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Front Cover Image: Jessica Pizaña Roberts**,** Rosarita in "Ay Papi," (1:02s), Video Still, 2012.

Back Cover images: Jessica Pizaña Roberts**,** Mother Goodness in "Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice...Thats what Little Girls are made of," (4:03s), Video Still, 2012.

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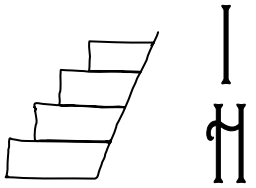
Fat Representations



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Editors' Introduction

Brenda A. Risch *The University of Texas at El Paso*
Christoph Zepeda, *Alliant International University, San Francisco*

> *The only thing that anyone can diagnose with any certainty, by looking at a fat person, is their own level of stereotype and prejudice toward fat people.*
>
> —Marilyn Wann, "Fat Studies: An Invitation to Revolution," *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009)

Fat studies is a burgeoning field within a vibrant interdisciplinary history. Groundbreaking scholars such as Ester Rothblum, Kathleen LeBesco, Jana Evans Braziel, Sondra Solovay, and Linda Bacon stem from disciplines as diverse as Psychology, English and American Literature, Law, Physiology, and Women's and Gender Studies. Indeed the history of fat studies has strong roots in work that crosses into community and political activism as well, with independent scholars such as Jewish lesbian poet Elana Dykewomon, and acclaimed fat activist Marilyn Wann consistently producing works both artistic and political that question sizeism and fat oppression from an intersectional point of view.

The purpose of this issue is to present a window onto current fat studies scholarship from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. In doing so, we hope our contribution to fat studies will provide scholars who are new to the field a selection of fat-focused critical inquiry and help unpack the thin/fat binary; meanwhile, the host of mediums discussed, ranging from traditional American literature to performative art to mainstream media and international film, faithfully promote worldwide study, teaching, and understanding of the humanities across a range of disciplines—the heart of *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, official journal of the Humanities Education and Research Association.

Our issue opens with a poetic expression that celebrates the voluptuous body. Written by Denise Jolly, the poem reveals a degree of fullness in a manner that is often rendered invisible or concealed. Lusciously thought provoking and peerless in its own right, the piece playfully blends sexuality and fatness without reservation, an image often colored by a sense of obscenity and grotesquery. In the articles that follow, various literary and visual representations of fatness are explored, engaging with the question of how representations of fat articulate subjectivity. As readers will notice, our authors also consider how gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, age, and physical ability are woven into or expressed through fat viewpoints. Moreover, they encourage readers to question what theories of being rise out of positioning fat, plenitude, and abundance as a positive attribute.

Specifically, the authors in this issue challenge common discourses pertaining to fat embodiment by unraveling the implications of its gendered visibility. In the first article, Maya Maor examines the on-stage performances of Kimberly Dark—a fat, queer, mother, sociologist, and performance artist—through the lenses of what Meleo-Elwin termed "the politics of the ordinary and familiar." Maor skillfully articulates the many tensions that Dark's performances evoke in her audiences, chronicling how Dark prods, amuses, and surprises her audiences into realizing the complexity and humanity of folks different from them, whether that be in terms of fat, disability, sexuality, race, or gender. Maor's piece provides an important example for readers from many disciplines of how performance art can function as a consciousness-raising tool to provoke personal examination of prejudice and stereotypes, rather than languishing as a stereotyped genre characteristic of spoiled and selfish elite cadres of performers and viewers.

Anne Stachura's analysis of Simón Bross's 2007 film *Malos hábitos (Bad habits)* zeroes in on the act of eating in relation to consumption and denial, elaborating on how eating is positioned as an activity of significance/insignificance. Drawing on Jane Bennett's concept of an actant, Stachura argues that food as a material entity is given an identity in *Malos hábitos* and serves as a source of power and control that ultimately determines the conditions of the protagonists' outcomes and choices in the film's portrayal of Calorie Wars, which are driven by two opposing ideologies.

Jasie Stokes works to locate the nexus at which fat identity politics, revolutionary acts and language, and feminist visual theory intersect in her piece entitled "Fat People of the World Unite!: Subjectivity, Identity, and Representation in Fat Feminist Manifestoes." Stokes explores some of the feminist-influenced declarations of the fat activist movement in the last forty years, from the radical feminist Fat Liberation Manifesto, to the autobiographical manifestoes found in fat activist zines, and finally to the growing use of visual representations of the fat body in fashion blogs and body positive websites.

In her article "Huge Women and Tiny Men: Sex, Luxury and Control in Depression-Era Faulkner," Alicia Bones considers the meaning of the

juxtaposition of lush, powerful large women with small, emasculated men in William Faulkner's pieces *Sanctuary* and *The Hamlet*. Her analysis of the main characters from these works moves beyond an obvious mapping of power and exploitation to ask questions about agency and individuality within a historically contextualized portrayal of men emasculated and women allowed grotesque freedom by the social disorder of the Great Depression.

Subsequently, Lee Ann Westman follows with an interview with book cover artist, Jessica Pizaña Roberts. Positioned as a "Spanglish" artist born and raised in the El Paso, Texas/Juárez, Mexico Borderland, Roberts' mixed media work explores identity and culture through the lens of body politics. Her work addresses the body's mutability and change and often pushes the limits of viewer's understanding of consumption, representation, and body modification, addressing eating, lactation, plastic surgery, and sexual performance among other topics. Her innovative skin suits, pictured on the covers of this issue, provoke viewers to consider the tensions between the multiple roles inscribed onto fat bodies, especially those of women.

And finally, the issue closes with a film review of *The Deep* by one of the guest co-editors, Christoph Zepeda. Focusing on such themes as body size, masculinity, heroism, and narratives of survival, he argues that the film provides commentary on Heroes of size and the way in which they are influenced by socially constructed appearance ideals. Along this framework, he examines what complexities and textures of superhero-hood become visible in a fat superhero and how he is *trans*lated in film.

We would like to thank all of the contributors for their enthusiasm and their help to make this issue possible. We are also grateful to Lee Ann Westman for her unwavering support and absolute patience throughout this process.

Body

Denise Jolley

Body, I see you
skin, rose hued alabaster

wearing all that thick and juicy
ass shake and swagger.

Dance body,
Move like living is what you were built for.

Let love fuck the hate back out of you.
Shake the sweat off your skin beyond morning.

After all
It is fall outside.

The world is still burning,
crumbling into mulching ash.

Survival is we rise up from.
It is not a sole reason for living.

Becoming the Subject of Your Own Story: Creating Fat-positive Representations

Maya Maor
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva, Israel

Introduction

In her on-stage performances, Kimberly Dark—fat, queer, mother, sociologist and performance artist—brings to life the ambiguity and complexity of embodying a non-normative body. In her series of performances entitled, "Complicated Courtesies, Dykeotomy, Good Fortune, and Becoming the Subject of Your Own Story—Rather Than the Object of Another's Gaze!," Dark uses her personal experiences to discuss and deconstruct social stereotypes about fatness and the fat female body as it intersects with other identities, embodiments and a variety of social settings. She encourages diverse audiences to explore their narratives in the same way. This article explores Dark's embodied performance through the lenses of what Zoë Meleo-Erwin termed "the politics of the ordinary and familiar."

According to Meleo-Erwin, members of stigmatized groups publicly share everyday stories and embrace moments of celebration and pride, as well as shame and fear, using a strategy of cultural resistance. Through these stories, non-normative modes of embodiment—deemed invisible or intimidating through mainstream media—become familiar and ordinary, and thus intelligible.

Power relations and processes of subjectification are inextricably interwoven into social life, pervading even contexts of opposition to hegemonic power relations, such as communities who struggle for social change.[1] The political strategies behind different forms of social struggles, including fat activism, do not only represent or reflect, but are also "helping to produce 'Fat' as a mode of subjectification, identification and collectivity."[2] Some of these fat modes of being are empowering, but also exclude fat individuals who cannot measure up to them. For example, because fat women

are often represented in mainstream media as asexual or practicing in a sexual masquerade, some fat-positive activities are focused on creating links between fatness and positive sexuality.[3] Such forms of fat activism, including fat burlesque and fashion shows for fat women, certainly provide alternative and positive imagery of the fat female body. Simultaneously, they may empower fat women by expanding normative modes of femininity, which are based on gendered, sexual and racial hierarchies, such as heterosexuality.[4] By analyzing Kimberly Dark's performances, this article contributes to the understanding of mechanisms and strategies that produce fat-positive counter-culture in general and fat-positive performances specifically.

Fat studies literature has examined the relationship between performance, fat politics, and fat embodiment, in a variety of contexts: the fat female body and comedy, the art works of performance artist Cindy Baker, the "fat lady" at Coney Island Seashore, and fat burlesque.[5] The relationship between fat politics and performances can be examined across a variety of axes, such as the degree in which the performance serves to disrupt or reinforce hegemonic discourses regarding fat, gendered or racial discourses.

In this paper, I argue that it can be especially useful to analyze the relationship between performance and fat politics through differentiating three types of politics that characterize these performances: assimilation politics, parody/grotesque politics, and what Meleo-Erwin refers to as "the politics of the familiar and the ordinary." I will argue that the performances of Kimberly Dark serve as a particularly striking instance of the latter.

On the basis of a series of conversations with Dark, and observations of several of her performances, I explore three mechanisms through which "politics of the ordinary and familiar" can neutralize fat stigma and stereotypes via stage performances. These include: (1) engaging politically with everyday experiences; (2) public presentation and exploration of the intersection of fat with other identities (e.g. sexual, gender, racial); and (3) performing ambiguous fat embodiment. I also argue that the employment of the "politics of ordinary and familiar," with an emphasis on ambiguous embodiment, could potentially resolve some of the difficulties that arise from performances based on assimilation or parody/grotesque politics.

Fat Studies, fat oppression and resistance to fat oppression

The motivation to understand the strategies and possibilities to resist fat oppression positions this paper within a fast-developing, inspiring interdisciplinary field of scholarship called fat studies. This field has challenged the causal relationship between fat and poor health; historicized and contextualized current cultural attitudes toward fatness; documented the marginalization and oppression of fat individuals in contemporary, Western societies, their effect on personal identity and the creative resistance to these messages, including different forms of fat acceptance and fat activism.[6]

The rise of fat acceptance movements is one of the most striking expressions of this resistance.[7] Since its inception, several of its branches have been involved in the creation of a fat-positive counter-culture.[8] This effort is extremely varied and includes organizing support groups and social groups, producing and distributing a calendar displaying fat women, creation of fat-positive art, and more.

Performance, fat politics and fat embodiment

Fat performance is a broad term covering everything from mundane performances of fat individuals to staged performances of fatness. The latter includes both mainstream media performances that present fat people as grotesque, and fat-positive performances which aim to challenge preconceived stereotypes of fat and fat people.

Scholars have shown us that even fatness-related performances that take place in anti-fat settings have unexpected, subversive effects, while fat-positive performances may have unwanted excluding effects.[9] It is likely that most stage performances of fat have contradictory, changing and unexpected political interpretations and implications, as a result of the indeterminacy and fluidity of discourse and interpretation.[10] Meleo-Erwin proposes a useful analytical distinction regarding the political strategies behind various forms of fat activism, distinguishing a politics of assimilation and of parody/grotesque. In the following section, I will briefly describe each types and provide examples of how each political strategy is manifested in stage performances of fat.

Politics of assimilation

In general, politics of assimilation operates by distancing stigmatized groups from stigma, and bringing them closer to "normative" modes of being.[11] This strategy can be used to reach others outside the stigmatized group; for example, when social activists work to raise public consciousness about the erroneous nature of stereotypes about the stigmatized group. This strategy can also be used to reach members of stigmatized groups themselves in events such as workshops that are designed to empower members of stigmatized groups, countering beliefs that they are not "normal." Most forms of fat activism that are based on a politics of assimilation focus on stereotypes around fat sexuality (e.g., showing that fat individuals are sexual and romantically loveable), or health (arguing that fat does not necessarily equal bad health). Critics of a politics of assimilation would argue that the concept of "normal," and what counts as "normative" in a specific cultural context, are not a-historical or neutral, carry political stakes, and exclude some groups.[12] Fat acceptance that is based on expanding "normative" sexuality and/or health to fat individuals may lead to exclusion of asexual or ill fat individuals. Adopting an assimilation-based politics may also limit the repertoires of

legitimate narratives and discourses regarding fatness within the fat acceptance community.

In stage performances that are based on politics of assimilation, the performer associates the fat body with positive traits or performs a rebuttal of common stereotypes about fatness. In her analysis of comedian Dawn French's program "On Big Women," Hole provides an example of one assimilation-based fat performance in action. In this show, French attempts to deconstruct the stereotypes linking fat women to ugliness or asexuality, searching for a photographer who can photo sexy pictures of fat women. Hole's critique of the "body politics" embedded in French's program is similar to Meleo-Erwin's critique of assimilation-based politics. Both argue that associating the fat body with "normative" ideals leads to the perpetuation of their oppressive dimensions and excludes those who cannot measure up. Performances based on assimilation politics may also create a hierarchy where the now "normalized" stigmatized group is still perceived as inferior to those who come closer to the ideal (fat models vs. thin models).

Politics of parody/grotesque

Whereas assimilation politics aims to associate the fat body with the "normal," parody/grotesque politics aims to accentuate the incompatibility of the fat body with the normal, in order to demonstrate how artificial, arbitrary or implausible "normality" is. Meleo-Erwin argues that this approach has two major advantages. First, it relieves members of stigmatized groups from the pressure of continually striving to be "normal." Second, it helps to uncover the oppressive aspects of the normative ideal, avoiding the exclusion of members who cannot approximate the norm that is sometimes the product of assimilation politics.

In a parody/grotesque fat performance, the performer exaggerates or parodies normative body ideals by accentuating the fat body's incompatibility with them, visually or verbally. Hole analyzes the "body politics" of Dawn French's collaboration with another comedian in the "French & Saunders series" as a performance based on a completely different type of politics. In different episodes, French and Saunders accentuate the physicality of their fat bodies by wearing skin-tight, flashy dresses (that are usually reserved for fashionably-thin women) and playing out traditional gender roles in an accentuated manner (similarly to drag performativity which also touches upon gender roles in an accentuated manner) . By exaggerating female behaviors and appearances associated with these roles (overly sexual or anorexic), they show that the demand for women to be thin is neither plausible nor beneficial to women.[13]

Performances based on parody/grotesque politics also have downsides. First, parodying is still a type of imitation, which recognizes the power of the normative categories it imitates, and treats them as points of reference.[14] Second, this genre of politics remains symbolic, and does not offer members

of stigmatized groups material alternatives to help cope with society's anti-fat biases. Third, the ability to "correctly" interpret parody depends on the audience and context. It is possible that some individuals would interpret French and Saunders' show as proof of the fat body's inherent inability to fit in.

Not all stage fat performance can be easily divided into these two types of politics. Fat burlesque performances, for example, seem to expand norms of heterosexual sexuality and feminine appearance to fat women. But they do so by representing female sexuality in ways that were popular in the past (early 1920s), thus parodying contemporary ones.[15]

The politics of the familiar and the ordinary

Meleo-Erwin articulates a third political strategy that may help counter some of the difficulties raised by assimilation and parody/grotesque politics. On the basis of Eli Clare's keynote speech at the 2002 Queer Disability Conference in San Francisco, she articulates the strategy of employing "the familiar and the ordinary" as a form of political resistance. Rooted in the insights of disability, queer and feminist studies, this strategy includes: (1) engaging politically with every day interactions with others; (2) exploiting the subversive potential of queer, multiple and intersecting identities; and (3) making room for contradictory experiences of shame and pain, as well as celebration and pleasure, thereby challenging the dichotomy between resistance and conformity.

In the following sections, I will briefly present the main features of Kimberly Dark's performances as a form of fat activism, in comparison to fat burlesque. I will then argue that her performances should be viewed as an instance of the politics of the familiar and the ordinary. This type of fat performance offers fat politics an interesting and useful model for political resistance.

Kimberly Dark's performance and fat politics

In the majority of fat performances based on an assimilation politics, the performer embodies a political message. In a burlesque performance, for example, the performer embodies the message of fat sensuality and sexuality. Dark's performances resemble assimilation-based performance as the dignified context allows her to represent a fat woman with positive traits: "Regardless of the stories I offer, the audience is looking at my body while I'm telling the story … it's rare for the fat female body to be on display in a dignified context."[16]

Even when the stories Dark tells do not overtly center on positive-fat themes, her performance of a large, confident, sexy, seductive, feminist woman generates a positive representation of fat embodiment, alternative to mainstream ridiculing and diminishing representations of fat women:

"Audience members would tell me how heartened they were to see me (and at this, they'd extend their arms to reference my whole body) on stage, telling those stories."[17]

Dark's performances also resemble assimilation politics by creating "safe places" for fat women. In her work on fat burlesque, Asbill describes how the performance allows performers to feel beautiful, sexy and graceful as fat women, disrupting hegemonic discourses. By watching the performers, women in the audience also have an opportunity to build their self-image. All of Dark's performances include interaction with the audience, although the intensity of these exchanges varies. Dark appears in front of different audiences, which do not have the same degree of awareness regarding fat acceptance. With audiences where this is a new and challenging concept, Dark allows them to view their own internalized fat hatred for the first time. Even from these audiences, however, Dark receives feedback indicating that during her performance, women in the audience have a chance to work out issues relating to body image and related self-esteem.

"The fat female body is just there"

In performances based on assimilation or parody/grotesque politics, fat as a stigmatized identity takes center stage, either to normalize the fat body or de-normalize the mainstream body. In contrast, in many of Dark's performances, she just lets her body *be* on stage, and that is itself the message:

> I'm being competent, funny, capable, sexy - at the same time that I'm being fat. The fatness is incidental, and yet, of course it's not, it's there for all to see… the audience can see my many identities as I tell the stories I tell, and they can simply LOOK at my body the whole time…[18]

So, rather than talk about her fat body, or even perform in ways that directly reference or highlight it (by dressing in a certain way or making certain gestures), Dark talks and performs other things, while being fat; and that is—in itself—part of the message. The audience cannot avoid her fatness, and by making it present, in conjunction with otherwise unrelated issues and performance, the female fat body insinuates itself into those topics and themes, and converses with them, in a manner which is all the more effective for its unobtrusive delivery.

This dynamic can be observed in Dark's treatment of fat sexuality. This is a prominent theme in fat activism in general, and fat performance in particular, because stigmatization of fat individuals "tends to focus a great deal around the area of sexuality."[19] Performances based both on assimilation and parody/grotesque politics engage with fat embodiment and sexuality.

Dark conveys her fat positive message by *speaking* openly about her sexuality while *being* a fat woman. The fact that her fat body is "just" there, or

rather, the fact that this body does not critically affect her sexuality, is what creates a scandalizing effect, undermining the "obvious" notion that for fat women, sexuality is always overshadowed by fatness.

Engaging politically with everyday experiences

Dark does not simply diverge from the messaging strategy of assimilation and parody/grotesque performances, she also employs her own brand of politics, which fits the politics of the ordinary and the familiar as defined by Maleo-Erwin. This is clear from the subject matter of her performances, which deviates from the world of Hollywood stars or ballet dancers, to mundane events and situations, ranging from visits to the beach to everyday conversations.

In *Becoming the Subject of Your Own Story - Rather Than the Object of Another's Gaze!*, Dark performs her poem "Work of Art." The poem is about a conversation she had with a friend who told her about her "weight loss project," a topic probably familiar to most women:

> My friend said:
> I haven't written a poem since last year.
> I stopped doing it.
> My new creative project is my body.
> I've lost thirty pounds and I'm working out now.
> My body is my creative project.
> I've decided to sculpt fat.

Dark discusses the conflict between the socially expected emphatic and supportive response and a critical analysis of the political aspects of this everyday situation:

> I felt suddenly light headed,
> as in any bad social situation where you have to
> listen to someone say something inane and be polite
> Or wait,
> in this case, maybe I was supposed to be supportive,
> think she'd said something witty.
> No, if sculpting fat were an art form, we'd all be Rodin…
> We'd all be gifted, lauded and comfortable with our expressions.
> But this isn't really comfortable, is it?
> It's because it isn't really art.
> In fact, this is the place where women's creativity goes to die!

Dark decides not to go along with the emphatic responses coded in the social script, and calls for her friend, and the audience, to discover other, less self-damaging and more fulfilling outlets for creativity and empowerment:

> No. I will not help you disparage yourself my friend.
> My body is not my creative project, my sculpture.
> It is my home.
> And I have other outlets for my creativity
> because my expression,
> through this body,
> is a work of art already.

In her performances, Dark does not only politicize *her* everyday experiences. She urges her audience to do the same, to engage politically with *their* everyday lives and to rethink their preconceived schemas about a range of identities. Politicizing everyday life also involves becoming aware of one's position, engagement, or relation to other groups' struggles.

Emphasizing multiple and intersecting identities

In accordance with the politics of the ordinary and familiar, Dark never performs an identity on stage. She always intentionally engages her audience in her own unique intersection of plural identities:

> I'm currently a middle-aged, femme, queer, fat, white-privileged, mixed-race, cisgender, able-bodied woman with varying amounts of beauty privilege depending on the viewer's beauty norms…[20]

In *Complicated Courtesies*, Dark employs the metaphor of the "Chimera," in order to explicate to her audience that we all have plural identities and aspects of selves:

> Does anybody know what a chimera is? A chimera is… a mythological creature that's made of perfectly normal animals but when they come together… they also take on additional powers… Chimeras actually exist in a number of different world mythologies… So for example, in Greek mythology a chimera is part lion, part goat, part snake, and it can breathe fire and it is always female- wrap your mind around that…

At this point, it is obvious to the audience that Dark refers to herself and the audience laughs:

> Folks, I am a chimera - and a courteous one! Because I understand that the way I live my great big interesting life can sometimes be scary to others. And genuinely, I don't want to offend. It's just that I don't want to make my life small, so that other people can be more comfortable [Dark draws the

> contours of a box with her hands, small here means one, or one-dimensional identity].. Does anyone here identify with this idea? Really, I think most of us are chimeras on the inside.

In the same performance, Dark discusses fat stigma by breaking down the characteristics of stigma as an abstract concept articulated by the sociologist Erving Goffman. She provides examples from her everyday life, while focusing the plurality of her intersecting identities:

> I would like to introduce you to Erving Goffman … He spoke about how we manage our identities… there are certain ways according to Erwin that you can get a permanently spoiled identity… I realize that it will be terribly impolite of me to ask you to talk about your spoiled identities in public, so we'll use me as an example… All right: defects of the body… I am able bodied, I have all of my senses intact… I also walk with my legs, don't use a wheelchair…

At this point, Dark breaks down the concept of fat stigma and oppression to its everyday experiences:

> …these are the big ones, the big ones that start to rob people of their social privileges, but let's face it: I'm too fat to be socially acceptable… it's possible that you sit there thinking: ah, look, that's not such a big deal, people don't really lose social privileges to that, do they? Well, if that's what you're thinking that's just evidence of how we normalize the ways that we take privileges from certain groups… 'cause folks, all you have to do is ask a bigger person, especially a larger woman… All you have to do is just look at how fat women are portrayed by the media… look at comedy, look at sitcoms, look at Halloween costumes to see just how much disrespect you can get…

Dark continues to talk about defects of character, counting the fact that she sometimes curses and that her womanhood accentuates this defect in people's minds. She also counts the fact that she talks publicly about very personal experiences in her performances, which also measures as a character defect, for some. Then, Dark moves on to talk about her queer identity:

> Membership in devalued social groups – woohoo - where do I start? Let's just start with the fact that I'm queer. Now listen, I could hide that because I'm fairly gender normative… like, I'm not the big scary dyke [audience laughs] the fact that

> we can all laugh means that we have shared meaning there … I could hide that [being queer] but I choose not to… although it may become clear why you would want to hide a spoiled identity, so that you can do stuff like have a job…

Dark utilizes the intersection of her different identities as a performative tool, carefully navigating the interaction with audience, very much like "language that fails us and serves us at the same time."[21] Since not all audience members necessarily share Dark's positions on social issues, highlighting her stigmatized identities entails the risk of alienating some of them. Talking about her queer identity, for instance, can alienate those who are fat "insiders" but queer outsiders.

But she does not back down, using humor and honesty to defuse the potential for hostile reactions. And it works: the audience laughs, not because they have suddenly been freed of their stereotypes, but because her reassuring tone allows them to reflect on their own attitudes in a critical manner. Avoiding accusations, she admits taking part of the "normative" game, allowing the audience to admit the same about themselves.

Dark continues to explore her gendered and racial identities:

> We still live in a culture that on the whole pays women less money for the same work it pays men…I am also a mixed race person, but maybe that does not go on the list because [points at her body] I have white privilege.

Dark chooses to present her fat identity in proximity to other stigmatized identities, such as queer identity. In doing so, she does the opposite of distancing fat identity from stigma: she intensifies the stigma associated with it. The rationale of her performance fundamentally differs from assimilation politics, which seeks to dissociate identity from stigma. At the same time, Dark does not *over*perform stigma, as in parody/grotesque. For example, Dark often chooses to dress like "a "nice lady", in a "sexy" or "silly-feminine" clothing (e.g. wearing floral print blouse and big flower in my hair, along with a cheerful, open-faced demeanor). Rather, the mechanism behind her performance includes translating abstract concepts into everyday experiences, making them familiar and easily imaginable to her audience, and thus intelligible and less intimidating or alienating.

Dark not only juxtaposes her fat identity with her many other identities, she also demonstrates to her audience how fat identity blends and interacts with other stigmatized identities. In her performance at the 2011 annual conference of NWSA in Atlanta, Dark performed part of her story "Becoming Travolta." Dark engaged with the intersection of her identity as a fat woman, and as a queer woman. She performed a scene from her early adolescence, when she and her friends reenacted the roles of characters from the movie

"*Grease*." Dark recounted how each time she was cast the role of the male (and not female) protagonist of the movie: Danny Zuko.

Dark reveals to the audience that even she herself did not doubt this casting, because her fat identity and large body *predisposed* her to the male role. At first, she evokes feelings of shame and pain. It is obvious that she wanted to play Sandy, the female protagonist, sometimes. On the one hand, as a girl, she identified with Sandy's feminine role, but as a *large* girl, she was re-cast, and then identified, with the male role.

As the performance continues, Dark reveals a more complex picture. At later points in her life, her queer subject position allowed her to re-appropriate and incorporate characteristics and traits that are culturally associated with masculinity, such as activity (versus passivity), or the option to relate erotically to other women. Dark's gendered repertoire was widened rather than diminished by her fat and queer identities.

Making room for contradictory experiences of shame and pain, as well as celebration and pleasure

Dark addresses the third element of the politics of the familiar and the ordinary as well—making room for contradiction, ambiguity and complexity. She performs the intersection of queer and fat identity at two points in time: first, as a negative experience, enforced from outside (by a society which views a large body as a signifier of masculinity), and as a positive identity that allows greater maneuver space within gender roles, identities and expectations.

Many of the excerpts and examples from Dark's performance mentioned above demonstrate how Dark makes room in her performances for moments of shame and pain, but also moments of celebration, acceptance and rebellion. First, Dark performs a range of personal experiences, from "tall, pretty, privileged" to "fat woman invisibility." Second, Dark show how moments of celebration, pride and shame are intertwined in reality.

In *Complicated Courtesies*, Dark recounts another everyday experience that demonstrates that acts of subversion and resistance need not be considered antagonistic or mutually exclusive with acts of social conformity. The interplay between elements of conformity and resistance is continuously taking place. In this case, Dark shows that even when we feel powerless when we face anti-fat remarks or comments, we can become powerful by preserving our human dignity and responding:

> Let's just say that I am at the beach, as I often am, and someone gives me one of these looks. Now listen, if you are a big girl, maybe even a big guy, you know these looks, or god forbid, comments… a look that says something like: fat women are not entitled to enjoy the sunshine on their skin and the breeze, somehow you should be covered up or put away. Those looks happen more than some of you might

> think. And when they do, I do my best to maintain eye contact, maybe make a little joke, but I stay in my full humanity, because in that moment I'm looking at someone who is wounded and doesn't yet know it…

Dark's performance and analysis of this experience of harassment and shaming presents the situation as indicating the aggressor's inferiority, rather than as a validation of fat stigma. Dark's attempts to change common cognitive schemes and tropes is also evident in her treatment of common binaries or dichotomies. Dark continuously challenges, and encourages her audience to challenge, the Western tendency to think in binaries:

> We have a cultural norm about thinking in binaries: good and bad, right and wrong, day and night, male and female -- right? It's very hard for us to contain ambiguity because it's not part of our cultural and linguistic norm. But actually, these are false dichotomies. There is a whole lot more diversity happening than just all of those one-or-the-other scenarios…

Recognizing the falsehood of binaries and dichotomies and embracing ambiguity makes it possible to recognize and accommodate persons who do not neatly fall into established categories or stereotypes. Boundaries between bodily-based categories, for example, are neither clear-cut nor permanent (e.g. a fat person can lose weight, skin color is often ambiguous). In the case of gender expression, tolerating ambiguity allows us to accommodate persons with physical attributes that are now (under the gender binary) labeled as belonging to the opposite gender. People then also have the freedom to express and develop traits that are associated with either gender within a binary system. For the fat acceptance movement, recognizing ambiguity increases the movement's ability to tolerate contradictions among members (e.g. rejecting fat stigma while still wanting to lose weight), and to accept members of different body size.

Making room for ambiguity and contradiction within fat acceptance discourse

Dark's performance opens up space for recognizing the plurality of embodied ways of being, as well as their complex and often contradictory nature. Making room for negative and painful aspects of fat embodiment in a fat liberation context is especially important, since fat acceptance communities tend, like other communities of social protest and liberation, to foster the fantasy of "pure resistance." Instances of identification with dominant ideologies pose the threat of "the enemy within" what is supposed to be a safe space, and remind members that because of the bombardment of dominant messages, even the most dedicated activists often have ambivalent feelings.

Some fat acceptance communities deal with this issue by constructing the borders of the community around the ideal "resisting" fat subjects.[22] In this context, members who are not able to fully accept their fat bodies, either by wanting to lose weight or by actually losing weight, are regarded as a threat to the integrity of the movement's political messages of self-acceptance.[23] These members become caught "in a new web of shame and guilt,"[24] and are disciplined, e.g. encouraged to keep their desire to lose weight to themselves.[25]

Fat acceptance strategies and tactics, or performances that emphasize the positive and glamorous aspects of fat embodiment, are essential to the fat acceptance movement. As Hill[26] points out, in a cultural climate of fat hatred, declaring that beauty lies outside the body is simply not enough to enable empowerment for fat women. Only explicit valorization and assertion of fat bodies' beauty and grace can lead to significant fat acceptance.[27]

However, when a subject is embedded within an oppressive social context, a consciousness of pure resistance, self-acceptance or valorization is neither possible nor necessary.[28] Subjectivity is multivocal, plural, contradictory and constantly changing, for those who practice fat acceptance as much as for everyone else.[29] The ambivalent nature of resistance is not a deformity or deficiency, but rather symbolic of the inner dynamics by which resistance manifests itself over time. Accordingly, acts of subversion and resistance need not be considered antagonistic or mutually exclusive with acts of social conformity.

In this article, I have shown how Kimberly Dark's performances have created a performative outlet that allows a re-working of the ambiguous and contradictory nature of everyday embodiment of fat. Making room for the full spectrum of fat embodiment also enables us to challenge "false, binary choices of reclamation and celebration or shame and normalization" and to make room for "contradictory and multiple stories which, in turn, allows for both a more complex ethos of embodiment and a more inclusive politics of resistance."[30]

In addition, Dark's emphasis on the intersection of identities has special significance in relation to fat politics, precisely because "Obese people are fat first, and only secondarily are seen as possessing ancillary characteristics."[31] Dark refers to this point:

> It's powerful for people to be able to experience the fat body morphing through a variety of identities. Powerful in its rarity and in the way it prompts people to consider all of the identities they occupy within the one relatively fixed appearance each person seems to possess.[32]

When Dark performs her poem "Work of Art" in her performance, *Becoming the Subject of Your Own Story—Rather Than the Object of Another's Gaze*!, she simultaneously embraces different narratives regarding the cause of fatness:

> When you see a woman with a really big ass, she has that ass for one of two reasons: Either she comes from big ass people genetically –
> or she's had a tough life, as most people have, and she has chosen an addiction that doesn't fuck up her ability to think. Aw come on. [to the audience] You know those choices…but hey, there is no one alive who has a big ass because she is stupid, or lazy or inattentive, "Oh my god, when did that get here? I didn't notice" [laughs from the audience]. And having a big ass does not keep her from being capable or sexual or lovable or damaged by people who want to attach female worth to their ability to remain as small as children.

The passage above contains several normative assumptions about fat. Talking about the causes of fat implicitly assumes that fat is a problem to be solved. Suggesting that fat is the result of addictive eating reinforces the dominant medical framing of fat. These adherences to orthodoxy does not discredit Dark's resistance to fat stigma. Resistance and self-acceptance are never pure, nor is purity necessary. Dark's fat-positive performance need not achieve "pure" resistance in order to be effective in promoting social change. Dark's ability to make her audience re-think social stereotypes and prejudices about fat stems not from manipulation, nor from the purity of her resistance; but from her affinity to the audience. Like them, she does not pretend or aspire to a total rejection of mainstream thought. Instead, she offers them the more modest, but still significant, opportunity to be more open and accepting toward fat bodies and other socially marginalized positions.

Notes

[1] Zoë Meleo-Erwin, "Disrupting Normal: Toward the 'Ordinary and Familiar' in Fat Politics," *Feminism and Psychology* (2012), doi: 10.1177/0959353512445358.
[2] Ibid., 2.
[3] Janna E. Braziel, "Sex and Fat Chicks: Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body," in *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, eds. Janna E. Brazie and Kathleen LeBesco. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
[4] Rachel Colls, "Big Girls Having Fun: Reflections on a 'fat accepting space'," *Somatechnics* 2, no 1 (2012): 18-37.
[5]See Petra Kuppers, "Fatties on Stage: Feminist Perspectives," in *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, eds. Janna E. Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 277-92; Stefanie Snider, "Fatness and Visual Culture: A Brief Look at Some Contemporary Projects," *Fat Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012):13–31.; Sharon Mazer, "'She's so fat...': Facing the Fat Lady at Coney Island"s Sideshows by the Seashore," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 257-76; Lacy D. Asbill, "'I'm Allowed to Be a Sexual Being': The Distinctive Social Conditions of the Fat Burlesque

Stage." in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 299-304; Heather McAllister, "Embodying Fat Liberation," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 305-11; and Debra Ferreday, "'Showing the Girl': The New Burlesque." *Feminist Theory 9*, no. 1 (2008): 47-65.

[6] See Deb Burghard, "What is 'Health at Every Size'?" in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 41-53; Maor, Maya. "Fat women: The role of the mother–daughter relationship revisited." In *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 97-108. Pergamon, (2012); Maor, Maya. "Stories that matter: subverting the before-and-after weight-loss narrative." *Social Semiotics* ahead-of-print (2013): 1-18; Farrell, Amy Erdman. *Fat shame: Stigma and the fat body in American culture*. NYU Press, 2011; Kathleen LeBesco, *Revolting bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004; Samantha Murray, *The 'Fat' Female Body* (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Douglas Degher and Gerald Hughes, "The Adoption and Management of a 'Fat' Identity," in *Interpreting Weight: The Social Management of Fatness and Thinness*, eds. Jeffery Sobal and Donna Maurer (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1999): 11–28; Puhl, Rebecca M., and Chelsea A. Heuer. "The stigma of obesity: a review and update." *Obesity* 17, no. 5 (2009): 941-964.; and Charlotte Cooper. *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size*. London: Cox & Wyman, 1998.

[7] Jeffrey Sobal, "The Size Acceptance Movement and the Social Construction of Body Weight," in *Weighty Issues: Fatness and Thinness as Social Problems*, eds. Jeffrey Sobal and Dona Maurer (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999): 231-49.

[8]Cooper, Charlotte, "What's Fat Activism?" Working Paper WP2008-02 (University of Limerick Department of Sociology Working Paper Series).

[9] Mazer, "'She's so fat…',"; Colls, "Big Girls Having Fun."

[10] Judith Butler, "Critically queer," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 17-32.

[11] Meleo-Erwin, "Disrupting Normal."

[12] Ibid.

[13] Anne Hole, "Performing Identity: Dawn French and the Funny Fat Female Body," *Feminist Media Studies* 3, no. 3 (2003): 315–28.

[14] Meleo-Erwin, "Disrupting Normal."

[15] For works analyzing Fat Burlesque see Asbill, Lacy D. "'I'm Allowed to Be a Sexual Being': The Distinctive Social Conditions of the Fat Burlesque Stage," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University, 2009): 299-304;
Ferreday, "'Showing the Girl',"; and McAllister, "Embodying Fat Liberation."

[16] Kimberly Dark, personal correspondence, May 15, 2012.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies?*, 86-87

[20] Dark, personal correspondence, May 15, 2012

[21] Dark, personal correspondence, May 15, 2012

[22] Maya Maor, "'Do I Still Belong Here?': The Body, Collective Identity and the Israeli Fat Acceptance Community," *Social Movement Studies* (2012). Doi: 10.1080/14742837.2012.716251

[23] Charlotte Cooper and Samantha Murray, "Fat Activist Community: A Conversation Piece," *Somatechnics* 2, no. 1 (2012):127–38
[24] Cooper, *Fat and Proud*.
[25] Maor, Maya. "'Do I Still Belong Here?' The Body's Boundary Work in the Israeli Fat Acceptance Movement." *Social Movement Studies* ahead-of-print (2012): 1-18.
[26] C. A., Hill, "Spatial Awarishness: Queer Women and the Politics of Fat Embodiment, Unpublished Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, 2009, p. 12.
[27] C. A., Hill, "Spatial Awarishness: Queer Women and the Politics of Fat Embodiment, Unpublished Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, 2009).; Maya Maor, "The Body that Does Not Diminish Itself: Fat Acceptance in Israel's Lesbian Queer Communities," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 177-198.
[28] Murray, *The 'Fat' Female Body*; and Maor, "The Body that does not Diminish Itself."
[29] Murray, *The 'Fat' Female Body*
[30] Maleo-Erwin, "Disrupting Normal," 10.
[31] Degher and Hughes, "The Adoption and Management," 12.
[32] Dark, personal correspondence, 15.5.2012

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Consumption and Denial: Eating and Ideology in *Malos hábitos*

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The role of power and control in situations of fasting and self-denial of food has been studied extensively, primarily in terms of the pathology of eating disorders. This is true for extreme cases of fasting for spiritual purposes as well as for scientific analyses of eating disorders. In his book *Holy Anorexia*, Rudolph Bell notes that in cases of extreme fasting and self-induced starvation amongst young female devotees, "Holy anorexia involves a need to establish a sense of oneself, a contest of wills, a quest for autonomy."[1] The psychological and emotional underpinnings of contemporary pathologized eating disorders take the phenomenon of control to a different level, one still based on power, but power over others through control of one's own desires. As Susan Bordo explains, through controlling her own body, a woman with anorexia discovers "a range of values and possibilities that Western culture has traditionally coded as 'male' and rarely made available to women: an ethic and aesthetic of self-mastery and self-transcendence, expertise, and power over others through the example of superior will and control."[2] However, Bordo asserts, as a strategy of control over others and a means of asserting masculinity and power, anorexia is limiting, because the disorder leads to extreme weakening of the body and the loss of physicality itself becomes an erasure of female presence, a making-invisible of the woman. In the 2007 Mexican film *Malos hábitos (Bad Habits)*, the young female protagonist Linda is exposed to these battles of wills in the name of control from both the religious angle through her teacher, Matilde, and in the pursuit of her mother's proposition of a neoliberal ideal, in which Linda functions under the illusion of mastering self-described aesthetic freedom—that of working within consumerist beauty ideals—by buying into a networked ideology of corporal management. At the same time, there is another equally potent factor at work: the power of certain foodstuffs and their control over Linda.

In the history of Mexican cinema, there are virtually no examples of films that have eating disorders as their primary theme, making the award-winning *Malos hábitos*[3] unique for its subject matter and the way in which family and tradition are presented. Representations of eating are foremost in Simón Bross's film, the protagonist of which is a young girl who is preparing for her first communion and simultaneously struggling with her weight. Ironically named "Linda," from the Latin for perfection and beauty, this child is trapped between two opposing ideologies of consumption: the Neoliberal pursuit of happiness espoused by her mother Elena and the Catholic-religious self-denial espoused by her teacher, the young nun Matilde. Elena teaches Matilde that accumulation of goods is a priority in life, and that it is both possible and advisable to purchase an identity as a bourgeois woman—one who reflects the feminine ideals of beauty portrayed in the media—no matter the cost, whether monetary, psychological, physical, or emotional. Both of these ideologies have to do with power and control; Elena's struggle for physical perfection as perceived by society is an internalized struggle for self-control, whereas Matilde's internal struggle to deny herself sustenance is an attempt at spiritual perfection meant to improve the outside world. The end result of both of these struggles is the same, since both Elena and Matilde model gendered behavior related to ideologies of consumption whose intended outcomes are opposite, represent the only socially and culturally appropriate responses to control of the female body that are available to women. As Susan Bordo writes in *Unbearable Weight*,

> Viewed historically, the discipline and normalization of the female body—perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class, and sexual orientation—has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control.[4]

Despite both of these influences, in the film there exists another actor that exerts control over Linda: food itself, as a material commodity. In fact, the other representations of consumption and denial reflect the struggle Linda has with food itself, and the power that food has over the protagonist in this film is stronger than that of religion or bourgeois concepts of beauty. Drawing on Jane Bennett's concept of an actant, I argue that food as a material entity is given an identity in *Malos hábitos* and serves as a third source of power and control that ultimately determines the protagonist's available choices and outcomes.

Food itself can have an active role in the weight struggle of an individual. In *Vibrant Matter,* Jane Bennett theorizes food or edible matter as "as actant inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, and culture-making human beings, and as an inducer-producer of salient, public effects."[5] In this formulation, food itself is

empowered as a coercive force that can determine an individual's actions or set of behaviors. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Bennett elucidates this theory further, explaining, "In the case of some foods, say potato chips, it seems appropriate to regard the hand's actions as only quasi- or semi-intentional, for the chips seem to call forth, or provoke and stoke, the manual labor. To eat chips is to enter into an assemblage in which the I is not necessarily the most decisive operator."[6] Throughout *Malos hábitos*, Linda is depicted in various scenes in a power struggle with food itself, while at the same time she battles her mother and Matilde, who have their own struggles with food.

The film opens with a scene of eating; a meal in a family home, the first time that Gustavo brings his girlfriend, Elena, to meet the family, including the young Matilde. From the outset, food is associated with danger, as the head of household, Ramón, begins to choke on a fishbone. While other members of the family begin first aid treatments to dislodge the bone fragment from their loved one's windpipe, Matilde decides to pray. Ramón is given the Heimlich maneuver and survives this initial struggle with the power of food; however, this scene establishes Matilde's weapon in the struggle against the destructive power of food: prayer. While Matilde is trained as a physician, upon graduation she chooses instead to take holy orders and become a nun, convinced that faith is more powerful than medicine or science to heal the sick. It is thus in this first scene that food asserts its power, determining Matilde's future path for her. The near-fatality through choking on food inspires Matilde to study medicine, in order to aid in the case of emergency, a profession that she in turn rejects when she decides that prayer and faith are more effective means of averting disasters and healing those who are ill.

Illness and food are again conflated in the introduction of Linda, the protagonist, into the film. The initial scene fades out and opens into the interior of a hospital room as the camera cuts to a medium-shot of a delivery room and it is announced that a girl has been born. As Elena checks her appearance in a hand mirror, the male voice of the doctor from off-screen announces Linda's weight for the first time (*cuatro kilos*, *100 gramos*, or about nine pounds). From the outset, the film establishes that this number will be an important focus of Linda's identity, as well as her mother's; as Natalie Boero notes, "The weight of one's children has increasingly become a litmus test of good mothering."[7] As the wife of a prominent architect and professor, Elena's lifestyle as an upper-middle-class mother is predicated upon her appearance and that of her child. In order to fit the example of the well-to-do, she must present a certain type of figure to the public. As Julie Guthman observes, "as thinness becomes a performance (and requisite) of success in a neoliberal world, it effectively becomes a criterion by which one is treated as a subject, a marker of deservingness in a political economy all too geared toward legitimizing such distinctions."[8] Throughout the film, Elena strives to perform as the adequate neoliberal subject by consuming endlessly while appearing

astonishingly thin, an ideology that she models for her daughter and that she actively attempts to impose upon her.

The relationship between Linda and Elena is characterized by a power struggle in which Elena attempts to control her daughter through consumerism. In the first scene in which Linda and Elena interact, the camera cuts to the interior of a department store, where Elena looks at herself in a mirror speaks to Linda, who is offscreen telling Elena that "it doesn't fit." Linda emerges from a dressing room in a white dress for the first communion ceremony that is too tight for her, shamefacedly, as the camera cuts to a close-up shot of Elena's disapproving stare. Elena is frustrated in her attempt to include her daughter in the lifestyle that she values, since Linda is unable to participate in this purchasing ritual of department store shopping due to the fact that her body is not a standard, pre-fabricated size for a child of her age. Thereafter in the film, all mother-daughter activities will continue to revolve around consumption, but the items and services purchased will be focused on weight reduction. This is the result of the limit of neoliberalism, the outcome of overconsumption; as Guthman explains,

> But what to do when what economists call the problem of inelastic demand kicks in—when one reaches an upper limit of food consumers' demand, because there is a limit on the total amount of food that any one person can eat—or when consumers otherwise want to thwart the weight-gaining effects of food? Neoliberalism's other fix is to create purchasable solutions to the problems that it generates.[9]

Elena's uncontrollable spending in the realm of weight-loss products and services is paralleled by her excessive control of personal physical desires, in particular that of eating. Linda resists her mother's attempts to control her weight, but her rebellion is not overt, leading Elena to become frustrated and more determined to find a "cure" for her daughter's excess weight.

Each successive failure in Elena's attempts to purchase a solution for Linda's weight problem leads to more extreme, repressive, and invasive measures. Elena's initially responds to the first communion dress problem by taking Linda to the doctor, seeking a biomedical answer from a practicing physician. A long-angle shot shows Linda in her underwear standing on a scale with her mother looking on as an old man in a lab coat explains to her that her veins are fat, and that they will continue to get fatter until the blood cannot flow through them and she will die. Linda is the center of the shot, just as she is the center of attention because of her body size. The doctor prescribes a diet for Linda and gives her mother a small vial of medicine and instructs Elena to give Linda exactly three drops in a glass of water before each meal. The scene cuts to a close-up as the doctor repeats the instructions, adding that more than three drops is dangerous, and the camera cuts to a reaction shot of Linda taking in this information. Upon their next visit to the doctor, the scene on the

scale is repeated, only this time the doctor announces that Linda has gained 300 grams (approximately 2/3 of a pound) since her last visit. Elena becomes extremely angry and confronts the doctor in his office where Linda cannot hear their conversation. The doctor explains that the drops are a placebo and that he uses fear to motivate weight loss because the mind controls the appetite. Enraged, Elena tells the doctor that she refuses to pay for ineffective water drops and leaves the office with Linda in tow. Elena is unwilling to accept the placebo as having any scientific significance, yet the placebo effect, based on the patient's faith that the treatment will cure their ailment, has been supported by clinical evidence in a number of studies.[10] Elena is motivated to find the most effective cure for her money, and is invested in finding a solution that will take as little time as possible.

When the mental control and intimidation Elena invests in by purchasing the doctor's services to motivate Linda's weight loss proves ineffective, she continues to experiment with further services. She begins by standing over Linda as she walks on the treadmill in their home, in a long shot almost identical to that of Linda on the scale in the doctor's office, as she firmly tells Linda to exercise harder and to move more quickly. In the next scene with mother and daughter, the camera cuts to a medium shot of Linda lying in bed playing video games while wearing a vibrating electronic fat reduction girdle around her waist as Elena sits on the edge of her bed, reading a fashion magazine. Linda's attention is focused on the game, a way of escaping the ever-present pressure to be thin put on her by her thin mother, and by society, as reflected in the fashion magazine. However, this scene symbolically transposes the physical weight of these societal ideals to Elena and the magazine as they remain on the margin of Linda's consciousness. The treadmill and the weight belt are bought to counteract the effects of consuming other goods, both foodstuffs and media and social elements associated with a sedentary lifestyle, such as the videogames and magazines featured in this scene. However, they cannot satisfy Elena's desire to achieve weight loss for her daughter, making it necessary for her to seek out further services, thereby perpetuating the cycle of consumption. Later in the film, the camera cuts to a close-up of a television screen playing a commercial for the Betty Lange Weight-loss Clinic, and the camera zooms out to reveal the interior of the waiting room of the clinic itself and pans to a medium shot of Elena and Linda sitting there together. The camera then cuts to a scene that replicates the scene in the doctor's office: Linda and Elena in the foreground while a professional sits behind a desk facing them and explaining their options for weight loss, available for a price. This time the professional is a young, thin, heavily made-up woman who represents the weight-loss clinic. A slight variation on the mind control/ appetite control dynamic in this scene is the promise of a special treat, a blueberry sorbet, if she can reach her goal of losing two kilos (4.4 pounds) per week. Despite the promise of the sorbet, when Linda returns to the clinic to be weighed in at the meeting, she has gained another 300 grams. While food does exert a considerable influence over

Linda's willpower, the diet blueberry sorbet has very little control over her, a contradiction explained by the fact that highly processed foods have less "vitality" than fresh ones: "We would say that the berries in Pop-Tarts do not act the way their wild counterparts do, or that processed cheeses and sterile filtered wine are rendered more passive, less vital, and more predictable than their unpasteurized and unfiltered counterparts."[11] After this failed attempt at weight loss, Elena again scolds Linda for embarrassing her and costing her money, as the Betty Lange Clinic turns out to be an investment for which Elena receives nothing in return.

Elena's attempts to control her own weight intensify as she fails to reduce her daughter's body mass. At the same time, her attempts to control Linda's weight intensify and become more invasive. In her desire to reduce Linda's weight, she begins to look to alternative treatments for weight loss. The camera cuts to a medium shot of a colorful commercial block in the Chinese neighborhood of Mexico City. The camera pans as Linda and Elena walk past hanging red lanterns and brightly-colored merchandise and zooms in on a sign with the photo of a morbidly obese woman with text promising weight loss through acupuncture. This attempt at weight loss forces Elena and Linda out of their comfortable, middle-class world and into a space of difference, where they have less control of the situation; at the same time, it serves to call attention to nature of the global market, in which there is a discrepancy in many cases between where products are consumed versus where they are produced. The scene cuts to the interior of a windowless room as Linda lies on her back on a table surrounded by men speaking Chinese while Elena stands in the periphery of the room. Linda submits to the treatment as one of the men places acupuncture needles into her face and body, but all the time she is clearly terrified, and cries out in shock and surprise as each tiny needle penetrates her skin. To supplement the effects of the treatment, and to ensure Linda's compliance, Elena employs discourses of heteronormative femininity as a psychological incentive for Linda to lose weight. The acupuncture scene cuts back to Linda's bedroom, where she is again laying on her back, while Elena tells her that she is going to all of these extremes for Linda's own good—that nobody likes fat people, and if she wants to get married, she will have to lose weight. Elena resorts to intimidation and shaming in order to coerce Linda into controlling her weight gain. She seems to be unaware of the irony of the situation, that her threat about the inability to find a suitable marriage partner is being received by a second grader holding a stuffed animal in her childhood bedroom. At the same time, she reinforces the patriarchal view that Linda should base her own self-worth on male perception of her attractiveness, and also on her ability to achieve heterosexual marriage; although she says that "nobody" likes fat people, she follows that up with a statement alluding to the fact that men do not like fat women, thereby making "everybody" who is "anybody" male and the default judge of female worthiness. In her ultimate and most extreme attempt to control Linda's weight, it becomes clear that in fact it is Elena who does not like fat people. It

is also interesting because it is Elena's role as a mother that "requires" her to align herself with masculine power.

Elena's obsession with thinness is revealed in her last attempt to control Linda's weight. Elena's final recourse in the struggle to ensure that Linda lose weight is the most invasive and potentially harmful option: surgical intervention. The camera cuts again to the interior of a doctor's office, where Elena is seated opposite a surgeon who is behind a desk. The doctor insists that Linda is within a normal weight range for her age, and begins to ask Elena probing questions about her own weight and eating habits. Elena becomes defensive and objects that the existence of many fat people in the world necessitates her daughter's surgery, and the scene cuts to Elena sitting on the floor of the shower in her house as the water pours over her, while the doctor's voiceover continues explaining to Elena that she is the one who is sick and needs help. As she is curled on the floor of the shower, Elena's extreme thinness is observable in her exposed ribs, while the blue-green tinted light reinforces the idea of illness and abnormality. The shot from outside the transparent shower door makes it appear as though Elena were imprisoned in a glass cage, thereby turning the spectator's gaze into that of a judgmental patriarchal society. This is the turning point for Elena's obsessive condition, in which she can either relent and recognize that she needs help, or continue on her self-destructive path. It is also the last time she attempts to control Linda's weight.

At the same time that Elena is devoting all of her energy to ensuring that Linda adopts her ideology of neoliberal feminine subjectivity, Matilde is offering Linda a related but opposite model of acceptable, traditional womanhood. After the aforementioned choking incident in the opening sequence of the film, Matilde has been convinced of her own power channeled through prayer and self-denial. As Dorfman and Rossato assert, Matilde "Tenta ter controle castigando a si mesma dentro da lógica de que quanto maior o sofrimento maior o controle que terá sobre o mundo" (Tries to retain control by punishing herself using the logic that the more intense the suffering, the more control she will have over the world.)[12] Matilde denies herself food and also ingests foodstuffs that are not fit for human consumption, such as leftover organic refuse, or consumes items that are unpleasant or unhealthy in large quantities, such as drinking an entire glass of vinegar. The young nun's actions mirror a historical trend of religious self-denial of food that attributed power to both the subject of fasting and the object; as Margaret Miles explains, in early Christianity:

> From the perspective of the subject, the practice of fasting was an indispensable tool for disciplining the spirit and for fashioning the Christian body. The object—food—has been regarded as both symbol and site of pleasure and danger, nourishment and prohibition.[13]

Matilde engages in these activities to prove her faith in God's healing power when her aunt becomes ill and is hospitalized. After these purging and self-punishing acts related to consumption, Matilde's aunt recovers, thereby strengthening her belief in her ability to affect the outside world through her personal acts of faith and will related to eating. Matilde's self-denial intensifies when she becomes convinced that she can stop major flooding that is affecting the country through her faith. Her self-denial is paralleled by increased consumption of food in the outside world, as the convent begins to sell foodstuffs in order to make money for their religious order, which in turn leads to increased consumption within the convent itself. Scenes of Matilde's hiding food that she refuses to ingest in a napkin and sneaking it into her habit are intercut with scenes of recently-purchased items introduced into the convent, such as new television set. Matilde's self-denial in the pursuit of spiritual perfection has the opposite goal of Elena's self-denial in the pursuit of physical perfection; Matilde is attempting to change the external world through her sacrifice, while Elena is attempting to conform to the unattainable standards of the external world. Despite this ideological difference, the outcome of their self-denial is the same; both women become physically weaker, until Matilde is hospitalized for acute anemia and Elena dies as a result of self-starvation.

Presented with these two examples, and caught between both ideologies of consumption and denial during her formative years, Linda is faced with another controlling agent: food. Food, and in particular material fat, is another active agent in Linda's struggle between herself, her mother, and society; as Bennett theorizes,

> The problem of obesity would thus have to index not only the large humans and their economic-cultural prostheses (agribusiness, snack-food vending machines, insulin injections, bariatric surgery, serving sizes, systems of food marketing and distribution, microwave ovens) but also the strivings and trajectories of fats as they weaken or enhance the power of human wills, habits, and ideas.[14]

While the incentive of the "light" blueberry sorbet (which does not contain a significant amount of fat) does not entice Linda to lose weight for the Betty Lange Clinic, there are several scenes in which food exerts its power over her. In fact, while at the Betty Lange Clinic, Linda speaks to a boy in her social circle, Lalo, who is also being forced to lose weight and who attempts to help her triumph over her weight problem. While Lalo is a positive influence for Linda—he reassures her that she is neither fat nor ugly, despite her mother's disapproval—he also tries to teach her pre-bulimic weight control tactics. In their first meeting in the waiting room of the clinic, Lalo shares a bite of his blueberry sorbet prize while giving her the secret to weight loss: he instructs her to take a bite of a delicious cake, chew it for a while, and then spit it out.

Later, Lalo invites Linda to his house and shows her where he keeps his hidden cache of junk food and demonstrates to Linda his previously revealed technique: he takes a bite of a chocolate cupcake, chews it, and spits it into a trashcan, narrating each step so she can benefit from his experience. Linda takes a bite of the cupcake, and although Lalo indicates to her the appropriate moment to spit, in a close-up shot swallows the sweet, unable to dispose of the food as instructed. Linda apologizes in a close-up shot, while Lalo admonishes her for not learning the proper technique, sighing and shaking his head, saying "Ay, Linda." Even when offered the opportunity to taste the food she enjoys, Linda is compelled to ingest the fatty treats. These food items are incorporated into her being and produce more tissue; they become part of her and part of her problem, in particular her conflict with her mother. In this way, food is an actant in *Malos hábitos* and the power it exerts over the protagonist influences the choices she makes with regard to her future.

With these three forces converging upon her—neoliberal consumerism and the ideal feminine subject projected by Elena, religious devotion and self-sacrifice espoused by Matilde, and the productive power of food, particularly that of fat—Linda must choose to act in her own self-interest as her first communion approaches. The turning point of the film takes place in the church as Linda walks down the aisle to receive her first communion wafer: as she approaches the priest and ingests the "spiritual food," the scene is intercut with one of Linda sneaking a phone call with Lalo. The voiceover of their conversation follows Linda as she advances down the aisle of the church, as Lalo reveals that Elena is planning on forcing Linda to have weight-loss surgery, despite the risks, because she would rather that Linda be dead than be fat. Lalo says that his mother told Elena of someone she knew who died from complications of weight loss surgery and says that he has to go before he is discovered talking on the phone. At the moment this statement is revealed, Linda looks up to the balcony where the nuns are sitting and sees Matilde faint from extreme anemia and dehydration as a result of self-starvation, and Matilde's inability to support herself coincides with the insistent voiceover sound of the dial tone from the children's disconnected telephone call. Thereafter, Linda makes the decision to save herself by turning her mother's weapons against her. She pours the entire bottle of "dangerous" placebo drops into her mother's water bottle and leaves it on the treadmill. Rather than choosing to buy anything or to pray in order to avoid suffering and what she considers possible death at the hands of her mother due to her perceived fatness, Linda instead opts to contaminate Elena's water with what she believes to be an overdose of a controlled medication. Later, at Elena's funeral, Linda asks her father if God forgives all sins, to which he replies that he does not know. Therefore Linda is aware that her choice to "kill" Elena is a sin and goes against the self-sacrificing ideology modeled by Matilde. Instead of taking the drops herself, Linda forces them on her mother by tricking her into taking them, thereby rejecting Elena's neoliberal subject ideology. Despite the fact that Linda feels responsible for ending Elena's life when in fact the placebo

drops where merely water, she can be comforted by the fact that ultimately it is this ideology that kills Elena—the drops representing Elena's obsession with consumerism and thinness.

At the film's conclusion, the surviving female characters, Linda and Matilde, are freed from the constrictive expectations that have controlled them throughout the film. Linda is no longer forced to participate in humiliating and unhealthy weight-loss regimes, due to the death of Elena. With Elena's death, the death of the good neoliberal subject, excessive consumption is curbed. Elena reaches the absolute limit of her ideology of consumption and denial that results in her destruction. In contrast, Matilde awakes in the hospital on the same day that the sun comes out and the excessive rain that has caused so much flooding and destruction finally ceases. In the final scene, Matilde removes her nun's habit and leaves the veil outside, just as it begins to rain again. Hence, Matilde has given up her "habit" of food denial in order to restore order to the world and to achieve perfection through her self-sacrifice in the name of faith. Linda also rejects faith or prayer as a viable option for control of the outside world and instead chooses to actively seek a physical solution to her problems, choosing to give her mother "a taste of her own medicine" without even realizing that Elena has died of complications of a severe eating disorder. In this sense her role seems to partially blend the underlying ideals of both Matilde and Elena: Linda is led to believe in her own power and agency, despite the existence of a more compelling scientific explanation for the death of Elena than her introduction of water droplets into Elena's water bottle, but the "solution" involved is a weight-loss product purchased in hopes of body mass reduction for the formation of an acceptable neoliberal subject.

In conclusion, throughout the film *Malos hábitos* there are multiple actors vying for control over Linda and her actions. This power struggle is reflected in the individual struggles for autonomy and control that take place internally for both Elena and Matilde. At the same time that Linda witnesses the two women's struggles and resultant behaviors of consumption and denial, she also is subject to the power of food as an actant in her life. When Elena attempts to control Linda's weight by consuming weight loss products, devices, and services, Linda initially complies, but when faced with the power of fatty foodstuffs, she is unable to resist consuming them. However, Linda's consumption of fatty foods, particularly sweets, remains constant throughout the film in spite of her attempts to curb her eating to placate her strict mother, while Elena's consumption of weight-loss solutions becomes more desperate and accelerated as the film advances. In the end, Linda chooses neither of the options proposed to her by Elena and Matilde, both of which have the same result—the reduction of mass of the female body that makes woman take up less space in the public sphere—and instead continues the same behaviors she has demonstrated throughout the film. She even goes to the length of attempting to "poison" her mother through two of the items that Elena continuously consumes: bottled water and weight-loss treatments. By rejecting

her mother's example, Linda presents another path for a young, middle-class Mexican woman, one that is neither rooted in the ideology of neoliberal consumerism nor in traditional religious self-sacrifice; however, in order to make this space for herself, Linda is convinced that she needs to murder her mother, and she is willing to do it. But just as the "murder" is symbolic in the film, since Elena in actuality dies from complications from her eating disorder, it also is emblematic of the unsustainability of the neoliberal subject, who in the end will consume herself to death, or will die of the 21st-century version of "consumption," replacing tuberculosis with self-induced starvation. In the end, the young Linda is left without the role model of her mother or her teacher, and will have to reimagine a version of 21st century womanhood for herself.

Notes

[1] Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 8.
[2] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body* (Berkeley: Health Press), 178.
[3] *Malos hábitos*. Film. Directed by Simón Bross. 2007. Mexico: Distrimax, 2008. DVD *Malos hábitos*, directed by Simón Bross, was awarded the Best Film award at the 2007 Guadalajara Mexican Film Festival; the Silver Zenith Award at the 2007 Montreal World Film Festival; the Special Jury Award for Simón Bross at the 2007 Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival; the Próxima Ola Jury Prize at the 2007 CineVegas International Film Festival; and the Golden Precolumbian Circle Award for Best First Work at the 2007 Bogota International Film Festival, among various other prize nominations.
[4] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, *166*.
[5] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 39.
[6] *Ibid*, 40.
[7] Natalie Boero, "Fat Kids, Working Moms, and 'The Epidemic of Obesity'," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press), 113.
[8] Julie Guthman, "Neoliberalism and the Constitution of Contemporary Bodies," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press), 193.
[9] *Ibid,* 191.
[10] See, for example, "The Placebo Effect: A Neglected Asset in the Care of Patients" by Herbert Benson and Mark D. Epstein in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (1975; 232 (12): 1225-1227). For a review of studies on the placebo effect, see *The Placebo Effect: An Interdisciplinary Exploration,* edited by Anne Harrington (Harvard University Press, 1999) and *The Placebo: A Reader*, edited by Franklin G. Miller et al. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
[11] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 47.
[12] Dorfman, Ieda Zamel and Maria Lucia Rossato. "A Dinâmica do Controle na Anorexia Nervosa". *Revista Brasileira de Terapia de Familia*. 4.1 (Julho 2012): 61.
(My translation)

[13] Margaret Miles, "Religion and Food: The Case of Eating Disorders," *Journal of the American Academy* 63 no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 149. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465093
[14] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 43.

Huge Women and Tiny Men: Sex, Luxury and Control in Depression-Era Faulkner

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In Faulkner's two popular novels, *Sanctuary* (1931) and *The Hamlet* (1940), bodies are often grotesquely sized, imbued with power, and desired perversely. Fat women luxuriate in their largeness and sloth, dripping with a natural, almost primal sexuality and lazy sumptuousness. Small men, often romantically paired with these large women, fight the powerlessness and effeminizing forces inscribed on their frail frames by shackling these women's power and fettering their luxurious lifestyles, often tying them down sexually and domestically. Since abnormally-sized characters are recurrent in these two novels written for popular audiences, it would be remiss not to map these characters as a part of the Southern grotesque tradition, as well as consider prevalent attitudes towards fat women's sexuality and laziness during this period. Additionally, the stark contrast between these large women, and the debilitated, Great Depression-era little man bears consideration, particularly in Faulkner's reiteration of the littler man grappling valiantly with these women and the characteristics they represent in order to regain his lost masculinity. Faulkner's fat women are both sexually powerful and opulent—characteristics tied to their largeness—while his small men, so disenfranchised by their own bodies physically and symbolically, conquer fat women, making them submit to them in order to regain their lost control.

Faulkner's strangely-sized bodies in these novels certainly seem to fall into the tradition of southern grotesque literature populated with literally malformed people. Patricia Yaeger explains

> Southern women writers pack their fictions with characters whose bodies and minds refuse to be average—characters extraordinary because they are witless or limbless, crippled, deaf, or blind, hermaphroditic or filled with same-sex desire,

> Lilliputian or gigantic—hybrid characters with bodies and minds that refuse, or fail to comprehend, the norm.[1]

With his reliance on often-disgusting physical and behavioral descriptions of these abnormally-sized, Faulkner certainly seems to be participating in this tradition. Further, Yaeger says that the Southern gothic tradition uses the body as a site of "both self and culture—a place where culture is mapped onto subjectivity and the pain of this mapping becomes visible."[2] Socially-connoting the atypical bodies in Faulkner's novels, the tiny man, removed from masculinity and power by his size, reclaims his physical failing and symbolic losses by controlling the big woman, whose body, in turn, has been mapped as a location of excess, sexual power and luxury.

Faulkner creates three large women, Miss Reba, Mink Snopes' wife, and Eula Varner Snopes, whom I will consider in this essay. Faulkner conveys Miss Reba's size through her inability to make her body do much because of its extreme size. When Temple is first introduced to Miss Reba, she notices that Miss Reba's "slightest movement appeared to be accomplished by an expenditure of breath out of all proportion to any pleasure the movement could afford her."[3] Faulkner's limited physical descriptions of Miss Reba's size are superseded by his numerous examples of the disability afforded to her because of her condition: her limited mobility and asthmatic breathing problems. Despite the physical ailments associated with her weight, however, Miss Reba's fatness is simply another facet of the excess and opulence of her presentation of herself more generally. In addition to her "lush" bosom, Miss Reba's hand is "ringed with yellow diamonds as large as gravel" and she wears "a black silk gown and a hat savagely flowered."[4] Her ostentatious presentation seems to naturalize the excessive amount of flesh on her body—the flesh, the clothes, the jewelry are all part of her same choice of presenting herself in an over-the-top masquerade.

Jana Evans Braziel explains the commonness of this excessive masquerade in fat women in her essay, "Sex and Fat Chics: Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body" by explaining:

> …the corpulent woman is depicted in full regalia, ornamented and flamboyantly arrayed; she is licentiously saturated with sexual masquerade. Her excess is both jocund and rotund, her body is the site of performative excess—she is the unbound carnality of hypercorporeity.[5]

Miss Reba's body is certainly the site of "performative excess"; her presentation of both excess flesh and costuming ushers gentlemen customers into her brothel, a boundary-breaking place of fantasy. Miss Reba's body itself and its trappings signal the "unbound carnality" of the brothel; like the extramarital dalliances of her customers and the absurd glamour of her costume and jewelry, Miss Reba's flesh—and the sexual connotations mapped

onto it—is simply another indulgence in her gluttonous lifestyle. She also is certainly enacting another type of "sexual masquerade." Although she is the keeper of the entrance to her brothel, a world of sexual transgression, she never has sex with customers herself. Her clothes can never be removed to find another site of defiance of normative femininity and the literal broken-bonds of the female shape: her grotesquely fat body. In this way, she keeps control of her own site of transgression.

Rather than a commentary on her sloth, Miss Reba's extreme weight and the immobility issues it creates imbue her with a lazy opulence in opposition to the hardscrabble, working-class Yoknapatawpha. Miss Reba's largeness—her "billows" of flesh—seems to be another hedonistic excess, like her excessive alcoholism, her dress, and her house of extramarital luxury. Additionally, the physical immobility and illness of Miss Reba's body is a site of luxury. She can barely walk, so she sits on her well-upholstered couch all day:

> She rose heavily…She waddled toward the door, the dogs crowding about the felt slippers…Temple could hear Miss Reba cursing the dogs as she descended the stairs with terrific slowness.[6]

Also, her asthma makes it difficult for her to traverse her house: "she began to tell Temple about her asthma, toiling up the stairs in front of them."[7] In contrast to the hard work required in much of the rural South in order to make ends meet, Miss Reba *cannot* work, but still, she is not poor. Because of this wealth, her inability to perform physical work is Miss Reba's luxury, rather than a detriment to her well-being. Further, Miss Reba's immobility and illness require that others come to her, meaning she controls the physical movement of their bodies. Miss Reba's luxury is conveyed through her weight-required sloth—her size, physical unfitness, and position of power indicate that she neither needs to work the land in the rural South, nor perform sexual labor in her own brothel.

This size-based control of others' bodies extends both to Miss Reba's powerful, sexual control of the bodies of her prostitutes, their clients, and both the dog and human Mr. Binfords. Miss Reba controls the sexual acts performed by both her prostitutes and by the men who frequent her brothel. She controls the presentation and skills of her prostitutes, literally molding their sexuality into something palatable to men, and also controls the men's sexual satisfaction, asking for money before their sexual appetites can be sated.

Miss Reba is made proud and powerful by these men who frequent her establishment. She boasts:

> Anybody in Memphis can tell you who Reba Rivers is. Ask any man on the street, cop or not. I've had some of the biggest men in Memphis right here in this house, bankers, lawyers, and doctors—all of them.[8]

In this way, Reba controls these men's sexuality; she creates an environment that they wish to frequent, fostering and providing memorable evenings. She controls lust and sexuality. She also keeps an eye on the sexual acts of her girls and their clients:

> Beyond the door the man and woman were utterly quiet …She listened to Miss Reba's shouting hoarsely into the blank wood. It died away into terrific gasping, then it rose again in the gross and virile cursing of a man.[9]

In checking to see that the sexual acts of her prostitutes and clients are meeting her standards, Reba shapes sexual situations, and the limits of what could happen in an encounter. Further, Miss Reba certainly controlled the tenor of the marriage when Mr. Binford was alive, enacted onto the little dog that bears his name. Minnie says that

> Last time [Miss Reba] throw him outen upstairs window and go down and empty Mr Binford's clothes closet and throw everything out in the street except what he buried in.[10]

Miss Reba's treatment of the little dog demonstrates that she held the power—potentially the sexual power—in her marriage. Mr Binford needed to please his wife or she would control him with her rage.

The large size of Mink Snopes' wife affords her power to transgress the boundaries of traditional womanhood. Before she becomes Mink Snopes' wife, the nameless woman presents herself in a masculine way, a woman "as masculine as the overalls and her height and size and the short hair."[11] She is in charge of a logging operation manned by a group of convicts, all of whom are submissive to her overlord status, as signified by her large size. Even her interactions are masculine—when Mink first interacted with her, she "[looked] at him as a bold and successful man would…"[12] Riding on a horse, her status in life is higher than Mink's, both literally and figuratively. Mink has a transitory, dirt-poor existence, while she has success, money and power—statuses usually reserved only for men, but of which she partakes because of her masculine presentation. However, I would argue that her masculinity hinges on her large size, as well, particularly in relation to the "child-sized" Mink. In describing two black, fat female characters, Mary Condé in "Fat Women and Food" argues that it is extreme size that allows a female character to break the boundaries of femininity, saying "…their size signals their power to transgress social boundaries."[13] In Condé's view, these women's large size, which does not fit within the social bounds of propriety female thinness and smallness, allows them to transgress the traditional spaces for women. In Mink's wife's case, it is her size which allows her to claim a masculine position of power. Unlike the performative hyper-opulence of Miss Reba's fatness,

Mink Snopes' wife uses her large body—and the power it gives her—to occupy traditionally male spaces of power.

Despite using fatness for different types of transgressions, Mink's wife, like Miss Reba, uses her size and masculinity to live a lazy, luxurious life, a luxury that is tied to her almost animal, exotic sexuality. Although in charge of a labor-heavy operation, Mink Snopes' wife is not described as physically active herself, and instead seems to be fairly immobile. As the leader of the gang, she is never described as walking to oversee her operation and men, but instead rides a horse for meetings, or to summon her men to her. This sort of immobility is described in the following passage, which also details how Mink's wife calls on her workers to service her sexually:

> Sometimes she would ride past on the horse and stop and speak briefly to the foreman and ride on; sometimes the quadroon would appear on the horse and speak a name to the foreman and return, and the foreman would call that name and the man would drop his axe or saw and follow the horse. Then he, still swinging his axe and not even looking up, would seem to follow and watch that man enter the private door and then watch him emerge later and return to work—the nameless, the identical, highwayman, murderer, thief, among whom there appeared to be no favorites and no jealousy.[14]

The passage here demonstrates Mink's wife's laziness, as well as her luxury. Certainly, because of her numerous partners, her sexuality is also in excess—the definition of luxury—once again mimicking the excess of her transgressing, fat body. In terms of laziness, she does not even confront her intended partner face-to-face; rather, she has her foreman do it for her. Additionally, she orders the men to come to her, implying that she will wait, immobile, staying in one spot and drawing the men to her. In another passage of this section, Mink's wife's sexual appetite is described in more luxurious, otherworldly terms: she is described as "the confident lord of a harem."[15] These terms combine Mink's wife's immobility and sexuality: a "harem" conveys exotic sexuality, controlled by a "lord" who sits or lies as women take care of him. Taken together, these two passages imply that Mink's wife's power is contained within her own body; she remains immobile as men come to her. Aside from sexually servicing her, the most persuasive aspect of Mink's wife's luxury is the fact that she has hardened criminals cut her hair "almost man short with razors."[16] Mink's wife would choose "out of foremen and armed guards and convict laborers, and [Mink] himself in his turn, after his summons came and he had long since discovered the reason for the separate entrance, contributed to keep cut almost man-short with razors."[17] In this way, the men give up their own masculinity—*they* are the ones who must come to *her*; they must perform the domestically-oriented grooming ritual—while symbolically instating Mink's wife's

masculinity through the shortness of her hair. Mink's sexuality is both linked to masculinity—she is the traditional man and her partners fill the roles of the traditional woman—but also linked to an exotic luxury typified through immobility, and certainly, excess.

Like Miss Reba and her fat opulence and Mink's wife's fat masculinity, Eula Varner Snopes' fatness is represented as her closeness to the earth: her body is almost animal-like, sprung from something ancient and natural. When first introduced to her as a thirteen-year-old girl, Eula is described "bigger than most grown women and even her breasts were no longer the little, hard, fiercely-pointed cones of puberty or even maidenhood."[18] This early description already starts to link Eula to natural, earthly woman, as if she were both still a part of and formed fully from the earth. Throughout the novel, Faulkner continues to link Eula's large body to the earthly feminine, calling her "Olympus-tall" and "Brunhilde," and describing her

> as emanating that outrageous quality of being, existing, actually on the outside of the garments she wore and not only being unable to help it but not even caring.[19]

In these ways, Eula is of the earth, something of an unthinking goddess who does not understand the innate power that she possesses. Even though she is a stocky thirteen-year-old, Eula continues to gain weight, a condition which makes her more and more inherently sexual. Her brother, who wants to keep her sexuality under wraps

> wondered at times in his raging helplessness how buttocks as constantly subject to the impact of that much steadily increasing weight could in the mere act of walking seem actually to shout aloud that rich mind- and will-sapping fluid softness.[20]

Eula's weight here is described as natural, inevitable, and of little concern to its owner, as is her sexuality itself. Braziel explains Eula's lack of consideration about her weight gain and her lack of concern with protecting her virginity, writing:

> fat female bodies undermine the stability of Western metaphysical and dualistic thought: the body is subordinated to the soul…Corpulence as *excessive feminine* (to use Butler's term) catalyzes insubordination to the binaristic thought of Western, patriarchal knowledges and discourses.[21]

In other words, a fat body makes a woman literally *more than a woman,* while simultaneously raising the body above the soul in that the body is of more concern than what is inside it. Thoughtless, immobile Eula seems an

embodiment of both of these ideas: her body and her sexuality, as they grow and grow, are examples of the *excessive feminine*, but she also seems completely devoid of the basic qualities of a soul: desire, thought, and movement.

In fact, Eula is described as literally immobile. She is loathe to walk anywhere on her own. She has the luxury of not wanting to be moved, so she must be carried everywhere like a queen. Reminiscent of the passage of Eula's removal from desire, she is also removed from the desire for any kind of active future:

> It was not that she insisted upon being carried when she went anywhere. It was rather as though, even in infancy, she already knew there was nowhere she wanted to go….Until she was five and six, when she did have to go anywhere because her mother declined to leave her at home while she herself was absent, she would be carried by their Negro manservant.[22]

This extreme, almost parodic discourse about Eula's immobility invokes ideas of a queen being carried by servants. Eula need not work; she cannot even be encouraged to move on her own. In addition to and because of her immobility, Eula seems weak, as though she cannot move on her own, or be spurred to move on her own. Condé also argues that

> …the weakness conferred by fatness can become a source of strength…fatness, with its pathos of the dispossessed, is used to smuggle through an unsuspected power.[23]

Although she displays moments of brute strength, Eula's power here is through her immobility, and her innate virility; her very stagnancy means that others must come to her. Her power seems to lie in the fact that they do come. She controls men, bringing them to her, without interest or direct agency.

Like the innate control she holds over men, Eula's sexuality—and the power she wields because of it—is a thing almost separate from her, uncontainable, a power that controls and ruins men swept up by it. When her brother takes her to school on his mule,

> he happened to look aside and so behind him and saw the incredible length of outrageously curved dangling leg and bare section of thigh between dress and stocking-top looking gigantically and profoundly naked.[24]

Here, Eula's sexuality—as typified by her leg breaking its boundaries—is uncontrolled and uncontrollable, tantalizing to men, and driving them wild without Eula's real understanding about the need to cover herself or her sexuality. Although her brother is horrified, Eula does not even seem to notice

or care that her sexuality is seeping out from her body. In practice, too, her chastity is of little concern to her. Her teacher, LaBove, is driven crazy by his lust for her, but when he tries to rape her, she simply tells him to leave her alone, not even telling her brother about the incident. In some ways, the link between Eula's size and sexuality functions in a similar way to Miss Reba's: she has both excess flesh and overabundant, oozing sexuality.

Amy Farrell in her essay, "'The White Man's Burden': Female Sexuality, Tourist Postcards, and the Place of the Fat Woman in Early 20th-Century U.S. Culture," writes,

> In terms of fatness, what this means is that women were considered more likely than men to exhibit 'bodily excess' because their rational qualities were not sufficiently developed to control their bodies.[25]

In terms of *The Hamlet*, Eula has too much sexuality, but not enough rationality—more accurately, enough consciousness—to consider the effects of her irresistible, sexual body. Noel Polk in, "Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy" tries to explain Eula's sexuality, arguing that

> [she] is far more than sexual, however; indeed, she is in most ways a parody of the merely sexual, as the opening paragraph of the 'Eula' section makes clear.[26]

Like many of the mock pastoral segments of the novel, to some extent, Eula is linked to animalistic, earthly sexuality in the same parodic way that Polk suggests. This does not seem to be the only thing that Faulkner is doing here, however. Eula's sexuality is not only parodic, particularly because her virility has utility and consequences—in contrast to the bestiality/love enacted between Ike and the cow—both for the men who lust after her and in terms of her own reproduction. Indeed the most marked section in linking Eula's size and her sexuality is the night when Eula loses her virginity to Hoake. After removing her body from its typical immobility, she "…sprung from the buggy and with the reversed whip beating three of them back."[27] Yaeger explains Eula's changing body and the power it wields—both in terms of strength and sexuality, saying

> …what the figurative grotesque adds to southern fiction is an element of the fantastic or the marvelous: a body magic that is fascinating, amorphous, and labile—a lability that swings many ways.[28]

Eula's body is magnetic to men. It seems that because she had to help protect Hoake—and perhaps his masculinity—she gives him her virginity, something she neither cares to preserve or minds giving. She is also completely

uninterested in her sexuality or virginity. She gives Hoake her virginity because it was as natural and came as inherently as her ability to beat back the wild horses.

These characteristics of fat women and their sexual power and immobile luxury seem more productive in conjunction with tiny men's disenfranchisement and need to control these women in order to subsume their power. This idea of reclaiming economic stability, as typified here by the opulent laziness of these fat women, and power, inherent in their sexual control, can be usefully considered through the worthwhile cultural lens of the "forgotten/little man" trope common during the Great Depression. During the Depression, men were diminished in their control of their own lives by the loss of their jobs, and their subsequent inability to care for their families. In considering this idea, Christina S. Jarvis in the chapter of her book titled, "Building the Body Politic: From the Depression to World War II" invokes sociologist Michael Kimmel who said that

> for most men the Depression was emasculating both at work and at home. Unemployed men lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent patriarchs.[29]

This removal from successfully performing traditional roles was said to emasculate men, often described as "forgotten men" who no longer had power to dictate their own lives or those of their families. It is also useful to think about this idea of masculine diminution mapped onto the physical body; if manhood, masculinity and power is shrunken, then figuratively, so is the body that houses that masculinity. In relation to both unemployment and a shrunken physical body during this period, Jarvis says,

> While relatively few Americans actually starved to death, sickness and malnutrition increased dramatically, especially among the unemployed…they had problems physically performing the same work they did before the depression.[30]

In other words, a frail frame signaled not only the fact that the man could not feed himself or his family, but physically demonstrated that he was unemployed, and therefore emasculated him in the ways that joblessness implied.

In opposition to these ideas of powerlessness and emasculation in small men, a heavy emphasis was placed on physical largeness in men as it represented health, employment and masculinity. Jarvis says,

> While various New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) offered some heroic images of male workers, a more sustained national imaging campaign was

> needed to help transform millions of still unemployed men and their thin physiques into muscular, able-bodied servicemen.[31]

In other words, society told little men that they needed to transform into larger men, both physically and ideologically. Although the men in *The Hamlet* and *Sanctuary* do not gain physical size after they conquer large women, this trope still makes sense theoretically. The transformation in the weak, powerless man occurs when he conquers the well-fed, excessively nourished fat women in these two novels.

It also seems useful to think about how small men's desire for big women was portrayed and conceived before, during and after the Great Depression. In her essay, Amy Farell discusses tourist postcards created from the 1910s to the 1940s that depict fat women and the small men that love them on vacation. These kitschy, over-the-top postcards seem like worthwhile cultural sources in considering the cultural context in which these popular novels were written. Like the figures represented in the postcards, Faulkner's abnormally-sized characters also succumb to and play with these sorts of stereotypes. Some of the fat women in these postcards are being stuffed into cars by their tiny partners, others have travel labels stuck to their breasts or stomachs, all of them are sexualized. Farrell argues that the women in these postcards

> …are portrayed as taking up excessive sexual space. Sometimes this overabundance of sexuality seems to please the men in the postcards.[32]

Men are interested in the literal and figurative female sexual excess in these postcards. In all contexts, fat women take up more room than thin women with their bodies. Like Eula's sexuality, Judith Butler labels this idea of the extra femaleness in the fat female, her extreme sexuality, the excessive feminine. The link between too much flesh and too much sexuality in these postcards and in the novel demonstrates that men could lose control of their libidos and their lives by this encroaching female sexuality. Additionally, Farrell says that the type of men happy with fat women are "either poor (the hobo), working class (the plumber), or silly (the comically small or thin)."[33] For my purposes in this essay, the small man is useful to think about because his "comically" small size is what makes the big woman attractive to him; if he woos her, together they will fill up the symbolic and real space that he lacks. The connection between smallness and poverty here, however, is also useful to consider, particularly in times of the Depression when malnutrition was literally making men shrink.

In this same essay, Farrell invokes the early 20th century physician, Dr. Leonard Williams, who "pointed to the supposed link between civilization and obesity…According to this theory, lower-class people harbor unconscious memories of times when worries about food supply shaped [sexual] desire."[34]

Extrapolating this idea to the Great Depression, when food supply was actually low and difficult to come by, small, malnourished or unemployed men looked for alternate sources of power. In these novels, the sources of power were fat women, who demonstrated through their extreme flesh that they were also in possession of excess food and excess wealth.

The diminutive men to be considered are Mr. Binford (Reba's dead husband), and Mink and Flem Snopes. Faulkner provides Mr. Binford, Miss Reba's dead husband, no physical description, so we cannot be sure if he was a small man in stature. However, he was the "little man" in the marriage, and now, Miss Reba has given him a symbolic rebirth in the form of a tiny, abused dog. Inasmuch as she has sublimated her feelings towards her late husband onto the tiny canine Mr. Binford, Miss Reba seems to have treated her husband badly in life, throwing the little dog out the window and constantly yelling at it. Demonstrated by her treatment of the dog, certainly much of the human Mr. Binford's behavior was controlled by his wife during his lifetime, though her behavior in the novel's present day is, perhaps strangely, controlled by his dead presence. Her alcoholism seems to have been exacerbated by her husband's death. Minnie says, "Whenever she go to the cemetery she start drinking like this evening."[35] This section of dialogue indicates that Mr. Binford's death predicated her alcoholism, suggesting that in some ways Mr. Binford controls Miss Reba's behavior from beyond the grave in ways that he was not able to in life.

Mr. Binford's death also shapes her interactions with others, in that she loses control of her behavior several times in melodramatic, alcohol-induced crying fits. First, we see her barging into Temple's room in tears, saying, "We was happy as two doves," she wailed… "Then he had to go and die on me."[36] Later, with her friends after Red's funeral, Miss Reba breaks down again, saying again "He was such a good man…We was like two doves."[37] In these two instances, Miss Reba cannot control her behavior because of constantly-lingering memories of her dead husband; he doubly controls her behavior here, making her drink, which then, in turn, makes her lose her composure in public over thoughts of him.

In life, rather than in death, tiny Mink shackles his masculine wife, giving her several children and spurring her to renounce her masculinity by growing out her short hair and dyeing it. Mink is a strangely small man. At his trial for the murder of Houston he is described as "looking hardly larger than a child."[38] He seems particularly miniscule in comparison to his wife; he is "small, almost a half head shorter than she."[39] With these descriptions of his effeminized size, Mink is the female counterpart to his large, masculine wife, serving as the traditional woman who makes his wife settle into a dissatisfied haze of domesticity. Noel Polk says that

> Mink is so sexually powerful that when he is summoned to her bed he persuades an insatiable and openly sexual woman to leave her incredible position as the 'confident lord of a

> harem' (*The Hamlet*, 953) at the logging camp her father runs, whose workers she summons, at her will, to service her.[40]

Polk's reading here seems overly simplistic, and leaves out the alternatively-gendered dynamic of their relationship. Mink's wife has had a hundred men, who, since they perform manual labor, would be matched to her in terms of size. Rather than the "little man" searching for the excessive feminine, here tiny Mink seems to be her "little woman," and her responsibility to him, rather than his sexual prowess, seems to be what makes her marry him. Because of her large size and his diminutive proportion, she is the traditional husband who must domesticate the no-longer-chaste wife through marriage. Although it would be plausible in a traditional schema of male/female relations and marriage, Mink's wife's absolutely-male, completely-bizarre sex life and masculine presentation, coupled with Mink's often-stated, diminutive size are too absurd to comfortably coalesce into Polk's argument about traditionally-gendered power here.

Although it is not marriage, Mink's wife is shackled by her pregnancy. Mink's wife had no intention to be married; she was satisfied with her previous situation and had no plans for domesticity. Still, Mink surprised her by interesting her in marriage. After their marriage, they still lived as she once had, keeping her hair short and having frequent, animalistic sex with her husband. Despite her claims that he would never get her pregnant, he did, twice. By Mink's account, those children

> served to shackle her too, more irrevocably than he himself was shackled, since on her fate she had even put the seal of a formal acquiescence by letting her hair grow out and dyeing it.[41]

Her pregnancy, which initiated changes in her body made against her will, and her children, whom she bore rather grudgingly, signal that Mink has taken control of her life. The growing out and dying of her hair—the feminizing of her prideful masculinity—is the ultimate symbol of Mink's newly-gained control of her, her sexuality and her body. After her children are born, Mink's wife's status as an opulent, sexually-powerful woman is completely dismantled. By the time she is introduced in the present day of the story, she is being beaten by her small husband and living in extreme poverty.

Like Mink, small and featureless Flem Snopes domesticates the wild Eula, who has become pregnant by Hoake. Flem's physicality is barely noticeable. He is "a head shorter [than Varner]" and nondescript—"a thick squat soft man of no establishable age between twenty and thirty…." "with a small nose "projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox…like the beak of a small hawk."[42] Coming from dirt-poor beginnings, Flem's entire quest in the novel is to take what he wants in life, often from those who should rightfully have it. One of the things he wants becomes the

oft-lusted over Eula, already pregnant by another man. Eula has no inclination to sleep with or marry Flem, but because of her lack of interest in her own sexuality and the consequences of it, her wild naturalness must be fettered by social consequences, in this case, marriage to Flem. Flem, in turn, takes control over Eula's power in a marriage of traditionally-sized mismatches—their marriage is described as being between "the splendid girl with her beautiful masklike face, the froglike creature which barely reached her shoulder."—and unequally-matched individuals.[43] Afterwards, Eula's power is fettered, as described in the following passage:

> It was Flem Snopes's wife…She did not lean out, she merely stood there, full in the moon, apparently blank-eyed or certainly not looking downward at them—the heavy gold hair, the mask not tragic and perhaps not even doomed: just damned, the strong faint lift of breasts beneath the marble-like fall of the garment; to those below what Brunhilde, what Rhinemaiden on what spurious river-rock of papier-mâché…[44]

Here, Faulkner invokes a Wagner opera and its painted sets, indicating that Eula's natural, earthly qualities are now only demonstrative; her once-real qualities are now all "papier-mâché" performative. Men can still look at her statuesque beauty, but it is no longer viable, touchable. She, too, seems to have been turned into a statue—she is "blank-eyed" and wearing a "mask," her body turned into something "marble-like" and literally immovable, no longer simply immobile but turned into stone. Now, the very things that made Eula so powerful—her natural, sexual energy and the immobility that brought men to her—have been frozen, trapped by Flem both in time and space.

Rather than being disgusting and weak like many of the fat women tropes common during this period, Faulkner's fat women have more control over men and more luxurious, lazy lifestyles than almost any of the other female characters in his novels. They do not diet or bemoan their states; rather, their fatness is the source of their power. Miss Reba, Mink's wife and Eula Varner Snopes typify the luxury and laziness only afforded to the wealthy, while the sexual control hidden within the folds of their bodies gives them a sexual power usually only given to men. Both of these facets of female agency are linked inherently to these women's size, which allows them to transgress traditionally female boundaries of space, shape and control. These women cannot retain their power, however. Tiny men, then, are figuratively and literally removed from masculine power by their frail frames, which effeminize and weaken them, stripping of them of their vocational prowess and traditional statuses. Their conquering of large women, then, or the coupling of the small body and the large one, allows them to take up more room in the world. Together, both spatially and in terms of tackling women of higher status than most, the little man makes up for his size. Faulkner's grotesquely-sized

characters serve an allegorical function in relation to Great Depression realities of excesses of wealth and power afforded to a few, while the rest of the beleaguered "little men" would grapple for a piece of the pie, or, in this case, for women who had a few too many slices of it.

Notes

[1] Patricia Yaeger, "The Body as Testimony," in *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*, by Author (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 218-31.
[2] Ibid., 224.
[3] William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 143.
[4] Ibid., 144.
[5] Jana Evans Braziel, "Sex and Fat Chics: Deterritorializing the Fat Female Body," in *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen Le Besco (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 231-56.
[6] Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, 148.
[7] Ibid., 143.
[8] Ibid., 143.
[9] Ibid., 158.
[10] Ibid., 154.
[11] William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, (New York: Random House, 1964), 237.
[12] Ibid., 237.
[13] Mary Condé, "Fat Women and Food," in *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics*, ed. Sue Vice, Matthew Campbell, and Tim Armstrong (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1994), 124-31.
[14] Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 237.
[15] Ibid., 237.
[16] Ibid., 236.
[17] Ibid., 236.
[18] Ibid., 95.
[19] Ibid., 362; Ibid., 306; Ibid., 101.
[20] Ibid., 101.
[21]Braziel, "Sex and Fat Chics," 237.
[22] Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 237.
[23] Condé, 125.
[24] Falkner, *The Hamlet*, 237.
[25] Amy Farrell, ""The White Man's Burden': Female Sexuality, Tourist Postcards, and the Place of the Fat Woman in Early 20th-Century U.S. Culture," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 256-62.
[26]Noel Polk, "Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy," in *Faulkner and Welty and the Southern Literary Tradition*, by Author (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 44-67.
[27] Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 137-38.
[28] Yaeger, "The Body as Testimony," 233.

[29] Christina S. Jarvis, "Building the Body Politic: From the Depression to World War II," in *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II*, by Author (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 11-55.
[30] Ibid., 19.
[31] Ibid., 11; Ibid., 14.
[32] Farrell, "The White Man's Burden," 258.
[33] Ibid., 259.
[34] Ibid., 260.
[35] Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, 154.
[36] Ibid., 157.
[37] Ibid., 255.
[38] Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 332.
[39] Ibid., 221.
[40] Polk, "Testing Masculinity in the Snopes Trilogy," 59.
[41] Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 239.
[42] Ibid., 22; Ibid., 51; Ibid., 51.
[43] Ibid., 147.
[44] Ibid., 306.

Other Works Consulted

Stukator, Angela. "It's not over until the fat lady sings: Comedy, the Carnivalesque, and Body Politics." In *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen Le Besco, 197-213. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Fat People of the World Unite!: Subjectivity, Identity, and Representation in Fat Feminist Manifestoes

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The fat acceptance movement has, for better or worse, maintained a significant heterogeneity throughout its forty year existence. It is a movement relatively small in numbers, but diverse in goals, strategies and tactics, and theoretical influences and alliances, including feminist and queer theory and activism. The relationship between fat activism and feminism is strained and yet intimately entwined as fat activists rely on feminist theories of embodiment, the production and performativity of gender, and social discourse related to gendered bodies. Despite this reliance, feminist thinkers and activists have often excluded or overlooked fat activist accomplishments and goals. Nevertheless, feminist fat activism has remained theoretically challenging and productive as it has evolved alongside of feminism in the last forty years. This paper explores some of the feminist-influenced declarations within the fat activist movement over the course of its history, from the radical feminist Fat Liberation Manifesto, to the autobiographical manifestoes found in fat activist zines, and finally to the growing use of visual representations of the fat body in fashion blogs and body positive websites. It attempts to locate the nexus at which fat identity politics, revolutionary acts and language, and feminist visual theory intersect. Beyond the written and published manifesto, this paper also explores the potentiality for visual manifestos, representations of the fat body created and used by contemporary fat activists that assert radical concepts of fat identity and establish a kind of collective subjectivity within the fat community.

Although feminists in the 1960s and 1970s addressed the damaging effects of the prevailing body and beauty standards on women and girls, few focused on combating stigma and discrimination against fat individuals, and many perpetuated it.[1] While Women's Liberation sparked conversations about body image and dieting, feminists were never quite able to challenge those issues head-on. In 1978 Susie Orbach published *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, which took a

psychoanalytic approach to explaining fat, arguing that women over-eat and emotionally eat as a direct result of patriarchal oppression. This kind of argument was, and continues to be, a disappointing conclusion for those involved in getting at the heart of fat hate and oppression. Out of the politically charged social and cultural climate of the 1960s, the fat acceptance movement emerged in 1969 with the organization of the National Association to Aid Fat Americans.

The NAAFA, which altered its name to the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance in the 1980s, was spearheaded by William Fabrey, a thin electrical engineer married to a fat woman and inspired by a 1967 Saturday Evening Post article by Llewellyn Louderback titled "More People Should Be Fat." Fabrey contacted Louderback, whose book *Fat Power* would become a key resource for fat activists, and the two organized the first meeting of the NAAFA on June 13, 1969 in New York City to draft the organization's constitution and bylaws.[2] Although initial organizers were largely politically conservative, white and middle class and had little experience with these other movements, the NAAFA attracted men and women who were actively involved in social justice and feminist organizations.

However, in its early years, many of its feminist and queer members found the NAAFA's more conservative and assimilationist strategies inadequate for addressing the multifaceted factors that contributed to fat oppression. As disagreements between the NAAFA leaders and its feminist members mounted, a group of radical lesbian feminists in Los Angeles broke from the organization and started a new group, the Fat Underground, which openly attacked the medical and diet industries through disruptive performances and protests.[3]

In 1973, two founding members of the Fat Underground, Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, wrote the Fat Liberation Manifesto and established an ideology of fat activism that more or less remains intact forty years later. Influenced by radical feminism and radical therapy (a social constructivist form of psychotherapy that sought to relate personal problems to broad political injustices), the group solidified their aims and goals through the form of the manifesto, perhaps one of the most overlooked, under theorized, and yet politically significant genres of writing in the modern period. The manifesto is a distinctly modern genre, developed as Enlightenment ideals of political subjecthood and universal rights were taking hold in the West. While the manifesto is best known, Janet Lyon argues in her *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, as "the no-nonsense genre of plain speech, the genre that shoots from the hip, it is in fact a complex, ideologically inflected genre that has helped to create modern public spheres."[4] The political manifesto might not always be a causal agent of change, but as an artifact of modernity it does reveal the contradictions and struggles apparent in the constitution of modern subjectivity, identity and community. As such, it "provides a foothold in the culture's dominant ideology by creating generic speaking positions."[5] The Fat Liberation Manifesto not only demonstrates a fat activist perspective, but

sheds light on the kind of dominant cultural climate it is attempting to interrupt.

The rhetoric of the Fat Liberation Manifesto works to establish an awareness of the outside forces, the dominant ideology, that work against fat people in the United States. Unfortunately, it has endured and influenced subsequent generations of fat activists, partly because, despite small victories, the dominant ideology towards fat remains largely unchanged. Nevertheless, within the public discourse, the interrupting manifesto creates a space for alternative ideologies as it demands a place at the political table through its rhetorical strength rather than the actual size of the movement behind it. Fat activist manifestoes have therefore helped establish a voice for fat people within public discourse, a voice that has subsequently led to political, social, and legal improvements for fat people. It has also had a direct impact on the formation of a fat identity which, as I discuss below, perpetuates manifested interruptions with dominant ideologies regarding fat, beauty, and health.

The Fat Liberation Manifesto contains three conventions of manifestoes as outlined by Janet Lyon: history, an enumeration of grievances, and a declarative rhetoric that directly challenges the oppressor. It begins, most importantly, with a declaration of personhood and political subjecthood: "WE believe that fat people are fully entitled to human respect and recognition." The second point specifically condemns what they see as not only the site at which dominant forces oppress fat people, but where they take advantage of that oppression for commercial gain:

> WE are angry at mistreatment by commercial and sexist interests. These have exploited our bodies as objects of ridicule, thereby creating an immensely profitable market selling the false promise of avoidance of, or relief from, that ridicule.

This establishes a kind of contemporary history of oppression, especially considering the 1960s and the rise of "reducing" industries such as Weight Watchers. Their fifth grievance further singles out these industries and then demands

> that they take responsibility for their false claims, acknowledge that their products are harmful to public health, and publish long-term studies proving any statistical efficacy of their products.[6]

After outlining their positions, including condemnations of social discrimination and of the diet and medical industries, the writers end by declaring,

> WE refuse to be subjugated to the interests of our enemies. We fully intend to reclaim power over our bodies and our lives. We commit ourselves to pursue these goals together. FAT PEOPLE OF THE WORLD UNITE! YOU HAVE *NOTHING* TO LOSE…[7]

This declaration may be mistaken for the kind of contemporary body-positive declarations of self-love and acceptance, but at its heart it is something far more public than personal, more politically and policy oriented. It is a declaration of rights as citizens of the United States, a vocal challenge to those who disregard the promises of protection under certain laws as political subjects.

While the manifesto genre establishes a format for public declaration, the Fat Underground also took their declaration to the public. For the next four years the Fat Underground continued to grow in membership as they organized and staged interruptive events in weight loss clinics and weight loss meetings throughout Los Angeles and San Francisco, and as they stormed meetings and staged protests at clinics they read aloud their manifesto.

The Fat Liberation Manifesto has since been reprinted over the years: in the 1983 collection of fat feminist writings, *Shadow on a Tightrope: Writings by Women on Fat Oppression,* in magazines, in online forums and blogs, and recently in the *Fat Studies Reader*.[8] Although it marks a very particular moment in fat feminist history, its tenets continue to speak to and reflect those of contemporary fat activists. Lyon argues that as a genre, the manifesto's

> revolutionary speaking position constructs political certainty...not just by reinforcing polemical fields, but also by assuming control of the language of history, the conditions of plot.[9]

The Fat Liberation Manifesto functions as a means of controlling the language of history regarding fat oppression, especially as it outlines specific institutions and practices that limit individual rights based upon size discrimination. In its fourth point, the indeterminate voice of one or many "demand equal rights for fat people in all aspects of life, as promised in the Constitution of the United States."[10] The text therefore recognizes the ideological value of the universal subject with universal political rights and calls upon a larger shared acceptance of that value in order to obtain those rights from dominant powers.

This kind of demand reaches back to some of the first manifestoes of the 17th and 18th centuries which drew on the growing modern ideals of political subjecthood, and which, according to Lyon, arose as a

> public genre for contesting or recalibrating the assumptions underlying this newly 'universal' subject…[and] exposes the broken promises of modernity: if modern democratic forms

> claim to honor the sovereignty of universal political subjecthood, the manifesto is a testimony to the partiality of that claim.[11]

The Fat Liberation Manifesto continued the project of exposing the broken promises of modernity and demanding equal political subjecthood regardless of social prejudices.

While the Fat Liberation Manifesto focused on a politics of liberation, it also contributed to questions of identity that soon arose during the Fat Underground's shift toward a radical feminist politics which, as Greta Resenbrink argues, "sought to empower fat feminists within a fat feminist community and fat positive culture."[12] As Rensenbrink further notes, the fat feminist movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s

> created a radical fat feminist identity politics that challenged the larger culture to redefine fat from a sign of sickness and failure to a sign of power, beauty, and resistance.[13]

At a time of pervasive fatphobia, fat feminists claimed fat as an identity. However, fat identity politics were, and continue to be, highly problematic. Janet Lyon argues that within "identitarian movements" of the late 1960s,

> the internal logic of interrogating the status of the "we" quickly issues in a series of challenges to all notions of group identification: Who has the authority to designate membership in the group?[14]

This struggle over collective identification marks the fat feminist movement. Who, exactly, is the "WE" of the Fat Liberation Manifesto? Who suffers from fat oppression, and who can claim the identity of fat? Most importantly, how can fat be an identity when body size appears to be, at least to some degree, mutable?

Rensenbrink outlines the challenges facing the radical fat feminists in negotiating a fat identity politics. First, the apparent mutability of the body limited an ability to claim fat as an identity. Who counted as fat? How fat did one have to be to claim a fat identity? Marilyn Wann has more recently argued that the word fat functions as a

> floating signifier, attaching to individuals based on a power relationship, not a physical measurement. People all along the weight spectrum may experience fat oppression.[15]

This, however, highlights the problems with the project of establishing fat identity, a project which many radical fat activists in the late 1970s and 1980s attempted by various means of exclusion and inclusion, and by the monitoring

of behaviors and actions, such as whether or not someone engaged in dieting. Rensenbrink argues that the

> failure to claim fat as a biologically predetermined category proved to be most productive because it challenged activists to look more deeply at the complex workings of culture in the construction of fat.[16]

Let us then go back to the Fat Liberation Manifesto and determine how the declaration of political subjecthood opens up a potential space of inclusion in fat identity politics, which may further illuminate the manifesto's enduring power in fat activism.

Although the Fat Liberation Manifesto designates a "we," Lyon notes that the "we" of any manifesto "derives power from indeterminacy," that the "we" does not denote a multiplication of identical subjects, but a junction between "I" and the "non-I." The unspecified "we" therefore

> denotes and affords participation, on the part of the interpellated subject(s), in a provisional community whose power is located in a potentially infinite constituency.[17]

While the fat feminist activists of the 1980s struggled to assert a definitive fat identity, their Fat Underground predecessors had already utilized a form which opened up a "provisional community," a "we" that far exceeded their own numbers and that allowed for a potentially infinite participation in their political interpellation. In this respect it is not biology or behavior that designates a fat identity, but rather an ideological alignment. Nevertheless, as Resenbrink notes, "being fat became in itself a radical statement, a political assertion of defiance that far transcended mere demands for tolerance."[18] Therefore, while the Fat Liberation Manifesto opens up fat identity as an ideological subject position based on concordance with the manifesto's provisions, may it also be possible to view the fat body's political assertion of defiance as a kind of manifesto? Or, more precisely, can the rhetorical power of the manifesto transfer to visual representation of fat, to the point of denoting the same kind of provisional community found in the written manifesto?

Perhaps the way into answering these questions lies in an exploration of a new generation of fat feminist activists who emerged in the early 1990s, specifically those who began writing and sharing ideas through a network of self-published magazines, known simply as zines. As a staple of DIY (do-it-yourself) culture, the zine was not only a vehicle for personal expression; in its rejection of the mainstream, its reliance on networking, and its frequent connection with the punk and independent music scenes, the zine often served a political function. One of the most prominent manifestoes of the early 1990s was the Riot Grrrl Philosphy by the band Bikini Kill. Riot Grrrl was a

grassroots feminist movement that grew out of the punk scenes in Washington D.C. and Olympia, Washington. Bikini Kill was one of most influential voices in the movement and in 1995 they published their feminist philosophy, a manifesto listing sixteen declarations such as "BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings" and "BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak."[19] This manifesto outlines and establishes the work which the Riot Grrrl movement sought to perform, and which influenced young women across the country to publish their own zines, form punk bands, and reject sexist attitudes.

Because of the rhizomatic structure of zine networks, the manifestoes that we find within fat feminist zines do not attempt to present a unified front, as the Fat Liberation Manifesto does. Instead we find personal and autobiographical manifestoes, declarations of determination, of changes in personal behavior, of entreaties for help. One of these manifestos is found in the zine *I'm So Fucking Beautiful* by Nomy Lamm.[20] Lamm forgoes the "we" of earlier manifestoes and states,

> I will reclaim and use the word 'fat' w/o shame. my world is perceived through the eyes of a fat girl, and that is important.

Rather than an "us" versus "them" attitude, Lamm declares,

> fighting fat oppression is not solely the work of fat people. it is necessary for non-fat people to recognize the relative privilege they receive bcuz (sic) of their bodies, and to prove themselves allies to fat people. this is difficult work but it belongs to all of us.

Finally, Lamm ends with a personal promise:

> i will not allow myself to be discouraged or disillusioned. i will find beauty, life, and meaning in this struggle.

Although Lamm's rhetoric does not pit "us" against "them," through her manifesto she nevertheless constitutes a community by aligning herself with a potential audience who sympathizes with her struggles, an audience who is encouraged by her perseverance. The manifesto not only contains words about Lamm and her personal experiences and goals, it is also contains personalized embellishments such as squiggly lines and her signature, creating a sense of reading someone's intimate diary. Those reading the zine may not have had any personal contact with Lamm, but the act of sharing similar ideas with individuals from across the country was the cornerstone of zine culture. Her audience was likely to be like-minded, to have shared in her isolation, and to

have formed a kind of ideological community through interacting with her personal declarations in zine form.

The shift from the "we" to the "I" of the autobiographical manifesto, especially one as vulnerable as Nomy Lamm's, represents not only a postmodern sensitivity to essentializing language, but is also a way of disturbing the modern notion of universal subjectivity and its inherent hierarchies, stratification, and social abjection of non-normative groups. As Sidonie Smith argues:

> purposeful, bold, contentious, the autobiographical manifesto contests the old inscriptions, the old histories, the old politics, the *ancien regime*, by working to dislodge the hold of the universal subject through an expressly political collocation of a new "I."[21]

While the "we" of earlier manifestoes delineates, and perhaps even perpetuates the dominant forces of a society by defining and pushing against those forces, the poststructuralist autobiographical manifesto at the turn of the twenty-first century "blurred boundaries, crossed borderlands of multiplicity, differences and divergences, political possibilities and pitfalls, strategies for intervention."[22] One of the manifestoes which is successful in complicating identity politics in the 1990s is the Lesbian Avengers' Dyke Manifesto, which Lyon argues

> lays open the ostensibly static category of "lesbian" and reveals within it an extraordinary motion of bodies, partial identities, public struggles, class-based oppressions, and political passions.[23]

The manifesto so thoroughly complicates the notion of universal subjectivity that Kathleen LeBesco suggests that fat activists utilize it as a model to re-theorize fat politics by queering the fat body and fat identity. She argues that the manifesto embodies a queer theory that "suggests that individuals can inscribe themselves with meanings over and against dominant inscriptions" and which in turn "encourages us to play with ourselves and to make a joyful noise while doing it."[24] Indeed perhaps one of the most frequent ways that the manifesto is used in fat feminist zine culture is not an assertion of a unified self demanding entry into the mainstream, but as a fractured and fragmented self demanding a space to play, to "make a joyful noise," as fat individuals "cross borders to know and create themselves in acts of affirmation and resistance."[25] There is no definitive statement of unified action in the zines self-produced by young fat activists, but there is a refreshing transparency in their attempts to search out and discover ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of helping others to fight a similar fight.

One important element in Riot Grrrl and fat activist zine culture is the proliferation of visual images within zines, such as illustrations and collage,

images which are seen alongside manifestoes, and which may in and of themselves act as kind of manifesto. As Mary Ann Caws argues, the manifesto is a loud genre, an

> act of démesure, going past what is thought of as proper, sane, and literary. Its outreach demands an extravagant self-assurance. At its peak of performance, its form creates its meaning.[26]

Fat activist representations of the body also push past what is thought of as proper; their depictions of fat, happy, and sexy bodies upset the ways in which western contemporary culture and society read the fat body. Like manifestoes, these representations demand extravagant self-assurance, creating meaning out of their form, while also continuing the project of building and sustaining a fat positive community.

In her article "Theorizing the Female Nude" Lynda Nead argues that the "transformation of the female body into the female nude" in Western art is an "act of regulation."[27] This act of regulation not only regulates and contains the female body, it also acts as a way of disciplining the *viewer* "by the conventions and protocols of art."[28] One on hand, therefore, depicting the female nude is an act of exerting power over the female body, and on the other hand the viewer's gaze is disciplined by art, by the frame imposed over the female body. Nead argues that the

> frame is the site of meaning, where vital distinctions between inside and outside, between proper and improper concerns, are made.[29]

Framing not only delineates the boundaries between proper and improper, it also reinforces and strengthens those boundaries. The depiction of the female body as a nude within the framework of western art conventions imposes both a codified and regulated method of creating a gendered representation of the body as well as a method seeing, reading, and understanding that body. Nead writes that within the traditional western aesthetic regarding the female nude,

> "fat" is excess, surplus matter. It is a false boundary, something that is additional to the true frame of the body and needs to be stripped away.[30]

The excess of fat on the female body disturbs not only ideal female beauty standards but also the identity of the masculine-oriented gaze. Her excess signifies both the inability for the body to be determined by the self as well as the impossibility of self-determinacy.

Similarly, Susan Bordo addresses the ways in which Western culture understands and "reads" the body as a symbol of the individual subject which

it houses.[31] She argues that the disciplined body is one which both accepts the economic imperative to consume, but is at the same time able to purge that which is consumed and maintain the body within strict boundaries. She uses "obesity" and "self-starvation" as contrasting extremes to the "bulimic" norm, and argues that the imperative of self-discipline is ultimately impossible.

For both Nead and Bordo the fat body and its incongruous borders represents a danger and "stands in opposition to the patriarchal, rule-bound order of the symbolic."[32] One of the significant functions of fat positive representations is the way in which they challenge the constructed ideals regarding the depiction of the female body. Nead argues that the

> patriarchal tradition of the female nude subsumes the complex set of issues and experiences surrounding the representation of the female body within a single and supposedly unproblematic aesthetic category.[33]

Fat activist depictions of the fat body challenge the boundaries of this category by proposing a series of possibilities for the size, shape, race, and age of bodies. One recent illustration of the fat body which acts in a declarative mode like a manifesto is a drawing by a Tumblr blogger in response to a "thinspo" image (which she did not reproduce). Under the headline "Things I will wear whenever I want to" is a cluster of images depicting a diverse group of fat bodies in a variety of clothes which are often considered "unflattering" for fat women to wear, such as skinny jeans, bikinis, sundresses, and itank tops (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1 **http://creativeconflagration.tumblr.com/image/48549307743**

Flattering clothes are usually those which hide the fat body, and this image refuses to conform to a dominant imperative to control or hide the body. It is a kind of manifesto which uses both representations and forceful language. It does not, however, make a series of demands. Instead it declares a way in which fat bodies can proceed to undermine and disrupt dominant forces.

Another image which places a representation of a fat body with a declarative statement is one published on another Tumblr blog (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2 http://fat-grrrl-activism.tumblr.com/image/49261438847

In the top panel we see a figure holding its protruding belly accompanying by the words "Sigh. Look at this belly. I must be getting fa--." The bottom panel then shows the figure as a woman standing with her arms spread triumphantly with the fragment "BULOUS" at the top. The reader expects a lamentation over the fat body, but instead sees a defiant acceptance of the fat. This again undermines the dominant imperative of self-discipline. As Caws argues,

> the manifesto stands alone, does not need to lean on anything else, demands no other text than itself. Its rules are self-contained, included in its own body.[34]

Similarly, the images discussed above perform this function. They stand alone and need no other text, no other explanation of their declarations. I see these images as the embodiment of the Fat Liberation Manifesto's claim:

> WE refuse to be subjugated to the interests of our enemies. We fully intend to reclaim power over our bodies and our lives.[35]

The images are not designed to make their audiences necessarily feel good about their bodies; they are designed to empower, to demonstrate a way in which the fat individuals can reclaim power over their bodies and lives, by refusing to see their bodies in the way that dominant views necessitate.

Like the "we" of the Fat Liberation Manifesto, these and similar representations of the fat body constitute an identity based on attitude rather than strictly defined physical appearances or social boundaries. They do create a kind of "us" against "them," but the "us" is an indeterminate group, and as the Internet reaches more and more homes, the "us" is further unbound by geographical location. Like the manifestoes found in zine culture, these images are part of a large network of fat activists who continuously share and disseminate declarative representations, thus constituting a shared collective identity that resists and undermines the dominant forces which propagate western ideals of self-discipline over the docile body. If, as Bordo suggests, we read the body as a text, then the fat body is an embodiment of the manifesto, and representations of the fat body utilize its apparent excess to make declarative statements which are ideologically infused and which serve to constitute a collective fat activist identity.

Notes

[1] See Amy Erdman Farrell's *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) which offers an analysis of the fraught relationship between fat and both first and second wave feminism.
[2] National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance. 1995. Size acceptance & self-acceptance: the NAAFA workbook: a complete study guide. Sacramento: NAAFA, 19.
[3] Vivian Mayer, "Foreword," in *Shadow on a Tightrope: Writings by Women on Fat Oppression*, eds. Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser, (Iowa City: Aunt Lute Books, 1983), xiii.
[4] Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 2.
[5] Ibid., 24.
[6] Ibid., 52.
[7] Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, "Fat Liberation Manifesto," in *Shadow On A Tightrope: Writings By Women On Fat Oppression*, eds. Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser (Iowa City: Aunt Lute Books, 1983), 53.
[8] Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser, eds., *Shadow On A Tightrope: Writings By Women On Fat Oppression* (Iowa City: Aunt Lute Books, 1983); Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, eds., *The Fat Studies Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
[9] Lyon, *Manifestoes*, 60
[10] Ibid., 52.

[11] Ibid., 2.
[12] Greta Rensenbrink, "Fat's No Four-Letter Word: Fat Feminism and Identity Politics in the 1970s and 1980s," in *Historicizing Fat in Anglo-American Culture*, ed. Elena Levy-Navarro (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 219
[13] Ibid, 213.
[14] Lyon, *Manifestoes*, 25.
[15] Marilyn Wann, "Foreword: Fat Studies: In Invitation to Revolution" in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009), xv.
[16] Resenbrink, "Fat's No Four-Letter Word," 237.
[17] Lyon, *Manifestoes*, 26.
[18] Rosenbrink, "Fat's No Four-Letter Word," 233.
[19] Bikini Kill, "Riot Grrrl Philosophy," in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, eds. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartowski (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 532.
[20] Nomy Lamm, *I'm So Fucking Beautiful*, no. 3. Olympia, WA: Nomy Lamm (Barnard College Zine Library and Archives, New York, NY, 1995).
[21] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 157.
[22] Ibid., 182.
[23] Lyons, *Manifestoes*, 37.
[24] Kathleen LeBesco, "Queering Fat Bodies/Politics," in *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 82.
[25] Ibid., 84.
[26] Mary A Caws, *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), xx.
[27] Lynda Nead, "Theorizing the Female Nude," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, (New York: Routledge. 2010), 520.
[28] Ibid, 520.
[29] Ibid., 520.
[30] Ibid., 523.
[31] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1993).
[32] Nead, "Theorizing the Female Nude," 532.
[33] Ibid., 533.
[34] Caws, *Manifesto*, xxv.
[35] Freespirit and Aldebaran, "Fat Liberation Manifesto," 53.

Interview with cover artist Jessica Pizaña Roberts

Lee Ann E. Westman
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LEW: First, will you introduce us to your work and tell us about the images found on the front and back covers of this issue of *Interdisciplinary Humanities*?

JPR: My work explores body politics associated with identity, culture, and the complexities of authenticity. I am a Mexican-American who was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. I consider myself a "Spanglish" artist because I embody plural cultural backgrounds. Instead, I embrace subversion, the hybrid identity, and utilize multiple perspectives in my artwork. I enjoy working in mixed media and bridge sculpture, performance, photography, and video installation. Through the embrace of mimicry and contradiction, my work uncovers the absurdities of social norms. I explore the fluctuation of the body and mind by creating and performing in skin suits. Often times, my work humorously showcases sexuality and popular surgical practices with food.

The video performance titled, "Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice…That's what Little Girls are made of," is inspired by a nursery rhyme which I learned as a child. The garment used throughout the performance (*Mother Goodness*) is made with cooked and crushed sugar and spice. This labor-intensive video performance portrays the hardships of gendered norms, specifically those associated with female behavior. Additionally, binary oppositions are harmoniously presented through the construction of the garment, props, and performance. The pagan sculptures of *Artemis of Ephesus* or the *Lady of Ephesus* inspired the form of the garment. This skin suit explores the consumption of food literally and metaphorically. Force-feeding is implied as an enteral feeding plug was sewed onto the top of the garment. In the video work, I present the look of serenity often found in the images that portray the *Virgin Mary*. The video performance explores theories presented by Judith

Butler who states, "The body is a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed." [1]

The pinto bean motivated the garment titled *Rosarita*. This food is thought provoking because it is considered a Mexican staple. However, the light and dark mixture in each bean can also be a symbol for hybridity. Additionally, I was interested in portraying a conscious hypersexual representation of Hispanic or Latin American women with food. I utilized pockets in the construction of the garment to figuratively represent sexual availability. In the video performance, "Ay Papi," *Rosarita* sings and dances to a Puerto Rican song, which could be considered an embracing gesture towards the Latin culture. On the contrary, her action of pulling out burritos can simultaneously represent the rejection of many things. While editing "Ay Papi," I was inspired by the filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha who opposed the National Geographic perspective in her short film titled "Reassemblage."

LEW: Like this issue of *IH,* your work explores the relationships between women, their bodies, and food. How has your work addressed the ways in which women's bodies are often described in terms of food, such as "peaches" or "melons" or even pieces of meat?

JPR: I have always been interested in food as sex metaphors. As a child, I was introduced to these ideas through Mexican and Caribbean music. The analogies date back to ancient culture. "Eating the forbidden fruit," for example, is a sexual metaphor found in ancient scriptures. Foods like fruit or meat can easily be used to elevate or degrade the human form.

I utilize these metaphors and react to contemporary culture. In the work titled, "The Appointment," *Kapparah* responds to the slang term *chicken head*. This derogatory terminology is specifically used to describe women. I purposefully implemented a rooster tail in the construction of the garment, thereby, applying the term to both sexes. I often question the exclusivity of gender labels.

The availability of fast, cheap, and sexy food is also a thriving concept that I explore in my work. In a recent advertising campaign for Carl's Jr., for example, gorgeous models are exhibited eating burgers to erotic music. In my video work "Ay Papi," I utilize the sound of the microwave as *Rosarita* moves rhythmically in a sexual manner. The instant heat provided by the microwave is compared to the instant hypersexual body. Pinto beans provide controversy as they represent specific cultures while maintaining hybridity; pinto beans are made up of light and dark colors. In this work, I reject hypersexual food metaphors by extracting bean burritos from my body suit.

LEW: This issue of *IH* focuses also, in part, on the female body and fat. Some of your work has interrogated this issue of surgery and the female body, particularly removing fat from the body. Will you tell us more about those works?

JPR: When I researched surgeries like liposuction or Botox, I became more interested in the ritualistic ideals of sacrificing the body. Catholics, for example, believe that through the Eucharist they consume the body and blood of Christ. This ritual is a guide that teaches society the importance of sacrifice. Christians believe that through sacrifice, they can be closer to spiritual perfection. Not surprisingly, our modern society seeks to sacrifice the body to reach outward perfection. In other words, religion and plastic surgery both yearn for superiority.

These ideals manifest in my work. In the video "Atrevete," I remove cheese balls (which mimic cellulite) from my breast and thighs. During the live performance, I offered the cheese balls to the audience in hopes that they would consume the body and blood of *Venus*. The fluctuation of this skin suit demonstrated that one body ideal could be devastating to social values. The *Venus of Willendorf* was an impossible body ideal for ancient cultures.

LEW: As a Mexican-American artist who focuses on hybrid identities, how does your work characterize the particular experience of the Mexican-American female body?

JPR: Everyone is infatuated with beauty in one form or another. In many ways, American culture liberated me from traditional Mexican female roles. The video work, "Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice…that's what Little Girls are made of…" was a performance in which I explored my personal relationship with beauty and Mexican culture. In this labor-intensive performance I sought to uncover the romantic ideal of the nursery rhyme and my culture. The live performance was held for a month as I filled the garment (*Mother Goodness*) with cooked sugar and spice. Inevitably, the garment's weight became unbearable. Through the absurdity of this routine, I question cultural ideals and the burden they transmit.

LEW: Last semester, three students in a Contemporary Art course gave a group presentation on your work, and one thing that their presentation reminded me is how funny your work is as well. I am not sure we typically think of "Contemporary" art and humor in the same sentence; I wonder what you think about that? Do you think your art is funny? Are you surprised when you hear laughter when you perform?

JPR: Art theory and the institutionalization of art birthed very serious artworks like Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* or Picasso's *Guernica*. Many noteworthy artists have maintained a sense of humor in their work. In 1917, Duchamp flipped a urinal and titled it the *Fountain*. In this way, Duchamp mischievously introduced alternative perspectives in art. Artists utilize humor as a way to engage with larger audiences. Charlie Chaplin's work comes to mind when thinking about social political comedies. Artists like Isabella

Rosellini, Yoshua Okon, Bjorn Melhus, Mika Rottenburg, Pat Oleszko, Claes Oldenburg, Coco Fusco, and Guiilermo Gomez Peña, among many others, have approached art making in devastatingly funny ways. Laughter is part of the human experience and, therefore, a valid form of art making. Many artists argue that humor should not be confused with a lack of seriousness. Instead, artists approach humor as a way to digest serious issues. In the video "Ay Papi," I approach the hypersexual Latin female body in a comically disturbing style. I utilize comedy subversively as a way to captivate the viewers while opposing the dominant perspective. Some of my work is funny. Hence when I lecture about my work, I feel relieved when the audience laughs.

[1]Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Routledge 2006).

Heroism at Every Size: A Review of the film *The Deep*[1]

Christoph Zepeda
Alliant International University

Directed by Baltasar Komákur, *The Deep* is an Icelandic film about a fisherman who survives the harsh cruel weather and waters of the North Atlantic for six hours after being shipwrecked miles away from home as a result of his dense layer of fat. The sole survivor out of six fisherman, Guðlaugur Friðþórsson, also known as "Gulli," does not possess a body commonly portrayed in films depicting Western notions of hypermasculine superheroes. Instead, replete with a receding hairline and second chin, Gulli appears to be an ordinary chunky man of few words. Upon his entrance into the film, for instance, viewers see him drink, smoke, and urinate before hearing him utter any complete sentences, stressing his embodiment over his consciousness; later, however, viewers witness him overcoming tremendous tests of strength and endurance that should not, by any means, be reduced to physical feats. Based on a true story, this film portrays the depths of one man's solitude and fortitude as he flees death and faces the aftermath of his near-death experience; I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the field of fat studies, and particularly to those also interested in representations of masculinity, heroism, and narratives of survival.

Set in 1984, the movie was filmed in the actual location where the events took place.[2] With minimal use of special effects or Hollywood-like glamour, the scenery and props were kept simple in order to capture the realness of everyday life. According to director, Komákur,

> I didn't want to Hollywood-ize it too much. I wanted to not make a documentary, but be poetic. Nature and man, when you're alone at sea […] Even the more poetic moments are

> actually based partly on the truth. This was very important to me. We didn't want it to be "emotional porno," how we call it in our country: fictionalizing, making it over-the-top. There's always a bigger power out there. It's humbling. You're constantly reminded of that in Iceland.[3]

Certainly, Komákur's intentions remain consistent in that some might even interpret the early scenes of the film as slow or mundane, yet such calmness is ultimately short lived.

After a series of ominous foreshadowing scenes that involve the boat's net briefly being caught by underwater reefs and eerie panoramic montages of oceanic tranquility, the boat flips over roughly 20 minutes into the film. Repeatedly, the visceral coldness is further imprinted on the viewers' minds as the screen slowly flashes the air temperatures of about -3 °C (27 °F) and sea temperatures of about 5 °C (41 °F), continually emphasizing how dire the situation is. For the next 12 filmic minutes, a melancholic chaos washes over Gulli's reality, as viewers are left to observe his expressions of horror, desperation, and anguish; as he watches his fellow comrades perish, one by one, either through injury, drowning, or hypothermia, it's difficult not the feel the numbing silence of death. Yet, in spite of the awfulness of his situation, Gulli never quite loses himself; instead, he systematically checks in with the dying and soon to be cold lifeless bodies, selflessly offering what little sources of warmth he still has to others (e.g., he offers his boots to one of his mates). It is not until Palli, one other fisherman, dies mid-sentence in Gulli's arms gasping, "If you make it…If you survive…," when he experiences true solitude, a degree of isolation that can only be described as balanced between life and death. Shortly, thereafter, the camera zooms out to suggest that Gulli is now the only heat to be found in these freezing waters.

On his long journey back to land and safety, Gulli meets a seagull whom he claims as his faithful friend and guide. Swimming towards land for hours, he speaks to the seagull humbly. In a poignant scene, he pleads:

> I don't want to die…not just yet…If only he would give me one more day…One day… Just one day…That's all I ask…I would wake up early…Just one more day…What a day it would be…I'd drink milk from a glass to please mom…I was never the perfect son, but somehow she managed to make a man out of me…Then I'd go to the bank and make the last payment on my bike…I would only drive it this one day…It won't matter…I just don't want anybody to be left with my debts…I'd confront Halla and tell her that Palli didn't suffer…that he just fell asleep…And I know, because I held him when he passed away…Then I'd get the old dog and have mom take care of it…after that…I'd go visit someone

> special…and then you can take me…you hear?...when I've said what I need to say…done what I need to do…

What one hears from these words is that this man has a past, a story, a heart precious in its own way; an inner life is spoken from a person who has down-to-earth flaws, dreams, and passions. Much like other legendary male heroes, his life's narrative intersects with other's lives and interpersonal relationships; yet, here, what is worthy of consideration is not only his humility and will to live, but also the way in which an element of this ordinary man's extraordinary survival could have easily been overlooked due to the shape and image of his body as a corpulent individual. In other words, had this scene been omitted, the psychological nature of his personhood would have been ignored, further perpetuating the manner in which fat narratives are often affected by an objectifying gaze.[4] Yet, by affording a moment for him to say what he needs to "say," this scene shows Gulli's words being heard by a sentient being—his seagull friend.

After finally reaching land after swimming for hours, Gulli painfully climbs to higher ground as vicious waves easily destabilize him along the shore; then, viewers watch him being forced to walk barefoot over sharp lava rocks moving further towards civilization. Deliriously arriving with bloody feet, frosty pale skin, and a grotesque facial expression, he knocks on someone's door, only to be met by a young boy who immediately shuts the door on him after exclaiming, "Dad! There's a drunk at the door!" A few words are then spoken, but he finally collapses and the scene cuts to an ambulance taking him away on a stretcher. While this is a brief scene, it is an important one as it seems to encapsulate much of the remainder film, which focuses upon surviving "survival."

On the remaining narrative of the film, some might feel that the film loses artistic momentum; in fact, one critic has even claimed

> Although the opening act is pensively and emotionally built up, while the accident on the ship is brilliantly well-handled, the second half of this title is no match at all to what came before, with an immensely anticlimactic finale, as the story drags on aimlessly.[5]

But I disagree, for I believe there is value to taking note of Gulli's re-acclimation to society, specifically the way in which his traumatic experience is not fully recognized and validated by those around.

While Gulli lies in his hospital bed bearing witness to what happened, his testimony is constantly met with initial disbelief; medical teams and naval officers cannot believe he had walked for four hours in the freezing snow after

swimming in the North Atlantic Ocean for six hours, especially someone his size. Whenever he speaks to someone, asking "have they [the other fishermen] been found?", he is usually given such cold responses as "don't worry about that" or "they won't be found, not after an accident like this, son. Dead sailors are best kept in a watery grave." In a way, their lack of warmth and empathy for Gulli almost resembles an emotional manifestation of the coldness from which he had previously escaped. At the same time, while the local community is mourning over the deaths of the other five crewman, viewers do not see anyone reach out to Gulli, who is seen as a marker of their deceased loved ones, suggesting that he is still dead to everyone even though he survived.

When people express interest in Gulli story, they are usually more concerned with practical explanations and hard facts, to the extent that a scientist eventually approaches him requesting that he participate in human research. After multiple experiments are conducted, the scientist concludes that the enzymes in his fat helped prevent him from developing hypothermia and go so far as to declare that he has "seal fat," an efficient thermal insulator. While this hypothesis seems to quench the curiosity of everyone around him, Gulli doesn't feel satisfied. In this way, viewers see another disconnect between his lived experience and that of others. Moments like these flood the rest of the film, revealing how conceptualizations of body fat can take on varying depths of meaning depending on one's underlying beliefs about fat.

After learning that Gulli follows through and fulfills all of his earlier made promises, however, the film seems to close on a slightly hopeful note as he is seen on a sailboat once again. With a look on his face suggesting courage or possibly even posttraumatic growth, we see that he does not let his traumatic experience keep him from his livelihood.[6] In the end, Gulli's survival reminds us that heroism is possible at every size, though it also reemphasizes that how this heroism is received and perceived is tied to socially constructed appearance ideals.

Notes

[1] *The Deep*, directed by Baltasar Komákur. 2012; New York, NY: Virgil Films & Entertainment, 2013, DVD.
[2] Solvej Schou, "Iceland's Oscar entry 'The Deep' director on filming shipwreck, working with Mark Wahlberg," *Entertainment Weekly*, last modified November 30, 2012, http://insidemovies.ew.com/2012/11/30/prize-fighter-oscar-foreign-film-iceland-the-deep/
[3] Ibid.
[4] Sarah J. Gervais, Theresa K. Vescio, and Jill Allen, "When What You See is What You Get: The Consequences of Objectifying Gaze for Women and Men," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2011): 5-17, accessed November 30, 2013, http://pwq.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/01/21/0361684310386121.full.pdf; Chelsea Kilpack, "Wait Watchers: Exposing Fat-Shaming One Frame at a Time," *SLC*

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[5] Stefan Pape, "The Deep Review," *Hey U Guys*, last modified July 8, 2013, http://www.heyuguys.co.uk/the-deep-review/

[6] Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence," *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (2004): 1-18, accessed November 30, 2013, http://data.psych.udel.edu/abelcher/Shared%20Documents/3%20Psychopathology%20(27)/Tedeschi,%20Calhoun,%202004.pdf

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Notes on Contributors

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