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INTRODUCTION

I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies.

—Spinoza, in *Ethics*

This quote from Spinoza seems an unlikely launching pad for a discussion of the new intimacies arising between humans' bigness and big data. Yet, by considering human activities through the elegant, elemental figures of geometry, we shall see how Spinoza gets us straight into the thick thicknesses of things.

Big data refers to the massive quantity of records that are captured, amassed, and mined in the wake of digitally structured actions. It is the

sum total of records of actions—the exponential archive of every component transaction captured in every data trail. These actions may originate from human or nonhuman protagonists (e.g., online shoppers or particle accelerators) and may describe human or nonhuman referents (e.g., medical data or atmospheric data). But this essay will not address data generated by or descriptive of nonhuman objects. Instead, I will adopt an object-oriented feminist perspective, arriving at the non-human by following big data as it restructures the human.¹ Beginning with the work that humans—in the conventional sense, individual subjects—do as the producers of big data, I'll describe how, by wielding Spinoza's "lines, planes, and bodies," big data unproduces and deindividualizes its subjects to become transhuman objects, something, I'll argue, far *vaguer* than any small subject could be.

This essay will also show how, through its materiality, big data models what I call *decelerationist aesthetics*. In decelerationist aesthetics, the aesthetic properties, proclivities, and performances of objects come to defy the accelerationist imperative to be nimbly individualized.² Decelerationist aesthetics rejects atomistic,

liberal, humanist subjects; this unit of self is too consonant with capitalist relations and functions. Instead, decelerationist aesthetics favors transhuman sociality embodied in particulate, mattered objects; the aesthetic form of such objects resists capitalist speed and immediacy by taking back and taking up space and time. In just this way, as we shall see, big data calls into question the conventions by which humans are defined as discrete entities, and individual scales of agency are made to form central binding pillars of social existence through which bodies are drawn into relations of power and pathos.

So let us begin. En route, as we work our way up to Spinoza's "lines, planes, and bodies," we'll start by taking stock of the simplest geometrical unit: the point.

