Historicizing Fat in Anglo-american Culture

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We donnot want dainties, we want bellyfuls; we donnot want gimcrack coats and waistcoats, we want warm clothes; and so that we get ’em, we’d not quarrel wi’ what they’re made on.

—“John Barton,” in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*

## INTRODUCTION: LEARNING A LIFESTYLE

Judgments of “healthy” food so often manifest a moral basis—as William Ian Miller notes, “a calorie of sugar from fruit is morally superior to a Twinkie calorie.”¹ Miller himself later intimates, the particular morality at work here often has its basis in the significations of class, itself increasingly morally scripted since the rise of the Protestant middle classes in Western societies. Popular ciphers for the social problems of obesity have long been certain kinds of food, and in particular, those of the sort perceived to be consumed most of all by working-class people. We need only consider the covers of endless books and magazines about the horrors of obesity to discover that the cultural culprits are hamburgers, pizzas, French fries, and so on. And the shock-power of these images is surely as much the perceived vulgarity of this diet as it is the actual nutritional content of the food. Consider a recent episode of the U.S. television series *Top Chef*, a show in which chefs competitively prepare meals to certain specifications to win a grand prize and title.² In one episode, teams of chefs were asked to produce a low-calorie meal for children, conscripted by their parents into Camp Glucose, a
summer camp designed to discipline and correct the aberrant eating behavior of fat children. The Black Team produce a Sausage and Cheese Pizza, Melon and Berry Skewers, a Meringue (“Crispy”) Cookie with Peanut Butter and Bananas, and a Mixed Berry Lemonade (440 calories per serving). The Orange Team, meanwhile, produced Spiced Turkey Meatballs, Roasted Corn on the Cob, and a Summer Fruit Smoothie (453 calories per serving). When the kids plump for the pizza and cookie, the Orange Team chefs are irritated by the wholesale rejection of their food. Asked by the judges why they made, of all the godforsaken things, turkey meatballs for a bunch of food-loving, ravenous, exercise-ragged kids, Carlos huffs, “Maybe they have to learn that they can’t always have the pizza. This is about learning a lifestyle.” Why is it assumed, then, that a lower-calorie meal that features pizza is less acceptable? The food almost appears to perform the function of magic: certain “lifestyle” foods and their symbolic utterances are imagined to have greater consequences than their materially identifiable nutritional content. The magical effects the foods are presumed to produce do indeed have something to do with the “material”—albeit not in a directly corporeal mode. Rather, the signifying characteristics of food in practices of consumption are routinely used in the practices of social classification: as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, “tastes”—artistic, cultural, and of course, gastronomic—function as legitimations, justifications and naturalizations of socioeconomic difference. Perhaps particularly because Camp Glucose is expensive, and, as such, even if the conscripted kids are likely to be predominantly “middle class,” the horror Carlos feels in their choice of food has little to do with the body and its “health,” and perhaps everything to do with how that body—social and corporeal—might be (re-)classified by its lifestyle, that is, by its taste. Such classifications may at least be perceived to have very material consequences: there is always, famously, that “fear of falling.” For all that I want to counsel here, as does Pierre Bourdieu, against the subjectivist fallacy of class—that class is solely about perception — the fact is that how we are classified through the perceptions of others may provoke a great deal of anxiety in societies which believe in the endless malleability, and hence the individualized moral responsibility, of socioeconomic status.

1. THE FAT MATERIAL

There may be a temptation to see the body as somehow separated from issues of class: indeed, this may be a problem in the formative source materials of leftist critique, since Marxist theory appears to all but ignore the physical
body. The “material” for Marx, after all, is the social and economic—and that might be seen by some to “transcend” the individual flesh of the body. Of course, this is simply a question of overt focus: not least, Marx’s materialism is based on the necessity of bodily survival, albeit through an assertion that this is achieved, and hence should be analyzed, socially. Importantly, however, the “materiality” of the body has been a subject of some focus for gender theorists, and studies of fat have already converged, of course, around the body as the site of inscription. Any close study of body shape and class will also reveal that the fat body is an intensive site at which the relation of socioeconomic and bodily materiality becomes most apparent. As Bourdieu points out in his epochal work, *Distinction*,

Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body. It is an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically. It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste, which manifests in several ways. It does this first in the seemingly most natural features of the body, the dimensions (volume, height, weight) and shapes (round or square, stiff or supple, straight or curved) of its visible forms, which express in countless ways a whole relation to the body, i.e. a way of treating it, caring for it, feeding it, maintaining it, which reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus. . . . It is in fact through preferences with regard to food which may be perpetuated beyond their social conditions of production (as, in other areas, an accent, a walk, etc.), and also, of course, through the uses of the body in work and leisure which are bound up with them, that the class distribution of bodily properties is determined.

Any body, then, is always an embodiment of (among other things) socioeconomically fashioned habitus. As such, the body is also a place in which class seems most intensely to become “naturalized.” Of course, there is nothing unquestionably “natural” about the production of the body: it is always a site of discursive production and inscription, even if a central problem for feminists has been that the body always has its social inscription effaced by its apparent preexistence of discourse. And yet, there is more here than simply the fact that, as Judith Butler points out, “bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain . . . regulatory schemas.” We must also recognize that socioeconomically classed bodies are routinely physically produced—corporeally, at the root of the flesh itself—by systemic regimes of power. It is all very well, then, to argue in post-structuralist
fashion that eating and body shape should be analyzed purely on the basis of discursive formulations—but to ignore the fact that the availability of a wide range of foods and the potential for any kind of choice is precisely limited by socioeconomic position—and the habitus which precedes, and may even outlive, such factors—would surely be to turn a blind eye to a massive source of injustice, which often has very physical effects, one of which is to produce the bodily condition(s) referred to as “obesity.” Looking at the fat, classed, body, what we find is always, as Foucault reminds us, “a body totally imprinted by history”—but it is so as much in its fleshy material production as in its discursive constitution. Exercise of social control and inequity occurs at the level of both material and discursive production, as bodies produced by material conditions which are reinforced by ideology go on then to become ideological deployments in themselves. In the discourses I will analyze here, then, I feel it is important to note that the process of the physical writing of a body through material and socioeconomic forces is just as important as the reading of that body; indeed, the interrelation of the two—and the proposed model of interrelation and causation—will be my focus. In particular, the Althusserian idea that ideology represents the imaginary resolution of real contradictions is vital to the arguments I will make: what I want to suggest is that the fat body has become a remarkably useful ideological deployment, and a site of ideological inscription, in ongoing global and local class war. In particular, what I will seek to emphasize is the disparity between the realities of the body’s production by class, and the imaginary ideological deployment of the body as it is produced by class discourse.

II. DON’T MENTION THE (CLASS) WAR

Class has not been a central object of analysis in fat studies as a developing discipline. Instead, feminist analysis has tended to predominate, at least in the humanities, even though, as some have argued, fat tends to be a generally underexplored category in wider feminist analysis. Race too has been an occasional focus in the field: Sander Gilman’s work, while largely focusing on masculinity and the perceived feminization of fat men and boys, has also considered race, and, in particular, Jewishness. The cluster of knowledges in gender and sexuality studies known as “queer theory” has also had considerable influence. While there are many articles and books on fat that mention class, there remain none, to my knowledge at least, that centralize the analysis of class, rather than seeing it solely as a secondary mode of analysis worthy of supplementary note. Moon and Sedgwick’s essay, for example,
provides a couple of important observations about the history of class in representations of fat, and others have used these insights as a basis for class dimensions of their own analyses. But there is the sense that Sedgwick and Moon’s somewhat tangential observations have come to serve as one of very few tent poles of class in a field where sustained analysis has not really been forthcoming. This said, there are notable exceptions: Peter Stearns’ *Fat History* has much to tell us, while, as we will see later, Michael Gard and Ian Wright gratifyingly skewer Greg Critser’s journalistic study, *Fat Land* at length for its class assumptions. Furthermore, the role of capitalism as an economic system in the production of fat perhaps maintains an ongoing presence—but then, perhaps talk of “capitalism” on even the left in the academy, in these post-Seattle, anti-globalization days, seems somehow more persuasive as a series of systemic relations, than the related notions of “class.” This critical oversight is problematic because a central strategy in ideology (in its deformative sense) is of course the displacement of discourses of class entirely, often by the substitution of apparently natural and “common sense,” and preferably viscerally culturally anxious, semi-mystical ciphers. In our “scientific” age, biological science, perhaps ironically given its constant and formative attempts to interfere with whatever “the natural” appears to be, so often fulfils this function in the popular press.

**OBESITY ‘CONTAGIOUS’, EXPERTS SAY**

Having a friend, sibling or spouse who is overweight raises a person’s risk of being obese too, US researchers say.

Obesity is—as we all know, don’t we—a *disease*. And “it” is not produced by social and economic factors, or indeed constructed discursively as an ideological regime, and certainly not clustered within similar class groupings and shared habituses in families, friendships. Rather, it is *spread* by some kind of, perhaps morally aware, semi-mythic cultural pathogen. This is remarkably unconvincing, and indeed, even the article later seems to intuit this—once the shock headline, taken from “experts” no less, has been deployed. But here we meet our old ideological friend, mystification. And then there are the ideological substitutions:

**HIGH I.Q. LINKED TO BEING VEGETARIAN**

Intelligent children are more likely to become vegetarians later in life, a study says.
We might ask, first, what traditional and ongoing use the “I.Q.” test has in social regimes of enforced inequality, regimes themselves produced by, and designed to reproduce, systematically iniquitous social divisions and classifications of various sorts. Second, “vegetarian,” in Western societies at least, may as well be a byword for “middle class.” What this arguably tells us, then, is that ruling class children do better in ruling class tests. Surely not.

The silences too can be, almost literally, breathtaking. In New Zealand, class is considered with some insistence not to exist, despite the fact that, under more than a decade of neoliberal reforms and privatizations, socioeconomic inequality was extremely high by the 1980s. The recent death of a Samoan immigrant woman in New Zealand offers a useful example of how class remains largely invisible and unexamined. The private corporation that provided her home with electricity cut off her supply because she had failed to pay the bill, apparently in full knowledge of the fact that she was attached to a life-support machine therein. At first, in line with populist xenophobia, it was suggested that the problem was with allowing Samoan immigrants into the country. This argument did not apparently provide sufficient ideological deformation of material reality, however, and so the latest threat to civilization was wheeled out: it was all because she was “obese.”

SCREEN IMMIGRANTS FOR OBESITY AND SMOKING—DOCTORS RECOMMEND

Two Auckland doctors are calling for potential immigrants to be tested for obesity and smoking because of the burden both place on health services.

[ . . . ] Samoan woman Folole Muliaga, who was obese, died after her power was cut off and she could not use her breathing machine. Dr Garrett said, “south Auckland had more obese patients than most other areas.”

What appears to happen here is that the one thing that cannot be countenanced—that socioeconomic injustice, in a supposedly “classless” society, had killed this woman—is displaced onto health and race. She is, after all, a big fat immigrant. Ethnicity and body shape (the latter itself a useful sort of racialization of class) are thatched into a veritable bird’s nest of intolerance and inequity. The debate also relies on a remarkable substitution: the one discourse that must not be invoked is the one which points out the role of economics—a multimillion dollar corporation seeming to allow the death of a poverty-stricken woman over a few hundred dollars. Given that socioeco-
nomic inequality relies so heavily on the exclusion of class discourse, on a suffocating silence in the face of the visible sources and strategies of injustice, it is all the more important that the academy attend to the role that class plays in such injustice. I should make it quite clear here that I am not suggesting in a paranoid vulgar Marxist fashion that all other modes of analysis are a bourgeois plot to conceal class. The primacy of class, or race, or gender, or sexuality issues is a tediously phony war that, if it has a material reality, is based in the professional need to have something controversial to say at a conference once in while. Rather, I am simply suggesting that talk about class needs to continue to happen in cultural studies precisely because silence is the general rule in culture. More specifically, I am suggesting that fat studies needs more directly to address the issue of class if it is to understand the type of oppression faced by people like Folole Muliaga. Given the tendency of fat to serve, as we have already seen, as a meeting place of so many signifiers of stigma and exclusion, the potential for fruitful overlap and intertheoretical work is surely of massive potential in this field: consider, for example, the interrelation of class and gender as it is imagined in discourses on fat. As Sally Munt points out, one of the central tactics in the representation of working-class men has been their construction in terms of a “feminine excess which needs restraint, of fat, cigarette-smoking, beer-drinking men who have become a drain on the social body (they leak, they weep, they rage: excrescent and grotesque).” Fat sits at the anxious, viciously traumatic, meeting point of the multiple social stigmata of sexuality, gender, race, and class. As so many of us know, this is not a fun place to be.

III. HONEY, LET’S DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH THE KIDS

Father[,] a bank manager[,] hated to see them drawing the dole, believing that the principle of giving money away was wrong. He had been heard to call the destitute of the town, ironically, our “non-banking friends.” “Non-washing, you mean,” Mother said. It was not their financial so much as their hygienic habits she loathed.

—B. Aldiss, The Hand-Reared Boy

Although now exported to international markets, Honey, We’re Killing the Kids is a British invention. The episode I concentrate on here appeared on New Zealand television late last year. After an “overweight,” obviously working-class, nine-year-old boy’s lifestyle and eating habits (habitus?) were splayed on the table for the consumption of a hungry audience, his parents—instantly recognizable to some of us as northern English working-class
people of a certain generation, the sort of people around whom I grew up—
were berated for their imperfections by a cut-glass-accented, trouser-suited,
immaculately coiffed woman wielding a clipboard. In the central presence
of the clipboard-clutching voyeur, the show presents a televisual analogue—
and a publicly displayed \textit{enaction}—of the everyday experiences of many
working-class, British families: the social worker marching unannounced and
uninvited into the living rooms of kids and their parents on housing estates
(i.e., developments) to observe, to judge, and to correct the behavior of those
society considers potentially \textit{unfit}.\footnote{26} That this mundane occurrence has now
become a spectacle provided televisually, for the salacious observation of the
middle classes, and the moral \textit{education} of the underclasses—always under
scrutiny, always at risk of interference from their social betters—seems an
excellent use of resources.

The child’s parents are made to watch, sobbing, a digitally (”scientifically”)
predicted image of their child’s future body before and after changes
in diet and behavior: two possible futures, to be generated by adoption of
the lifestyle choices presented by the “expert.” The future fat man can be
\textit{prevented} by the adoption of middle-class eating regimes. What must be
removed is of course the staple diet of the modern working class, northern
English habitus: potatoes, sugars, animal fats, red meat, deep-fried things
(some even—swoon—previously frozen), convenience foods, fast-food—all
the things that would have the readers of \textit{Gourmet} magazine clawing at
their gullets.\footnote{27} Such items are to be substituted by such acceptable staples
as steamed fish with spinach—perhaps the kind of “light” and “healthful”
foods that Bourdieu identifies as those central to certain strands of middle-
class nutritional habitus.\footnote{28} Unsurprisingly, the boy, fed on McDonalds and
pies, is disgusted by the food, thereby confirming how badly brought up he
has been. His parents too find themselves unable to eat such unpalatable
stuff, evidence of course, that they are \textit{holding back} their child.

After the child and parents have been forced to change their own lifestyle
practices, we are shown a second future self. There are subtle differences in the
\textit{stylings} of the future subject which exceed the shape of the flesh itself: in the
“before” image, the “unhealthy” man has shorn hair, facial bruises, and wears
stained, ill-fitting sportswear. In the “after” image of the “healthy” man, the
subject miraculously sports a pristine, open-necked, white shirt, and a coif of
medium-length chestnut brown hair. The future image looked, to this specta-
ctor at least, like the architect of modern, classless Britain: Tony Blair. Whether
or not others would agree with my view, the fact remains that the surface styl-
ings of the body transforms the subject from a council-scum (“white trash”
in U.S. parlance), couch potato to an elegant, middle-class Islingtonite. What
is remarkable is how naturalized these visual texts manage to render a causal productive association of the slenderness of the body and upward class mobility—through contiguous but apparently continuous and fundamental contact between skin and clothing, between style and substance, between flesh and fabric. All of this is surely a spectacular ideological deployment of the most overt kind: a terroristic carnival of public shame and disgrace for the sake of social control. And it is, in many senses, nothing new. As Howard Leichter points out, the “health and wellness” movement that began to emerge at the end of the twentieth century “helped set and protect social boundaries by defining acceptable and unacceptable lifestyles.” Leichter compares these injunctions to Leviticus—and “just as pre-modern societies patrolled the boundaries of their societies with dramatic rituals of inclusion and exclusion,” so too do modern societies.29 It scarcely needs pointing out that the precise boundaries, and targets, of such exclusions will be decided politically—not just in “politics” per se, but in wider cultural political discourse—and in the name of historically emergent social and material expediency.

IV. FAT AND THE IDEOLOGY OF THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY

What we might suggest is at work here is what Ross McKibbin calls ideological stereotyping:

Those outside the working classes have always seen them in stereotypes and their behavior towards them has been instinctively shaped by varieties of folklore. In the inter-war years, more perhaps than in most, these stereotypes were constantly hostile; and even when so hostile as to be parodied—as with the most famous of the inter-war invention, “the coals in the bath”—parody merely suggests how strong and not how foolish they were.30 Certain stereotypes of working-class identities allow the ruling classes to cement their privilege by producing a near-mythic, folkloric image of a homogenous group of people to be ridiculed and stigmatized as inferior in the name of the material interests of those in power. (We should note that these stereotypes can exist in all directions—the ideological stereotype of the middle class is one I will deploy myself later.) The idea that the fat body manifests working-class identities is a surprising reversal of history, to say the least. Miller notes that “when the poor were thin, fat was beautiful. And when poverty came to be characterized less by insufficient calories and more by too
many calories of the wrong kind, fat became ugly. In a perverse way, the poor
determine fashion by providing an antimodel of the ideal body type that the
rich then imitate negatively.” At one point, of course, it was imagined that
fatness was the product of too much leisure—“fat cats” were aristocratic, or,
later, the wealthier bourgeoisie. Sedgwick and Moon observe of Dickens’s
excoriations of injustice, after all, that the rich woman’s body is almost imag-
in ed as being fashioned from the bodies of Victorian starvelings.

However, this slowly began to reverse, and Peter Stearns provides a convinc-
ing picture of this historical transformation in his Fat History. Fat was targeted
since the turn of the twentieth century as a moral issue, and in the post-war
period, says Stearns, the message began to emerge that “fat people and work
did not mix well.” By this logic, the poor and working class needed to be re-
educated so that they could become better workers and subjects. Additionally,
it begins to be assumed that one can simply attain upward social mobility by
asserting (moral) control over one’s own body. Stearns explains,

A teenager [in 1955] who lost thirty pounds was told that such strength of
character in a fifteen-year-old-boy means “you can look forward to success
in any future undertaking.” Diet morality, easily measured, counted strongly
in the job market. [. . . Before long,] like the daily or weekly bout with the
bathroom scales, dealing with one’s doctor about weight became one of the
real constraints in middle-class life, a public reminder of the need to attend
to health and virtue.

Worrying about weight and being held accountable for one’s girth, then,
became part of a wider moralistic and ideological process, firmly stitch-
ing together medicine and “hygiene,” with socioeconomic self-production,
particularly as a fully functioning bourgeois economic subject: that is,
characterized by forward movement, economic dynamism, and autogenic
self-actualization. The diet industry has certainly played a central role in this
development. This association of a naturalized bourgeois physicality with
economic productivity has also, of course, gone on to become a way of sepa-
rating out others, and of justifying, naturalizing for the increasingly ruling
class the privilege brought only tremulously, contingently, vulnera bl y, by a
worryingly turbulent economic system. By the same token, these associations
have naturalized and justified the social exclusion and iniquitous compensa-
tion of those in its competing classes. Both the elephantine aristocrat and the
cumbrous council-scum couch potato are ideological stereotypes which have
been of great use to the middle classes in their history. We might even suggest
that what has changed historically is the class seen as the greatest perceived
When the aristocracy were still a threat to middle-class supremacy, they were “fat.” Now that the aristocracy is dead and faintly ridiculous, the working class are made to take on the stigma, created and maintained by the ruling ideas of the still-ruling class.

Such hegemonizing projects shift throughout history, then, according to the emergent needs of the ruling class—their own, as Gramsci reminds us, always a yoking-together of various groups and classes, always shifting strategically in ideology, as McKibbin’s study shows persuasively over some eighty years. There is also an identifiable cultural political project of a long pedigree at work here. Not least, the moralism of fat stigma can be read as much as anything as part of an ongoing bourgeois deployment which stretches across the centuries: the association of class, morality, and the body has been a consistent site of fervid development of social power over the course of the rise of the bourgeoisie. As Terry Eagleton points out, in England the development of “good taste” was part of the bourgeoisie’s attempts to naturalize its own privilege, won only by luck and the vicissitudes of markets in history. The previous ruling class, the aristocrats, after all, could rely on the symbolic guarantee of blood lines and heredity for that stabilization—whatever the reality of their pedigree. Eagleton even evocatively uses the word “transfusing” to show the attempts by the new middle classes at an almost biological naturalization of privilege that takes place in the establishment of cultured tastes which appear to naturally inhere in bourgeois subjects—those structured-and-structuring structures that Bourdieu calls habitus. And the very involvement of a symbolic kind of corporeality in this process has some relevance to the present discussion—after all, is it not the case here that when working-class bodies are stigmatized for their fatness, their social disenfranchisement is naturalized, almost racialized, in the body, just as the attempts to “transfuse” the cultural tastes of the aristocracy were designed to replace, and yet seem to produce, that same almost-embodied, subjective naturalization of privilege in the rising bourgeoisie?

We are now told, of course, that this classed-and-classifying body is changeable by practice, by lifestyle, by consumption. We all have a choice in our class, so the developing ideology claims. In such a schema, the body is produced by class, but the individual is made to believe that s/he is morally and individually culpable for his/her class identity. After all, the central ideology of middle-class cultural taste has always been the notion of deserving, of moral superiority evinced by correct consumptive choices from an increasing variety of possibilities (after, for example, the end of sumptuary laws). The ideological deployment of such moralized assumptions is central to the devel-
oping ideology of classlessness. This ideology has been well-articulated, and perhaps reached its apotheosis, in the British political sphere by the ideology of New Labour, a social democratic reformulation of the British Labour Party, formed over a number of years from various, often disparate, elements in the party, and rising to power with the election to the leadership of Tony Blair after the death of former party leader John Smith. Early New Labour propounded the “Third Way,” initially influenced, or perhaps simply given an alibi, by the formerly leftist sociologist Antony Giddens. This system, outlined by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder as a new political vision for Europe, crystallized ideas that had been coming to formation in the British Labour Party (and indeed, the German and British Social Democratic Party) for some years:

Social democracy . . . stands not only for social justice but also for economic dynamism and the unleashing of creativity and innovation. . . . Fairness and social justice, liberty and equality of opportunity, solidarity and responsibility to others—these values are timeless. [Our aim is] to promote employment, to promote prosperity, to offer each individual the opportunity to fulfill their own potential. . . . The importance of individual and business enterprise to the creation of wealth has been undervalued. The weaknesses of markets have been overstated and their strengths underestimated. . . . The most important task is to invest in human capital.

Its German title, “The New Middle/Center,” is arguably something of a misnomer, as Julie Hyland observes, “Despite [the authors’] pretensions, [the Third Way] is devoid of any philosophical or ideological merit. Nor does it set out a “new” idea as such. [It] is in the main a repackaging of the same right-wing, pro-market policies that have been pursued by governments internationally over the last two decades.” What is salient in the Third Way, and remains so more broadly in the New Labour project (the term “Third Way” has long been dropped as yesterday’s spin), is a rejection of the “Old Left”: it removes automatic links with the union movement even as it promotes further privatization of capital and private ownership (often in supposed “partnership” with the public sector). In terms of New Labour’s approach to individual socioeconomic subjects, the aim has been to minimize social rights and welfare, and to maximize personal responsibility and individual entrepreneurship, creating individualized personal “human capital.” We might even suggest that New Labour is a sprightly, “slimmed-down” reformulation of the welfare politics of Old (fat) Labour.
Blair began very early on to differentiate his politics from those of the Old Left, in his view too attached to what he calls—but some might not recognize as—Marxism: “human nature is complex. There is free will, individual responsibility. We can choose and decide. The problem with Marxist ideology was that, in the end, it suppressed the individual by starting with society.” Central to New Labour’s ideology has been the myth of classlessness—although this in itself is only a newly intensified spin on one of the central political formulations of postwar Britain. As David Cannadine points out, since the end of the Second World War, many have promised that class would soon cease to exist. Ted Heath claimed just this in the 1970s; John Major promised as much on taking over the Conservative Party in 1990; Blair has wholeheartedly promised just such an imminent classless society. Blair also foregrounded meritocracy, declaring in 1998, “People are born with talent, and everywhere it is in chains. [. . . ] Fail to develop the talents of any one person, and we fail Britain. Talent is 21st Century wealth. [. . . ] The class war is over, but the struggle for true equality has just begun.” Talented of the world, you have nothing to lose but your chains. Ironically, Blair declared the class war at an end just as the (residually aristocratic) Country-side Alliance squared up to hunt saboteurs and striking workers outside the annual Labor party conference.

The myth of a classless society in New Labour’s Britain has entailed stressing the potential for, and indeed likelihood of, autogenic social mobility. The problem with certain formulations of meritocracy, of course, is a tendency to suggest that each individual is personally responsible, or even morally culpable, for their own social position. This is further emphasized by the tendency, inherited perhaps from Thatcher, for New Labour to replace a rhetoric of class with a rhetoric of consumption; thus to speak no longer of workers, producers, or classes, but of “consumers” and, sometimes, “citizens.” Such rhetoric serves to individualize class, providing an idea of class as an ultimately malleable set of practices and habits of consumption produced by personal choice rather than by subjectively and materially inscribed systemic socioeconomic factors. Also influenced by the ideas of American “Communitarian” sociologist Amitai Etzioni, Blair’s ideological base tended to focus on the moral imperative of the responsibility of the individual to the community. As Lavalette and Mooney point out, for Communitarians (of Etzioni and Blair’s sort, at least), the problem in our societies has been “demoralization”—a decline in morality and the absence of a commitment to fulfilling obligations.”

And it is this moral responsibility that the social subject who successfully and faithfully transforms him- or herself into human capital, is seen
to be fulfilling. Of particular interest to New Labour has been the role of welfare: “policies to offer unemployed people jobs and training are a social democratic priority—but we also expect everyone to take up the opportunity offered.” 47 Similarly, “the state should not row, but steer.” 48 “Part-time and low paid work” is “better than no work because [it] ease[s] the transition from unemployment into jobs.” 49 Such an ideology judges the unemployed and underemployed as equally suspect insofar as they have failed in the moral imperative to rise to the deserving middle class. 50 The moral aspect of this is paramount in the ruling class ideology of modern Britain, and consistently evinced by what Lavalette and Mooney call New Labour’s “highly moralistic stew of censure, condemnation and punishment [. . .] lurking within New Labour’s policies is a vicious ideology which both demonizes and victimizes some of the very poorest sections of the working class, that blames the poor and their “individual inadequacies” for their situation rather than the structural constraints of more than 20 years of mass unemployment and welfare cuts.” 51 In the New Labour formulation, those who are poor are simply lazy. Worst of all, the welfare recipient is a parasite, who consumes resources they have no right to have. As Munt astutely notes, they are perceived as a “drain on the social body.” 52 Is it not then the case that the fat poor somehow manifest greed per se as well as gluttony? Indeed, the analysis of Greg Critser’s Fat Land, offered by Gard and Wright, underscores the cruel logic of such a belief. Despite a superficial class analysis, Critser puts the blame squarely on individual fat folks in a manner which mirrors the ideological censure behind New Labour’s belief in a British classless society:

If, as Critser claims, obesity is primarily a moral issue, [his] statistics push him close to the point of claiming either that wealthier people are also more virtuous or that the poor are simply more lazy and gluttonous. . . . Above all, Critser is unrelenting in his scorn for any suggestion that we should be happy with who we are. While some of us would empathize with people who might already have enough to worry about, such as the poor and ethnic minorities, Critser’s argument is that these people should be more concerned about exercise and diet than more affluent groups. . . . What matters for Critser is only that the rich should instruct the poor about the “moral absolutes” of life. 53

The public stigmatization of the fat body in current British culture is the result of just such a sociohistorical exigency. Indeed, it is an ideological deployment designed to, at least, appear to engineer functioning socioeconomic subjects through, not systemic change, but an individual realignment of consumptive practices.
New Labour’s public health policy has focused strongly on the notion of, as the seminal white paper has it, Choosing Health (2004): it is up to individuals to exercise their consumptive power, and through an act of Nietzschean self-will, to rewrite the body as a healthy one. But is this kind of social policy not just a way, as Frank Furedi puts it, of “taking the social out of policy”? Early intervention, particularly in the lives of children and their families, has been a central “tentpole” of health strategies, and “behavior change” and “behavior management” are the watchwords:

The orientation towards early intervention has been one of the principal policy innovations of New Labour. Its Sure Start programme and numerous local initiatives launched in recent years are primarily designed to save children from their parents or to manage the emotional behaviour of youngsters. This focus is on spotting potential trouble makers and managing their behaviour. New Labour’s institutionalization of people blaming reduces problems to individual emotional deficits. [. . . ] For some such policies represent an attempt to “re-establish the social virtue of self-discipline” for others it is about encouraging people to adopt “positive lifestyle choices.” Whatever the motive, the politics of behaviour presents problems as the outcome of individual or psychological deficits. Through minimising the influence of the social, our culture has fostered a climate where the internal world of the individual has become the site where the problems of society are raised and where it is perceived they need to be resolved.55

What we see in the justificatory ideologies—both overt and underlying—of the political sphere, then, are carnival-mirrored in popular culture, where the underlying assumptions are rendered in all their moralistic unpleasantness. Class, in Honey, We’re Killing the Kids and other such texts, is rendered as a matter of individual consumption: that is, what you choose to eat, and the significations that this will then produce, both in terms of visible consumptive lifestyle, and in the signs of the body itself. Turning class into a matter of stylistic choices, rather than inevitable conflicts in society over the distribution of material resources and wealth and power, has been a neat trick. Here, and elsewhere, changing habits of consumption—“lifestyle modifications”—are presented as a way out of the systemic injustices and inequities of class, rather than, say, any kind of conflict produced by social association as leftists have more traditionally imagined, or indeed, by changes to social and economic systems. Hence, class is manifested by food, but can also be produced by it—as if by magic. Fat chance.56
Bodies are so often imagined to express some perceived internal disposition or essence. This takes us back of course to Foucault’s criminal, made to express its deviance, but we might also look to a more recent epidemiologically oriented moral panic to see another pressing analogue. As Simon Watney notes in his groundbreaking 1988 essay, “The Spectacle of AIDS,” AIDS came to manifest, and indeed, was seen to produce, the mythic homosexual body: a physical manifestation of the moral depravity and indeed previously only internally apparent disease of homosexuality. In the same way, the fat body is so often produced and read as expressive of the moral characteristics of the working class, long since changed in their dominant ideological construction from an association with work to an association with a parasitical sloth: they are not “dynamic” or “active” but passive; they are an “underclass,” perhaps so economically shapeless and directionless as to almost not be a class at all; they are those left behind by the—at one point—massive class mobility of the postwar period. As Thomas King notes in his brilliant 2004 book, What’s the Matter with America, the working class are even constructed in some accounts, such as that of capitalist guru Tom Peters, as the new leisure class: parasitic layabouts “freeloading on the Olympian labors of management.” Consider, then, Joyce Huff’s observation:

In the era of industrial capitalism, an economic model has framed the narratives inscribed upon the corpulent body. Alimentary and material consumption, as Gail Turley Houston has observed in her study of Charles Dickens, were frequently conflated in Victorian representations of the body. Within scientific discourses, a one-to-one correspondence was reinscribed and intensified by the economic metaphor. Body fat was interpreted as the residue of aberrant acts of consumption. The corpulent body was thus made to stand in for rampant, unchecked consumerism and the abuses of laissez-faire capitalism. It served as a trope for excessive consumption, representing both waste and luxury . . . the corpulent subject was selfish, was consuming more than his or her share of the limited resources available within the British economic system. The corpulent body, and particularly the corpulent female body, thus bore the guilt of exploitative economic relations as a legible, stigmatic mark upon the body, freeing the average man and woman, from not merely the vagaries of embodiment but also consumer guilt.
The usefulness of the fat body and the “obesity epidemic” to ideology at this point cannot be underestimated: it serves to reinscribe the connection between alimentary and material consumption, but also to effect a remarkable ideological turnaround.

For Althusser, ideology can best be understood as the imaginary resolution of lived contradictions: it exists to explain, and justify, bizarre states of affairs in which, for example, outrageous material inequities continue to increase in our advanced capitalist societies, or in which surplus labor continues to be extracted, with menaces, from the many, for the benefit of the few. In this justification it also persuades itself of the rectitude of its own practices. There is no thinking outside of ideology for Althusser, and the process of the self-constitution and self-validation of the ruling class is as important as its imaginative constitution of its exploited others. Hence, the ideological deployment of the “Obesity Epidemic,” concentrated in the poor and lower class, is almost impressive in its elegance, telling us as it does that the poor working classes are lazy and greedy, and bolstering by opposition the idea that the bourgeoisie are dynamic and unselfish. With the most fiendishly clever ideological sleight of hand—and yet, no doubt in full un-ironic certainty of its truth—the bourgeoisie has managed to construct the poor and working class as the greedy bastards. And the wider economic patterns of conspicuous middle-class fetishistic consumption, of massively misapportioned material wealth, have become projected, doubly and perversely fetishized, into the now “excessive” bodies of the working classes. Were they not too indolent and corpulent to raise their arms, they would surely be moved to applaud.

Just as the body of Foucault’s criminal is literally stigmatized in order to manifest, to produce, to, in Butler’s later formulation, performatively constitute the interior existence, or “soul” of the criminal, so the fat body is used here to create, in historically exigent form, the stubbornly, resistantly residual, classed subject: that is, the lazy, refusenik, lower-class moron that Munt conjures. Prodded to weeping, publicly shattered, and symbolically (but never truly) reformed both physically and mentally, in Honey, We’re Killing the Kids, he is made to “become” the prime ideological and socioeconomic subject of modern Britain in the name of pedagogy—just as his once-future body was designed to construct that subject typologically in opposition. As Foucault reminds us, the body “is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations and domination.” In this context, we might also remind ourselves of Althusser’s counsel that societies must reproduce themselves ideologically as well as materially: as such, the production of domination (which is, of course, in the name of production) should in
itself be seen as a material practice, and as such as precisely a force of production.\textsuperscript{63}

Meanwhile, again in Foucauldian terms, as “a subjected body,” the fat body also becomes “a productive body,” not only in “its constitution as labor power,” but through its \textit{subjection} to “the instruments of violence or ideology,” \textit{transformed into} the instrument itself.\textsuperscript{64} While working-class people still—whatever Tom Peters would like to think—do the donkey work of the material through their body’s subjection to toil, they are also transformed into material practices of ideology. Thus, their body’s systemic subjection to poor diet is reconceived through the proceeding and preceding discourses of the “war on obesity,” and publicly deployed. At this point, then, the fat body itself—systemically produced, and spectacularly reinscribed—becomes an auto-locomotive Ideological State Apparatus all of its own. The role of diet-show mortification of the poor, then, is not only to stage a single public pedagogical intervention, but to render all similar bodies as ongoing, outgoing, foregoing material practices of ideology. The body continually inscribed \textit{by} class then goes on to \textit{signify}, ideologically helping to stabilize the systemic inequities that contributed to the initial formulation of its fleshy significations. In a sense, we might suggest that fat bodies have become, as Althusser would have it, “the realization of an ideology.”\textsuperscript{65} Or perhaps, bringing together Foucault and Althusser, it is more specifically an ideology’s \textit{corporealization}.

\textbf{VI. RESISTANCE? WHAT RESISTANCE?}

There are here some highly unfashionable theories: Althusser’s concept of the I.S.A., for example, is no longer widely invoked outside of its teaching as a lamentable wrong-turn in the study of cultural politics. The problem for our appreciation of Althusser at least is that he is now most often read as a theorist of \textit{entrapment}: the theory of the I.S.A., some suggest, works so well in explaining the subjective determination of continued subordination that it is difficult to find a way out of it. Althusser was writing, after all, in the aftermath of Mai ’68. The Gramscian turn in cultural studies was adopted by theorists such as Hall, Sinfield, and others, precisely as a way of theorizing the potential for resistance in the face of Althusser’s tendency to see the whole thing as already sewn up.\textsuperscript{66} Similarly, Foucault’s idea of our “docile bodies” has long been considered too disempowering in terms of social subjects and their capacity for resistance. We tend to focus now on his later work which tells us that “there is no single locus of great refusal,” which highlights the “tactical polyvalence” of resistant strategies, and which tells us
that “where there is power, there is resistance.” In many cases, this has been a good idea. Refocusing on resistance and other political possibilities produced socially within working-class culture—subcultures, youth movements, and so on—was once a way of thinking past the apparent dead end of trade unionism and other traditional sources of resistance or even, as many of us once dreamt, revolution. And yet, while the critically liberating Gramscian/Foucauldian resistance turn was an important development in cultural studies, I suspect we may often be in danger of exaggerating present resistance—presented perhaps purely as a textual effect—and producing hopefulness and triumph where there is currently only degradation, control, and injustice. As Sally Munt points out in the introduction to one of remarkably few books in recent memory to focus on class in cultural studies, there is some danger in the “mandatory celebratory progressivism of resistance theorists, asking us to look more tangentially for evidence of survival, of ‘getting by,’ to temper the appetite for heroic potency.” We should beware, she suggests, of “imposing a condescending glamour on working class struggles where none exists.” And my sense is that Althusser and Foucault’s work which centralizes social control works horribly well in explaining the forces we see mobilized against the fat body in the name of the social relations it has come to justify.

Indeed, when these theories work so well, it is a sign that we need to start producing some kind of resistance—not simply looking for it where it may not currently exist in remotely sufficient or organized form. This is not to say that there are no possible strategies of resistance: the transgressive potential of fatness as it has been hailed in fat studies often recalls carnivalesque, that most historically class-based of disobediences. This may well be a starting point for further representational fat/class resistance, although again, carnivalesque often appears here largely stripped of its connection with class and instead rendered in the feminist terms that it has most often been critically associated with since the 1970s (even, for example, in the context of a study of that poet of white trash, John Waters). Surely another strategy would be to employ ideological stereotypes against those who benefit from the existing ideological stereotypes examined here. Ideological stereotyping cuts both ways: perhaps we should do more to ridicule the skinny socioeconomic subjects who drive their SUV to the extortionately priced, glass-fronted, air-conditioned gym, double-shot nonfat latte in hand and pay ever-increasing bills for ever more calorically-deficient fetishized food products. Might not the rough-and-ready fat kids scowling on street corners, gulping coral-pink thick-shakes and throwing rocks at the cars they will never afford, repeat—with a different emphasis—that age-old football chant, so often hurled at the fat:
Who ate all the pies?
Who ate all the pies?
You fat bastard
You fat bastard
You ate all the pies.71

Because who here, in the material scheme of things, has had more than their fair share of the pies? Destabilizing the norm has been a useful strategy for queer cultural activists, as well as academics in the past: not for nothing did queer academics and activists spend so much time pointing out the vacuity and impossibility of the straight ideal. Furthermore, we did not always play fair, or cling to a sense of rational disengagement from emotion or the overtly polemical. “I hate straights!” went the manifestos; “Queer power now!,” we shouted. The reason was that for discourses of sexuality, as with fat discourses, bourgeois liberal rationality was often the problem, not the solution, based as it always is on presumptive privilege, on the spurious naturalization of the cultural and historical:72 “it only stands to reason” that heterosexual privilege is the sine qua non of a functioning society just as “it only stands to reason” that the slender body is the norm. Perhaps it is about time we did some ideological stereotyping of our own to undermine the symbolically unassailable, smugly slender ass of the middle class. As Anonymous Queers put it in 1990: “Let yourself be angry.”73

VII. CLASS WAR

In 2007, a white paper by Sir Derek Wanless, commissioned by the British Government, was being reported in the press to suggest that obesity—and the choices of fat people—are the fundamental reason for the (supposedly) likely collapse of the National Health Service. The Daily Mail leads with the headline, “Obesity crisis threatens to overwhelm NHS as £43bn is squandered,” mentioning only later in the article that “In a move that will once again reignite the row over GP and consultants’ pay, Sir Derek questions the value of the huge rises handed out by the Government in the last contracts negotiated between 2003–4.”74 Likewise, BBC News online leads with the headline “Obesity crisis threatens the NHS” (2007), despite again mentioning massive salary increases for General Practitioners and consultants as a secondary concern. That sum, at least, was not “squandered” on the obese—that is, on actual health provision for a large part of the population. The BBC article is predict-
ably linked to a contextualizing feature on the NHS “crisis,” featuring an image of a child guzzling what my intrepid research tells me is probably a McChicken sandwich.\textsuperscript{75} None of these articles considers the class aspects of obesity, just as none considers the wider systemic problems in the funding of the NHS—such as the spending of massive sums on corporate management consultancy firms, widely suggested to have soaked up the greatest proportion of health spending increases in recent years. According to a National Audit Office report in 2006, public service spending on consultants reached £3bn in the 2005–6 financial year, with a morbidly obese £500m—a 1500\% rise in two years—spent in the NHS. Indeed, this rise was almost equal to the size of the NHS’s “deficit.”\textsuperscript{76}

I find that so many of my leftist colleagues often seem to imagine, in these days of globalization of protest, that capitalism is solely a problem for them: that is, for someone else, in a place at some comfortable distance, whether that might be the worker in an Asian sweatshop, starving Africans, or struggling Latin Americans. Inequality is not something we might find just down the street. After all, Zapatistas and gap-toothed Asian children do look so gratifyingly exotic, so cosmopolitan, on the cover of New Internationalist. Given this tendency, fat studies is one very useful place that socioeconomic inequalities and the attendant ideologies local to “developed” Western societies can be critically pursued. My hope is that in analyzing class in the U.K., I will not simply persuade readers to see class as a peculiarly British concern, but rather, as the beginning of wider work on class in Western fat studies as a whole. And indeed, such studies might add to a recent burgeoning of interest in “white trash,” working-class studies in the United States—especially as such issues interrelate with race.\textsuperscript{77}

It is all too easy for Marxists to fall into Puritanism: man cannot live on rice crackers alone, and the possibility for working-class people to eat a wide variety of foods in a wealthy industrial early twenty-first century society is something that we cannot fail to argue for. Indeed, how we might at least allow people to develop eating habits such that they are not at increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, all the usual suspects, is indeed, to my mind, a reasonable question, although emphatically not one that can be answered by the kind of strategies of bullying and ideological intimidation, or indeed, the fostering of self-loathing, studied here. For the bourgeoisie to berate working-class people for a habitus shaped by the very systemic conditions which produce their exploitation is surely the most grotesque injustice, as well as a sickeningly impressive strategic maneuver.\textsuperscript{78}

I might end by observing that it has long been profoundly unfashionable to suggest that there is a thing as overt, engaged, and ideologically concerted as a “class war” in action—at least, in British and American society. That, as
we have seen, is part of the ideology. My sense is that the ferocity of recent attacks on the working-class fat body should persuade us that this fashion needs to change. With Blair long gone, the policies continue apace: in 2008, the National Child Measurement Scheme measured the waists and weights of nearly a million primary school children to keep tabs on the progress of the “obesity crisis.” Meanwhile, early in 2009, a Department of Work and Pensions campaign to root out “benefit thieves” ran a poster across the nation featuring a very overweight, obviously lower-class woman, her face a mean mask of greed. Overlaid with an image of a target, the caption reads “We’re closing in.”

NOTES

8. Certainly, most of us would balk at arguing that hunger in the Third World is a matter of significations alone.


17. See, for example, Braziel and LeBesco, Introduction to Bodies Out of Bounds, 6; Gard and Wright, Obesity Epidemic, esp. 182, 141; Stearns, Fat History, throughout. Then there is the anti–fast food movement, for example, Supersize Me, dir. Morgan Spurlock (New York: Hart Sharp Video, 2004); Eric Schlosser, Fast Food Nation: What the All-American Meal Is Doing to the World (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).


22. Leftist writer Jeremy Seabrook’s contribution to a recent New Internationalist series of introductory guides, The No-Nonsense Guide to Class, Caste, and Hierarchies (London: Verso, 2002), recently claimed “The rich Western societies declare themselves dedicated to equality of opportunity for women, ethnic minorities, those of diverse sexual orientation, and people with disability. These aspirations to equality are both a substitute for and an avoidance of addressing more profound inequalities” (9). If I agree that these issues are sometimes used in this way, this is not the same thing as arguing that they are actually in any sense less important. Just how profound do inequalities have to be before they are not simply a distraction from the real business of class? To my mind, this is the kind of chauvinistic monoculturism that gives class analysis a bad name and has led to participants in post-60s New Social Movements abandoning class struggle in droves. This mirrors concerns raised in other, late-90s, post-structuralist academic discourses such as queer theory and cultural materialist feminism, in which Marxist analysts—with greater and lesser degrees of shrillness and hyperbole—have claimed that the New Social Movements of the late 60s have reached their dangerous nadir in theories which deny reality itself—and in particular, socioeconomic reality. These critiques have some validity, I think, and yet also tend to suffer from the same totalizing fervor of certain of the critiques they seek to usurp—see, for example, Max Kirsch, Queer Theory and Social Change (London:
Routledge, 2000); Donald Morton, ed., *The Material Queer* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). On the continuing relevance of class analysis, see, for example, Erik Olin Wright, “The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis—Comments,” *Theory and Society* 25 (October 1996): 693–716, a response to suggestions that class is outmoded as a term of analysis. Note in particular that Wright makes it clear here that the primacy of class analysis is not of central importance to an argument that class is a vital form of analysis (693)—he is quite correct, and I would caution strongly against outmoded arguments that suggest that “class trumps everything” in the light of the vital analytical modes produced by what began as New Social Movements, in contemporary academic and critical discourse.

23. Sally Munt, Introduction to Sally Munt, ed., *Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change* (London: Cassell, 1999), 8. Note likewise the endless jokes about male breasts in shows such as *The Simpsons*: for example, Homer’s brassiere discovered by his children in the recent *The Simpsons Movie* (Beverly Hills: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007), or Marge telling Bart that she has been saving for breast reduction surgery for her husband, in “Yokel Chords,” *The Simpsons, Season 18*, written by Michael Price, dir. Susan Dieter, aired March 4, 2007. What could be more risibly perfect than a working-class male—formerly productive, now reduced to pushing buttons in a power plant—with breasts . . .?


27. Or might at some point be featured as the latest exoticized authentica, plundered from some heretofore-ridiculed, now-fetishized, culture in *Bon Appetit, Olive, or Good Food*, perhaps a temporary indulgence to be worked off at the gym later.


34. Ibid., 116.


37. There are numerous histories and analyses of New Labour and their time in power. Fairly even-handed—perhaps rather too even-handed for this reader—and concentrating on the party’s policy record is Martin Driver and Luke Martell, *New Labour*
7: Greedy Bastards


38. See Driver and Martell, New Labour, 47–50.


45. Cannadine, Class in Britain, 179; 182.


48. Ibid., 30.

49. Ibid., 36.

50. Of course, some might suggest here that it is wrong to elide the differences
between the (respectable) “working classes” and the lazy, good-for-nothing “unworking classes”—but the point we should not fail to make is that the separation of these two groups might be seen as an ideological deployment in itself, producing factions between groups with very similar interests.

51. Lavalette and Mooney, online.
52. Munt, Introduction, 8.
55. Ibid.
56. Of course, it would be wrong to deny outright that change in habitus, where possible, may indeed produce social mobility—much as teaching kids to eat with the right knife and fork or taking them to art galleries may help them scrabble up the greasy pole later in life (most formerly working-class academics will attest to this process; I know I do). But the source of agency for such changes remains problematic: it is not achievable individually, and the unavailability of such a strategy to most is precisely, as Bourdieu shows, the system’s *raison d’être*. Furthermore, persuasive evidence suggests that inter-generational social mobility in Britain remains in decline: see Will Paxton and Mike Dixon, *The State of the Nation: An Audit of Injustice* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2004), 60.
64. Foucault, ibid.
65. Althusser, ibid.
67. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 95–96; 100; 95.
68. Munt, Introduction, 12.
69. Ibid.
70. Angela Stukator, “It’s Not Over until the Fat Lady Sings: Comedy, the Carnivalesque and Body Politics,” in *Bodies Out of Bounds*, 197–213.
71. For those readers spared this, it is generally sung to the tune of “Knees Up, Mother Brown.” Fat stigmatization, it should be made clear here, has by no means been
the sole preserve and practice of the bourgeoisie.

72. See Anonymous Queers, “I HATE STRAIGHTS!” and “QUEERS READ THIS!,” in Mark Blesius and Shane Phelan, eds., We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics (New York: Routledge, 1997), 773–80. As my remarks indicate, these were originally flyers distributed at 1990 New York and London pride marches. For more on the political strategies of the queer movement, see Michael Warner’s collection, Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), esp. his Introduction.


78. See the 2005 British TV documentary, Jamie’s School Dinners, Guy Gilbert, Jamie Oliver, and Timothy Spall, 2005. Indeed, there are certain problems with the cultural politics of the British campaigns of Jamie Oliver, designed to get reasonably nutritious food into school canteens. Occasionally, Oliver seems as much motivated by a desire for cultural “improvement” as much as truly material and social concerns, and there is a remaining tendency in publicity to cruelly stigmatize the overweight (for example, Oliver’s publicity stunt which involved dressing in a fat suit, “comically” crushing his motorcycle under his girth—sensitive stuff). But while these campaigns are conducted, of course, within the constraints of capitalism (how could they not be?), Oliver makes much of the role of corporate interests in enforcing poor diet for children at schools and the necessary role of government in breaking their stranglehold; and Oliver’s work deserves, I think, some leftist plaudits for its greater interest in systemic factors such as education and capital, and a collective, communitarian (not in the Blairite sense) focus. I intend to pay greater attention to Oliver’s work elsewhere.