The subtitle of the essay “Slow Death” by the inimitable Lauren Berlant is a parenthetical ontograph, “(Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency).” The last item, lateral agency, takes place across a common plane, zoned for occupancy and populated by a host of factors and actors. Mimicking the plane’s extensiveness, Berlant describes “ordinary life” as including and constituted by “spreading-out activities like sex or eating.” Devoting her essay to describing what is “vague and gestural about the subject” (not unlike our bloated tuber), Berlant traces the slow spread of obesity’s profile as “not a thing, but a cluster of factors that only looks solid at a certain distance.”

Bogost writes, “An ontograph is a crowd,” and for Berlant, too, the cluster that coheres is collective, crowd-like. In contrast to the individual profile Latour et al. shaped by including points to reference a person, obesity precludes personhood. For Berlant, it is always “oriented toward . . . self-abeyance,” toward what she calls self-suspension, as opposed to self-negation. Obesity
is an instance of biopower that dismantles individual sovereignty, and indeed, Berlant sees obesity’s profile embodying (so to speak) biopower and its relationship to managerial control. Obesity is an endemic, not an epidemic, a chronic condition requiring perpetual management, not a crisis in need of a cure; and it deals in populations, not persons. The same could be said of big data. Both are surfeits set for management and the more we eat and click, the more management we require.

Berlant uses the term *actuarial rhetoric* to describe both the material effects of the actuarial production of data, i.e., the fat data of statistics and policy, and in a figuratively broader sense, to convey how actuarial management strives “to get the fat (the substance and the people) under control.” With actuarial rhetoric, obesity contains fat-as-substance, fat-as-people, and data-as-fat.

Patricia Ticineto Clough and her collaborators also deal with self-abeyance in their own strange blend of substance and people in “Notes Towards a Theory of Affect-Itself.” Drawing from “resonances” with information theory, the life sciences, and physics, they propose to “mov[e] beyond the laborer’s body assumed in the labor theory of
value [which is referred] to as the body-as-organism” to arrive at a new conception of bodies “arising out of . . . matter as informational.”

Echoing Berlant’s individual’s self-abeyance, Clough et al. cite Akseli Virtanen and Paolo Virno to describe how affective labor has been theorized as “superced[ing] the individual” through an “abstract labor-power that is in excess of any one laborer’s body.” Pursuing this notion further, they ask whether it is also “in excess of the body conceived as human organism.” Whereas prior theories of affective labor already started suppressing personhood in favor of populations, shedding the sanctity of the individual laborer in favor of a “social individual,” Clough et al.’s radical move extends the notion of population well beyond the social individual or crowd, and into the nonhuman world, the informational world of data.

Theorizing that “the distinction between organic and non-organic matter is dissolving in relationship to information,” they conclude that “labor power must be treated in terms of an abstraction [that could accommodate] bodies that are beyond the [organic/nonorganic] distinction altogether.” This move to view the material
structure of labor power as informational is critical. Indeed, it is information that gives the form—fills out the profiles—of the bodies we have potatoed thus far. Recalling that for Harvey, the commodity was never data, but always the labor power traded in data’s production, and that for Berlant, individual sovereignty can’t be recuperated under biopower, this move to make ourselves bigger, to “spread out” into “information-as-matter,” or to include data in our own mattering makes sense if we are to set our “selves” aside, self-suspending to veer toward lateral agency.

Yet, if for Clough et al. the question is whether labor power can be in excess of the body, I might phrase this differently: Can it be excess body? In other words, can labor power accrue in and as excessive bodies, obese bodies? Can labor power be fat? Clough et al. find a route into this strange transhuman matter through affect. I wonder if we can arrive at the same through bignesses, understood as both people and substance, as both big data (inorganic bodies-of-information) and big populations (obese bodies-as-organisms).
Clough’s gross inclusions lend unexpected credence to the counterintuitive confusion between data as external object (product of labor) and data as included-in-subject (part of the laboring body). If affect is in matter, and an affective theory of value moves beyond the body-as-organism, we can reconsider that laboring body as including “connections between different levels of matter,” including data. So the profile isn’t personal. We don’t produce self. We aren’t who or what or how we think we are. We are, it seems, much bigger, more materially diverse, and crowd-like.
This leads us to the question of how a crowd-body that collects even-handedly such ontographic litanies as {self, multitude, data} or {plastic, fat, fact} or {points, lines, planes} might function. In my reading, a collective body-of-obesity/body-of-information models object-oriented feminist transhumanism and embodies decelerationist aesthetics. A transhuman body is capable of lateral agency, also described by Berlant as “the forms of spreading pleasure . . . necessary to lubricate the body’s movement through capitalized time’s shortened circuit.” If such a quite-crowded body already consists in and troubles {labor, labor power, commodity}, how else might it interface with capitalism? How might it deploy itself in relationships of power and pathos to “mov[e] through capitalized [time]”? 