the whole, “Paparazzi” is imbued with the theme of violence against women. It can be understood through the shots of the dead women along with Lady Gaga at the crime scene. The corpses of the dead women indicate that they die in a similarly brutal and violent way, and their limbs distorted and positioned bizarrely. Those dead women accentuate the violence of Lady Gaga’s death, and the shots of them as well as the paparazzi’s reaction to Lady Gaga’s corpse reflect “the media’s obsession with representation of sex and violence” (Fogel and Quinlan 186). Furthermore, given the women’s twisted bodies and violent death, Lady Gaga is drawing attention to how women and their bodies, sexually objectified, are abused and mistreated in male-dominated societies (185). Symbolically speaking, the twisted women’s bodies are suggestive of the distorted image of women in the media, like the blond in “Cherry Pie” music video.

When criticizing the media’s morbid fixation on women and the female body, Lady Gaga simultaneously opposes to the male gaze and the patriarchal ideology behind it. In my discussion of the lyrics of “Paparazzi” in the previous section, I argue that she is put in the passive position and subjected to the male gaze. Here, in the “Paparazzi” video, Lady Gaga elaborates on the ways in which women are victimized by the gaze, and the most evident example throughout the video is the shots of Lady Gaga plummeting to the ground. When she is falling, it is shown in slow motion and from a subjective perspective, as if the viewer is

the photographer. According to Laura Mulvey, “[a] woman performs within the narrative; the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude” (19). Though these subjective shots, the viewer identifies with the male characters in this video, the paparazzi, who represent societal scopophilia and voyeurism. It might be questioned that the viewer is not always male. Yet, as Ann Kaplan posits, the gaze “is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the ‘masculine’ position” (30). In light of this point, Lady Gaga’s fall through the subjective camera mirrors women exposed to the gaze of the patriarchal societies. Also, the vertigo reference is allusive. In Hitchcock’s film, Scottie’s vision of vertigo caused by acrophobia prevents him from saving Madeline from her death. In a similar way, since the camera is subjective, the vertigo vision is that of paparazzi, the male gaze, which foretells the demise of Lady Gaga and further points to the victimization of women under the male gaze. Via the image in “Paparazzi,” Lady Gaga wants to denounce the distorted perception of women and their bodies, and exemplify how they are exploited with a masculinist economy.

Similar to “Paparazzi,” the sequel “Telephone” includes many sexual and violent images. The music video begins with Lady Gaga taken to a women’s prison because she murdered her boyfriend at the end of “Paparazzi.” She is stripped off her clothes by two mannish female guards to complete nudity with only black tapes on her nipples. She is locked in the cell, when one of the guards comments, “I told you, she didn’t have a dick,” and the other replies, “Too bad.” This ostensibly refers to the rumor that Lady Gaga was a hermaphrodite. Then the next scenes focus on the activities in the prison; Lady Gaga is making out with an inmate; two women get in a fight; and Lady Gaga receives a phone call. The subsequent scenes show Lady Gaga dancing with four women in underwear. Later, Beyoncé bails Lady Gaga out and the two head to a diner to embark on a killing spree. After the news reporting the murders, the music video ends with Lady Gaga and Beyoncé

driving in the Pussy Wagon¹⁷ and leaving for good.

In “Telephone,” Lady Gaga experiments with sexuality and gender, and celebrates female agency via the female body. In the prison scene, the gender lines are blurred; some inmates seem to be female, while others, including the butch prison guards, appear to be transvestites or to be transgendered. It is unlikely to confirm their genders. Judith Butler, who argues that genders are constituted differently, points out that “gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions” and “the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on a bus compel fear, rage, and even violence” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 527). Since transvestites are usually *other-ized* in societies, those in “Telephone” along with the homosexual, and transgendered people can assert their selfhood and do not conform to heteropatriarchal orders. For example, the masculine prison guard clearly shows her interest in penises, which can be told from her comment on the fact that it is “too bad” that Lady Gaga does not have a penis. In other words, Lady Gaga is playing with the gender boundaries, and it is a way for her to display flexible and fluid female sexuality, as she is caressed and touched by an inmate whose gender is unknown and unknowable.

In addition to disrupting the gender norms, Lady Gaga takes on the trope of telephone. Typically, women are associated with passivity and in this case, passivity is represented by a telephone receiver, as embodied in bedroom shots. Judith Halberstam comments that, being aware of this presumed passivity, “Lady Gaga and Beyoncé decide to unleash themselves from the tyranny of phone—instead of hanging on the telephone, they become the telephone” (*Gaga Feminism* 64). Lady Gaga, wearing a blue telephone hat in the diner’s kitchen, accordingly places women in an active position, and insinuates that she is the one exercising power. In a sense, Lady Gaga’s and Beyoncé’s telephone bodies become the vessel for

¹⁷ Pussy Wagon is a yellow truck originally used in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*. The director Quentin Tarantino suggested that Lady Gaga used this iconic vehicle when she was discussing the plot for the video.

communication, highlighting the female body that transcends masculine modes of representation, indicative of multiplicity and flexibility.

On the other hand, Lady Gaga's telephone represents a subversion of communication and the media. At the end of the "Paparazzi" music video, Lady Gaga's life is utterly exposed to the public as she is chased by the media, who are crazy about getting her photos. In the "Telephone" video, however, Lady Gaga rejects to be spied by the media and controls the communication in her own way. This can be perceived through her trope of telephone and how she sets up a murder scene and toys with the media. Hence, the "Telephone" video signifies Lady Gaga's "creation of new forms of rebellion in a universe of media manipulation" (Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism* 63).

Described as one of the "Violent Trilogy" along with "Paparazzi" and "Telephone" by Kevin Gaffney (38), "Bad Romance" from *The Fame Monster* adopts a more aggressive approach to divulging the female body. The music video, shot in a futuristic style, revolves around human trafficking. Lady Gaga is abducted, stripped off, and forced to dance in front of the Russian mafia who are bidding on her. When the deal is made, she is sold to a man who is sitting on a bed and apparently waiting to have sex with her. As Lady Gaga takes off her jacket and sunglasses indifferently, the man is consumed by fire. The video ends with Lady Gaga lying beside a skeleton, smoking, and showing callousness with sparks coming out of her bra.

Ostensibly, the main theme in "Bad Romance" music video is the commodification of women in male-dominated economy. Throughout the video, Lady Gaga is treated as no more than a commodity and her body becomes the site where men vent their sexual impulse and pleasure; she is nothing but a sex object. This objectification of women reveals women's submission. In the scene where Lady Gaga is kidnapped, two women brutally take off her clothes and forcibly pour vodka down her throat in a bathtub. It is important to note that Lady Gaga's eyes look like those of a Barbie doll, which reinforces her image as an

object. In another way, the work of these two women and those who carry Lady Gaga to the audition suggests that women can be the accomplices of patriarchy without realizing it.

This women's oppression is greatly presented in another scene when Lady Gaga has to crawl to the man to lure him to bid for her.

The notion of women as commodities astutely accord with one of Gayle Rubin's ideas in the seminal essay "Traffic in Women." She argues that the traffic of women "places the oppression of women within social systems, rather than in biology," and "it suggests that we look for the ultimate locus of women's oppression within the traffic in women rather than within the traffic in merchandise" (86). In this sense, it is clear that Lady Gaga denounces the exchange of women in *Bad Romance*. Although she seems to be complying, the dance sequence in which Lady Gaga and her dancers wear strange masks, white leotards, and climb out of the coffin-like boxes, one of which has "MONSTER" marked on it, denotes that she is a monster in disguise and foreshadows her vengeance in the end. When Lady Gaga is lying in bed with the skeleton, her body in fire-breathing bras signifies that the female body is not a sex object or a piece of commodity to fulfill men's desire; instead, it is a powerful weapon to circumvent oppression. In this case, as in "Paparazzi" and "Telephone," Lady Gaga utilizes the female body a way to subvert patriarchy.

Indicated by the dance sequence just mentioned, Lady Gaga utilizes the trope of monsters in "Bad Romance." Apart from this sequence, the video features shots of different animals as well: a cat without hair, a rat hat on Lady Gaga's head, the polar bearskin rug that Lady Gaga wears, just to name a few. Victor Corona compares the dance moves that involves clawed fingers to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, and concludes that "the contrast of beast and beauty is used to provoke a reckoning with prevailing ideals of appearance, tolerance, justice, and sexuality" (11). While opposing to the commodification of women, Lady Gaga brings the monstrous elements into this video to undermine the dominant masculinist values and orders. Doing so, she is sending messages to her Little Monsters and

hopes to “empower them to express the ‘monster’ within them” (14). Insofar as the animal parts are integrated with Lady Gaga’s body, this means that the female body is a monstrous body, which corresponds to the notion of the grotesque body, a point to which I will return later in the thesis.

Unlike any other music video Lady Gaga has released, “Born This Way” from the eponymous album is infused with symbolic imagery. The video begins with the manifesto of Mother Monster which is as follows:

On G.O.A.T, a Government Owned Alien Territory in space, a birth of magnificent and magical proportions took place. But the birth was not finite; it was infinite. As the wombs numbered, and the mitosis of the future began, it was perceived that this infamous moment in life is not temporal; it is eternal. And thus began the beginning of the new race: a race within the race of humanity, a race which bears no prejudice, no judgment, but boundless freedom. But on that same day, as the eternal mother hovered in the multiverse, another more terrifying birth took place: the birth of evil. And as she herself split into two, rotating in agony between two ultimate forces, the pendulum of choice began its dance. It seems easy, you imagine, to gravitate instantly and unwaveringly towards good. But she wondered, “How can I protect something so perfect without evil?”

While she continues to recite the manifesto, the scenes show Lady Gaga in space and she is giving birth to an extraterrestrial race. As revealed in the manifesto, the birth of a new race also comes with that of evil; Lady Gaga wears a tuxedo to illustrate the side of evil. The succeeding scenes are interlaced with different shots: Lady Gaga who has protrusion on her shoulders and her face dances with her dancers; she is still giving birth; and her dancers and she gather around to embrace each other. The music video concludes with shots of Lady Gaga’s silhouettes.

From the beginning to the end in “Born This Way,” the female body, along with the trope of monsters, is inscribed with subversive meanings. In the manifesto it is clear that the eternal mother is Lady Gaga, and the extraterrestrial race her fans, Little Monsters. Aliens, like monsters, are outcasts, the other, but they are powerful as a collectivity. About Lady Gaga’s recourse to the aliens, Victor Corona maintains that “the power of ‘monster’ lies in being able to attract other self-identifying outcasts to her music and aesthetic” (14). Hence, in the space she creates, Little Monsters can define themselves in their artistic ways and assert their identities with no prejudice or judgment but boundless freedom, like the new race. The birth scene with the help of special effects is pivotal as well. The image symbolizes a woman’s vagina. As Lady Gaga keeps on giving birth to the new race throughout the video, the scene hints at the fertility of the female body. The manifesto further supports this point when Lady Gaga states that the birth is infinite. The fertility and infinity of the female body recalls the analogy between the sea and the female body drawn by Cixous. The other point about the importance of the birth lies in the provocative exposure of the women’s genitals. As earlier explained, the female body is associated with the dark continent within patriarchal contexts, and vagina, menstruation, child birth, etc. are regarded as taboos. The exposed symbolic vagina of Lady Gaga’s monstrous body is also her exemplification of the abject, i.e. what is cast as unclean is in effect a space of infinity and *jouissance*. Therefore, the shots of the symbolic vagina work as an influential way to upset this derogatory impression and praise the female body.

In effect, the transgression of gender and sexual boundaries, and the proclamation of female solidarity are also emphasized in the “Born This Way” music video. In the scene where Lady Gaga wears a tuxedo, she seems to be half-male and half-female because of her hair and appearance. What’s more, as Lady Gaga, appearing to be a half-male and half-female figure, continuously attempts to seduce the man who has skeleton tattoos on his face, her gender and sexuality remain uncertain. For those reasons, this figure played by

Lady Gaga embodies a hybrid body to challenge the heteropatriarchal perceptions about genders and sexuality. From another angle, this scene can be understood in the biblical context, i.e. the dichotomy between good and evil. Lady Gaga mentions the evil twin of the eternal mother in the manifesto, and she breeds the skeleton man and the Lady Gaga in tuxedo. As Woodruff analyzes, much like Adam and Eve who have to choose between God and the apple, “Little Monsters must choose to join the race without judgment. Without sin, we could not know good and without prejudice, we could not understand ‘boundless freedom’” (56). In short, “Born This Way” not only serves as a belief for Little Monsters, but provides moral ideologies to guide them (56). As noted, there are several shots of Lady Gaga and her dancers embracing and touching together, one of which shows they are surrounded by black, sticky mucus. These shots ostensibly display the female solidarity, and given the dancers’ genders are plural, no one in Lady Gaga’s space is excluded. Judged from all these viewpoints, this space out of which Lady Gaga breeds the new race is free from conformity to the dominant values and norms. It is “the multiverse,” the utter contrary to the patriarchal “universe” that favors the same, that represents a feminine libidinal economy. This “multiverse” reflects a subversion of language as well, as Lady Gaga plays on words to overthrow the language in the Symbolic Order. In this case, the “multiverse” of the “Born This Way” music video meaningfully corresponds to the pre-Oedipal and the semiotic in Kristeva’s terms.

All in all, Lady Gaga’s music videos show how she exerts the female body as the vehicle and the source in her aesthetic artistry. Reviewing those music videos, one can tell that she recycles a great deal of images from movies or other musicians, such as the references to the film, *Vertigo*, and the “Cherry Pie” and “Thriller” music videos, and then rewrites and reinscribes the meanings of the images. In this case, through her body, she significantly uses the established language to establish her own language. In addition, she affirms the reclamation of the female body to discover the repressed female knowledge, and

resorts to the concept of monstrosity to upset the social norms and subvert the masculinist discourse by transforming the female body.

The Female Body as the Grotesque Body

As in her lyrics and music videos, Lady Gaga's costumes hinge on the same idea of monstrosity. She always wears whimsical outfits that not only challenge the perceptions of how properly women should dress, but also overturn the normative human form. As she claims the role as Mother Monster, Lady Gaga identifies herself as someone with a grotesque body, and to explicate this argument, I will approach her costumes in terms of the grotesque. Before I proceed with the analysis, however, it is of necessity to understand the definition of the grotesque and its connection to *écriture féminine*.

Stemming from the Latin root, "grotto," the term "grotesque" was first applied to the decorations of Nero's *Domus Aurea*, the Golden Palace. According to Geoffrey Golt Harpham, the paintings on the wall of the Golden Palace are the images of unknown creatures which are the mixture of animals, plants, and human beings. Since these creatures can be viewed as the precursory of the term "grotesque," which only came into existence in the late fifteen century, some people may maintain that the central idea of the grotesque lies in the construction of the hybrid body, i.e., the combination of human and nonhuman parts in one body. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Noel Carroll argues that to define the grotesque, "a structural account" should be taken into consideration before the "functional account" (295). However, other people would disagree with Carroll's notion and, indeed, the definition of the grotesque has been at issue. Throughout the history of the grotesque, the first clear and patent elaboration of the grotesque can be found in Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. As he compares and contrasts the art of Hieronymus Bosch with that of Pieter Bruegel, Kayser thinks that the grotesque, the outlandish and monstrous creation of human imagination, produces an unfamiliar and estranged world in

which chaos and horror prevail and thus give rise to inauspicious and sinister effects. For Kayser, the grotesque not only involves laughter, but is also satanic. In addition, he emphasizes the importance of the “act of reception,” that is, we must pay attention to the fact that our sense of the world is transformed and defamiliarized by abysmal farces (180). This is when the experience of the grotesque occurs to the observer.

Mikhail Bakhtin does not agree with Kayser; for him, the grotesque concerns laughter, a regenerative force, rather than horror, and it is Bakhtin’s theory on the grotesque that I am adopting in discussing Lady Gaga’s costumes. Examining the grotesque through history, Bakhtin delves into the medieval (Renaissance) grotesque and modernist (Romanic) grotesque respectively regarding the idea of the carnival, and proposes that the former is the ideal and proper type of the grotesque. Putting the emphasis on the body as a fundamental category of the grotesque, Bakhtin points out two kinds of representation of the body in the Renaissance. One is the human body in popular festivity, and the other is that in classical statuary (Stallybrass and White 21). The classical body is usually represented in statues placed on pedestal and classical iconography, which suggests that the classical body is distant from the spectator. Also, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White put it, the classical statues have no openings and orifices, and thus represent “the classic images of the finished, completed man, of all the scoriae of birth and development” (Bakhtin 25). The grotesque body in festivities, especially in a carnival, is the absolute opposite to the classical body. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body is well-represented in carnivals. Generally, during carnival time, everyone would participate, wear masks, and dress ridiculously and ludicrously. Contrary to the classical feasts, there are no differences between actors and spectators since everyone is part of the carnival. In this case, the social hierarchies are suspended and erased during carnival time and everyone is free from regulations and considered equal, as they all dress and act in the same way (Bakhtin 10). What is more, a carnival, based on laughter, is characterized by its features of being regenerative, becoming,

undefined, and so on. (10-11), which suggests that humor is essential to the grotesque and the grotesque body is fluid. Admittedly, a carnival represents “a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time” (8), and the grotesque body symbolizes a way to challenge norms and prohibitions, which Bakhtin has found explicit in François Rabelais’s works.

Through Rabelais’s works, Bakhtin has desired the idea of grotesque realism, namely the material bodily principle. It refers to the images of the exaggerated human body, as the body is combined with “its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life” (18). For Bakhtin, this exaggerated human body is both cosmic and social; it represents fertility, renewal of the earth, and transgresses against what is deemed sacred and superior through the practice of degradation, a central principal in grotesque realism. Degradation, as Bakhtin contends, “means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time” (21). In this sense, the body is fused with the earth and everything on it, for instance, animals and objects. This fusion is indicative of the grotesque body’s “unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming (24). This formulation of the grotesque body as continuous and unceasing is similar to Cixous’s notion of the body “without beginning and without end” (Russo 67). In addition, the grotesque body outgrows itself and transgresses its own boundaries that make it the closed body (Bakhtin 26). The transgression of the limits also points to that of the higher/lower split and further deconstructs social hierarchies, as well as normative religious, moral beliefs. The degradation of the grotesque, aside from Cixous’s, also resembles Kristeva’s explanation of the abject which “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (*Power of Horror* 4).

The meaning of the grotesque might change with time, as Romantic and modern grotesque is associated more with terror than with humor, and laughter is reduced to irony and sarcasm. Bakhtin criticizes this type of grotesque for it loses the regenerative power and leads to the alienation of man from the world. On the whole, for Bakhtin, the grotesque body should be “a mobile, split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in process of exchange”

(Stallybrass and White 22), and has the regenerative force and the power to deconstruct boundaries. These characteristics of the grotesque body significantly echo the fluidity and plurality of the female body in *écriture féminine*. Therefore, Bakhtin's accounts of the grotesque body offer an appropriate framework for analyzing Lady Gaga's representation of the female body and her costumes.

In essence, Lady Gaga's costumes act to caricature and deconstruct the heterosexual perceptions of the female body. Contemporary Western societies are overflowed with images of idealized female body. The media, for example, has constructed the illusion of fashion and proposed a standard for a body that is generally thin, sexy, and feminine, a norm upon which women judge themselves and other women. As Satu Liimakka notes, "women not only evaluate their bodies in relation to cultural images, but, to a greater extent, they live their own bodies as representations" (21). This image of women is built up in accordance with patriarchal preferences. The representation of the ideal female body is further enhanced through women's costumes. Jane Gaines posits:

[C]ostume delivers gender as self-evident or natural and then recedes as "clothing," leaving the connotation "femininity." In popular discourse, there is often no distinction made between a woman and her attire. She is what she wears. This continuity between woman and dress works especially well to keep women in the traditional "place," especially during epochs when styles which accentuate the "normal" contours of woman's body are favored. (1)

To put it differently, women are defined by patriarchy based on their appearances which are expected to fit the normative standard. Lady Gaga shatters this formulation; her outrageous costumes not only upset the ways in which we perceive costumes, but she also employs her body to ridicule and circumvent the normative representation of the female body. In what follows, I will examine some of Lady Gaga's costumes to elaborate on this argument.

Among all of Lady Gaga's eccentric costumes, the meat dress she wore to the VMA

can be deemed as one of the most well-known and controversial ones. In 2010, at the Video Music Awards, Lady Gaga wore this meat dress made of raw beef and designed by Franc Fernandez to receive the award for Video of the Year. This meat dress has acquired both criticism and praise. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) found this dress offensive and accused Lady Gaga of attention gaining, while Andrew Groves, a London-based fashion designer, lauded the dress and the ideas behind it (Winterman and Kelly). Lady Gaga indeed deliberately wore the meat dress to obtain the public's attention. However, through the meat dress, Lady Gaga transforms her body into a grotesque one to direct people's attention towards repressed gender issues and subvert the image of women in the media. During the interview with Ellen DeGeneres, Lady Gaga talks about the message she wanted to deliver through the meat dress: "if we don't stand up for what we believe in and if we don't fight for our rights, pretty soon we're going to have as much rights as the meat on our bones. And I am not a piece of meat" (Kaufman). This statement is a response to the US military's policy toward homosexuality, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Since the majority in the military is men, the military is the epitome of heteropatriarchy, under which circumstances homosexual men are socially marginalized and have to hide their sexual orientations so as to fit in. In other words, the homosexual men, like the meat to be cooked, are submissive and left with no identities. Later in this section I will further explore the meaning of the meat, which is tied up with submission and alludes to women in the media.

Lady Gaga opposes to the hegemony of heterosexuality, and actively making the meat into a dress suggests a reversion of the passiveness of those who are not heterosexual. As discussed, the grotesque degrades everything toward the realm of the body and designates the mergence of the body and foreign objects to confront whatever is "high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" (Bakhtin 19). Here, the meat dress is indicative of the fusion of the human body with that of animals, which then becomes a powerful entity. Meat as a dress is to homosexuality what usual clothing fabrics are to heterosexuality. To be more specific, meat

originally symbolizes the void of identity and submission of homosexual people to the norms. However, by deploying the meat as a form of costumes, Lady Gaga's meat dress, replacing the usual clothing fabrics, actively demonstrates the sexual preferences of the socially marginalized and thusly is a metaphor that criticizes the idea of heterosexuality as the "normal" sexual orientation. In this regard, Lady Gaga overturns the negative connotation and asserts that the diversity of sexuality and gender identity should be emphasized and respected.

Aside from reacting against heterospatriarchy, Lady Gaga's meat dress is also to criticize the masculinist representation of women. On the other hand, as Lady Gaga wore the meat dress to the VMA, a public event which many people have attended and paid attention to, she aims to disrupt how women should dress and look in terms of fashion statement. Generally speaking, public events as the VMA offer female stars a platform to showcase their costumes and bodies. They normally would put on fancy gowns and endeavor to make themselves as stunning and glamorous as possible, and the media would judge these women and their costumes according to the normative beauty standards. These events and the so-called fashion shows are essentially small-scaled beauty pageants. As Jane Gaines puts it, "fashion is enslavement; women are bound by the drudgery of keeping up their appearance and by the impediment of the styles which prohibited them from acting in the world" (3). That is to say, these female stars and celebrities conform to the unitary patriarchal notion of a beautiful woman, and fail to assert their female specificities. Lady Gaga's meat dress is a striking contrast to theirs; it is a parody of those dresses that female stars wear. Given that the meat dress is crimson, according to Andrew Groves, it can be interpreted that Lady Gaga hopes to ridicule the situation in which women tend to wear red dresses on a red carpet to attract attention (qtd. in Winterman and Kelly). Also, since raw meat is regarded as filthy and impure, wearing a meat dress to a seemingly decent event like the VMAs ostensibly disturbs the high, formal standard about costumes. To put it in the

context of degradation and the abject, this meat dress enacts to challenge the image of ideal women and suggests a different way in which women can be free from masculinist judgments. Therefore, through the meat dress, Lady Gaga not only taunts those women who blindly follow the fashion trends, but subverts the stereotypical standard of beauty imposed on women.

On the other hand, suggested by the literal meaning, Lady Gaga is comparing the female body to meat. Within the masculinist socio-cultural economy, the female body has always been expected to fulfill (heterosexual) men's desires and the function of reproduction. Much like meat, the female body is sexually objectified and oppressed. However, combining her flesh with animal meat, Lady Gaga offers a powerful representation of the female body to dismantle the sexual objectification. To put it in Hilary Malatino's words, "wearing the meat dress, she's selling autonomy, a politics of sartorial and sexual self-determination that is not at all coterminous with sexual objectification" (129).

There are several characteristics that are common to Lady Gaga's quirky costumes. Most of her costumes feature audacious experiments with her female private parts and extravagant ornaments and accessories. For instance, at the 2011 MuchMusic Video Awards in Canada, when performing on the stage, Lady Gaga shocked the audience by showing fake blue armpit hair and pubic hair. In addition to the tabooed hair, Lady Gaga also applies objects, such as flowers, lace, bubbles, to her costumes to exaggerate femininity ludicrously. Moreover, some of her costumes toy with the societal boundary of exposing the female body. She either nearly exposes herself in complete nudity, like wearing a semitransparent dress and underpants with her nipples covered by tapes at the Madison Square Garden concert, or she covers her body fully, such as wearing a crimson laced dress and a hat to the 2009 VMAs. As elaborated previously, the media and fashion have proposed an ideal form of the female body for women to measure themselves, a body that is conventionally feminine, slim, and has smooth skin. Sandra Bartky notices that this type of body is rather juvenile. She states:

The body by which a woman feels herself judged and which by rigorous discipline she must try to assume is the body of early adolescence, slight and unformed, a body lacking flesh or substance, a body in whose very contours the image of immaturity has been inscribed. The requirement that a woman maintains smooth and hairless skin carries further the theme of inexperience, for an infantile face must accompany her infantile body, a face never ages or furrows its brow in thought. (35)

Bartky's observation critically explicates the current phenomena that a great number of women prefer a hairless body and have gone through painful procedures to have their bodily hair removed. If a woman, especially a young girl, shows her armpit hair, she would be judged by both men and women as inadequate and unappealing.

In like manner, the ideal type of the female body indicates the ideal femininity as well. As the objects, like flowers and lace, as well as the normative costumes are attributed to reinforcing the ideal form of the female body, this femininity is heteropatriachally constructed and thus is considered a kind of "false consciousness" (Gaines 2). On the contrary, looking at her costumes, it is evident that Lady Gaga attempts to deride that ideal body of femininity. As she wears those weird feminine dresses, her body and femininity are represented in an exaggerated form. According to Bakhtin, the exaggeration of the body "has a positive, assertive character" and is suggestive of "fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (19). Hence, Lady Gaga's grotesque body through the costumes thwarts the stereotyping of women and further reconstructs the female body and femininity through exaggerating the human form. Further, since her costumes are always different, it means that her grotesque body is incessantly changing and cannot be defined by the norms, which reflects the fluidity and plurality of the female body. What is more, Lady Gaga's costumes can be discussed within the discourse of carnival; Little Monsters would follow Lady Gaga's way of dressing, especially when they attend her concerts. The idea that Lady

Gaga and Little Monsters wear eccentric costumes recalls Bakhtin's notion of the carnival discussed earlier. In this sense, Lady Gaga's concerts are akin to a utopian realm where people can be free, equal and assert their subjectivity without being judged.

Rejecting the image of perfect women and patriarchal idea of femininity has been one of the main ideas of *écriture féminine* in Cixous's, Irigaray's, and Kristeva's theories. Lady Gaga's strategy to turn her body into a grotesque one consequently subverts the heteropatriarchal economy, redefines the meanings of women and femininity, and even renders her female body impossible to be defined. To a certain extent, she is "writing" her artistry through her female body, which enables her to arrive at a point where the feminine socio-cultural economy will be constructed.

Lady Gaga and Performing Subversions

Similar to her music and costumes, Lady Gaga's performances are quite controversial as well, since she is never afraid to challenge social boundaries and taboos. Hence in this section, I will examine some of her performances and discuss the significance behind them. Among all of her performances, the most (in)famous is the one that sparked a rumor of Lady Gaga being a hermaphrodite. In 2009, when she was performing at the Glastonbury Festival in the UK, a "thing" bulging from her short dress was seen and captured in videos, followed by speculations that Lady Gaga had a penis. Albeit the rampant public's speculations, Lady Gaga played into the rumor and did not respond until a few months later. She admits that the performance was planned and she does not have a penis. She confesses, "I want to wear a dick strapped to my vagina. I also carry myself onstage in a masculine way and sing in a low register" (qtd. in Daly). While Lady Gaga has succeeded in drawing the attention to the gender issues again, I want to analyze this performing act with regard to Freud's idea of penis envy.

In the lecture "Femininity," Freud has elaborated on women's psychical development.

According to him, women's psychic is grounded on penis envy, which contributes to the formation of femininity. When a child is young, there is no difference between being a little girl and a little boy until the little girl catches the sight of the penis. As Freud notes, "the discovery that she is castrated is a turning-point in a girl's growth" (126). The discovery of not having a penis becomes a psychical complex of penis envy which contributes to the formation of femininity as the little girl transfers her affection toward her father and assumes passivity in sexuality. Freud's theory on women not only insinuates that women's body can only be defined with reference to men's body, but also devalues women's sexuality. The emphasis on the penis points to a form of biological determinism as well. Karen Horney argues that it is not the lack of the organ but rather the symbolic significance of the penis that makes women envious, i.e. the sexual, social power and privileges (54-55).

In this sense, Lady Gaga's deliberate act to put on a fake penis can be seen as an attempt to subvert the notion of penis envy imposed on women. Within the Freudian context of penis envy, women are always assumed to envy the power men have. Hence, when women are claiming power, men, feeling challenged, would attempt to maintain their power through discrimination against strong women. Lady Gaga brings this out when discussing her faking a penis with British's *Q* magazine: "I got criticized for being arrogant because if you're sure of yourself as a woman they say you're a bitch, whereas if you're a man and you're strong-willed it's normal" (qtd. in Daly). Therefore, as her trick seems to exemplify the notion of penis envy, Lady Gaga in fact tactically uses a fake penis to taunt the heteropatriarchal narcissistic fixation on the penis, and denounces the idea of women's want of the penis. Thus, Lady Gaga subversively reverses penis envy and underscores that women can assert sexuality and socio-cultural powers without being defined and subordinated by men, which allows women access to autoeroticism, a point supported by Cixous and Irigaray.

Lady Gaga's fake penis act also corresponds to Judith Butler's theory on gender.

Butler argues that gender is a series of performative acts, which means that “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always doing, though not doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (*Gender Trouble* 25). That is to say, there is no natural body existing prior to cultural inscriptions, or that women should be feminine, and men masculine, on account of the cultural hegemony of heterosexuality, which is disguised and reproduced “through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with ‘natural’ appearances and ‘natural’ heterosexual dispositions” (Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 524). Nevertheless, the gender norms can be disturbed by performances of gender, for instance, drag. Butler maintains that “drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (*Gender Trouble* 137). To a certain extent, Butler’s idea of gender performativity can be associated with Cixous’s notion of gender. Their arguments may seem to be different because Cixous believes that gender is constructed through male privileged language and Butler looks at the power relation and contends that gender is socially performed to fit into the mode of heterosexual hegemony. However, both Cixous and Butler pick apart the binary of gender and sexuality, and the idea of performing gender suggests that gender is not unchanging, and indicates different gender possibilities, such as drags who are liberated from heteropatriarchal hegemony. This idea echos the fluidity of gender in Cixous’s argument. In light of the argument of drag by Butler, Lady Gaga’s fabrication of her gender and sexuality suggests that she “does” her gender to disclose the unnatural essentialist assumptions of gender, and offers a gender parody to deconstruct normative gender politics, further demonstrating the fluidity of gender.

The other significant performance of Lady Gaga’s, which also involves drag, is the creation of her male alter ego, Jo Calderone, while attending a music event. Jo Calderone made the debut appearance in a magazine and did not step on the stage until the 2011 VMAs,

where Calderone did the opening performance and later received Best Female Video for “Born This Way.” During the performance, Calderone rambled about his relationship with Lady Gaga, how crazy she and her appearance are, and that Lady Gaga is a performance, before proceeding to perform “You and I.” It is ostensible that Lady Gaga, through the stage identity of Jo Calderone, endeavors to critique standardized gender constitution and explore the possibilities of gender identity. In an interview with Noah Michelson from the *Huffington Post*, Lady Gaga said:

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 that is so hidden or so chained up. [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 and exciting it may be. (Michelson)

Here, Lady Gaga’s answer implies that Calderone is a transsexual man, as is also noted by Abbie Woodruff (46). Since Calderone does not wear exaggerated outfits and makeup to amplify masculinity and looks like a regular man, this figure thusly alludes to the problem of assuming one’s gender based on their appearances under the influence of heterosexual hegemony. Moreover, inasmuch as Calderone rants about Lady Gaga’s appearance and costumes, he acts as a parody of how men judge women’s appearances based upon the stereotype.

In fact, Lady Gaga’s performance of Jo Calderone is practically an act of drag king. According to Judith Halberstam, a drag king is someone who is usually a female and dresses up in male costume; “the drag king performs masculinity (often parodically) and makes the exposure of the theatricality of masculinity into the mainstay of her act (*Female Masculinity*

232). There are several kinds of drag kings, as Halberstam points out, but there are two important subtypes; one is “the butch Drag King,” who celebrates her masculinity on- and off-stage, and the other “the ‘femme’ Drag King,” who only performs her masculinity on the stage (*The Drag King Book* 36). Lady Gaga clearly belongs to the latter. Woodruff associates Lady Gaga’s drag king act, as well as her other performances, with Jack Babuscio’s discussion of “camp,”¹⁸ for she argues that her performance acts which exaggerate both femininity and masculinity embody four features of camp, i.e. irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor (47). Babuscio’s exploration of camp seems to be able to account for Lady Gaga’s exaggerated performances. Nonetheless, Halberstam pinpoints in *Female Masculinity* that camp is “the genre for an outrageous performance of femininity (by men or women) rather than outrageous performances of masculinity” (237). She combs through Esther Newton’s definition of camp and Butler’s notions of gender identities and parodies, arguing that drag culture in both analyses is mainly connected with gay male culture. Even if Newton applies camp to lesbians, she “reads the performance of a butch performing as a drag queen, performing femininity” (238). Therefore, for Halberstam, camp is more about femininity. In “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” on the other hand, Babuscio emphasizes the relationship between camp and gayness, and although he mentions a few female actresses dressing as men in cinema, the examples he enumerates are mostly men under the guise of women.

Halberstam therefore coined the term “kinging” to describe drag acts that are associated with masculinity (238), which can be applied to Lady Gaga’s performance of Jo Calderone. The reason why Halbertstam differentiates the performance of masculinity from that of femininity is that drag king acts tend to be restrained and withholding, while drag

¹⁸ Camp usually refers to an aesthetic in which something is presented humorously and comically. Jack Babuscio defines camp as “a product of the gay sensibility” (“The Cinema of Camp” 117).

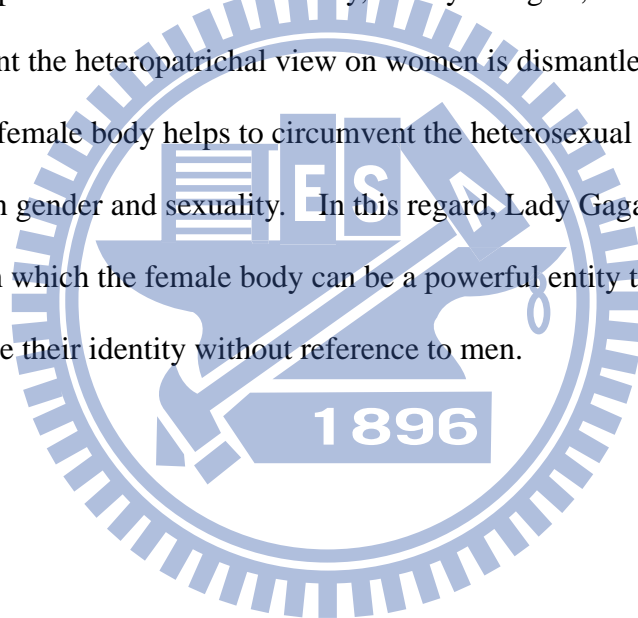
queens are prone to wear extravagant makeup and act hyperbolically.¹⁹ To define “kinging,” She cites an example of her own experience in which she was watching a drag show; on the stage, there were two drag kings and two drag queens. The drag queens were jumping up and down, and acting so exaggeratedly that they nearly took over the stage. On the contrary, the drag kings’ performance appeared evidently sincere, careful and moderate. This is what Halberstam calls kinging, “a reluctant and withholding kind of performance” (239). Indeed, Lady Gaga only wears a man’s suit and a wig, and holds a cigarette to enhance the appearance of masculinity without any excessive makeup. Halberstam goes on to specify the significance of a solo drag king act because it implies “an unusual confrontation between male and female masculinity” and serves as a “wholesale parody of, particularly, white masculinity” (239). This significance hearkens back to my previous discussion of how Jo Calderone criticizes Lady Gaga’s appearance; Jo is performing a prototypical white man, who claims the racial and sexual superiority, and judges women based on their looks and how they live their lives in accordance to his male-entered standards.

Halberstam further indicates that in the context of heteropatriarchy, mainstream male masculinity holds the claim of authenticity and other forms of masculinity and femininity are considered derivative and accordingly unauthentic. Under this circumstance, butch lesbians are seen to imitate heterosexual men, and femme lesbians are reduced to heterosexual femininity (240). The drag king performances nonetheless are a vehicle to “expose the artificiality of all genders and all sexual orientations and therefore to answer the charge of inauthenticity that is usually made only about lesbian identity” (240). In this sense, the transgendered Jo Calderone serves to ridicule and dismantle the legitimacy of male masculinity. Playing a woman who is impersonating a man who used to be a woman, Lady

¹⁹ The other reason is that drag culture is always related to gay male culture (*Female Masculinity* 236). Halberstam notices that female masculinity has not been well examined and valued, and “camp” always describes gay male community. In this sense, to discuss lesbians and female masculinity, inventing a new word is the only way that helps “avoid always collapsing lesbian history and social practice associated with drag into gay male histories and practices” (238).

Gaga not only showcases the fluidity of gender through the female body, but denaturalizes the notions of sex, sexuality, as well as gender by parodying heterosexual hegemony that attributes femininity to women and masculinity to men.

Seen from her music videos, costumes, and performances, Lady Gaga clearly has her own way of reconstructing the female body and femininity. The ways in which she represents herself reveals her disdain for the image of the ideal woman and the ideal body reinforced by the media within the masculinist socio-cultural economy. Lady Gaga's use of the trope of the monstrous and the grotesque in particular allows for the exaggeration of femininity and the exploration of the female body, and by doing so, she has dismantled at least to a certain extent the heteropatriarchal view on women is dismantled. Also, her representation of the female body helps to circumvent the heterosexual hegemony by blurring the boundary between gender and sexuality. In this regard, Lady Gaga successfully illustrates the ways in which the female body can be a powerful entity to challenge patriarchy and women can define their identity without reference to men.



Chapter 4

Conclusion

“Is Lady Gaga a feminist icon?” This question has been in circulation ever since Lady Gaga first appeared in the pop culture. Whilst Judith Halberstam develops the idea of “gaga feminism,”²⁰ veteran feminist and journalist Susan Faludi, in an essay entitled “American Electra: Feminism’s Ritual Matricide,” laments how the new generation of feminists are hostile to the older generation and does not think of a pop star like Lady Gaga as feminist inspirations. Faludi is not the only one who devaluates Lady Gaga’s gender theatrics. Another feminist Camille Paglia disapproves of the idea of Lady Gaga as a feminist icon in a 2010 article in the *Sunday Times Magazine*. In that piece, Paglia criticizes the Lady Gaga’s look is “either simperingly doll-like or ghoulish, without a trace of spontaneity,” and that she is so stripped of sexual eroticism that even drag queens are sexier than she is (“Lady Gaga and the Death of Sex”). She further calls Lady Gaga the “diva of déjà-vu” who appropriates from other artists, especially Madonna, whom she refers to as the future of feminism in another article of hers written twenty years ago.²¹ In Chapter 1, I discuss Lady Gaga’s background along with those of Mae West and Madonna because they have some similarities. Still, it is necessary to understand what distinguishes Lady Gaga from West and Madonna so as to explain why Lady Gaga embodies the idea of *écriture féminine*. West is known for her active female sexuality and gay friendliness as she would impersonate gay men or include gay characters in her works. Also, a fan of African American performances, West is associated with African American culture. Though she seems to cross gender and racial boundaries in the first half of the 20th century, West’s works involve mostly women and gay men and thus leave out other gender possibilities, restricted to the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality. In like manner, Madonna

²⁰ I will later explain this term.

²¹ See “Madonna—Finally, a Real Feminist” published on *The New York Times* website.

challenges normative gender, sexual, and racial concepts and appears as a strong feminist figure in the late 20th century. As Paglia points out, Madonna has shown women how to “be fully female and sexual while still exercising total control over their lives” (“Madonna—Finally a Real Feminist”). Mae West and Madonna both contribute to the construction of an actively sexual, attractive woman image to overturn patriarchal stereotype imposed on women.

What makes Lady Gaga distinct is that she evolves her own gender politics and extends beyond all expected limitations. While the female body is a crucial entity in the works of West and Madonna, unlike the two predecessors Lady Gaga reconstructs the female body and redefines femininity. Paglia criticizes Lady Gaga is not sexy enough and praises Madonna for being a sensual, attractive role model for women. However, this “model” is exactly what Lady Gaga tries to get away from since she is wary of how women could be turned into sex objects. Instead, Lady Gaga resorts to the trope of monstrosity, which allows for her re-representation of women and femininity to contravene patriarchy. What is more, Lady Gaga advances her sexual politics. Whereas West and Madonna are mainly associated with women and gay men, Lady Gaga’s artistry encompasses hybridized genders. Supporting LGBT communities, she contends that all genders are equal, and also enacts a hybridized identity, such as, playing with the hermaphrodite rumor and impersonating a transsexual man. Thusly, Lady Gaga comes to concretize the notion of *écriture féminine* through her demonstration of the fluid female body and the bodily gender theatrics. Furthermore, she represents a type of feminism, which can be called gaga feminism, in Halberstam’s term. Gaga feminism means to reformulate genders, bodies, race, desire, and so on; it is “a monstrous outgrowth of the unstable concept of ‘woman’ in feminist, a celebration of the joining of femininity to artifice, and a refusal of the mushy sentimentalism that has been siphoned into the category of womanhood” (*Gaga Feminism* xii-xiii). Yet, this is not to say that she is practicing a new feminism (Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism* xiii). Rather, what

characterizes Lady Gaga's feminism is her innovative deployment of the female body and her evolving gender politics. According to Halberstam, this gaga feminism suggests "emerging formulations of a gender politics for a new generation" (*Gaga Feminism* xiii).

In addition to being a feminist, Lady Gaga is a social activist as well; she has been dedicating herself to advocating for LGBT rights and anti-bullying legislation to change the socio-political status quo through her construction of collective identity. When discussing lesbian feminist mobilization, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier define collective identity as "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" and "direct opposition to the dominant order" (105, 110). There are three factors for the construction of collective identity in social movements: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. Boundaries mark differences "between a challenging group and dominant groups" regarding social, psychological, and physical respects (111). Consciousness entails the challenging group's struggle to redefine and the identifying common interests against the dominant order, and negotiation is the resistance to and reconstruction of dominant attributions. Taylor's and Whittier's notion of collective identity can be well applied to Lady Gaga and her "monster community."

A bisexual girl and once a bullying victim, Lady Gaga utilizes her music and popularity as platforms to draw awareness to the problems of bullying and issues concerning women and LGBT, as well as to deliver messages of self-acceptance and self-empowerment to her Little Monsters throughout the world. As stated in the previous chapter, Lady Gaga has publicly objected to the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy against homosexual people, and reached out to President Barack Obama to deal with the bully problems. Also, together with her mother, Cynthia Germanotta, she launched a non-profit organization, the Born This Way Foundation, in 2012. According its official website, the Born This Way Foundation aims to "foster a more accepting society, where differences are embraced and individuality is celebrated. The Foundation is dedicated to creating a safe community that helps connect young people with

the skills and opportunities they need to build a kinder, safer world” (“Our Mission”). Lady Gaga’s efforts and engagement, as Victor Corona argues, suggest her “pursuit of enduring cultural presence;” she makes use of the mediums to connect with Little Monsters who feel like outsiders, and puts forth the celebration of the other, the monster as her music appeals to the public (2). In this respect, her influence on societies is rather significant. In her thesis, Abbie Woodruff describes her interviews with several Little Monsters in which they explain how Lady Gaga and her music have helped and changed them.²² Admittedly, Little Monsters resort to Lady Gaga and her music not only for consolation but also identification, and follow the beliefs she conveys. This “monster community” that includes Mother Monster and Little Monsters thus significantly reflects a socio-political solidarity and collectivity that may counteract the patriarchal hegemony.

Through the analysis of Lady Gaga and her works, this thesis argues that Lady Gaga practices *écriture féminine* as she bases her artistry on the overflowing and plural female body and demonstrates her female subjectivity to challenge patriarchy. I first comb through the idea of *écriture féminine* and provide an account of Lady Gaga and the other two similar figures before my discussion of Lady Gaga. In the second and third chapters, I examine and analyze her song lyrics, music videos, costumes and performances to explore how she crafts different meanings of race, gender, sexuality, and even the human body. By writing this thesis, it is my hope to show that Lady Gaga represents a form of feminism for the young people of the 21th century and serves as a positive role model as she offers an alternative path not only for women but also for those who are non-heterosexual about how to assert their subjectivity.

²² See Chapter 3 of her thesis, *Lady Gaga, Social Media, and Performing an Identity*.

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