

SHE'S SO HEAVY

EXPLORING KNOWLEDGES OF FATNESS THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERFORMANCE



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When Cindy Baker asks '[i]s the artist inside a work of art, a scientist or examiner, an alien, a magician, mime, clown or other performer? Is she perfect, pristine, a specimen, an example?' (Baker, 2009), she offers the female body up for examination. Engaging in an embodied performance practice regarding fat, fatness, and my fatness, my research explores the abject as object: identifying and critiquing narratives where the feminine body is seen as weak; immoral; unclean; and/or decaying. Lydia Webb is a BA(Hons) Theatre and Performance graduate interested in ideas of the excessive woman/women in excess, abject femininity and indulgence.

By Way of (an Excessive)

Introduction

My research is informed by working from feminist discussions of body image that, to invoke Karen Kopelson in her essay *Radical Indulgence: Excess, Addiction and Feminine Desire*, have 'attempted to recuperate excess, in the forms of voluptuousness and largeness, as modes of [...] "embodied protest" against cultural demands that women at once contain their appetites and remain diminutively un-threatening to men' (Kopelson, 2006: unpaginated),

Marvin Carlson talks about some performances, some embodied protests, as being critical and subversive; what he calls 'resistant performances' and how they play a 'dangerous game [...] as a double agent' (Carlson, 2004: 173). In an

attempt to disrupt cultural demands surrounding 'appropriate' appetites, my research is engaged in embodied practice regarding fat, fatness, and my fatness.

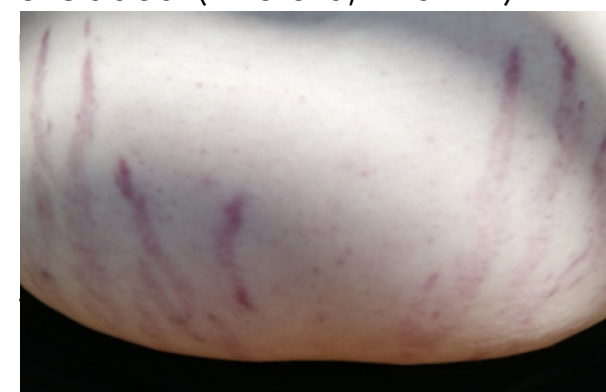
A 'Fatty' Cleaving Apart and Cleaving Together

By placing myself inside my practice-as-research process, I continue to explore the relationship I have developed with my physical excessiveness. Inspired by the works of Joseph Beuys and Janine Antoni, a recent performative exploration resulted in a five-hour durational performance, entitled *too much way too much*, in which I presented myself, naked, textured by stretch marks, and overflowing. My live body inside a wooden box too small for me to fit comfortably, was nestled in amongst blocks of lard. The box sat closed, but had a handle to allow an



audience the opportunity to look inside. On the walls of the space were photos, framed and hung precisely, of sugary, and indulgent foods pressed between the folds of my fat; my adipose tissue.

In this act of being cushioned in a wooden coffin-like box, there is both a cleaving apart and cleaving together of fat and my body. The fat becomes an abject object, and as Julia Kristeva points out, the place of the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses [...] the place where 'I' am not. The abject threatens life; it must be 'radically excluded' (Kristeva, 1982: 2).



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