Professor Jack Halberstam

Biography
Jack Halberstam is Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity and Gender Studies at USC. Halberstam is the author of four books: Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters (Duke UP, 1995); Female Masculinity (Duke UP, 1998); In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (NYU Press, 2005); and the forthcoming The Queer Art of Failure (Duke UP, 2011). Halberstam works on queer culture, subcultures, counter-intuitive epistemologies, animal studies, Holocaust studies and animation. Halberstam also contributes regularly to bullybloggers.com

Going Gaga

Abstract
In keeping with the tone and orientation of this conference on "erotic sounds and screen," I will explore new idioms of performance and femininity as they appear within the performance-scape of Lady Gaga. Less a survey of Gaga herself and more a commentary on what it might mean to go "gaga," this essay considers a range of female performers who have gone gaga, who have literally pushed the conventions of performance and femininity to the point where they splinter and indicate a new horizon. Like Grace Jones, Annabelle Lwin and Nina Hagen before her, Lady Gaga creates alter-egos, she syncs pop and punk sounds and she mixes dance stutters into sonic hiccups to create a spasmodic femininity that lurches and jerks into action. Going gaga is not simply being Gaga, it is a journey to the edge of sense – Grace Jones goes gaga in her cover version of Joy Division’s “I’ve lost control” and Poly Styrene went gaga on “Oh Bondage Up Yours.” While masculine versions of going gaga take on heroic proportions in rock history (guitar smashing, stripping on stage, crowd diving), feminine ecstatic performance is read quickly as sexual excess, wardrobe malfunction or psychological breakdown. This essay reads feminine performative excess as a new performance horizon.