

TANTALISING GLIMPSES

ALADA Study Room Guide on Fat



Charlotte Cooper

2020

Tantalising Glimpses: A LADA Study Room Guide on Fat

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LADA Study Room Guides

As part of the continuous development of the Study Room we regularly commission artists and thinkers to write personal Study Room Guides on specific themes.

The idea is to help navigate Study Room users through the resource, enable them to experience the materials in a new way and highlight materials that they may not have otherwise come across.

All Study Room Guides are available to view in our Study Room, or can be viewed and/or downloaded directly from their Study Room catalogue entry.

Please note that materials in the Study Room are continually being acquired and updated. For details of related titles acquired since the publication of this Guide search the online Study Room catalogue with relevant keywords and use the advance search function to further search by category and date.

Cover Image: Matthew See from the *Fattylympics* in 2012 depicting a non-competitive event called *Spitting on the BMI Chart*. You can find out more in Charlotte's book: *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*.

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Introduction

Hello and welcome. Let me explain a bit about who I am, why I think LADA's Study Room is a great place to be, how I came to write this Guide, some of the assumptions and limitations of it and some notes about language. Hopefully this will give you a bit of context before you go diving in.

About Me

My name is Charlotte Cooper and I am your guide. I'm going to show you around some of the things I've found that relate to fat in LADA's Study Room.

I'm a good person to do this because I am fat and I've been thinking about what it is to be fat for about 45 years, or most of my life so far, and I expect to keep doing so until I die. This thinking has worked its way into books, performances, films, activism, zines, conversations, making a living, scholarship, relationships, all kinds of things. I am often shy about tooting my own trumpet, but it's no exaggeration to say that I am a prominent theorist of fat feminist queer activism and a mover and shaker in my field. You are in good hands.

I am also a Live Artist and a psychotherapist and that has influenced my approach to the Study Room collection in two ways: firstly, with a great curiosity, wanting to learn about how Live Art works and what might be possible for my own practice. Secondly, with wanting to care for myself and others in the space, taking notice of feelings and thoughts, wanting to offer a rich picture of what it is like to use the Study Room if you are fat or interested in fat.

I won't go on about myself right now, some of my work is in the Study Room and we'll come to that in time. If you want to know more you can find me online at charlottecooper.net

Why I Love the Study Room

It took me a while to discover the Study Room and then a bit longer to understand that it was a place for me. Here are some reasons why I love it which I'm sharing to encourage you to come and visit and build a relationship with the place.

I can eat my sandwich and drink my tea as I read and watch and think*
I feel welcome
I find something new each time
I find the best of myself and others there
I learn so much with each visit
It embraces politics that I am allied with
It encourages me to be myself and do my thing no matter how _____
It gives me ideas about how people thrive in trying circumstances
It has lots of layers, the more you look there more there is
It helps me to think and be in the world
It is a sea of possibility, hope, imagination, pleasure
It is a unique and expansive collection about people and ideas that are not usually represented anywhere
It is for lovers of the beautifully obscure
It is non-authoritarian
It makes me feel part of something much bigger than myself
It's a beautiful space where I feel free and able to breathe
It's a place where I meet people who are extremely interesting
It's all the best and most concentrated bits of a regular library in one place
It's free and open access
It's fun to read and look at stuff by non-conforming people
It's somewhere I can come alone or with friends and comrades

It's warm in the winter
There is a super-abundance of stuff to explore, it's treasure

* I am always careful not to get food, or spill my drink, on those precious Study Room materials.

How I came to write this Study Room Guide

The purpose of this Guide is to attract new readers and users to LADA's Study Room and bring a new perspective to the material that exists within it.

I was commissioned to write the Study Room Guide in late winter 2020. This came about through a handful of events and dalliances with LADA and its shop Unbound where I talked about fat. I was nervous about accepting the commission because I wanted to do a really good job and make everyone proud, I wanted to be totally cool and write the best ever Study Room Guide. I was also scared that I wouldn't find anything and anticipated feeling really embarrassed after talking it up as a suitable subject for exploration and sharing. Yes, well, ahem, that was rather a lot of pressure to put on myself. But I think these ambitions and fears reveal a lot about what it is like to come to the Study Room. It is hard to imagine a more friendly and welcoming space than LADA, this is truly the place to be if, like me, you are not one of The Normals. Yet I also struggle to feel entitled to the space, or even that my perspectives are valid, and suspect that others might too. Fat people often feel that we have to offer some extra added value because we are culturally and socially devalued, but perhaps we are good enough as we are and maybe this Guide will also be good enough.

I got going with some preliminary planning and thinking in late February and then came to the Study Room on 6 and 11 March 2020. I spent this time looking at all the material on the shelves and taking in the space. It was my intention to go through the journals collection and cross-check my information in the catalogue, but I was thwarted by a thing called Coronavirus and the ensuing pandemic and lockdown. This continues as I write and so the decision was taken to publish what I have and do as much as I can remotely. Like almost everything in the lockdown it has not been easy. Oh well!

The lockdown is also more grist for the mill. Being fat means that it can be difficult to access a space. Sometimes places are physically too small, they are run by people with small minds, we have access needs that cannot be met, or we have things going on which make it difficult to be out in the world. For complicated biopsychosocial reasons, not least marginalisation, fat people are one of the higher risk groups for Coronavirus mortality. So here we are, Remote Study Room studiers, inching our way along together in these times that are both weird and familiar. Maybe one day we will be back there together in person.

Assumptions and Limitations

I love fat people and see us as part of the fabric of humanity, not a debate about health, beauty or social cost. I think fat is a political subject.

I'm assuming that you are someone interested in Live Art, fat, or both. I'm assuming that I probably know more about fat than you, but that our shared knowledge of Live Art is up for grabs. I'm assuming that we're meeting and relating with mutual friendliness and curiosity, even though right now I'm the one doing all the talking.

The Study Room Guide reflects who I am, it is not a universal statement of truth which, as a postmodernist, I doubt exists anyway. This is a world of being: fat, queer, a dyke, working class, middle aged, poly, low femme, a stressed out carer, survivor, east Londoner, white European, higher-educated, feminist, punk, anarchist, atheist, pacifist, pagan-ish, nihilist, social-model-disabled, chronic conditions-suffering synaesthete and self-employed para-academic vegetarian able to live within my means. I cannot be all things to everyone and my standpoint will mean that I miss a lot out. I'm not a high performance theory scholar, so there's none of that here, which may come as a relief.

You may be eligible for a prize if you can find a cisgender heterosexual in this Guide.

I decided to trust my experience and call something fat if it looks fat to me. What I call fat might not look like fat to other people. The person or thing I am calling fat might not see themselves as fat. This is not surprising given that being fat is a highly stigmatised experience, it is usually presented as something you can stop being, and there are many fat people who refuse to identify as fat. If this is you and I have called you fat, I am sorry, we can talk about it. Similarly, if you come to the Study Room, please remember that I am not the boss of fat, that you can call things fat too, if you want to. You are entitled to say what you see as much as anybody else.

I am being paid £200 to produce this work. This would pay for just under three hours of my time in my day job before tax. I'm a good writer but that isn't enough time to create a Study Room Guide. Private practice psychotherapy pays alright if you have the knack, Live Art pays poorly. I haven't worked out the hourly rate for writing this Guide but it is likely pennies since I wanted to do a good job. This is not to criticise LADA, I am glad of the opportunity, but this Study Room Guide reflects its investment and would be a more thorough and rigorous affair if it were fully funded.

I was limited in the Study Room by the spaces my body can reach. It was harder to trawl the lowest shelves and I skimmed some of the stuff on the highest because I was scared and shaky teetering fatly on the library steps! Please think of my vertigo kindly as you read on.

Language

I'm not into policing language and believe that people should use the words that are most meaningful to them. However, I do try to avoid euphemisms and language that is intended to be kind or polite, but which reinforces fat people's status as slightly less than human. Overweight is one of those terms, for example, I just find it a bit of a sad sack concept.

If you are new to thinking about fat you might be surprised to read that I think of obese and fat as different things.

- Obese is a medicalised term, a word that is used about us but which few of us use ourselves. It's not a neutral word even though it sounds scientific. It is often abjecting.
- Fat is an adjective that has roots in activism. It is a word reclaimed from hate and victimisation. It is associated with pride in identity, but this may be wishful thinking for many fat people because it is common for us to feel self-loathing. It's a challenging and daring word.

Both words are political, but I would like you to call me fat.

For more on language see my ebook *Fat Activist Vernacular*, a glossary of fat activist related words and concepts. It's available to download through Unbound.

Jargon

I write as someone indoctrinated in the British and Irish higher education system and sometimes I can't help using jargon. Here are some words I have used that might need a bit of explanation. There's no shame in using a dictionary, asking someone or searching for the idea online if you find something that isn't clear.

Discourse: a sociological term that means 'all the ways we think and talk about a subject'.

Fatphobia: fear and hatred of fat, which is actually the fear and hatred of fat people.

Normative: a way of saying normal which shows that normal is not a naturally occurring fact, but something that is decided by people.

Phenomenology: a way of understanding things based on how they are experienced.

Postmodernist: someone who believes that reality is made up of contextual bits and pieces that are always changing, rather than reality being one big universal and static picture.

Social Model: a way of understanding disability that says it's social attitudes that disable people, not bodily differences.

Theory: a way of trying to understand why things are as they are.

Background

Fat, especially the fat queer feminist thinking that I am grounded in, is a fringe discourse. By this I mean that it's obscure, most people don't know about it, it's easy to overlook as trivial. Fat is all about eating and exercise or 'loving your curves,' it's boring, a flimsy subject for deluded people, it's unhealthy and shouldn't be encouraged, there's nothing new to say about it. If you think this, you are wrong and I am about to set you right and explain why you might not have thought about this until now. I will also explain how you can develop your understanding by actually coming to the Study Room.

Five reasons why Live Artists should care about fat

1. Live Art is obsessed with embodiment and bodies are the heart of things. Fat people have phenomenologically super-charged bodies. Like anyone else from the margins, we have incredible, illuminating, powerful tales to tell.

2. Live Artists are people who are critically engaged with contemporary life. Chew on this: in 2000 the World Health Organization (WHO) published *Obesity*, a report authored by weight loss stakeholders and medics sympathetic to them or even on their payroll. It will come as no surprise to hear that weight loss is a mega-zillions industry. Although fatphobia had been a problem in the West before 2000, usually confined to bullying, grim encounters with your GP or nasty comments from family members, this report accelerated it into worldwide government policy and gave bullies, GPs and relatives a mandate to get further on your case. The report formed a backlash against an obscure feminist social movement that advocated fat acceptance and was gaining traction. It prompted rhetoric about an epidemic of obesity and a lot of money was shunted into anti-obesity programmes. The report had profound effects that continue to mutate. It is hard to see how obesity epidemic interventions have had any positive public health effects, twenty years later and now a generation of children who grew up saturated with this fatphobia are now coming into adulthood. It is my belief that fat people cannot be eradicated. The desire to do so is called eugenics. The WHO approach is a disaster, but it made fat a public subject even if for all the wrong reasons. There are at least fifteen performance projects that could be based on this one paragraph alone.

3. Fat is an intersectional subject. If you are talking about fat you are also talking about class, race, gender, disability and queerness. You might also be talking about identity, consumerism and capitalism. You will definitely be talking about medicalisation, ageing and healthism. I hope you will be talking about feminism. You can't separate it out, even if you are literally talking about fat cells on a thigh, that talk is contextualised by so many things. There's a lot in there and I'm barely scratching the surface, which makes fat a really fertile subject for Live Artists.

4. Fat looks amazing. It doesn't matter whether or not you have a costume budget, fat people are compelling to look at in all states of dress and undress. Live Artists love to get their kit off and fat people have an advantage in being easily able to make a spectacle of ourselves because our bodies are idiosyncratic and non-conforming.

5. Live Artists are contrarians who love all the things that normal people find uncomfortable. In the opposite land of Live Art things that are grotesque, weird, horrifying, bizarre and wrong are things in which we find beauty and power. Nail your scrotum to a board? Check. Bleed all over the floor? Love it. Get someone to shoot you? Yes please. Arrange your body fluids in jars? Heaven. The Normals really hate fat people so what could be more Live Art than to bring it to people's attention?

Add your own reasons:

Why fat Live Art is hard to find

Fat is a compelling subject for Live Artists but fat Live Art remains quite hard to find. Here are some thoughts about why that is.

You need a lens

It takes time and experience to see fat. If you don't have the means to see and make sense of something, you're not going to find anything. I often think of that scene in the film *Interview with a Vampire* where Tom Cruise homoerotically bites Brad Pitt and Brad can see all the squirming and unsettling vampire world things that were previously hidden to him as a mortal and it blows his mind. Fat is like that - you need to be bitten by someone in the know who can accompany you to the underworld. Maybe that's what I'm doing with this Study Room Guide. If you want to be more proper about it you could refer to Paolo Friere's idea of *conscientização*, which means the process that happens when oppressed people become critically and politically aware. I've also found Vito Russo's book and film *The Celluloid Closet* useful in thinking about this Study Room Guide. In that work he shows that even though there was no such thing as 'gay cinema' historically, queers developed an eye for performers who were unmistakably homo. Those minor supporting characters would become the focus of the film for a queer gaze, like a secret that straights don't understand.

The wrong people speak about fat

Fat is a subject for anyone to engage with. But it remains rare for fat people to speak directly about being fat. Where we do speak, our voices are invariably mediated by thin people with an agenda: medics, researchers, journalists, politicians, academics, celebrities and the rest of the peanut gallery. Disability activists coined the expression *Nothing About Us Without Us* but the depressing fact is that in the world of fat, especially within obesity, it is invariably about us without us. Institutional gatekeeping also ensures fat people's silence. I have argued elsewhere that standpoint matters, it is important that the people most affected by something are the ones whose voices are centred and listened to. It is imperative that we are the generators and owners of knowledge that affects us. But this is contentious in fat,

where thin people feel entitled to define the terms by which fat is spoken about and understood. They get affronted when you demand space or suggest that they don't know it all. Their perspectives skew fat reality, no matter how well-meaning. Their jobs and status depend on them being the experts and that's the way it stays, they can't seem to stick a cork in it.

Cultural transmission is under-developed

A diverse social movement of fat people has been around for several decades and now spans the globe. Fat feminist activism was established in the late 1960s and had precedents in anti-racist organising earlier in that decade. Most people don't know about this, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist or is worthless or banal. If you care to do your research you will find fat histories, communities and culture. Unfortunately, fat activist historians, intergenerational and cross-cultural conversations are rare or ultra-small scale. Things don't get documented and disseminated well. There is a lot of gatekeeping around who gets to make, publish and document their work and many fat people are left out and don't feel entitled to claim that space. Paper trails are easily broken, academics don't cite activists and activists don't cite at all, the ephemeral nature of online life means that so much gets lost.

Identifying fat is complicated

People's bodies change, how people see themselves is not always how others see them, people have other priorities. Is someone who self-identifies as fat but is normatively sized actually fat? How about someone who is positioned as fat in one context (eg ballet) but is considered normal in another? What if you used to be fat? What if someone suggests a boundary and you come in just under? What if you are a thin lover of a fat person and are entwined in their life? What if you are fat but don't call yourself fat? What if sometimes you are fat and sometimes you are not? What if you consider your work fat but your collaborators think it is about something else? How do you possibly pin this down in order to focus on it? Would you want to?

Fragments are considered enough

Sometimes people think that working with themes around food, eating, dieting or weight loss is the same as talking about fat. There may well be crossovers, but these themes are subsections of fat as well as subjects in their own right, they are not enough in themselves to represent fat. They are fragments of a whole. Same goes for when people talk about thinness and think they are talking about fat. Or Body Positivity (or even just 'bodies' in academia). These things are not the same as each other. They further remove fat from the discussion.

Oppression

It is common for fat people to be told repeatedly, from childhood to death, that we are ugly, stupid, disgusting and worthless. These messages can be blatant and subtle. They come from people we love and trust as well as complete strangers. They pop up at any time. We internalise them. Sometimes we find ways of living despite this noise and Live Art can be a means of helping with that. But it is a miracle that any of us ever leave the house, and actually some of us don't. We die young.

This is called oppression. When we put our fat bodies on the line, and share that we believe we are culturally valuable, we are doing so in spite of the noise. Sometimes it is easy, we learn tricks, we gain confidence and this is beautiful. This tension makes fat Live Art compelling, but it is also very, very hard. Oppression is part of the context in which we are culturally erased.

Navigating the Study Room if You are Fat

LADA has moved venues a few times over the years. Its current premises are located in a beautiful, big, light and airy hall in East London.

If you want to come to the Study Room to develop your understanding of fat, or anything else, contact LADA and see if it is open when you want to visit. Use this opportunity to ask about access if you have particular needs. Bear in mind that although the entrance is upstairs, there is a lift and a disabled toilet available. If you need parking, ask them about that. Do not be shy, LADA people are helpful and delightful.

Travel there somehow.

Get buzzed in at the front door. Wash your hands if the Coronavirus is still at large, or even if not. Then come in through two small doors that open into a big doorway, you might have to wrestle with them a bit. Say hello to people as you come in. Find a spot at a table. There are chairs of varying sizes and sturdiness. There is a kitchen where you can make a cuppa or heat up things to eat. Get settled.

Look around the room, look up at the ceiling, look at the art on the walls. There are fat people here, you are not alone. You might see a picture of Katy Baird looking out at you. Move around and take in the space. Mama Cass is on the jukebox singing *It's Getting Better* and *Who's To Blame*. Selina Thompson, Katherine Araniello and Franko B are there as *Tiny Live Art* artworks. There are memories of fat people in the walls and echoes of the room from talks and events. There have been images of fat people played on that big screen in the middle of the room and sounds of us from the speakers. We have thought, discussed, laughed, cried, listened, flirted, raged, eaten crisps, wondered, air-kissed, sighed and howled in this room together. I will soon show you some of the fat people who live in the collection. If you want, your presence makes you part of this community too.

When you are ready, crack open the catalogue on your own device or the computer in the corner and have a poke around. Or simply have a look at the shelves and see what you can find. It is ok to ask if you need help reaching something. Put them back in exactly the same place when you are done, or in the box in the corner for re-shelving.

Fill your heart and soul with what you find.

If you have a wobble or freak out for any reason, you can ride it out, hide in the toilets, go outside and sit on or by the steps, go to the park around the corner, or to a café and then come back or go home. Nobody minds. If you see someone interesting, see if it's ok to talk to them. You are allowed to flirt and make friends here.

You belong.

Suggested Reading and Viewing

This was my process and this is what I found, organised thematically and alphabetically. Sometimes I have added comments and sometimes not.

I searched the catalogue for:

- Keywords, like fat, obese, weight, diet, etc
- I followed keyword trails that people creating the catalogue had already set
- I asked my friends on Facebook to name as many fat Live Artists as they could and together we made a big list of names, which I then searched
- I searched for associated themes, like disability, body, food, medicalisation, and followed whatever trails opened up to me

I glanced through LADA's online resources and got a bit lost because there is so much there.

I came to the Study Room and looked at everything on the shelves apart from the journals. I let unknown things call to me, I trusted my knowledge and experience and let it guide me. I pulled things out if they seemed that they might have something to offer, based on my hunches. I paid attention to resources that had pictures.

I rested books on my belly as I read.

Activism

There are loads of resources about activism in the Study Room, too many to list here, you just have to pick something off the shelf and it will have some sort of political resonance and possibility.

You can also find some of my work in the Study Room. It differs from many of the other resources in this Study Guide in that it is mostly explicitly about fat. It differs from most things about fat in that it is produced by a fat person. The stuff here is about activism and Live Art crossovers, dance, DIY culture.

Fat Activist Vernacular (expanded digital version)	Charlotte Cooper	2020	EF5365
You're Not My Dad!	Charlotte Cooper	2017	P3419

	and Simon Murphy		
Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement	Charlotte Cooper	2016	P3540
Fat Activist Vernacular	Charlotte Cooper	2016	P3467
SWAGGA: A Study On Camera	Katarzyna Perlak	2016	EF5389

Also of note is this recording of a performance lecture where the audience is invited to take a journey with three fat activists through a number of imagined fat futures.

Performance Matters – Potentials of Performance – Fat Futures: "But you've got so much potential!"	Vikki Chalkin, Francis Ray White, Stacy Bias	2012	D2025
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Ambiguity

Katherine Araniello, Barby Asante, Franko B, sean burn and Isaac Julien are accomplished artists with plenty of work represented in the LADA catalogue and Study Room. I'm not going to list them all here, you can look them up yourself. I also found:

Not Today: How I Chose Life (My battle against the demon within)	Sophie Cook	2018	P3978
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Now, all of these artists look at least a bit chubby to me, but fat is not explicitly referenced in their work and I don't know what they would think about that. Fat is not clear-cut, there are many grey areas and these are interesting places to be because they raise questions about assumptions and realities. I think it's fine to hold these ambiguities in mind when looking for fat in the Study Room or anywhere else.

Clubbers

Art world elitism is about keeping out the riff-raff. But clubbing is a different matter, it's the art world of the streets. Fat people pop up as portraits in glossy picture books of club kids and in histories of nightlife. These document a white clubbing scene and there are occasional instances of racist attire and cultural appropriation. I found it exciting to see figures including George Melly, Leigh Bowery, Beth Ditto, Scottee and Kabir from Nag Nag Nag looking dandy.

Fat performance has emerged through clubbing in forms such as neoburlesque and cabaret, take a look at Dirty Martini in Beth B's book, for example. There are crossovers with the fetish scene, drag and through long-running queer arts scenes that have roots in clubbing such as Duckie and Wotever. In Brighton, Fat Cabaret has become an amalgamation of these trends, I'll name some performers to look out for later.

Club Kids: From Speakeasies to Boombox and Beyond	Raven Smith	2008	P2399
New Club Kids	Oggy Yordanov	2014	P2411
Neoburlesque Exposed: Beyond Burlesque	Beth B	2014	D2149
This Is Not A Dream	Gavin Butt and Ben Walters	2014	D2129

Contemporaries

My not-so-secret hope with this Study Room Guide is to encourage more people to consider fat in Live Art. Some are already doing that as artists who are fat and as artists whose works consider fat. Katy Baird, Chrissie Cadman, Gillie Kleiman, Liz Rosenfeld, Scottee and Selina Thompson are five represented in the Study Room.

I Don't Remember Exactly When It Happened...	Katy Baird	2011	EF5052
DIY 11: 2014 – 'Chances Are' Mail Art Collection	Anne Bean, Siriol Joyner, Yol, Katy Baird, Daniel Gosling, Thomas Bacon, Ezra Rubenstein and Elspeth Owen	2014	P2633
It's All Allowed: The Performance of Adrian Howells	Deirdre Hendon and Dominic Johnson	2016	P3196
Baird is naked and cradled in Howells' arms.			
Labour	Chrissie Cadman	2012	EF216 see also P1830
Ophelia is not Dead	Gillie Kleiman	2011	EF5003 see also D1713
Post-Show Talk	Gillie Kleiman,	2011	D1714

with Lois Keidan and Francis Alexander	Martin O'Brien, Joseph Mercier		
(Untitled) Dyketactics Revisited	Liz Rosenfeld	2005	EF5387
Proliferations – Part I	Liz Rosenfeld	2017	EF5345
Residenzen im Realen publication	Liz Rosenfeld and Rodrigo García Alves	2018	P3692, part of the Library of Performing Rights (P3041)
Why Are You Wearing That?	Thom Shaw, Scottee	2008	A0236
Never Trust a Man in a Wig	Scottee	2009	D1268
Late-night Cabaret pt.1	Scottee, Amy Lamé, Brian Lobel, Mitch and Parry, T. Straw	2010	D1515
Late-night Cabaret pt.2	Scottee, Amy Lamé, Bryony Kimmings	2010	D1516
Scottee	Scottee, Ben Walters	2010	A0428
Money Talks	Scottee	2014	EF5139
Dressed as a Girl	Jonny Woo, John Sizzle, Holestar, Scottee, Amber, Pia and Ma Butcher	2015	D2209
Failure	Scottee	2015	P2814
Bravado	Scottee	2017	P3466
Scottee: I Made It	Jen Harvie	2018	P3610
Holly Revell photo collection	Holly Revell	2018	P3943
Create News: Selina Thompson – Gender, Performance, Identity	Lynnette Moran	2016	P3184
salt.	Selina Thompson	2018	P3667
Tiny Live Art (Development	Robert Daniels	2019	

Agency): Pat It and Prick It and Mark It with 'B'			
Vanishing Points	Salome Wagaine	2020	

Fatphobia

I thought I would find more fatphobia and am glad that I didn't. But here are two examples which exemplify art fatphobia: pretentious, arrogant, ignorant, and where fat people are absent and represented as abstracted bodies, cautionary figures or debate.

Difference on Display: Diversity in Art, Science & Society	NAi Publishers/Niet Normaal Foundation	2009	P1391
A massive, critical and open catalogue of disability art. Hugely diverse in its interpretation of disability, inspiring, offering an expansive Social Model. And yet on pages 52-53 it's clear that fat people aren't allowed in to that world. Ine Gevers refers to a chair designed by TJEP which is "a tongue in cheek reflection on our excessive consumption and on obesity as the future's most common health problem." Spare me! The designers say "We designed this chair with a super-sized aesthetic in mind" – but not a super-sized arse or a super-fat person.			
Body of Art	Diane Fortenberry and Rebecca Morrill	2015	P3694
In this fancy coffee-table picture book the authors draw on John Isaacs' fatphobic sculptures for their chapter on <i>The Abject Body</i> . In a classic example of pearls-clutching fat panic they describe his work as "A life-size and life-like human body distorted though extreme obesity to a fascinating and terrifying degree," and propose that "Isaac's work is an uncompromising warning of what could happen to any individual." Later in the paragraph they try and show how caring and enlightened they are by referring to body dysmorphia and eating disorders but by then it is too late, their prejudice has been exposed.			

I had an entry in my notebook for "That fat suit artist" but I'm not sure what I meant. Oh well. Meanwhile, note to thin Live Artists: please don't wear fat suits.

Fodder

I use this term to describe situations when I or others are invited to be part of a work, but that it is clear we are not equal to the instigator and that we can never be owners of the work. A lot of community art treats people as fodder. It might be that we are happy to participate in this way, but I do wonder if people lack opportunity to be the agents of their own game. Fat people are often spoken for and about, and I feel sad

when I think of how art replicates this, how we are positioned as characters in someone else's story instead of protagonists in our own right.

English Magic	Jeremy Deller and The British Council	2013	P2154
Who is the woman from Melodians Steel Orchestra on pages 60 and 69? Everyone's in coats and scarves, she is in a summer top. I want to know about her and her practice.			

Then there is the carny sideshow, a place where you can usually find a fat person. Disabled performers have explored representations of disability in these spaces and considered what it might have been like to be in one, including possibilities for subverting the form (Mat Fraser's work in Coney Island springs to mind). Disability theorists occasionally reference such spaces as pre-welfare opportunities for financial independence beyond medical or charity models. I suspect there is a balance between entrepreneurship and exploitation in the sideshow and I have yet to come across accounts of how these performances were owned, what working conditions were like and who came out of it well. I include these references here as another way in which fat performers are positioned as fodder.

Freaks: We Who Are Not As Others	Daniel P. Mannix	1976/2000	P3051
Breezy and naïve. Chapter 7 is called The Not-so-Jolly Fat People. Mannix says: "Fat people are the bread and butter of the side show. They are seldom regarded as really great freaks, but everyone expects to see one." Thanks pal!			
Freak Babylon: An Illustrated History of Teratology and Freakshows	Jack Hunter	2005	P0740
This book lacks empathy for its subjects and the scholarship is not robust. Oh well, plenty of fat people here, in and out of the circus. Let's name them: Alice from Dallas, Anna, Baby Betty, Baby Irene, Baby Ruth Pontico, Cannon Colossus, Dolly Dimples (Celeste Geyer), Flossie, Happy Jack Eckert, Jenny Letto Teresina (from the Gallery of Monsters and the Neuilly Fair), Juliana Voort from the Netherlands, Mademoiselle Rose, Marie Lill, Miss Bertha, Miss Miranda from Canada, Olga, Robert Earl Hughes, Susan Barton (Barnum's Mammoth Lady) and Victoria. Hunter lists 'American negresses' as a separate category: Lucy Morris, Flora Mae Jackson (Baby Flo), 'Captivatin' Liza, and Miss Jean Hill, who acted in John Waters' Desperate Living. He mentions 'Happy' Jack Eckert who was one of 'Six Tiny Rosebuds,' a group of fat show folk from 1938-1939 which included Baby Thelma, Jolly Josephine and Tiny Griffin. He has a picture of Daniel Lambert and his gravestone, a classic Obesity Epidemic trope if ever there was one. There is a separate section on 'hermaphrodites', which includes an image of an anonymous 'Hottentot' woman, with racialised fat, but no interpretation. There are also images of fat disabled people including Seals the Seal-Boy and Kobelkoff. I greatly enjoyed the picture of Carl Herman Unthan firing a rifle with his feet and I wondered who or what was in the			

crosshairs. I was intrigued to see that Chang's (of Chang and Eng) wife is fat, but there is no other information besides her picture.

I think Divine is worth mentioning in this section. He was closely associated with John Waters, along with other fat performers including Edith Massey and Jean Hill. I'm curious about how they were positioned in the work, their ownership of it, their relationship to their director. Were they fodder too or is that too simplistic? I remain unsure about Waters' relationship to fat, but he is well represented in the Study Room, you could make up your own mind.

Shock Value	John Waters	2005	PO795
Performance Lecture Archive: This Filthy World	John Waters	2007	D1548
I Am Divine	Jeffrey Schwarz	2014	D2178

Founding Figures

Nao Bustamante is where you should begin if you are interested in histories of fat and performance. Her work is prolific and iconic, influential, dreamy and political, spectacular, beautiful, funny and serious. Her fatness is there and not there.

Sans Gravity/America, The Beautiful	Nao Bustamante	1993	V0312
America, The Beautiful	Nao Bustamante	1995	V0101
Stuff	Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante	1996	V0066
De Beweeging 5	Franko B, Nao Bustamante, Jerome Bel, Forced Entertainment	1999	V0311
Mega Compilation	Nao Bustamante	2001	D0843
Mega Compilation	Nao Bustamante	2005	D0295

Leigh Bowery had a hyper-fast trajectory from club-land and fashion to music, high art, fame, life as art. He had an AIDS-related death in 1994 at 33, which many of us are still trying to process.

Also worth noting:

- Bowery was ambiguously fat at various times, sometimes it's really hard to see his body because of the ways in which he presented himself.

- Two fat women played important roles in his career: Sue Tilley and Fat Gill. Gill was bullied by Bowery and later died of an asthma attack. There is a picture of her from 1986 on p.32 of *Take a Bowery* at the Alternative Miss World competition.
- There is yet to be a critical appraisal of Bowery's racism (blackface, cultural appropriation) and use of Nazi imagery, which pass without comment in these resources.

Leigh Bowery: Looks	Fergus Greer	2002	P0673
Take a Bowery: The Art and (larger than) Life of Leigh Bowery	Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art	2003	P0730
The Legend of Leigh Bowery	Leigh Bowery and Charles Atlas	2004	D0213
Leigh!	Donald Urquhart	2012	P2082

Amy Lamé is a co-founder of Duckie, performer, broadcaster, politician and powerhouse. Duckie is well-represented in the Study Room and if you troll through the documentation you will find plenty of images of her. But Lamé is a Live Artist in her own right with work that pre-dates and has clearly influenced Duckie, some of which is represented in the Study Room but much of which is not. In the mid-1990s she developed *Gay Man Trapped In A Lesbian's Body* (1994) and *Cum Manifesto* (1996). She presented and produced a series of *Lesbian Beauty Contests* starting in 1997. By the mid-2000s she created *Mama Cass Family Singers* (2006) and *Pom Pom International* (2008).

ICA Monthly Programmes 1992-1997: Amy Lamé <i>Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body</i>	ICA	1994	P2008
<i>Gay Man Trapped In A Lesbian's Body</i>	Amy Lamé	1994	EV0186
Duckie: Performance and Cocktails	Various	2010	D1507, D1508, D1509
Trashing Performance, Musing Muses & FeMUSEum	Lois Weaver, Bird La Bird, Amy Lamé, Carmelita Tropicana	2011	D2104
The FeMUSEum: Unpainted Ladies	Amy Lamé, Bird La Bird, Lois Weaver, Carmelita Tropicana	2011	P1785

The FeMUSEum: Unpainted Ladies	Various	2012	P1879
Performance Matters Archive	Various	2013	D2104
The Balls	Duckie	2016	P3001

Invisibility

There are a great many books and anthologies on The Body in the Study Room, including books about queer bodies and feminist bodies. I searched the indexes hoping to find something on fat but usually found nothing. One collection, of 520 pages, a book so heavy I found it hard to lift and read, contained exactly three puny references to fat. I am angry about this. These absences are outrageous to me. How can people talk about bodies without talking about fat? Especially when there's an alleged epidemic of fat people!

Here are some examples, in good and well-meaning books, of how fat people are made invisible. It's my belief that including fat could greatly enrich their offerings.

Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community	Oxford University Press	2014	P2453
A book that is modelled on <i>Our Bodies Ourselves</i> , a series that was supported by and reflected fat feminist thought. The index has this entry: "Obesity: see disability, Deaf culture." Hurray! They have seen that fat and disability have a lot in common, perhaps they are using a Social Model. But when you go to that page there is nothing.			
Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance	Amber Jamilla Musser	2018	P4027
Writing about Nao Bustamante, but no mention of fat.			
The Bodies That Remain	Emmy Beber	2018	P4011
An anthology of bodies missing from culture, but none are fat.			

Other Study Room Guides and LADA publications

There are glimpses of fat in earlier Study Room Guides and then a full-on romp in *The Outsiders' Handbook*.

The Body in	Franko B	2005	P0602
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Performance: A Study Room Guide on body based practices			
Food & Performance: A Study Room Guide on eating and dining as explored in performance	I'm With You	2016	P2997
The Outsiders' Handbook	Scottee, Travis Alabanza, Selina Thompson and Emma Frankland	2018	P3689

Tantalising Glimpses

What is most exciting to me in the Study Room is coming across tantalising glimpses of fat that provoked a sense of curiosity and wonder. These glimpses are never centre stage but, as Vito Russo showed us, and which I explained earlier, they become the main attraction. These glimpses show that fat people are not an abstracted Other, but that we exist in the same world as everybody else. The Obese are part of your community, humans and artists, we are here and have been for a long time.

Happenings	Michael Kirby	1965	P0489
I've written elsewhere about how happenings in the 1960s were part of the birth of fat feminist activism. The <i>Fat-In</i> , a prank with a serious subtext, was possibly the first modern instance of documented fat activism. In Kirby's book I am very intrigued by the man in silver at the "help" machine on page 197. Who was he? An early fat Live Artist?			
Whale Nation	Heathcote Williams	1988	P3928
Williams was a posh environmentalist, and this is his epic poem about whales that revels in gargantuan animal bodies. Marvel at his description of whale testicles!			
ICA Monthly Programmes 1992-1997	ICA	1993-94	P2008
There are a couple of gems in the collection of ICA programmes. August – September 1993 shows an image of Jackie Beat, who starred in Richard Glatzer's film, <i>Grief</i> . Then in July–August 1994 there's a reference to Club Girrls, which were club performances, with mud wrestling, karaoke and sex on a trapeze! "So what?" I hear you say. Well, this featured work by Tutu, who was fat, and I'll say more about her at the end.			
Performance: Live Art Since the 60s	RoseLee Goldberg	1998	P0002
An account of Ethyl Eichelberger's performance <i>Fiasco</i> from 1988 features an			

excellent photograph of an anonymous fat woman.			
The Drag King Book	Del LaGrace Volcano and Judith Jack Halberstam	1999	P2243
Beautiful portraits of Murray Hill, Angela da Castro and Uncle Louie. Double whammy of Elvis Herselvis and Elvis Emulator kinging a fat performer too.			
The Artist's Body	Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones	2000	P0116
There's one stand-out image in this collection and that is a reproduction on page 157 of <i>In Sandy's Room</i> (Self Portrait) by Laura Aguilar, a black and white photograph which was taken in 1991. She lies naked under a window. The authors describe Aguilar as "an overweight 'Latina lesbian'," who is "outside the discourse of desire and acceptability within the dominant American society as well as her own culture." How she is written about might not be how she saw herself and may well reflect the curator and editor's views. Can we read between the lines? They offer this quote: "I've been able to find some comfort and peace through my body...I'm a large woman – I'm not supposed to be comfortable with myself. I wonder what people think" (in Amelia Jones, <i>Body Art: Performing the Subject</i> , 1998). This photo and entry typifies a Tantalising Glimpse for me, I want to know more about her, her work, everything.			
Carnavalesque	Timothy Hyman and Roger Malvern	2000	P0707
There is so much unruly fat eye candy in this book. On page 18 we find Hans Weiditz woodcut of <i>The Fat Man</i> from 1521 with the quote "I am a fine winebag/ carrying my paunch in a wheelbarrow." Then on Page 32 <i>The Procession of Gluttony</i> by Peter Flötner from 1540. Moving on we have Pulcinella depicted as fat by Giambattista Tiepolo in 1743 on page 44 and – crikey! – <i>Gargantua</i> by Honoré Daumier from 1831 on page 58. Gargantua! Last treat is on page 61: Midas by James Gillray from 1797.			
Modern Pagans: An Investigation of Contemporary Pagan Practices	V. Vale	2001	P2527
I looked at the book's spine on the shelf and knew there would be fat people in there. Sure enough, an interview with Madrone, images of meaty women and a great account, by Joi Wolfwomyn, of what it's like to shit glitter.			
The Political Body: Posters from the People's Republic of China in the 1960s and 1970s	Katie Hill	2004	P0475
Chairman Mao is depicted as a chubby guy in the <i>Reddest Reddest Red Sun in Our Hearts</i> , and <i>Advance Courageously Holding High the Great Red Banner of Mao Zedong Thought</i> , both from 1967.			
Body & Eros	Elisa Guzzo Vaccarino	2007	P0897

This is a book accompanying the 5th Festival Internazionale di Danza's Contemporanea at the Venice Biennale. It's bilingual but really hard to work out who or what the image on page 56. I'll describe it: a fat white naked young-ish woman wearing undies made of a plastic bag saying Bankrot. She's standing with a nudy man. They're dancers and I totally want to know what is this about.

Open Space – Art In The Public Realm 1995 – 2005	Jemima Montague	2008	P1055
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Critical effect & intensity of affect : analyses of art productions of Zoran Todorović	Misko Suvakovic	2009	P3432
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These are the only two references in the LADA catalogue tagged with the word Fat that I couldn't corroborate because of the Coronavirus lockdown. One is a book about public art and one is a catalogue documenting an installation at the Venice Biennale. They remain a mystery to me.

Fat	Pete Edwards	2009	D1227, DB0099, DB0100, DB0101
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Edwards embarks on a journey across the city at night in search of a beautiful fat man. This is a show about queer and crip desire.

The Duckie File	Various		P2035
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Lots of images of Amy Lamé, of course, but there are other gems in this folder of fliers and clippings, including images of a fat drag ballet dancer called Madame Galina, also known as Iyestyn Edwards, who did a few turns at the club in the mid-2000s.

Queer Spirits	AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs	2011	P3573
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An image of an anonymous fat woman with ectoplasmic phenomena going on. A really weird and intriguing image. A queered and historicised ghost image.

Art & Queer Culture	Catherine Lord, Richard Meyer	2013	P2144
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A few more fat people make the grade in this collection. Images of Catherine Opie, Gertrude Stein, Laura Aguilar and a spectacular though anonymous fat butch by Brassai from 1932.

De la vista gorda	La Bala Damiana Cactaceae/ Alejandra Rodríguez	2015	EF5150
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A que no puedes comer sólo una	Santo Miguelito/ Miguel Perez	2015	EF5144
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Negación y Utopía (Denial and Utopia) was the first National Festival of Performance of Mexico. The festival included two fat performers: Miguel Pérez Ramos aka Santo Miguelito and Alejandra Rodríguez aka La Bala Damiana Cactaceae. They are represented in the Study Room by recordings of their performances, excerpts and

interviews. Rodríguez declares, thrillingly: "Fat women are on a mission to make the world tremble."			
Mesearch and the Performing Body	Mark Edward	2018	P3627
The book of Edwards' PhD thesis includes a section called <i>Dying Swans and Dragged-up Dames</i> , reflections on his own experiences of drag, dance, ageing and fat.			
Emergency Index Vol 7	Helena Gluzman and Sophia Cleary	2019	P3924
There are three tantalising glimpses in this collection of 260 contemporary Live Art performances: Liz Rosenfeld's moving body as a source of energy; Michelle Murphy moving against a parachute and Gemica Rosenberg critiquing garments designed to shape or control women's bodies. I want more!			

The Missing Study Room

When I started this project I was afraid I wouldn't be able to find any fat in the Study Room, even though I am in it myself. I was worried that fat was too obscure even for Live Art. I soon realised that this was a matter of perspective.

Here's a story to try and explain what I mean. I was thinking about my friend Amanda Piasecki who appeared in Ron Athey's show *The Judas Cradle* in the UK in 2005. She was a Live Artist at the time and is accomplished at other things besides. She is fat. When I went to see the show I was looking at Piasecki, not Athey or his co-creator Juliana Snapper. This is remarkable when you consider that Athey is a visceral performer and, in that show, ritually fucked his own arse with a giant pyramid. In Dominic Johnson's book *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performances of Ron Athey* (2013, P2115), Piasecki is a tiny footnote, but her presence as a fat performer in that show was everything to me. I come back to Vito Russo's queer gaze again and again: when you are marginalised, even amongst other outsiders, it's the Others who draw you in, not the main attraction. When you are fat and hungry for representation and possibility, to whom do you direct your attention? Ron or Amanda? For me it's always the fat one, even if they're at the back of the stage, that is the perspective I bring to this work.

In the Study Room I became interested in what was there, it was illuminating to see who the main attractions are in Live Art. Karen Finley and David Wojnarowicz are very well represented in the space. I love their work, but what makes them so prominent? Good documentation? A lively and extensive repertoire? Notoriety and death? A superfan who donated their work to LADA? I have no answers. There were also many academic texts and coffee table overviews. What do these objects mean for what's seen as important and significant? Who gets in? Who gets remembered? How come some are represented and some are not? How does class, race, gender, power affect who gets represented and who is forgotten? Who else is absent? So many questions!

I was thinking about these absences and missing people when I asked my friends online to suggest fat Live Artists they'd heard of. This is a list of people we came up with. It's skewed towards the anglophone UK, North America and Europe and we interpreted the category of 'Live Artist' loosely. Some of these people I know, one of them is me, many are new to me. We are scratching the surface. I haven't added any extra commentary. None are in the Study Room but should be. Maybe you'd like to find out more about them?

Alan Reade, the performance Bear-A-Go-Go
Allyson Mitchell
Alysia Angel
Amanda Piasecki
Amy Adams
Angela de Castro
Ashleigh Owen
Beth Ditto
Bevin Brandlandingham
Biscuit of Austin TX band the Big Boys, who was close friends with Gary Floyd
Brock Cocker
Butch Sassity from Boston
ButchTap
Cake Daddy
Comedians: Desiree Burch, Jayde Adams. Sofie Hagen, Alison Spittle,
Deborah DiGiovanni
Delicio del Toro
Desiree Burch
Dolly Sen
Dottie Lux
Drew Montana
Elana Dykewomon
EmFATic Dance
Emma Corbett Ashby
Eureka O'Hara, The Big Girl
Fairy Butch, 90s cabaret impresario from San Francisco
Fancy Feast, burlesque from New York
People who have performed at Fat Cabaret in Brighton: Bae Sharam, Chub Rub, Daphne, Fatiha El-Ghorri, Grace Shush, Lady Blue Phoenix, Lou Safire, Louis F.U.C.K (Evie Fehilly), Mama Hale, Marilyn Misandry, Martin Dixon, Maxxie, Maz Hedgehog, Mimi Kraft, Nyota Starr, PJ Samuels, Prince of Persia, Sadie Sinner, SemiColon, Smashlyn Monroe, Stacey Astill, Sukh Olja, Tamara D'souza, Tanaka Fuego, Tayris Mongardi, The Nightbus, Veronica Montenegro
Cindy Baker
Fat Flash Mob
Fat Lip Readers Theatre, Louise Wolfe and many others, from San Francisco in the 1980s
Fat Moves in Boston
The Fat Underground

Gabe Oi
Gary Floyd
Glenn Marla
Haley Morris-Cafiero
Heather MacAllister
Holy McGrail
Homosexual Death Drive
The Hungry Bitches
Ifasina TaMeicka L. Clear
Ingo Cando and Wotever World
Irene McCalphin
Jay Walker
Joyce D'Vision
Judy Freespirit
Juicy D. Light
Jukie Sunshine
Julishka Stengele
Katie Grenall who did a show called Fatty Fat Fat
Kayleigh O'Keefe
Kelli-Jean Drinkwater
Kentucky Fried Woman
Kreemah Ritz aka Big Daryl of the Cockettes
Krudas Cubensi "La Gorda"
Latrice Royale
Le Gateaux Chocolat
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
Leigh Crow aka Elvis Herselvis, from San Francisco in the 90s
Leslie Hall
Liu Susiraja's Self-Portraits from ASAP/J
Lizzo
Margarita & Maybelle
Matty May
Miasia
Miss Annabel Sings
Mulotta TaTas
Naima Lowe
Nomy Lamm
Phat Fly Girls
Phoebe Patey Ferguson
Rachel Herrick
Raks Africa
Renée Dunn
Roly Polys
Rubenesque Burlesque
Ruby Vixen
Rubyyy Jones
Shane Island

Shazam from Portland, around 2010
Sondra Solovay, Timnah Steinman and the cast of Fat Fuck / The F-Word
Sonya Renee Taylor
Sugarbush Lane
Tigress Osborn
The Weather Girls

Who are the missing artists? Please share your thoughts.

Last Word

This Study Room Guide is inadequate and incomplete. I have really good hunches about fat, I know so much about this subject, decades of experience and influential scholarship. I looked at everything I could look at, but I missed so much. I thought that it would be possible to know what is in the Study Room, to find the fat, but I was wrong.

Last week I had an email from a random person who wanted me to produce for them, for free, a reading list of fat activist literature in English. I said "Do your own research and talk to a librarian," they never replied. Thinking about it now, they were also looking for something that doesn't exist: a list of facts. They saw me as the owner of that list and as someone who should share it with a stranger. But a bibliography and a Study Room Guide are not a list of facts. They are acts of thinking and imagination, interpretation, they are based on the person who produces them. That person could be me or you or anyone else.

In the Study Room you see and find what you know, what you want to see. The Study Room is about you, your perspective, your life. (Whilst I was researching this Guide I looked at other stuff I just liked the look of, nothing to do with fat. It was nice. I came across someone in a book describing me as a "cultural critic" and that made me laugh and feel as though I'd gone up in the world). Old friends and memories emerged. Tutu Tedder in a show at the ICA, tiny print, so easy to miss. She has been dead now for some years. I can't think of many people who would recognise that name in an old programme though I mentioned this to Lois Keidan (of LADA) and of course she did remember. This made me feel that I was part of something, that I had roots and was being witnessed in my connection to them. Holy validation.

But familiarity is not the only quality that arises. You also open yourself to other worlds. Reading and finding is contextual, what you find today will be different to what you find in six months time, or ten years. Things come in and out of focus. LADA is a great place to train your eye and heart, you find what you know but you also expand it.

This Study Room Guide is inadequate and incomplete. Never mind! I hope you have enjoyed the excursion into my thinking about the place and about fat and Live Art. I hope it prompts you to do some thinking, exploring and sharing of your own. My biggest hope is that you become part of the collection, that you make work,

document it, acknowledge the people who have influenced you so that our networks can be transmitted and known, propose other artists for the space, and allow all of this to be lodged at LADA for future Study Room visitors to explore.

Appendix

Things not listed here I recommend you read and that LADA should consider acquiring:

A full set of *FaT GiRL* zines and/or V. Vale: *Zines, Volume 1* (includes an extensive interview with the FaT GiRL collective)

Allyson Mitchell: *Inside Killjoys Kastle: Dykey Ghosts, Feminist Monsters, and other Lesbian Hauntings* and *Ladies Sasquatch*

CM Donald: *The Fat Woman Measures Up*

Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay: *The Fat Studies Reader*

Hillel Schwartz: *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies and Fat*

Homosexual Death Drive vids <http://homosexualdeathdrive.com>

Kathleen LeBesco: *Revolting Bodies: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*

Kelli Jean Drinkwater: *Aquaporko* and *Nothing to Lose*

Lisa Schoenfelder and Barb Wieser: *Shadow on a Tightrope*

Llewellyn Louderback: *Fat Power*

Sabrina String: *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*

Scottee: *Fat Blokes* documentation