

Traces of spirituality in the Lady Gaga phenomenon

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This paper will explore the type of spiritual expression of adolescents and young people in and through current popular music culture. In particular, the paper will propose the music and industry constructed by and around the popular singer and songwriter Lady Gaga as a test case. Her incessant use of religious language and religious symbolism has equally attracted praise and criticism. This paper will acknowledge that Lady Gaga is not simply an icon of this hypermodernity, but she is a complex phenomenon which brings together various elements as well as actors. It will explore if and to what extent the main spiritual elements are traceable in this phenomenon.

Keywords: Lady Gaga; symbolic resources; spirituality

Introduction

There is a growing corpus of literature asserting that spirituality is an innate predisposition. There are at least two parallel and not mutually exclusive research traditions. On the one hand, there are those who highlight spirituality and religiosity as part of the evolutionary process from hominoids to *Homo sapiens sapiens* both in a biological sense and later in a cultural sense (see, for instance, King 2007; Mithen 1996). On the other hand there are those who construe the intrinsic nature of spirituality and religiosity through research with children (see for instance Hay and Nye 2006; Hay and Socha 2005; Kelemen 2004).

One, however, needs to be clear on what is meant by spirituality since, with the popularisation of the term during these past decades, it has become more difficult to delineate. If we accept that spirituality is an intrinsic dimension of being human then one could conjure that it permeates all human activity, including the most apparently secular and profane activities. Once spirituality has been defined, we may proceed to analyse different human activities in search for the spiritual component these construct. We may then see how it might be possible to educate the spiritual dimension through a direct or an indirect use of these activities or their products.

Consequently it is being argued that there are, at least, traces of spirituality in popular music. Furthermore, given that adolescents are not passive consumers (Steele and Brown 1995), it is possible to explore the type of spiritual expression of adolescents in and through current popular music culture. The paper will propose

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the exploration for traces of spirituality in the music and industry constructed by and around Lady Gaga as a test case.

Defining 'spirituality'

For the purpose of this paper, spirituality is understood to include three major inter-related elements, namely

- (i) awareness/consciousness which induces such sensations as awe, wonder, a sense of the beautiful and the sacred, and developing such emotions and attitudes as gratefulness, and the need of others;
- (ii) the ability to search for and construct meaning, and thus the aptitude to formulate and express fundamental existential questions; and
- (iii) the need to connect with oneself, others, creation and an ultimate reality, which in many cases is called God, that propels relatedness and the construction of communities.

From a developmental perspective, the above understanding of the elements which constitute spirituality is very much near to the framework proposed by Benson and Roehlkepartain (2008), Roehlkepartain et al. (2008), Roehlkepartain (2008), and Yust et al. (2006).

Furthermore, the spiritual dimension is understood to be complex in that although it is a personal construct, it is developed in and through the whole human community, past and present. Spirituality is understood within a specific context (van der Hoogen 2011), since it is through the narratives, rituals beliefs and symbol systems that the inexpressible is given form and possibly accessed and experienced. Its necessitating of contextual frameworks leads to rich interactions and diverse ways of understanding or experiencing similar realities. Indeed, spirituality and the manner in which it is sensed and experienced is interpreted before, during and after the same experiences through a cultural and a religious or non-religious worldview lens (Hense 2011). Yet, spirituality is not merely a by-product of a worldview; it is also the lens through which worldviews are constructed.

Given that spirituality is an essential core of our being human, it needs to be expressed and it influences one's way of living. Yet, while all share some basic form of spirituality and all may experience some intense spiritual experience at some given moment/s in time, not all have the same aptitude to sense and express spirituality. There are different levels of spiritual experiences and/or expressions, which may vary deeply.

Symbols as means of concretising the spiritual

Spirituality is an abstract human fundamental dimension in that it needs a concrete language in order to be accessed and expressed. Religions have definitely been the privileged medium to access the spiritual but music, art, poetry and literature have also been excellent ways to get in touch with the spiritual dimension. In the majority of cases, the commonality amongst these languages lies in their depending upon symbols and symbol systems. Symbols are not readily available in nature, but they are created by diverse communities in different spatial and temporal contexts. Amongst the first known symbols created to meet the requirements of the spiritual

dimension are the burial rituals of the first human beings some one hundred thousand years ago and the symbols developed and expressed thousands of years later in the Palaeolithic cave paintings (Lieberman 1991; Mithen 1996). The later development of symbols depended on the culture and context of the newly founded agricultural communities that were eventually to produce the first great civilisations. Indeed, one has to acknowledge that most symbols are constructed and understood within a context.

The languages of the spiritual develop and evolve through the adaptations needed by context. Yet in the process of adaptation, the past is not lost but is creatively integrated and re-constructed. Thus, every human individual enters in touch with his/her own spiritual dimension through a process of interaction and transmission that has been accompanying humanity from its very first appearance on earth some one hundred thousand years ago.

By utilising the thoughts of Slunecko and Hengl (2007) on language and culture, one could assert that the languages of the spiritual predate the individual. By using these languages, the individual is able to impose order and give meaning to the natural and lived worlds which are otherwise difficult to comprehend. Yet, the use of these languages is never neutral. In using these languages, the individual is radically changed. The conception of the world imposed by a particular symbolic language will radically change the way one understands oneself, connects with nature, others and the ultimate, as also the way one constructs meaning. Thus, to cite one example, the languages developed through the Mesopotamian mythologies developed some 5000 years ago, which held that only the king was the living image and likeness of the gods, is in stark contrast with the first creation narrative of the Jewish people which holds that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God (see for instance Mattioli 1981). The subsequent interpretation of the latter narrative led to the current notions of self and individual uniqueness, as well as contributed to the discourse of individual human rights. Had the language of the Mesopotamian mythologies prevailed, it is quite possible to assume a totally different way of how we would have understood ourselves, interacted with others and treated each other, amongst other consequences.

Pop culture, spirituality and adolescents

In our contemporary society, where context is still essential but where globalisation and hypermodernity have reduced the impact of the spatial and temporal frameworks, the availability of and exposure to symbols for the individual have tremendously increased. This is particularly true for adolescents who are immersed in media. It is worth noting that besides for its undeniable entertainment dimension, adolescents relate with popular culture present in the media for coping with issues, to identify with a youth culture, to experience high sensations and for their personal identity formation (Arnett 1995). Larson (1995) highlights the latter point further by arguing that popular music is used by adolescents as a tool to experiment with and construct their identity. He notes that during this phase, adolescents spend more time on their own. It is precisely during these solitary periods that music is used, among others, to fantasise and experiment with multiple-selves.

Thus, media becomes an important new source of socialisation (Arnett 1995). It is in this socialisation process that media also provides a plurality of symbols which has the potential of enriching the spiritual life of individuals since it provides a

greater repertoire from where to draw and can give access to different modes of constructing meaning and relating to reality.

Indeed symbols used by media should not be taken lightly. While it is true that the religious symbols reutilised for commercials, such as yoga positions and images of 'paradise' are often short-lived, in a number of cases the meaning that they construct are able to strike a chord with individuals. Through her research, Zittoun (2007a, 2007b) demonstrated the potential of cultural objects (music, images, symbols, etc.) to become a symbolic resource for individuals. Thus, while a song's immediateness lies in its entertainment element it becomes a symbolic resource when it is used by the individual or the community to create an atmosphere of serenity, or as an aid to giving solace, or when it is used in search of meaning. Furthermore, she noted that songs and music have the potential of becoming symbolic resources to young people, especially during periods of change and transition, empowering the individual to transform oneself. Thus, for instance, an adolescent who found that her ex-boyfriend is in a relationship with another girl may use Adele's *Someone like you* (2012) as a means of bereaving the relationship and to deal with emotional distress.

While the way individuals selectively use music for constituting themselves is ongoing (DeNora 2000), one must note that music consumption is at its height during the adolescent period (Larson 1995). Reporting on the studies conducted by Sloboda, DeNora (2000) points to the role that music plays in people's private lives. In a sample of 500 British participants of different ages, Sloboda reported that the use of music could be grouped under 'six thematic categories: memory, spiritual matters, sensorial matters ... mood change, mood enhancement and activities' (DeNora 2000, 47).

Lewis (1982) observed that the subjective and communitarian aspects of symbols lead to the forming and consolidation of subculture groups among adolescents, such as rock or rap groups. Furthermore, he also noted that the same music form may change its symbolic meaning in a different cultural and/or social system. On the other hand, without denying the communal significance of symbolic resource, Zittoun (2007a, 2007b) pointed to a more subjective personal importance of the symbols present in lyrics and/or visuals.

Both the personal and communitarian aspects of meaning making are true. The producer and consumer of popular music are not disengaged from each other. It is the adolescent who intentionally participates and selects media messages within the context of his/her own background and group of peers (Steele and Brown 1995). This process is needed in order to explore and construct one's identity as well as to identify oneself with a subculture (Arnett 1995). Thus, for instance, the adolescent who listens to hard rock, may use this type of music to vent anger and build an anti-establishment symbolic repertoire. When making a choice between heavy metal and punk, the individual is exploring a specific set of symbol systems, as well as identifying with a particular subculture. On the other hand, the artist, consciously or unconsciously, produces his/her music through the web of significance spun by a particular culture. This is further reinforced through the audiences' subculture that adopts the music.

While acknowledging that only a small, though considerable, amount of pop music directly tackles religious issues, popular culture is nonetheless a language where spiritual and meaning making discourse are inevitable. This is mainly because spiritual and religious language is indelibly tied with the search for

meaning and for the self, as well as with the aesthetic and with emotions and concepts that are difficult to express in words. Consider, for instance, Bruno Mars' *Locked out of Heaven* (2012) that uses religious and spiritual language to describe a sexual experience.

In this sense, the interest of this paper in Lady Gaga mainly stems from the awareness that she exemplifies the expression and thirst for meaning making of a particular subculture of adolescents and young people. This phenomenon illustrates the possibilities that contemporary popular music and artists offer especially to the adolescent audience. It is remarkable how Lady Gaga makes use of a variety of symbols and media to communicate a non-fragmented message related to the self. The paper will investigate to what extent she contributes to the development of awareness, meaning making and to a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Contextualising Gaga

Stefani Germanotta, better known by her stage name Lady Gaga, was born in 1986. She was brought up Catholic by a third generation Italian-American parents in a wealthy middle-class environment. Going through her biography, one immediately notes that her family and her secondary-level education were major sources of influence in her personal and entertainment career. Her father introduced her to different musical genres and to the love for the popular music produced and listened to by Generation X. On the other hand, her mother's taste and love for Italian designer clothes encouraged her to be interested in fashion and may have led her to understand fashion as a strong means of making statements about oneself and one's role (Jayne 2012).

Her schooling years at the Convent of the Sacred Heart School at New York were also fundamental in forging her character and for further equipping her with a symbolic repertoire. The school continued to reinforce her Catholic language through the ethos of the school, liturgy, Catholic Religious Education and extra-curricular activities. In the tradition and ethos of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus founded by St. Madeleine Sophie, Lady Gaga's adolescent schooling years were shaped by a philosophy that promotes education, social justice, the rights, equity and full integration of females in society and in the Church. When Stefani was 14, the General Chapter of the Society, meeting in Amiens, France, insisted that the education that the religious Congregation provides should place the human person at the centre of the educational process, should encourage critical thinking, form towards commitment to social justice and form persons capable of independence, solidarity and responsibility (Society of the Sacred Heart 2000).

In an interview to *The Guardian*, Lady Gaga claimed that the school taught her how to think. She claimed that her school helped her to be smart and instilled in her the values of discipline and drive (Barton 2009, 21 January). At school, Stefani was able to explore and deepen her love for theatre and performance through plays, coral concerts and musicals (Jayne 2012). In an interview to *Show Studio*, Lady Gaga had positive things to say about the nuns and her teachers who, she claims, instilled in her wonderful values, amongst which she recalls a feminist outlook (Fury and Lady Gaga 2009, 21 August).

Yet, her school years were also fundamental not only for developing her religious symbolic repertoire, but also for the construction of self and for the resources she later used to connect with her teenage audience. Although there are accounts

claiming that Stefani was popular at school, she claims that her schoolmates bullied her. In particular, she recalls that she used to be called the Germ, a pun on her surname, and that once she was thrown into the garbage (Jayne 2012).

The Lady Gaga phenomenon

Influenced by pop music, the flamboyant performances of the 70s and the heavy metal and rock of the 80s, she was able to fuse rock with electro-pop music (Jayne 2012). However, her originality does not lie in the sound, not even in her message. Indeed, she makes her influences so overt that it is easy to fragment her style, titles of songs, some rhythms, mode of presentation and the use of sex and religion, among others, and trace them to specific music and style of pop icons of the 70s and 80s. The novelty in Lady Gaga lies in the way she is able to mix and mash different elements together, drawing from various sources and, above all, her ability to use different media which are used to incorporate her symbol system, as well as used to amplify her message. She perfectly embodies the hypermodern pop star who is virtually (understood in various senses) omnipresent, is flexible, and stresses the here and now. This continuous presence in the media contributes to enhance a sense of connectedness and it nourishes the hope in her followers that they may be noted by Lady Gaga herself or by the virtual community. The individual follower may, thus, 'come into existence' or be emancipated. But to understand this process, we need to understand the complexity of the Lady Gaga phenomenon.

She became popular though her single *Just Dance* speaks about being drunk during a party (Jayne 2012). The lyrics, music and video struck a chord in the western world precisely because Lady Gaga describes a common experience among adolescents. In these past four years, she has produced three albums, *The Fame* (2008), *The Fame Monster* (2009) and *Born this Way* (2011). While there is no doubt that Lady Gaga is a talented and ambitious star who intelligently manipulates media and various cultural commodities, she is nonetheless the visible tip of a larger mechanism created by the record label and her Haus of Gaga. Inspired by Andy Warhol and his factory, the Haus of Gaga is a way of formally linking her music to fashion and consequently of making statements, as well as a way of consciously attempting to make an impact on pop culture.

Thus, while the music and lyrics are at the centre of the Lady Gaga's icon construction, they are just the hub of a larger reality where art, fashion, live musical/theatrical performances, live TV shows, digital media and social networking, as well as social activism, form an intricate network that assure the construction of an icon as well as contribute to the formation of her message (see Figure 1). The message does not solely lie in what is orchestrated behind the scenes. Going through the digital media and social networking, it is evident that Lady Gaga's followers and opponents echo her main line of thought and at the same time contribute to shape the message and the phenomenon.

She has the extraordinary ability to bridge and link various factors that have already been used in the past and to shape them anew by her understanding of the social media. Indeed, it is this understanding, together with her conscious or unconscious espousing the philosophy of late modernity that gives force to her uniqueness. Lady Gaga was the first pop star to have one billion viewers on YouTube (MSN Entertainment 2010, 25 March), to have 10 million followers on Facebook (AllVoices 2010 03 June) and to reach 25 million followers on Twitter

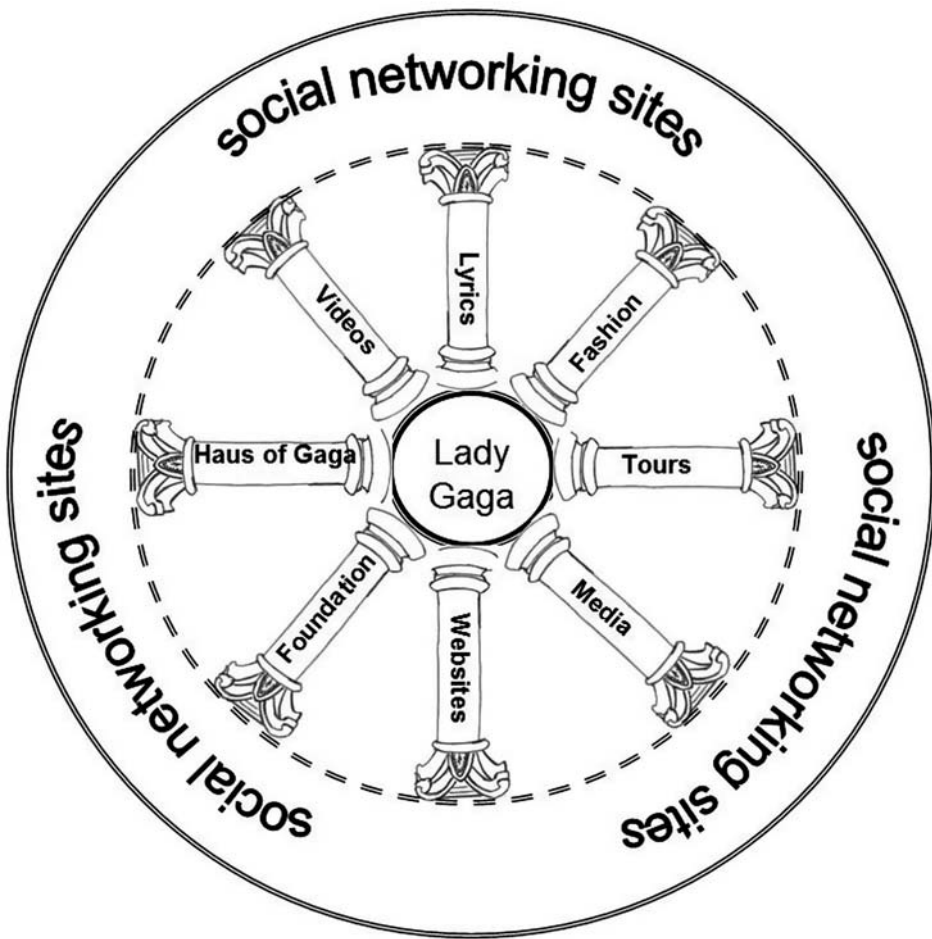


Figure 1. The Lady Gaga phenomenon.

(The Inquisitr 2012, 01 June). This online following generates millions of postings and comments that make the interaction between Lady Gaga, her followers and opponents fundamental. It is in this intricate message, feedback and reconfiguration of the message that lies at the core of the phenomenon.

Meaning making and/or traces of spirituality in the Lady Gaga phenomenon

By skilfully using the new media, Lady Gaga is able to elevate her followers to a new status where they are active participants and where they may perceive themselves as potential co-creators. Thus, for instance, the term *Mother Monster*, a term used to describe Lady Gaga, and the use of the *Monster Paw*, a sign made with the hand up, were both developed by individual fans and taken on board by Lady Gaga (Gagapedia, n.d. a). Furthermore, her incessant commitment to post videos or comments on the social networks and to make it evident that she is following what her fans are posting is at the core of this new mode of communicating and of reifying

her philosophy that every person is special. The case of Maria Aragon, a 10-year-old Canadian, epitomises this. After uploading her own cover version of the song *Born this Way* on YouTube, and after the video was viewed more than 34 million times, Lady Gaga invited Maria on the stage for a duet (Turner 2011). In this sense, *The Manifesto of Little Monsters*, proclaimed at the interlude of The Monster Ball Tour, is revealing

There is something heroic about the way my fans operate their cameras. So precisely, so intricately and so proudly. Like Kings writing the history of their people, is their prolific nature that both creates and procures what will later be perceived as the kingdom. So the real truth about Lady Gaga fans, my little monsters, lies in this sentiment: They are the Kings. They are the Queens. They write the history of the kingdom, and I am something of a devoted Jester. It is in the theory of perception that we have established our bond, or the lie I should say, for which we kill. We are nothing without our image, our projection. Without the spiritual hologram of who we perceive ourselves to be or rather to become in the future.

When you are lonely, I'll be lonely too, and this is the fame: Love and Art. (Lady Gaga 2009, November 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nikc3OUj3qoand feature=related> This is my transcript of a section of *The Manifesto of Little Monsters* and I take responsibility for its accuracy.)

In response to the above manifesto, many fans claimed that they cried, with one of her fans even claiming that

When you are lonely, I'll be lonely too.

This line prevented me from committing suicide a few months ago. I had seen this at her concert, but when I was about to do the act, that phrase just came into my head. And I cried all night, of a weird happiness.

Thank you for everything, you mean the world to me, and I owe myself to you. (Lady Gaga 2009, November 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nikc3OUj3qoand feature=related> This is my transcript of a section of *The Manifesto of Little Monsters* and I take responsibility for its accuracy.)

Such responses are indicative of the ability of her music, concerts and videos of being able to make an incisive connection with the deeper reality of individual teenagers, among others, and of contributing to her followers' meaning-making system.

Judging from the comments posted on social networking, it is evident that such emotional, gut-level response to her music, imagery, fashion and theatre is common. Certainly, her style and the symbols that she carefully chooses to use instigate awe, shock, admiration and/or anger. Thus, on the one hand, her opponents see her as a blasphemous entertainer, with some even going so far as to claim that she is involved in occult practices and that she is a member of *Illuminati*, a secret society which aims to subvert Christianity. On the other hand, she is seen with admiration by her followers who are able to connect with her message and see in her seemingly transgressive and shocking behaviour a means of being unique and true to oneself. Indeed, such a message is particularly important in one's exploratory journey of self-awareness and self-definition, especially during adolescence.

From the very beginning of her ascent to fame, Lady Gaga was able to point to the potential of the lyrics to become a symbolic resource for her audience by turning common experiences into life metaphors. This was done immediately through her first hit song, *Just Dance*. The lyrics of the song speak about being drunk during a party. In an interview to HX Magazine, she explained

‘If you’ve ever been so high that it’s, like, scary, the only way you can deal with it is not to deal with it, so you just kind of dance through the intoxication’. She further explained that ‘It’s about being drunk or high at a club and you dance through it, like you do in all stretches of life, when obstacles come, dance through it’. (HX Magazine as cited in Gagapedia, n.d. b)

Drinking is a *sine qua non* for many adolescents and youth who party. They most often need alcohol to get high, prevail over inhibitions and be socially accepted (see for instance, Kruse 1975, Schulenberg and Maggs 2002). Moreover, together with the rhythm of music and dance, alcohol can produce a sensual experience. This experience is an immanent one, where the here and now are extremely important and where pleasure, not happiness, is sought.

For her, the young person has to overcome the obstacles experienced at the party/life by dancing through them. Indeed, this song is the first concrete evidence that she is able to provide symbolic resources, as defined by Zittoun (2007a, 2007b), to millions of followers coming from different parts of the globe. Thus, Lady Gaga’s followers may turn her music, videos, recollections of her concerts and fashion consumables into symbolic resources when they use them not only for the immediateness that they provide, but especially for their ability to give sense to a particular period of their life, or to help them to construct their identity and/or to create a new meta-narrative through which they understand the world they live in.

Symbols, metaphors and life experiences have become an intrinsic part of her medium and her message. An analysis of the lyrics, videos, artefacts as well as the comments that she produces reveal that in order to do so, she (1) draws from her own cultural and symbolic baggage, (2) is aware of the anxieties, hopes, expectations and worldviews of her followers and (3) mediates through various means of communication. Figure 2 attempts to illustrate this. Lady Gaga has a vast repertoire of symbols that she can draw from. Strategically, she chooses to employ religious symbols, mainly using the Catholic symbol system and the symbols developed by pop culture during these past years, mostly through theatre, music, art and fashion. These are filtered through her belonging to an American, white, middle-class culture, through her family experiences and through her own personal experience, as well as the Catholic symbolic repertoire mediated through her schooling.

This symbolic luggage is brought to fruition when it is used to respond to the requirements of her current and potential followers. This is, for instance, the case when she uses her own experience of being bullied and her perception that she was an outcast during her school years (Jayne 2012) in order to create a connection with underprivileged members of society, such as adolescents who feel that no one understands them or that they do not fit.

However, the drawing from her own luggage of symbols and her connecting with the requirements of her audience is further enhanced by her ability to point to the potential of her work as symbolic resources for individuals. She not only provides the imagery, music, text and rituals (most of which are present in her live per-

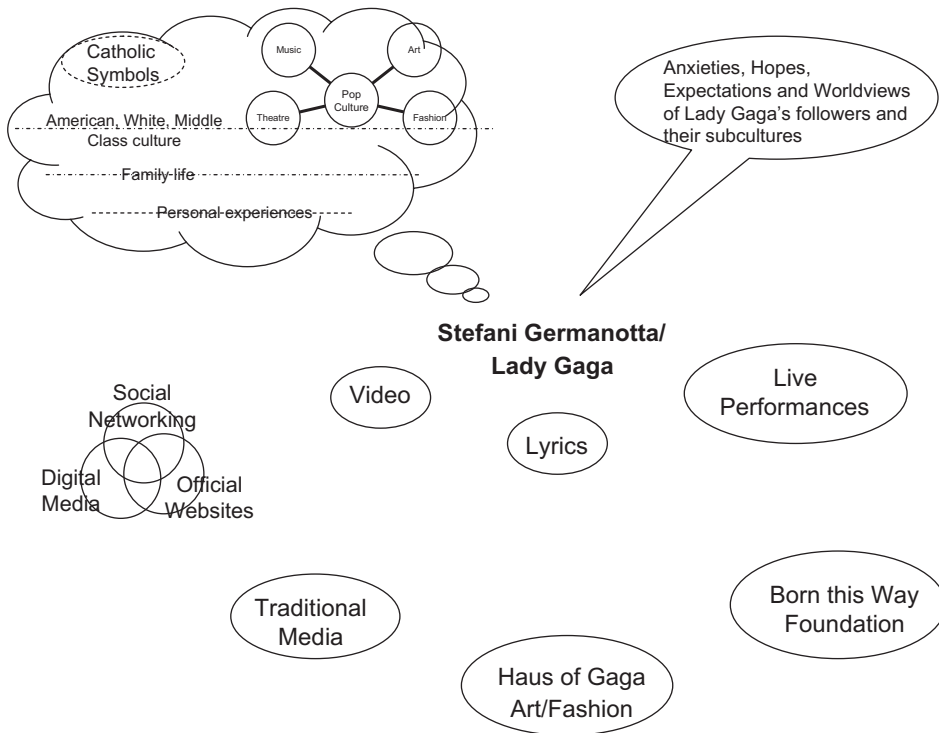


Figure 2. Stefani/Lady Gaga's resources baggage and message/medium.

formances, such as bathing in a fountain that pours blood-like liquid), but she uses different media, in particular the new media, together with fashion and her activism work, not only to relay her message but above all to amplify it.

While Lady Gaga eclectically utilises various media, and equally draws symbols, and styles from different sources, she nonetheless has a unified message. The message is equally passed on through her music, use of imagery and through the theatrical experience that she provides in her concerts. The theme of the macabre in her shows and videos including the reference to death, blood and monsters is part of a ritual to dispel fears of the past (Stramaglia 2012). Through her imagery and lyrics she insists that one has to face his past monsters (alcohol monster, sex monster, etc.) in order to move on. This is particularly significant for the adolescent who is in a transitory phase and is constructing the self.

In her shows, she tries to develop a coherent narrative that can act as a backdrop to the message of her music and that can act as a unifying factor. Likewise, as from the second album the lyrics of her songs make reference to each other, thus reinforcing a unified message. The message and the spirituality that ensues is an immanent one where, among others, the body is a sacred sanctuary, where one can worship the self, where the fight between good and evil is mainly within the self. Indeed, she consistently pushes the importance of self, love of self, uniqueness/originality, creativity and the potential for every individual to be at the top. According to the Manifesto of Mother Monster, her goal is the birth of 'the new race: a race

within the race of humanity, a race which bears no prejudice, no judgement but boundless freedom' (Gagapedia, n.d. c).

Transgression is one of the means adopted to create this new race and/or new self. Yet, one notes that to put across her message she goes into extremes; thus, too many subtle references to the Illuminati secret society, too much blood and too much physicality. The need to transgress, to go beyond what is (or was) perceived as culturally acceptable, has become so much part of what is to be expected that it is losing its meaning and pushes further the need to transgress more. Nevertheless, pushing too far means rendering transgression, and the symbols used for such transgression, poorer. The problem with such phenomenon lies in its being contagious to other pop stars, leading either to meaninglessness and/or to an exaggerated self-centred immanence. For instance, in her *Die young* (2012), Ke\$ha, goes further to overt use of Illuminati symbols and a prelude to a Satanic rite.

Conclusion

The complexity, variety and wealth of information about and by Lady Gaga is so large that it is difficult to do justice to all the facets of this phenomenon. Even so, with the admittedly incomplete data at hand it is still possible to draw some conclusions.

Meaning making, or at least the potential of what she (and her followers) develops to become symbolic resources that empower individuals to construct identity and to overcome hurdles that limit the self or one's freedom, is very much part of the Lady Gaga phenomenon. To do this, she borrows from diverse and apparently opposing symbol systems and assembles them into a composite language by giving them new meaning.

Furthermore, besides meaning making, the centrality of the self, and consequently the awe and reverence towards one's uniqueness and creative potential, is also clear. By repeatedly giving importance to self-worship, she pushes to the utmost the western secular reverence for the self and the individual. Through her work and message, one can fully understand Taylor's concept of the ideal of authenticity where one has to be true to oneself, discovering the true self so as to realise one's full potential, which

involves (1) creation and construction as well as discovery, (2) originality and frequently (3) opposition to the rules of society, and even potentially to what we recognise as morality. (Taylor 1991)

However, because of its very immanent and self-centred nature, the Lady Gaga phenomenon seems to fall short of what the Ideal of Authenticity requires, that is

(1) openness to horizons of significance (for, otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (2) a self-definition in dialogue. (Taylor 1991)

Indeed, the third identified element of spirituality, i.e. connectedness, seems to be the most lacking. While there is definitely a strong sense of need to connect with oneself and to transcend any limitations imposed by others, and while there is also a sense of being connected with other 'Little Monsters', the almost narcissistic centring on the self distorts or, at best, limits any sense of relatedness and possibility

of constructing real (and not virtual) communities. This will most probably lead to the implosion of the self, with the consequent nihilistic tendencies of an immanent spirituality coming to the fore (Walsh 2010).

In sum, it is possible to trace some elements of spirituality in the Lady Gaga phenomenon which is made concrete through the use of symbols and by capitalising media, which in turn become symbols themselves. While, it is clear that this phenomenon reflects, at least partially, the immanent spirituality of a good portion of Western adolescents, they nonetheless need to be equipped with a capacity to critically engage with this 'spirituality' that is being constructed so that they may be fully empowered and become able to access and express their spirituality.

Notes on contributor

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