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DON'T BE A DRAG, JUST BE A QUEER: Lady Gaga and semiodiversity in digital networks of pop culture journalism

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Abstract

We analyze the senses triggered by news related to Lady Gaga in Brazilian pop culture journalism, aiming to understand what they signal about issues of gender and sexuality, understood in a queer perspective, processes of social networking sites and pop culture. We have grouped five constellations of meanings that point to the ways in which signs of pop culture are reverberated through semiotic territorialities, acquiring sociocultural signs that are very typical of Brazilian digital pop culture and making think of queer aspects. We find that languages built and spread by queer communities in digital dynamics start to mobilize semiodiversity – constantly threatened – in digital networks of pop culture journalism.

Keywords

Pop culture journalism; Pop music; Digital culture; Gender; Lady Gaga.

Introduction

A queer child or teen, who does not fulfill the performative assumptions of the heterosexual hegemony, is subjected to aggressions on several levels to be coerced into conforming to acceptable social norms, on the part of the school system, their family or the media. In this context, Jamey Rodemeyer was 14 years old when he committed suicide¹, in 2011. He was held hostage by the cultural terrorism (Miskolci, 2015) created around dissident lifestyles of gender and sexuality. On YouTube, he published videos narrating how he carried his daily struggle against prejudice and how, in this context, Lady Gaga's music helped him. On September 18, before committing suicide, he left a farewell note on Twitter, thanking Mother Monster² for all she had done and saying paws up forever – a common expression among fans of the singer. This tragic episode, with its consequences, such as the consequent activism and performances of Lady Gaga against bullying, is a legitimate cyberevent (Henn, 2014): originated in social network sites, with intensified semioses (Peirce, 2002) – action, creation and propagation of signs – due to its link to pop music (Soares, 2015). It incites reflection on how these sociocultural processualities are materialized in networks, establishing semiotic territorialities (according to Lotman, 1996) that signal the hybridization of pop and queer.

Pop music, in several historic moments, has been connected to people that were marginalized due to being marked as unequal because of their differences. Madonna shocked US conservatism with the revolutionary sexual innuendo of her music, becoming thus a symbol of resistance for, especially, women and LGBTQs³ that grew up between the 1980s and 1990s. Lady Gaga, in her Born this Way phase, demonstrated, via music, ways of facing prejudice for many fans. Beyoncé represented African-American pride with songs and performances such as that of Superbowl, in which she referred to the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the Black Panther Party, the Black Power activism group of which Angela Davis was a member. And long before this, Judy Garland potentialized a true LGBTQ revolution – the Stonewall riots happened during a night in which people mourned her death (Duprat, 2007). We understand that, in social network sites, the musical-pop feeling that incites reflection on these differences becomes intensely semiotic, given the lush arrangement of signs it mobilizes, in addition to its spreadable and mappable conjuncture.

This study intends to analyze the constitution and the consequences of (cyber)events of this nature, based on posts published on two pop culture journalism sites (Gonzatti, 2017), as well as a mediatic collective of fans who are also inserted in this logic (this refers to how Lady Gaga appears in the fan collectives RDT Lady Gaga⁴, which integrate this journalistic pop form, and the news sites POPLine⁵ and Papelpop⁶). Its goal is to understand the meanings that emerge from events situated in the interface between gender questions, specific processualities of social network sites, pop culture and journalistic

1 The suicide rate among LGBTQ (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transexuals and Cross-Dressers, Queer) youth is greater than that of heterosexual youth: Retrieved January, 2019, from: <http://acoisatoda.com/2016/09/14/suicidio-de-jovens-lgbt/>

2 *Mother Monster* is a term used by fans to refer to Lady Gaga, just as *little monsters* refers to her fandom.

3 Although this term does not encompass the whole plurality of identities within the movement, we understand that *queer*, in its theoretical potential – which shall be emphasized throughout this article – , contains a framework that allows us to ponder all non-heterosexual sexualities and genders that surpass the binarism of masculinity and femininity.

4 RDT Lady Gaga. (2019). Retrieved January, 2019, from: <http://www.rdtladygaga.com/>.

5 POPLine – O maior portal brasileiro sobre música pop. (2017). Retrieved January, 2019, from: <http://portalpopline.com.br/>.

6 PAPELPOP – Música, cinema, famosos e televisão pra quem ama diversão. (2019). Retrieved January, 2019, from: <https://www.papelpop.com/>.

potentialities. This relation is investigated using the Analysis of Meaning Construction in Digital Networks (Henn et al., 2017). It is a methodology that allows the mapping of semiotic traces, their grouping in meaning constellations and the development of inferences about the questions proposed here. It functions on the presupposition that the semiosis flows of environments created by digital networks allow disputes of meanings, as well as the establishing of semiotic territories and frontiers where the survival of semiodiversity is at stake.

Which pop are we talking about?

It seems overly complex, to us, to evoke pop terminology without defining what exactly we refer to: films, series, songs, performances, celebrities, games, comics and an infinity of other signs are activated by this intensely market-driven culture – which cannot be comprehended, however, solely through an economic lens. If we focus on pop music alone, the epistemological umbrella that can be activated remains multiple: rock, indie, *samba*, funk, *sertanejo* – these are all musical genres that integrate this logic. Here, we think pop music as part of a transnational structure, in the predominantly US logic and in the pop activated by the divas – celebrities that evoke femininity with live performances, music videos, albums and other advertising methods.

We understand that the signs activated by pop music “(...) aid in the weaving of the texture of daily life, dominating leisure time, shaping public opinion and social behaviors, and supplying the material for people to forge their own identities” (Kellner, 2001, p. 9, translation ours), functioning also “(...) as an array of machinery, a constellation of concepts, beyond the binary circuits activated by binomials such as rock/pop, art/entertainment, erudite/popular” (Janotti Junior, 2016, p. 120, translation ours). Soares (2015) speaks, in this context, of a pop sensibility that connects people around the world via the imaginary and the fictional, permitting the emergence of languages anchored in the mediatic. It is a processualism that is constituted by interpretations, negotiations and appropriations that resignify cultural experiences.

Hence, in all its complexity, pop music created many liberation hymns for people that demonstrate different aspects than those imposed by heterosexual norm (Butler, 2014): gays, lesbians, bisexuals, cross-dressers, among others. Judy Garland, for instance, was an American actress who starred in one of the most revered musicals of all times, *The Wizard of Oz*, in 1939. She portrayed the main character, Dorothy Gale, who sings the song *Over the Rainbow*. Several studies analyzed the way LGBTQs related to her performance (Currid, 2001; Herberto, 2015; Bessa, 2015), considering her one of the first pop divas of queer. Judy Garland died on June 22, 1969, aged 47. During her funeral, that same day, a group of fans gathered in the Stonewall Inn bar to pay tribute to her, their diva (Matzner, 2015) – that night, the bar’s frequenters did not stand for the aggression of the police against the LGBTQ persons there and a riot began (Duprat, 2007). A year later, in commemoration of the riot, on June 28, 1970, the first parades expressing gay pride – LGBTQ pride nowadays – took place in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.

Pop can be political. It communicates directly with each person in their most singular subjectivity, through interpersonal exchanges, productions, affects, sensibilities – it develops a daily pop living that sends out layers of meanings through the media (Soares, 2014). Fans develop affects that are very close to the one felt for Judy Garland, be it through relations with Lady Gaga, Madonna, Beyoncé, Britney Spears or other pop divas. Hence, marginalized people, through pop culture, represent lifestyles and daily aesthetics, dictate fashion and define tastes, “(...) revealing how thin the rigid frontiers between counterculture and commercial culture have become” – as stated by Rose de Melo Rocha and Ozzie Gheirart (2016, p. 169, translation ours). They represent lifestyles that breach the norms of gender and sexuality subjectively built around constructions of experiences involving pop. Queer theory – which is so plural and complex one may as well speak of *theories* – helps us comprehend how some signs can challenge hegemonic constructions.

Queer

Queer is, primarily, an offense, an abuse term, something similar to homo, faggot or dyke (Louro, 2013), but that was resignified to name this movement of activism and theory. In this context, language emerges, in its verbal potency, as a means of, based on a swear word, forcing historical-social constructions of masculinity and femininity into their due bodies – from a heteronormative viewpoint, for no body is sufficient to determine a sex/gender, as is understood by queer thought. We see in queer theory a point of convergence between feminist studies and those of gays and lesbians. But that is not all: regarding feminism, queer theory helped in the questioning of the male and female categories, showing that there is an enormous plurality of lifestyles based on using a gender that is interwoven with other social markers. As to gay and lesbian studies, it contributed by drawing attention to the way LGBTQs are made abject by the creation of binarisms such as homosexuality/heterosexuality.

From an encounter between Cultural Studies and French post-structuralism (Souza & Benetti, 2013), queer theory emerges between the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990's, with authors such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler and Paul Beatriz Preciado. We do not resume, here, a history of the concept in the Brazilian and international theory field, as is very well done by Marconi Dieison Pereira (2015), but we seek traces of queer culture that reveal its potential for contributing to a view on differences and how they are constructed.

To Steven Seidman (1996, p. 13), queer would be the study of knowledges and social practices that organize society, "(...) by sexualizing – heterosexualizing or homosexualizing – bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture, and social institutions." This society belongs to a reality that, politically, continues to deny and punish the historically constituted and excluded female identity, as was already shown – a punishment that is even harsher for bodies that are unaligned with biological determinism and foundationalism: if you have a *cock*, you must be a man and have an exclusively male and heterosexual performance, for instance. Butler (2003) calls this body-affecting force *gender performativity*.

A society founded on compulsory heterosexuality, which assumes that heterosexuality is normality (Rich, 2010), oppresses not only lesbians and gays, but also many other/different individuals, all women and many categories of men (Wittig, 1992). Heteronormativity (Warner, 1991), however, functions as a means of organizing life by taking the heterosexual model as a template: monogamy, marriage, children and a series of other devices that design an ideal sexual order for bodies. Queer persons can also reinforce heteronormativity by imposing specific behaviors, such as the disqualifying of effeminate gays and the valuing of an active position, which penetrates and operates symbolically as the male. A series of behaviors also contribute to a closer comprehension of a heteronormative conception of sexuality. These behaviors are seen by Rubin (2012) as ideological formations of sexual thought: among them, sexual negativity, which sees sex as something threatening, which should not be mentioned or spoken of; and the valuing of hierarchic sexual acts, which understands that the only correct way of having sex is the one involving, within matrimony and preferably with reproductive purposes, a penis penetrating a vagina.

Queer, hence, "(...) is the theory of faggots, the theory of the asshole (...)" (Pereira, P. P. G., 2015, p. 15, translation ours), which resignifies languages by employing Derrida's citationality – Butler (1999) sees in this concept a potential for subverting norms and creating a *queer* perturbation. A perturbation that speaks of sex without employing the medical lexicon, that looks to one authoritative *sir* and says:

(...) I no longer desire what you desire. What you offer me is little. That's right, I'm a faggot, I'm a dyke, I'm a tranny. And what are you going to do about me? I'm here and I won't live a miserable and shoddy life anymore. I want a life where I can be flamboyant, have sex with whomever I want, be the owner of my own body, spit on marriage as an obligatory and appropriate institution for living love and affection, vomit all the garbage you made me swallow in silence (Bento, 2016, p. 23, translation ours).

As with social network sites, the musical-pop feeling is permeated by the whole potentiality of these cultural expressions that are spread throughout queer lives. We understand that some territorialities, such as that of pop culture journalism, activate signs that incite reflection on the possible relations between queer and pop. We present in the next section our comprehension of these territorialities that permeate spaces of digital sociability, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Digital semiotic territorialities in pop culture journalism

In social network sites such as Facebook, it is perceivable that tendencies, collective feelings, interests and meaning disputes are visible in public and collective conversations, which influence general culture, construct phenomena and disseminate (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2014) memes and information (Recuero, 2014). It is important to stress that the social forces that lead to the emergence of these phenomena are *online* and *offline*, capable – or not – of being potentialized by these exchanges in social network sites. Digital spaces, in this sense, inspire people to show their feelings, to perform their own selves and to interact within their contexts, and are fertile terrain for pop culture practices. Social network sites – and, considering a broader range of media, digital networks that configure themselves based on multiple platforms – become potentially semiotic.

Memes, in their common meaning as content that is widespread in social network sites, or in Dawkins's (1979), shed light on how the notion of semiodiversity permeates sociability and consumption networks. Dawkins (1979) provides an example that is analogous of human cultural transmissions, which he understands as only interesting and contextual, since it is we, humanity, who demonstrate how cultural evolution works. A species of bird native to a region of New Zealand was capable of displaying nine different types of songs that did not result from genetics, but instead from the imitation of its parents – and with the passage of time, a new song arose due to the manner in which other birds modified the melody, repeated notes or mixed songs. By looking at human culture, Dawkins proposes, hence, the term *meme* to denominate the most basic unit of cultural transmission – just as a single gene transmits genetic information, a meme transmits cultural information. He cites as an example melodies, ideas, fashion, the way one constructs pots or bows – all of which are processes that are grounded on specific information shared from brain to brain. Even belief in God is, to the author, a meme that suffered mutations by cultural means. To Henn (2014), thus, a meme is something that triggers the structure of all cultural processes.

Lotman (1996) understands the semiosphere as a space of convergence and metabolization of all semioses (Peirce, 2002), i.e. of the processes that produce meaning in reality. Therefore, memes create machines of survival for themselves – signs –, diversify themselves and promote intense disputes within the semiosphere by using the dynamic processes of culture. In digital networks – which possess a high degree of connection –, these disputes are intensified and generate transformations in the most diverse levels of languages. The semiosphere, therefore, in an analogous way to the biosphere, also needs diversity to *survive* – there is, in this process that is intensified by digital culture, the possibility of glimpsing a semiodiversity. Given that the many digital networks are diversified – constructed by different social bubbles, some more dependent on algorithmic logics, others less –, it becomes necessary for us to think of semiospheres that configure specific semiotic territorialities. Pop culture journalism (Gonzatti, 2017) features some of them.

Pop culture journalism (Gonzatti, 2017) dedicates itself exclusively to covering media originated from pop, especially in its Anglo-Saxon iteration: music videos, songs, trailers, celebrity discussions on Twitter and many other high visibility products that abandon disputes between entertainment and journalism, and work mutually with fans/consumers. Within the logic of pop culture journalism, we call special attention to the presence of fan mediatic collectives. The concept of *mediatic collective* (Aquino

Bittencourt, 2015) was developed as a framework for reflecting on the construction of informative spaces that remove themselves from a journalism that is hegemonic, traditional etc. With regard to pop culture, fans develop sites, forums and profiles in social network sites that also seek, in a collaborative manner, to spread information about mediatic products – films, singers, celebrities etc. There is a singular journalistic practice implied in these processualities, which also function as intensifiers of the semiotic process triggered when music is the subject of news articles, for instance. And it is to this process, with Lady Gaga as a starting point, that we dedicate our analysis in three distinct territorialities.

Queer meanings in digital networks

The analysis of meaning construction in digital networks presupposes an observation of the connections that constitute different digital networks. In three movements – mapping and identification, grouping of meaning constellations, and construction of inferences – the semioses inaugurated by network processes are dissected, with the goal of identifying the semiotic layers that integrate any chosen object (Henn et al., 2017). This methodology allows the comprehension of phenomena on many levels of complexity.

Our focus, here, is to apply the analysis method to understand which semioses that incite thought on queer questions are activated, in intensely semiotic territorialities linked to news articles about Lady Gaga. Papelpop (Pop Paper) is one of the largest news portals dedicated to the coverage of pop culture as a whole: songs, series, films, comics, celebrities and other elements. POPLine is the largest Brazilian portal dedicated to the exclusive coverage of news about pop music. In our mapping, the two largest fan collectives regarding Lady Gaga, in Brazil, are RDT Lady Gaga and Lady Gaga Brasil⁷. Although Lady Gaga Brasil is the largest in quantitative terms, RDT Lady Gaga has a greater degree of engagement with the public, which results in more comments on its site and posts – hence, we choose it as the main reference for our analysis.

We analyzed publications on Facebook and the comments section of each news portal – which signals, in our point of view, the constitution of a digital network around each of these spaces. From RDT Lady Gaga, Lady Gaga fala sobre final de semana do orgulho LGBT+ em Nova Iorque (Lady Gaga speaks about LGBT+ pride weekend in New York)⁸; from Papelpop, Vazou o álbum novo da Gaga e gente tá gargalhando com os fãs comentando (New Gaga album leaked and we're laughing our asses off with fans' comments); and from POPLine, Lady Gaga promete lançamento de novas músicas na turnê mundial (Lady Gaga promises release of new songs during world tour)⁹. Capturing the comments on the sites and Facebook pages (with the exception of Papelpop, as the selected article had no comments on its site version), we came to five meaning constellations as a result: Celebrated Performance/Fan, Valley Languages/Transviado Memes, LGBTQ Sign, Fan Dispute, and Hate. Although the methodology does not presuppose a qualitative intentionality, Figure 1 allows the visualization and identification of the intensity of the semioses surrounding each news piece.

7 <http://www.ladygagabrasil.com.br/>

8 Retrieved January, 2019, from: <https://www.facebook.com/RDTLadyGaga/photos/a.197373210450137.1073741828.197346857119439/764559833731469/?type=3&permPage=1> (page with over 177 thousand likes)

9 POPLine (Facebook). (2017, June 29). Lady Gaga está preparando grandes novidades durante suas novas turnês!. Retrieved January, 2019, from: https://www.facebook.com/portallpopline/photos/a.10150220957829341.339347.31264_1429340/10155776970004341/?type=3&theater (page with over 1 million and 600 thousand likes).

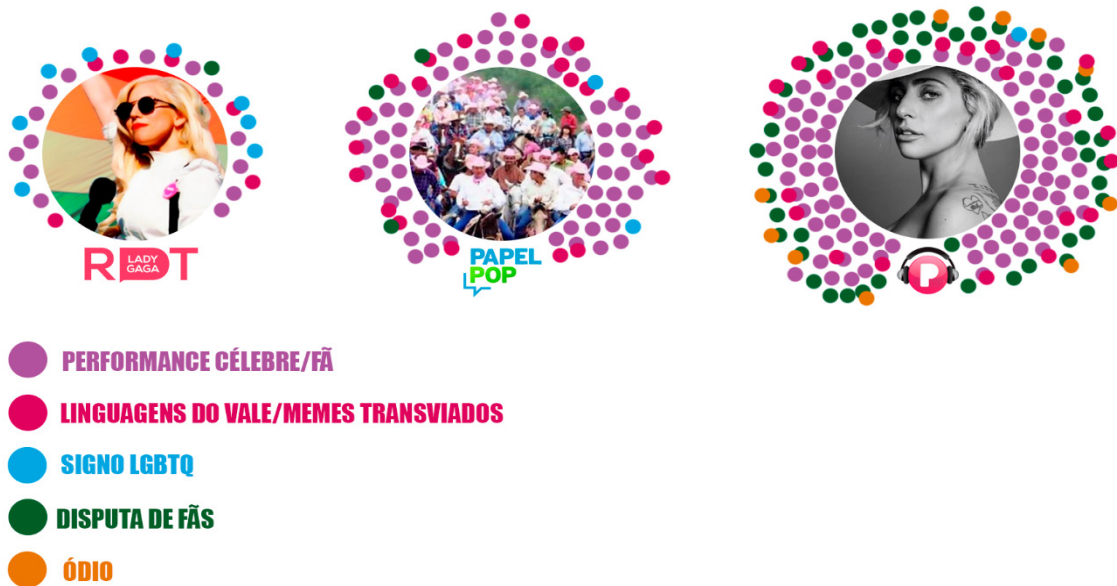


Figure 1 – Monster Semiosis
Source: created by the authors.

The semiosis process inaugurated by each news article is correspondent to the visibility of each site – however, considering the phase of the mapping process, we stress that there are ruptures and sometimes the meaning-inaugurating intensity of a quantitatively minor portal can surpass that of a major one. The constellations do not cancel each other and are intertwined. We do not opt for discarding the semioses that do not concern the issue of this study – especially the Celebrated Performance/Fan and Fan Dispute meaning constellations – as they interact with other meanings, revealing how the semiodiversity activated by pop news about Lady Gaga appears in these territorialities. We present our comprehension, in a more succinct way, of the circumstances around these two constellations, each in their own context, and then we examine the semioses that correspond directly to our objective.

We define the Celebrated Performance/Fan constellation as encompassing the ways in which profiles perform their tastes, or, as is understood by Simone Pereira de Sá (2016), a love of sociocultural objects. Among the semioses of the RDT Lady Gaga fan collective, this relation of expectation about her performance, or even the publicizing of her doings, appears in many diverse textualities: expectations regarding music video release dates, citation of practices for providing more visualizations to her videos (in this case, keeping a video running in another window while working) and desires for partnerships between Gaga and other singers, for instance. In Papelpop, since the article we chose cites the leaking of the album *Joanne* (2016), bringing forth the meanings that were spread by Twitter as the main topic of the news – which configures the article as a cyberevent –, there is a prevalence of praises for the album’s songs and attempts of predicting which of them would become singles. Lastly, on POPLine, fans debate the release of new songs: they debate how this event might be related to the release of an EP – as was done by the singer around the time of *The Fame* (2008) –, releasing it after *The Fame Monster* (2009); how this revelation may signal the end of the *Joanne* era; their frustration at Gaga not announcing released songs such as *John Wayne* and *The Cure* with the same intensity of the *Born This Way* (2011) phase; or, even still, the pride they feel of the singer, citing her commercial success. Some comments integrated to this constellation are intensified, or unlock answers through the technical possibilities of Facebook, which generate disputes of meaning.

The Fan Dispute constellation presents discussions between profiles that seek to delegitimize Lady Gaga as an artist, indicating the presence of anti-fans and haters in these territorialities. Adriana Amaral and

Camila Monteiro (2013) shed light on the performatic mutuality among fans and haters, as the presence of one activates the other, and the means in which social network sites amplified this engagement. On RDT Lady Gaga, one comment is integrated into this constellation by pointing out that a partnership between Gaga and Demi Lovato, for instance, would be a source of mockery on the internet (in this case, the profile presumes that jokes would be made regarding Gaga). On Papelpop, the comment that alone indicates the intentionality of constructing a dispute against Gaga published an image of Madonna wearing a pink cowboy hat, with the caption *Vem Joanne (Come, Joanne)* written beneath it – referring to a supposed plagiarism. Meanwhile, the POPLine news article generates an intense fan dispute in which, predominantly, the debate designed for delegitimizing Gaga via anti-fans/haters is inaugurated, using market questions as a starting point. The debate points out the issue of a sales decrease, to which fans reply by calling attention to the failure of other singers, such as Katy Perry, in order to legitimize their idol.

POPLine, being the only portal with an intense semiosis related to disputes, was, in this sense, the only network to contain comments that provoke thought about those who are outside the hegemony – that provoke thought regarding the constructed norms that instituted queer bodies, that produced “(...) Others, without which the hegemonic individual would not exist either, nor be able to keep his power” (Miskolci, 2009, p. 174, translation ours). Permeated by the gender dimension, patterns of beauty, class, ethnicity and sexuality are established, which marginalize those who do not fit in the model reiterated by advertisement, capitalism and, in this context, pop culture, marginalizing them in relation to desire and power. Beyoncé fans who criticize Lady Gaga are called *Beylajes* that bark at news that are not about their diva – with *laje* (slab) referring to poor neighborhoods and the mention of barking comparing them to dogs. For instance, Lady Gaga is called a pig, a fat person (depreciatively), and fans offend each other with terms such as *cara de macaco* (monkey face), *baleia frustrada* (frustrated whale), *suricato* (meerkat), and *Santanás* (in answer to a profile with the first name Santana). In a dispute activated by a profile stating that the singer will have another flop (a term originated from digital territorialities that shall be presented next, meaning a sort of failure with few visualizations), very aggressive answers are given, since, as we observed in these conversations, said profile acted as a recurrent anti-fan on POPLine comments – using terms such as, for instance, *bixa esquizofrênica do fundo do mar* (schizophrenic faggot from the bottom of the sea) and *veado mal comido é um problema sério* (a not properly-fucked homo is a serious problem). The norm dictates offenses that qualify certain conditions as inferior: thus, schizophrenia becomes an offense and being a *veado* is understood as requiring a passive act of receiving penetration to, from the viewpoint of the comment author, quench a supposed hysteria – a word with sexist connotations – coming from this anti-fan manifestation. At the same time, the terms *bixa* (faggot) and *veado* (homo), in the analysis we develop here, often appear in a resignified way – which we include in the meaning constellation comprising what we call *Transviado*¹⁰ Memes and Valley Languages.

The terminologies of *Iorubá*, the African religious language of *Candomblé*, originate a dialect spoken primarily by cross-dressers and, posteriorly, by the entire LGBTQ community: the *Bajubá*, also known as *Pajubá*. It consists of several expressions that have several meanings for persons permeated by these identity markers: *amapô*, for instance, refers to women, and *edi* to asshole (Lau, 2015). The diffusion of the *Pajubá/Bajubá* – a LGBTQ language – was potentialized by social network sites. Several signs are activated by the use of these languages in mainly LGBTQ groups that call themselves, internally, the *Vale dos Homossexuais* (Valley of the Homosexuals) – a name resignified from the speech of a female Evangelical pastor who claimed to have visited Hell fifteen times and seen there a Valley where gays and lesbians burned eternally. There is a video¹¹, shared on many Valley groups, of a few cross-dressers explaining some terms of *Pajubá*; their class also deals with other

10 A term suggested by Berenice Bento (2016) as a possible naming for queer in the Brazilian context.

11 YouTube. (2012, October 23). Dicionário TRAVESTY. Retrieved January, 2019, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kin0TiXUeas>.

expressions coined by queer persons and that acquired visibility in certain contexts, such as close (posing up for a picture), babado (gossip, or a heated discussion) and fazer a linha (to play the part of, to act stereotypically as) something (a friend, a rich person, a false person, for instance). The book Aurélia – A Dicionária da Língua Afiada (The Dictionary of the Sharp Tongue – its main title is wordplay on the Aurélio, one of Brazil’s main dictionaries) (Lib & Vip, 2006)¹² compiles many of these expressions and even served as a consulting source for the translation and dubbing of RuPaul’s Drag Race on the Brazilian cable network Multishow¹³: terms such as bicha and bafo (a synonym for babado) were employed to replace a few American English expressions, such as tea (gossip). Several of these expressions have been expanded and gained notable visibility due how some LGBTQs perform themselves in these digital semiospheres, which are highly linked to pop and incite thought on the constitution of the Transviado Memes. Pop culture journalism attuned to pop music, especially that of female performers, establishes and activates many of these queer semioses, as we demonstrate in Figure 2.



Figure 2 – Transviado Memes and Valley Languages
Source: data collection carried out by the authors.

12 It is important to point out that, when reading the dictionary, we found transphobic definitions, e.g. that a cross-dresser is a male homosexual dressed as a woman.

13 Folhpress. (2015, July 12). Gírias de drag queens de RuPaul serão traduzidas no Multishow. O Popular. Retrieved January, 2019, from: <https://www.opopular.com.br/noticias/magazine/g%C3%ADrias-de-drag-queens-de-rupaul-ser%C3%A3o-traduzidas-no-multishow-1.895633>.

On RDT Lady Gaga, the aforementioned profile employs the expression *fazer a egípcia* (act as an Egyptian) – of common use in the groups cited previously, meaning something akin to elegantly pretend not to have seen something/someone – to describe how a Lady Gaga dancer would react when questioned about the music video for *The Cure. Papelpop*, by changing its Facebook cover photo to a meme created by Gaga fans and sharing an article with the best tweets about the release of *Joanne*, incites reflection on the ways the album – which deals with a conservative scene of the United States (Texas, country music, songs about exclusively heterosexual love) – is semiotically remixed by, principally, gays speaking digital languages.

Using the loopholes left by the norm, and by the means and spaces of digital communication, these groups found ways of parodying heteronormative standards, demonstrating “(...) that spectators interact actively with texts, and specific communities incorporate and transform foreign influences” (Shohat & Stam, 2006, p. 64, translation ours). These semiotic processes provoke thought about a presence of queer elements in Brazilian digital pop culture (Amaral, 2016): for instance, when Brazilian cowboys adopted the color pink (historically imposed on femininity through market relations) as a representative sign; in the images of Gretchen and Inês Brasil, two personalities that gained visibility with the aid of LGBTQ territorialities and expressions that allude to anal sex, such as in the profile of a boy who comments *todos amam uma cavalgada* (*everybody loves a ride*, referring to sexual performance); in the elevation of Lady Gaga to the status of divinity (*amém, Lady Gaga*); or also in the performance of the effeminate, flaming *bicha* who does his *berro* (scandalous yell). On POPLine, its textualities also cite languages from the *Valley of the Homosexuals*, such as *arrasou* (*you showed them*), *lacrou o cu* (similar to the previous expression, but more intense – literally *you sealed that asshole*), *mon amour* and the view of Gaga as a cross-dresser/drag queen and of Britney Spears as a goddess (*quando essa travesti vai fazer o live de Hey Girl? Pelo amor de Britney Spears – when will that queen do the live for Hey Girl? For the love of Britney Spears*, substituting the popular expression *pelo amor de Deus*). In all analyses, the *viado* and the *bicha* appear in resignified ways – from an offense to an unembarassing addressing sign. The entirety of these elements incites reflection about a semiotic queer performativity.

The language in question here, in its verbal potency, emerges as a means of, based on an offense word, forcing historical-social constructions of masculinity and femininity into their due bodies – as no body, from a queer viewpoint, is sufficient to determine a sex/gender. If a man does not perform in the hegemonic masculine way, he begins to suffer, for instance, symbolic (and physical) punishment, because he activated in himself signs constructed as feminine. LGBTQ people spend a good part of their lives listening to hateful offenses in many situations: when they wear clothing that is seen as inadequate for their gender, when their voices do not fit into masculinity or femininity, their gestures etc. There are many stigmas – which, according to Goffman (2008), mark the life of those who are not passible of receiving plain social acceptance – that motivate the offenses within queer culture: *bicha*, *viado* and *sapatão*, for instance. At some point of their social lives, some persons embrace this sign of hatred and start resignifying it, an act that Preciado (2014) understands as a queer performativity based on language, in which a deviation may become a potency.

Simultaneously, we find in the works of authors such as Rosie Marie Muraro (1997), Gerda Lerner (1990) and Tania Navarro Swain (1998) another way of looking at the gender issue, a history that emphasizes how, in the beginning of mankind, the world is created by a mother goddess in the culture of the many different societies, focusing afterwards on the myths that feature an androgynous goddess or a creator couple, then on a takeover by a male god who creates the world using the power of a primordial goddess, and, lastly, a phase where the male figure predominates and creates the world alone. Or, in other words, a history that points out the obliterated role of femininity in political conquests (Pedro Maria, 2005). There is a metaphoric annihilation that is linked to mythic feminine figures and bonded to power relations

(Swain, 1998), which encompasses a range of examples: from Theseus fighting the Medusa and Hercules crushing the snakes – one of the most ancient symbols related to creator goddesses – to Eve being tricked by the serpent. From this point onward gender binarism gains strength in the West, and femininity, when not punished for violating social conventions, is relegated to the figure of the procreator mother, pure and virgin, such as Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. In the pop context that we analyzed, however, it is primarily the *bichas* oppressed for embodying femininity who develop a return to the way of ancient goddesses, seeing female aspects and behavior as an icon of power, a sign representing LGBTQ people – who, as some musical performances of Lady Gaga demonstrate, abandon the virginity and innocence of Mary. Figure 3 shows the semioses, integrated into the LGBTQ Sign constellation, that activate these inferences.



Figure 3 – LGBTQ Sign

Source: data collection carried out by the authors.

Regarding RDT Lady Gaga, although its article is not mainly about the song, at the end of its page, after reproducing Gaga’s speech about the LGBTQ Pride Parade, the authors inserted a link to the video of Born This Way – one of her songs that are seen as an anthem for differences¹⁴. Little monsters narrate in the comments the ways in which this song activates in them the incorporation of performances that seek to approximate themselves to Gaga’s celebrated identity. A photo of a fan attending a parade narrates, therefore, the way Gaga is seen as a LGBTQ sign, capable of materializing through the song the digital territoriality of the Valley of the Homosexuals. The interactive possibilities of Facebook, such as the disponibilization of the celebratory pride reaction (a rainbow flag available during June 2016), also motivate the semioses connected to these territories, as demonstrates the comment that views Gaga as the Rainha do Vale (Queen of the Valley) and inserts an image of Mônica – a character from Turma da Mônica (a popular comic targeted at children and teens) – inside a meme that features the writing *ata* (yeah, right, or, following its colloquial stylization, *yea rite*) on a computer screen (a meme used recurrently

14 A line from the song –*Don’t be a drag, just be a queen* – inspired the title of this article.

in groups that refer to the Vale dos Homossexuais). The insertion of rainbow emojis, or a reference to the gay movement, such as the comments by POPLine and RDT Lady Gaga, are also within this logic. The article on Paper Pop reproduces the post of a Twitter profile whose author states that he listens to Lady Gaga, but is not gay – which tells of an association of the celebrity with sexuality. On Facebook, in her response to a comment saying that there were better songs than Perfect Illusion, the first single from Joanne, a little monster quotes a passage from the Bible to explain the commercial choice and includes an image that puts Gaga in the place of Jesus Christ, the iconic sign of Christianity. The religious rite around the diva, or goddess, emerges from pop music, its possible LGBTQ interpretations and the way how Mother Monster breaks conservative tenets culturally established by religious fundamentalisms – the same is done, in other contexts, by singers such as Beyoncé, Madonna, Cher, Britney Spears and a diversity of other signs that incites thought on a queer pop polytheism.

Antunes (2007) speaks of three representation points of time that operate in history: the religious and mythic signs that involve an idea of origin; the invention of history itself, which seeks to attribute meaning to the past based on its remains; and, finally, fiction, which, by using the imaginary, breaks previously established assumptions of linearity and sequence. Western culture, in this sense, was on several levels structured and grounded in the Bible, which imposes interpretations about the creation of man and woman. Several events, that are of prime importance in day-to-day experiences and serve as raw materials for means of communication (Antunes, 2007), still betray – culturally and politically – the historical construction that despises non-masculine practices because of, among other factors, the imposition of a God, generally one from the Judeo-Christian tradition (Thomsett, 2011). Hence, the fiction constituted around Lady Gaga, and other pop divas, opens the way for imagining another time, another history, where power does not come from the imposition of a faith, but from the act of *bater cabelo* (*hair whipping*), from the music for dancing in nightclubs, from relating to a certain melody, and from an exacerbation of femininity signs that refer to *drag* performances – that are, therefore, *queer*.

Martín-Barbero (2009) already pointed out that not every assimilation of hegemonic elements by subordinated individuals is a sign of submission, and that the refusal to do so, conversely, would not be a direct resistance. Thus, the activated semioses signalize pathways and interpretations of meanings that extrapolate domination and, due to the possibilities of digital culture, manage to remove themselves from contexts of presupposed heteronormativity, signaling the constitution of a networked semiodiversity that harbors aspects of *queer*.

Conclusions

In the meaning constellations that we named Fan Disputes, the debate focused mainly on commercial success, chat results and awards weakens a thought framework that is more aesthetic, political, located in queer possibilities around music. As to Hate, the offenses exchanged within this constellation also reinforce normative standards. Nonetheless, the manner in which a few profiles, focused on the discussion about Lady Gaga's celebrated performance and their performances as fans, start activating signs that come from other territorialities evidences the presence of a queer semiodiversity that is connected to music – via the expectation about releases of music videos, songs, shows, or praises and criticisms of previously-released material. We noticed this relation in the meaning constellation denominated *Transviado Memes/Valley Languages*. Dawkins's (1979) view of God as a meme gains queer textures and is materialized in the semioses that perceive Gaga as a Goddess or, even still, in the way that, through a spreading process, she can be seen as an LGBTQ sign, which is also the name of one of the meaning constellations in this work. Furthermore, the term *rainha* (queen), which appears frequently in the corpus, conserves some hierarchies and power relations that are closely related to the impositions of Christian religions, and is the subject of issues yet to be investigated.

Lastly, we emphasize the mobilizing potency that is generated by the profiles composing the groups understood as semiotic parts of the *Vale dos Homossexuais*. The constitution of a digital queer language, in addition to the visibility and spreading of memes around (web)celebrities, such as Inês Brasil and Gretchen, demonstrates that there is a cyberevent-related question implied in these digital processes, whose meaning-inaugurating strength is linked with the spreadability potential of LGBTQ persons (Jenkins et al., 2014) who interact with pop culture journalism news. The analysis of meaning construction in digital networks can help us to comprehend, in future studies, these communicational, transmediatic, *queer* dynamics.

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