Bigger Than You: Big Data and Obesity

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One persists

Bigness is sameness. It is thermodynamic entropy played out to the end. As Spinoza writes, “Nature is always the same.”\textsuperscript{51} With sameness, the imperceptibility advanced by a big body politics diverges from Grosz in a small but significant way. For Grosz, Nietzschean force is agonistic and fulfills itself in becoming.\textsuperscript{52} Yet, this kind of dynamism feels alien to big being, which seems to need a decelerated form of force closer to mere, simple persistence. From point to line to plane to body, each aesthetic form we have considered has gradually expanded and gently decelerated expressions of self. So can we use this notion of deceleration to conceive a more lethargic politics?

For Spinoza, part of any being’s essence is a power to act understood, as philosopher Steven Nadler explains, as a “power to persevere in being,”\textsuperscript{53} which is to say, to hold an outline, to cohere in form, to persist. Much as Latour et al. advance persistence of form across gradual temporal change, Spinoza’s term conatus describes this “kind of existential inertia.”\textsuperscript{54} Accordingly, political resistance
in this model is not oppositional, not little, and not about action. For example, practices like sousveillance, in which small actors watch the big from below, are not what’s at stake. Instead, a politics of imperceptibility mobilizes correspondences, vastness, and stasis.

In stasis, individual laborers cease to work and the commodity labor power ceases to function. Critics of object-oriented theory are mistaken to associate being an object with oppression. Not being an object, but being circulated as such in the generation of value, is what oppresses. And so deceleration grinds circulation to a near halt; bigness swallows value, the unevenness that is the motor of capitalism and exceptionalism; and labor power idles in a state of listlessness. When bigness can barely budge, exchangeability breaks down. The inertia of conatus sets in.

Here, a big body politics finds its ethics. Such slow bigness evokes the yogic principle of ahimsa, or nonviolence. In his commentary on “Book Two” of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Sri Swami Satchidananda explains that ahimsa should not be understood as not acting violently, but as refraining from any harm, even so much as thinking
harmful thoughts. For Irina Aristarkhova, the practice of ahimsa in Jainism manifests the enlarged scope of transpecies feminist practices of care. Care summons responsibility toward the otherwise-mattered populations and collective forms we have examined here.

Rubbing up close with otherness produces friction, like static electricity. Can we be static, nearly still? Bonded together in a static force field, difference generates dampened prickles of energy and even—persisting and tingling in stasis—awareness. Ahimsa stands aware as slow, considered mindfulness. This friction is no rapid, repellent antagonism—far from it. The extreme prudence in ahimsa requires a radical slowdown to a pace against which the momentum of reactivity no longer holds sway.

Ahimsa is an aspect of the first of the eight limbs of yoga, yama, which Satchidananda translates as “abstinence.” Yama is the abstention from the very assertion of self, like Berlant’s self-abeyance. Rather than acting with force or reacting to force, yama abstains from any agitations. So, too, the politics of decelerationist aesthetics slumps against connections and correlations, along with
the politics of recognition and even representation. In such a spirit, François Laruelle’s One summons radical inclusiveness in the manifold-turned-singular, evoking the “more” we associate with bigness (and the geometrical structure adopted here):

The One is immanence (to) itself without constituting a point, a plane, without withdrawing or folding back upon itself. It is One-in-One, that which can only be found in the One, not with Being or the Other. It is a radical rather than an absolute immanence. The ‘more’ immanence is radical, the ‘more’ it is universal or gives-in-immanence philosophy itself (the World, etc.).

In his hyperobjects, Timothy Morton bounces object-oriented thinking up a level to the vastness of ecological scale and geological time. Like geologic sediment, a big body politics is unconcerned with minutia like mere human life, and the other bits, informational and otherwise, that
compose it. Lethargically, separation converges in One. Things settle, and entropy overrides variation. Sharp apprises us that “[a] feminist politics of imperceptibility simply siphons enabling energy and power wherever it happens to find it.” Drawing a line through geologic time, a “slow death” of populations eases in, coming to embody a subtle standstill. “Inside this circle,” Latour et al. explain, “everything might change through time. . . . What matters is that the change be gradual enough to preserve some continuity.”

Imperceptibly, all things persist, existing as a way of insisting, silently stating for the record that big being is.