Foreign: this is exactly how I would describe my new body. I am an actress/scholar who lost nearly 100 pounds and am still learning to navigate this landscape of blackness and thin privilege. When I lost weight not only was my physical body affected, but my psychological state was significantly impacted as well. Though the world now experiences me as a slender person, I process my current encounters on the stage and off the stage as a morbidly obese person. In this performative piece I investigate the use of touch in order to better understand my new physical identity as a transweight woman. This script explores the relationship between my right fingers, belly, and mind, as it is through touch that I have been gauging my assimilation into a slender identity. I share the voices of my liminal self (the self between the fat psyche and slender psyche), my belly, and my fingers. I ultimately explore the ways in which touch helps shape my identity as a transweight woman.

My name is Sharrell and I am a transweight\(^1\) black actress. When I lost weight, my formed identity as a confident, secretly depressed, fat black woman was shattered into the stratosphere, and now I find myself picking up the pieces. At this stage in my career I have been investigating what it means for a morbidly obese mind to suddenly inhabit a smaller body. When the weight loss occurred my ‘real’ identity became trapped between my morbidly obese psyche and my slender psyche, causing three distinct identities/voices to emerge. They are called Fat, Slender, and me (Sharrell). Sharrell exists in a liminal space and acts as a

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\(^1\) “Transweight” refers to a person who willfully acquires a new size identity by losing or gaining a large amount of weight in a short amount of time.
mediator between Fat and Slender. However, for the purposes of this performative offering, I created a text that highlights the voices of two additional characters, as they reveal the role the haptic plays in orienting my morbidly obese psyche to my slender body: a body that has suffered shock from rapid weight loss and is recovering from the suffocation of fat. The most interesting haptic relationship thus far involves my fingers and belly. The belly is the main area of my body in which I somatically and visually experience the ebbs and flows of transweight maintenance. For the belly enlarges when I gain weight and collapses as I lose weight. The belly is also a site of contention because she simultaneously houses my enemy and source of survival: food. Inside the belly, that which is good is digested, filtered, and dispersed throughout the body. And whatever can’t be used for fuel at the moment is stored, saved, packed up for later use. But for me, later rarely comes. Only in starvation mode does my body use the stored nutrients. And I’m rarely in starvation mode, so my body is constantly storing food after each meal. And I grow. As I grow I touch my belly. I eat. I touch my belly. Food is stored. I touch my belly. I eat some more. More food is stored. I touch my belly to feel it grow and change with each swallow. I touch my belly to gauge the distribution of fat on my body. The exchange between my fingers and my belly is visceral, full, and charged. Furthermore, I have found that the act of transweight maintenance is deployed in direct correlation with the times that my fingers explore my fully fed belly. I feel my growing fat with my fingers and then I diet, if only for a few hours.

What follows is a script that offers three disjointed identities an interactive space on the page, revealing the ways in which the haptic is helping me shape my new identity as a slender, black woman. The liminal identity (Sharrell), Fingers, and Belly are characters who are reacting to the recent weight gain that is threatening my slender existence.
In my house the spook did not sit by the door
Nor did the spook parade with the poor
Drudging up worms that creeped from within
The spook made his home under my skin
Some say the spook stores for the winter
Others say she’s a terrible sinner
The world says the spook is bitter as lemons
I know better cuz the spook is my dinner
Breakfast and snacks and what’s in your pail?
What’s in your buggy? Oooh, is that for sale?
The spook done made me buy out the store
All the while, reaching for more
Reaching for pig, reaching for cow, reaching for sugar
Gimme five pounds
Tasting the duck, tasting the deer
Gov’t cheese that’s covered with beer
Dreaming of shakes and slurping them down
Feening for fries that come with a smile
Bigger and bigger and bigger I grew
The spook was so pleased she knew what to do
Sharrell D. Lackett

Belly and the Brain

Sharrell: hungry black woman, single, mid 20s (don’t believe the hype), fat and skinny at the same damn time

Fingers: inquisitive, wrinkled, very important to Sharrell’s survival, attached to Sharrell’s right hand and are controlled by Sharrell without much thought

Belly: eight pounds and growing, soft, protective, unloved, speech is slurred and distorted depending on how much food is inside her stomach and how hungry she is

Life up on Sharrell. She is alone and standing. She is almost obsolete again. She is again rubbing her belly. Fingers are lying on top of Sharrell’s belly. Fingers tap trying to get Sharrell’s attention. Sharrell doesn’t move. Fingers push and poke on the over 8 pounds of fat that pad Sharrell’s stomach area. Belly rises. Belly quickly traps Fingers in folds of side skin. Fingers retreat. Sharrell exhales. She steps onto the scale.
The Beginning

Sharrell: (Thinking about how she weighs 195.4 pounds. Thinking real hard about her strategies to keep the weight off. Thinking hard some more about nothing.)


(Fingers not having the courage to console Belly, rests by Sharrell’s side.)

One Week Later

(Sharrell undresses and stands. She can still see her feet. She exhalls and steps on the scale. It reads 195.4 pounds. She is thinking about how she still weighs 195.4 pounds. Thinking real, real hard about her strategies to keep the weight off. Thinking hard about losing noth-

Belly: I gut fringe fries in my gut fram last nite. Theenk she gut hungary. Theenk she gut hungary and pit two mech food in mi. Cooldn’t brake et down. Cooldn’t break it down by morning. I heard her this mourning. Moaning and groaning. Then I felt those pricklee pointers on mi outer walls. They was bak. They come bout everyee mourning at the same tyme.

Fingers: Belly knows me as the prickly pointers. I feel to estimate exactly how overweight or under weight Sharrell is. Belly is my favorite place to go. I go there every opportunity I have to push and push on Sharrell’s fat and hopefully expel the grease, liquids, and toxins that contaminate her body. On either side of the belly button are worms that live under the skin. They are darker than the rest of the body and they bend and curve. These worms hump and reveal. They remind Belly who reminds Sharrell that she has grown beyond control. That she is big, large, stretched, exacerbated. Her skin is tired.

Belly: Here they go agin. I’m tryan ta die-gest.

Five Days Later

(Sharrell weighs in at 195.4 lbs. She smirks.)
Belly: She saw 193.4 lbs. All uv the emptiness in me moved around. Jest bile. Jest bile. Eye wuz floodid yestirdae with chocolate around ate pm. It was ate pm. Afther the chocolate there wuz no moore. I been empti lately. Empti. Think Sharrell iz maad at me becuz eye moove too slow. Eye wishhhhh eye coud toss n tern the foood moore bet its alwayz sticky aynd uhnhellthee.

Fingers: I looked down toda y and saw hair coming outta Belly. Right below the button. It’s usually about 20 strands of hair, growing in every direction, reaching, wanting to protect Belly I suppose. These hairs are unfeminine, ungirlly, unattractive. Though I sometimes touch the edge of the hairs, I also know that I must aid in the annihilation of the hairs. Hair removal, right index finger, right middle finger, a few minutes, Sharrell experiences a burning sensation, I wipe hair away, back to constructed womanhood. Sigh.

Belly: Dat green cheeze onion ball, ritz crackers, soy bean patty, and brown rice did not do thuh trich. Et feels lyke an empti bawl is rowling around en my stamack. En my stamack. En my stamack there iz foooooood, bet eye aym steel hungree. Thiz alwayz hhhhaaaappppins. Maybee its becuz thoze prickly prod-ders tucked mi write b4 eye ayt.

2 Weeks Later

(Sharrell exhells. Steps on the scale. It says 198.8 pounds. Sharrell doesn’t feel like talk-ing.)

Fingers: I feel Belly when it is in distress. Because I cannot reach in and soothe it, I comfort from the outside. Today I slipped into the hole that is the epicenter of her brown bubble. It is a fairly deep hole; was deeper when she was larger. When I push and press, Belly pulls back. Belly tightens up. I try to get her to relax by retreating, but she doesn’t. She just stays guarded. I rest my finger in the hole anyway. I feel creases and lines of severed attachment. I feel that which lets Sharrell know that she came from somewhere, some wombman.

Belly: Bubblynn browyn soduh n greeze wuters moove around. Kant seeeeem tuh saddle. Eye half to sind aye signuhl ta lit her no thet a herrican iz comen. A herrican iz comen uhp n oudda hear.

Fingers: My hand stayed by Sharrell’s side today. She slept because she was up late last night. Dreaming. Conjuring. Theorizing. Being. She stayed out late last night and been sleeping a long time. I also do not wish to touch Belly at this moment. She’s big. Unordinarily big and strange. Seems distantly familiar to me.
The way she is hanging, moving, protruding outwards. Maybe it was those onion rings and cheese quesadillas Sharrell ate last night after 11pm.

Belly: Shat uhp aynd stey offa mey!

3 weeks later

(Life up on Sharrell. She steps on the scale. It reads 203.6. She steps off. Fingers hold Belly gently as Sharrell angrily weeps.)

Belly: Eye thank she madd aht me. Don’t wunt her ta hert mey no mo. Whan shee guts reelly sadd nuthin coms dwn heer. Noh fooooood for daes. Aend everii wonce n aywhile shee guts reelly crazi end fiids mey sum type uv shake. Thin eye gooooo duuuuuwwwwwwwwwnnnnnn. Waaay duuuuuwwwwwn. Eye half nevher fullee disappeared though. Nevher plan to. Eye like to rize.

Fingers: When Sharrell doesn’t want to be nice to Belly, I try to make Belly feel better. Sharrell is gaining her weight back. I often feel like I’m losing my connection with her. She doesn’t think any more about where she puts me or what she does with me. I’ve been getting cut a lot lately. Trying to help her make food, hang pictures, paint. I’ve been rubbing away tears a lot lately too. I know it’s tears because I can feel the soft cheeky skin under the wetness. I just work to soothe her. That’s all I’ve ever done. That’s why I know her so well; every crevice, every pimple, every tattoo bruise. I think I will just hang by her side until she itches or decides to eat again, but I’m going to wait awhile before I press on Belly. I’m sure Sharrell doesn’t want me meddling in her sorrow. Not tonight at least.

Now

Sharrell: (Unable to speak. Her conundrum has silenced her. As she types she decides that she can’t control the future or the present. Her strength to battle the fat is gone. Practice does not make perfect when it relates to weight loss. Practice makes denial, anger, frustration, sadness, hopelessness, and silence. Sharrell tries to speak.)

Sharrell: ........ (Sharrell continues to type. She just wiped off her left eyebrow liner by mistake. Her eyebrow bone is blank. She thinks about her eyebrow bone being blank. The black liner is now on her fingers. They rub together and the liner disappears behind or under the skin she guesses. Thriving in silence is not easy.)
Fingers: There is water falling from her eyes. *(Fingers reach up to wipe the cloudy water that is falling from Sharrell’s eyes.)*

Belly: Thair iz wuhtar fawling fruhm her eyez beecuz iht iz tyme for mee to eet.

Fingers: I hear Belly. Loud and clear. Belly is alive.

*(Sharrell hears and feels Belly from the inside. She heads for the kitchen as cloudy water falls from her eyes, down her cheeks and drop onto the floor.)*

Fingers: *(Realizing she missed her cue to attend to the water.)* Oops. I was seasoning the porkchops.

**The End**

**EPI-love:**

Sharrell is unable to talk.
Sharrell is unable to think.
The water which falls from her eyes have seeped up under her feet.
The once solid ground is slippery wet
Her fingers are dangling
Filled with regret
That they cannot love
They cannot reach
And soothe the place
That houses the breach
An Eclipse of the Chocolate Moon