13 Twenty-First-Century Girl

Lady Gaga, Performance Art, and Glam

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> Pop culture was in art, now art's in pop culture in me.
>
> —Lady Gaga, "Applause"

Introduction

Although the glam sensibility that defined the first half of the 1970s, particularly in Britain, reached its fullest expression in popular music, the premise of the 2013 exhibition at Tate Liverpool, *Glam: The Performance of Style*, was that it also flowered in such other fields as performance, fashion, film, and visual art. Curator Darren Pih defines glam by saying that it "is characterized by its use of stylistic overstatement, reveling in revivalism, irony, theatricality, and androgyny, privileging surface effect and artifice over meaning" (2013, 11), all features that find expression in multiple media and artistic forms. In some cases, the connections between artists working in different fields were explicit: Bryan Ferry of Roxy Music studied with visual artist Richard Hamilton, while David Bowie regularly cited Andy Warhol as a key influence.

Lady Gaga, "the first true millennial superstar" in pop music (Erlewine 2014), who went from playing clubs in New York City to international stardom in the course of just a few years, her stardom cemented by the 2008 album *The Fame* and its accompanying tour, is one of the key figures carrying the glam torch into the twenty-first century. Her stage name supposedly derives from Queen's song "Radio Gaga," and, as Simon Reynolds (2013) notes, her performances draw on "the glam theatricality and gender-bending [Bowie] pioneered." But Gaga's version of glam is distinctly twenty-first century in flavor. I will discuss here the ways in which Gaga both participates in the glam sensibility pioneered in the 1970s and reconfigures glam for her own historical moment by looking at her relationship with performance art and other forms of visual art; her strategies for performing identity, including gender identity; and her revisionist approach to those aspects of glam that align it with postmodernism, including its politics.

Pop Performance Art

Like other glam performers, such as David Bowie and Brian Ferry, Gaga presents herself as a nexus between the art world and the world of pop music. She describes herself as a "pop performance artist" and claims to

have been significantly influenced by performance artists and other art world figures. Unusual for a pop musician, her background includes a stint as a neo-burlesque dancer in clubs on Manhattan's Lower East Side and work in a performance duo with DJ and downtown icon Lady Starlight. Gaga describes her mission as synthesizing performance art with pop music:

> When I was really young, I was fascinated with performance artists. Leigh Bowery, Klaus Nomi. And when I got older I became fascinated with Yoko Ono and Marina Abramovic. I grew up with them, and sort of naturally became the artist I am today. It wasn't until I started to play out in New York and my friends said, "Look how much this has influenced you", that I realised it. The one thing there wasn't on the Lower East Side was pop music. So as a pop songwriter, I thought that would be an interesting way to make a name for myself in this neighbourhood. I figured if I could play the grocery store around the corner as if it was Madison Square Gardens [sic], maybe some day I can assimilate pop music into performance art in a more mainstream way.
>
> (Qtd. in Petridis 2011)

To this end, Gaga not only incorporates elements perceived to be related to performance art into her public appearances, such as her wearing a "meat dress" to the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards and being borne into the 2011 Grammy Awards ceremony in a translucent egg-shaped vessel; she has also undertaken performance art works herself. These include her appearance in *Ballets Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)* (2009), a gala celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles created by Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli; *Sleeping with Gaga* (2012), a performance event at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City that doubled as the launch of Gaga's signature fragrance The Fame (she had previously launched the photo book on which she collaborated with fashion photographer Terry Richardson at the New Museum in New York in 2011); and, in 2013, her appearance in a video designed to help raise funds for the Marina Abramovic Institute in which she is seen naked performing exercises from the Abramović Method for training performers to undertake durational pieces.

Although Gaga's ambition to bring performance art and pop music together bears a family resemblance to the relationship between art and pop pursued by some of the main figures in 1970s glam, notably Bowie, the cultural context in which she operates is necessarily different. Ian Buruma (2013), discussing Bowie, observes, "Artists and filmmakers have often created interesting results by refining popular culture into high art. Bowie did the opposite: he would, as he once explained in an interview, plunder high art and take it down to the street; that was his brand of rock-and-roll theater." This supposes a clear-cut distinction between high art and popular culture as separate realms between which images, ideas, and sounds may be

transported. During the first glam era, performance art was firmly situated on the high art side of the equation.

This has changed, however, and not just because of Gaga. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, and especially over the past five years or so, performance art has been undergoing a change of cultural status. The popular illusionist David Blaine now calls himself an endurance artist on the strength of his physically demanding public stunts. In 2009, the film actor James Franco undertook a 20-episode stint on the US television soap opera *General Hospital*, playing "the bad-boy artist 'Franco, just Franco'" as a work of performance art. He argued that his presence as a recognizable film star on the show could trigger a meta-level discussion of the relationships between reality and fiction and between art and popular culture that he sees as akin to the concerns of performance art (Franco 2009). There has been an accelerated incursion of performers from other fields into performance art: the actresses Tilda Swinton and Milla Jovovich have appeared in installations at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Venice Biennale, respectively, and the rapper Jay Z undertook a marathon performance at the Pace Gallery in New York, calling it performance art, all in 2013. While some commentators decry this development "as pop culture commandeering genres of art for marketing purposes and celebrities using it to expand their brands" (Wagner 2013), a position that implies art is somehow outside the market, it is apparent that this is a generational phenomenon. Both Gaga and Franco state explicitly that their education at university art schools was instrumental in their becoming involved with performance art, suggesting that younger performers (Gaga was born in 1986, Franco in 1978) in a range of disciplines are acquainted with performance art and understand it not as a genre specifically belonging to the art world, but as a way of thinking about performance and an aesthetic vocabulary on which anyone can draw.

As Donatien Grau (2011) observes, "the very concept of 'pop performance art' would be impossible if it weren't formulated today. As such, it is the perfect form of 'contemporary art', a creation of a certain time period," a period in which performance art is more visible and popular than it ever has been, and distinctions among art forms and between art and pop have become ever more porous. The doyenne of this moment is Abramović, who has done more than any other artist to popularize performance art. As many as 750,000 people attended her retrospective exhibition, *The Artist Is Present*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2010, and more than that number observed the eponymous performance online. The event both attracted celebrities, an aspect of it well documented in the press, and turned Abramović into a celebrity herself, which generated a certain amount of opprobrium among art critics. Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2010), for example, pointed out that the staging of "The Artist Is Present," for which Abramović took up her position in the museum each day before it opened to the public and remained in

place until after the last spectator departed, seemed designed to elevate her above the level of ordinary humanity. Lambert-Beatty concludes, “it looks like performance art is entering the Museum of Modern Art in the form of unabashed celebrity worship.” Abramović also actively cultivates other celebrity performers who have shown an interest in performance art: Gaga, Franco, and Jay Z have all worked or appeared with her in one way or another.

As against the first glam era, when performance art was firmly ensconced as one of the edgier options available to visual artists, Gaga’s relationship to performance art both reflects and furthers a historical moment in which performance art no longer clearly belongs to the fine art context, and the lines between artist and celebrity have been blurred even more than in the past to allow traffic in both directions. This is the cultural landscape that Gaga engages. Elizabeth Kate Switaj notes that “Lady Gaga, in her role of performance artist, enacts and displays her role of pop star” (2012, 34). In other words, she performs the social role of pop star while simultaneously engaging in conceptual actions that expose the workings of what Joni Mitchell calls, in her 1974 song “Free Man in Paris,” “the star-maker machinery behind the popular song.” That is, “she performs [a star image] in such a way as to make the performance visible” (Switaj 2012, 36). The story of Gaga’s purple teacup is an example. For a time in 2009, Gaga was always seen in public carrying a particular teacup. Writing in *Billboard Magazine*, Courtney Harding (2009) describes this as “a little experiment” on Gaga’s part and quotes her as saying, “I was talking to the members of the Haus [her creative team] about the power of the image and the camera, and I wanted to say something on a real level about fame … and I decided to take a purple teacup out of my china collection and take it to London and make it famous. I put it in videos and had fans pose with it and put it on TV—at one point, the teacup had a call time.” As Harding observes, “it became the most famous teacup since Meret Oppenheim covered one in fur.” Eventually, the celebrity teacup sold at an auction to raise money for tsunami victims for US$75,000 (Davisson 2013, 107).

Trans/Formation

The relationship between art and pop played out in the 1970s not only in terms of mutual influence but also in a shared concern with identity. Identity was one of the main loci of the exploration of surface effect and artifice in glam rock as well as the visual arts and performance art of the 1970s. Challenging the notions of personal authenticity that had been central to the countercultural rock of the 1960s, Marc Bolan, front-man of the band T. Rex, Bowie, and Ferry all presented their performance personae as clearly constructed and theatrical. Bowie has been quoted as saying, “if anything, maybe I’ve helped establish that rock ’n’ roll

is a pose" (in Reynolds 2013). Bowie not only embodied a fictional character, the androgynous alien Ziggy Stardust, as his persona, but he also reimagined the rock concert as a theatrical performance involving staging and choreography, dramatic lighting effects, performers who were clearly costumed and made up, and multiple costume changes. His reconceptualization of what a concert is casts a long shadow over the performance practices of popular music still today, when stylistic excess and theatricality have become the norm in many genres (Reynolds 2013). This deconstruction of rock star identity from within rock itself, a concept furthered by Gaga through her self-deconstructing performance of pop star identity, is paralleled in the work of visual artists like David Lamelas, whose *Rock Star (Character Appropriation)* (1974) is a series of photographs that emulate black-and-white concert shots as if to suggest that anyone who understands the visual conventions of rock performance and concert photography may assume rock star identity, at least as a pose, without much difficulty. While Bowie's and Ferry's respective theatrical concoctions displaced authentic rockers on the concert stage, Lamelas demonstrated that such authenticity was a theatrical concoction to begin with.

Glam's treatment of identity as above all performed rather than inherent or authentic embraces the possibility of transformation. If identity is constructed, it can be reconstructed, seemingly at will. This notion of transformation is most often articulated in relation to the gender play that was perhaps the most overtly provocative aspect of glam (and perhaps its most political aspect, too, especially in a UK that had only decriminalized homosexuality in 1967). Gender-bending certainly was a central strategy of glam rock, clearly evident in Bolan's and Bowie's glittering androgyny, Ferry's devotion to fashion and his evocation of dandyism, and the feathery transvestite portrayed onstage by Ferry's Roxy Music colleague Brian Eno, not to mention the more demotic versions of masculinity feminized through make-up and costume represented by The Sweet in the UK and The New York Dolls in the US, among many others.

Experiments in visual gender transformation were undertaken at the same time by a great many visual artists, both male and female, including Ulay's Polaroid self-portraits as simultaneously male and female, such as *She* (1972); Jürgen Klauke's extravagantly pansexual image in his *Transformer* series (1973); and Eleanor Antin's performances as The King. In the first of these, a video work of 1972, Antin is seen applying a false beard as she searches for the right look for the character, thus emphasizing the process of transformation from female to male. But glam transformation was never just about crossing over gender lines. Antin, for example, also portrayed female characters, such as Eleanora Antinova, a fictional African American member of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and Nurse Eleanor, a figure inspired by Florence Nightingale. Her continual adoption of fresh characters and Bowie's program of regularly remaking both his musical style and

his performance persona—from Ziggy Stardust to his cousin Aladdin Sane to the Thin White Duke and beyond—testify to the idea that, to the glam sensibility, transformational performance and the freedom to define oneself that it implies are ends in themselves.

The 1970s transformative gender and identity play in which many figures associated with glam in music and the visual arts engaged was provocative, but its provocation was frequently hedged. Michael Watts (1972) described Bowie's "coming-out" to him in the pages of *Melody Maker*:

> David's present image is to come on like a swishy queen, a gorgeously effeminate boy. He's as camp as a row of tents, with his limp hand and trolling vocabulary. "I'm gay", he says, "and always have been, even when I was David Jones". But there's a sly jollity about how he says it, a secret smile at the corners of his mouth. … The expression of his sexual ambivalence establishes a fascinating game: is he, or isn't he? In a period of conflicting sexual identity he shrewdly exploits the confusion surrounding the male and female roles.

A similar teasing ambivalence is visible in Ulay's Polaroid self-portraits in which one side of his face appears as male while the other side is made up to appear female. These representations of ambiguous gender identity and sexuality take the borderland as their territory and thus remain noncommittal even while holding out tantalizing possibilities of queerness.

Such a delicate balance may not be robust enough for the current historical moment characterized by the dominance of social media and the 24/7 news cycle, a moment that demands intensified sensation, which Gaga is pleased to deliver. Whereas Bowie knowingly and intentionally prompted the question "Is he or isn't he?" Gaga declares herself to be both, not only by frequently proclaiming her own bisexuality, but also by constructing both male and female personae. When she embodies masculinity, it is not through transparent transvestism like Antin's King or an ambiguous figure like Ziggy Stardust, but, rather, it is through a full-on drag king persona called Jo Calderone, who first appeared as a model in the pages of *Vogue Hommes Japan* in the summer of 2010, then stood in for Gaga at the 2011 MTV Video Awards to accept in her place, claiming to be her lover. The irony that she won the award for Best Female Video for *Born This Way* while dressed as a man did not go unnoticed. Calderone also appears in the video for "Yoü and I" (2011), in which he sits atop Gaga's piano in a field while a female Gaga, who appears as a plainly dressed blonde, serenades him (fig. 13.1). While still operating within the field of gender play pioneered by the glam aesthetic, Gaga does not linger on the borderline between male and female, or masculine and feminine, but straddles it, with a foot planted firmly on each side. She presents herself as neither sexually ambivalent nor androgynous but as able to "'try on' different genders at will" and inhabit them fully (Humann 2012, 80).

Figure 13.1 Gender Bending, Gaga Style: Lady Gaga as Jo Calderone kisses Lady Gaga in the music video for "Yoü and I," directed by Lady Gaga and Laurieann Gibson. Factory Films, 2012.

Both Antin and Bowie treated their multiple characters and personae as discrete, passing from one to another in their respective works and performances. While Antin sometimes circled back to revisit an earlier character, Bowie assumed different personae sequentially, each in relation to a new album and tour, in keeping with the pace of a system of marketing and communication based in traditional media. Gaga has carried the idea of embodying multiple personae to an extreme: each time she appears in public, she looks different, often to the point of being unrecognizable. Not only do the length, color, and texture of her hair change continually, but so do the shape of her face and the definition of her features. She often wears extreme fashions that distort her body or mask her face. There is no baseline image from which this sequence of images departs or to which it returns, only a succession of personae all equally representative of Gaga and yet totally different from one another (Auslander 2014, 517). As Francesco Bonami puts it, "her body is … a stage on which you can set up a new scenography each time" (2012, 266).

When Gaga poses nude, as she did for the September 2013 issue of *V Magazine* and in her video supporting the Marina Abramovic Institute, there is no sense that we are seeing the "real" Gaga at last because the versions of her face and body we see in the nude images simply take their place in the on-going parade of different Gagas. These multiple images are not discrete; like Jo Calderone and Gaga, they often appear on the same screen. In the music video for "Bad Romance" (2009), at least 13 different versions of Gaga appear, some only in one scene, some recurrently. Rather than moving from one persona to another, Gaga deploys an infinite array of images, any of which she may embody at any moment. The principle of her transformations is simultaneity rather than sequentiality. Pih rightly suggests that the glam sensibility of the 1970s overlaps significantly with postmodernism (2013, 11). Douglas Crimp famously defined postmodern art by saying, "we are not in

search of sources or origins, but structures of signification: underneath each picture there is always another picture" (1979, 87). This certainly applies to Gaga. She is fundamentally a series of images without ontology and is just as much about the play of surfaces, the idea that identity resides in appearance, the destabilization of identity through unsettled appearance, etc., as any of the glam era or postmodernist artists.

The way Gaga uses photography as one of the central mechanisms of her transformations aligns her with the performance photographer Cindy Sherman. The experience of watching one of Gaga's videos or looking at multiple photographs of her public appearances or fashion shoots is akin to paging through *The Complete Untitled Film Stills*, the book that documents a body of Sherman's work from 1977 till 1980 (Sherman 2003). In both cases, you know you are looking at the same person from image to image, yet the person appears totally differently in each one. Sherman and Gaga (in her music videos) share a taste for the framing and composition associated with classic films of the post-war era, especially Italian films. Both also often dwell on images of women in distress, sometimes isolated or seemingly stuck in circumstances beyond their control, or who have suffered physical violence.

The connection between Sherman and Gaga is manifest not only in specific iconography but also at a deeper level in that both suggest that artistic identity resides more in a process than an image. Unlike performance artists as different as Laurie Anderson and Marina Abramović, Sherman's artistic identity does not inhere in a specific image or persona. While both Anderson's mildly ironic gamin persona and slight physical presence and Abramović's earthy Eastern European toughness and strong, athletic body are crucial trademarks that persist across their respective works, Sherman's artistic identity resides in being the woman who takes pictures of herself that engage with a range of cultural referents and in which you cannot recognize her. Rather than being a pop star with a specific visual identity or even a series of such identities, Gaga is a pop star whose visual signature morphs continually to the point that any given iteration may be unrecognizable as connected to previous ones. Gaga takes a radically new approach to branding in that there is no consistent persona or image that defines her performances or marketing efforts. There is no picture of Gaga on the bottle of her perfume, The Fame, because it would be impossible to decide which picture to use.

While the underlying trope of Sherman's work is acting, especially in its aspects of disguise and costume (this is explicit in her early works that resemble film stills and continues through her even more theatrical later work), the underlying trope of Gaga's performance is fashion. Whereas Sherman is like an actress who assumes and commits to the appearance of each character she portrays, even if only for a single image, Gaga is akin to the runway model who is re-dressed and re-styled for each trip down the catwalk. She asks her fans to identify not with an image or persona

but, rather, with the possibility of being able to morph at will. As I argue elsewhere, "Lady Gaga is neither a persona nor an avatar. … Lady Gaga is a randomized algorithm … that continuously generates … the personae Stefani Germanotta [her birth name] portrays" (2014, 520–21).

On account of her background in performance and professed interest in making art world interventions as well as performance strategies, the question "Is Lady Gaga a performance artist?" has been posed with surprising regularity for a pop musician (D'Addario 2011). But this is the wrong question. Performance artist Gaga is but one of the many Gagas extant and represents who or what she is only at moments and no more definitively than any of the other guises she has assumed. Craig N. Owens describes Gaga as an assemblage, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the term, pointing out that the elements of an assemblage are not coherent: "we can expect the assemblage to produce some effects and phenomena at odds with others it may produce" and that this incoherence is visible "in the multiple and incommensurable roles she assumes, often in the course of a single song or video" (2014, 94). Arguably, we are now beyond postmodernism and perhaps in an era better described as hyper modern. Victor Corona describes hyper modernity as

> an accelerated state of western capitalism characterized by "the culture of the fastest and the 'ever more': more profitability, more performance, more flexibility, more innovation". … From this perspective, post-modernity's progeny is a cultural landscape where any possible event of interest can be almost instantly tweeted, blogged, texted, uploaded on YouTube, displayed on social networking sites, and discussed on comment boards. (2011, 2)

The velocity and incoherence of Gaga's transformations reflect the demands of a hyper modern digital world in which everything is available at once (in the Cloud, for instance), everything happens instantly, on demand, and anything can morph into anything else.

Twenty-First-Century Girl

Acknowledging the ways the historical context has changed since the 1970s is crucial to understanding Gaga's twenty-first-century version of glam. Glam (rock) originally came in the wake of the 1960s counterculture and both drew on it and reacted against it. As Dominic Johnson suggests, "while both upheld the importance of play, outrage and cryptic singularity, glam can be seen to celebrate irony, fakery, opacity and glamour in contrast to the countercultural values of sincerity, verisimilitude, transparency, and the communion with nature" (2013, 99). Gaga's version of glam does not entail this oppositional stance. Coming to both glam and the counterculture from a historical distance, she does not have to obey the imperative to position

glam against its immediate predecessor. Rather, she is able to select whatever elements she wishes from the past without necessarily adopting a critical posture towards them.

Describing the audience's response to Sherman's photographs, Laura Mulvey identifies a postmodernist "oscillation effect" or "double take." "The viewer looks, recognizes a style, then recognizes that the style is a citation, and meanings shift and change their reference" (1991, 146–47). Gaga's music, performances, and personae are replete with citations, references, and appropriations (a list of her influences and sources runs several pages [Callahan 2010, 81–86]), but they provoke no double take. The absence of this effect has partly to do with the relationship Gaga assumes to her sources, which is comprehensive and archival rather than critical—she has described herself as a "librarian" whose particular obsession is with the history of glamour (*US Weekly* 2011). But this absence is also partly generational. Bonami sees Gaga more as repurposing existing artistic ideas for a new generation and historical context than as engaging in cultural or historical criticism:

> Nowadays artists, from Cattelan to our Lady GG, don't feel any longer the urgency of reinventing themselves from scratch in order to exist. They know that they are medium and message at the same time. They are connectors which offer images that were confined to the darkness or that were considered too élite to a wider public, at times a huge one. Few people talked about or remembered Jana Serbak [sic] before Lady Gaga appeared wearing an "evening steak". Performance, even the derived one, sometimes helps discover things that would otherwise get lost in the collective indifference. Lady Gaga belongs to a generation of mutatis mutandis, that is to say those who build their own identity by changing things that already existed but that needed to be changed in order to continue to exist. That does not mean copying: it means putting on stage. (2012, 266)

While Gaga certainly does "celebrate fakery, opacity, and glamour" in her staging of glam, she paradoxically also celebrates values more closely associated with the counterculture, including sincerity, transparency (particularly in her use of social media as a means of creating the effect of direct communication with her fans), and social activism.

Returning to Owens' characterization of Gaga as an assemblage, we can observe that the materials and discourses Gaga chooses to enact do not form a consistent or coherent whole any more than does her morphing appearance, particularly with respect to her deployment of irony. On the one hand, Gaga engages in parodic play to unsettle normative discourses of gender and sexuality, and, as Matthew R. Turner suggests, parody involves "a certain critical ironic distance" (2012, 194). On the other, she wholeheartedly embraces the world of fashion, a cultural discourse often condemned as

"a system for the subjugation of women" (Heartney 2007, 177). While Sherman, for example, used her knack for transformation to critique fashion and its impact on women in her *Untitled* series of 1983, in which she portrayed grotesque, overly made-up fashion victims in designer attire, Gaga enthusiastically and unironically participates in the world of fashion. Sally Gray and Anush Rutnam describe her as "exhibiting the cool savvy of the fashion insider, unintimidated by fashion's secrets and vanities." She has sometimes designed her own outfits and includes several cutting-edge fashion designers in the Haus of Gaga, the group that contributes to her creative work and whose name evokes the idea of a fashion "house" or brand (Gray and Rutnam 2014, 44). She champions the work of specific designers (she included Alexander McQueen's line for 2009 in the video for "Bad Romance," for instance) and frequently models for them. Sherman sought to challenge the world of fashion from the vantage of the art world by creating images that turn the conventions of fashion photography against themselves. Ironically, these images were embraced by the fashion world (Heartney 2007, 177). In a photo spread for *L'Uomo Vogue* (September 2012) shot by Inez and Vinood, Gaga appears wearing designs by Philip Treacy and Yves Saint Laurent, among others, with cyborg-like hardware adorning her face and body. These images exhibit no critical distance from fashion and its demands—to which Gaga submits fully—yet the juxtaposition of flesh, fabric, and futurism yields images that are as compelling and disconcerting as Sherman's, images that are nevertheless produced from within the fashion system itself.

Two other important areas in which no ironic detachment is implied in Gaga's attitude are her persona and her commitment to social causes. Gaga regularly insists that "Lady Gaga" is not a persona she assumes for the purpose of performing; rather, it is an identity she enacts all the time. Her version of glam thus reinstates the concept of authenticity so systematically undermined by predecessors like David Bowie and Brian Ferry, not in the sense that Gaga means the personae she enacts to be seen as authentic, but in the sense that her commitment to performing them as her identity is. Despite continually disappearing into and behind various disguises, she seems surprisingly earnest, vulnerable, and accessible. She has often claimed that she was bullied as a youth, treated as a freak and an outsider. There is reason to suspect these claims—if anything, she seems to have enjoyed a rather privileged and comfortable childhood and youth on the Upper West Side of Manhattan—just as Bowie's coming out to Watts may have been more a pose than anything else. But whereas Bowie delivered his news to Watts archly, Gaga never seems less than completely sincere. Comparing Gaga with Bowie and Prince, her predecessors in self-invention, biographer Maureen Callahan comments,

> Prince pulled it off, Bowie, too, but both did it before the Internet, and both did it without the warmth Gaga has been able to exude; their

> mystery seemed born of an essential coldness, a disaffection with the human race. It was totally believable that both belonged to an alien species. Gaga's [sic] seems born of genuinely feeling like the misfit she's claimed to be. She seems human. (2010, 20)

Regardless of the truth of Gaga's claim to have been bullied, she maintains it with a straight face and has set up the Born This Way Foundation (in partnership with Harvard University, the MacArthur Foundation, and others) to empower young people. Oprah Winfrey helped Gaga launch the venture in a ceremony at Harvard in 2012 (Huba 2013, 45–47).

Heather Duerre Humann describes Gaga's political program as "giving a voice to those who cannot speak for themselves" (2012, 79), particularly socially marginalized youth. Her very visible social activism allies her much more with the 1960s counterculture than with glam rock. It is difficult to imagine Bowie, for example, setting up a drop-in community center for gay-identified youth after "coming out" to Watts. Glam's unyielding posture of irony, and the critical distance required to maintain it, mitigated against such direct engagement. Glam's cultural-political impact in the 1970s should not be underestimated, however. As Buruma (2013) puts it, "however contrived to attract attention, Bowie's statement was seen as a coming-out that encouraged and inspired many confused young men at the time. The freakish isolated man from another planet became a model, a kind of cult leader." While glam in all its manifestations was ultimately political, its politics in the 1970s were largely implicit. The socio-political impact of glam rock came primarily through the audience's response to the freedoms represented by Bowie as Ziggy Stardust and other glam icons who were performing in newly flamboyant ways rather than from these icons' explicit embrace of specific political positions or causes. This contrasts with the overt political posturing of the previous generation of rock musicians and visual artists for whom it was almost obligatory to take a stand against the war in Vietnam, for instance:

> Glam rock's central social innovation was to open a safe cultural space in which to experiment with versions of masculinity that clearly flouted social norms. It was in this respect a liminal phenomenon in Victor Turner's sense of that term, a performance practice through which alternate realities could be enacted and tested.
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> (Auslander 2006, 228)

Gaga unquestionably seizes on this dimension of the glam sensibility, including its predilection for queerness, but expresses it in ways that meld glam spectacle with a commitment to changing the world through social and political activism reminiscent of the 1960s though implemented using purely twenty-first-century means that include leveraging celebrity, institutional and business partnerships, and social media. Like Bowie, Gaga serves her fans as an object of identification, but, whereas Bowie did this by default,

Gaga embraces it. Gaga refers to her fans as "little monsters" and to herself as "mother monster," thus seeking to create a sense of community around a generalized notion of shared otherness and marginalization. At the same time, she clearly supports specific causes: the video for "Born This Way" (2011) both begins and ends with images framed by the inverted pink triangle that has been a symbol of gay pride since the 1970s.

Conclusion

Although glam rock was pretty old news by 1975, the glam sensibility has remained influential in popular music and other cultural fields in the four decades since. The meaning of glam in the 1970s was context-dependent, however. Understanding glam's relationship in music to psychedelic rock and in visual art to the more austere minimalism and conceptualism that were its immediate predecessors is crucial to understanding its impact then. Lady Gaga is one of the most important and visible performers to perpetuate the glam legacy within popular music today, not only in music but also in her approach to representing herself in all contexts. Gaga retains and even amplifies many of glam's aesthetic strategies but has reconfigured the glam sensibility for a hyper modern, post-ironic world. Her flirtation with performance art recapitulates the glam ambition to bridge art and popular culture but in the terms of a historical moment in which performance art is becoming the point at which the art world intersects with the culture of celebrity. Her version of gender-bending goes glam ambivalence one better by evoking the drag king phenomenon that hit its stride in the 1990s. Gaga borrows the idea of continually changing personae from Bowie and those he influenced (Madonna in particular), but shifts it into hyper drive by creating a seemingly infinite number of personae simultaneously rather than assuming different identities sequentially. Whereas irony was a central trope of both glam and the postmodernism of which it is a variety, Gaga's self-presentation is simultaneously wholly artificial and wholly sincere. In the absence of the large-scale social and political movements that formed the backdrop of glam as the 1960s became the 1970s, Gaga has created her own movement that celebrates absolute self-definition, always the deepest value of glam.

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