

## РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

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**Tetiana Vlasova**

Doctor of Philosophic Sciences, Professor,  
Dnipro National University of Railway Transport  
named after Academician V. Lazarian of Dnipro

ORCID: 0000-0001-5040-5733

Researcher ID: D-3841-2016

Scopus-Author ID: 57216435953

Email: vasovat2@gmail.com

### **POSTMODERNITY, SEXUALITIES AND CULTURE: FEMINIST SCRIPTS AND GENDER POP-ICONS**

**(Review of the book: Gaga Feminism. Sex, Gender, and The End of Normal.  
J. Jack Halberstam. Boston : Beacon Press, 2013. 157 p.)**

**Abstract.** Lady Gaga as a postmodern cultural icon manipulating with images and symbols has created in her “performances” a kind of new “post”-postmodern feminism, in which she followed the line of feminine anarchists – in politics, arts and culture. “Gaga ideology”, which in fact “embraces a void”, nowadays is vividly presented across alternative forms of popular culture with the subsequent great impact on the generation of millennials.

**Тетяна Власова**

доктор філософських наук, професор,  
Дніпровський національний університет залізничного  
транспорту імені академіка В. Лазаряна, м. Дніпро

### **ПОСТМОДЕРН, СЕКСУАЛЬНОСТІ ТА КУЛЬТУРА: ФЕМІНІСТСЬКІ ТЕКСТИ І ГЕНДЕРНІ ПОР` - ІКОНИ**

**( Рецензія на книгу Gaga Feminism. Sex, Gender, and The End of Normal. J. Jack Halberstam.  
Boston : Beacon Press, 2013. 157 p.)**

**Анотація.** Lady Gaga як постмодерністська ікона мас-культури, маніпулюючи образами та символами, створила у своїх перформансах свого роду новий пост-постмодерністський фемінізм, у якому вона продовжує лінію «анархізму у фемінізмі» – у політиці, мистецтві та культурі. Gaga-ідеологія, яка, по суті, «огортає пустоту», сьогодні яскраво представлена в різних альтернативних формах масової культури з відповідним значним впливом на покоління міленіалів.

In the book under review the author asserts that Lady Gaga as a symbol for a new feminist anarchism has created a specific kind of feminism. With her power as a queen of media manipulation, her loud proclamation of different “arrangements” of gender, sexualities, etc., she has become an instrumental device for performing the very specific “performances” of bodies, desires, genders, sexualities, communication, race, etc., producing great impact on the generation of millennials in the XXIst century.

The contemporary situation is unanimously used by scientists in different fields of knowledge for representing one of the most vivid revolutionary periods, in which sex, gender and sexualities have become per se symbols of change. In the long and often contentious relationship

between feminism as theory and movement and gender studies and practices, feminism is often considered to lose the “battle”. The future of feminism is referred to the “postfeminist era”, feminist projects are said to intersect with gender conflicts creating the problems of dilemmas over priorities. Though feminist researchers claim that “feminism is alive and vibrant”, the stigmatizing of the term “feminism” has had its effects [3]. On the other hand, gender as the radical import of postmodernity has provided many opportunities to consider some of the most fundamental issues of the uncertain and confused human response to the world’s challenges in their continuing transformations of the XXIst century [4]. In outlining the complicated and problematic relations between feminism, gender and pop

culture scientists admit that to define what pop culture is actually much more difficult to do than to say. Definitions of popular culture – as always – depend on who is defining them (“The view includes the viewer”). Pop culture has been condescended upon for centuries, though nowadays it is pop culture that has a profound impact not only on teenagers but “mass audience” on the whole [2]. Nowadays the future of the sexual encourages quite a number of people from different spheres of social life to broaden our perception of the sexual, to help us to understand how the sexual shapes the totality of our everyday experience. Within this large project of making sense of “genders”, sexualities and pop culture J. J. Halberstam’s book occupies an outstanding position [1]. Intellectually profound, politically engaged and no doubt challenging this book is in itself an enjoyable reading: in it scientific analysis is mixed up with the postmodern irony, reference material is connected with intertextuality, hermeneutical interpretation – with psychoanalysis. Moreover, it makes an interesting case for “the end of normal”. One of the key messages of the book is that the American lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer movement has never been only a movement about civil rights. Halberstam as a cultural critic, a transgender theorist, and an activist – “all come together” – represents “a new way to understand the queerness of the worlds we would like to occupy” [1, p. X]. The book represents an analysis of how all the themes mentioned above, their modes and their implementations apply to a very specific “text” of Lady Gaga, including films, shows, reality television, and – implicitly – a variety of other “texts”. No doubt, Lady Gaga is the post-postmodern icon for the generation of millennials and, – to some extent, – Z, as “Cybergirl” Madonna with her muscular frame and “identikit” face was the postmodern icon of the 80s. Among others, the author asks questions: Do irrationalist attempts of Lady Gaga have the only aim – to transform feminism into new images and symbols? Is her standpoint one more interpretation, which cannot see that it “embraces a void” (J. Kristeva)? J. Halberstam analyses Gaga genders, Gaga sexualities as the end of normal, her attitude to the concept of “marriage” – as the end of marriage, and the message of Gaga Manifesto is feminist anarchism. In fact, the book asserts that Lady Gaga with her power as a queen of media manipulation, her loud proclamation of different “arrangements” of sex, sexualities, etc., has become an instrumental device for performing the very specific “performances” of bodies, desires, genders, communication, race, etc. In short, Halberstam’s use of the term “gaga feminism” does not simply mean a person or a set of performances, he uses her “meteoric rise to fame... to hint at emerging formulations of a gender politics for new generation” [1, p. XIII], though it is necessary to add that as a kind of “new feminism” it is rooted in destruction and refusal of the cultural norms and standards.

It is absolutely evident, that Lady Gaga has not appeared in the frontline from a “vacuum”, nor “does she spring fully formed” in the space vacated by Madonna, Gwen Stefani, Britney Spears, etc. The author maintains that in fact “she is the last manifestation of a long line of feminine and queer performers” [1, p. 139]. Still there are some definite factors that make Lady Gaga part of a very different group of performers: the author connects her “feminism” to a long tradition of feminist anarchists, musicians and writers (Emma Goldman, Shulamith Firestone, Yoko Ono, Marina Abramovic and others). Gaga feminism ideology is vividly represented nowadays across different forms of popular culture, there are many examples of it in the popular series, films and TV shows. Gaga ideology proclaims that the world rewards the corrupt, so the only way to advance is to “undermine the religious, and upset the moralists” [1, p.147]. In the final analysis, Gaga feminism, being “for the failers and the losers”, represents “an intellectual emancipation through improvisation” [1, p. 148].

This book, written with expertise and literary talent, gives a lot of ideas and facts that help to learn a lot about western culture of the first decades of the XIXst century. It is both serious and light reading for anyone wishing to understand the recent transformations in the relationships between feminism and pop-culture, ideology and arts.

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