



Fat Politics Photography: The Stareable Body and “Openings” for Social Justice

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Abstract

In complicating understandings of art’s effects, critical theorists mobilize the notion of “openings” to surface simultaneously the unpredictability and indeterminacy of ethical engagement as well as its possibility. I explore the potential of these ideas and consider their application through Haley Morris-Cafiero’s photography on fatness and disability in her *Wait Watchers* series. Through problematizing surveillance and staring relations, between the observed Fat woman and her watchers, and interrogating the constitution of the monstrous other, the photography unsettles regimes of normalization in relation to fatness and disability. The images invite recognition for embodied difference as they register the complexity and difficulty of social justice “openings” for anomalous embodiment.

The “Cultural Puncture” of Fat Embodiment in the Photography of

Haley Morris-Cafiero

“A stigmatized person is a blemished, not quite human person.”

(Titchkosky, “Disability Studies” 42)

A photograph:

[1] The Fat woman walks purposefully down the street. Squints in the bright sun. Pink sleeveless sports top tight on abundant belly. Black capris hugging full thighs. Beside her, a group of two young girls, a teenage boy, a middle-aged man. Normatively shaped and sized. Appearing as a family. One young girl gazes under her eyes, trying not to look yet compelled to catch a view of the woman. The other young girl in the background appears puzzled. She too wears pink, but how is she to understand the Fat woman's different version of and inhabitation of pink. The teenage boy, hip with hands in pockets, looks down and to the side; down on the woman. He's grimacing: some kind of sneer. Disbelief. The older man, in sunglasses, isn't watching. But he's there, with his arm around his older daughter. Perhaps comforting her. Perhaps steering her away and keeping her safe from the monstrosity of fatness.

[2] My narrative describes a photograph in Haley Morris-Cafiero's *Wait Watchers* series, a fat politics work of numerous self-portraits, from 2010-2015.ⁱ The photographs, which are available on the artist's website, depict how fatness disturbs the social sphere (www.haleymorriscafiero.com). In each image, Morris-Cafiero places her body, as a white, Fat woman, in full view and in a different public space, often a streetscape.ⁱⁱ She engages in particular everyday activities, perhaps just standing and looking out of the frame, but also talking on her cell phone, waiting for a bus, stretching in

exercise clothes, and sunbathing. She appears contained in her own world: neither gazing at the watchers while they observe her nor revealing any awareness of how people are regarding her. However, in contrast to Morris-Cafiero's deliberate disregard or lack of acknowledgment of the watchers, the looks of one or more of the viewers of her presence reveal their acute awareness.ⁱⁱⁱ In facial and body expressions, they convey laughter, shock, dismay, dismissal, avoidance, ridicule, and repulsion. The overall effect is of a Fat woman's body demeaned and stigmatized. The images are bright, almost glaring in their kaleidoscopic colouring, with high sun and long shadows in many of the photographs. The intensity of colour, framing, and vivid lighting underline the force and concentration of the people gazing at, judging, and rejecting fat embodiment. The capture of the watchers' reactions is serendipitous: Morris-Cafiero positions her camera for the photograph, she enters the frame, and then the camera takes the image. The *Wait Watchers* series has received considerable media recognition as well as social media attention. An online article and interview notes that the series achieved "viral" popularity (Schwlegershausen).

[3] *Wait Watchers* generates an understanding of the anomalous body as an interruption to concepts of normalization; interrogates practices of staring at fatness as disability, as monstrosity; and produces a spectatorial summons that can provoke "openings" (Ranciè 55) for social justice effects. In this paper, I mobilize Morris-Cafiero's *Wait Watchers* photography

series to consider how the images of the photographer's fat body, which intrudes into various social contexts and is stared at in shock and dismay, re-frame notions of the "disciplines of normality" regarding embodiment (Wendell 88) and theorize the making of monstrosity and abnormalization. Importantly, the images also reflect upon the complexity of spectatorial positions: the starrer/staree relations that complicate the possibility of social justice effects (Garland-Thomson). Morris-Cafiero's work functions as a "cultural puncture" (Titchkosky, "What" 66) and as a "visual politics of protest" (Robertson and Cronin 17) about the contours of fat oppression, such as, for example, the anxieties, angers, violences, and medicalizations that shape the lives of fat subjects. *Wait Watchers* is especially evocative: the images of Morris-Cafiero, stared at and demonized, are arresting, confrontational, and disturbing. The "arresting image" that Barbara Klinger claims for "a particularly rich example of cinematic imagery" can be transposed to Morris-Cafiero's photographic images that are, similarly, "significantly evocative" and have the capacity "to capture fully our attention" (24). And, not only do they seek and find spectatorial attention, they demonstratively demand an engagement with embodied difference, generating a summons to, and opening for, social justice consciousness about fat and disability oppression.

Fatness and Disability

[4] Morris-Cafiero's photography in *Wait Watchers* contributes to fat studies and disability studies through the interrogation of the regulation of embodied normalcy and, simultaneously, through the insistence on anomalous embodiment. The epigraph at the beginning of this paper, quoted from Tanya Titchkosky, refers to those deemed not quite human via stigma that "can be attached to visible and non-visible disabilities, physical abnormalities, unusual body shape or marks, interactional quirks, mental illness, and depending on the context, aspects of gender, sexuality, race, and class" ("Disability Studies" 42). Adding to this consideration of the "human" and how stigma and diminishment affect the multiple embodiments that Titchkosky identifies, W. J. T. Mitchell underlines the need to "question the whole model of the self-sufficiency, mastery, and perfectability (not to mention perfectibility) that governs our picture of the human individual" (397). Fatness and disability come together on these terms and through critical disability studies perspectives on the regulation of normalcy, its "unmarked" status, ("Disability Studies" 46), and a recognition of "the general impossibility of normalcy's achievement" (44).

[5] In addition to these views that convey the possibility of shared frameworks for understanding disability and fatness, there are perspectives that productively focus on interrogating the relationship of fat studies and disability studies and that stress the need to investigate particular historical

structures and practices. With regard to the latter, for example, Amy Erdman Farrell thoughtfully situates the denigration of fatness in contemporary and historical social anxieties about the uncivilized and uncivilizing fat body, a scholarly offering that crucially theorizes fatness in its particular contexts and conditions. The potential of the relationship of fatness and disability and of fatness studies and disability studies is a central query for a number of authors. Charlotte Cooper poses questions that address the politics of self-naming and self-positioning for Fat women. April Herndon maps out a number of resistances to constituting fatness as disability, while also exploring how linking fatness to disability can emphasize political subjectivity, support fat politics, and strengthen “shared goals of social justice” (259). In examining representations of fatness in visual culture, Kathleen LeBesco connects fatness and disability in terms of how they disrupt philosophies and practices that “reinforce normality as superior” (83). All of these theorists complicate concepts about identity and social justice in relation to fatness and disability, question the notion of coherent and fixed subjectivity, and problematize knowledge-making for disability studies and fat studies. Subjects who live fatness and disability do so in a wide range of ways, under divergent circumstances, and via distinct identifications and disidentifications. They may engage in differing social justice purposes and politics. Yet, they also contest marginalization in aligned approaches, share urgencies for social change, and collectively resist

normatively organized relations of power. With regard to fatness studies and disability studies, both of these fields seek to generate fatness and disability as methods of critical thought and as sites for “analyses of fatphobia and oppression” (Herndon 259).

[6] Another sphere of analysis that links fatness and disability pertains to medicalization and pathologization. Fatness is often understood as an impairment that can and should be corrected by individual improvement regimes and not as a socially organized human embodiment. Furthermore, current emphases on the so-called obesity epidemic construct fatness as a medicalized and pathologized subjectivity that endangers individual health and wellbeing – as well as the health of the state – despite the fact that research does not in fact provide evidence for clear and meaningful links between health and body size/weight (Herndon 250). This conjoining of medicalization and pathologization and an insistence on cure and correction embed perspectives on both disability and fatness, but management regimes will be organized and implemented in divergent ways, and affects will, of course, vary.

[7] Discourses of disciplinarity and self-disciplinarity, medical systems, and social regulations organize varied experiences of fatness and disability. Knowledges developed by fat activism, fat studies, and fat cultural production, may oppose, illuminate, and/or align with ideas in critical

disability work. Along with a number of fat studies and disability studies scholars, I find it productive to include a consideration of fat embodiment and fatphobia as imbricated with perspectives in critical disability studies (Herndon, Hladki, Kirkland, Shildrick *Dangerous*). In this vein, it is useful to bear in mind how numerous anomalous embodiments, such as fatness and disability, are perceived as contaminating the social sphere, a point noted by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder as they reflect on “the peripheral location of risky bodies as always-already prescribed as a form of contagion from which others need shielding” (101). In considering the implications of this critical approach for disability studies, Titchkosky suggests that there is a development “from a unified concept of disability to disjunctive and multiple conceptions of disability” (50). Morris-Cafiero’s fat politics photography recognizes Mitchell and Snyder’s view by illuminating how fat bodies as risky bodies are constituted as contagion, and her work suggests the limitations of unified concepts of disability as it disrupts regimes of stigmatization for anomalous bodies. Her images unravel the normative notion of “disability as a ‘problem’ of the body gone wrong” (38) and interrogate how “fat bodies are simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible” (Snider 123).

[8] Before turning to a discussion of how *Wait Watchers* mobilizes ideas about monstrosity, staring practices, and the implications for social justice, I consider the concept of “openings” and the notion of a movement towards,

rather than an achievement of, ethical accountability. These understandings emerge in the work of a number of theorists who are concerned with the im/possibility of artwork to foster an ethical encounter and to yield social justice consciousness.

Towards Accountability and Social Justice: As Unanswerable Dilemma, Reverberating Agitation, Openings, and Moments of Im/Possibility

"It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation."

(Rancière 72)

[9] In *The Emancipated Spectator*, philosopher Jacques Rancière draws from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to posit "openings" in relation to the political potential of art (55). He notes that modernist versions of art's consequence attach a clear path from the art object to awareness and that this view is persistent: we are "prone," he observes, "to believe" that an artwork "will mobilize us against injustice" (61). However, in a move that is productive for a flexible consideration of openings and agitations with regard to ethical engagement, Rancière does not land in an either/or dichotomy by arguing that art's social justice effects are either possible or impossible. He

elucidates the “tension” regarding artistic practice “as a means for producing an effect” (59). What can be felt and understood, as well as the potential of “ethical effects,” are complex and ambiguous. The dilemma of the im/possibility of these social justice effects is “unanswerable” and indeterminate (61). Rancière’s philosophy of critical art in relation to ethical engagement recognizes that there is “no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action” (75) while also suggesting that “all forms of art can rework the frames of our perceptions ... [and] open up new passages towards new forms of political subjectivation” (82).

[10] Rancière’s notion of openings finds alignment in theorizations offered by Penelope Rossiter and Margrit Shildrick. Rossiter emphasizes “response-ability,” which, she suggests, implies how to “find, and create, openings and moments of possibility” (65) in terms of social justice outcomes for artistic work. Rossiter references Kelly Oliver’s understanding of response-ability, and, rather than assuming a “finite task of comprehension” (64-5), she underscores “the infinite task of encountering” cultural work that seeks social justice effects. This idea of an “infinite task” echoes Rancière’s thinking about the unanswerable and indeterminate quality of ethical engagement. It also underlines the idea of spectatorial labour with regard to the encounter with art. Accountability cannot be guaranteed, but it can be worked on, with and for ‘others.’ In assisting her students with the complications and openings of encountering challenging art, Rossiter

proposes “a movement toward, and dwelling with, immeasurability” as counter-practice to contemporary, institutional, and neoliberal emphases on measurable outcomes (61). This is a “critical standpoint” that can facilitate “an appreciation of the importance of social justice, a sense of the responsibility for progressive social change” (62). The notion of openings and immeasurability also synchronize with how Shildrick reflects upon and agrees with Megan Boler’s interrogation of empathetic identification. Shildrick suggests the need for “an openness that renders the self vulnerable” (*Embodying* 80). This openness, which resonates with Ranciere’s emphasis on the unanswerable and the indeterminate, is about a recognition of incommensurability, or “irreconcilable difference,” such that “we cannot simply enter into the experiential being of the other” (80). Rather, Shildrick suggests an approach to empathetic identification that acknowledges that “the self and the other are mutually engaged, and yet are irreducible the one to the other” (80).

[11] Art theorist Jill Bennett also proposes the idea of simultaneous possibility and impossibility for social justice effects. She asks how art generates thought and affect, with these outcomes intersected rather than opposed. Following Deleuze, Bennett argues that art can compel the “encountered sign” (9), an affective register, which is translated as neither emotion nor sympathy, neither identification nor disidentification. She proposes that art has the capacity to “transform perception” though a

“conjunction of affect and critical awareness,” a back and forth of “affective and intellectual operations,” and, like Rancière, Rossiter, and Shildrick, she questions the idea of “transmission,” whereby art is understood as producing empathy by way of affinity for another (10). Bennett seeks to theorize empathic vision through the idea that art can agitate political engagement: “it understands or ‘enacts’ the political as a sphere of interconnection, in which subjectivities are forged and sustained, but within which new links might be traced between subjects and places with only limited experience in common” (21). In this view, art offers imprints on the seeing/viewing subject; it neither illustrates nor mediates meaning. Empathy, as generative of a political, social justice outcome, is a tenuous possibility distinct from sentimental affinity, and it can emerge from the embodied, critical encounter with the work—views that echo those of Rossiter and Shildrick. Bennett asks, then, how artwork might be “actively political,” as distinct from work that reproduces/represents political critique. She suggests, drawing from Deleuze, the painter Francesco Clemente, and theorist Ernst Van Alphen, that the potential rests in conceptualizing art as a method of doing politics generatively and expressively rather than representationally. This approach suggests an “affective quality of space and objects to evoke modes of subjective experience” (151). It is a process, as Bennett articulates, of thinking visually, of “depth concerns” (14), and of shifting perception, to echo Rancière’s notion that art can have the capacity to change perception.

[12] In imagining an engaged public and reflecting on indeterminacy and openings, Kirsty Robertson and J. Keri Cronin note the difficulty in registering “the differences between political art, activist art, oppositional art, subversive art, resistant art, tactical media, interventionist art, and so on and so forth” (1). Their final phrase signals the ongoing complication of trying to conceptualize and understand the ways that art and activism might come together under a range of descriptors that attempt to signal the potential of artistic practice to foster just social relations. Robertson and Cronin remind us of specific Canadian-based cases of artistic practice that have had broad social influence, including, for example, the work of Indigenous artist Rebecca Belmore (4). Belmore has had a strong impact on the organization of museum spaces through her artistic interrogations of settler colonialism and its authoritative influence on how art is funded, displayed, circulated, addressed, and received, as well as mobilized for ethical engagement, in public exhibiting spaces. Nevertheless, as Robertson and Cronin observe, “ambivalence” characterizes possibilities for how “art might effect change beyond the art world” (10). In positing “ambivalence,” the authors resonate with Ranciere’s notion of the “unanswerable,” Rossiter’s “immeasurability,” Shildrick’s “irreconcilable difference,” and Bennett’s “depth concerns.” All of these theorists underscore the potential of art for social justice perceptions to emerge, but they are also insistently

cautious and give emphasis to openings as signaling complicated possibility and inevitable impossibility.

[13] As I engage with Morris-Cafiero's *Wait Watchers* series, I keep in mind the dilemmas, openings, and im/possibilities concerning art's capacity for ethical effects and for generating relations of social justice. Given the emphasis on openings in the work of theorists I've discussed above, I find it helpful to consider various terms that connote the meanings of this word: "opportunities," "expansions," "cracks," "gaps," and "porosities." These definitions gesture to caution and contingency while signaling potential and an opening out. With an emphasis on avoiding truth claims about art's potential for ethical social relations and on questioning resistant art as necessarily productive of an ethical encounter, I focus on "openings," and the meanings attached to them, as engendered by Morris-Cafiero's art. Her photographs disorder space, subject and spectator positions; agitate social relations of power; and invite openings for just social relationships. There is an immersive imperative to *Wait Watchers*. Morris-Cafiero's work does not arrange a recuperative model for fatness and disability, but, rather, summons recognition for anomalous embodiment or embodied difference and underscores the always already constitution of normalization in relation to disability and fatness. Bodies that fail to adhere to regulatory norms are policed, pathologized, medicalized, marginalized, and violenced.

Consequently, it is a pressing matter to examine artwork that might yield a

“transgressive image of possibility” (Erevelles 124) for those bodies as well as offer (uncertain) potential for social justice openings.

Staring at the Monstrous, Spectatorial Complicity, and Ethical Responsiveness

“Stareable sights disturb not just the visual status quo but the ethical status quo as well.”

(Garland-Thomson 188)

A photograph:

[14] The Fat woman leans casually into her left hip, left hand slouched into left pocket. Right hand holding her cell phone to her ear. Green shorts for her fulsome legs. Knees crinkled. A tight blue top over tummy rolls. She faces us. She is occupied with her phone call. A casual streetscape with people on benches. Two uniformed police officers just behind her and to her left, also facing us. Obligatory sunglasses. White militarized masculinity fills the frame. One officer, with a joking face looking toward the Fat woman, makes her the butt of his ridicule: he holds his police hat over her head from behind. She is non-noticing. The other officer looks towards her with a puzzled frown, wondering why she is inhabiting the public space. And he holds his stomach. Is he suppressing a laugh? Is he nauseated by the presence of the Fat woman?

A photograph:

[15] The Fat woman stands in a tourist space, busy with passersby, taking photos. Occupied by her activity, she looks away out of the frame. Her face is obscured by her hands holding the camera. Black capris hug her body. Blue T-shirt ripples over her side and tummy. Behind the Fat woman and walking towards her, appears a young woman, appropriately embodied with her thin frame. Fashionably dressed and registering youthful attraction in her off-the-shoulder, V-neck top, hip-tied bright, plaid pants, she looks to the Fat woman with amusement, her left hand covering part of her laughing mouth.

[16] As with most of the *Wait Watchers* images, such as the three I have described in this paper, Morris-Cafiero's gendered body takes centre stage. She is a noticed and noticeable woman who appears particularly present in the frame. Morris-Cafiero mobilizes fatness in relation to gender throughout the series of photographs, and while I focus on fatness as disability and on their potential for social justice impacts, there is much that could be explored in an analysis of the images by taking up gender and sexuality, as well as race in terms of the representation of whiteness. With regard to gender, for example, women's bodies in particular have historically been under scrutiny and pressure to fit particular embodied norms of weight and size. Morris-Cafiero reminds us that failure to meet those norms continues to be a source of gendered diminishment and demonization and that women are constantly and consistently expected to adhere to self-disciplinary

regimes. In addition, as Herndon notes, “physically discernible ‘imperfections’ such as fatness manifest as further evidence of women’s pathologies” (246). In the photographs, we see the viewers pathologize Morris-Cafiero: here is a woman, their gazes say, who is uncontrolled and uncontrollable.

[17] As an example of scholarship that analyzes how race, gender, and fatness come together in relation to Morris-Cafiero’s exploration of the regulatory norms that organize and classify the acceptable body, we could turn to Amy Erdman Farrell’s analysis of 19th-century images that denigrate both white and Black Fat women and Farrell’s examination of the social anxieties that shaped a racist and ableist visual culture discourse attaching fatness to the decay of civilization. Images of fatness with Blackness, in particular, signaled the social upheaval and primitivism that were deemed to result from women’s rights. Propaganda images were mobilized for and against the white women’s movement of the 19th century. Farrell unpacks how the white Fat woman became a sign of the dangerous suffragette for anti-suffragists and how, concomitantly, for suffragists, her image represented anti-suffragist inferiority. The image strategies of white feminists at the time, Farrell observes, “emphasized not only their white skin, ... but also their thin and wispy body size as physical evidence for their rights to full citizenship” (83). Fatness and race were interrelated in the

sense that the white Fat woman, Indigenous peoples, and Black subjects

were positioned, albeit differently, as “primitive, undeveloped, and less civilized” bodies (100).^{iv} In *Wait Watchers*, Morris-Cafiero’s whiteness is unaccompanied by thinness, and fatness does not afford recognition for entry into citizenship based on norms of body size and weight. Her body will “contaminate the rites of public citizenship” (90).^v Morris-Cafiero is situated in a culture of surveillance and reconnaissance whereby subjects deemed disabled are scrutinized to determine their fitness for participation in the public sphere (Erevelles; Hladki; King-White, Newman, and Giardina; Stoneman; Tremain).

[18] Although she is imaged in public spaces with surrounding subjects, Morris-Cafiero is alone in space and time. In her fat subjectivity, she is not only separate from the watchers but also constructed as the marked other who is under review, assessment, and surveillance by those viewers. She is analyzed and found wanting. Such solitude and dismissal is, as disability theorist Tobin Siebers remarks in an autobiographical work, “crushing” (25). Siebers reflects: “the upright and healthy fear the leveling of the horizon. They are afraid they will be brought low themselves and swallowed by the dirt” (25). Fatness, in particular, is associated with “dirt” and the “low,” in the sense that the fat body is construed as excessive, neglected, uncontrolled, unhealthy, distasteful, degenerate, immoral, and dangerous to the public sphere (Farrell, Herndon, Hladki, Kirkland, LeBesco). In relation to disability, Titchkosky observes, “disability is still viewed as an unexpected,

undesired, asocial, apolitical, bodily condition" ("Disability Studies" 51). And, Shelley Tremain, working with Foucauldian thought in relation to disability, notes how biopower and "the conduct of conduct" are organized through "normalizing technologies that facilitate the systematic objectivization of subjects ... and the techniques of self-improvement and self-transformation" (8). Fat bodies are un-fixed; they have failed to abide by these techniques. Susan Wendell remarks that a "failure to control the body is one of the most powerful symbolic meanings of disability" (61). The body that is uncontrolled and uncontrollable is a "threatening condition" (Titchkosky, "What" 117) to public life, to "corporeal, ontological, epistemological, and ethical boundaries" (Shildrick, *Embodying* 116), to the normalizations that make subjects governable (Tremain), and to neoliberal notions of individual and group disciplinarity and self-disciplinarity.

[19] Morris-Cafiero emphasizes the context of surveillance through the striking images of people staring at fatness, at a woman who is the staree. The watchers constitute Morris-Cafiero as the anonymous object: she is fatness as concept, as sign. In that sense, she is marked as invisible: she does not exist as a relatable subject, and she is unrecognized as a participant in the social sphere. Simultaneously, however, she is especially visible, in that she functions as an invasive presence and is highly conspicuous for her body's intrusion, as non-normative, into worlds defined by normalcy. Morris-Cafiero positions herself as outside and peripheral as

the object under scrutiny, yet she also situates herself as inside and centre because she is the figure with whom the viewing others are in an intense embodied relation. In imaging herself as both inside and outside, centre and periphery, Morris-Cafiero interrogates those boundaries and asks who belongs in the public sphere. Under able-bodied norms, fatness does not belong, and Morris-Cafiero becomes, as the subject under surveillance, “a blight on the state” (Stoneman 4). However, the photographer asks: who is under surveillance here? And who can be afforded notice as a member of society? While she is the subject/object under surveillance, she is also defining the organization of the visual landscape and the public space. She has set up her camera to record the people viewing and responding to her. They, too, although differently, are under surveillance through her photographic method and structure: they are both the watchers and the watched. Through these tensions and complications of gazing—the spectator of Morris-Cafiero, the spectator of the watchers, the watchers of Morris-Cafiero, and Morris-Cafiero gazing back at the spectator—the artist complicates what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls starrer/staree relationships.

[20] Thus, there are multiple directions of staring that construct the *Wait Watchers* series. Critical disability studies scholar Garland-Thomson explores staring as a practice that has been addressed by various critics, yet, she argues, attention to the role of starees and to persons and images of

persons who stare back in staring encounters has been missing in discussions of the ethics of looking and in scholarship about how social justice consciousness and effect might be created. For example, Garland-Thomson engages Susan Sontag's work in *Regarding the Pain of Others* and suggests that Sontag "is concerned about the ethics of looking rather than the ethics of being looked at" and about how empathic identification might be achieved or violated through good and bad staring (186). Garland-Thomson also observes how Elaine Scarry's work on staring posits possibilities for equity and social justice through staring at those bodies and images that compel "intense attention" (188), such as Morris-Cafiero's body in *Wait Watchers*. However, Garland-Thomson is concerned with the practices of looked-at bodies, the starees, and how subjects with anomalous bodies direct staring; how they direct the looking practice of the spectator, as does Morris-Cafiero through her photographic constructions. In discussing a range of art practices, Garland-Thomson points to the ways that autobiographical images of subjects with disabilities can turn spectators away from pity, a normative response to disability, to a potential recognition of human variation. As Garland-Thomson suggests, this is a social justice practice that can enable social justice implications, but like Robertson and Cronin, Bennett, Rossiter, Rancière, and Shildrick, Garland-Thomson acknowledges the risks, the complications, and the often impossibility of a move to influence, effect, and transform. Nevertheless, through a "visual

politics of deliberately structured self-disclosure" (193) enacted by the stareable body, the staree, can produce "staring as beholding," a responsibility, accountability, or obligation: "This is an act of generosity, of political and interpersonal leadership, that starees offer starers" (194). Morris-Cafiero's art in *Wait Watchers* deliberately generates awareness about how attention is paid to the stareable subject. She shows not only how the watchers in the photographs stare at her, but she insists on spectators examining how we/they align with those starers to devalue embodied difference and to participate in fatphobia.

[21] This alignment is facilitated by what Esther Lezra calls "spectatorial complicity" (351). In the *Wait Watchers* photographs, "we," as outside spectators looking at the photographs, are made complicit with the viewers of Morris-Cafiero in the images. We, too, stare, and become a participant in the relations of power that organize oppression. The opening, here, is the potential of "social justice-based knowledge" (348) that can surface because the spectator can see, via the staree's constructions, how fatness and disability are abnormalized, objectivized, and othered in social relations and can begin to understand how the body is, as Judith Butler puts it, "constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, [whereby] my body is and is not mine" (*Precarious* 26). The outside spectator is separate from but also imbricated and implicated with the watchers in the

photographs, such that, in this spectatorial complicity, spectators, along with the watchers, are starers of the staree, Morris-Cafiero.

[22] Made abject through the watchers' gazes, the Fat woman is positioned as the monstrous other, but the photographs problematize "the binary that opposes the monstrous to the normal" (Shildrick, *Embodying* 3), generate openings for how we understand what constitutes the "human," and invite an ethical engagement with that dilemma. Morris-Cafiero makes evident the social anxieties about asocial and monstrous bodies as she shows us the performance of the watchers' perspectives through images of them captured in spontaneous, grimacing responses. But monsters, in Morris-Cafiero's image constructions, "are always liminal, refusing to stay in place, transgressive and transformative. They disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject" (4). Shildrick argues that the failure to establish embodied normalcy can be considered an ethical turn from "normative ethics" to "the ambiguity and unpredictability of an openness toward the monstrous other" (3). Here, again, notions of uncertainty and of openness shape understandings about how social justice recognition might emerge and shape ethical spectatorial relations, particularly in terms of Morris-Cafiero's mobilization of the monstrous other. In her consideration of ethical relations, Butler observes: "the body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition" (*Frames* 33). Her attention to vulnerability and her emphasis on

“how we are bound up with others” (*Frames* 52) are foundational concepts for Butler’s probing of the possibility for solidarity and social justice (*Precarious; Frames*), and they provide an opening for the spectator to be receptive to “the question of what it means to be ethically responsive” (*Frames* 63). In a similar vein and through her consideration of the generative quality of the monstrous, Shildrick also queries the constitution of the human and the potential for ethical consciousness: she suggests that “vulnerability is not a debased condition of the other, but the very condition of becoming” (*Embodying* 133). In this sense, there is possibility for the spectator to engage with monstrosity “as hopeful,” as generative of a social justice interrogation: “a reconceived ontology and a new form of ethics” (131) regarding “the category of the human itself” (121). Shildrick frames this opening as a question:

[23] Rather than attempting to recuperate the monstrous, might we not refigure it as an alternative, but equally valuable, mode of being, an alterity that throws doubt on the singularity of the human and signals other less restrictive possibilities? As such the monster might be the promising location of a reconceived ontology, and an ethics centred on a relational economy, that has a place for radical difference. (*Embodying* 67)

Becoming Undone

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.

(Butler, *Precarious* 23)

[24] In complicating fatness as monstrosity, problematizing the normalization and diminishment of corporeal difference, and mobilizing relations of staring to interrogate how we might come to register the implications of spectatorial practices and denigrating looking for ethical effects, Morris-Cafiero's work agitates the possibility for social justice openings. Openings have the potential to make us become "undone," such that we are not "missing" the necessary labour, risk, complication, and im/possibilities of ethical engagement. *Wait Watchers*, in its aesthetics of "ethical non-indifference" (Bal 425), "configuration of ethics and sociality" (Lather 10), and "movement toward responsibility with indeterminacy" (Lather 136), suggests how accountability to and for others can neither be guaranteed nor disavowed. The photographic work can be considered a "search for what ... can be meaningfully connected to what we thought we knew but wish to revision" (Bal 447). In this sense, openings for social justice, then, are an opportunity for becoming undone, for questioning truth claims, and for "suspending ... certainties" as we "hesitate, wonder and doubt" (Bal 454-5). Patti Lather describes the simultaneity of uncertainty and persistence for social justice as a practice "that makes a difference in

struggles for social justice while working against the humanist romance of knowledge as cure within a philosophy of consciousness” (148). Openings for social justice become an imbrication of estrangement and entanglement, disorientation and affiliation, limits and possibilities.

ⁱ I discovered Morris-Cafiero’s photography when Sarah Brophy and I were researching artwork for our co-curated exhibition, *This is Me, This is Also Me* (McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, Ontario, Nov. 7, 2014-March 22, 2015). While we wanted to incorporate some of the *Wait Watchers* images in our exhibition, budget constraints prevented inclusion of the photography.

ⁱⁱ Like April Herndon, I capitalize “Fat woman” and “Fat women,” which signals a gendered politics of fat embodiment. This use is mobilized by many people working in fat studies/Fat Studies. It echoes how Mad is capitalized by subjects who identify as Mad, participate in Mad activism, and/or contribute to Mad Studies.

ⁱⁱⁱ I use “watchers,” “viewers,” “gazers,” or “starers” to refer to the people in the photographs who are either looking at or are in proximity to Morris-Cafiero. I use “spectators” for people who, outside of the image, look at the photographs. “Staree” refers to Morris-Cafiero, following Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s terminology, and it references theory on the interchanges between starers, who do the staring at stareable bodies, and the starees, who not only are stared at but also can enact a staring-back politics.

^{iv} Historically and contemporaneously, whiteness affords advantages to the fat subject, and fatness as contamination is produced differently depending on multiple intersecting registers of race, class, and sexuality, with disability. Importantly, the idea of multiple intersecting subjectivities with disability finds emphasis in the work of Nirmala Erevelles, who brings together an analysis of class, race, and global economies to map out what she calls a “transnational feminist disability studies perspective” (129).

^v Erevelles makes a particularly important observation when she discusses war and violence in relation to disability and other subjectivities: “In the war on terror eugenic ideologies that associate race, gender, and disability with disease degeneracy, biological inferiority, and dependence shape ideas about legitimate citizenship and justify representational and material violence against both disabled and nondisabled people of color, especially women” (131).

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