Fashion, Style & Popular Culture
Volume 4 Number 1
© 2017 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/fspc.4.1.105_1

EMILY L. NEWMAN
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Fashionable flesh: Meat as clothing

ABSTRACT

Society's fascination with women's bodies is well known, so it is therefore unsurprising that many people strive to articulate and draw attention to the pervasive objectification of women. Dresses made of animal flesh have been variously fashioned by a diverse group of figures including activist Ann Simonton, punk musician Linder Sterling, artist Jana Sterbak, and singer Lady Gaga. The effectiveness of these works is only achieved through the collaborations between celebrity and designer, artist and press, and activist and media. Dependent upon each other, these works thrive on controversy and public attention. The audience is needed to fully objectify both the model wearing the clothing and the clothing itself, doubling the objectification. By exploring the societal implications and scandals that these works provoke, we can examine the way that these meat dresses have the ability to push the viewer to consider how women's bodies are actually consumed in daily life.

KEYWORDS

meat dress
female objectification
art
women's fashion
activism
pop music
punk rock
Miss America

On 12 September 2010, Lady Gaga shocked viewers everywhere by accepting an MTV Video Music Award wearing a dress made of 35 pounds of flank steak, one that recalled her meat outfit worn on the cover of *Vogue Hommes Japan* that same month. While Gaga (née Stefani Germanotto) was already known for her outlandish and memorable fashion choices, this oozing and rotting dress made of raw flesh brought about a new level of public scrutiny.

People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) immediately and unsurprisingly released a statement criticizing the ensemble, proclaiming that

> Wearing a dress made out of cuts of dead cows is offensive enough to bring comment, but someone should whisper in her ear that there are more people who are upset by butchery than who are impressed by it – and that means a lot of young people will not be buying her records if she keeps this stuff up.
>
> (2010)

Asked about the purpose of the meat dress on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (2010) filmed immediately at the conclusion of the awards and with her still wearing it, Gaga explained that the dress was against the US military's 'don't ask, don't tell' policy regarding homosexual soldiers. She went on to say:

> If we don't stand up for what we believe in and if we don't fight for our rights, pretty soon we're going to have as much right as the meat on our bones. And I am not a piece of meat.

Perhaps then, *The Simpsons* (2012) had this quote in mind in the episode 'Lisa Goes Gaga', when Lady Gaga appeared in a similar version of the meat dress. Homer attempts to cook the pieces of meat on the dress even as Gaga is still wearing it. She shoos him away, saying 'Stop it Homer! Some of that meat is me!'.

After all, in today's society, women's bodies are still commodities – one need only look towards surrogacy, prostitution and female trafficking for examples. More than most women, female pop stars are increasingly having to present and sell their bodies based on their apparent sex appeal (Railton and Watson 2005; Levy 2006). Lady Gaga perhaps understands this most of all, as she has created a marketable and enthralling identity that has garnered her large amounts of attention and fame. While her dress was designed by Franc Fernandez and styled by Nicola Formichetti, much of the attention that the dress received in the days following the awards ceremony was an attempt to determine the originality of the outfit. Drawing attention to activist Ann Simonton, punk musician and artist Linder Sterling, and artist Jana Sterbak, it quickly became clear that Gaga was by no means the first to use meat as clothing. But it is also much more than that. The choice of meat as fabric immediately inspires controversy, perhaps more so than any other material selection. The outfits discussed are all inherently engaging fashion, and they are all positioned to resemble typical and stylish dresses. Yet, at the same time, the notoriety of these clothing items is also reliant on performance and spectacle. These events reiterate the important conclusion, that the inherent combination of animal flesh on human female flesh has the potential to push viewers to consider their objectification of the female physique.

Significantly, the choice of incorporating a processed meat ready to be cooked in clothing implies a type of power. In modern society broadly, the people who generally have had more access to meat – considered one of the most hearty, beneficial foods inasmuch as it provides high levels of protein – were comparatively privileged people, especially white men (Counihan 1999; Ross 1980). Women, often considered second-class citizens, have been likely to depend more on less costly vegetables, fruits and grains. Similarly, persons of colour have often had less access to meat for economic reasons, or, at the

very least, less valued cuts of meats (Adams 1990: 25–38). Hence, using meat as a material for a work of art tacitly can imply a certain status, a food often connected to white men.

Women could and did buy meat all along, but they were supposed to cook it primarily for their husbands and sons. Feminist writer and activist Carol J. Adams wrote that, 'The sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity' (1990: 26). While that formulation may be extreme, meat has certainly been coded as a more masculine foodstuff than vegetables, and the 'masculine' meat used to make these dresses cemented complicated ties to issues of gender. As Sarah Milroy has elaborated:

> The flesh dress is female, and it is made of meat. In conjoining these two signs, [the artist or designer] commit a major gender infraction, naming the equation between meat and women – both objects for male consumption – that patriarchal society would prefer to leave unspoken (and therefore more pervasive).
>
> (1991: 70–71)

In looking at the history of meat dresses, there were two artists who used meat in the 1960s, and can be seen as potential influences for the artists or designers already mentioned. Both artists worked in the genre of performance art, a new art form that functioned close to theatre, yet often without a script or the repeatability that theatre is so dependent upon. These spectacles blurred art and life, and were frequently meant to force the viewer to confront their own preconceptions about what art could and could not be (Forte 1988: 217; Phelan 1993: 3–4). Carolee Schneemann used a variety of meat – fish, chicken and hot dogs – in the climax of *Meat Joy*, first presented in Paris at the 1964 Festival of Free Expression (McPherson 1997: 62–87). The performers, who were only wearing underwear embellished with feathers or fur, had the meat products dumped upon them as they writhed about on the floor in movements that were sensual and erotic (Serra and Ramey 2007: 106–08; Knafo 2009: 89–101). In the work of Alejandro Jodorowsky, the meat was used violently instead of sexually. Performed one year after *Meat Joy* at the same festival, *Sacramental Melodrama* was presented by the theatre troupe Panic, which consisted of Jodorowsky and Fernando Arrabal (Cobb 2011; Dollar 2011). The four-hour performance culminated with Jodorowsky decapitating two geese, and eventually beating female performers with the headless birds. Dressed in twenty pounds of beef, Jodorowsky's intent was to inspire and provoke further action (Ford 2010: 38–39). While beef and animal carcasses play an indispensible role in both of these pieces, they function as an extreme materiality that is used to amplify the actions of the performers. Their materiality, while important, is not the centrepiece of the works.

It is unlikely that Ann Simonton knew of these works, but her use of meat certainly recalls the performances as she challenged the Miss America pageant system. Having had a successful career as a model, Simonton appeared on covers of *Sports Illustrated* (January 28 1974) and *Seventeen* (June 1971). By the 1980s she had stopped modelling, and turned her attention to protesting the way women's bodies are used and manipulated in the media. It was the 1982 pageant, which memorably included a 'Myth California' protest organized by fellow activist Nikki Craft and Simonton, where 100 women and men showed up in elaborate costumes, each standing on a handcrafted Barbie

Figure 1: Ann Simonton wearing dress made of assorted meats, 1982, photo: Chip Scheuer.

Doll float with a sash containing a humorous title that played on the word 'Miss'. Simonton wore the most photographed outfit of the protest (Figure 1). The dress included 30 pounds of bologna, a mix of olive and pimento loaf, and a crown and bodice of hot dogs. Simonton's sash (not pictured) proclaimed that she was 'Miss Steak' (Howard 1984: 23).

Chants echoed her sign that pushed pageant goers to 'judge meat not women!' (Craft 2009). Simonton became the face of the protests, as she was frequently interviewed because of her elaborate dress and her own physical beauty. It was important for much of the costumes of the protests to be gowns, emphasizing the exaggerated femininity that was critical to the success of the pageants. Dresses, and even more broadly, just a broader interest in fashion, provided an easy and visible symbol of women's identity (Evans and Thornton 1991: 48–49). Therefore, Simonton was easily able to prefigure Gaga's sentiments, professing, 'Women should celebrate the strength and beauty of their diversity as human beings and not be reduced to Miss California's beauty-contest version of women as competitive, ever-smiling pieces of meat' (Howard 1984: 23).

The dress recalled a similar outfit worn in 1955, by Geene Courtney, an actress chosen to be 'Sausage Queen' by the Zion Meat Company. Little is known of the circumstances surrounding this outfit, other than the clear promotional intent of the picture. The variety of meats, strategic placement, and resemblance to popular styles and accessories certainly connects the two pieces of clothing. Simonton's dress reappeared in numerous versions, with different types of processed meat used to create texture, length, and even embellished details. The dresses were so cleverly created that in 1982, she

was mistaken for a contestant. These dresses, then, managed to be shocking, but reminiscent of the pageant that was being protested, so they were not distracting from the cause. A short version of the dress was worn in 1985 with the sash 'Miss Behavin', made with skirt steak and racks of ribs on the side, was circulated in the press with the more familiar 'Miss Steak' sash. Often joking about having to keep the dogs away from her outfit, these dresses provided a memorable, visual signifier of the protests (Lieber 1989: 131–33).

The women and men who protested the Miss California pageant succeeded in forcing the pageant to leave its longtime home in Santa Cruz. In 1987, the organization moved the pageant to San Diego, yet the demonstrations followed. This time, the protesters wanted to acknowledge the problematic role that race played in the pageants, which, for example, was epitomized by the fact that no black woman had ever won the pageant. The different types of meat were chosen for aesthetic effect, but could also be used to make a larger argument. Simonton's 1987 meat gown was now made entirely of white meat, with a necklace of chicken parts. But it seemed the shock of the meat dresses was waning, and it was not enough to sway the public. So, to continue to garner notice, Simonton dyed her hair blonde, and then proceeded to publically shave her head wanting to visualize her rejection of the beauty standards that women are held up too (Craft 2009).

Simonton's meat dresses were just the first of many that would appear in the last twenty years of the twentieth century. The Undertones, an Irish punk band who produced music from 1975 to 1983, would feature a model, Cath Johnson, wearing a meat dress on the cover of their album *All Wrapped Up* (1983). The credits on the album call the photograph *Dressed to Grill* and list the artist as Rupert Pretious. The cover's origin is mysterious, as not much is known about the photographer, model, or the circumstances of this photographer. This is further complicated by the fact that band members had no input into the album cover according to the band's website, as the LP was released after they had split up. A compilation of their greatest hits, the title can easily be seen as referring to their body of work. But of course, it also references the image of a woman wearing a skin-tight dress made of thinly sliced meat and bacon covered in plastic wrap, accessorized with a sausage link necklace (Houghton 1983). Thus avoiding the pitfalls of the meat dresses that have been showcased so far, this one is still able to emphasize the slink, sexy body of the model. 'Dressed to Grill' epitomizes everything that Simonton was against and was protesting.

Music, and especially the punk scene, were a logical pace to push boundaries, and it was not just in the album cover of *All Wrapped Up*. Prominent punk figure Linder (also known as Linder Sterling and Linda Mulvey) was well known in Manchester for creating a popular punk fanzine 'The Secret Public' in 1978, along with images and collages that have come to define the movement. She also formed the band Ludus in 1978, a punk group known for a combination of pop music with avant-garde jazz and unusual vocals by Linder that included screaming, crying and laughter (Nice n.d.). While critically well received, the group did not have much popular success (Kugelberg 2012; Bernière and Primois 2013). Ludus, and by extension Linder, achieved notoriety for an infamous performance at the Hacienda Club on 5 November 1982, which she chronicled in her recent catalogue raisonné (Bovier 2006: 40–43). The showstopper was Linder's outfit, which was composed of leftovers from a Chinese restaurant (Figure 2). She explains:

Figure 2: Linder Sterling performing with Ludus at the Hacienda club in Manchester, England on 5 November 1982, courtesy of the artist, Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo.

> I am a vegetarian, but was prepared to be bloodied for protest; I insisted that all of the meat used had to be that which was normally discarded. Someone knew someone who worked at a restaurant and so I was handed a bag of chicken heads and claws, and strands of some poor creature's flesh.
>
> (Bovier 2006: 40)

The meat was sewn onto layers of black net and tulle, and Linder wore long black gloves.

The meat was not the most shocking part of the outfit though; during the last number of the performance, a song entitled 'Too Hot to Handle', Linder removed her skirt to reveal a large black dildo. This part of the performance was inspired by Linder's lifelong interest in gender constructions, and roles that men and women were supposed to play. She had amassed a large collection of both women's magazines (fashion, good housekeeping, etc.) as well as men's magazines (Do-it-yourself, pornography, etc.), as she was thinking about the way the magazines audiences are frequently segregated by gender (Bonacorsi 2013). In addition, she was motivated by the screenings of pornography geared towards male customers at the club and hoped to challenge that practice. Lastly, Linder has mentioned that she was also specifically reacting to a performance by the Bucks Fizz, winners of the 1981 Eurovision Song Contest, and the first champions to appear on television (Nice n.d.). The group of two men and two women were singing a melodic pop song, and in the middle of the performance the two men pulled the longer skirts off the

women to reveal much shorter skirts. Linder had felt the venue and crowd would be perfect for this type of challenging performance, but she was a bit taken back by their reaction:

> I remember the audience going back about three foot. There was hardly any applause at the end. And that was a crowd who thought: nothing can shock us, we see porn all the time, we're cool. When that happened, when they stepped back, I thought, that's it. Where do you go from here?
>
> (Nice n.d.)

Using her clothing and performance, Linder was able to shock the often unshakeable punk audience. Incorporating a sense of dissent, which at moments even bordered on chaos, looking to fashion was a logical choice for Linder. Historian Rebecca Arnold describes that 'punk allowed young women a strong, if intimidating, dress code. It flouted accepted notions of femininity, preferring to shock with ripped fishnet stockings, plastic mini-skirts and garishly unnatural make-up' (2001: 47). Linder's long black gloves had been purchased at a sex shop as an accessory to the homemade meat dress, which itself recalled the do-it-yourself aesthetic preferred in the punk movements (Bovier 2006: 38–40). Linder's punk dress and calculated performance emphasized the potential for meat dresses to make impactful statements.

Figure 3: Jana Sterbak, Vanitas, Flesh Dress for Albino Anorexic, *1987, collection: Walker Art Centre and MNAM Centre Pompidou.*

In *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* of 1987, Jana Sterbak sets out to make a similarly bold declaration (Figure 3). This simple, sleeveless shift dress was made of 60 pounds of half-inch flank steak sewn together like fabric. After it was formed, the dress was rubbed with over five pounds of salt, then displayed on a fibreglass mannequin. Over a period of five to six weeks, the meat dried and shrank, taking the form of the mannequin, until the dress fell apart. As the exhibition went on, the dress would be remade as many times as needed. René Blouin, Sterbak's Montreal dealer, worked with her to acquire the necessary meat and helped sew the original dress. This was the only time that Sterbak was involved directly in the fabrication of the dress; afterwards it was left to the gallery or museum exhibiting the artwork (Kalinovska 1991: 52). In original installations of the work, the dress would only last about six weeks, until it rotted and fell apart. More recently, in exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou and the Walker Art Center, there has been a change in the desiccation. Through more modern practices of meat curing, the dress dries up and shrinks but can last through a much longer installation (Donaldson 2011).

When the work was first made, Sterbak hired a model to wear the dress for photographs that are generally exhibited next to the mannequin. While the work was not conceived as a performance, the inclusion of photographs of the dress as worn by a woman, rather than merely displaying the dress on a mannequin, emphasize physicality. Created for the first time in New York, *Vanitas* was intended as a reaction to the surging art market and the current popularity of Neo-Geo, a clean, almost clinical type of art. As she explained, 'The contradictions of a society, whose ostentatious wealth only finds a corollary in an invasive poverty, had no option but to summon the artist's innate sense of paradoxes' (Storsve 2004: 164). When offered a show at Montreal's Galerie René Blouin, she particularly liked the small, unventilated room that they offered her, as the intimacy of the space would allow people to interact with the piece (Nemiroff 1991: 29; Kalinovska 1991: 52). Displayed in the small area with poor circulation, the meat dress was meant to arouse the viewers' visual and olfactory senses. Indeed, the work immediately conjured mixed emotions.

Sterbak prefers that people refer to the pieces as made of flesh, intentionally reminding viewers of the once-living source material that she has incorporated. As she explained in 2004:

> Many people, myself amongst them, have doubts about meat consumption, and, above all, the way our society takes care of its livestock intended for mass consumption [...] This is why meat often does not resemble itself in the effort to divorce it from any appearance that may recall our own flesh.
>
> (Storsve 2004: 165)

In the production of *each* of these dresses, the artist/designer never kills the cow herself; rather, the choice of specific, processed parts of the animal reflect the supermarket culture that western audiences have come to expect. The packaging and processing of the meat bears no reminder of the cow that once used the flank muscles to move. The distance between the origins of meat as part of an animal to the packages at grocery stores makes the product easier to consume.

All of these disparate terms – meat, anorexia, ambiguity of gender – come together in *Vanitas* in the connection between the physicality of the female body and the flesh of the dress. The decaying flesh on the young alive woman

reinforces our awareness that everyone is simultaneously ageing, as Jennifer McLerran has emphasized:

> Because the image of the fashionable woman is one of youth, slimness, and vibrant good health, Sterbak's piece, with its associations of aging, death, and decay, shows the workings of, but also offers resistance to, the disciplinary force of fashion.
>
> (1998: 538)

The model epitomized the compliant follower of fashion, with her thin body, yet while showing off the decaying dress, she at once reinforced the temporality of the artwork and the short lifespan of fashionable clothing.

One important reading of *Vanitas* is its potential to serve as a stand-in for an anorectic, which Sterbak alludes to in the full title of the piece. Despite the withering and detrimental physical side effects, the thinness that occurs when starving oneself is for the anorectic the desired result (MacSween 1993: 17). An anorectic woman sees success when her body, becomes a smaller version of its original self, much like *Vanitas* will do over time. On the other hand, Sterbak's dress is composed of 60 pounds of rich steaks that would certainly never be a part of a strict diet such as an anorectic observer. The dress represents in that regard an impossible temptation made all the more painful by the fact that the anorexic is unbelievably hungry, simultaneously symbolizing both the desires and the repulsions of the anorexic. As curator Lene Burkard astutely explained, '*Flesh Dress* turns the arguments for consumption inside out, one by one. Here, seduction encounters a sort of cruelty, desire comes out upon repulsion, and time runs up against aging and deterioration' (2004: 13–14).

Furthermore, with the incorporation of the photograph of the model wearing the dress, Sterbak reiterates the identity of the dress as a wearable piece of fashion, similar to what has been done at costume and fashion exhibitions. The model sits with her hip on the ground, a languid pose that allows the viewer to see the entire front of the garment and that might suggest a page out of *Vogue* or *Elle*. Simply put, we clothe our bodies to make ourselves acceptable in society, and the photograph of the dress being worn normalizes *Vanitas* as clothing (Entwistle 2001: 33–58). While the flesh dress could be seen as disgusting, it could also be arguably sensual, with compellingly textured 'fabric' and a detailed pattern that, over the course of the exhibition, only becomes more defined and shapelier because of the female mannequin that supports it.

It is in the curves that develop and form in this dress, and that are also seen when the other dresses are worn that distinguish them from a meat outfit by the Chinese artist Zhang Huan. Zhang's *My New York*, a performance for the 2002 Whitney Biennial, was his first event since the 11 September 2001 attacks and responded to the intimidation he felt city residents were experiencing at the time. Zhang explained the formation of the work, saying:

> In New York, I saw many body-builders who spend hours training themselves, sometimes even beyond what their bodies can support […] Five tailors spent an entire day and a whole night sewing bits of beef, piece by piece, on to a diving suit. The beef-costume was very heavy, perhaps around 50 kilograms [110 pounds]. […] What a bodybuilder achieves only after going through more than ten years of training, I achieved overnight.
>
> (Dziewior et al. 2009: 122)

My New York relies on the idea that the viewer will recognize the beef as muscle, which again is associated with masculinity. The meat turned Zhang into what he would call 'Mr Olympic', embellishing him in a way that invoked a bid for reactions of respect and awe reserved for bodybuilders (Zhang). Zhang wore the suit as he walked down Fifth Avenue towards the Whitney, where his performance culminated in the release of white doves from a cage, a gesture of peace rooted in Buddhism (Aloi 2009).

Zhang had the opportunity to speak about broader issues of peace and recovery, because as a man his gender was rarely discussed. When speaking about the meat dress and the women who wear it, it seems impossible to deny the connection between the physicality of the female body and the flesh of the dress, clearly suggesting the risk of women becoming nothing but dead meat. As Lewis Johnson has suggested,

> wearing a dress as a woman thus suggests the risk of flesh becoming meat for her spectators; and the meat dress becomes the presentation of an unpresentability of the otherness of *this* woman, an image of a promise and threat of her becoming nothing other than animal, meat, dead.
>
> (1997: 176, original emphasis)

Insistence on the relationship between the female body and meat, recalls Rebecca Schneider's discussion of the explicit body, which is the 'explosive literality at the heart of much feminist performance and performative actions'. She continues, arguing that by incorporating the female body, artists are able to acknowledge the body as a 'site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality – all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege' (1997: 2). Linder, Simonton and Sterbak are all clearly hoping to make apparent the historical objectification of the female form.

When displayed for the first time at Montreal's Galerie René Blouin in 1987, *Vanitas* did not draw much attention. Controversy erupted, however, when it was shown as part of a retrospective of Sterbak's work at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991. Canadian parliament member Felix Holtman denounced the Ottawa show and threatened to cut off funding to the museum after learning that the National Gallery had spent $250 on flank steak and allowed it to rot, not grasping that this was one of Sterbak's points: that consumption of meat is intrinsically wasteful (Storsve 2004: 165).

On 2 April 1991, the *Toronto Sun* and the *Ottawa Sun* ran a cartoon titled 'The National Gallery Needs Your Help' that was intended to provide a way for viewers to respond to *Vanitas*. Cartoonist Andy Donato created a drawing of a plain shift dress on a hanger, with its feminine curves exaggerated. Accompanying this image is a brief blurb explaining the materials and process used to create the piece (the drawing is clearly signed by Donato, yet the author of the typed text and the relationship between the instructions, the photograph, and the cartoon is left unexplained). In a section titled 'Here's How You Can Help', readers were encouraged to cut out the cartoon and mail it to the gallery:

> Cut out the area on the right surrounding the hanger, and wipe your dinner plate with the paper. Try to create a colorful garment on the hanger. Then mail it to [curator] Diana Nemiroff […' HERE'S

> A TIP – Eat something colorful. Ketchup, mustard, and eggs are nice. Salmon and tuna will smell good in a couple days. Diana will like that.
> (original emphasis)

More than 200 people mailed the cartoon to the museum, many covered with rotten food and feces, forcing the gallery mailroom staff to open the mail with rubber gloves. Some of these cartoons were even accompanied by threats against both the curator and the National Gallery communications director, both of whom had defended the artwork (Milroy 1991: 71–72).

That same spring, Sarah Milroy argued that perhaps one of the contributing factors to this controversy was the fact that the main players were women.

> But for a woman artist (and curator) to 'waste' 50 pounds of meat constitutes a transgression of her traditional role as woman, a creature who requires no meat, who is herself meat, who saves herself and her resources for male consumption. What is posited by Sterbak's critics as an issue of class in fact screens an issue of gender.
> (1991: 71)

A cartoon by Mariken Van Nimwegen published in the *Vancouver Sun* on 28 April 1991 reinforced Milroy's point. A 'meat dress' hangs on a rod next to, but slightly behind, a large pair of 'meat pants'. The message here is clear: the dress, and by extent the female gender, is dominated by the masculine pants. This cartoon also seems to respond to the gender issue that Milroy speaks of; beneath the controversy was the sheer challenge to the dominance of masculinity in western culture. It is as if the dress and its femininity (and, by extension, the femaleness of the artist and curator) made an easy target for critics.

The attack on *Vanitas*, as well as on Lady Gaga's meat dress, was prompted in part by societal insecurities and uncertainties regarding body weight and personal appearance – hence, for instance, the Canadian cartoonists' exaggerating the feminine curves of *Vanitas* and the *Simpsons* artists shrinking the waist and raising the hemlines of Gaga's dress. In the same way, images in fashion magazines are designed to appeal to the general public because the women are ideally slender. The shrinking waistline of *Vanitas* when exhibited is echoed in the way Lady Gaga is depicted on *The Simpsons*.

This editing of the female form to impossible thinness is not uncommon in the fashion industry, thanks to strategic angles and heavy use of computer modification (Reaves et al. 2004, Hitchon; Reaves 1999; de Perthuis 2008). Embracing the comparison of women and meat similarly to the artists discussed, meat, clothing, and fashion appeared multiple times in editorials in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Noted controversial photographer, Steven Klein photographed model Caroline Trentini in 2004 for *Vogue* in a meat processing plant for a fashion editorial, 'The big chill' (Bullock 2004). The extremely thin woman does not wear meat in this instance; rather, she poses in a red wig, topless but covering her breasts seemingly trying to stay warm in a meat locker. The experience of being surrounded by the large slabs of meat was rather unsettling for Trentini, who after the photo shoot became a vegetarian (Anon. 2013). Tyra Banks, supermodel turned mogul, expanded on this idea for a 12 March 2008 episode of her popular *America's Next Top Model* (*ANTM*) (2008) titled 'Where's the Beef?'. The contestants were posing in a similar location as Trentini, but this time they were asked to model various pieces of clothing and accessories made of meat. Some girls complained

variously of the smell and the discomfort of the clothing, but many embraced the challenge. One of the girls who had a successful photo shoot, actually called her assigned clothing 'beef panties' and went on to enjoy the contest.

When it came down to judge the panel, former supermodel Paulina Porizkova claimed the challenge was a 'metaphor for the modelling industry'. The rest of the critique abounded with puns, as the judges asked which of the models would be 'going off to slaughter?'. Banks herself, summed up the situation, 'You want to be in the industry? Well, a lot of times that is how you are going to get treated. Like a side of beef'. Both Banks and Klein relied on the audience's understanding of female bodies being read as meat. While not as sophisticated as Sterbak or Linder, these photographers and models are attempting to work within the industry itself. At the same time and unlike those artists discussed, neither Banks nor Klein made any attempt to correct or critique the situation. The judges of *ANTM*, with the exception of Porizkova, used derisive meat terminology – like chopped liver or prime rib – when discussing the model's bodies that week. In fact, it seems as if both Klein and *ANTM* are actually reinforcing the objectification of their models.

Even famed designer Jean Paul Gaultier attempted to shed the skin of his model, particularly in designing the costumes for Mylène Farmer's 2009 tour titled 'Mylène Farmer en tournée'. While not meat itself, the fabric, stitching and embroidery were all made to resemble the muscular and circulatory system of the human body. Now, the human flesh was made bare, echoing Sterbak's earlier sentiments. Farmer wore this outfit as she entered the stage to an instrumental song entitled 'From the Dead'. Many felt it was as if she had been reborn, over twenty years into her massively successful career (Loriot 2011: 370). Needing to create a similar impact in her concerts, Lady Gaga would actually revamp her variation of the meat dress, into a more accessible dress that recalls Gaultier's costumes for Farmer. Now made of leather, Gaga's dress takes two different forms: first, a leotard, that shows off more skin, and second, a shorter, much more flattering cocktail dress (Darwin 2012). Because Gaga and Farmer needed the consistency and reliability of a fabric costume for their tours, it was not practical to make a dress out of real beef. This begs the question if the material even matters, seeing as both Gaga and Gaultier still attracted press and attention for their fabrications that resemble meat and flesh.

The implications of the various meat dresses build upon one another. While they all engage the idea of female as flesh, they also serve to remind us that over the 30-plus years these dresses have been made, the conversation concerning the size of women's bodies persists. As many as 75 per cent of women are thought to experience some kind of disordered eating – including anorexia, but more commonly skipping meals, avoiding food with carbohydrates, binging and purging, and even some ill-conceived types of dieting (Bulik 2008; Karras 2008). There are even starting to be calls for change in the fashion world, for instance, the restrictions placed on models' body mass index by regional government at Madrid Fashion Week in 2006 (Tan 2007; CNN 2006). In the end though, there is still much work to be done.

By 2010 and Lady Gaga's variation, the meat dress seems to have achieved thorough popular culture saturation. It was not just *Simpsons* that incorporated the dress, but 'Weird Al' Yankovic also utilized a version of the meat outfit in his video for his song 'Perform this Way', a parody of 'Born this Way', written by 'Weird Al' Yankovic, Stefani Germanotta, Jeppe Laursen, Paul Blair and Fernando Garibay. In the 2011 video directed by Yankovic

himself, his face is superimposed onto a woman's body. 'Weird Al' 'wears' a meat bikini and a skirt made of steaks. Referencing Gaga's clothing, he sings, 'I strap prime rib to my feet, cover myself with raw meat; I'll bet you've never seen a skirt steak worn this way'. In all actually, this 'skirt steak' is not new. Rather, it has been used for so long now, that it is possible the metaphor is all dried up.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all those who helped me along the way with this project – from those who sent me pictures and ideas to those who gave me encouragement. Thanks especially to Laurie Newman, Robin Goodman, Emily Witsell, April Anderson, Kiera and Ben Faber, and Allison Newman. Additionally, I would like to express gratitude to Joseph H. Hancock, II, Rosemarie J. Conforti and the entire gang of the 2013 PCA/ACA Summer Writers' Workshop who provided invaluable feedback and encouragement on this project. Variations of this article were presented at the *Midwest PCA/ACA Regional Conference* in St. Louis in October 2013, the *College Art Association Annual Conference* in Chicago in February 2014 and the *National PCA/ACA Conference* in Chicago in April 2014.

REFERENCES

Adams, C. J. (1990), *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, New York: Continuum.

Aloi, G. (2009), 'Zhang Huan @ White Cube', *Whitehot Magazine*, September, http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/2009-zhang-huan-white-cube/1952. Accessed 14 August 2010.

Anon. (2013), 'Caroline Trentini: Model profile', *New York*, http://nymag.com/fashion/models/ctrentini/carolinetrentini/. Accessed 13 July 2013.

Arnold, R. (2001), *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Mortality in the 20th Century*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Bernière, V. and Primois, M. (2013), *Punk Press: Rebel Rock in the Underground Press 1968–1980*, New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Bonacorsi, I. (2013), 'Linder: Femme/object', *domus*, 16 April, http://www.domusweb.it/content/domusweb/en/art/2013/04/16/linder_femme_objet.html. Accessed 20 July 2013.

Bovier, L. (ed.) (2006), *Linder: Works 1976–2006*, Zurich: JRP|Ringier.

Bulik, C. (2008), 'Strange bedfellows: UNC Eating Disorders Program, SELF Magazine', *Chapel Hill News*, 6 May, http://www.chapelhillnews.com/features/story/14350.html. Accessed 30 January 2011.

Bullock, M. (2004), 'The big chill', *Vogue*, November, n.p.

Burkard, L. (2004), *Jana Sterbak: Video Installationer*, Odense, Denmark: Kunsthallen Brandts Klaedefabrik.

CNN (2006), 'Skinny models banned from catwalk', CNN.com, 13 September, http://articles.cnn.com/2006-09-13/world/spain.models_1_association-of-fashion-designers-skinny-models-pasarela-cibeles?_s=PM:WORLD. Accessed 29 January 2011.

Cobb, B. (2011), 'AnOther thing I wanted to tell you: Alejandro Jodorowsky on Lady Gaga and surrealism', *AnOther Magazine*, 13 April, http://www.anothermag.com/current/view/1022/Alejandro_Jodorowsky_on_Lady_Gaga__Surrealism. Accessed 11 July 2014.

Counihan, C. M. (1999), *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*, New York and London: Routledge.

Craft, N. (2009), 'Myth California 1982 to 1983', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agyEAhwrVUU. Accessed 11 July 2014.

Darwin, L. (2012), 'Lady Gaga's meat dress makes a comeback!', MTV Style, 14 May, http://style.mtv.com/2012/05/14/lady-gagas-meat-dress-is-back/. Accessed 11 July 2014.

Dollar, S. (2011), 'Interview: Alejandro Jodorowsky', *Green Cine Daily*, 20 May, http://daily.greencine.com/archives/008062.html. Accessed 11 July 2014.

Donaldson, S. (2011), 'Making Jana Sterbak's Vanitas', Walker Art Center Walker Blogs, http://blogs.walkerart.org/visualarts/2011/03/16/-making-jana-sterbaks-vanitas. Accessed 29 April 2011.

Dziewior, Y., Goldberg, R. and Storr, R. (2009), *Zhang Huan*, New York: Phaidon.

The Ellen DeGeneres Show (13 September 2010, USA: NBC, Episode #8.1).

Entwistle, J. (2001), 'The dressed body', in J. Entwistle and E. Wilson (eds), *Body Dressing*, New York and Oxford: Berg Publishers, pp. 33–58.

Evans, C. and Thornton, M. (1991), 'Fashion, representation, femininity', *Feminist Review*, 38: 1, Summer, pp. 48–60.

Ford, K. (2010), *Politics and Violence in Cuban and Argentine Theatre*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Forte, J. (1988), 'Women's performance art: Feminism and postmodernism', *Theatre Journal*, 40: 2, pp. 217–35.

Hancock, II, J. H. (2013), 'Brand this way: Lady Gaga's fashion as storytelling context to the GLBT community', in J. H. Hancock, II, T. Johnson-Woods and V. Karaminas (eds), *Fashion in Popular Culture: Literature, Media and Contemporary Studies*, chapter 1, Bristol, UK and Chicago: Intellect, pp. 1–22.

Hitchon, J. C. and Reaves, S. (1999), 'Media mirage: The thin ideal as digital manipulation', in M. Carstarphen & S. Zavoina (eds), *Sexual Rhetoric: Media perspectives on sexuality, gender and identity*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp. 65–76.

Houghton, M. (1983), 'The Undertones', *All Wrapped Up* (sleeve notes), Hollywood: Capital Records.

Johnson, L. (1997), 'More and less than objects: unapproachable alterity and the work of Jana Sterbak and Rosemarie Trockel', in J. Steyn, *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art,* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 169–184.

Howard, E. M. (1984), 'Miss Steak and other beauties', *Ms*., November, 13: 5, p. 23.

Kalinovska, M. (1991), 'Jana Sterbak in conversation with Milena Kalinovska', in U. Caplan and C. Rochon (eds), *Jana Sterbak: States of Being = Corps à Corps*, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, pp. 46–54.

Karras, T. (2008), 'Disordered eating: The disorder next door', *SELF*, 20 April, http://www.self.com/fooddiet/2008/04/eating-disorder-risk. Accessed 30 January 2011.

Knafo, D. (2009), *In Her Own Image: Women's Self-Representation in 20th Century Art*, Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corporation.

Kugelberg, J. (2012), *Punk: An Aesthetic*, New York: Rizzoli.

Levy, A. (2006), *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, London: Pocket Books, Simon and Schuster.

Lieber, J. (1989), 'The woman warrior: Ann Simonton fights for feminist issues – and against the SI Swimsuit issue', *Sports Illustrated*, 7 February, pp. 131–33.

'Lisa Goes Gaga', *The Simpsons*, (20 May 2012, USA: Fox, 23.22).
Loriot, T.-M. (ed.) (2011), *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier*, Montreal/New York: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts/Abrams.
MacSween, M. (1993), *Anorexic Bodies: A Feminist and Sociological Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa*, London: Routledge.
McLerran, J. (1998), 'Disciplined subjects and docile bodies in the work of contemporary artist Jana Sterbak', *Feminist Studies*, 24: 3, pp. 535–52.
McPherson, B. R. (ed.) (1997), *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works and Selected Writings*, New York: McPherson & Company.
Milroy, S. (1991), 'The flesh dress: A defense', *Canadian Art*, 8: 2, pp. 70–72.
Nemiroff, D. (1991), 'States of being', in U. Caplan and C. Rochon (eds), *Jana Sterbak: States of Being = Corps à Corps*, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, pp. 14–45.
Nice, J. (n.d.), 'Ludus\Biography', LTM Recordings, http://www.ltmrecordings.com/ludus.html. Accessed 20 July 2013.
Perthuis, K. De (2008), 'Beyond perfection: The fashion model in the age of digital manipulation', in E. Shinkle (ed.), *Fashion as Photograph: Viewing and Reviewing Images of Fashion*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co., pp. 168–84.
PETA (2010), 'Lady Gaga's meat dress', PETA.org, 13 September, http://www.peta.org/blog/lady-gagas-meat-dress. Accessed 11 July 2014.
Phelan, P. (1993), *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York: Routledge.
Railton, D. and Watson, P. (2005), 'Naughty girls and red blooded women: Representations of female heterosexuality in music video', *Feminist Media Studies*, 5: 1, pp. 51–63.
Reaves, S., Hitchon, J. B., Park, S. and Yun, G. W. (2004), 'If looks could kill: Digital manipulation of fashion models', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics: Exploring Questions of Media Morality*, 19: 1, pp. 56–71.
Robb, J. (2012), *Punk Rock: An Oral History*, Oakland, CA: PM Press.
Ross, E. B. (ed.) (1980), 'Patterns of diet and forces of production: An economic and ecological history of the ascendancy of beef in the United States diet', in *Beyond the Myths of Culture: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, New York: Academic Press, pp. 181–225.
Serra, M. M. and Ramey, K. (2007), 'Eye/body: The cinematic paintings of Carolee Schneemann', in R. Blaetz (ed.), *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 103–26.
Storsve, J. (2004), 'Jana Sterbak in conversation', in E. Féloneau and M. Fréchuret (eds), *Hors d'oeuvre: Ordre et désordres de la nourriture*, Lyon, France: Fage Editions, pp. 163–65.
Tan, C. L. (2007), 'Fashion group sets guides to rein in ultra-thin models', *Wall Street Journal*, 8 January, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB116821067978269650. Accessed 29 January 2011.
The Undertones (n.d.), 'Historical LP releases', http://www.theundertones.com/_/Albums-Historical.html. Accessed 10 July 2013.
'Where's the Beef?', *America's Next Top Model* (12 March 2008, USA: CW, 10.4).
Zhang, H. (2010), 'My New York, 2002', Zhanghuan.com, http://www.zhanghuan.com/ShowWorkContent.asp?id=19&iParentID=16&mid=1. Accessed 13 February 2010.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Newman, E. L. (2017), 'Fashionable flesh: Meat as clothing', *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture,* 4: 1, pp. 105–20, doi: 10.1386/fspc.4.1.105_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Emily L. Newman is presently Assistant Professor of Art History in Texas A&M University-Commerce, where her research concerns intersections of contemporary art history, popular culture, and the body. Currently under contract with Routledge Press, she is completing her book project, *Female Body Image in Contemporary Art: Fatness, Dieting, Self-Harm, and Eating Disorders.* Newman co-edited *The Lifetime Network: Essays on 'Television for Women' in the 21st Century*, and is currently co-editing a collection on ABC Family/Freeform, both with McFarland Press. She has additionally published on FX's *Starved* – a sitcom about eating disorders, the illustrations of *Pride and Prejudice*, rape and twentieth-century art, among various other subjects. She completed her Ph.D. at The Graduate Center, City University of New York, where she specialized in contemporary art and gender studies.

Contact: Assistant Professor of Art History, Department of Art, Texas A&M University-Commerce, P.O. Box 3011, Commerce, TX 75429-3011, USA.
E-mail: emilylnewman@gmail.com

Emily L. Newman has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.