

Intra-face

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'Twas three weeks before Christmas
And pretty damn dark
Up north here in Sweden
As I walked through the park.
I was thinking of how
To theoretically base
A medical simulator
And its intra-face;
A tool to teach students
The pelvic exam
With organs and diodes
But no diaphragm.
When doing a study
On how I could teach
I realized the box came
With inserts for each
Type of womb and some ovaries
But even more odd
With a fat pad to mimic
A large woman's bod [y].
Place the thin fat pad
Which came in one piece
Below the abdominal
Skin and – voilà!
You're obese!
It looked like a mouse pad,
Insertable foam
But centimetre thin
And shaped like a dome.

I thought of the women,
Those termed as 'obese'
And thought, it'd take dozens
Of inserts, at least
To model their middles
And properly hide
Their wombs and their ovaries
Deep there inside.
So I asked the designer
At a factory in Kent
How one little fat pad
Such bulk could represent.
And her answer surprised me.
Quite matter-of-fact,
She explained how the body
Is not so compact.
When fat is kept warm
And enclosed in a space
The cells are real fluid
In movable ways.
And most fat in a woman
Who's been asked to lie
On her back on the table
Slides out of the way.
So the fat pad's a model
Of fat, as it were
When known in the practice
Of examining her.
The pad doesn't simulate

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Fat on command.
 It simulates
 Fat as it's felt by the hands.
 And nor is the simulator
 A model of bones
 Of bodies or organs
 It simulates 'known'.
 To think all this through
 I returned to my books
 And to feminist science studies
 And its various hooks
 I applied the term taken
 From Karen Barad
 'intra-action' – how objects
 are not to be had
 But rather are compotes
 Both the *hows* and the *whats*
 Of the tools used to know them
 And discursive cuts.
 So the body as modelled
 Is not its own 'thing',
 Ontologically separate
 From medicine's zing
 Instead, that same body
 Can only be known
 Through techniques and instruments.
 It can't stand alone.
 And when it is modelled
 What's placed in that wax
 Is the practice of knowing it.
 Practices, not facts.
 So my point with this fat pad
 Is merely to say
 When talking of simulators
 We have to give way
 And think of a body
 As a knowledge phenomenon
 A product of practice
 And what it's been done on.
 It isn't the fat that
 We're trying to model.
 It's how the fat's felt.

How it wiggles and wobbles
 And how it behaves
 During a specific ordeal.
 Not what it might be
 But how it might feel.
 The body, the doctor
 Anatomist, wax
 Are entangled and 'Intra'.
 Distinctions are hacks.
 To think of the model
 As representational
 Ignores that its agency
 Is really relational.
 So instead of an interface
 Which connotes units,
 With representation
 Objectified bits
 I posit an 'intra-face'
 With contours of doing,
 Of knowing the body
 And contexts ensuing.
 And one implication
 This insight might give
 Is that medical models
 Model the body we live
 And the way that our doctors
 Or anatomy Profs
 Can know what our body is
 Requires Philosofs.
 The term of validity
 Ought to be tossed.
 And models, realistic
 That dream is losted.
 At least till we grapple
 With accepting the thought
 That both of these terms
 Without practice are fraught.
 A simulator mimics
 The way that we know
 It's an intra-face for us.
 Now let's hope for some snow ...