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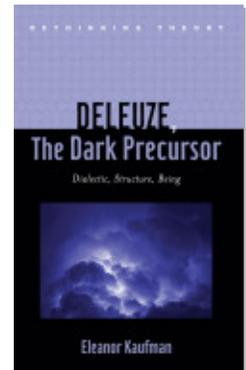
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Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Mind

ONE OF DELEUZE'S PHILOSOPHICAL achievements is that he renders the classic mind-body dualism both more complex and ultimately beside the point. He does this by showing over and over again how the body and the mind are inseparably linked to each other, how they are part of the same assemblage that is to be regarded in terms of what it can do rather than what it is or is not. It follows, then, that to link Deleuze to a concrete distinction between the mind and the body is treading on risky ground. In the same fashion, feminist readings of Deleuze by Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz underscore the difficulty of the mind-body distinction and suggest a form of "thinking through the body" as a way to get beyond this dualism. What I propose is an extension of these analyses that builds on their insights yet returns to the unwanted mind-body split to suggest that there are perhaps some things — and things pertinent to both Deleuze and feminism — that a mind in disjunction from its body can still do. Indeed, in certain (and often extreme) cases there is a lived necessity of maintaining such disjunctions. Drawing on the work of Braidotti and Grosz, I outline a parallel but reconfigured framework that puts greater emphasis on the world of the spirit and the mind. Using Deleuze's studies of Spinoza and Pierre Klossowski's study of Nietzsche, I then suggest ways in which the mind's potential for exceeding the body and maintaining the dualism allows access to new states of health and exuberance.

In the essay "Toward a New Nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism," Braidotti maps the work of a series of feminist thinkers of sexual difference — including Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway — onto such Deleuze and Guattarian concepts as the rhizome, the body without organs, becoming-woman

and becoming-minoritarian, and nomadic thinking.¹ Without rehearsing the various linkages Braidotti proposes or attempting an overall synthesis on the same scale, I wish instead to highlight those specific points in Braidotti's text where she discusses the mind-body relationship and the relationship of embodiment to thinking.²

Initially, Braidotti casts feminist theory as working to overcome a history of female disembodiment:

[F]eminist theory . . . expresses women's . . . structural need to posit themselves as female subjects, that is to say, not as disembodied entities, but rather as corporeal and consequently sexed beings. Following Adrienne Rich I believe that the redefinition of the female subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity and the rejection of the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral, and consequently gender-free. This "positional" or situated way of seeing the subject is based on the understanding that the most important location or situation is the rooting of the subject into the spatial frame of the body.³

This passage begins by locating a fundamental disjunction between "female subjects" and "disembodied entities." While these disembodied entities have historically fallen on the side of the "universal, neutral, and consequently gender-free" masculine subject, the question at hand is whether there is anything in these disembodied entities that is redemptive for feminism. Moreover, could the very disjunction female subject/disembodied entity be in itself a productive contradiction?

Braidotti concludes this passage with a call for a "rooting of the subject into the spatial frame of the body." While such a rooting is a necessary corrective to a long-standing disdain for the body, it also seems that more than one such rooting is possible. An alternate perspective would be to situate the subject along the lines of tension between the body and the mind. Indeed, later moments of Braidotti's text provide the seeds for such an alternate form of embodiment, one where the body does not simply correspond to the physical frame of the person. Rather, the body is itself a complex interaction of forces, not all of them clearly readable as either physical or human. It is in articulating such a notion of the body a few pages later that Braidotti has recourse to Deleuze. I quote at length:

The embodiment of the subject is for Deleuze a form of bodily materiality, but not of the natural biological kind. He rather takes the body as the complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is not an essence, let alone a biological substance. It is a play of forces, a surface of intensities: pure simulacra without originals. Deleuze is therefore of great help to feminists because he deessentializes the body, sexuality, and sexed identities. The embodied subject is a term in a process of intersecting forces (affects), spatiotemporal variables that are characterized by their mobility, changeability, and transitory nature.⁴

In thinking the body as an interplay of forces,⁵ Braidotti uses Deleuze to portray a body that is populated with things and flows and movements that would belie any static or absolute essence (I argue in subsequent chapters for the force of the static essence). Furthermore, such a fluid conception of the body reinforces the now standard and certainly somewhat simplified critique of the Cartesian system of the mind-body dualism or split. Such a critique would run as follows: if the body really were a complex system of forces, not a distinct entity in itself but rather a system of overlapping and changing boundaries, how can there be some kind of pure and absolute boundary between it and the mind? Braidotti presents precisely this argument when she writes: “Clearly for feminist corporeal materialism, the body is not a fixed essence, a natural given. . . . [T]he ‘body’ as theoretical *topos* is an attempt to overcome the classical mind-body dualism of Cartesian origins, in order to think anew about the structure of the thinking subject. The body is then an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces.”⁶ According to such an analysis, the body is used as a philosophical tool to disrupt the mind-body dualism.

In *Feminism and Geography*, Gillian Rose helpfully explicates this use of the body as an anti-Cartesian tool when, after reviewing several feminist theories of space, she concludes: “This sense of space offered by these feminists dissolves the split between the mind and the body by thinking through the body, their bodies.”⁷ What Rose puts forth is a bodily appropriation of a mental capacity — thought. Thus thought is not just the purview of the mind but is also integrated into the fiber of the body, and in this fashion both mind and body partake of the same mechanism. In other

words, thought is not thought without the body to “plunge” into. This expression is taken from the opening lines of Deleuze’s chapter “Cinema, Body and Brain, Thought” in *Cinema 2*. Here, Deleuze presents a slightly different version of thinking through the body, one in which thought, in order to reach its unthought, must delve into the body. Deleuze writes that “the body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought.”⁸ The apparent ease with which the body can be “thought through” or “plunged into” is striking. At issue is how mind-body relations might work differently in those cases where the body actively resists integration with the mind or vice versa. Furthermore, could something interesting be said to happen when, to reverse Deleuze’s formulation, thought also reaches itself by working through the body as obstacle? That is, could thought work both through and against the body in ways that are not exclusively masculinist or retrograde?

Apprehending such a potentially antagonistic working of thought or mind *against* the body entails looking at thought for what it can do. Deleuze’s entire oeuvre might be considered as a manual for precisely this, for articulating what it is that philosophy as thought does. It is in this sense, then, that while not drawing necessarily Deleuzian conclusions, my line of inquiry strives to work within a Deleuzian framework of conceptualizing that which is potentially new about thought.

Braidotti describes the newness that Deleuze brings to thought when she writes that “thinking is for Deleuze not the expression of in-depth interiority, or the enactment of transcendental models; it is a way of establishing connections among a multiplicity of impersonal forces.”⁹ Furthermore, “[T]hinking for Deleuze is instead life lived at the highest possible power — thinking is about finding new images. Thinking is about change and transformation.”¹⁰ In holding to the spirit, if not the letter, of a Deleuzian quest for thinking as newness, I use Deleuze to elaborate what I would term a new form of disembodied thought. In the same chapter of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze compares “cinema of the brain” to “cinema of the body” and distinguishes them in terms of attitude and geste: “There is as much thought in the body as there is shock and violence in the brain. There is an equal amount of feeling in both of them. The brain gives orders to the body which is just an outgrowth of it, but the body also gives orders

to the brain which is just a part of it: in both cases, these will not be the same bodily attitudes nor the same cerebral gest[e].”¹¹ While the brain and body are presented as parallel and equal, they are nonetheless marked by an important differential. This differential occurs on the level of “bodily attitude” and “cerebral gest[e],” which, according to Deleuze, are not the same. To push this line of reasoning further, what if we were to magnify the differential between bodily attitude and cerebral geste so that the space in between becomes a radically disembodied and incorporeal one? (The disjunction of bodily attitude and cerebral geste in Klossowski is taken up in chapter 4.) And if this is done, how could that space be used productively and strategically?

It is here that Elizabeth Grosz’s account of Deleuze with respect to the mind, the body, and the incorporeal is of particular importance. Like Braidotti, Grosz provides a series of frameworks for a new conjunction of Deleuze and feminism, drawing on such feminist theorists as Alice Jardine, Irigaray, and Braidotti and on such Deleuzian concepts as rhizomatics, the body without organs, and becoming-woman.¹² Like Braidotti, Grosz articulates the conjunction of Deleuze and feminism along the axis of the mind-body duality and, more specifically, the displacement of this axis by a foregrounding of the body. Grosz first poses her argument for Deleuzian embodiment as a series of rhetorical questions at the beginning of her chapter on Deleuze in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. This series of questions echoes many of Braidotti’s formulations, discussed above:

Can accounts of subjectivity and the psychical interior be adequately explained in terms of the body? Can depths, the interior, the subjective, and the private instead be seen in terms of surfaces, bodies, and material relations? Can the mind/body dualism be overcome using the concepts associated with the devalued term of the binary pair of mind and body, that is, are the body and corporeality the (disavowed) grounds and terms on which the opposition is erected and made possible? What happens to conceptual frameworks if the body stands in place of the mind or displaces it from its privileged position defining humanity against its various others?¹³

Like Braidotti and Rose, Grosz claims the body as the unacknowledged framework for the mind-body duality. By supplanting the mind, the body

allows feminist access to a new space that is neither masculinist nor humanist. Such a new space has indeed been charted by such thinkers as Grosz and Braidotti and has opened the way for still different approaches. One such approach is also neither masculinist nor humanist, though in privileging a certain concept of the mind it might appear to be precisely that which a corporeal feminism is defined against. Yet, just in the way the body has been reclaimed as a site of feminist practice, so too does the realm of the mind contain the same, albeit difficult, potential. In charting out a Deleuzian-feminist space of corporeality, Grosz simultaneously provides the navigational tools for a feminist inquiry into the incorporeal.¹⁴

In the same fashion as Braidotti, Grosz gives a new definition of the body, which surpasses the restricted physical space of the person. However, Grosz goes beyond Braidotti in inscribing the incorporeal into this new definition of the body. Following from Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz specifies how such seemingly disembodied notions as the incorporeal, the nonhuman, and the inanimate can help form a new definition and practice of the body:

[Deleuze and Guattari's] notion of the body as a discontinuous, non-totalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations, may be of great value to feminists attempting to reconceive bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object and interior/exterior oppositions. They provide an altogether different way of understanding the body in its connections with other bodies, both human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, linking organs and biological processes to material objects and social practices while refusing to subordinate the body to a unity or a homogeneity of the kind provided by the body's subordination to consciousness or to biological organization.¹⁵

If the body combines "corporeal substances and incorporeal events," it seems that the act of thinking, or an act of mind, would also be just such an incorporeal event in conjunction with a corporeal substance.

Where exactly lies the disjunction between mind and matter, thought and body? In his study of Bergson, Deleuze links the coincidence of mind and matter to a form of virtual perception. Explicating Bergson, he writes,

“We perceive things where they are, perception puts us at once into matter, is impersonal, and coincides with the perceived object. . . . There cannot be a difference in kind, but only a difference in degree between the faculty of the brain and the function of the core, between the perception of matter and matter itself.”¹⁶ This is a curious reference, as Deleuze goes on to champion the Bergson who insists on difference of kind over difference of degree. Yet, just as Deleuze finds elements of degree over kind in Bergson, so too Deleuze does not always pursue to its conclusions the logic of difference in kind and pure difference that he puts forward in his work from the 1960s. The question of difference of degree in Deleuze is considered further in what follows, but first it is useful to examine how the coincidence of thought with matter might as readily fall under the domain of the incorporeal as the corporeal.

Such a vision of mind as orchestrating a mind-body conjunction is perhaps closest in the philosophical tradition to Spinoza’s view of mind as the idea of the body. By this account, the mind and body are inextricably linked, yet the mind as idea also exceeds the boundaries of a single physical body and takes in or intersects other conjunctures of minds and bodies.¹⁷ Deleuze glosses this helpfully in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, where he writes that “the soul, insofar as it is the idea of an existing body, is itself composed of a great number of ideas which correspond to the body’s component parts, and which are extrinsically distinct from one another. The faculties, furthermore, which the soul possesses insofar as it is the idea of an existing body, are genuine extensive parts, which cease to belong to the soul once the body itself ceases to exist.”¹⁸ On this account, the intricacy of the soul or mind is fundamentally dependent on the body’s existence. If the body is no longer living, the mind is no longer the idea of the body. Yet, as Genevieve Lloyd underscores in her reading of *Spinoza*, there is a fundamental ambivalence in the final section of the *Ethics* over this question, where Spinoza at once suggests that “the mind can only imagine anything, or remember what is past, while the body endures” (part 5, prop. 21) and that “the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains of it something which is eternal” (part 5, prop. 23). While Lloyd does not view this conflict over whether the mind outlives the body or coincides with it as a contradiction — but argues instead that “the mind resorts to the ‘fiction’ of eternity as a state to be attained”¹⁹

—I think that Spinoza’s philosophy of mind is useful precisely because it enables the mind to simultaneously inhabit seemingly contradictory states.²⁰ That is, the mind is interwoven into the very fiber of the body and at the same time seeks to outlive or transcend the body, here in the form of taking on a quality of eternity, not unlike eternity as Deleuze takes it up in *Difference and Repetition* and at other points in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, as discussed in the introduction. It is this oscillation or dialectic between mind as idea of body (mind as mind-body) and mind as exceeding body (mind as not mind-body) that is at the heart of the philosophy of mind at issue here.

This disjunctive dialectic between mind as coincident with body and mind as somehow apart from it contains a potential energy that, if capitalized on, might have useful practical consequences. Not least of these consequences is a reevaluation of the complexity of mind in feminist thought. It seems fair to state that in contemporary feminist philosophical discourse, it is still the body and not the mind that holds sway.²¹ While the body has been studied with all its attendant complexities, the mind is skirted around with much more caution, and for good reason. Yet it seems that we have arrived at a time and a place in feminist thinking where to move forward might just mean to welcome back the mind (albeit hesitantly) into the registers of acceptable discourse. These registers would not be the old ones where the mind signaled a cultivated humanism, but rather ones where, according to the logic of oscillation outlined above, thought is mobilized both to heighten the mind-body conjunction and to dismantle it. Grosz expresses this twofold dynamic with respect to the body when she discusses Deleuze and Guattari’s antihuman and elemental approach to the body:

Deleuze and Guattari produce a radical antihumanism that renders animals, nature, atoms, even quasars as modes of radical alterity. . . . Deleuze and Guattari imply a clear movement toward imperceptibility that is in many ways similar to the quest of physics for the microscopic structures of matter, the smallest component, the most elementary particle. If it remains materialist at this level, it is a materialism that is far beyond or different from the body, or bodies: their work is like an acidic dissolution of the body, and the subject along with it.²²

Grosz highlights the way in which the body is not to be thought of as coincident with the human, or with a particular human being. Rather, it is

to be considered on a level that is much more elemental (or even molecular, to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology). When one breaks the body down into its affective components, or its components of movement and work, what results is a body that is no longer a body strictly speaking, and a subject that is no longer a subject. If this is the case for the body, then couldn't this same elemental reading be applied to the mind? It would then follow that the mind would similarly not coincide with the human, nor with the subject. Rather, it too would be a space of dissolution and materialism conceived otherwise. Indeed, an illustration of this is Spinoza's notion of the mind that miraculously outlives the body, taking on, as it were, the materialism not only of the mind-body nexus but of the eternity existing above and beyond that nexus. Whether this eternity actually exists or not is, as Lloyd argues, somewhat beside the point.²³ What matters is that the potential or possibility for the mind to outlive or be radically separate from the body incites the mind to new levels of exuberance.²⁴

By way of conclusion, I would like to illustrate this logic of the mind as both coextensive with and excessive of the body with reference to two quite different concrete situations. The first directly entails a woman-focused approach to the mind-body assemblage that can be found in various self-defense and martial arts programs designed for women. In this context, the attention paid to mental preparation is particularly striking. What is emphasized over and over again is that self-defense is never merely a matter of executing physical skills but more importantly a matter of combining those skills with mental concentration and awareness. Clearly, the mental and the physical are entirely bound up with each other, and this is nowhere more true than in the emphasis placed on the voice and its crucial function in linking and enhancing the mind-body conjunction. Indeed, much time is devoted to noncontact self-defense in which the voice (which utters a few select words), in combination with a strong neutral or ready stance, is the sole instrument employed on the would-be assailant. Such a defensive strategy illustrates the way in which mind and body come together as both voice and stance and also as the potential for the unleashing of further — and primarily physical — energy. But here mind and body are conjoined under the auspices of a mental energy that is one of collecting, focusing, and concentrating. So far, this example attests to the way in which both mind and body think each other and are ultimately not entirely distinct, what we might term a difference of degree.

There is, however, a second order of defense, which mobilizes a more radical separation of mind and body, a veritable difference of kind that comes to the forefront in the remainder of Deleuze's reading of Bergson. This is a defense called upon when the first order defense and other physical resistance has failed and an attack may be already in progress. At this stage what is called for is a momentary but necessary disengagement of mind and body in which the body plays at capitulation and the mental awareness moves away from what is happening to the body and instead focuses on the surprise reversal that is about to be unfurled in the form of a full-body throwing off of the attacker. The execution of this powerful technique rests fundamentally on the disentangling of mind and body so that the mind can function as the strategizing spectator to the body's disempowerment. That this moment of mind-body separation may last only a few seconds in no way minimizes its role as a crucial catalyst for the force that is to be unleashed. In this fashion, martial arts and self-defense techniques employ, at different moments and sometimes in conjunction, both mind-body fusion and mind-body separation, and both at the service of women's empowerment. Furthermore, these two formations are at once contradictory and complementary, and in this sense they reflect a dialectical form of logic, one that does not collapse oppositions but allows them to constructively coexist side by side.

A second example concerns the relation of mind to body as inflected by bodily sickness. In certain cases of illness, the double process outlined above—that of the mind orchestrating a coterminous relation between body and mind and secondly a break or cracking between the very same mind and body—might be said to reach its epitome. Nowhere is this process better explicated than in Pierre Klossowski's monumental study of Nietzsche, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, which takes Nietzsche's physical suffering (his migraines) as the central barometer for reading Nietzsche's work—here, quite literally his corpus, or body of thought. Klossowski gives particular attention to the multiple letters Nietzsche wrote between 1877 and 1881 describing his condition, and this powerful analysis perfectly illustrates the dialectic of mind-body conjuncture and disjuncture with respect to sickness.

First, we see the dissolution of the mind-body boundary, this time in the form of the ravaged body's threat to dissolve both itself and the mind that

supports it. Klossowski describes how this threatened dissolution is experienced by the mind:

The agonizing migraines, which Nietzsche experienced periodically as *an aggression that suspended his thought*, were not an external aggression; the root of the evil was in himself, in his own organism: his own physical self was *attacking* in order to *defend* itself against a dissolution. But *what* was being threatened with dissolution? Nietzsche's own brain. Whenever his migraines subsided, Nietzsche would put his state of respite in the service of this dissolution. For the dissolution was judged to be such only by the brain, for whom the physical self and the moral self apparently coincide. But the body provided the perspective of *active forces* which (as organic and therefore subordinate functions) expressed a will to break with this servitude. But they could do so only if this will passed *through the brain*. The brain, on the other hand, could experience this will only as its own subordination to these dissolving forces: it was threatened with the impossibility of *thinking*.²⁵

Already the dynamic between body and mind is one of contradiction and paradox, and this at a stage where the body and mind are largely dissolved into one entity of pain. The attack of the body is so strong that it threatens to dissolve the very distinction between mental and physical. Yet this threat of dissolution is perceived as such by the mind, is experienced only by passing through the mind, and is registered as an attack on the mind. Though the mind and body approach a state of total collapse into one another, the mind remains separate from the body in that it perceives this impending dissolution as an attack on itself. In this fashion, we have a dissolution of the mind-body split from the direction of the mind. However, rather than the mind instigating this dissolution (as in the previous example), this dissolution actively presses against the mind. Moreover, this pressing against the mind is experienced as an aggression, an aggression of the body on the mind, but one that simultaneously prevents the mind's dissolution. Of particular note in this passage is the language of attack and aggression, or what Deleuze discusses as active and reactive forces.²⁶ Rather than signaling an undesirable dualism, these forces produce a dialectical tension that has surprising results.

Klossowski goes on to describe the counterintuitive outcome of the

mind's encounter with the threat of mind-body dissolution: pleasure, lucidity, and joy. Through a process of the mind's experiencing the potential of mind-body dissolution in its fullest thought-shattering intensity, a strange reversal occurs where new and voluptuous thoughts are actually produced: "Physical suffering would be livable only insofar as it was closely connected to joy, insofar as it developed a voluptuous lucidity: either it would extinguish all possible thought, or it would reach the delirium of thought."²⁷ As Klossowski elaborates, this potential thought-delirium is achieved through an act of mind that entails a "spiritualizing" mechanism in which the mind not only experiences the threat of dissolution but responds to this threat by revoking it, a revocation that allows the mind access to still-higher realms of lucidity and joy.²⁸

Yet the condition of possibility for this separation of mind and body is none other than an extreme coincidence of mind and body, here in the form of bodily sickness, that makes these two entities virtually indistinguishable:

There seems to be a strict correlation between the phenomenon of pain, which is experienced by the organism as the aggression of an invading external power, and the biological process that leads to the formation of the brain. The brain, which concentrates all the reflexes on fighting the aggression, is able to represent the *inflicted* pain as degrees of excitations oscillating between pain and pleasure. The brain can have representations only if it meticulously spiritualizes the elementary excitations into the *danger* of pain or the *good fortune* of pleasure — a discharge that may or may not result in further excitations.²⁹

There are at least two things here that are of crucial importance for this transformation of pain into something other. First is the necessity of "meticulous spiritualization." This spiritualization entails the mind perceiving the dissolving pain as simultaneously dissolving and enhancing. In other words, the mind produces a distance, if only a minute one, between itself as coming into imminent dissolution and its unique excitement at this impending prospect. It is this excitement, distilled and magnified, that leads to the possibility of unparalleled joy. Second, it is important to underscore the phenomenon of oscillation, here described as an oscillation between pain and pleasure. Previously such an oscillation has been

described as the dialectic between the two processes of mind-body conjuncture and mind-body disjuncture. Insofar as pain might corresponded to the former and pleasure to the latter (as in the example of sickness, but not in the self-defense strategies), then we are dealing with oscillations of a similar order.

Finally, just as the disjunction between mind and body was a brief but crucial one in the self-defense example above, so too is the short durational quality of the sickness-induced suspension of mind and body emphasized in Klossowski. Such brevity also heightens the experience of confronting and surpassing mind-body boundaries.³⁰ In the passage that follows, Klossowski describes the relapse as the shortening of duration combined with the heightening of boundary consciousness:

Convalescence was the signal of a new offensive of the “body” — this rethought body — against the “*thinking Nietzsche self*.” This in turn paved the way for a new relapse. For Nietzsche, each of these relapses, up until the final relapse, heralded a new inquiry and a new investment in the world of the impulses, and in each case he paid the price of an ever-worsening illness. In each case the body liberated itself a little more from its own agent, and in each case *this agent* was weakened a little more. Little by little, the *brain* was forced to approach the *boundaries* that separated it from these somatic forces, in that the reawakening of the self in the brain was brought about *ever more slowly*. And even when it occurred, it was these same forces that seized hold of the functional mechanism. The self was broken down into a *lucidity that was more vast but more brief*.³¹

According to this analysis, the brevity of the mind-body separation is directly proportional to the intensity of the lucidity it brings about. Furthermore, as the separation shortens and the lucidity increases, the boundary between mind and body is approached. One might picture a hyperbola that comes ever closer to the axis it approaches without ever coinciding with it. Such is the experience of mind-body separation at its highest, where the very boundary necessary for the experience of separation is simultaneously at its most tenuous yet still distinct from a complete dissolution. It is this state of disjunctive equilibrium, momentarily balanced yet about to explode, that, when mobilized, represents one of the most extraordinary

states of being.³² Such a state is in many respects not far from a body-centered exploration of mind-body boundaries. Yet it seems that a body-oriented focus works best in the realm of the positive, while a mind-centered one helps precisely at that point — and perhaps it is the briefest of points — where the body is besieged by or under threat of great pain.