

Image and Symbolism in Leo Svirsky's *The Satanic Gospel Of Stefani Germanotta*

The Satanic Gospel of Stefani Germanotta was a music-theatre piece by Leo Svirsky that was performed by Acid Police Noise Ensemble on 13 June 2010. It involved the transformation of Lady Gaga's hit *Love Game* into a Black Metal satanic ritual, complete with a female dancer wearing a large strap-on dildo. This is one analysis of the piece.

...beyond the shockschlock aesthetic... beyond the pop-porn satansex... and before the Asianchickwithdick fetish turns into a party of bellywetkleenexjizzjuice; let me take your hand and put it somewhere less sordid.

POLITICIZED NOISE GROUP COVER POP SONG! Well, hold the front page of *The Sarcastic Express* and tick us off on your clichélist! But, maybe, there's something more going on here than young faces pulling the old Marxist trick of taking a shit on popular culture and serving it back to the bourgeoisbanquet on a silverplatter...

I don't apologize for this. I don't like clarity in art, as it blocks the road to transcendence. Transcendence is fixed in the un-nameable and un-rationalizable that clarity precludes. So, see this not as me telling you what to think; but as me telling you what not to think.

Let's get past the pentagrams and fellatio. This comes from a musical idea: a perceived affinity between an acapella track of Lady Gaga and the tintinnabulation compositional technique of Arvo Pärt. But this is only one part of a nexus of images, sounds and ideas that synapse-spark with citations and are sucked by its Einsteinmass through the dimensionality of cultural reference.

Thus, Lady Gaga becomes the cynosure for a choir of concerns centering on her Gagasexuality and public reaction to it, seen through the prism of Judeo-Christian Mystical symbolism.

...there is a scene at the start of the film *Road Trip* in which, in curtainclosed dorm-space and sextapeviewanticipation, one man turns to his fellow companions and utters the words: "It's boner time!", before hitting play on the remotecontrol. Should this be our approach to an appreciation of this piece? Do we watch it with an Encyclopaedia of Occultism, or of Onanism? With furrowed brow, or furtive over-the-shoulder glance?

...Westboro Baptist Church. Homophobic rightwingers with a gospel of hate and internet access;

creating websites so offensive they either re-emerge as hipsterlaughable postironic internet-tabookmarks for emailenvy; or create another reason for your insomniac-arm razorwork. They posted a “parody” video of the homofriendly™ Gaga's *Poker Face* video on youtube, in which it is proposed that her support of the gay community and outré and ambiguously-marketable sexuality assure her, and her listeners, a place in the Eternal Fires Of Damnation...

...but which is more likely to earn one a place in Hell? Tolerance and a predeliction for publicly revealing body parts, or the performance of a satanic ritual? Leo Svirsky's piece takes this idea as its starting point.

...

Lady Gaga hates women in the same way that Dr Dre hates women. But, instead of the unpalatable *BitchesAin't Shit* rhetoric of *The Chronic*, Gaga plays into more acceptable (read marketable) forms of degradation, in which subservience becomes empowerment.

For all her public support for homosexuality, we still see it being used as a cheap tool for the satisfaction of hetero-male lechery, such as in the Tarrantino-homage *Telephone* video¹. In this video, (whose Womens' Prison setting belies the fact that its aesthetic would only seem artistically innovative if one had not watched any softcore pornography for the last 40 years), we find ourselves watching lesbian sexuality unfolding in the most exploitive and titillating way possible. It's gayness played for boners, and nobody, outside the demographic of sweatepalmed thirteenyearold cockfumbling heteroboys, is impressed.²

And, with the positioning of the visual aspects of her sexuality in the hetero-lech demographic, her projected Gagalsexuality becomes clearly heteromale, despite its homopretensions. Time and again, we see her oscillating within the heteroporno-dialectic; between the punklovingpornoslut™, devouring discosticks with wild abandon; and the girlchild of innocence, vulnerability and projected virginity *pace* early Britney Spears (see the *Bad Romance* video).

Yet, as with any presentation of sexuality in popular culture: it is clean, sanitised, safe and marketable

1I use the word 'homage' lightly, as Tarrantino, himself, is paying homage to a set of 1970s exploitation films and, whether a homage of a homage can be considered anything at all, other than an almost homeopathic watering down of the original ideas, is another question.

2Though some cultural commentarors have seen the gender-ambiguous prisonyard crotchfondler in the video as an example of a Gaga-initiated Transgender Inclusion Policy in pop music; placed in the context the of softpornprison, with its sexualized aggression and stylized titillation, it is hard to see it as anything more than a reflection of the everywhichway permutational sexuality the internet is reknowned for, and an extension of the fetishization of the exoticized niche-sexuality prevalent in internetpornography: [CLICK HERE FOR GIRLS KISSING TRANSGENDER CHICKS!](#) In using an aesthetic so clearly related to the sexually exploitative 1970s Woman-In-Prison movies of Roger Corman, it is almost impossible for any type of sexuality presented on screen to be seen as anything other than the basest type of commercial exploitation.

(I've never seen underwearclad S&M-inspired dryhumping look less sexy than in the video to *Alejandro*).

...gone is the wild abandon and Dionysic excess... gone are the untamed and unconformist ... gone is anything that seeks to question or subvert the malegaze-glazed sexuality ripped straight from the pages of *FHM*.

And this is where the piece comes in.

Through the strap-on, Svirsky articulates the heteromaleness at the heart of Gaga's version of sexuality. The fellatio forms a key part in the subversion of gender expectations; positioning the dancer not as a passive recipient of imposed societal sexual norms, but as an active, demonic agent, defining and enforcing her own terms of sexuality. (Whether this dominance itself constitutes a quasi-pornographic subservience to heteromale domination fantasies is debatable...)

The role-reversal undermines Gaga's tokenistic view of "alternative" sexuality and surpasses it in both its explicitness and "alternativeness". Seeing as Gaga works within clearly defined boundaries of marketability, the overstepping of normal social acceptability and marketability is a key technique in defining the extremities of expression in a capitalist marketplace – thus, it shows you not what Gaga does, but what she cannot do. The sexuality is set free from the bounds of paddedwalled christiancapitalism and into the Dionysic excesses of Satanic ritualism.

The engaging in Satanicfellatio not only assists in the de-commodification process, discussed below, by placing the original material within an un-marketable framework of excessive sexuality and anti-christian imagery, but also serves as a very literal acting-out of the comedian Bill Hick's famous routine, in which he equates the subsumation of the musician to the music industry as the equivalent of 'sucking Satan's cock'.

The piece is in thrall to Satan, in which he represents not only an alternative to the straightjacketed fundamentalism of the Westboro Baptists, but, in the combination of female sexuality and Satanic imagery, draws on centuries-old biblically-oriented fears.

Christian philosophy is malecentric in conception and interpretation and filled with bastardisations of Plato, (which occurred when the two retardedchild philosophers of Christian dogma (Aquinas and St. Augustine), sat at the back of the class trying to hammer a square, plastic shape into a round hole, through brute force alone).

From those sunsprayed schoolroom smashabouts onwards, Christianity has always hated both women and sex. And since, in a patriarchal society, these are pretty much synonymous (with

women as objects of temptation to revel in the corporeal, un-Idealized (in the Platonian sense) aspects of this fetid and evil world), the Gaga/Satan/Victim hybrid positions herself in the piece as Dionysically and diabolically sexual, and makes tacit the connection between Satanism and sex. A view, to some extent, shared by the Westboro Baptist Church.

The Westboro “satanicpanic” kneeherk video poof-spoof feeds off Gaga's normalization of queer culture in the same way that New England witchfinders fear-fed on “deviant” femalesexuality. Fictionalized withcrituals came embedded with the idea of femalelust as the energysource for satanicmagic; as seen in text from the 15th Century *Malleus Maleficarum (the Hammer of Witches)* onwards.

And this superstition was saddled with legal reasons: *femme covert*. Women were property and the virginity of brides comparable to the demand for unsullied perfection in cattle or other boughtgoods. Low dowries for nonvirgin brides reflected a patriarchal desire to control female sexuality as a way of ensuring patrilineage through exclusive breeding rights.

When the role of the womanpossession became undermined – as with widows or shorebound spouses of seaward sailors – the society condemned them as witches (see 18th Century New England).

So, the witchtrial-fear and sex-satan hybridity becomes little more than the safeguarding of a system of patriarchal propertyprotection.

Gaga presents us with a modern version of the women-as-property concept; a commodity version of sexuality in which her body, as in days-of-olde, becomes a possession to be bought and sold, and the seeminlgy contradictory marketability of her confrontational sexuality typifies the paradox of contempo-capitalism:

The studied ambiguity and excess of her sexualityshocks attempts an econo-cultural normalization of her queerculture/performance-art New York-underground-gaybar origins. This attempt at the integration of fringe culture into mainstream capitalism is representative of the periodic borg-like assimilation of extra-mainstream cultural phenomena used to stem the stagnation into bottom-dredging conservatism inherent in the ourobouric tailswallowing tendencies of the risk-averse, innovationstealing, dollargrabbing, fetidpool of contradiction that is the Music Industry.

The normalization of culturally external innovation and quasi-shock is essential to produce the innovation that the capitalist system fails to foster, due to its profit-driven – and thus – gamblefearing – orientation. Gaga's performance-art/queerculture hybrid is an example of this.

The Gaga/Satan connection is explored not as a simplistic comment on the “evil” nature of commodified music within a capitalist system, but the anti-capitalist rhetoric of the piece can't be

ignored. The deconstruction of the track and its descent into noise, satanism and sexual aggression are intentional attempts at de-commodification of the music itself; a technique also used in Svirsky's *The Worst Minus*, written for the same ensemble.

In that piece he takes issue against the crass and shallow appropriation and covering of popular songs by “serious” musicians, such as The Bad Plus (hence the title), Brad Mehldau etc., in order to cynically cash in on their commercial appeal.

By taking a song from one of the reputable and reknowned bands (radiohead), frequently covered by such groups, and having it played by modified instruments karaokiing their parts from unsynchronised mp3 players, he hoped to achieve the opposite, and create a “cover” which had absolutely no commercial appeal, and thus uncommodifiable. A similar alienating and de-commodifying technique is at work in this piece, although here using two different techniques:

Firstly, the slowing down of the acapella track; this not only immediately draws on filmic representations of Satan (the backwards echo also helps with this), but, through the elongation of the lyrics, detached from their original context, allows them to be heard for their cheap and shallow sexuality (“I want to take a ride on your disco-stick”), which draws on highly marketable ideas of female submissiveness.

Secondly, the use of Pärt-based composition techniques to both highlight the static harmonic quality of the song, which suits the ritualistic atmosphere of the piece; combined with a noise-rock aesthetic, to place the original in a new, less marketable, context.

It is no accident that Lady Gaga, somebody whose image revels in the capitalistic excess of bigmoney highfashion, is chosen as the target for this type of de-commodification.

I hope I have shown that this piece has depth ... that it is much more than 'tube titillation or trouser-tentpole ...

that it is not just a 'cover': it is an extrapolation and examination ...

and why do I feel the need to say these things? Because one day it will be on the internet. Because it will be out of context.

Because it is placed in an environment of lechery and mysogyny, shallowness and bigotry, that does not privilege long thoughts or attentionspans.

Because it is more than just Gaga or Satan or pentagrams or strapon.

and for it to be seen as simply “shocking” or exploitative or mysogynist or shallow, repulses me so much I feel forced, compelled and driven to write this – to justify what shouldn't need to be justified and try to explain what shouldn't need to be explained.

... and so soberminded ...

... let me take your hand and put it somewhere less sordid.

dp

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