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Q1|Q2|Q3 Spin and Surrender: Letting go as a Mode of Resistance

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Abstract

During spin class, the author of this paper thinks into her resistance to letting go of her marriage. She finds herself thinking about a politics of surrender that is not necessarily the opposite of resistance but rather a necessary precondition to a particular quality of resistance that has the potential to lead to a more expansive and inclusive activism. As she looks around the class, and falls into rhythm with those around her, she realized that this inclusive activism could lead perhaps to a more intimate solidarity.

Keywords:

activism, surrender, resistance

Are you ready? I am Jude, your instructor. This is Leith Walk Edinburgh, this is Tribe Yoga, and this is the 6:45 am Spin Class. You know what to do. Reach down to your resistance dial on your bike. We are turning that resistance right down! Turn your resistance all the way to the left and turn it all the way off. This is the path of no resistance. So let's begin by letting go.

Those of us attending Jude's spin class turn off the resistance but the dials are stiff. Turning off resistance is uneasy. We hold on tight to what seems precious even if holding on hurts. I can hear my resistance to letting go of my unhealthy relationship with my partner in every, "We're really well thanks" when we really are not. I can hear it in every late-night phone call to a hospital checking to see if my missing partner is there. I know I need to let go. I know that the time has come now that even he wonders why I hold on so tight. As he stumbles in and lies on the bed and I take off his shoes, even he looks at me quizzically and asks, "Why?"

I write a story about the materiality of non-resistance because we are *homo narrans* (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 25), we write stories to rewrite the human and all that this entails. In rewriting my resistance to letting go of my relationship, I find myself thinking about a politics of surrender that is not necessarily the opposite of resistance but rather a necessary precondition to a particular quality of resistance that has the potential to lead to a more expansive and inclusive activism—that can lead perhaps to a more intimate solidarity, a solidarity that is not grown out of reactivity to an event. Massumi (2017) writes, "but the starting point is still reaction. And the activation achieved remains wed to an episodically renewed becoming-reactive, which continues to serve as its motor" (p. 55)

If we begin with reactivity, it, "will always serve as its motor,"

I spin this story with Jude the instructor as she seems to intuitively create the conditions that enable an increase in capacity for what bodies can do when they are together. Jude calls out, "For this first track it doesn't matter if you fall out of sync, just set your own pace, and ask yourself this question: *Why are you here?*"

My thoughts pedal to a chapter entitled “Surrender” in Jennifer Nash’s (2019, p. 81) book. In this book, Nash thinks through the potential of wedding herself from the analytic of intersectionality, at least in its present conceptualization. She is not the only one thinking through this dilemma, but it is not so much intersectionality itself that I am thinking about in Spin class that day, but more Nash’s process of surrendering something prized. Jasbir Puar (2012) asserts that intersectionality is the main feminist mode of understanding the lives of women and central to black feminist scholarship. Nash (amongst others) is potentially surrendering an analytical tool that is thought of as the *gold-standard*, or as Kathy Davis (2008) writes, “the most important contribution women’s studies...has made so far” (p. 68).

When I tell my friends about my separation from my partner, they are caught in a similar predicament that I am caught in with Nash. My friends don’t know what I should do, and they haven’t been in my relationship with me enough to know, and likewise I haven’t spent enough time, or done a deep or intimate enough reading of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) work on intersectionality to possibly be able to trust or put forward my own thinking on its futurity, but Puar (2017) writes:

Far from being postrace or postintersectional, this methodological demand is about redressing the epistemological bifurcation that has occurred around intersectional theorizing that has let white feminists, especially those working on...(the) (new) materialisms, off the hook and has, quite frankly, burdened women of color, theorists and activists, most directly black feminist theorists, with the responsibility of adjudicating and defending the perceived successes or failures of intersectional scholarship (p. 20).

As we spin, I imagine Nash on the bike beside me and asking her, “*How do you/we surrender something so important in unjust circumstances?*” But we’re both distracted by the man beside her. I imagine he is spinning fast and appears to be losing control. Without resistance there is nothing to push against, the pedals spin fast and light, and in order to keep up one must develop the capacity to fall. A tiny bead of sweat drops into the unknown.

The man on the bike is Kevin Quashie who wrote the beautiful book, “The sovereignty of Quiet” (2012). He feels the weight of Nash’s stare and briefly opens one eye while spinning sentences that assert that surrender is not a passive state that is the “counterpart to being conquered, dominated or defeated...But surrender can also be expressive and active...the simultaneous practice of yielding and falling towards what is deep and largely and unknowable.” (p. 27). Then, he turns quietly back to himself with faith in his ride. He leaves me thinking about surrender as an active fall and an imaginative process, and could be a vehicle through which we can reimagine new forms of intimate solidarity. I turn my resistance down a little more and cycle a little faster.

Quashie’s turning away, demonstrates that surrender includes a necessary “intensification of the body’s relation to itself” (Puar, 2017, p. 18). How can solitary become solidarity? This “self” Jude, the riding instructor, asks us to connect with seems to be produced by the significance of the provocation of Jude’s question, “why are you here,” of my separation, of Nash’s particular dilemma, of Quashie’s advice and the bodily force and energy put into the spin and the surrender itself. Surrender then could be seen as the active yielding to an event that brings an opportunity to deepen our capacity to go into the unknown in a way that allows us to position ourselves within new arrangements.

Jude says, “*Now you have cycled without resistance, and your heart rate is up, and you are spinning fast, and now what I want you to do is to turn your dials to the right and this time you begin to push against the resistance. I want you to start to feel the friction. And so to help you, I want you to stand up off the saddle, and open your chests. Standing up will help you use your weight and your whole body to start to push back*”: We turn up the resistance and find that it is through this frictional shift, that expansion begins to grow out of surrender. Both Nash (2019) and Puar (2012) think about what may happen if they expand the concept of intersectionality by bringing it into relationship with another supposedly opposing paradigm so that they become frictionally relational rather than opposites or binaries.

I now imagine Puar, pushing pedals next to Quashie who watches the becoming shape-shifting bike-bodies heave and burn and she imagines a frictional relationship between the concepts of intersectionality with assemblage. Meanwhile, Nash notices the empty bike in the corner and thinks about who was not able to make it to spin class, she imagines remaking intersectionality by bringing the unforgotten into relationship with the perhaps forgotten analytic tool of transnationalism, opening up to new narratives. Nash (2019) writes, “It is this radical intimacy, a letting go of what we

think intersectionality must do, a [deeply generous act] that will compel women's studies to tell a different story" (p. 110).

The cyclists now are soaked with sweat from their uphill climb. There is dizziness and pain. It would seem that the energy should have run out but instead, Jude shouts out, "*you know whats happening next, we're not stopping here. This time we're riding together, using the energy we have produced in the room, in sync.*" And it happens, surprisingly groans somehow turn to laughter as bodies push beyond the limits of what they thought they could do. [Massumi \(2017\)](#) writes:

There's a point when I'm composing where the movement starts to take over and I begin to feel that instead of me thinking the concepts, the movement is thinking them through me. The concepts are fielding themselves, step by step, pulse by pulse. There's a certain sense of abandon, or perhaps surrender. But it's a surrender to the intensity of a movement of thought in the making, with all its precision (p. 73).

Jude's initial request for our surrender and falling prior to our standing up and pushing back seemed to allow for us to exceed what we thought we could achieve. The bikes staying rooted to the spot, serves as a reminder that this capacity is epistemic and not geographical, personally felt but not personally known, always already there. I email Stacy, apologizing for being tardy with something. I tell her about my separation from my partner. She writes back that she offers solidarity if not wisdom. I wonder if they are one and the same thing.

Perhaps, we could think of this solidarity as strange intimacy made of closeness with difference and difference with closeness, perhaps a frictional intimacy made of surrender and pushback.

Eventually, the ride is over. Jude asks us to lift up the weights from the back of the bike. The last part is for us to each claim this strength we've generated between us in the room, each of us putting it back into our bodies and beings as we high five Jude on the way out before walking off in our separate directions, strangers, together-apart, stronger.

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