GAGA META-MANIFESTOS

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European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 852205). This publication reflects only the author's view, and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Laura Handl, Carsten Junker: "Gaga Meta-Manifestos", in: Pierre-Héli Monot, David Bebnowski, Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier (eds.): *Activist Writing: History, Politics, Rhetoric*, Zürich: intercom Verlag (2024), 173–184.

LET US POSIT...

... that a critical (re-)assessment of activist writing – which we pursue in the framework of a politicized approach to form – requires a close look at the genre of manifesto.[1] The use of this genre and the expectations of it today are profoundly shaped by the history of the manifesto. The genre label that signals the form's cultural labors conjures up thoughts of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), manifestos of avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Dadaism,[2] and the manifestos of mid-twentieth-century social movements such as the Black Power movement and second-wave feminism.

Our inquiry is prompted by a recent upsurge of the manifesto that we observe in the politically polarized landscape of the current "Divided States of America" and beyond.[3] The manifesto in particular offers effective ways for authors to declare their positions and authorize their interventions in a public arena, thus creating (counter)publics. The current manifesto boom includes sociopolitical as well as cultural-critical and artistic manifestos and cuts across multiple media. Diverse in thematic outlook and broad in medial outreach, what most manifestos share is their insistence on structural and discursive intervention.

We zoom in on the Gaga Manifestos, published by *and* about the pop-culture artist Lady Gaga, as specific contemporary instantiations of the form, to highlight the changing conditions and potential effects of the genre of manifesto for feminist and queer theorizing. We look especially at the sense of time that these texts evoke, as well as at temporal constructions of the genre of manifesto and the historiography of feminism more generally.

In her book *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), which also contains a manifesto itself, not coincidentally, Sara Ahmed states that "the histories that bring us to feminism are the histories that leave us fragile."[4] In other words, conditions that call for recognizing patterns of structural and epistemic violence can transform embodied memories of discrimination and exclusion into agendas that call for change. A manifesto that aims to resonate with a current feminist (or generally activist) sensibility will have to disturb an undisturbed sense of personal and communal history-making, not to mention a linear narrative of social progress

1 This paper comes out of the research project "The Upsurge of the Manifesto in Contemporary Debates on Diversity in the United States," funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, project number 501505288). Many thanks to Galia Yanoshevsky, who cordially invited us to present on Gaga Manifestos in a seminar session at Bar-Ilan University and so generously shared her ideas. We also extend our thanks to the useful comments by two anonymous readers and the editors of this volume, Pierre-Héli Monot, David Bebnowski, and Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier.

2 The relationship between the rise of fascism and the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century is an important one to address in the context of the manifesto. For further elaboration on the (proto-)fascist influences of Salvador Dali, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Filippo Tomaso Marinetti as well as a reading of *Mein Kampf* (1926) as a manifesto, see Thomas Riggs (ed.): *The Manifesto in Literature – Volume 2: The Modernist Movement: 1900–WWII*, Detroit: St. James Press (2013).

3 Yahia Lababidi: "Never Forget, Never Remember", in: *Small Blows against Encroaching Totalitarianism: Volume One*, ed. by Daniel Levin Becker, San Fransisco: McSweeney's Books (2018), pp. 65–68, p. 65.

4 Sara Ahmed: *Living a Feminist Life*, Durham: Duke University Press (2017), p. 22.

associated with (white and heteronormative) feminism and other Western histories of activism. A known phenomenon of manifesto-writing is its ability to disorganize preconceived notions of temporality. With respect to manifestos of the French Revolution, Janet Lyon, in her influential book *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (1999), describes the creation of a "mythic present," a notion of time that interrupts preceding understandings of history and rejects them in favor of a revolutionary discourse that posits the inevitable arrival of a new era.[5] Lyon further describes the rhetorical link between politics and the arts from manifestos of avant-garde movements onward and reiterates the manifesto's general approach to memory and linear progress: "*historical teleology* is necessary to any radical artistic production, just as it inheres in revolutionary discourse as a principle of utopian inevitability."[6]

Whether artistic or political or both, authors typically manifest an inevitable agenda of subversion and, in its temporal framing, anticipate a diachronic narrative of progression. The modality of time in the manifesto – as well as in the narratives of its theorization – is, prototypically, one of necessary temporal advance. However, as an ever-variable genre, its uses can reframe this predictable sense of time as well as challenge the often unsurprising dogmatisms of its agendas. We argue that Gaga Manifestos are illustrative of these formal disturbances, taking up and further developing what queer-activist theorist Jack Halberstam began in his book *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* (2012): reading "gaga" as a potential concept with which to disturb the narratives of linear progress in feminism. Our analysis focuses not only on how Gaga Manifestos construct time in unconventional ways, but also on how the form lends itself to theorizing the potential effects of this phenomenon. Both the artist herself and the theorist Halberstam consciously mobilize the manifesto to critically, if playfully, irritate feminist and queer practices. As we argue, their manifestos can be read as meta-manifestos that anticipate what could be called gaga counterpublics.

LET US EXPAND...

... on the cultural meanings of Lady Gaga and the artist's manifesto work.[7] The term gaga, used by the artist born Stefani Germanotta, has been irrevocably linked to the persona of Lady Gaga for more than a decade. The artist has shaped popular culture since she stepped onto the musical scene in 2008 and achieved enormous fame within only a few years. Her commercial success has been

5 Janet Lyon: *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press (1999), p. 59. In this specific historical case, the mythification of the present also leads to a drowning out of grievances articulated by female (and, for that matter, enslaved) revolutionaries through an over-prioritization of a supposedly universalist rhetoric. See Lyon: *Manifestoes* (1999), pp. 59–62.

6 Lyon: *Manifestoes* (1999), p. 79, original emphasis.

7 We use the phrase of manifesto work here in analogy to Jane Tomkins's notion of the cultural work that popular fiction performs, providing its readers, among serving other functions, "a conception of themselves and of their history." Jane P. Tompkins: *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860*, New York: Oxford University Press (1986), p. 199.

attributed to her being perceived as a reinventor of pop music and performance art.[8] Lady Gaga herself has been open about her strategic use of provocative imagery, choreography, and language in videos, live performances, and cover shoots to enter into the limelight, garner the public's attention, and shake up pop culture. At the start of her career, "gaga-ness" stood for sexualized entertainment with a horror or surreal twist, such as appearing on the cover of *Rolling Stone* in a g-string and leather machine gun bra, or artificially bleeding out while performing on stage. This sensationalized media image has been somewhat toned down as of 2014 and today Lady Gaga is widely seen as a unique, eccentric musical talent – a recognition cemented by her Super Bowl Halftime performance in 2017 and Academy Award win in 2018. The various manifestos she has published at different points in her career also allow for a changing perception of her persona.

In the early years of Lady Gaga's stardom, the manifesto was a rarely used form of sociopolitical and artistic expression.[9] In 2009, the year that saw the centennial of Filippo Tomaso Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*, art critics "seemed to be either declaring the manifesto dead or defensively acknowledging its 'pariah status'." [10] It is perhaps the very pariah status of the genre at the time that made Lady Gaga publish her first manifesto in an album booklet: *The Manifesto of Little Monsters* (2009) originated as a live speech performance addressed to her ardent fans she dubbed Little Monsters on her first tour, a name that has stuck ever since, fittingly called Monster Ball. Coming out of a highly trans-medial context, the text showcases a clear link between Lady Gaga's free interpretation of the manifesto as form and her performative acts of self-mystification, which would recur in her later manifestos. In 2011 she released a second, more widely distributed video manifesto called *The Manifesto of Mother Monster*, whose title refers to the name her fans had given her in return and which serves as an intro to her song *Born This Way*. In Jack Halberstam's own Gaga Manifesto – published as the last chapter of his book *Gaga Feminism* and expanded in the 2013 essay "Charming for the Revolution: A Gaga Manifesto" – Lady Gaga's *The Manifesto of Mother Monster* is described as "some weird sci-fi shit about choosing good over evil after emerging from an egg covered in goo!"[11] Halberstam also aligns it with *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and the *SCUM Manifesto* (1967), as well as Marinetti's manifesto (1909), emphasizing the striking science-fiction-inspired visuals as well as

8 See Cyndi Lauper: "The 2010 TIME 100", in: *Time.com*, https://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1984685_1984940_1984943,00.html (2010) and Daniel D'Addario: "Lady Gaga's Oscar Performance Could Redefine Her Career", in: *Time*, https://time.com/3718883/oscars-2015-lady-gaga-performance/ (February 23, 2015).

9 Reasons for this downturn of "socially progressive" manifestos after a previous boom during the 1960s and 1970s are manifold. One factor is the post-structural skepticism of stable subject positions required of and endorsed by the form, see Carsten Junker: "Innovation and Iteration: Queer Machines and the Tension between Manifesto and Manifestor", in: *Queer Reflections on AI: Uncertain Intelligences*, ed. by Michael Klipphahn-Karge, Ann-Kathrin Koster, Sara Morais Santos Bruss, London: Routledge (2023), pp. 145–61, p. 157.

10 Julian Hanna: *The Manifesto Handbook: 95 Theses on an Incendiary Form*, Ridgefield, CT: Zero Books (2019), p. 102.

11 Jack Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*, Boston: Beacon Press (2012), p. 132.

the *weirdness* (or gaga-ness) of the manifesto and thereby also hinting at its camp potential.

The latest manifesto by Lady Gaga is *The Manifesto of Chromatica* (2020), which was released as a promotional video for her album *Chromatica* (2020) on the music-on-demand service Spotify. Here, contrary to her much more dramatic Mother Monster visual style, Lady Gaga is sitting on a floor in a neutral room and speaking to camera. But the manifestos are connected by a common thread that ties them all together: her mystification as an artistic persona. In *The Manifesto of Mother Monster* she presents herself as the cosmic mother of the world; in *The Manifesto of Chromatica* she stages herself as the originator of a philosophy of kindness. The form allows Lady Gaga to abstractly examine her artistic self-fashioning and process, the nature of fame, and her ethical responsibilities toward her fans. Nevertheless, there is still a degree of eccentricity and alienation in the *Manifesto of Chromatica* that also persists in Lady Gaga's public brand. As Halberstam argues, Lady Gaga's performances have critical potential within the pop culture mainstream, which, when taken seriously, can be used to imagine a feminist notion of anarchy. Halberstam understands this notion to be readily relatable, even granting a sense of self-empowerment, to those who experience structural marginalization due to their genders and sexualities. While this is not the place to discuss anarchy at length, it seems worthwhile to pause here for a moment to ponder Halberstam's abstract and rather tongue-in-cheek notion of anarchy:[12]

> [Lady Gaga] is in fact the last manifestation of a long line of feminine and queer performers who have used their time in the spotlight to produce funky forms of anarchy, to demonstrate an anti-sentimental fascination with loss, lack, darkness, and wild performance and to dig into the intersections of punk and glamour to find songs of madness and mayhem.[13]

Halberstam purposely forgoes an anarchist critique of the materialist-capitalist structures that objectify bodies such as Lady Gaga's and instead references anarchy as a symbolic resource of playful insurgence and rebellion, indicating a freedom from patriarchal conventions and a freedom to refuse these very conventions. Zeroing in on the figurative meanings of gaga performances and mobilizing references to anarchic rebellion as *discursive* strategy, Halberstam also circumvents an academic dispute often polarized into two competing positions: an exaggerated estimation of pop culture or a critique of the dynamics of its capitalist foundations, the latter reverberating with Frankfurt School-inflected concerns about culture-industrial mass appeal.[14] Let us move beyond this dichotomy here:

12 It would be worthwhile to discuss Halberstam's notion of Lady Gaga's anarchist performance aesthetics in relation to different historical strands of anarchy. One provocative question to ask when locating the cultural work of gaga-feminist anarchism would be, for instance, how to link it to the cultural logic of an authoritarian version of anarchy in the vein of Murray N. Rothbard's anarchocapitalism. See Jacob Jensen: "Repurposing Mises: Murray Rothbard and the Birth of Anarchocapitalism", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83/2 (2022), pp. 315–332, p. 315.

13 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), p. 139.

14 Taking Theodor W. Adorno's discussion of ethics in the Nazi era out of context, we

while the sociopolitical and economic conditions surrounding the production and circulation of Lady Gaga's manifestos should arguably be considered, and while a consideration of the pop star's presumably willful self-capitalization is plausible in light of anti-capitalist cultural critique, we take it as given that the Gaga Manifesto phenomenon, including its feminist agendas, is propelled by capitalist processes of extraction, which it also reproduces.

In light of complex dynamics of capitalist incorporation, we can home in further on the inherent subversive potential of Gaga's aesthetics. In his book, Halberstam acknowledges Lady Gaga as a brand, but also stresses that the singer's practice of "going gaga" indicates new foundations of feminism that exist independently of the actual person and the persona's commercial dimensions.[15] The meanings of "going gaga" have changed for Lady Gaga herself in the years since Halberstam published his book. Nonetheless, her enduring status as a pop icon continues to involve traces of eccentric and camp aesthetics, as, for example, in the stilted appeal of the *Manifesto of Chromatica* video. We read Lady Gaga's manifestos as performances that are expressive of her politics, in light of the fact that they are always already an expression of the capitalist implications of Lady Gaga's trademark, including the marketing strategy of an album or single release. Lady Gaga cannot and should not be located outside of capitalist dynamics that incorporate, contain, and strive on their critique.[16]

In sum, Halberstam neither advocates for an overthrow of the capitalist order nor willingly participates in the normalization of disruption as a mode of capitalist extraction. Instead, he focuses on how people experience the omnipresent power relations of capitalism. Accepting seeming contradictions, Halberstam suggests that we theorize gaga feminism as a movement that "leads the way to an anarchist project of cultural riot and reciprocation: [...] it is this gaga spirit of anarchy that I believe courses through Lady Gaga's music and forms the spine of a liberatory anthem."[17] To corroborate this, he draws parallels with other public personas who have questioned existing power relations from different standpoints and in various ways, among them Emma Goldman, Grace Jones, Shulamith Firestone, and Marina Abramović. Halberstam's interpretation of the Lady Gaga persona is applicable to *The Manifesto of Mother Monster* (2011) as well as to *The Manifesto of Chromatica* (2020): both share a high degree of theorizing gaga-ness as a point of departure. In comparison, *Chromatica* is more programmatically articulate in its argumentation for an open-minded, non-dogmatic philosophy, but still maintains a poetic and emotional style. While centered on the mythologized persona of Lady Gaga, the text directs attention to promoting what can be called a permissive principle of kindness: "[Chromatica is] neither right nor wrong nor is it greater or less

might polemically evoke his aphorism "Wrong Life Cannot Be Lived Rightly" here. See Theodor W. Adorno: *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. by Edmund F.N. Jephcott, London: Verso (2005 [1951]), p. 39.

15 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), p. xxv.

16 The assumption that capitalist processes incorporate critique can loosely be related to Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's notion of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which resonates here. See Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiapello: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso (2005 [1999]).

17 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), p. 137.

than any other perspective on life. No one thing is greater than another. Kindness rules all things. It simply is and it's mine. You can have it too, though."[18] The high level of self-reflection and abstraction in the manifesto, as well as the fact that this is her third manifesto published with an ever-expanding target audience in mind, elevates her latest use of the form to a meta-level of pop-cultural theorizing. In this manifesto, Lady Gaga expresses a philosophy which she sees as a valuable contribution to society, and theorizes her own performance to get at what the potential meanings of the Lady Gaga persona might be. While we may detect some faulty logic at play in this manifesto that self-undermines its own validity – e.g., does kindness rule all things and is it at the same time no "greater than another" thing? – we read the text as staging a performative contradiction, rather than seeking to resolve the complexities of its worldbuilding.

What does "going gaga" mean for the more recent, transformed artist Lady Gaga and how does the concept of gaga complicate narratives of mainstream feminism? In an interview in early 2020, Lady Gaga outlined her own responsibilities and ambitions as a celebrity: amid a general quest to destigmatize mental health issues, the artist is determined to share her own experiences and fund research that will contribute to the alleviation of today's mental health crisis. She proclaims that her goal is not only to entertain through her art, but to "help change [the audience's] life."[19] Yet another paradox emerges: the testimony is staged as authentic, but it is also a clearly dramatized performance given at an event sponsored by the weight loss industry, namely Weight Watchers. It would, again, make little sense to resolve any seeming contradictions here. The authority of the Lady Gaga persona is built on the validation of a willful *staging* of authentic personal experience. This can also be seen in *The Manifesto of Chromatica*, where references to personal experience authorize Lady Gaga's caretaking position.[20]

In this context, a specific notion of maternalism is crucial, i.e., a highly queer and camp notion that avoids approximating new normative horizons of motherhood for the emancipation of women. Lady Gaga features as the chosen Mother of the House, specifically the *Haus of Gaga* – a term that amalgamates fashion, design (Bauhaus), and queer culture. *Haus of Gaga* is her nickname for her creative team, as well as the brand name of her cosmetics line, which again displays the duality of art and capitalism inherent in the Gaga persona. While her 2011 and 2020 self-presentations are maternal in similarly mythologizing ways, the recent narrative of *The Manifesto of Chromatica* is more personal and less dramatic than Mother Monster. The concept of Chromatica is born as a starting point for changing the world, with Lady Gaga showing the way:

18 GagaMediaArchives: "Lady Gaga's Welcome to Chromatica Spotify Playlist Manifestos", in: *Youtube.com*, www . youtube . com / watch ? v = Hx90QBSHcLs (May 30, 2020), 00:02:47–00:03:08.

19 WeightWatchers: "Oprah's 2020 Vision Tour Visionaries: Lady Gaga Interview", in: *Youtube.com*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8iNYY7YV04 (January 9, 2020).

20 Lady Gaga's persona staged as an embodiment of caretaking and kindness could also be witnessed at the Oscar ceremony in 2022, when she presented the Best Picture category with Liza Minnelli, see Alex Meier: "Lady Gaga Helps Liza Minnelli Present Best Picture at 2022 Oscars, Whispers 'I Got You'", in: *abc7*, https://abc7.com/lady-gaga-liza-minnelli-2022-oscars-and/11687601/ (March 28, 2022).

> One reality I experienced was my Earth reality. The day-to-day painting of what I was taught was my natural state in life. At the time I also experienced a dream simultaneously and this dream was in combat with my earth reality at all times. A vision where I performed my thoughts for the world [...]. And in this world, I was kind and that kindness spread through people, through sound. This was the birth of Chromatica.[21]

The practice of self-mystification in the *Manifesto of Chromatica* is not only demonstrated through the theme of birthing, but it is also reinforced through a rhetoric that creates a narrative defying rational thinking, the narrative of a supposedly infinite temporality that conveys a sense of vast and expanding gaga worlds. In the metaphorical world of Chromatica, "time and linear structure don't matter, they don't exist" and the manifesto "is never-ending."[22] In the open time of this narrative, logic gets suspended to make room for two worlds that can exist concurrently. Earth and dream reality coexist, they become part of one and the same mythical manifesto world, a world in which narrow conventions and troubling hardships can be overcome. Historical realities get juxtaposed with the exploration of a "mythic present" in Lyon's sense.[23] In lieu of reason, the *Manifesto of Chromatica* is geared toward mythologizing Lady Gaga's philosophy. In this vein, Lady Gaga comes to embody an ideal characterized by kindness, weirdness, and self-reflective mythologizing. Stylizing the manifestor-persona of Lady Gaga as a chosen mother of the concept of Chromatica, the manifesto itself invites reflections on what Lady Gaga as an artist and public figure might represent.

LET US REVISIT...

... scholarship on the manifesto. As Lyon reminds us, manifestos from both artistic and political spheres are closely linked through their sense of urgency and shared revolutionary discourse. As a genre, the manifesto indicates and enables changing histories, generally marking a distinct before and after in time. The prototypical instance of this is Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848). While not the only text that shaped Marxist revolutionary discourse, it remains *the* reference text in the history of the form. The pamphlet owes its massive influence to its radical gesture toward impacting the world. In declarative ways, this manifesto proclaims its principles, writes its own version of history, insists that the world needs to change, as well as introducing "a new agent," the proletariat.[24] This performative power of the text was taken up by artists who made use of the potential of the genre to create new artistic movements and anticipate new forms of artistic expression. The influence of the *Communist Manifesto*, Martin

21 GagaMediaArchives: "Lady Gaga's Welcome" (2020), 00:00:59–00:01:38.

22 GagaMediaArchives: "Lady Gaga's Welcome" (2020), 00:01:59–00:02:05; 00:03:23–00:03:24.

23 Lyon: *Manifestoes* (1999), p. 59.

24 Martin Puchner: "Introduction", in: *The Manifesto in Literature – Volume 1: Origins of the Form, Pre-1900*, ed. by Thomas Riggs, Detroit: St. James Press (2013), p. xiv.

Puchner implies, did magic in the early twentieth-century cultural sphere. Now, manifestos brought art movements into being even before the art that would constitute that movement had been created, futurism being the prime example. It soon became more important for avant-garde artists to declare a movement or, at least, to identify with one, rather than to create art,[25] leading Puchner to credit manifestos with the discursive strength needed to bring about entire artistic movements. Avant-garde manifestos, in that sense, anticipated facts by virtue of their future-oriented rhetoric. And since they were launched in public at specific points in time, aiming to leave behind earlier movements, they themselves can also be positioned on a temporal vector.

Puchner pinpoints WWII as a historical turning point in the construction of manifesto time. Manifestos could no longer apply the rhetoric of newness in the same way as those of previous decades. Instead of declaring their own originality, manifestos had to join an established tradition of modernist manifestos.[26] Hence, while pre-World War II manifestos mobilized a cataphoric temporal orientation, post-World War II manifestos mobilized an anaphoric one. Thus, Puchner's narrative itself implies a serial sense of time.

Lady Gaga certainly plays with the edginess of artistic manifestos and, in taking up the form, inserts herself into a history of avant-gardism. In light of her position as a high-grossing artist, Lady Gaga's manifesto-writing can be interpreted as an appropriation of avant-garde art in a bid to increase her brand value. Nonetheless, like Halberstam, we interpret her pop-cultural work as art with impact and see epistemic *value* (pun intended) in her use of the form in which her politics and philosophy find expression. This reading is based on the fact that Gaga's manifestos do not project the serial sense of time that is so relevant in other avant-garde manifestos: they do not mobilize a sense of urgency for change through a narrative that stresses the inevitability of progress. Instead of projecting a strict dogmatism that leaves little room for an alternative present or other futurities, Lady Gaga adopts and re-fashions the form through a narrative temporality of openness. The motif of birthing in *The Manifesto of Mother Monster* is crucial in this respect: through the utopian setting suspended from any distinct place and time, birthing becomes a metaphor for an "eternal" creative act free of a serial-temporal trajectory. Notably, Lady Gaga also reverses the logical biographical sequence from the position of child to one of mother through her shift from mythic motherly creator to earthly child in the first lines of *Born This Way*: "My mama told me when I was young, 'We are all born superstars'."[27] While the lyrics, which also include religious slogans, may lend themselves to a critical reading of, again, a heteropatriarchal concept of motherhood, it has had an undeniable impact on the queer culture of its time: it invites queer readings of gaga kinship that upend normative notions of temporality.[28] For Halberstam, Lady Gaga's self-abstraction makes

25 Puchner: "Introduction" (2013), p. xvi.

26 Puchner: "Introduction" (2013), p. xvii.

27 "Lady Gaga – The Manifesto of Mother Monster", in: *genius.com*, https://genius.com/Lady-gaga-the-manifesto-of-mother-monster-lyrics (February 27, 2011).

28 For a retrospective on the album and its impact on queer culture, see Owen Myers's article on pitchfork.com, where he interestingly calls the songs on it "placard-ready manifestos."Owen

her a suitable emblem of an alternative feminism: "I build gaga feminism on the bedrock of the outrageous performance archive that Lady Gaga has created."[29] We add that temporal openness – which is also an openness to seemingly logical contradictions – qualifies her performative practices in this respect.

The suspension of linear time in Lady Gaga's art, her insistence on a utopian moment in the now, corresponds to the approach to feminism that Halberstam proposes. Rather than subscribing to a narrative of linear development toward progress, which involves shallow, stalling, and questionable promises of empowerment for disenfranchised groups in the future, Halberstam's gaga feminism focuses on the political imagination of marginalized communities and subjects who recognize and, in imaginatively embodied rebellion, transcend what the societal middle calls normal. As the title of the book already signals, Gaga feminism declares an "End of Normal" and refuses an agenda of clear objectives in favor of the open potentialities that its formalizations afford.[30] In its gaga-adaptations, the manifesto is the form that allows for this openness.

LET US PONDER...

... how Alice Yaeger Kaplan interprets the relation of manifestos and their theorization: Kaplan suggests that a theoretical engagement with pamphlets and manifestos impacts this engagement in such a way that theory itself becomes activist writing, the form "contaminates" theory.[31] This could be considered a contentious position articulated from a privileged position: conflating activist theory and praxis and therefore depreciating the risks of activists who put their lives on the line outside of the academic field. Furthermore, linking scholarly and non-scholarly activism may also downplay the epistemic value of, say, street protest. But theory on activist writing may very well shift from commenting on a textual archive of protest and activism to becoming part of that textual archive. Those who do the theoretical work on activist writers, therefore, cannot necessarily be easily distinguished from burgeoning activists themselves. This idea is corroborated by Galia Yanoshevsky in her essay "Three Decades of Writing on Manifesto," where she discusses the reciprocal relationship of the objects and the methods of manifesto research. She notes that theorists of the genre not only shape an understanding of its history and functions but are, in turn, also inspired, if not often impacted, by what they study: "Indeed, the declarative and revolutionary tone and style of manifestos [...] perhaps demands that the critic break with a standard, logical reading in studying the manifestos."[32] So what happens when theorists of a

Myers: "Lady Gaga: Born This Way the Tenth Anniversary", in: *pitchfork.com*, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/lady-gaga-born-this-way-the-tenth-anniversary/ (July 2, 2021).

29 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), pp. 103–104.

30 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), p. 143.

31 Alice Yaeger Kaplan: "Recent Theoretical Work with Pamphlets and Manifestoes", in: *L'Esprit Créateur* 23/4 (1983), pp. 74–82, p. 75.

32 Galia Yanoshevsky: "Three Decades of Writing on Manifesto: The Making of a Genre", in: *Poetics Today* 30/2 (June 1, 2009), pp. 257–286, pp. 275–276.

form that often combines arts and politics choose to use the manifesto themselves as their form of articulation?

What happens when Halberstam, reading Lady Gaga's art as an embodiment of feminist theorizing, writes a manifesto himself? The keywords of his theorizing – "failure," "wild," "punk," and "anarchy" – serve as red threads woven into a tight-knit artistic-political-activist discourse. By codifying his ideas about "wild theory," "wild methodology"„ and "a wild archive"[33] in manifesto form and thus mobilizing the nexus of arts and politics, Halberstam adds heft to his own theorizing.

Further, Halberstam's "Gaga Manifesto" is not merely *about* Lady Gaga's *Mother Monster Manifesto* and other manifestos. Halberstam uses the label of the genre to manifest an urgent call for a distinct kind of feminism, "to push us," as he notes, "further into the crisis, into the eye of the hurricane, deep into the heart of nonsense."[34] In so doing, he both references manifestos, commenting on their functions, and uses the form to push an agenda. In other words, Halberstam's own Gaga Manifesto can be understood as a *meta-manifesto*. A simple definition of meta-manifesto, as we understand it, is a manifesto about manifestos, a text that manifests possible meanings and practices of the manifesto itself. Mary Ann Caws also uses the term: "In its extreme case of self-definition, the manifesto consists of reflections on the manifesto itself: these become *meta-manifestos*."[35] To go further still: construing Halberstam's form of theorizing as a meta-manifesto points to meta-manifestors' deliberate attempts to draw attention to the urgency of their task and to position themselves in artistic, political, and academic fields. It raises questions about the overlapping of these fields, about willful modes of pushing or destabilizing boundaries between theory, art, and political activism. It knowingly gives theory a particular status of fierce – and possibly playful – determination. Reading Halberstam's manifesto as a meta-manifesto also highlights the fact that manifestos are located in a force field of tensions, not least between playful theory and politics. And it suggests overcoming the dominant historicizing narratives of the genre, with their serial sense of time, in favor of an approach detached from the logic of temporal progress. Instead of emplotting manifestos within a teleological historiography of activist writing, meta-manifestos call for reading various manifestos synchronously, also with respect to their plural and potentially contradictory agendas. This perspective does not exclude historical, economic, or social contextualization, rather it engages meta-manifestos in controversial debate and works out where their agendas potentially conflict and fail to line up, giving way to the mode of memory and remembering that Ahmed promotes in *Living a Feminist Life*: "offering new ways of understanding what we come up against."[36] This includes reflections on what the manifesto as a form, in general, can accomplish.

33 Jack Halberstam: "Charming for the Revolution: A Gaga Manifesto", in: *e-flux* 44, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/44/60142/charming-for-the-revolution-a-gaga-manifesto/ (April 2013), p. 7.

34 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), p. 132.

35 Mary Ann Caws: *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (2001), p. xxix, original emphasis.

36 Ahmed: *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), p. 22.

If we define a *meta-manifesto* as a manifesto about manifestos, and if we also consider that, in Halberstam's sense, manifesto world-making promotes dogmatic openness, epistemic instability, playful anarchy, and experimentation – as much as it provokes critical responses – then we can also apply this term to Lady Gaga's own manifestos. Considering that Lady Gaga uses the form to experiment and expand the possibilities of the manifesto in formalizing her world-making, the texts become sites to reflect the potential of the manifesto as form. They can then also be considered, in their own respective iterations, to be meta-manifestos.

What is the temporality of Gaga meta-manifestos? And where can their constructions of time be positioned in time? Despite the temporal openness they postulate, despite their empty time and potential historical amnesia, despite their *nunc stans*, should they not be located in their own specific time, in the years of their respective publication (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2020), and be related to the actual historical moments they reference? The temptation of these texts lies in the fact that they perform contradictions.[37] As Halberstam reflects: "Lady Gaga may be the name now for a site of global popularity and global investments in difference, but this name too will change and what is gaga today will be something else entirely tomorrow," before adding: "Let gaga feminism begin!"[38] Gaga meta-manifestos may endure and create counterpublics precisely because they are of the moment.

37 On Contradiction Studies, see Carsten Junker, Marie-Luise Löffler: "Ghostwriting and Its Contradictions, Or: Meet the Trumps", in: *Spaces of Dissension: Towards a New Perspective on Contradiction*, ed. by Julia Lossau, Daniel Schmidt-Brücken, Ingo H. Warnke, Wiesbaden: Springer (2019), pp. 39–66; Carsten Junker, Ingo Warnke: "Marguerite Stix and the Shell: Notes on Disciplinarity and Contradiction", in: *Quaderna* 3, https://quaderna.org/3/marguerite-stix-and-the-shell-notes-on-disciplinarity-and-contradiction/ (2015).

38 Halberstam: *Gaga Feminism* (2012), p. 149.