Hysteria and the Multimedia Art of Lady Gaga and James Franco

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On November 14, 2010, in honor of the thirtieth anniversary of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, pop star Lady Gaga performed her single "Speechless" (2009). She played the ballad on a grand piano that British visual artist Damien Hirst laquered with pink paint and festooned with appliqué butterflies. Bolshoi Ballet dancers, costumed by couturist Miuccia Prada, performed a terpsichorean interpretation of Gaga's ballad. While the superstar sang, Italian conceptual artist Francesco Vezzoli, who devised the entire spectacle, sat on a bench at the other end of the piano, silently embroidering multicolored tears onto a photographic image of Gaga digitally reproduced on muslin. Their identical masks, designed by Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann and production designer Catherine Martin, suggested a twinning of artist and muse.

Hysteria has been identified as the primary theme of Vezzoli's work (Rimanelli 176). Moreover, readers familiar with the preface to Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) will recall that the traditionally feminine activity of embroidery was thought to exacerbate the malady by catalyzing "twilight states" (13). By stitching Gaga's image, Vezzoli invokes a craft associated with the antiquated condition while also highlighting its most salient thematic features: mimesis and identification. In the nineteenth century, the now discredited diagnosis was defined as a malady of mimicry. Hysteria was understood not as a manifestation of individual sufferer's symptoms caused by an organic source but rather as the imitation of the symptoms of others or as Freud observed, "symapthy. . .to the point of reproduction" (*Interpretation* 173).

Vezzoli's inscription of Gaga's visage and their matching masks affirm his identification with Gaga as both artist and muse despite their gender difference. Freud identified cross-sex identifications as an indicator of hysteria in male and female hysterics ("Hysterical" 166). Rather than physically mimicking Gaga's "symptoms," Vezzoli embroiders her image on a cloth surface. Contemporary feminist theorists draw on Breuer and Freud's correlation of bourgeois feminine domesticity with hysteria to argue that nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle hysterics resisted prescriptive gender roles through their transgressive if pathologized behavior. Vezzoli's hysterical identification with Gaga similarly rejects contemporary notions of masculinity. Likewise, Gaga demonstrates her cross-sex identification by frequently characterizing herself as a gay man "trapped in a woman's body and blaming 'him' for her most provocative exploits" (Music-News).

The MOCA event is rife with examples of artistic and cultural transgression. In addition to troubling distinctions between artist and muse, Vezzoli's pairing with Gaga

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blurs boundaries between pop music spectacle and performance art, artist and celebrity, self and other. By transforming an architect into a milliner and a filmmaker into a costume designer, the spectacle unseats dermacations between various artistic media and disciplines. Gaga acknowledges that her collaborations with visual artists like Vezzoli and Terence Koh reflect her desire for inclusion within the canon of contemporary art. As the name of her short film persona Candy Warhol suggests Gaga "strive[s] to be a female Warhol. I want to make films and music, do photography and paint one day, maybe. Make fashion. Make big museum art installations" (Barton). She praised her MOCA collaboration with Vezzoli as an opportunity to "have all these amazing art lovers—a very highbrow community—be engaged in the commercial community and blending the two together" (Vena). Gaga implies that audiences for conceptual art and pop music rarely overlap and that "high" art and popular culture continue to be delineated as oppositional rather than co-implicated terms.

Such a view appears somewhat paradoxical in the wake of critical proclamations that postmodernism has inaugurated the "death" of avant-garde art. However, Paul Mann's characterization of this particular postmodern fatality also describes Vezzoli and Gaga's principle artistic concerns:

> The death of the avant-garde is not its end but its repetition, indeed its compulsive repetition. Today this repetition calls itself postmodernism. The death of the avant-garde is precisely the cultural explosion of the so-called postmodern era, when. . .it seems that everything verges toward exposure, publicity, the spectacle, interpretation and surveillance, and the surface of the screen. (4)

Gaga has long contended that she makes no distinction among the "exposure, publicity, and spectacle" entailed in being Gaga and her "private" self–Stefani Germanotta contending "the largest misconception is that Lady Gaga is a persona. . .I am 150,000 percent Lady Gaga every day" (Scaggs 34). Asserting that "everything has been done before," Gaga bases her fame upon her ability to "reference and put together things that have never been put together before" (ibid.). She is a master of mimesis, producing an original artistic vision precisely through the imitation and incorporation of others and their oeuvres. By invoking artists as diverse as Vezzoli, Michael Jackson, Madonna and Andy Warhol, Gaga makes herself the site of postmodern pastiche.

Gaga demonstrates what I identify as a distinctly hysterical aesthetic that resonates with a number of postmodern developments. These include the dissolution of boundaries between "high" and "low" cultural forms; the blurring of roles between artist, actor, celebrity and commodity; and a rejection of the modernist preoccupation with medium specificity. Gaga is not alone in proferring a new kind of celebrity persona that refuses to differentiate between performance and reality. Like Gaga, polymath actor James Franco enacts hysterical identification or a (con)fusion of the self with a diverse set of multimedia artistic progenitors and contemporaries. Just as Gaga has worked with preeminent visual artisists, Franco has collaborated with noted art world figures like Marina Abramović, Carter, Kalup Linzy and Gus Van Sant on short films, gallery and museum exhibitions. He also demonstrates a strong affinity for gay culture despite denying persistent rumors about his sexuality. In a 2010 cover story for the gay-themed magazine the *Advocate* Franco observed "people think I'm gay because I've played these gay roles. That's what people think, but it's not true. . .I'm not gay" (Denizet-Lewis). Many of the

short films Franco made as an MFA student at New York University focus on gay male protagonists. He cast himself as suicidal poet Hart Crane in his directorial debut feature *The Broken Tower* (2011) and his most recent project *(Interior. Leather Bar.)* purports to be a reenactment of scenes cut from *Cruising* (1980) William Friedkin's controversial film about a homicide detective gone undercover amidst gay S/M leather culture. Demonstrating how identity is largely performative, Gaga and Franco present the self and its variants as a simulacral pastiche of popular culture and artistic references. Indeed, Breuer and Freud argue "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (7) in that their mimetic symptoms function as coded references to a repressed past trauma they are subconsciously compelled to repeat. For Gaga and Franco, that underlying trauma is deeply connected to issues of gender, objectification, and performance.

Freud initially theorized that the origin of hysteria lay in sexual trauma, possibly repressed childhood fantasies involving incestous desire for one or both parents. He understood the malady to be imbricated with a "failure" of positive oedipalization, hypothesizing that female hysterics typically identify with their fathers and desire women. Similarly, male hysterics, whom nineteenth-century clinicians stereotypically characterized as effeminate and likely homosexual, presumably identified with their mothers. Like Freud's hysterical patients, Gaga and Franco exhibit a crisis of gender identification in relation to their apparent sexual ambiguity. Gaga and Franco challenge prescriptive gender roles by adopting the symptoms and techniques of nineteenth-century hysterics. The outdated malady best describes their postmodern aesthetic strategy.

Hysteria: The Return of the Repressed

Despite the prominence of hysteria as a clinical diagnosis throughout the nineteenth century, the condition largely vanished from medical and social discourses in the early twentieth century. In 1952, hysteria was dropped from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fragmenting into a variety of other conditions including conversion, borderline, eating, histrionic and dissociative identity disorders. Many contemporary feminists claim nineteenth-century hysteria as a form of proto-feminism through which women and some men resisted the limitations of gender roles. Consequently, the diagnosis "disappeared" following gains made by first-wave feminism. However, the contemporary resurrection of hysteria as a cultural model and artistic strategy indicates that the malady never actually "died." As contemporary theorist of hysteria Elaine Showalter suggests, the "extinct" malady has evolved from an outmoded clinical condition into a pervasive cultural phenomenon (*Hystories*).

Hysterics' mimetic symptoms indicate how the self is formed in relation to the desire and gaze of others. Consistent with this formulation, psychoanalyst Gérard Wajcman presents a Lacanian view of hysteria in which the hysteric poses herself as a question, "Who am I?" This question is addressed to another/interlocutor who is recognized as "the master of knowledge" (11). He responds to her inquiry with the declaration, "You are who I say you are" (13). However, the hysteric, defined by a paradoxical yearning for the desire of the other and a refusal to act as the object of the desire she provokes, is never satisfied with his diagnosis. She poses the question in seeming deference to his mastery yet uses his answer to reject his authority. Wajcman describes this scene as the "castrating dimension of the hysteric's game" based upon her manipulative seduction

and humiliation of the interlocutor (19). The hysteric is characterized by her paradoxical submission and resistance to her symbolic categorization as "lack" in contrast to masculine plenitude. Through the theatricality of her self-presentation—a performance of the self designed to conform to the desire of her interlocutor—she indicates that femininity is both performative and simulacral. She highlights how castration anxiety motivates men to fetishize women's bodies in order to disavow their own lack. By exposing her interlocutor's possession of the phallus as a fallacy, she reveals his dependency upon her calculated performance.

Like hysterics, Gaga and Franco pose themselves to viewers as a question, challenging audiences to diagnose their protean symptoms and identities. Freud argued that hysterical discourse is fundamentally incoherent and fragmented. The analyst's job involves facilitating the patient's translation of her symptoms into a linear narrative. Viewers of Gaga and Franco's work are, like analysts, hystericized in the process of attempting to convert performative displays of discordant, ahistorical symptoms into coherent narratives and stable subjectivities. Moreover, their artistic avatars compel us to recognize ourselves as similarly fragmented and mimetic subjects.

The question that both artists pose to their audiences is "who is the 'real' Lady Gaga and James Franco?" Many observers have suggested that the incessant performativity and media ubiquity of both celebrities is simply an elaborate hoax. Such suspicion demonstrates how audiences are positioned as interlocutor to Gaga and Franco's "mutable" hysteric. The suspicion that we are being duped reflects how the:

> hysteric['s] versatile and seemingly infinite array of self-representations can traumatize those toward whom her discourse is directed—precisely because the inconsistent number of masks she dons. . .awakes the sense of how impossible it is to determine whether there is a consistent subject behind them. (Bronfen 39)

Though they are widely known as a pop star and a Hollywood heartthrob, Gaga and Franco have described themselves primarily as performance artists. Gaga noted of her 2009 appearance on the television show *Gossip Girl* "the reason I want to do this is because I am trying to say something that is not mainstream in a mainstream capacity. So, if I can say it on your show, that would be. . .a real coup d'état for me as a performance artist" (Vena "Lady Gaga Describes"). Likewise, Franco declared his television appearances on *General Hospital* performance art via a published explanation in the *Wall Street Journal* (Franco 2009). However, the art they perform is, as Gaga affirms, the art of fame; fame is the means of their self-expression such that ultimately their artistic product is celebrity.[1] Both are consummate career-focused self-promoters who position their celebrity personae as a kind of multimedia synergistic brand.

Just as clinicians ascribed gender identity confusion and homosexual tendencies to nineteenth-century hysterics, Gaga and Franco's celebrity personae are inextricable from rumors that the former is a hermaphrodite or male transvestite and the latter is a closeted homo- or bisexual. Despite their denials, both clearly enjoy the speculation and encourage rumors by performing themselves as sexually ambiguous. Gaga responded to rumors of her hermaphroditism by posing for *Q* magazine topless and packing a dildo in 2010 (Patterson). In an *Entertainment Weekly* interview, Franco explained his attraction to gay characters with the caveat, "You know what, maybe I'm just gay" (Staskiewicz). By embracing sexual transgression and male homosexuality as tropes, they resist main-

stream heteronormative culture much like nineteenth-century hysterics. Gaga and Franco's unique postmodern aesthetic embraces a distinctly hysterical approach to issues of gender, sexuality and genre.

Lady Gaga's Esthetic of Hysteria

Lady Gaga is the most obvious example of the postmodern hystericization of contemporary American culture. Like the hysteric who reflects the lack her analyst assigns back upon him, Gaga exhibits a propensity for physically mimicking her interviewers. She arrived for a 2010 interview with Larry King with her hair styled like his and wearing his signature ensemble: oxford shirt, necktie and suspenders. Similarly, in a *20/20* interview with Barbara Walters, Gaga appeared in a blond wig resembling Walters' trademark coiffure. She also performed the self-revelatory intimacy we have come to expect from Walters' interviews in which celebrities break down in tears and reveal details about their personal traumas. Gaga functions as a mirror, reflecting her interlocutors' images and behaviors back to them with a difference. She seems to exist only by way of her appropriation and projection of the gaze and desire of others, forcing us to confront ourselves in her image.

Gaga's ambiguous sexuality and gender identity delight in mimesis and the proliferation of images that have no clear or accessible referent. Like nineteenth-century hysterics, she exhibits subjective splitting, most strikingly, through Jo Calderone, a masculine doppelgänger. Calderone has a Twitter account and his *Vogue* cover included an interview. Asked about his relationship with Gaga, he admits to knowing her both personally and sexually. By creating Calderone, Gaga defines herself as both masculine and feminine while also demonstrating a desire to have sex with herself as both a man and a woman. In "Hysterical Fantasies and Their Relation to Bisexuality," Freud explains that "hysterics simultaneously play both parts in the underlying sexual phantasy" (165–66). Calderone's claim to have slept with Gaga is an especially literal demonstration of this hysterical tendency. By embracing the signifying language of hysteria and combining it with a rhetoric of self-empowerment, Gaga indicates that what was once considered a malady now represents a legitimate, nonpathological model of identity formation.

Gaga's elaborate cosmetics and outrageous couture are hyperfeminine, but also an appropriation of the exaggerated femininity associated with gay male drag. Thus, on the one hand, Gaga reifies feminine conventions derived from patriarchal norms. On the other, her myriad stylistic guises reflect Juliana Chang's contention that "masquerade and hysteria are excessive performances of femininity" (639). As early as 1929, psychoanalyst Joan Riviere argued that all womanliness is masquerade, and characterized femininity as a disguise that can "be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" (38). The hysterical connotations of Gaga's excessive femininity fueled widespread rumors that she is either a male transvestite or intersexed. To be so hyperbolically feminine, she must be hiding an actual penis; indeed a number of websites claim to have photographic evidence that Gaga possesses male genitalia. While it does appear that Gaga has a penis in these images, most likely her member is simulacral—a copy without a stable referent.[2] Thus, Gaga implies that masculinity (as symbolized by the penis) can also be "assumed and worn as a mask." In exposing her "penis," she demonstrates that there may no

longer be a need for "womanliness as masquerade." Gaga affirms that women are as likely to possess phallic power as men. Thus, she demonstrates how "normative" gender roles depend upon maintaining the illusion that the penis (as symbolic equivalent of phallus) insures masculine plenitude. This illusion requires women to perform themselves as man's "lacking" other. In suggesting she possesses male genitalia despite her hyperfeminine appearance, Gaga literally performs the cross-sex identifications and gender identity confusion fin-de-siècle clinicians' ascribed to the hysterics.

Nineteenth-century clinicians also correlated female and male hysterics' cross-sex identifications with fantasies of self-birth. As a subject without a clear gender identity, the hysteric could occupy both male and female sexual functions and therefore reproduce without need of an opposite sex partner. Though she defines herself as "Mother Monster" Gaga contends that her fans have birthed her as well. In the video for "Born This Way " (2011), she appears as the Monster Mother who gives parthenogenic birth to a "new race within the race of humanity, a race which bears no prejudice, no judgment, but boundless freedom." She produces this "new race" by splitting herself into two—a twinning of good and evil. Gaga gives birth to multiple versions of herself including Gagas that are (con)fused with such artistic predecessors as Madonna and Michael Jackson. Such imagery suggests that she is the spawn of her pop cultural forebears. However, this vision of gestational fusion ultimately positions her as their creator. British psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell observes that "the point at which the hysteric exists is the one where the child's belief that it can have a baby just from its own body is maintained" (155). By giving birth to her cultural antecedents, Gaga becomes the center of own imaginative history.

In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), Freud argues that hysterical sexuality represents a paradox: "exaggerated sexual craving and excessive aversion to sexuality" (255). Gaga embodies this conundrum. She typically presents herself in scenes of transgressive sexual behavior. The video for "Telephone" (2010) features a women-in-prison make-out session. In "Poker Face" (2008), Gaga sings about the travails of deceiving both her male and female lovers. Not only does she participate in sex with both men and women (in her private life and in her music videos), she inverts the gender roles in positions correlated with both heterosexual and homosexual intercourse.[3] Despite this celebration of polymorphous perversity, Gaga encourages her fans to emulate her celibacy. Her contradictory comments about her sex life—she is bisexual (Walters), all she looks for in a partner is a big penis (Stephenson), she is celibate (Wilson)—suggest a striking sexual ambivalence. However, this ambivalence likely has nothing to do with Gaga's actual sex life; instead it reflects another facet of her hysterical persona. She positions herself as an object of desire for women and men be they gay, bi- or homosexual. In this way, she conforms to the desire of every possible audience member or interlocutor; she is the hysterical other to any given subject. Moreover, she describes her concert performances as a sexual experience, noting, "being onstage is like having sex with my fans" (Van Meter). Sexually stimulated by her fans' desire for her, Gaga replaces actual sex with the performance of sexual images. By encouraging her fans to be celibate, she urges them to experience her performance as virtual coitus. They are to supplant the real with the image.

One of the centerpieces of Gaga's celebrity is the symbiotic relationship she fosters with her fans. Describing them as fellow "freaks," she seeks to liberate them from self-

doubt caused by being bullied and marginalized. She presents herself as Mother Monster to the acolytes she anoints "little monsters," detailing her own persecution by adolescent peers. By emphasizing a cathartic narration of shared experiences of "otherness," the cult of Gaga revolves around collective trauma. In this symbiotic interchange, Gaga acts as both traumatized hysteric and powerful interlocutor to her fans who are encouraged to express their own traumas (Hiatt). Just as nineteenth-century skeptics derided hysterics as deceptive actresses, some critics have accused Gaga of manufacturing stories about her troubled youth to ingratiate herself with her fans. However, for Gaga there is no separation between herself and her audience. Her identity is constituted through the desire and gaze of others. Indeed, in her "Manifesto of Little Monsters" Gaga describes her relationship with her followers: "the real truth about Lady Gaga fans lies in this sentiment: They are the kings. They are the queens. They write the history of the kingdom." By suggesting that her fans are the ultimate authorities, the creators of history, she exposes the paradoxical logic of the hysteric who is both subject and originator of mimetic discourse.

Much of Gaga's dialog with her fan base involves self-help style bromides encouraging self-love and acceptance. She explains, "I want my fans to love themselves. It's almost like I want to hypnotize them so when they hear my music they love themselves instantly" (Silva). Gaga's desire to hypnotize her fans aligns her with Jean Martin Charcot, the director of Paris' Salpêtrière asylum during the late nineteenth century. The physician used hypnosis as a means to alleviate his hysterical patients' symptoms and to catalyze their public performances. Like Charcot, Gaga uses hypnosis to ameliorate her fans' seemingly hysterical symptoms: their lack of self (esteem) and feelings of isolation. She encourages hysterical identification by positioning herself as role model and fusing her life narrative with their own. Gaga, like Charcot, operates as the ringmaster of a theater of hysteria jointly created by performers and their interlocutors.

Francophrenia

I take the title of this section from the 2009 episode of the daytime soap opera *General Hospital* in which Franco made his debut as a performance artist.[4] Confusing the boundaries between acting, life and art, he played a character named "Franco, just Franco" who is a "world-renowned" performance artist. In this particular installment of *GH*, "Franco" arrives at Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art to install his scheduled solo exhibit, "Francophrenia." At the request of the "real" Franco, the show was taped live in conjunction with his museum sponsored performance art event, "Soap at MOCA: James Franco on *General Hospital*" (2010).

The suffix "phrenia" translates as "a disordered condition of mental activity" (Mosby). Based on the *GH* writing staff's description of "Franco" as "an artist whose canvas is murder," the character clearly suffers from an unspecified mental illness. However, because "Franco" shares a name with the actor (and now performance artist), the "real" Franco may also be understood as suffering from a "phrenia"–perhaps schizophrenia, a condition defined by the coexistence of disparate identities or ways of being. Moreover, "Franco" and Franco's artistic experiments catalyze a "phrenia" for audiences confronted by the seemingly endless proliferation of multiple Francos (Hollywood actor, soap star, performance artist, perpetual grad student, aspiring filmmaker and writer). Like Gaga's

mimetic self-fashionings, Franco's multimedia corpus also incorporates hysteria as an artistic strategy. I trace the origins of Franco's hysterical aesthetic to his partnership with openly gay conceptual artist Carter on a film entitled *Erased James Franco* (2008). This collaboration was the catalyst for Franco's subsequent apperance on *GH* (Yan).

Unlike his eponymous soap doppelgänger, Franco is not psychotic; however, he is deeply invested in presenting multiple selves that are at once performative and real. Franco describes his (not "Franco's") MOCA exhibit as "an attempt to blur the lines between different disciplines, between life and art, between art and popular culture, and between representations of the self as both performative character and as nonperformative self" (Soap). Franco's many endeavors inspired *New York* magazine's Sam Anderson to write a lengthy profile entitled, "Is James Franco for Real?" (2010). Reflecting on the proliferating Francos, Anderson like other critics is unable to answer his opening query, but instead finds himself beset by ever more questions:

> Why is Franco doing it? Are his motives honest or dishonest? Neurotic or healthy? Arrogant or humble? Ironic or sincere? Naïve or sophisticated? Should we reward him with our attention or punish him with our contempt? Is he genuinely trying to improve himself or is he just messing with us—using celebrity itself as the raw material for some kind of public prank?

Anderson's feature demonstrates that there are no easy answers to the questions Franco inspires. The bewildered tone of Anderson's article suggests how the actor's multiple personas can "traumatize" interlocutors "because it seems that behind the multiple layers of masks there is nothing" (Bronfen 39). The wave of Franco backlash, which began following the actor's universally panned co-hosting of the 2011 Academy Awards, was compounded by the widespread suspicion that there is no "non-performative" Franco underlying his many highly publicized projects.

Despite gaining notoriety in the last four years for artistic projects in every conceivable realm, Franco's rise to fame as a Hollywood actor was fairly conventional. After dropping out of UCLA in 1996–7 to pursue a career as an actor, he landed a role in Judd Apatow's critically acclaimed series *Freaks and Geeks* (1999–2000). In 2001, he won a Golden Globe for his portrayal of James Dean in a Turner Network Television mini-series, launching his reputation as a talented character actor with leading man potential. Franco then parlayed his status as Hollywood "it boy" into a spate of forgettable leading roles. In 2007, unhappy with the direction his career had taken, he returned to UCLA after a ten-year absence to finish his bachelor's degree. Soon after he enrolled in numerous graduate programs. Despite his newfound status as a leading man, Franco signed on for two supporting roles in Gus Van Sant's *Milk* (2008) and David Gordon Green's *Pineapple Express* (2008). His return to academia coupled with the praise he received for his turns in *Milk* and *Pineapple* inspired Franco to expand his celebrity persona from Hollywood star to art world darling. This unorthodox shift began with his appearance in Carter's *Erased James Franco*.

In *Erased*, Franco performs stripped down re-enactments of scenes from his performances in the James Dean miniseries, *Freaks and Geeks* and the *Spiderman* trilogy. His re-presentations of compressed versions of his early roles bears a striking affinity to the mimetic symptoms ascribed to hysteria. Franco re-enacts the past in the film's diegetic present. While the mimetic performances resemble scenes that audiences familiar with

Franco's work may recognize, the isolation of discrete moments culled from larger narrative contexts makes the scenic repetitions difficult to translate. In a conversation about the project published in *Believer* (2011), Franco demonstrates the dissociative fragmented identity of the hysteric, noting of *Erased* that he "played James Franco" presumably to differentiate this version of "James Franco" from his *GH* character "Franco" (Franco 2011). By referring to himself in the third person, he implies that there is some disjunction between who he feels himself to be and "James Franco" or at least the version he performs in Carter's film. In addition to replicating scenes from his own work, in *Erased* Franco also reenacts several tableaux performed by Julianne Moore in Todd Haynes' *Safe* (1995).

Moore's character is arguably a contemporary hysteric; she suffers from an amorphous illness and exhibits symptoms unrelated to an organic source. The film presents her ailment as a possible case of psychosomatic environmental sensitivity or malingering. In *Hystories*, Elaine Showalter contends that chemical and environmental sensitivities represent one of the malady's postmodern adaptations to its contemporary cultural context. By reinterpreting Moore's scenes in *Safe*, Franco's performance alludes to present-day forms of hysteria. Moreover, like nineteenth-century clinicians such as Jules Falret and P.C. Dubois, he draws a parallel between the figure of the actor and the hysteric since both perform subjective fragmentation for the benefit of interlocutors. By definition, actors' careers depend upon their ability to perform convincing mimeses. Thus, a successful performance can be understood as a product of the actor's hysterical identification with a character—a process resulting in the fusion of self and other.

Erased also includes re-enacted scenes from the John Frankenheimer film *Seconds* (1960) starring Rock Hudson. Bored with his bourgeois suburban lifestyle, Hudson's character fakes his own death, adopting the identity of another man, a bohemian artist; A scenario similar to Franco's attempts to straddle the dual roles of Holllywood actor and performance artist. Despite his new persona Hudson's character remains dissatisfied. Carter's reference to Hudson capitalizes on viewers' knowledge that the actor was a closeted homosexual who died of AIDS-related complications. The revelation that Hudson, a Hollywood hearthrob and icon of rugged manliness, had successfully passed as heterosexual fueled cultural anxiety that gender roles and sexuality may be largely performative. In this way, *Erased* taps into contempary concerns about the kind of masculinities white male Hollywood actors disseminate to the culture at large. The early 1990s saw the birth of the "angry white man" phenomenon both on and offscreen. Discussions about the diagnosis of this new cultural type proliferated in conjunction with the publication of two key texts addressing a crisis of gender. Robert Bly's treatise on imperilled masculinty, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), and Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991) reflected the desperation of hegemonic white masculinity seemingly on the wane due to perceived loses of power. A number of sociopolitical factors contributed to this crisis of masculinity, namely the popularization of identity politics, affirmative action, the gays rights movement and third wave feminism. Two decades after his mass mediated heyday the angry white man appears to have been supplanted by the metrosexual. A kind of post-postmodern man, rather than struggle against the "feminizing" effects of consumer capitalism à la Bly, the metrosexual embraces his inner femininity and its ostensible correlate conspicuous consumption. Unlike the 90s angry white man, metrosexuals invite the objectification of their bodies

by men and women and actively groom themselves to function as objects of desire. Cultural commentators' descriptions of the metrosexual's propensity for overweening vanity and exhibitionism reflect Freud's nineteenth-century correlation of women and male homosexuals with abiding narcissism (Simpson).

Despite the wanton pilfering of homosexual styles by metrosexuals, men like Franco stop short of openly identifying as gay or bisexual. Nonetheless, the actor often seems to be performing for a queer audience. In a Gucci ad campaign, Franco appears topless with especially low hanging jeans. Affirming his commitment to challenging gender roles, he stares at himself in the mirror while lathering his armpit hair, an unusual grooming activity for men but quite common amongst women. Another Gucci photo spread features Franco emerging from a swimming pool in a wet t-shirt, a scenario more commonly enacted by women seeking to sexually tittilate heterosexual men. Franco teases the fetishistic viewer since the dark shirt, unlike the more traditional white fabric, conceals rather than reveals the contours of his chest. More recently, a photograph of Franco's nude buttocks graced the cover of *Flaunt* magazine. Once again, Franco codes himself as "feminine" by temporarily inscribing a "tramp stamp" tattoo of the magazine's title immediately above the cleft of his bum (Leon). This fetishistic close-up hints at the possibility of anal intercourse as well as other kinds of sex play for hetero-, homo- and bisexuals of various gender identities.

Franco's (self) objectification has led to hysterical dissociation or split consciousness when performing for others. Danny Boyle, director of *127 Hours* (2010), notes that during the shoot Franco solicited direction by querying, "What do you want from Franco?" (Shone). By referring to himself in the third person, the actor alludes to the possibility that it is *GH*'s "Franco, just Franco" or the "James Franco" of Carter's *Erased* rather than the "real" Franco who performed the role of *127 Hours*' protagonist Aron Ralston. In interviews, the actor relates that he "doesn't get much out acting because it's a director's medium and the actor has little or no creative input" (Pidd). Franco claims that he began to produce his own art as a means to counteract the trauma of ceding control of his image to others. In a public conversation with his collaborator artist Laurel Nakadate, Franco explained the motives underlying his decision to carve the name of his friend, deceased actor Brad Renfro, into his arm with a switchblade (Massara, Robbins). He expounds upon the powerlessness of the actor, "You put everything into your performance, [in]to being someone else, and then ultimately you can be used up and thrown away" (Robbins). Franco's artistic endeavors enable him to exercise a greater degree of mastery over his image. His experiences of objectification by the gaze (and by inference "feminization") have led him to explore the imbrications of "normative" masculinity with femininity and homosexuality.

The lack of controversy around the movie star's seemingly wholesale immersion in gay male culture suggests that the boundaries separating male hetero- from bi- or homosexuality have become increasingly blurred in the last twenty years. In response to such developments, Franco hysterically identifies with women and male homosexuals in an attempt to "other" himself. He distances himself from historical damage wrought by white masculine hegemony by constructing a model for a kinder, gentler heterosexual white masculinity that incorporates rather than rejects homosexuality and the feminine. However, such an embrace of "otherness" poses the danger of wholesale appropriation in which heterosexual men are as feminine and gay as women and homosexuals. From this

perspective, "otherness" becomes just another domain of white male power. However, Franco seems less invested in flaunting the entitlements of white masculinity than in exposing the fiction of all identity. If the self is ultimately performative as both Gaga and Franco suggest, then we are all free to create ourselves anew.

Conclusion

The revivification of hysteria after a century of supposed latency reflects the very operation of the "disappeared" malady. Just as the hysteric's protean symptoms are representative of a return of repressed past trauma, we are witnessing a renewed engagement with the breakdown of modernist values and aesthetics. These are especially acute given the efflorescence of social media and digital forms of communication. The resurgence of hysteria in the early twenty-first century suggests a collective return to the repressed "trauma" of the modernist nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle which was largely coterminous with the second industrial revolution. In this way, the mimetic condition epitomizes both modern and postmodern subjective shifts. Subjectivity, like the ostensibly obsolete malady, is a performance of lack inscribed or projected upon the surface of the body. At the turn of both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, cultural critics diagnosed widespread subjective fragmentation. Such psychic disturbance manifests as dissociative split selves produced by way of hysterical identifications in which the self is (con)fused with another. Both Max Nordau and Fredric Jameson discuss subjective fragmentation in conjunction with the invention and popularization of novel imaging systems (photography, cinema and digital communications technologies) and artists' propensity to mimic recognizable images associated with past masters.[5] By inscribing simulacral images upon her body, Gaga demonstrates that the self is born through identifications with others. Similarly, Franco's work unsettles the very expectations of identity by confusing performance with the self. Subjectivity must thus be understood as simulacral—a copy of images that lack an original referent. While nineteenth-century clinicians argued that hysterics' mimetic identifications were evidence of pathology and subjective lack, Gaga and Franco demonstrate that such identifications are less pathological than a necessary and inevitable aspect of identity formation in the digital age. Moreover, like Gaga and Franco, nineteenth-century hysterics used their bodies to display the trauma of interpellation into normative codes of gendered behavior. Just as a number of contemporary feminist theorists contend that nineteenth-century hysteria functioned as a means of resistance against prescriptive gender roles, Gaga and Franco use their art to unsettle the very expectations of gendered identity. Their work demonstrates a repetition with a difference of nineteenth-century hysteria: a calculated, artistic appropriation of the "disappeared" malady approximately a century after its "death."

Notes

1. See Anderson Cooper's *60 Minutes* interview "Lady Gaga & The Art of Fame" (2011) and "Soap at MOCA: James Franco on *General Hospital*."
2. "Lady Gaga has a penis!" is available on Youtube.
3. I refer here to the music video for "Alejandro" (2010).

4. "Francophrenia" is also the title of a recently debuted documentary (2012) directed by Ian Olds detailing the production of this particular *GH* episode at Franco/"Franco"'s MOCA exhibit.
5. See Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) and Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

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