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What a Mess: Exploring Failure, Ephemera, and Possibility in Meat My Package

Anna C. Wilcoxen
Southern Illinois University Carbondale, annawilcoxen@gmail.com

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WHAT A MESS: EXPLORING FAILURE, EPHEMERA, AND POSSIBILITY IN MEAT MY
PACKAGE

By
Anna Charlotte Wilcoxen
B.S., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2009

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree

Department of Speech Communication
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WHAT A MESS: EXPLORING FAILURE, EPHEMERA, AND POSSIBILITY IN MEAT MY PACKAGE

By
Anna Charlotte Wilcoxen

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the field of Speech Communication

Approved by:
Dr. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, Chair
Dr. Elyse Pineau

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TITLE: WHAT A MESS: EXPLORING FAILURE, EPHEMERA, AND POSSIBILITY IN MEAT MY PACKAGE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: DR. CRAIG GINGRICH-PHILBROOK

In this essay I explore what it means to think about queer possibility through a lens of gesture and ephemera, as described by José Esteban Muñoz. I use the show I wrote and performed in, entitled Meat My Package, as an artifact to analyze through this lens. Before articulating how gesture and ephemera occur in Meat My Package, I first explain Judith Butler’s notion of the presentist conceit and how it relates to my performance of identity in Meat My Package, then I move on to connect the presentist conceit, gesture, and ephemera, discussing how these elements combine to create spaces of possibility within queer performance.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An Actor Needs to Know Where to Stand

In the early stages of attempting to make an argument for how *Meat My Package* exemplifies queer performance, I experience much hesitation. It’s the same hesitation I experience when calling *Meat My Package* “sex positive,” or “feminist,” or “postmodern.” The same hesitation I experienced when writing the blurb for the Kleinau Theatre brochure, or when someone in conversation inquires, “what is your show about?” I hesitate because I don’t want to answer. I don’t want to explain, and I don’t want to name. To say what something is is to pin that something down in so many ways that I’m far too uncomfortable with. To many, this probably sounds like a cop-out. But I can assure you, that is not what this is. Though I may not fully be able to articulate what this hesitation is, I can say that it is a reflection on how I feel about my sexual orientation(s). It is a recognition of how meanings change over time. How I change over time. How the sense I make about everything in my life is never static.

Each day brings new experiences that can shift my own existential narrative. I’ve never been comfortable calling myself a “lesbian,” because, even when I’m eating pussy, I know I still really like dick. And I don’t call myself straight because usually what I want to do to that dick isn’t so “straight laced” or “lady like.” I became more and more uncomfortable landing on “queer” once I started feeling as if I had to prove that queerness. If there are actions I have to take in my life in order to be considered truly queer by those around me, then I don’t want to be queer either. Sure there are millions of labels one can take on, but sometimes the absence of labels is the only thing that truly feels freeing. But how does one market a show about, well…stuff? You can’t. You have to land somewhere.

Ok, fine, *Meat My Package* is a queer performance. But not just because of the fact that I
talk about having sex with people of multiple genders, OK!? Therefore, throughout the first section of this paper, I will make an argument for how *Meat My Package* functions as an example of queer performance by, first, discussing this resistance or inability to name both my show and myself. To do so, I will define and apply Judith Butler’s notion of the presentist conceit as well as José Esteban Muñoz’s ideas of failure and virtuosity. Second, I will discuss Muñoz’s concepts of gesture and ephemera as they help contextualize and interpret the dancing in and messy artifactual remains of *Meat My Package*. Third, I will conclude by summarizing how all of these elements combine to leave space for possibilizing queer exploration. My report will conclude with the script for *Meat My Package* in its entirety.

A Note on Stylistic Language Choices

As you may have already noticed, the language used in this paper is in no way the clinical language used to describe body parts or human sexuality. In fact, I use language that some might deem “inappropriate” to describe body parts and experiences throughout this paper. This is an important and strategic move on my part. One of the prominent arguments in *Meat My Package* is that, in our puritan society, we detach ourselves from our bodies, our desires, and sex in general. I think this is a problem – a problem I try to resist by not falling into the strict lines of what is acceptable behavior, and that includes the language I choose to use. I find that words like “pussy” and “dick” are not only more provocative but also more evocative. When writing this paper, I asked my server at Longbranch Coffee House what he thought of when he heard the word “vagina” as opposed to the word “pussy.” He said, “Well, I don’t really like ‘pussy,’ to me it sounds like all big and messy and wet. ‘Vagina’ isn’t that bad of a word, even though it’s the medical term, I like it because it sounds cleaner and nicer.” Exactly, Longbranch server, exactly.
In *Meat My Package*, in this paper, in my life, I try to embrace the mess both psychologically and physically. If the word “pussy” makes someone think of something big, messy, dripping wet, hairy, engorged, and near an explosive orgasm, then that’s the exact word I want to use to describe a vagina (which, by the way, is not a very accurate term to describe the entire female genital region, as the vagina is only one part to the whole. Of course it comes as no surprise that the term most often used to describe female genitalia only describes the part that allows for penetration. The poor clitoris always gets overlooked). What I’m getting at is that though clinical terms can be sexy (especially when doing some doctor/patient role playing), for the purposes of this paper, which is in service of *Meat My Package*, clinical terms are just that, too clinical, clean, sterilized. I want to evoke the mess. Doctor offices are sterile, just like packaged meat, just like our everyday language and interactions. This is my time to disrupt the polite, and in doing so I follow in the footsteps of other insurgent female performers: among them, Karen Finley, Eve Ensler, Annie Sprinkle, and Holly Hughes.
CHAPTER 2: THE POWER OF NAMING

The Presentist Conceit, Failure, and Virtuosity

In her book *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler defines her notion of the presentist conceit:

It may be that the conceit of autonomy implied by self-naming is the paradigmatically presentist conceit, that is, the belief that there is a one who arrives in the world, in discourse, without a history, that this one makes oneself in and through the magic of the name, that language expresses a ‘will’ or a ‘choice’ rather than a complex and constitutive history of discourse and power which compose the invariably ambivalent resources through which a queer and queering agency is forged and reworked. (228)

In other words, Butler points to the notion that every word, every identity, including “queer,” has a history of discourse to which it is attached. “Queer” didn’t just show up one day as a word representing fluid identity. Rather, it has a history of violence and oppression and has been reworked and reappropriated for contemporary use. For Butler, failure to remember or acknowledge the history of the deployment of the word “queer” is one example of the conceit of autonomy: the presentist conceit. The presentist conceit involves taking the position that we are present to ourselves at all times without language and history, and thinking we know ourselves completely.

Before even being aware of Butler’s ideas, I had a hard time naming myself. I’ve always been bad with things like titles and names and identities. They’ve always felt too solidifying to me. I get this internal struggle when naming that makes me feel as though naming says, “I know.” For a while, I felt comfortable with a queer identity—it was a way of knowing that didn’t exactly know. But after a time, after learning more of the history of “queer” and the multiple
ways in which “queer” gets deployed, even it felt troubling. I started thinking how my way of knowing what was and was not “queer” could come across as the “right” way of using and policing others’ use of “queer” in conversation, and I didn’t like that. Though I describe *Meat My Package* as a queer performance, I fail to name an identity for myself throughout the duration of the show. In fact, the closest I come to naming my identity is by calling myself a “muff diver.”

Calling myself a “muff diver” as opposed to “queer” or “lesbian” isn’t received with the same pragmatic force of an avowed identity the way “lesbian” might be in the speech act of saying it. For one, “muff diver” connotes an action rather than a stable identity. If I am a “muff diver,” then that means I muff dive. I am doing something rather than being something. This becomes particularly important in the context of the script. This term appears in *Meat My Package* as follows: “I discovered how much I enjoyed my face buried in her petunia, and I figured if I, a novice muff diver, was as in love with the taste, smell, sight, sounds, and everything involved in carpet munching, she, a seasoned lesbian, had to love it too.” In this sentence I draw a contrast between the notion of my position as someone just learning to perform oral sex on a woman, and my then girlfriend’s identification of herself as a lesbian well versed in the “oral traditions,” so to speak, of lady-on-lady action. “Muff diver” does not function as a stable identity; instead it connotes action, and at any point that action can end. By contrast, “lesbian” implies that I muff dive, but I don’t dick dive, if you will. “Lesbian” has the social implication that I am exclusively interested in those who identify as “woman” with female genitals. Because that is not the case for me, I feel more comfortable saying that yes, I do have sex with female-identified individuals who do possess a “muff,” but not exclusively.

Second, as you can see, the term “muff diver” comes in a ludic way that brings a playfulness the way that the word “lesbian” doesn’t because of social and political affiliations
attached to it. “Muff diver” plays as comic relief because it is not a term widely used by an individual describing herself. I am being playful with notions of “identity” and what it means to “identify” with a term, and in doing so I invite the audience to laugh with me and ease into my inability to fully name my identity. There’s fear in the unknown, but when that unknown can be playful, it can become less terrifying.

Throughout *Meat My Package*, I attempt to open up space for multiple interpretations of what my identity might be, as well as the identities of those on stage with me. I do this by not only shying away from naming myself, but also through not naming others. I do, however, name my desires, sometimes in explicit detail, but I don’t follow those desires by saying, “therefore I am” in some kind of ironic Cartesian gesture: “I think (about fucking women), therefore I am (lesbian).” It’s not that simple for me. I don’t feel comfortable with such a “static notion of selfhood” (Albright 6). I’m constantly surprised by my own desires. There are many times I wish I could just know or understand how my desire worked. But when I start to feel that way, I reflect on a conversation I had with Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, in which he said, “You orient to the not knowing as a kind of failure instead of a super power. See it as a super power.”

Judith Butler says, “As much as it is necessary to assert political demands through recourse to identity categories, and to lay claim to the power to name oneself and determine the conditions under which that name is used, it is also impossible to sustain that kind of mastery over the trajectory of those categories within discourse” (227).

I’ve never been one to assume my own mastery over anything. Though I, ironically, consider myself the “I don’t know” or “I have a lot to learn” queen. Therefore, I let others speak identities in *Meat My Package*. I let Urban Dictionary point to “fatness” and “lesbianism;” I discuss Bob Flanagan’s sadomasochistic “fuck journals” and Margaret Cho’s “slut pride;” Lady
Gaga sings her sex-positive lyrics; Fox News disciplines queer art; I read excerpts from *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book*; I play “Anna as Gaga,” listing different sexual identities (“bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, sadomasochists, fetishists, non-monogamists . . . ”); and I create a list of many of my sexual encounters. All of these things represent different aspects of me, but instead of trying to bring them all together and figure out what kind of category I could fit into with all of these combined, I instead leave my identity open-ended, open for interpretation and surprise (*Meat My Package*).

Perhaps this is a failure on my part: a failure to name, to understand, to locate. But on the flip side, maybe this kind of failure is virtuosic. Muñoz says, “To accept the way in which one is lost is to be also found and not found in a particularly queer fashion” (73). Maybe it’s a combination of what Craig said and what Muñoz is getting at: maybe it’s not that my “not knowing” is a super power *instead* of a failure, but rather a super power in its failing. It could be that this particular kind of failure opens up space for further exploration, where “we can locate a kernel of potentiality” (173). As I mentioned earlier, not knowing, not being able to separate people into categories of straight/gay, male/female, black/white can really freak people out. It is the “what are you?” phenomenon. It seems as though, before someone is comfortable proceeding with you as a part of their daily or even momentary encounter, they must know “what” you are and “where” you stand in order to even comprehend how to engage with you. Living in a world where we are still very much limited by language (especially gendered language), I can, to a degree, understand fear of ambiguity. I can understand not wanting to offend someone by using the “wrong” gender pronoun. I can understand not wanting to problematically misconstrue someone’s sexual orientation because s/he said s/he likes to “muff dive.” But as an ambassador of the unknown, I believe that the failure to name and know myself can have powerful
possiblizing effects based on the tension that people may experience when wondering what to “call” me. If I, like other category resistors, continue to leave my identity ambiguous, if I continue to not name, perhaps, over time, the need to categorize will become more irrelevant.

Though I theorize my failure through a lens of possibility and potential virtuosity, I think Judith Butler puts a particularly nice cap on these ideas: “The political deconstruction of ‘queer’ ought not to paralyze the use of such terms, but, ideally, to extend its range, to make us consider at what expense and for what purposes the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought” (229).
CHAPTER 3: GESTURE AND EPHEMERA

Post Production: Pop Culture and Appropriation

Before I begin my discussions of failure, virtuosity, gesture, and ephemera through the analysis of the dances and other elements present in *Meat My Package*, I must take a moment to preface the aforementioned discussions with an exploration of postproduction as an artistic practice as described by Nicolas Bourriarud. In the introduction of *Postproduction*, Bourriarud lays out a scintillatingly evocative sentence describing this very notion, saying, “It is no longer a matter of starting with a ‘blank slate’ or creating meaning on the basis of virgin material but of finding a means of insertion into the innumerable flows of production” (17).

First, I just want to say that I really love this sentence, particularly in terms of the themes at play in *Meat My Package* and therefore in this paper. Words like “virgin material,” “insertion,” and “flows of production” evoke sensuality and play with the metaphor of artistic practice as sexual acts. What’s so wonderful about this particular sentence is how Bourriarud says that postproduction artists don’t accept the false notion of “virgin material.” What Bourriarud is getting at is that the art of postproduction involves using cultural artifacts available to the public already as a basis for “new” artistic creation. That, as artists today, we have so many media artifacts, art objects, and sounds infiltrating our daily lives that they become a part of our existence. A postproduction artist will use these artifacts at her disposal creating new meanings by using them in a way that they were not originally intended. Another reason why the aforementioned sentence is so wonderfully dripping with delicious possibilities is because of Bourriarud’s word choice and how it connects so well with *Meat My Package*. This particularly relates to the dances in *Meat My Package* wherein I disregard the notion of “virgin material” and instead find myself drawn to the sexy sounds and movements of the “innumerable flows of
production” already in place, tempting and tantalizing me everywhere I go, until I eventually “find a means of insertion” into these preexisting “flows of production” and create a deeper meaning through our fleshy, sweaty, salacious encounter.

The dances produced in Meat My Package are neither born out of original music nor original choreography. Just as I reject the notion of a woman being “used up” if she is not a virgin, I reject the notion that the only art worth doing is fresh, new, “never been done before” art. Instead, I recognize the importance of the cultural pioneers who came before me, and those before them, and so on, and I look to what’s been done in the past to inform my present and our future. Therefore, I use popular music and make attempts at embodying the choreography from the music videos for each song.

What I mean when I say, “attempts at embodying the choreography” is that within the dances performed in Meat My Package, my backup dancers (Sam, Nichole, Nico) and I try to re-create the choreography from the music videos for each song (“Love Game” by Lady Gaga; “Telephone” by Lady Gaga; “Single Ladies” by Beyonce) as best we can. But of course we need to make alterations based on our limited budget, our human/technological restrictions, and the gaps in the original music videos where choreography doesn’t actually take place. Because of our limited budget, our costumes, though resembling those in the videos, aren’t exactly the same. The music videos for the aforementioned songs each technology that actually speeds up the dance moves so quickly that no human could perform in real-time, so we had to change some of the moves to half-time. Because of our budget, technology, and concern for safety, we couldn’t walk up an invisible wall, like the professional dancers in the “Single Ladies” video do. Finally, because there are moments in the music video for “Telephone” when choreography isn’t happening, we had to create a few moments of original moves. Because “Pop explores the visual
conditioning (advertising, packaging) that accompanies mass consumption,” these dance breaks (our reappropriation of the popular), which to some may seem misplaced and without purpose, become a central tenet of *Meat My Package* (Bourriaud 26).

The following discussion is centered on the dances in *Meat My Package*, of which there are three: 1. “Love Game” by Lady Gaga; 2. “Telephone” by Lady Gaga; and 3. “Single Ladies” by Beyonce. Throughout this discussion you will notice how each song and corresponding choreographed moves have been appropriated to make new meaning, or further meaning, beyond that perhaps intended by the original production of each song and video. As “Postproduction artists are . . . the specialized workers of cultural reappropriation,” it is appropriate and important that we begin these discussions here: “Appropriation is indeed the first stage of postproduction: the issue is no longer to fabricate an object, but to choose one among those that exist and to use or modify these according to a specific intention” (Bourriaud 25). As I mentioned earlier, we made modifications to each dance based on pragmatic concerns and needs. However, the modifications don’t stop at the practical level. Additional modifications occur through the use of American media, costume choices, and an “inaccurately” gendered cast.

In both the “Love Game” and “Single Ladies” dances, as performed in *Meat My Package*, I add a strap-on harness with a phallic device attached. This was not present in either of the music videos for either song. In both “Single Ladies” and “Telephone,” Sam, the only male-identified cast member, appears as a dancer. Again, in neither of the videos corresponding to these songs does a male appear as a dancer. In “Single Ladies,” Sam wears a bra, giving him a fuller chest, and I wear a strap-on, giving me a phallus. Nothing like this happens in the original “Single Ladies” video. The purpose and impetus behind these choices will be explained in further detail in the following sections of this paper. But the reason it is important to consider
postproduction first, before the analysis of the choices made, is that these dances become a connecting thread in the narrative arc of the show. Instead of the dances existing outside of the narrative, they become a part of the narrative. “To create is to insert an object into a new scenario, to consider it a character in a narrative” (Bourriaud 25). Though these dances may be delivered as a surreal juxtaposition in proximity to the relatively realistic narratives being performed around them, they aren’t necessarily breaks in the narrative. They are a part of the whole narrative. They become the character (me) being played. They illuminate aspects of my thought process about being inundated by Pop and media and phalluses. They operate as the “temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives” (Bourriaud 19). The original videos, songs, and dance moves are still alive, they are still breathing air into their lungs, but now, they breathe it in through their fingertips or their eyes rather than their mouths and noses.

In the following paragraphs of this paper I discuss the dances from *Meat My Package* in great detail, and I ask that you, the reader, keep the idea of postproduction in mind. I ask that you remember that “meaning is born of collaboration and negotiation between the artist and the one who comes to view the work,” and that “the meaning of a work [has] as much to do with the use one makes of it as with the artist’s intentions for it” (Bourriaud 20). Though I theorize and explain my choices and delve into the desire of what I “hope will come across,” I ask that you allow yourself, as the audience of this report, to theorize, find new paths of insertion, and discover deeper connections than I have. I never took the time to explain what the dances “mean” in *Meat My Package*, because I wanted audience members to deduce their own meanings. Now that I must explain certain choices for the purpose of this report, I still ask that those choices not be taken as sacred and “the answer.” For there are multiple ways one can
interpret a single second, whether in a sex act or a dance. My path through understanding in this moment is just one of many.

Troubling Gender: A Gesture Toward Ephemera

In his book *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz discusses the notions of gesture and ephemera by critically analyzing the performance work of a well-known New York drag queen, Kevin Aviance. One particularly pointed moment of critique Muñoz makes is when describing a performance Aviance does where he dons high heels and walks the stage in an “unorthodox fashion,” by which Muñoz means that Aviance intentionally stumbles and rolls his ankles while walking in these shoes. Muñoz theorizes this by saying that this performance “constitutes a disidentification with these traditions of gay male performances of female embodiment” (75). Aviance also refuses to wear wigs or tuck his genitals, which Muñoz says, “is a further example of this disidentifactory dynamic” (75). Aviance simultaneously performs male and female while also performing not-male and not-female. “To perform such a hybrid gender is not only to be queer but to defy troubling gender logics within gay spaces” (Muñoz 76).

A similar performance of gender hybridity happens in *Meat My Package* with the opening sequence and dance number. The show opens with the stage unlit and the song “Music is My Hot, Hot Sex,” by CSS, playing. The lights come up on me as I am already in motion. There are two large paper maché sides of beef hanging from the ceiling, one on either side of a projector screen. I am wearing a short purple silk robe, a black skirt overtop of a black bustier, and black tights with white socks over them that have the word “Meat” sewn on. I have men’s red boxing gloves on both of my hands. As the lights come up, I am punching at the sides of hanging beef. After I punch both the hanging sides of beef, I then take the boxing gloves off and
throw them off stage left. I then take my robe off and do the same. The volume of the music decreases, and I pick up a long riding crop (side note: this was an actual riding crop that I bought from Rural King). I then address the audience by saying,

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the livestock auction we are having here tonight! We’ve got cattle, we’ve got swine, we’ve got chicks! Buy, sell, or trade; you want ‘em, we got ‘em. Tasty and affordable meat, no added hormones. Wouldn’t you love the sight and smell of this baby burning on the rack? Savory, thick cattle; big plump swine. Chicks, chicks, chicks, fresh lovely chicks. Juicy tender thighs, thick full-grown breasts. Lean in all the right places. Here we go again, boys, open the gate! Number 28, fine, feeder cattle. Start off at 20, can I hear a 20? 20 to you sir! Can I get a 25, 25 scat, scat, scat, sold! Good boys! Alright, what we have next, bring ‘em out, boys . . . *(Meat My Package)*

Throughout this, I used the riding crop to point to the audience; to whip myself; and to make grand gestures, such as the outlining of a woman’s curves. At the last line that trails off (“ . . . bring ‘em out, boys . . .”), I intentionally drop the riding crop (though I make it appear as though it was unintentional), and as I bend to retrieve it from the stage floor, I discreetly remove the black skirt (which was fastened in the back by small pieces of Velcro). As I stand back up, the skirt falls to the ground revealing that I am wearing a strap-on harness with a purple water bottle hanging on it. It is the kind of water bottle that hairdressers use, the ones with the squirting apparatus that can be adjusted based on the desired intensity of the squirt. Upon seeing this, the audience gasps, the music stops, and I “realize” I’ve lost my skirt. I quickly put my hands down and cover up my squirt bottle phallus and turn my back toward the audience. After a beat, the song “Love Game” by Lady Gaga starts, and I begin my choreographed moves.
The choreography beings with my arms extending out to the sides. My right hand still holds the riding crop. The song starts with the phrase, “Let’s have some fun, this beat is sick. I wanna take a ride on your disco stick,” repeated twice. Lady Gaga then lets out a grunt, “Huh!” and there is a loud bass drum beat. At this point I jump and turn around, facing the audience. My face no longer has a look of embarrassment, but one of direct intensity: a look that says, “Here I am. Take it all, bitch.” I begin moving down stage, toward the audience. I sway my hips in a circular motion while pointing to the audience with the riding crop while the first verse of the song says, “I wanna kiss you.” I then put the riding crop between my legs and start rubbing it against my gentials while doing rapid pelvic thrusts during the next sentence of the song, “but if I do then I might miss you, babe.” I look out at the audience and stick my tongue out and lick my upper lip. On the next lines of the song, “It’s complicated and stupid, got my ass squeezed by sexy Cupid,” I turn my back to the audience again, throwing the riding crop on the ground, then grab my ass cheeks and squeeze and lift them, alternating each side. I then turn back again toward the audience and do a full-body rub, down to the ground, and come back up, still running my hands up the sides of my body and over my breasts. My mouth opens and my face suggests pleasure in this encounter with myself. After this, the song goes, “baby three seconds is enough for my heart to quit it.” During that line, I look out at the audience and begin to gesture the masturbatory act of someone stroking their own penis.

Directly after that, the lines of the song are, “Let’s have some fun, this beat is sick, I wanna take a ride on your disco stick. Don’t think too much just bust that kick . . . ” During that whole segment, I squirt the audience with rose-scented water that is held in the squirting water bottle attached to the strap-on harness while still thrusting my hips forward. The purpose of the rose-scented water is both a simultaneous challenge of society's notions of “unpleasant” female
fragrance, as well as a critique of products designed to make women’s bodies smell “more pleasant.” Also, the rose scent is something that will stay with audience members once it touches their skin and clothes in a way that unscented water wouldn't. This stanza ends again with, “I wanna take a ride on your disco stick,” at which point I quit squirting the audience and put my hands behind my head and do one singular strong and overt thrust toward the audience, causing the spray bottle to jut forward. During the chorus (“Let’s play a love game, play a love game. Do you want love, or you want fame? Are you in the game? Dans the love game”), I move my hips from side to side and bring my arms up over my head with my index fingers pointed and then bring my arms around to point out toward the audience. The chorus repeats, and I again spray the audience until the chorus is over. The music abruptly stops, and I fall to the ground, landing on my right knee with the right side of my body toward the audience. I cover my face with my right hand, and slowly uncover my face and look at the audience for a brief moment, and walk away (Gaga, “Love”).

This opening segment resembles some of the aspects of Aviance’s performance that Muñoz discusses. First of all, a blatant hybridity of gender happens in this moment. Though I enter the stage in a skirt, I carry out the traditionally male sport of boxing. I then embody a certain kind of masculinity when conducting the “livestock auction”: my gestures are large and the language I use to speak about women and animals is highly sexual and suggests a judgment value based on the size and shape of the bodies mentioned. Second, once the robe and skirt come off of my body, I create a multi-gendered embodiment. Like Aviance’s refusal to wear wigs and tuck his genitals, I refuse to bind my breasts or hide my unshaven armpits. On the contrary, I actually chose to wear an outfit that would accentuate my large, natural breasts. During the “Love Game” dance, the gestures I make in terms of sexual gratification do this gender blurring
as well. I both rub the riding crop on my female genitals while making a face of pleasure, as well as gesture to stroking a penis. These gestures lead to Muñoz’s notion of ephemera.

Muñoz says that “Gestures transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarion public culture” (67). Queer phobia extends beyond a resistance to gay marriage in our American culture. Our phobic culture permeates through to our bodies, our performances of gender, our sex, even our daily interactions. By creating a campy, fun performance accompanied by Lady Gaga (the queen of contemporary pop), I invite audiences to be less fearful of gender fluidity, of overt displays of sexuality, of non-normative body practices. I invite their laughter in a way that soaks into their flesh, permeating their bodies again with something different, leaving a trail of ephemeral scent on them, the memory of getting sprayed by a queered body. “Memories that remain after the actual live performance are the queer ephemera, that transmutation of the performance energy, that also function as a beacon for queer possibility and survival” (Muñoz 74). These gestures can lead to a retracing of “lost queer histories” through their refusal of subtlety and shame.

Historical Traces and Queer Dance

Queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence. Historically, evidence of queerness has been used to penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts. When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term. The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the
concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor. (Muñoz 65)

In an attempt to fuse Judith Butler’s notion of the presentist conceit/historical traces of queer identities, and Muñoz’s concept of ephemera, I turn to the second dance in Meat My Package, which is done to the song “Telephone” by Lady Gaga and is performed by myself and three other actors (Nichole Nicholson, Sam Sloan, and Nico Wood). This dance was an attempt to restage the majority of the official video for Lady Gaga’s “Telephone.” I chose to overlay Fox News commentary on both this music video specifically, as well as some of its other news reports about homosexuality in general.

I chose this video because of all the social speculation around Gaga as intersexed and whether or not she was straight, bisexual, or a lesbian. It seemed that everywhere I went, someone was talking about Lady Gaga's gentials. There was so much homophobic panic around Lady Gaga at the time this video came out because she was such a megastar, and people were so unsure of where or how to place her in terms of identity. In many ways, I admire Lady Gaga for allowing such an ambiguous space to exist within the spotlight of fame and fortune, a space that rarely, if ever, allows for this kind of ambiguity to grow at all. I also see “the Hollywood star system as a potential site of transformative potentiality” (even within my own critique of Lady Gaga and pop culture that occurs within the show as well) (Muñoz 171). Lady Gaga’s fame leads to an uncovering of queer histories through her narrations of those histories in a way that is unavoidable based on her popularity. However, the Fox News clips that are placed in and over the “Telephone” video point to the ways these histories tend to get covered up. Some of the quotes from clips dispersed within the “Telephone” video as remade for Meat My Package include:
• “I don’t care what you guys do, or what lesbians do, it doesn’t matter in private. But I don’t like the fact that there is a segment of the gay population that’s in your face” (“Eric”).
• “We don’t want to normalize homosexuality in a public way in an academic setting” (“Bill”).
• “This time we have to speculate on whether she [Gaga] has a male member or not, and whether it’s been cut off or not” (“Fox”).
• “This should be outlawed, it should be banned . . . there is a limit to what we should tolerate” (“Fox”).
• “I think private behavior belongs in private settings” (“Bill”).
• “[This video is] pushing what critics call twisted sexual fantasies to young children” (“Fox”).
• “Beyonce and Gaga, gay lesbian lovers? I mean, it’s disgusting, Meagan” (“Fox”).

In our restaging of this video, we attempt to recreate the original choreography from the official “Telephone” video. Each of us wears a blue top with red and white striped bottoms. This is inspired by the American flag bikinis and skirts that Beyonce and Gaga wear in the original video (“Lady”). The original purpose for this as a part of the show was to stage a simultaneous intervention and affirmation. To my knowledge, Gaga has never proclaimed lesbianism. But because she makes out with a woman at the beginning of the “Telephone” video, the Fox News reporters place lesbianism on her anyway. There is a lack of the presence of a queer way of knowing, or a space for potential fluidity of desire, which points to the societal repression of identity politics. In other words, our intervention comes into play by not allowing the Fox News
reporters to have the final say in covering up the queer acts in “Telephone,” and our restaging of the video is a gesture of affirmation of the queerness Gaga takes on in this video, a gesture that leaves ephemeral effects. Muñoz explains that:

Queer dance is hard to catch, and it is meant to be hard to catch—it is supposed to slip though the fingers and comprehension of those who would use knowledge against us . . . Rather than dematerialize, dance rematerializes. Dance, like energy, never disappears; it is simply transformed. Queer dance, after the live act, does not just expire. The ephemeral does not equal unmateriality. It is more nearly about another understanding of what matters. It matters to get lost in dance or to use dance to get lost: lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality. (81)

Though the Fox News anchors and guest commentators represent those “gatekeepers” who “penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts,” by restaging the dance from the video, we are retracing the queer evidence that those gatekeepers try to shut out both through their commentary of “it should be banned …” and through their attempts to locate the identities of Gaga and Beyonce and to subsequently place shame on those identities (Muñoz 65). A new thought then emerges about how it is possible that even those who attempt to cover the historical traces of queerness can fall into the trap of the presentist conceit by placing others within identity categories for the purpose of disciplining fluid desires. The question then becomes how is it that the retracing through gesture and ephemera can open up spaces of rematerializing histories in a way that can potentially help us avoid the presentist conceit? I try to answer that question in the next section.
Queer Ephemera and Possibility in “Single Ladies”

The third dance in *Meat My Package* is performed to the song “Single Ladies” by Beyonce. The music starts in the dark, and lights go up slowly on dancers (Sam Sloan and I) who are already moving. The stage is blank and the lights are white and red. Sam and I stand down center stage. I am still wearing my black lingerie and leggings, but I have now adorned a strap-on harness with a hot-dog phallus (which is actually a squeaky dog toy) attached through the o-ring where the dildo would customarily go. Sam is dressed in black spandex pants made for dance and a tight black tank top. Over the tank top he is wearing a white bra with hamburgers sewn onto the middle of each bra cup. These, too, are squeaky dog toys. These costumes represent two things: 1. The playfulness that comes from using squeaky hot dog toys points back to the notion of us playing with gender. 2 They represent “the negotiation between how one defines one’s body in face of how that body is defined by society” (Albright 4). The costume choices along with the movement will be explained and theorized after the following description of this dance.

The dance starts with both dancers swaying their hips from side to side while flipping their wrists and twinkling their fingers, a gesture that could be read as both a sassy dismissal and a wave goodbye. A few more seconds into the dance and the hip bounces get more intense, causing both the burgers on Sam’s breasts and the hot dog hanging between my legs to shake and make their presence known (both to the audience and the performers). While dancing I become increasingly aware of how my body must adapt to something hanging between my legs. I imagine that Sam noticed, to a degree, how his body oriented differently to space as well with more weight on his chest. At the end of the first chorus, Beyonce sings, “If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it, don’t be mad once you see that he want it.” During this part of the song,
Sam sways his entire body in a slow, sensual fashion, while I, at first right behind him, then right beside him, gyrate my hips back and forth causing a more rapid, staccato movement that also makes the hot-dog phallus swing back and forth toward the audience. We are technically attempting to recreate the dance moves from the actual “Single Ladies” video, but we put our own twist on them by adding the meaty, sexy elements as well as by switching or blurring who plays the Beyonce “character.”

Directly after the first chorus, the song goes, “I got gloss on my lips, a man on my hips, hold me tighter than my Dereon jeans.” At this point, Sam becomes the focus through the choreography. He kneels down center stage facing the audience. I stand to his side facing him. While the lyrics are sung, I stand still with my hands on my hips. Sam puts his fingers to his lips during “gloss on my lips” then continues to run his hand down his body. He moves down his neck, to his chest, and down to his hip. His lips are sensually parted and suggestive while doing this. The second chorus, which follows the lyrics “‘Cause you had your turn and now you’re gonna learn what it really feels like to miss me,” happens while both Sam and I do pelvic thrusts toward the audience. Once again Sam’s pelvic thrusts are more full-bodied, a tad slower and more sensual. Mine, on the other hand, are pretty simple pelvic thrusts, centrally located and focused on one particular area of the body, my hot-dog dick. My thrusts resemble the stereotypical jackhammer sexual thrust. The hot dog sways violently back and forth. Sam and I then turn toward each other and shake our hips toward one another. The hot dog swings back and forth toward Sam now, and the audience can see the side of it, or the length of it.

The bridge starts with the words “don’t treat me to these things of the world,” while Sam stands in one place and sways his hips from side to side and I walk toward him. On the word “world,” I play Sam’s burger boobs like drums, then quickly turn my back and walk away. Sam
then turns his head from me and turns his body toward the audience. He stays in one spot while swaying his hips suggestively, and I come back to him and start dancing around his body while the song goes, “what I deserve is a man that . . . delivers me to a destiny, to infinity and beyond.”

Sam and I then separate, and as Beyonce starts to sing “pull me into your arms,” I mime pulling Sam by a rope. We come towards each other with our bodies slightly bent over our feet, and we pump our hands in front of our hips toward the floor. Then, on the lyrics “and like a ghost, I’ll be gone,” Sam and I let the tops of our bodies (from hips up) collapse and hang loose, bending all the way over toward the ground. As soon as the final chorus starts again (“All the single ladies . . .”), Sam and I pop back up and start clapping. We end with some more pelvic thrusts while pointing to our ring fingers. The lights go down and we exit stage right (Knowles).

Throughout the “Single Ladies” dance, there is a blurring of gender performance and character, which brings us back to “the negotiation between how one defines one’s body in face of how that body is defined by society” (Albright 4). To expound upon this further, I will start with the blurred gender lines that occur because of our accoutrements. Through our society’s expectations of what it physically means to be “male,” Sam’s body has a number of traits that would lead audience members to read him as male. He has a beard, a flat chest, and a convex genital area (the proverbial “bulge”). However, the costume he wears pushes against conventional male norms. First, he is wearing a bra that accentuates or adds on feminine features with the burgers that are attached to them, making Sam appear as though he has fuller breasts. Second, he is wearing tight, black spandex pants and a tight black tank top. These two garments hug Sam’s body and show curvaceousness in him that defies masculinity by the sheer fact that “curvy” is a term designated for women. Third, he wears a headband in his hair.

With the same lens of what our Western society deems “female,” I undoubtedly get read
as such based on my voluptuous chest, the presence of cosmetic make-up and nail polish, and my lack of the aforementioned bulge. Allow me to make a quick note on how problematic it is to consider female genitals as a “lack of” something in comparison to male genitals. However, for the purpose of discussing how our society views bodies widely, I find it appropriate to refer to my genitals appearing to be “lacking” something, as that is how female genitals often get described (Adams 47-49; Malson 14; Jones 24). Yet I use my costume as an act of resistance to female norms. First and foremost, I choose to accentuate my genital region by wearing a hot-dog phallus. Second, I wore a sleeveless top that allowed my hairy armpits to be seen. Finally, something not necessarily pre-scripted came into play during this dance: my body moved in a much more “masculine” way than Sam’s.

Throughout the dance, Sam gives “come-hither” glances to the audience; smiles almost the entire three minutes and thirteen seconds; and seems like he’s flirting with the audience. I, however, am far less connected to the audience: I have a rigid, serious face throughout; and I focus mostly on Sam, rather than the audience. As I mentioned in the description of the dance, Sam’s body moves in slower, more sensual ways than my body does. He is looser and less tied to the rigid choreographed moves than I. My movements are short, purposeful, and my body clearly tries its hardest to never deviate from the choreography. This wasn’t planned, this is just how our bodies move. Muñoz states that “Queer theory has made one lesson explicitly clear: the set of behaviors and codes of conduct that we refer to as feminine or masculine are not slaves to the biological” (76). I went into this show knowing that Sam’s body moves differently than mine. I knew his hips had more sway potential. I thought that was beautiful and went along perfectly with the blurred gender I was attempting to accentuate in this moment. However, it wasn’t until I watched a video of us dancing, post-production, that I realized just how differently our bodies
move. Perhaps it was the added body parts (Sam adding breasts, me adding a penis) and the way our bodies adjusted. But mostly, in the “Single Ladies” scene, the dance floor became a revelatory space, putting on display the complexities of gender as performed and ascribed.

Muñoz also says that he

considers the dance floor as a space where relations between memory and content, self and other, become inextricably intertwined. Furthermore . . . the dance floor increases our tolerance for embodied practices. It may do so because it demands, in the openness and closeness of relations to others, an exchange and alteration of kinesthetic experience through which we become, in a sense, less like ourselves and more like each other. (66)

Throughout the “Single Ladies” dance, both my performed gender and Sam’s performed gender, along with both of our biological sexes and culturally ascribed genders, meld into a collective poly-gender performance by exceeding cultural limitations of gender and embracing and rejoicing in the “pleasures of queerness, the joys of gender dissidence, of willfully making one’s own way against the stream of a crushing heteronormative tide” (Muñoz 74). Throughout this dance, it becomes more and more unclear who is female, who is male, who is the ring-put-ter-on-er, and who is the ring receiver. In Beyonce’s version, she wants a ring from a man. In our version, traditional gender lines are blurred so far that it becomes unclear as to which one of us wants a ring, or a man, or if we even want those things at all.

There are also added ephemeral aspects of the “Single Ladies” dance. The scene directly previous to the “Single Ladies” dance was a scene in which I tell a narrative of my sexual history. As I mentioned earlier, this was a way for me to express my sexual desires without having to tie them to one specific identity. But during this scene, I throw cut up pieces of hot
dogs into the air, at the audience, to my sides, behind me, and even on myself while listing the
different people I’ve had sex with:

I’ve had sex with men, sex with women, sex with ex teachers, with trans-gendered
men, with gender-queer people, I’ve had sex with ex lovers, I’ve even had sex
with some of you, and you . . . were fantastic. I’ve had group sex, fetish sex, non-
genital sex, sex with best friends, one-night stands with strangers, sex with other
people’s boyfriends, sex with an audience, public sex, over-the-border sex, drunk
sex, high sex, boring sex, amazing sex, stupid sex, sexy sex, and self-cultivated
sex. Ok… I think that pretty much covers the basics. (*Meat My Package*)

After this list is over, the hot dog chunks remain on the stage. Some stay whole, in the
form they were in before being thrown, and some get stomped on both while Sam and I dance
and in the scenes that follow. The hot dog strap-on can be seen as an ephemeral call back to these
hot dog bits. When discussing gesture and ephemera, Munoz states that “Gesture . . . signals a
refusal of a certain kind of finitude. Dance is an especially valuable site for ruminations on
queerness and gesture” (65). The phallus reappearing as a hot dog with bits of actual hot dogs all
over the floor represents such a “refusal” of “finitude.” The hot dog/phallus returns, refusing to
let stories of the past remain buried in history, never to be spoken of again. Instead, by wearing
the hot dog/phallus, I allow those stories to be elemental parts of me, even as I refuse to let these
past experiences dictate my future. The sexual experiences I have had thus far are only part of
the story, but this story is far from over, and I am far from having this all figured out. The past
(the hot dogs on the floor) is still present, and in fact informs the here and now as well as the
future, and this future comes fully equipped with a hot dog strap-on (all the single ladies, put
your hands up!).
To summarize and answer the question posited in the previous section of this paper (How is it that the retracing through gesture and ephemera can open up spaces of rematerializing histories in a way that can potentially help us avoid the presentist conceit?), I would argue that the refusal of finitude through gesture and ephemera work to keep those “gatekeepers” at bay. In the “Single Ladies” dance, Sam and I allow ephemera to stay with us, on our bodies, lingering in the air, and mingling between our toes. We also allow our bodies to flow into a poly-gendered performance, one that makes it hard for authority to place us within strict lines of identity, not allowing them much room to discipline our desires. So even though those who work to cover up queer histories may still try to silence this and say things like, “this should be outlawed,” through our proud display of histories with ephemeral remnants placed on our bodies, our history refuses to be covered up or silenced with shame. We won’t allow the labels and disciplining and shame force us into a space of “I am” for the sake of their comfort. With the ephemera of our history played out in our bodies, we won’t allow those histories to be erased.
CHAPTER 4: AN INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSION

I Dance, Therefore I am?

Descartes keeps haunting me. Maybe it’s because of that last little thought, “therefore I am.” “His ‘I am’ is a state simply attained for some and not (as one’s experience might suggest) a situation of constant negotiation and struggle” (Albright 6). I’m uncertain (and perhaps gratefully so) that I will ever reach a place of “I am,” and if I somehow magically were to reach that place, I certainly doubt it would come from a place of “I think, therefore . . .” As a performer I understand and live in a space of corporeal epistemology. I learn from my body: the way my body moves, the way it reacts to stress and pleasure differently, the stories it remembers, all of these inform me in ways that nothing else can. Yet we live in a society where “This material substance – messy and excessive, refusing to be bound – needs to be controlled by the mind and ruled over by reason” (Albright 6). We demand answers. We demand certainty. We refuse to let the unknown be a place of great potential and freedom from contemporary constraints of society; and instead, we allow it to be a place of fear and unproductive tension.

Throughout the process of writing Meat My Package, performing it onstage, and reflecting on it for the purpose of this paper, failure is a key element that comes to mind. I fail to know. I fail to come to conclusive evidence of what “I am.” In a recent conversation with a friend, I said, “sometimes I don’t even know what to identify with in terms of gender. I’m sure I’m often read as a cisgendered female, but I don’t feel like a cisgendered female. But I’m not transgender either. I don’t know where that leaves me.” She replied, “Gender-queer, I guess.” After a moment, I said, “I guess. I don’t know.” This conversation isn’t over. This show is not over. In my mind, it may never be over. It will never be “right.” I will never be “I am.” But the beauty, there, is that I don’t have to be.
Muñoz talks a lot about queer utopia. He says, “Utopia can never be prescriptive and is always destined to fail” (173). I guess in some ways, *Meat My Package* reaches for that fictional utopian space of openness, of seeing the not-knowing as a super power, of regarding one who can avoid the presentist conceit as a virtuosic act. Through a hesitation to name and label, a staging of hybrid gender, performing gestures that retrace queer histories that are generally covered up, and the lingering ephemera, *Meat My Package* leaves a space for exploration. I want people to explore—explore their bodies, their desires, their fears, their failures, their histories, and their possibilities. “... Utopia is not about simply achieving happiness or freedom; utopia is in fact a casting of a picture of potentiality and possibility” (Muñoz 125).

Perhaps the most important connection between the presentist conceit and ephemera is the need to pin things down, to have evidence to prove one’s identity in an autonomous presentation of self, as if we need more than ephemera, as if ephemera isn’t enough. *Meat My Package* concludes with a dance party that invites the audience to join in. This is a culminating moment of dance, ephemera, and avoidance of the presentist conceit. Because I recognize that I am not the only person with a difficult sexual journey, it is so very important for me to have audience members who choose to come up dance with me in the wake of the mess. We share space and gestures all while stomping on the wet floor covered in meat. We become one with the performance ephemera while also creating a new ephemeral experience.

Muñoz says:

It has become somewhat axiomatic within the field of performance studies that the act exists only during its actual duration. I have been making a case for hermeneutics of residue that looks to understand the wake of performance. What is left? What remains? Ephemera remain. They are absent and they are present,
disrupting a predictable metaphysics of presence . . . there is a deductive element to performance that has everything to do with its conditions of possibility, and there is much more that follows. (71)

Nearly a year and a half has passed since Meat My Package was performed on the Kleinau stage, a year since I began writing this Research Report, and nearly a year since its appearance in the Minnesota Fringe Festival, yet I still struggle to finish this paper. Why is that? Is it because I have a tendency toward procrastination? Is it that my hope for this paper was that it be my Grand Opus, and I fear that I will never be able to live up to my own foolishly high standards? Is it that I just hate writing papers because I know I’m not very good at it? The answer to each of the preceding questions is “possibly.” But there still seems to be more to it than that. Meat My Package was a part of a process of growing, learning, coming closer to an understanding, and an attempt at sense-making about the events in my life that seemed to connect to each other, to the world around me, and to other narratives that already exist. When I think about where my life is now, the process through which I am still enduring and from which I am still learning, it still seems daunting to put a final cap on what this whole experience (writing and performing Meat My Package and writing this paper) has been about or for what purpose. I am still not whole, I still lack in complete understanding. However, after taking this amount of time to step back, to see Meat My Package as a part of my history in coming to understanding, I can fully say that it was necessary. It was and is a magnificent step in my process of healing. But, like learning choreography one move at a time, it is one step of many before, and many to come.
Works Cited


APPENDIX: MEAT MY PACKAGE SCRIPT

Meat My Package (Script)

[Sound Cue #1: Music is My Hot, Hot Sex by CSS] (CSS).

(Anna enters stage L and comes out boxing the sides of beef hanging from the ceiling. After boxing, Anna takes off boxing gloves and picks up riding crop). Hello, everyone and welcome to the livestock auction we are having here tonight! We’ve got cattle, we’ve got swine, we’ve got chicks! Buy, sell, or trade: you want ‘em, we got ‘em. Tasty and affordable meat; no added hormones. Wouldn’t you love the sight and smell of this baby burning on the rack?

Savory, thick cattle; big plump swine. Chicks, chicks, chicks; fresh lovely chicks. Juicy tender thighs, thick full-grown breasts. Lean in all the right places. Here we go again, boys, open the gate! Number 28—fine, feeder cattle. Start off at 20 can I hear a 20, 20 to you sir, can I get a 25, 25 scat, scat, scat, sold! Good boys! Alright, what do we have next, bring ‘em out, boys… (Anna drops riding crop).

(As Anna bends down to pick up riding crop, she undoes her skirt to reveal a strap-on harness with a spray gun water bottle attached to it. As she stands back up, the music abruptly stops. Her face has a look of astonishment. She turns her back to the audience. Nichole and Nico exit to either side of the stage).

[Sound Cue #2: Love Game by Lady Gaga] (Gaga, “Love”).

(Anna begins dancing and squirting audience with water bottle attached to harness).

[Dance Ends] (Anna walks behind table and sits down in the chair. She pours A1 sauce into a sundae cup. She proceeds to recite the following list of cultural sayings/artifacts while dipping her fingers into the A1 sauce and licking them sensually).

“I need to get my dick wet.”
“I just imagine that fat girls would have meaty vaginas, and that’s gross. I just don’t think I could be down with that.”

Urbandictionary.com: beef-wings—the large labia that protrude from a woman’s vagina.

Example: That bitch had some big beef wings. They were hanging out from both sides of her thong (“Beef”).

“I once had a friend tell me he broke up with a woman because she had a ‘roast beef vagina’”

“Pound the flesh”

“Meat:

3. Verb: To give someone the meat. To engage in coitus. To stuff a vagina with your cock.

You: Hey baby I’ll meat you later at your place.

Her: Ok (thinking you mean meet)

You arrive at her place with a full-on hard-on and meat the hell out of her.

12. A describing word for fat girls used in a derogatory way.

20. Adj.- something extremely manly or awesome in a masculine way.

Dude! That old truck I bought is sooo MEAT!

42. One's significant other, most often used to refer to a female. “Yo, fool, why you be all up in muh meat?!” (“Meat”).

“Pork the one you love.”

Urbandictionary.com: lesbian—‘someone useless. Example: ‘our new co-worker must be a lesbian because when he’s in the office he doesn’t do dick’” (“Lesbian”). (Anna takes a bite of steak).

(Anna walks down center) Early in my twenties, I was introduced to the work of the late performance artist Bob Flanagan, the self-proclaimed ‘supermasochist’ who was mostly known
for hammering a nail through his own penis. He largely performed for people in the BDSM community (BDSM standing for Bondage and Discipline, Sadism and Masochism). From the moment I was introduced to his work, I was taken by him. See, Flanagan lived his whole life with cystic fibrosis, a disease that eventually took his life at the age of 43, which was amazing as he was told he wouldn’t live much past the age of 10. His cystic fibrosis caused him to produce excess amounts of phlegm and have leaky, uncontrollable bowels. Also because of his cystic fibrosis, he lived a life of consistent pain, and he said, “holding my penis makes it feel better.” Flanagan often attributed his sadomasochistic lifestyle to his ability to beat the odds and live much longer than expected (“Sick”).

(Anna is joined onstage by Nico and Nichole, who are wearing lingerie). Flanagan and his dominatrix partner, Sheree Rose, made numerous performance art pieces together based on their S/M relationship. One thing Sheree Rose demanded that Bob Flanagan do was to write down every sexual experience they had in detail. He called it his “Fuck Journal.” This practice really appealed to me. Many times we only keep track of the number of people we’ve slept with, not the corporeal, visceral memories involved. We forget too quickly that sex is an experience with our bodies. So I started keeping my own fuck journal, writing through fragmented memories of what my body could still recall – all the pulsating, heart racing, explosions of wetness, and soothing hands running over soft, post-orgasmic, glowing skin. And in the spirit of Bob Flanagan, these are some of my fuck fragments (“Sick”).

(Nichole, Nico, and Anna approach audience members and we all simultaneously recite the following fragments):

I sat on his lap with my legs wrapped around him. I could feel him hard against me. I moved down to wrap my lips around his hard cock. When he started to cum, he tried to pull my
head away, thinking it was the polite thing to do. I simply said, “I want it.” And moved back down to taste him.

It was a dull and mindless day, so we took a stroll down to the park by the river. We sat on a bench while families had picnics and flew kites around us. She sat on my lap facing me, and I reached my hand down underneath her clothes to feel her warm and inviting. I fucked her until she came. I can’t tell you whether or not anyone was watching us because we had both forgotten we were in public.

We sat naked on my bed, my already soaked bed. She straddled me from behind, gently caressing my breasts, my stomach and thighs. She gently slipped inside of me, reaching her arm around while using her other hand to delicately run her fingernails down my spine. I asked her to scratch me harder, and harder. I told her to make me bleed. For the next two years, we created endless surrealist art pieces on worn-out sheets using nothing but our mingling DNA.

We circle each other like mating flies: crashing into one another and then retreating as quickly, denying our untimely need to fuck. She eventually took me into a dark vacant room, where she exposed her beautiful cunt, allowing her soft fragrance to invigorate my senses. I couldn’t wait to taste her. Her legs squeezed my head so tightly that I couldn’t break free, even if I wanted to. As she came closer to an orgasm, she pulled me in every possible direction, my head still clamped between her soft thighs.

The first time I ever had an orgasm, I was with my male-identified ex-partner. He was very energetic. It was a discreet amount of cum I produced, and because I’d never experienced this before, I thought initially that the condom had broken. He then informed me that it had not, that the wetness that was all over both him and me was in fact from me.

I once had a threesome with two men. While getting fingered from behind and my clt
rubbed from the front, I came all over, leaving a puddle of my beautiful warm cum spreading out, filling in the grooves of my old hardwood floor.

(Nico and Nichole exit to the wings. Anna walks back to the table and starts cutting a piece of steak. Nichole enters carrying the “sexy pig” poster. Anna then walks over to the image). Meat industries and restaurants that sell meat do it by making animals female and sexy sending us the message that eating meat is manly, and men like women, and we’ve been told that women are similar to meat. Therefore, if you eat meat and have sex with women, then you are truly a man.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the organization otherwise known as PETA, and vegetarian restaurants do it by presenting women as the alternative tasty treat, or by placing women in the position animals get put in (CBS). Which begs the question, “Why eat her, when you could fuck her?” You can still be a man’s man even if you don’t eat meat, as long as you still want to have sex with beautiful women. Even though PETA and vegetarian ads presented in this way ask us to be mindful of the fact that, when we are eating meat, we are eating dead animals, we are still being told from multiple directions to be absent-minded about what women are: you know, humans with their own thoughts and personalities and stuff, and who, oh, I dunno…might actually enjoy sex for reasons other than men’s pleasure.

Did you know that 80% of slaughterhouse workers belong to one or more of the following identity categories: undocumented workers, people of color, and women? Those who are in control of meat industries and advertising, usually white, affluent males, can choose whether or not they want to see the reality of what makes their money. They can continue to make the choice to be absent-minded about what happens to animals for them to become the meat we eat. So it makes sense they wouldn’t necessarily take issue with advertising for meat
that conflates it with women, making the cycle of women-and-meat, meaty-women, women-as-animals, continue on and on (Adams).

Even when there is an attempt to subvert these messages to mass audiences, it usually falls short. The argument of a woman stating “I am not a piece of meat” is an argument that has sort of lost its umph. We’ve heard it so often that it doesn’t really mean much to us anymore. But when Lady Gaga posed on the cover of Japanese Vogue in a meat bikini, which she followed with an appearance at the MTV Video Music Awards in a meat dress—and I’m talking real meat, actual carcass—she then made a public statement, if you can call it that, on the Ellen show by saying “if we don’t stand up for what we believe in, if we don’t fight for our rights, pretty soon we’re gonna have as much rights as the meat on our bones. AND, I am not a piece of meat” (Style; McDaniel; Oldenburg). Ok, so I know Lady Gaga is sort of ruled by her PR team, the so-called Haus of Gaga, and whatever, whatever. But, I mean, come on. How about making this a commentary on the use of fur and leather? Perhaps this could be a statement about making the power of sexism visible, and on the body, the place where it affects women most. How about questioning the acceptance of raw slabs of animal flesh when it comes neatly packaged and sanitized to the point that we can no longer recognize that this was once the muscle of a living creature and having issues with it only when it’s not stamped with the FDA sanitation seal of approval? I mean, SOMETHING. I’m not satisfied. Are you? (Anna turns and talks to the picture of Lady Gaga that is currently being held by Nichole) And, ok, I love you Gags, I really do. I mean, you’re always speaking out in support of gay rights in ways that most pop stars are afraid to; your music pumps me up like no other; and you’re totally weird, which makes you totally awesome, but you let me down. (Anna addresses audience again) This could have been one of her most politically powerful moments, and instead it became little more than a publicity
stunt.

Ok, so I’ve thought a lot about this, and I think I’ve come up with an answer that gives a little more meat to her argument. So let’s imagine, for a moment, that I’m as famous as Lady Gaga and that anyone would actually care whether or not I wore a meat dress.

(Anna walks over to the chair behind the table and grabs it to move it down stage right. While doing so she sings: “raah raah rah ah ah, romah romah mah, ANNA ooohh lala, gonna talk about meat dress.” She sits in the chair she just placed down stage right). (Gaga, “Bad”).

“Hi, Ellen, it’s so great to be here, I’m a huge fan of yours. So you wanna talk about why I chose to wear a uhh…meat dress, which is a great question considering that, when one decides to put raw slabs of beef on their body, one is usually attempting to make some kind of statement, as I am. So often in our society, women and animals, women and meat get conflated in things like advertisements. Women of color often get depicted as exotic animals and white women play the role of that ever-craved white meat. And I think one of the reasons this happens is because, as a society, we are told to detach ourselves from the truth about women and animals and food and sexuality in general. As American consumers we know very little about the secret lives of our “food.” By placing this meat on my body, I’m attempting to call attention to the unknown, often ignored middle space. See, Ellen, this doesn’t represent the animal in its natural habitat, nor does it represent the neatly packaged steak that comes tightly wrapped in cellophane and injected with numerous chemicals to make it less animalistic. Now, this is not me attempting to encourage my fans or anyone else to be a vegetarian or vegan or a cannibal (Nico, standing next to Anna holding a sexy chicken poster, clears her throat to interrupt and correct Anna, she says, “carnivore”), carnivore. Instead, I’m trying to raise awareness about the violent middle space between free range animals and meat.
Now, Ellen, I believe there needs to be a similar awareness of the middle ground of sexuality. Though the dominant discourse in our society tries to impose straightness on us from birth, and perhaps even before, there are many facets and fluid aspects that sexuality can take on beyond even heterosexual and homosexual. There’s bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, sadomasochists, fetishists, non-monogamists, the list goes on . . . and not just in Congress. But, Ellen, we don’t often hear the narratives of these sexualities because many in our society would prefer not to know about them. They’re too messy and not easily contained. And uncertainty, unpredictability tend to make us uncomfortable. But that fluidity, that messiness is not always a bad thing, maybe sometimes, we need to embrace the mess. That’s what my meat dress is about to me.”

(Anna sits in awkward silence for a moment while waiting for Sam, AKA, “Butch,” to throw The Whole Lesbian Sex Book on stage. Eventually she shouts, “Butch! The book!” Sam then stumbles backstage and throws the book to land somewhere near center stage. Anna acknowledges it, goes over to it, says, “Well, what do we have here?” Then Nichole enters [stage right] and moves the chair to down-center. Anna sits on her lap and begins to read about female ejaculation, miming an orgasmic climax that builds throughout the reading).

Female ejaculation is produced in the paraurethral glands. Ejaculate isn’t urine, though it may contain small traces of urine. The clear fluid may contain vaginal lubrication, cervical mucus, and fluid from the uterus, and has a similar chemical composition to male ejaculate (minus the sperm).

How much fluid is ejaculated varies from woman to woman. Some women spurt streams of ejaculate into the air. Others leave pie-sized puddles on the sheets. A lot of women feel self-conscious about what they perceive to be peeing during
sex. You can reassure yourself by urinating before sex.

For some women, ejaculation precedes orgasm. They experience a gush of wetness right before orgasm. For others, ejaculation and orgasm are separate phenomena. Ejaculation may be experienced as a feeling of release with a nice big spray of come—but not the same level of intensity as other orgasms.

Some women like having sex with women who gush or ejaculate; others find it a big mess. Some women ejaculate with G-spot stimulation. Some ejaculate without any penetration at all. Others simply don’t ejaculate.

How can you learn to ejaculate? You can explore your urethral sponge or G-spot with a firm, curved dildo or your fingers. Make sure you’re well aroused. Insert your fingers or dildo, aiming for the front wall of the vagina. Stroke this area with a ‘come hither’ motion. You can also press down on your pelvis with your free hand, applying pressure just above the pubic bone. Stimulate your G-spot until you feel intensely turned on. As you approach orgasm, push out, and the stream you produce is ejaculate. (Newman 55-56)

(Anna leans back on Nichole’s lap in post-orgasmic bliss).

[Sound Cue #3: Telephone by Lady Gaga] (Gaga, “Telephone”)

(Anna and Nichole then kiss and Nichole puts a blue shirt on Anna, then Nichole takes chair off stage R, Sam/nico take table off stage L. Anna approaches front row of audience and talks with them briefly).

(The entire cast slowly gets into a trapezoid formation while the beginning of “Telephone” plays, then the whole cast dances for the duration of this song). [Dance Ends]

(As “Telephone” is ending, Sam and Anna bring the table back on. Sam [“Butch”] starts
to squirt water into Anna’s mouth from a spray bottle, Anna then grabs the bottle from his hand and starts pouring it into her mouth. Sam looks defeated and sad as he was unable to please his master. Anna notices this, then gestures to him to turn around, and then whips him on the butt).

She called me squirt, I called her slopface. It was because I came on her face a lot. It was playful. Everything we did was playful. I loved her. Or, at least I think I loved her. It could have just been the intense amount of, to quote the band Bush, “chemicals between us” that confused me into believing what we had was love, but what we had, whatever it was, was amazing. I’d only had one orgasm before I met her. Before sleeping with women, I was petrified of receiving oral sex. I mean, I’d done it, a few times here and there, but was always too uncomfortable to ever get off. But when you start screwing a woman who loves eating pussy, you start to let go of your inhibitions. When you want someone badly enough, you’ll forget about how awkward you feel when their face is in your vagina. Also, I discovered how much I enjoyed my face buried in her petunia; and I figured if I, a novice muff diver, am this in love with the sight, smell, taste, sounds, and everything involved with carpet munching; she, a more seasoned lesbian, had to love it too. Long story short, I got more comfortable with getting face.

Ok, this is a little something I wrote for her, my one and only slopface:

(Anna still holding the squirt bottle moves down-center. Singing to the tune of “Here’s to the Night” by Eve 6):

“Here’s to the nights we felt alive” (double squirt up from harness)

“Here’s to the tears you knew you’d cry” (two squirts on my face like tears)

“Here’s to goodbye my baby’s gone. I’ll cum for you.” (double squirt to audience) “for you” (double squirt to audience) (Eve).

So we broke up, as the song suggests. Which seemed highly tragic at the time, but let’s be
honest about something: since we broke up, I have had a lot of sex.

I’ve had sex with men, sex with women, sex with ex-teachers, with trans-gendered men, with gender-queer people, I’ve had sex with ex-lovers, I’ve even had sex with some of you, and you…were fantastic.

(Anna throws bits of hot dogs toward audience, all over the stage, and on herself throughout this list). I’ve had group sex, fetish sex, sex with best friends, one-night stands with strangers, sex with other people’s boyfriends, sex with an audience, public sex, over-the-border sex, non-genital sex, sex on your face-hole, sex and the city, drunk sex, high sex, boring sex, amazing sex, stupid sex, sexy sex, and self-cultivated sex (performer drops remaining pieces of hot dog on herself). Ok…I think that pretty much covers the basics. And the main thing all these sexy parties had in common was the intense amount of cum that came from my body (performer breaks a condom-water-balloon by smashing it on the floor). And strangely enough, this porn-star ability of mine wasn’t so well received by all. In fact, many of the men that I’ve been with didn’t enjoy it in the least. Ugh!?

Ok, so I wrote this little performance in response to this experience. It’s called Trajectory, in three acts. Look for it this Spring: (Anna runs and grabs a chair from off Stage R. The following scene takes place up stage right):

Act I: The Command
Guy: “Get wet for me baby”
Girl: “I’m not sure how to do that.”
Guy: “You have to get turned on”
Girl: “I’m not sure how to do that.”

Act II: The Response
Girl: “Oh my god, I’m so wet. Feel how much you turn me on.”

Guy: *(reaches over, feels, look of disgust)* yeah…that’s really nice *(clearly not enjoying it).*

Act III: The Release

Guy: *(giving his lady some face, which leads to an ejaculatory explosion all over him. He acts as though he’s dripping wet)* Ugh!…what--the hell--was that?

Girl: Oh my god, I’m so sorry, I should’ve warned you about that. *(Anna turns to deliver the next line to the audience)* This is the climax of the play *(Anna returns to her imaginary world)* I should’ve warned you!

Guy: Did you just pee on me?

Girl: no, I ejaculated *(said with pride, Anna then winks at audience).*

Thank you *(bow)*

*(Anna moves to down center stage)* “Is it pee?” Can you believe that guy? I mean, I suppose if I take a step back I can believe it. But here’s the thing, I really want to be angry at that guy, and perhaps for a while I was. I think I may have even called up one of my lady friends and went on some ridiculous tirade like, oh, I don’t know *(Anna approaches an audience member in the front row)*, “He asked if it was pee, not once, but multiple times, even after I told him it wasn’t. Like, what the hell, man? Am I just here for you? Am I not allowed to have an orgasm over here? Yeah, like I don’t know the difference between what it feels like to pee and what it feels like to cum. Uh, huh. I guess only YOUR orgasms are allowed to have tangible results? What if I asked him if the shit that comes out of his dick was pee? Ugh! Patriarchy!! *(Anna takes a centering breath, and calmly walks back onstage)*. But, the truth is, the first time I ever ejaculated, I had no idea what happened either. I was embarrassed, and confused, and shocked. Hello, flaws in sexual education.
Throughout the following paragraph, Nichole enters [stage right] and puts a strap-on harness with a hot dog attached to it on Anna). I guess, in some ways, I’d forgotten where I came from when asked the “is it pee?” question, and where I had come from is a place that some of you may know all too well. It’s a place that allows us to live in shame about our bodies, not knowing how they function and leaving us unaware of anything other than the ultimate male-ejaculate sex act. Up until a short time ago, I had no idea what a female orgasm could potentially look like, feel like, sound like, and the multiple manifestations of it. I just thought that sex meant a man getting hard, him penetrating me until he comes, and then … well that’s it. And if it just so happened to feel good at times, well then I was a lucky girl. (Lights fade to black).

[Sound Cue #4 - Single Ladies by Beyonce] (Knowles).

(Lights come up slowly at the beginning of the song to reveal the dancers already moving). [Dance Ends].

(Lights fade to black again. A spotlight is on stage right where Anna stands behind the table). I’ve always had anxiety. When I was a little kid, and my anxiety prevented me from sleeping, my mom would draw a heart on my face. With her index finger. she’d start at the dip in my nose between my eyebrows and move from the center to around the top of my left brow, following the curve down past my cheekbones and ending at the tip of my chin. She’d then repeat this on the right side of my face, completing the shape of the heart. She did this with the most delicately loving touch I’ve ever encountered. It always worked like a charm. Soon, I’d be asleep with the tracings of my mother’s heart etched into my subconscious.

There was a time in my life when I wasn’t able to sleep at all. I kept replaying images of him on top of me, choking me, and I couldn’t even keep my eyes closed. One sleepless night, at 4:38 a.m., I decided to trace my own heart on my face, just to see if it would help. My hands felt
just like my mother’s did all those years ago. As I laid there with my eyes closed remembering my mother’s love and realizing that I’d inherited her gentle touch, I started to cry. Tears ran down both sides of my face, interfering with the smooth caress of my skin. I felt agony like I hadn’t felt in years. I longed for my mother’s heart. I longed to feel comfort from the touch of another. I longed for when I couldn’t remember; when I was too young to understand my anxiety and when a heart-shape traced on my face with my mother’s hands would put all my fears to bed.

But at that particular sleepless time in life, nothing seemed to work. My body knew it needed this time to heal, and I had to face the images I saw when I closed my eyes. Years of secrets piling up in my gaze making me believe that one led directly to another. How having tree branches shoved inside of me at age three leads to my neighbor fucking me at age four. How my mom’s best friend teaching me how to masturbate at age 8 leads to her daughter’s hands inside of me at age 9. How old men grabbing my ass at ages 10, 12, 13 lead to me being trapped in the athletic equipment room by two star varsity athletes who wouldn’t let me go until I showed them my tits at age 14. How being coerced into sex throughout my late teens and early 20s led to the physical torture I inflicted upon myself because my body didn’t desire you, but I didn’t know how to say “no.” See, for the longest time, to me, sex and violence were always synonymous, and my worth as a human was nothing if you didn’t leave satisfied and I didn’t leave bruised.

In many ways I’ve reclaimed this abuse and learned to reframe it as welcomed masochistic pleasure, because honestly, I love being consensually whipped, and flogged, and bound, and choked. I do. And I used to struggle to find the answers. To figure out whether this was something I chose, or something I needed. But the truth is, for now, I choose to need this. I no longer need you to fuck me as hard as I blamed myself, but I still need you to fuck me. I want you to trace a heart that will leave a mark.
(Spotlight on stage right goes down and spotlight down-center comes up). A newer friend of mine asked me, on like, the second time we ever hung out, if I thought I knew how or why I’d become so hypersexual. OK, so there are two things I really love about this question: 1. The recognition and willingness to talk about my performance of sexuality; 2. The recognition that in our society, most of us aren’t brought-up to talk openly about sex, and when we do, we get labeled “hyper-sexual,” implying that we are more sexual than those around us, which isn’t necessarily true. Now, I know it may be hard for those folks who have only known me for a few years, or a few minutes, to believe that at one point, not that long ago, I was so guilt-stricken with anything surrounding sex that I would pray to God for hours, begging for forgiveness if anyone’s hand even came near the city limits of my Vag-town, USA, but it’s true.

So this new friend, he wasn’t condescending or sarcastic in his questioning. No, in fact he was quite genuine and respectful in his curiosity, so I decided to be open with him. I told him about some of the events in my life that have led up to the person I am today. I told him about the invasion, the blood, the pain, the abuse I endured as a child and teenager, something I’d only recently come to terms with in my life.

See, it’s all about transforming the shame and guilt that I felt for years into something positive. It’s a matter of survival. For years, the only way we have been allowed to talk about sex, is through an attempt to repress it. And perhaps the French philosopher Michel Foucault is right, even our best attempts to silence sex, only cause it to become more tangible. But that doesn't mean that the stories that we choose to tell have no effect on us. For many women, the violation of their bodies is supposed to make them hate sex forever and long to escape from their bodies. For me, it has created a desire to find something new in sex, to find something redeeming. And that journey to redemption, though not perfect, has been painfully beautiful.
(Lights fade one more time, and a light comes up down right where Anna is standing behind a chair, leaning against the back of it, facing the audience). I say your name until it becomes foreign to my ears. I read you every night. You give to me over and over again. You fill me. You FULL-fill me, full. I’ve memorized your smiles, the way you bite your bottom lip, the way you move your hips. I shake to think of you. I’m a frosted-lemon coward, and I don’t know how to tell you that I want to hold you, that I want to feel your hands sliding over my skin—my warm skin with hairs standing on end. I see your hands move through space, and I drift into my own, closing my eyes and making that sound, you know that sound, you know the “mmmmm” of desire. And then I come back to reality, and remember you’re not inside of me, and I yearn, harder than the night before.

How do you tell someone you love their anger without just saying, “I love your anger?” Your anger shows me you’re real, that you’re human, that you’re substantive. “Je veux ton amour, et je veux ta revenge” (Gaga, “Bad”). I want it. I want to dress you up and force you to dominate me. I want you as the pitcher to my switch-hitter. I want to get high on your chemicals, bury my face in those dark places so few get the pleasure of encountering. I want you to count on me. I want you to cum on me, and in me, after I’ve made you harder and wetter than you have ever been before. I want you to understand that I understand that this is probably not forever, so give me what I know we both need right now, and love the way tonight, and perhaps tonight only, begs us to.

(Spotlight fades as a wash comes up). Ok, so there’s something I need to get off my chest. Earlier I mentioned the phrase “roast beef vagina.” Which, let’s face it, that phrase in and of itself, is kinda funny. I mean, pretty gross, but still kinda funny. The first time I heard this a couple years ago, I had no idea what it meant. Upon asking the man who said it to explain, he
said, “it’s like when a woman gets used up and her inner lips start to hang below her outer lips.”

OK, let’s just jump to the most problematic part of that statement: the phrase, “when a woman gets used up.” It has been estimated that 1/3 women worldwide will experience some form of violence in their lives, which can include rape, sexual assault, acid burnings, and female genital mutilation (“Facts”). So what does it mean when you say that a woman is “used up?” Was her body violated in ways she had no control over? If so, I guess it makes sense that you would compare her to meat. The animals we eat have no say in whether or not they get slaughtered.

But that’s not exactly what he meant. No, he was referring to a woman who was perhaps older, or maybe has had a kid, or worst of all, is a slut. This whole notion of a woman who is “used up” possessing a “roast beef vagina,” which makes her far less desirable and attractive, is the age-old argument that a woman who sleeps around is not deserving of love, affection, happiness, even sex. I mean, how exciting is opening your presents on Christmas after you’ve already peeled back the wrapping to take a peak on Christmas Eve? Well I say, *fuck that*. Sex is the gift that keeps on giving, and it only gets better the more you do it.

So let’s collectively say enough is enough. Enough of the slut shaming, enough of the body shaming, enough with things like cosmetic labiaplasty. Enough of the trophy wives and expectations of masculinity. Enough of a sex-negative culture that makes women out to be meat. Instead, I say let’s transform all of these things: Transform slut shame into slut pride (bless you, Margaret Cho); transform the pain into pleasure, like Bob Flanagan did; transform the silence into garrulousness; and transform the fear and hatred of our bodies into exploration and appreciation. That’s what all of this is about: transformation. The work that Bob Flanagan did, and the work I’m trying to do here tonight, is all about subverting the polite, contained, sanitary bodies we have come to expect in art and literature, in our everyday bodies, in the ways we do
and don’t talk about sex, or in our selection of meat purchases. I am reanimating this flesh, giving it back the pulse it so often gets stripped of. And I’m asking you to join me in this reanimation, even if it means I have to splash you in the face.

And it’s like Lady Gaga once said, “I want women—and men—to feel empowered by a deeper . . . part of themselves. The part they’re always trying desperately to hide. I want that to become something that they cherish” (Powers 3). AND, “once you kill a cow, you gotta make a burger” (“Lady”).

(Anna takes remaining slab of meat and throws it down on the ground. Lights go black instantly once it hits the stage floor).

[Sound Cue # 5 – I Like You So Much Better When You’re Naked by Ida Maria] (Maria).

(House lights come up for a curtain call/dance party with the audience).
VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Anna Charlotte Wilcoxen Date of Birth: January 10, 1986

annacharlotte.wil@gmail.com

2652 Lepage Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70119

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, Speech Communication – Performance Studies, August 2009


Major Professor: Craig Gingrich-Philbrook