

Chapter 8

Fat Temporality, Crisis Phenomenology, and the Politics of Refusal

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Little in late-twentieth-century U.S. culture has given any inkling that it might be possible to *live* as a fat woman. Die as a fat woman, yes. Die *because* you're a fat woman, unquestionably.¹

There is a growing body of scholarship that addresses the position of fat people as oppressed and as resisting oppression.² Stigma about body size, drawing momentum from the “obesity crisis” is growing, sparking various resistance strategies by fat activists. As literature analyzing the dominant discourses and critical responses has grown, many writers have noted that fat oppression and fat resistance strategies have an interesting relation to time or to a “fat temporality.” Fat studies work that engages fat and temporality primarily focuses on the circulation of “before” and “after” images to illustrate weight loss narratives, arguing that the pervasiveness of these images makes fat bodies uninhabitable in the present and often results in a lived experience of “temporariness.” Resistance strategies directed at these narratives aim to “occupy” the present and refuse temporariness. For example, fat activists assert that they are not “before” pictures nor are they “temporarily embarrassed thin people.”

In this chapter I advance three related arguments: first, that the fat temporality sketched in current fat studies literature is narrowly focused on the temporality of diet and weight loss norms; second, that the “obesity crisis” supports a distinct crisis phenomenology; and third, that combining these perspectives renders possible a wider notion of resistance than a politics of refusal. This particular area of fat studies literature offers a case study to think more deeply about how lived temporality and social and cultural narratives of time enable particular forms of resistance to oppression. The broadest argument I am advancing here is that resistance that takes temporality as its

object must simultaneously considers a phenomenology of time as it consider structural oppressions.

FAT STIGMA AND TEMPORALITY

How can a dominant discourse, such as the contemporary discourses of health and body size, create and complicate possible temporalities for situated subjects? This question is often answered with an examination of what Kathleen LeBesco has called a “moral panic.” She writes, “Moral panics are marked by *concern* about an imagined threat; *hostility* in the form of a moral outrage toward individuals and agencies responsible for the problem; *consensus* that something must be done about the serious threat; *disproportionality* in reports of harm; and *volatility* in terms of the eruption of panic.”³ Many fat studies authors have directed their energy toward changing disproportionality in reports of harm⁴ and explaining how medical and public health authorities are managing and producing obesity.⁵ Under the specter of the “obesity crisis” the future is dystopic or spoiled as society continues down a slippery slope of ever-increasing body size. Fat people’s embodiment is routinely used as a cultural shorthand to explain this crisis. Amy Farrell has written extensively about how fat panic of this sort shares a lingering and morphing eugenic history.⁶ Fat panic encourages certain kinds of (healthy because thin) bodies by evoking the fear of a physical “backslide” of populations. How can resistance strategies, against this backdrop, create and foster possibilities for embodying alternative temporalities?

I ask this question, however, with an understanding that one’s experience of time cannot be reduced to a project of individual resistance. While resistance has an important individual dimension, social, cultural, and economic forces contribute to future anticipation that differentially affects certain bodies. Fat studies authors and activists are right to note that fat oppression has a significant effect on anticipation for the future: “The various forms of *discrimination* that fat people experience, in schools, at doctors’ offices, in the job market, in housing, and in their social lives, means that effectively their *life chances*—for a good education, for fair and excellent health care, for job promotion and security, for pleasant housing, for friends, lovers, and life partners . . . in other words, for a good and safe life—are *effectively reduced*.”⁷ I hope to describe through this chapter what both a flattening of one’s horizon of anticipation and a positioning of one’s body as a location of crisis offer and further, that these produce a distinct temporality that can expand a critical approach to the phenomenology of oppressed peoples. To do a phenomenology of this sort, however, is not to say that this is how fat people necessarily experience time but rather to describe a cultural milieu that constrains the

situation from which fat subjects embody meaning. For example, projects of weight loss, which are *verboden* in fat activist communities, on this analysis, could be seen as a kind of temporal negotiation of “opening up a future” in lived experience (regardless of whether weight loss “works” or makes you healthier, etc.). Further, amid daily messaging of one’s impending premature death, renegotiating livable, spacious futures helps to make sense of the extent to which fat people are willing to go to rid themselves of intense social stigma (e.g., commercial weight loss programs, bariatric surgery)

To return to the earlier idea of a temporality of “temporariness,” visual culture is saturated with “before” and “after” images of weight loss, as well as heartfelt first-person stories of weight loss; scholars have identified this as producing “fat temporality.”⁸ Searching for this experience, as a fat person, is fleeting at best. Lost in an imaginary future of a different body and hatred of my present body, I am quickly taken forward into the future where I have to put on supper, plug in my laptop, and get on with meeting my needs and the needs of others, all of which flood out any sense of temporariness. I draw out this tension because much of the literature on fat temporality makes it seem as though it is the main mode of lived time that necessarily follows from ubiquitous diet culture, instead of being one mode among many.

Temporariness can, I think, offer an interesting set of possibilities especially in light of the work of disability activists and scholars to refigure the term “able-bodiedness” into “temporarily able-bodiedness” to underscore the inherent temporariness to all embodiment. Thus, explaining the functioning of temporariness in fat temporality is not itself a full critique. When entrenched in a socially marginalizing phenomenology of temporariness, however, what kinds of anticipation can one experience if they are not *in the right time*? If one’s body is constructed as “to be changed” and as not legitimate in the present, then it affects one’s daily projects of embodied care in particular (i.e., food, rest, activity, relationships, etc.). Le’a Kent writes, “As in the before and after pictures, the fat body is endlessly present in its representation as *past*. It is drawn back, recalled, referred to again and again, only to be cast out again; and through that casting out, it forms the margins defining the good body, the thin body that bears the mark of the self’s discipline.”⁹ These temporalities are not merely imagined selves floating in possible worlds; they help to anchor one’s temporal horizon in the present they order. They strengthen and make possible a particular horizon. For the newly thin, for example, their experience is often of a future opening up and expanding, and I think this phenomenological change is not false just because the weight loss does not last. In shifting away from a highly limiting visual economy, the social position they occupy is now felt differently. One might feel from this position that their fat selves are either dead or are in the past, but their fat self might haunt the future if weight regain is a strong fear (and

inevitability). The question of who gets to be a “real” or “true” self after a bodily transformation reflects social hierarchies, however ambivalent the discourses around whether a fat self is ever a “true” self.¹⁰ Starting a diet might help someone start a new future and open up possibilities. Or, one might have a thin self in the past that they are trying to become again and they may mark that as “the real me.” The struggle to maintain a “break” with the past or to “bring” the future to the present from the past shows how body size affects temporality predominantly in terms of discourses of who the “real” you is or who you want it to be, which cannot be inferred from one’s size or their level of the incorporation of diet and weight loss norms. Given that the social meaning of fat is as murderous flesh, it is understandable that an embodied response might be to feel like one must “hurry up” and get thin, disavowing one’s present for a better future.¹¹

Recalling feminist analysis of the temporality of fairy tales and princesses “waiting” for their princes to save them, Samantha Murray describes fat temporality in terms of waiting: “The fat body can only exist (however uncomfortably) as a body aware of its own necessary impermanence. Consequently, in experiencing my fat body there is a sense of suspension, of deferral, of hiatus. One is waiting to become ‘thin,’ to become ‘sexual,’ waiting to *become*.”¹² The effect on one’s horizon here is one of deferral in terms of future projects, relationships, and other life trajectories because it defers phenomenological weight from the present and puts it into the future. Because the fat body is figured as a “before” picture with the potential to melt away fat to reveal the “authentic” thin person, the body is figured as either in a process of transformation or *as it should be* just *before* a process of transformation.

Levy-Navarro’s investigations of before-and-after temporality are interesting because she surveys the diet industry’s culture of confession:

The successful dieter, in making her confession, divides her life into two completely distinct stages and, indeed, selves. There is the “before” of her former fat self and the “after” of her new thin self. . . . Oddly, no matter how much she traces the progress of her diet, the diet is, ultimately, understood in terms of timeless moments in which she discovers that she has once-and-for-all achieved this “new me” she so desperately desired. Such narratives are, then, apocalyptic in the sense that they focus on this absolute break with the past (even as they also implicitly recognize that they must struggle to maintain this break).¹³

Levy-Navarro is analyzing dieting futurity in particular—how does dieting extend to and attempt to construct a future for dieters? Fat subjects experience fat as intransigent not only because of its present disavowal but also because of its corrosive effects limiting their future possibilities. The future feels as though it *is* sharply divided, which burdens the decision-making present—continue on this way and *die*, or embrace the temporariness (by dieting) and live.

Many fat studies authors working on fat temporality shed light on different experiences; however, I do not think it is right to theorize fat temporality as *primarily* connected to weight loss narratives. There needs to be an understanding of a subject's experience of multiple and contradictory meanings of these temporalities, acknowledging that they are not totalizing. For example, one might diet not to lose weight primarily but to maintain a size, which might still be *quite* fat. This does not hang on a loss of true self; it may primarily be getting down to a size that fits the majority of one's wardrobe or simply not gaining. Though one's *reasons* cannot easily be divorced from dominant discourses of weight loss, one's temporal experiences cannot be deduced from these discourses. Further, there should be an understanding that diet and weight loss industries are not the only forces affecting the lived and cultural meaning of fatness; it must be taken as intersectional with economic, gendered, racialized, and larger social pressures that affect lived experience.

I have offered this overview of fat temporality because I think much fat studies literature has focused too heavily on before-and-after temporality without considering how these temporalities contribute to diverse phenomenologies. This may in part be due to the focus of fat studies literature on critiquing diet and weight loss industries, but it does not capture a broad range of possible fat temporalities and thus offers a narrow view of resistance to fat oppression. There are more possibilities for temporal meaning available in our discourses of managing food, exercise, and larger social projects that can contribute to and shape fat temporality. If I am on track with this critique of the fat studies literature on temporality, then this should ground a critique of the role of experience in theorizing resistance to fat oppression.

CRISIS PHENOMENOLOGY

Jean-Paul Sartre offers an articulation of crisis phenomenology as an inverted religious conversion. Whereas in a religious conversion one might have positive feelings of hope because of a glorious future, one has negative feelings of fear or dread in the present because of a projected dystopic future. Crisis phenomenology can be experienced differently, but I think it is an instructive addition to discussions of fat temporality.

While one can experience a crisis in the first person (a tragic accident), one can also experience a social crisis with others (economic collapse). These come together when one's body *itself* is registered as a social crisis in ways that promote an experience of urgency in the present. Sartre's account of radical conversion captures how negotiation of possibilities changes our temporal experience. A radical conversion is a jarring experience that floods our consciousness with norms, and echoing Kierkegaard, it is the first moment of ethicality. He describes radical conversion as "an abrupt metamorphosis of

my initial project.”¹⁴ Bourdieu draws on this account as well, explaining it as an awakening of a certain type of consciousness “produced by a sort of imaginary variation—the power to create the meaning of the present by creating the revolutionary future which negates it.”¹⁵ For Sartre, in a religious conversion we imaginatively create meaning in the present of a future that affects present experience by marking it as temporary. The religious worldview negates the present world; thus, one does not need to take it into account when negotiating possibilities. The religious conversion negates this world as fleeting and replaces it with a truer, universal, and eternal world of meaning. This changes one’s relationship to the future because we lean away from the present and toward a normative future.

In contrast to a religious conversion, crisis experience affects our relation to the future as marked by ominous and looming events. In a crisis we experience heightened anxiety in the present about an unpredictable and drastic change to our future, usually a near future. Instead of a positive religious future that negates the present, consciousness of a crisis is of a dystopic or nihilated future that marks the present as temporary as well: the good times will *soon be over*. Crisis experience can be thought of as a phenomenological anchoring in the present that forces heightened awareness of ourselves in time. This future rushes into the present with the same fervor as a religious conversion, but it produces a feeling of heightened anxiety or dread (depending on how you cope with crises) rather than an expectant or happy form of anticipation. Unlike in a religious conversion where God makes the future certain and just, crises bring unpredictability especially in terms of a moral demise and thus phenomenological anticipation is of a negative and erratic future. It does not free oneself of the present, but anchors and distorts the present flooding it with ways to mitigate or avoid crises. Since obesity marks the backslide of populations, a crisis of agency, environmental crises, and so on, it has become a way of rattling the present, with a future that must be avoided.

Imagining a capricious and gloomy future unsettles the present and burdens it with an urgency that intensifies norms that are considered valuable for avoiding such an imagined future. As a crisis for social stability and for our understanding of bodily values, obesity threatens taken-for-granted ideas of which bodies represent agency, which are (re)productive, which are healthy, and so on. In light of crises, it can be tempting to reverse the looming future and imbue it with, for example, faith in God, technology, the enduring human spirit, or some other saving force. To bring the analogy of conversion and crisis together, there are religious groups which are strengthening their religious faith to “save” society from the obesity crisis. Lynn Gerber, in her book *Seeking the Straight and Narrow*, unearths the contemporary comingling of the Christian weight loss and ex-gay ministries

in evangelical America, which employ similar rhetoric of controlling desires used to discipline homosexuals in service of weight loss goals.¹⁶ According to the rhetoric of Christian weight loss, fat people are choosing to be fat and they need to get their desires under control in order to honor God. Sexual orientation and body size are matters of personal responsibility for which we answer to God.¹⁷ For those communities, God is weighing in on the obesity epidemic, and eternity is at stake.

In “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, and Lateral Agency),” Lauren Berlant has argued that a particular form of experiencing crisis is unique to the “obesity crisis.”¹⁸ She terms “crisis ordinariness” a drawn-out crisis with no end in sight. According to Berlant, we live in a time of ordinary crisis because managing crises (whether real or imagined) is our new sense of *getting by*—our ordinary time has been flooded by episodic times of crisis. Her view contrasts with the account of crisis phenomenology I have offered because, for Berlant, the urgency we feel in the present is not experienced as urgency anymore—it is our new base rate of anticipation; we continue to feel these crises but more and more often and thus cannot respond to them as we would to individual crises. According to Berlant, the crisis of obesity is one of many contemporary crises (economic, environmental, etc.) that cause crisis fatigue. Berlant points to the connection between the lives of those figured as in crisis and the cultural phenomenon of crisis rhetoric but fails to take into account the lived experience of those who are figured as in crisis. Further, my argument is that for the fat person figured as the cause of social collapse, the crisis experience is primarily not drawn out at all but more closely resembles heightened anxiety in the present to respond to the crisis that is their own body.

A familiar and widespread cultural technique for accomplishing crisis phenomenology occurs with the advent of image-altering software in which a thin person can see how they might look fat. On the lifestyle-turnaround show “Last Ten Pounds” the contestant is shown a time lapse image of what they would look like if they gained ten pounds a year for five years. The contestants are supposed to experience this as a “wake-up call”—to motivate them to avoid the drastic future. The contestant is shown this abject fat figure so may avoid this future possibility. They are prompted to feel an intensification of diet and exercise norms in the present. Similarly, in the BBC television show “Honey, We’re Killing the Kids,” the producers use face-aging software to make the contestants’ children fat but they add blemishes, rotten teeth, excessive dark shadows under the children’s eyes, and sometimes they just say the child would be dead within a certain number of years. These shows along with countless others put the “fear of God” in participants, recapitulating temporal religious norms around the fear of an afterlife in hell—the fat body is a death sentence in this world and in the next.

FAT RESISTANCE AND TEMPORALITY

It should go without saying that the majority of representations of fat people are negative. This contributes to a general phenomenology of *illegitimacy*—of not being able to build a self of one’s *own* in the present. Articulating these negative experiences, however, can contribute to exactly what the fat studies literature is aimed at resisting—widespread social attitudes that fat people are inactive, inattentive, lacking in self-worth, and so on—creating a representative double bind. My phenomenological project is both to describe this phenomenology and to point out how it is taken up differently and resisted. The danger of not describing these negative experiences is what I engage with in this section, which is a politics of refusal. Constructing the “good fat activist” as someone who simply “refuses” and “supplants” temporalities can actually just add a layer of feelings of failure when temporalities do not actually shift the way one “wills” them to. Representations play a key role in resisting dominant narratives and crafting what resistance looks like. In many ways, our social imaginary construct what we think is possible. Judith Butler writes, “Fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons.”¹⁹ The legitimating effect that a social imaginary can have on lived experiences is differentially distributed according to what kinds of bodies are valued in society and also constructs the kinds of resistance thought possible by oppressed persons.

Because of the focus on representation and fantasy, much fat activism has been a response to celebrities and media representations. Kathleen LeBesco groups fat public figures into three “types,” depending on their relationship to diet and weight loss norms. These categories can also be understood according to a specific normative temporality of fat activism—namely, that mandated resistance is to reject before-and-after temporality and temporariness. The three categories are the “Out and About,” the “Silent Type,” and “Traitors.”²⁰ Out and about are fat people who refuse weight loss and the forced impermanence and future-directed wish-fulfilling nature of a thin future—they are unapologetically fat.²¹ LeBesco’s example is Camryn Manheim’s autobiography *Wake Up, I’m Fat!* in which she offers a quite typical story for fat activists who resist fat temporality:

Waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. All my life I was waiting for my life to begin, as if my life were somehow way up ahead of me, and one day I would just arrive there. I’ve wanted to write a book for ten years now, but I was waiting.

Waiting to be thin, so I could write about what it was like to be fat and how I emerged the righteous champion: the conqueror of my fat!

But a few years ago I finally realized something. My life was not way up ahead of me. I was standing smack dab in the middle of it. In fact, I was standing on the corner of “Life” and “You better get going, Camryn,” and the way I saw it, I had two choices: I could either cross that street or just keep waiting for a few more years of green lights to go by.²²

This forced “either-or” is characteristic of many “out and about” and fat activists’ stories—this “either-or” is *also* used to get people to *lose* weight—it conjures a future in ways that mirror a crisis phenomenology. This point of overlap suggests the free-floating nature of a crisis phenomenology and the radical temporal change encouraged by both fat activists and diet and weight loss norms.

One direction of resistance to temporariness has taken on the form of “coming out” as fat in the fat activist community. Originally emerging from Eve Sedgwick’s work with Michael Moon, “Divinity, A Dossier”²³ Abigail Saguy has written that “coming out as fat involves a person who is easily recognized as fat affirming to herself and others that her fatness is a nonnegotiable aspect of self, rather than as a temporary state to be remedied through weight loss.”²⁴ Fat activists who refuse temporariness through non-dieting are shifting the meanings of fat temporality that can affect their temporality in the renegotiation.

One response to temporariness is to affirm oneself as worthy of respect and legitimacy in the present. Kent describes the move as “shifting the relations of embodiment gives fat women a way to stop living their bodies as the ‘before’ picture and to begin to have a body that is valuable in the present.”²⁵ Focusing on pleasure, happiness, and taking care of oneself in the present is a way of renegotiating dominant weight loss temporalities. LeBesco’s three simplified categories impose a normative temporality on fat activism that suggests that only the “out and abouts” are *properly* temporally situated. This call is itself a normative temporality that devalues the weight of the past and one’s engagement with future possibilities. Some fat activists have started online campaigns stating “I am not a before,” demanding that their embodiment not be split into a “sad past and a “future happiness.” These strategies strike me as deeply ambivalent; on the one hand, they release a representation into the social imaginary to be circulated and recirculated, perhaps finding someone else who is also engaged in negotiating their lived sense of time. On the other hand, one cannot remake their temporality through photoshopping words onto a jpeg. Refusing temporary embodiment and a thin future can shift one’s burden of fat temporality, but it cannot be changed by fiat.²⁶ Changing our temporality takes place through multiple negotiations, encounters with others, and imagining new worlds over time.

Refusing temporariness is ambivalent because bodies are *inherently* temporary, precarious, and they often change size over time. Resisting fat temporality with a politics of refusal as a model for changing temporalities papers over the complexities of self-transformation and supports a picture of the self as changing through an exercise of the will. Further, mandating refusal belies the habitual connection one might have to the practices and beliefs that underwrite these discourses. Many fat activist narratives reiterate the trope of “deciding to love your body,” and most identify a turning point or epiphany as being responsible for the change.

Much like Manheim’s story earlier, there is a norm within fat resistance to “declare” body love both as the acid test of good fat activism and as a refusal of stigma from the outside world. More ambivalent narratives describe this as an ongoing struggle, but in fat activist communities there tends to be little space for the airing of bad body feelings.²⁷ Many within that community share in smaller intimate ways that the pressure to refuse stigma is exhausting and that the demands for resistance within these communities requires a kind of superhuman strength. Recalling the problem of feminist failure, volitional accounts of personal transformation and resistance can lead to these feelings of diminished self-worth and self-reproach. The fat activist “refusal” model asks that we fundamentally change how we experience our bodies *in time* when our habits *of time* must be undone over time and with multiple strategies to shift old habits and create new ones.

The refusal strategy of fat resistance papers over the fact that losing weight *is* an effective way to negotiate one’s temporality, albeit in ambivalent ways: it puts one on the right temporal track with social progress and people who lose weight often report feeling younger because of it.²⁸ These temporal changes should not be ignored. Losing weight itself can be considered as a way of lightening one’s temporal burden of being “in crisis.” Weight loss and dieting are practices of time in that we bring forth a particular future through certain practices in the present and those practices constitute a temporal renegotiation. It is thus no surprise that people who lose weight talk about their life as “new” and “just begun.”²⁹ They may be experiencing their first feelings of legitimately occupying the normative cultural temporality of the present, opening up possibilities that were foreclosed.

Living in the “thin future” for a fat subject can be a project of making one’s life more livable in the present—a way of responding to a future of impending crisis. Under the weight of cultural figurations of one’s own flesh as personally and socially threatening, the fat person can live *anywhere but* the future. A fat person may revisit the past if they were previously thin. A time before they were fat can take on increased importance as the place before “things went wrong.” The counterfactual past sneaks into our present as an

instantiation of a lost future and a desire to reckon with that loss. Negotiating oneself in response to a longer thinner future or a shorter fat future can divide our understanding of our lived future timelines—it may be worthy of grief to kill the thin timeline if it has taken on phenomenological importance. Thus, as a form of resistance, declaring oneself as “out and about” is not an attractive option without smaller negotiations that lead toward changes in temporality.

Melisa Brittain and Lucas Crawford’s video “Elephant in the Room” is a fat resistance strategy that riffs on “the heterosexual questionnaire,” which, much like a privilege checklist, functions to reveal to heterosexuals the number of invasive and uninformed questions that queer people are often asked. The original questionnaire asks questions such as “When and how did you first decide you were heterosexual? . . . Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex? . . . Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality?”³⁰ In “Elephant in the Room” Crawford, who is fat and genderqueer, is seen in close frame casually taking pleasure in eating and drinking many foods considered stereotypical and stigmatized for fat people: burgers, chips, donuts, tarts, and ribs, and drinking Mountain Dew and chocolate milk. Crawford and Brittain read in voiceover: “Do you have *slender* trouble? . . . Is it possible your slenderness is a phase you will grow out of? . . . Are you afraid that you will catch *the obesity*? . . . Why do you slender people feel so compelled to seduce other people into your *lifestyle*? . . . Are you afraid that inside of every slender person there is a fat person waiting to get out?”³¹ Crawford is seen casually and happily eating foods that are especially identified as “causing” the obesity crisis, yet there is no “crisis” in the video. The video, rather, calls on the viewer to *confront* their feelings of crisis and disgust. The viewer is invited to want to stop Crawford’s eating—to take away the food. The viewer’s anticipation is toyed with as they expect Crawford to be ashamed of the food he’s eating, and instead Crawford eats contentedly, smacking lips, and at times looking happily at the food before consuming it. We see pleasure in eating—no crisis at all. Brittain and Crawford suggest that it is one’s fears of fatness, fat pleasure, and fat eating that are the elephant in the room, rather than Crawford.

Cindy Baker, a performance and mixed media artist, also disrupts crisis temporality in an interesting way. In her work “Personal Appearance,” she makes personal appearances as a plush mascot persona of her likeness. The mascot suit is a cartoon version of Baker, and it is about the size of a mascot for a professional sports team. Baker’s mascot counterpart has a smiling face with bright red lipstick, large glasses, and various vibrant colored outfits. The mascot suit is lively, cuddly, and approachable. Baker makes personal appearances in public spaces; events, art openings, and so on. She opens

herself up to closer scrutiny (by drawing attention to her mascot self) while keeping a safe distance from vulnerability (by remaining silent inside the costume). Not only are participants not sure who is inside the mascot, they are not sure *for what* she is a mascot.

While some people approached Baker in the stereotypical sense of fat women as hypersexualized, for example, men (mostly) would look up her skirt and grab the mascot breasts and some even put their tongues in the mascot's mouth, one of the common things people do with mascots is hug them—they are there to cheer people on, to liven up public spaces, and to entertain. Baker's "Personal Appearance" is interesting because it takes a fat body and makes it lovable and *unthreatening*. Baker breaks down layers of crisis by inviting people to hug her, to touch the mascot, and affectively engage with a smiling fat woman in a "muumuu" whose embodiment regularly attracts disgust and contempt in public spaces. While performing as herself, people came up to her and offered to touch and hug her and were made happy by her appearance. Baker's temporal performance and relational engagement of making people happy and hugging and touching them is a politics of humor, relational embodiment, and ambiguity. Entirely unlike a politics of refusal, this creative resistance centers temporal embodiment and renegotiations of vulnerability. This reveals one way in which some of the crisis of fatness can be renegotiated and disrupted—through new and creative engagements in time and space.

CONCLUSION

Fat temporality carries with it a number of specific aspects—crisis phenomenology, near-death or foreshortened future, before-and-after ambiguity, temporariness, and fat/thin timelines negotiated through dieting. As a child and young adult I remember hearing that it is "hard on your heart" to be fat. I remember fear of exercising as a young adult because I believed my heart would "give out." While foreclosing on the health benefits and pleasures of exercising, this led to a fundamental mistrust of my own body's capacity for *life*. The closing of possibilities for fat people resulting from a phenomenology of crisis can affect one's lived sense of time and thus the kinds of future projects one can undertake. If my heart is soon to go out, then what kinds of dreams can I have for the future? This worry is connected to one's temporality more generally—how long will I live? What can I hope for? Reviving hope for the future is a vexed strategy because it is too often purchased at the price of the abjection of lives figured as *threats* to the future, be they fat, queer, poor, racialized or disabled, but this should not lead to wholesale rejection of strategies that renegotiate the possible.

NOTES

1 Le'a Kent, "Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women," in *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, eds. Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 133.

2 I use "fat" in this chapter to describe neutrally a certain kind of body. There are, however, degrees of fatness and some fatness is more proportional (or normative) than others and fat is always already gendered and raced. Much like its use in the fat studies and fat activist communities, I use the term as a family resemblance term that picks out non-normative bodies marked by size attributed to body fat; see Marilyn Wann, *Fat!So?* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1998); Marilyn Wann, "Forward," in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Not all fat *people* would agree with my use, but all fat people are subject to some kind of social categorization based on the fat on their bodies.

3 Kathleen LeBesco, "Fat Panic and the New Morality," in *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*, eds. Jonathon M. Metz and Anna Kirkland (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 73.

4 Glen Gaesser debunks many studies that have underpinned current "obesity epidemic" discourses that rely on the body mass index in Glen Gaesser, *Big Fat Lies: The Truth about Your Weight and Your Health* (Carlsbad: Gurze Books, 1996). Paul Campos is engaged in a similar project in Paul Campos, *The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight Is Hazardous to Your Health* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004). A more recent skeptical engagement with obesity science is Michael Gard, *The End of the Obesity Epidemic* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

5 The edited volumes Michael Gard and Jan Wright, eds., *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality, and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2005) and Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood, eds., *Biopolitics and "The Obesity Epidemic": Governing Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), contain essays that describe in close detail the techniques of obesity management and how the discursive authority of public health and medicine produces and maintains consensus that obesity is a serious social threat and on what should be done about it.

6 Amy Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

7 Kathleen LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 7.

8 Samantha Murray, "(Un/Be)Coming Out? Rethinking Fat Politics," *Social Semiotics* 15, no. 2 (2005); Samantha Murray, *The "Fat" Female Body* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008); Elena Levy-Navarro, "I'm the New Me: Compelled Confession in Diet Discourse," *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 2 (2012).

9 Kent, "Fighting Abjection," 136.

10 See Cressida Heyes, "All Cosmetic Surgery Is Ethnic: Asian Eyelids, Feminist Indignation, and the Politics of Whiteness," in *Cosmetic Surgery: A Feminist Primer*, eds. Cressida J. Heyes and Meredith Jones (Farnham, UK: Routledge, 2009). Heyes argues that the differential use of the terms "create" and "restore" cuts across

racial lines when referring to cosmetic surgeries, especially in the case of the article, blepharoplasty.

11 Many fitness centers, including Orange Theory, now have posters that say “sweat is fat crying.”

12 Murray, *The “Fat” Female Body*, 155.

13 Levy-Navarro, “I’m the New Me,” 344.

14 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, [1943] 1966), 598.

15 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 74.

16 Lynn Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Orientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

17 One of the many texts she analyses is authored by noted self-hating homophobe Ted Haggard, who has a weight loss book: Ted Haggard, *The Jerusalem Diet* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2005).

18 Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, and Lateral Agency),” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007).

19 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge) 28–29.

20 LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies?*, 92.

21 In the fat activist community, Roseanne Barr was a much-championed “out and about” until she lost weight and had bariatric surgery. She is now considered a “traitor.” See the invective in Beth Bernstein and Matilda St. John, “The Roseanne Benedict Arnolds: How Fat Women Are Betrayed by Their Idols,” in *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

22 Camryn Manheim, *Wake Up, I’m Fat!* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 2.

23 Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Divinity, a Dossier, a Little-Understood Emotion,” in *Tendencies*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London: Routledge, 1994).

24 Abigail Saguy, *What’s Wrong with Fat? The War on Obesity and Its Collateral Damage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13.

25 Kent, “Fighting Abjection,” 131.

26 Murray, *The “Fat” Female Body*, gives an extended critique of what Murray terms “voluntarism” in fat activism, that is, “deciding” to love one’s body, and so on. All other references to Murray’s work are to her article “(Un/Be)Coming Out? Rethinking Fat Politics.”

27 Similar experiences are reported within disability activist circles. The social model of disability (in short, the idea that disability is produced through certain spatial, medical, social, and economic arrangements) is so dominant that it becomes difficult for a disabled person to acknowledge experiences of physical pain, fatigue, or wanting medical intervention.

28 Levy-Navarro, “I’m the New Me,” 349.

29 Dieters often describe their lived rhythm of time as speeding up as their increase in energy means they also speed up: “Now more vibrant, energetic, and smart, they were before sluggish and dull.” *Ibid.*, 350–51.

30 Lucas Crawford and Melisa Brittain, “Elephant in the Room,” <https://vimeo.com/37506430>.

31 Ibid.

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