

Brian Massumi

PARABLES FOR THE VIRTUAL

Movement,

Affect,

Sensation

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INTRODUCTION

Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn't

When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?

If you start from an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, the slightest, most literal displacement convokes a qualitative difference, because as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling, and feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably. Qualitative difference: immediately the issue is change. Felt and unforeseen.

The project of this book is to explore the implications for cultural theory of this simple conceptual displacement: body—(movement/sensation)—change. Cultural theory of the past two decades has tended to bracket the middle terms and their unmediated connection. It can be argued that in doing so it has significantly missed the two outside terms, even though they have been of consistent concern—perhaps *the* central concerns in the humanities. Attention to the literality of movement was deflected by fears of falling into a “naive realism,” a reductive empiricism that would dissolve the specificity of the cultural domain in the plain, seemingly unproblematic, “presence” of dumb matter. The slightness of ongoing qualitative change paled in comparison to the grandness of periodic “rupture.” Against that possibility, the everyday was the place where nothing ever happens. Culture occupied the gap between matter and systemic change, in the operation of mechanisms of “mediation.” These were ideological apparatuses that structured the dumb material interactions of things and rendered them legible according to a dominant

signifying scheme into which human subjects in the making were “interpellated.” Mediation, although inseparable from power, restored a kind of movement to the everyday. If the everyday was no longer a place of rupture or revolt, as it had been in glimpses at certain privileged historical junctures, it might still be a site of modest acts of “resistance” or “subversion” keeping alive the possibility of systemic change. These were practices of “reading” or “decoding” counter to the dominant ideological scheme of things. The body was seen to be centrally involved in these everyday practices of resistance. But this thoroughly mediated body could only be a “discursive” body: one with its signifying gestures. Signifying gestures make sense. If properly “performed,” they may also unmake sense by scrambling significations already in place. Make and unmake sense as they might, they don’t *sense*. Sensation is utterly redundant to their description. Or worse, it is destructive to it, because it appeals to an unmediated experience. Unmediated experience signals a danger that is worse, if anything can be, than naive realism: its polar opposite, naive subjectivism. Earlier phenomenological investigations into the sensing body were largely left behind because they were difficult to reconcile with the new understandings of the structuring capacities of culture and their inseparability both from the exercise of power and the glimmers of counterpower incumbent in mediate living. It was all about a subject without subjectivism: a subject “constructed” by external mechanisms. “The Subject.”

“The Body.” What is it to The Subject? Not the qualities of its moving experience. But rather, in keeping with the extrinsic approach, its *positioning*. Ideological accounts of subject formation emphasize systemic structurings. The focus on the systemic had to be brought back down to earth in order to be able to integrate into the account the local cultural differences and the practices of resistance they may harbor. The concept of “positionality” was widely developed for this purpose. Signifying subject formation according to the dominant structure was often thought of in terms of “coding.” Coding in turn came to be thought of in terms of positioning on a grid. The grid was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a “site” on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid. Proponents of

this model often cited its ability to link body-sites into a "geography" of culture that tempered the universalizing tendencies of ideology.

The sites, it is true, are multiple. But aren't they still combinatorial permutations on an overarching definitional framework? Aren't the possibilities for the entire gamut of cultural emplacements, including the "subversive" ones, precoded into the ideological master structure? Is the body as linked to a particular subject position anything more than a local embodiment of ideology? Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very "construction," but seems to prescribe every possible signifying and countersignifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms? How can the grid itself change? How can what the system has pinpointedly determined flip over into a determining role capable of acting on the systemic level? The aim of the positionality model was to open a window on local resistance in the name of change. But the problem of change returned with a vengeance. Because every body-subject was so determinately local, it was boxed into its site on the culture map. Gridlock.

The idea of positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture. This catches the body in cultural freeze-frame. The point of explanatory departure is a pinpointing, a zero-point of stasis. When positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second. After all is signified and sited, there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture. But adding movement to stasis is about as easy as multiplying a number by zero and getting a positive product. Of course, a body occupying one position on the grid might succeed in making a move to occupy another position. In fact, certain normative progressions, such as that from child to adult, are coded in. But this doesn't change the fact that what defines the body is not the movement itself, only its beginning and endpoints. Movement is entirely subordinated to the positions it connects. These are predefined. Adding movement like this adds nothing at all. You just get two successive states: multiples of zero.

The very notion of movement as qualitative transformation is lacking. There is "displacement," but no transformation; it is as if the body simply leaps from one definition to the next. Since the positional model's definitional framework is punctual, it simply can't attribute a reality to the

interval, whose crossing is a continuity (or nothing). The space of the crossing, the gaps between positions on the grid, falls into a theoretical no-body's land. Also lacking is the notion that if there is qualitative movement of the body, it as directly concerns sensings as significations. Add to this the fact that matter, bodily or otherwise, never figures into the account *as such*. Even though many of the approaches in question characterize themselves as materialisms, matter can only enter in indirectly: as mediated. Matter, movement, body, sensation. Multiple mediated miss.

The present project began almost ten years ago in response to these problems. It was based on the hope that movement, sensation, and qualities of experience couched in matter in its most literal sense (and sensing) might be culturally-theoretically thinkable, without falling into either the Scylla of naive realism or the Charybdis of subjectivism and without contradicting the very real insights of poststructuralist cultural theory concerning the coextensiveness of culture with the field of experience and of power with culture. The aim was to put matter unmediatedly back into cultural materialism, along with what seemed most directly corporeal back into the body. Theoretically, the point of departure would have to be to part company with the linguistic model at the basis of the most widespread concepts of coding (almost always Saussurian in inspiration, often with Lacanian inflections) and find a semiotics willing to engage with continuity (in fact, a major preoccupation of the founder of the discipline, C. S. Peirce). This was undertaken not in a spirit of opposition to "Theory" or "cultural studies," but in the hope of building on their accomplishments, perhaps refreshing their vocabulary with conceptual infusions from neglected sources or underappreciated aspects of known sources.

If at any point I thought of this refreshing in terms of regaining a "concreteness" of experience, I was quickly disabused of the notion. Take movement. When a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation. The range of variations it can be implicated in is not present in any given movement, much less in any position it passes through. In motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary. That relation, to borrow a phrase from Gilles Deleuze, is real but abstract. The positional grid was abstract, despite the fact that it was meant to bring cultural theory back down to the local level, since it involved an overarching definitional grid whose determinations preexisted the bodies they

constructed or to which they were applied. The abstract of Deleuze's real-but-abstract is very different from this. It doesn't preexist and has nothing fundamentally to do with mediation. If ideology must be understood as mediating, then this real-abstract is not ideological. (Chapters 2, 3, and 9 tackle the description of nonideological mechanisms of power.) Here, abstract means: never present in position, only ever in passing. This is an abstractness pertaining to the transitional immediacy of a real relation—that of a body to its own *indeterminacy* (its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now).

The charge of indeterminacy carried by a body is inseparable from it. It strictly coincides with it, to the extent that the body is in passage or in process (to the extent that it is dynamic and alive). But the charge is not itself corporeal. Far from regaining a concreteness, to think the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension *of the body*. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal. Inseparable, coincident, but disjunct. If this is "concrete," the project originally set out on will take some severe twists.

One way of starting to get a grasp on the real-material-but-incorporeal is to say it is to the body, as a positioned thing, as energy is to matter. Energy and matter are mutually convertible modes of the same reality. This would make the incorporeal something like a phase-shift of the body in the usual sense, but not one that comes after it in time. It would be a conversion or unfolding of the body *contemporary* to its every move. Always accompanying. Fellow-traveling dimension of the same reality.

This self-disjunctive coinciding sinks an ontological difference into the heart of the body. The body's potential to vary belongs to the same reality as the body as variety (positioned thing) but partakes of it in a different mode. Integrating movement slips us directly into what Michel Foucault called *incorporeal materialism*.¹ This movement-slip gives new urgency to questions of ontology, of ontological difference, inextricably linked to concepts of potential and process and, by extension, event—in a way that bumps "being" straight into becoming. Paraphrasing Deleuze again, the problem with the dominant models in cultural and literary theory is not that they are too abstract to grasp the concreteness of the real. The problem is that they are not *abstract enough* to grasp the real incorporeality of the concrete.

When it comes to grappling productively with paradoxes of passage and position, the philosophical precursor is Henri Bergson. The slip into

an incorporeal materialism follows the logic of Bergson's famous analysis of Zeno's paradoxes of movement.² When Zeno shoots his philosophical arrow, he thinks of its flight path in the commonsense way, as a linear trajectory made up of a sequence of points or positions that the arrow occupies one after the other. The problem is that between one point on a line and the next, there is an infinity of intervening points. If the arrow occupies a first point along its path, it will never reach the next—unless it occupies each of the infinity of points between. Of course, it is the nature of infinity that you can never get to the end of it. The arrow gets swallowed up in the transitional infinity. Its flight path implodes. The arrow is immobilized.

Or, if the arrow moved it is because it was never *in* any point. It was in *passage* across them all. The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity. That *continuity* of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed. It doesn't stop until it stops: when it hits the target. Then, and only then, is the arrow in position. It is only after the arrow hits its mark that its real trajectory may be plotted. The points or positions really appear *retrospectively*, working backward from the movement's end. It is as if, in our thinking, we put targets all along the path. The in-between positions are logical targets: *possible* endpoints. The flight of the arrow is not immobilized as Zeno would have it. We stop it in thought when we construe its movement to be divisible into positions. Bergson's idea is that space itself is a retrospective construct of this kind. When we think of space as "extensive," as being measurable, divisible, and composed of points plotting possible positions that objects may occupy, we are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movements. We are looking at only one dimension of reality.

A thing is when it isn't doing. A thing is concretely where and what it is—for example a successfully shot arrow sticking in a target—when it is in a state of arrest. *Concrete is as concrete doesn't.*

Solidify?³

Fluidifying with Bergson has a number of far-reaching consequences:

(1) It suggests that a distinction between extensive and intensive is more useful than any opposition between the "literal" and the "figural" if what we are interested in is change. Extensive space, and the arrested ob-

jects occupying the positions into which it is divisible, is a back-formation from cessation. The dynamic enabling the back-formation is “intensive” in the sense that movement, in process, cannot be determinately indexed to anything outside of itself. It has withdrawn into an all-encompassing relation with what it will be. It is in becoming, absorbed in occupying its field of potential. For when it comes to a stop in the target, it will have undergone a qualitative change. It will not just be an arrow. It will have been a successfully shot arrow. It is still the same thing by definition, but in a different way, qualitatively changed by the passing event. But if it is qualitatively changed, isn’t it only nominally the “same”? Shouldn’t we assert, with Leibniz, that all the predicates that can be stated of a thing—all the “accidents” that might befall it (even those remaining in potential)—are of its nature?⁴ If so, “nature” changes at the slightest move. The concept of nature concerns modification not essence (chapter 9).

(2) The emphasis is on process before signification or coding. The latter are not false or unreal. They are truly, really stop-operations. Or, if they have movement, it is derivative, a second-order movement between back-formed possibilities (a kind of zero-point movement that can be added back, against all odds). The models criticized earlier do not need to be trashed. They are not just plain wrong. It’s just that their sphere of applicability must be recognized as limited to a particular mode of existence, or a particular dimension of the real (the degree to which things coincide with their own arrest). Einstein’s theories of relativity did not prove Newton’s laws wrong. It showed them to be of limited applicability: accurate, but only at a certain scale of things (where the law of entropy holds). The same goes for the Bergsonian revolution. Cultural laws of positioning and ideology are accurate in a certain sphere (where the tendency to arrest dominates). Right or wrong is not the issue. The issue is to demarcate their sphere of applicability—when the “ground” upon which they operate is continuously moving. This “limitation” does not belittle the approaches in question. In fact, it brings wonder back into them. From this point of view, the operations they describe are little short of miraculous. Like multiplying by zero and yielding a positive quantity. “Miraculation” should figure prominently in the semiotic vocabulary.⁵

(3) The Bergsonian revolution turns the world on its head. Position no longer comes first, with movement a problematic second. It is secondary to movement and derived from it. It is retro movement, movement residuc. The problem is no longer to explain how there can be change given

positioning. The problem is to explain the wonder that there can be stasis given the primacy of process. This is akin to late-twentieth-century problematics of "order out of chaos."

(4) Another way of putting it is that positionality is an emergent quality of movement. The distinction between stasis and motion that replaces the opposition between literal and figurative from this perspective is not a logical binarism. It follows the modes by which realities pass into each other. "Passing into" is not a binarism. "Emerging" is not a binarism. They are dynamic unities. The kinds of distinction suggested here pertain to continuities under qualitative transformation. They are directly processual (and derivatively signifying and codifying). They can only be approached by a logic that is abstract enough to grasp the self-disjunctive coincidence of a thing's immediacy to its own variation: to follow how concepts of dynamic unity and unmediated heterogeneity reciprocally presuppose each other. The concept of field, to mention but one, is a useful logical tool for expressing continuity of self-relation and heterogeneity in the same breath (chapters 3 and 6). Embarrassingly for the humanities, the handiest concepts in this connection are almost without exception products of mathematics or the sciences.

(5) It is not enough for process concepts of this kind to be ontological. They must be *ontogenetic*: they must be equal to emergence.

(6) If passage is primary in relation to position, processual indeterminacy is primary in relation to social determination (chapters 2, 4, 9). Social and cultural determinations on the model of positionality are also secondary and derived. Gender, race, and sexual orientation also emerge and back-form their reality. Passage precedes construction. But construction does effectively back-form its reality. Grids happen. So social and cultural determinations feed back into the process from which they arose. Indeterminacy and determination, change and freeze-framing, go together. They are inseparable and always actually coincide while remaining disjunctive in their modes of reality. To say that passage and indeterminacy "come first" or "are primary" is more a statement of ontological priority than the assertion of a time sequence. They have ontological privilege in the sense that they constitute the field of the emergence, while positionings are what emerge. The trick is to express that priority in a way that respects the inseparability and contemporaneousness of the disjunct dimensions: their ontogenetic difference. The work of Gilbert Simondon is exemplary in this regard.

(7) As Simondon reminds us, it is important to keep in mind that there is a contemporaneous difference between social *determination* and sociality.⁶ The approach suggested here does not accept any categorical separation between the social and the presocial, between culture and some kind of “raw” nature or experience (chapters 1, 8, 9). The idea is that there is an ontogenesis or becoming of culture and the social (bracketing for present purposes the difference between them), of which determinate forms of culture and sociability are the result. The challenge is to think that process of *formation*, and for that you need the notion of a taking-form, an inform on the way to being determinately this or that. The field of emergence is not presocial. It is *open-endedly social*. It is social in a manner “prior to” the separating out of individuals and the identifiable groupings that they end up boxing themselves into (positions in gridlock). A sociality without determinate borders: “pure” sociality. ● One of the things that the dimension of emergence is ontogenetically “prior to” is thus the very distinction between the individual and the collective, as well as any given model of their interaction. That interaction is precisely what takes form. That is what is socially determined—and renegotiated by each and every cultural act. Assume it, and you beg the whole question (chapter 3). Not assuming it, however, entails finding a concept for interaction-in-the-making. The term adopted here is *relation* (chapters 1, 3, 9).

(8) That there is a difference between the possible and the potential needs to be attended to (chapters 4, 5, 9). Possibility is back-formed from potential’s unfolding. But once it is formed, it also effectively feeds in. Feedback, it prescripts: implicit in the determination of a thing’s or body’s positionality is a certain set of transformations that can be expected of it by definition and that it can therefore undergo without qualitatively changing enough to warrant a new name. These possibilities delineate a region of nominally defining—that is, normative—variation. Potential is unprescripted. It only feeds forward, unfolding toward the registering of an event: bull’s-eye. Possibility is a variation *implicit in* what a thing can be said to be when it is on target. Potential is the *immanence* of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way (chapters 3, 4, 5, 8, 9). Implication is a code word. Immanence is process.⁷

(9) If the positional grid feeds back, then the success of that operation changes the field conditions from which the determinate positions emerged. The distinction between potential and possibility is a distinction

between conditions of emergence and re-conditionings of the emerged. Conditions of emergence are one with becoming. Re-conditionings of the emerged define normative or regulatory operations that set the parameters of history (the possible interactions of determinate individuals and groups). History is inseparably, ontogenetically different from becoming. But if feedback from the dimension of the emerged re-conditions the conditions of emergence, then it also has to be recognized that conditions of emergence change. Emergence emerges. Changing changes. If history has a becoming from which it is inseparably, ontogenetically different, then conversely becoming has a history (chapter 9).

(10) The difference between the actual stopping that occurs when a continuity exhausts itself and reaches a terminus and the logical stopping that goes back over what then appears as its path, in order to cut it into segments separated by plottable points, is not as great as it might seem at first. The retrospective ordering enables precise operations to be inserted along the way, in anticipation of a repetition of the movement—the possibility that it will come again. If the movement does reoccur, it can be captured (chapters 1, 2, 3, 9). It comes to a different end. At that terminus, its momentum may be diverted into a new movement. The back-formation of a path is not only a “retrospection.” It is a “retroduction”: a production, by feedback, of new movements. A dynamic unity has been retrospectively captured and qualitatively converted. Space itself is a retroduction, by means of the standardization of measurement (chapters 7, 8). Before measurement, there was air and ground, but not space as we know it. Ground is not a static support any more than air is an empty container. The ground is full of movement, as full as the air is with weather, just at different rhythm from most perceptible movements occurring with it (flight of the arrow). Any geologist will tell you that the ground is anything but stable. It is a dynamic unity of continual folding, uplift, and subsidence. Measurement stops the movement in thought, as it empties the air of weather, yielding space understood as a grid of determinate positions. The practices enabled by the spatialization of ground convert it into a foundation for technological change. This is not simply a “cultural construction.” It is a becoming cultural of nature. The very ground of life changes. But it remains as natural as it becomes-cultural. This becoming-cultural of nature is predicated on the capture of processes already in operation. Putting up a new target to stop an arrow connects with forces of mass and inertia. The arrest of the arrow prolongs

a tendency toward stoppage belonging to the ground, converting it into a cultural function—the foundation, say, for an archery competition. The anticipation of a next arrow prolongs powers of repetition also incumbent in nature, converting them into a basis for scoring. The point is that the “natural” and the “cultural” feed forward and back into each other. They relay each other to such an extent that the distinction cannot be maintained in any strict sense. It is necessary to theorize a *nature-culture continuum* (chapters 1, 9). Logical operations prolong and convert forces already in nature, and forces of nature divert into cultural operations normatively regulated (ruled) by the logical conversion. Nature and culture are in mutual movement into and through each other. Their continuum is a dynamic unity of reciprocal variation. Things we are accustomed to placing on one side or another of the nature-culture divide must be redistributed along the whole length of the continuum, under varying modes of operation, in various phases of separation and regrouping, and to different degrees of “purity.” (As was suggested for sociality, note that “pure” sociality is found at the “nature” end of the continuum, in culture’s just-becoming, “prior to” its separations; chapter 9.) On the list of distinctions it becomes difficult to sustain in any categorical way are those between artifact and thing, body and object—and even thought and matter. Not only do these relay in reciprocal becomings; together they ally in process. They are tinged with event.

(11) The status of “natural law” (the normative self-regulation of nature; nature’s self-rule) becomes a major theoretical stake, as does the naturalizing of cultural laws with which cultural theory has more traditionally been concerned. The problem has been that the concern for “naturalization” was one-sided, only attending to half the becoming. Of tremendous help in looking at both sides is the concept of *habit*. Habit is an acquired automatic self-regulation. It resides in the flesh. Some say in matter. As acquired, it can be said to be “cultural.” As automatic and material, it can pass for “natural.” Sorting out the identity or difference between law and habit (chapter 9), and distributing the result along the nature-culture continuum, becomes a promising direction for inquiry. Of course, a preoccupation with precisely this question accompanied the birth of *empiricism* (with Hume). “Incorporeal materialism” has a date with empiricism (chapter 9).⁸

(12) The kinds of codings, griddings, and positionings with which cultural theory has been preoccupied are no exception to the dynamic

unity of feedback and feed-forward, or double becoming. Gender, race, and orientation are what Ian Hacking calls "interactive kinds": logical categories that feed back into and transform the reality they describe (and are themselves modified by in return).⁹ Ideas about cultural or social construction have dead-ended because they have insisted on bracketing the *nature* of the process.¹⁰ If you elide nature, you miss the becoming of culture, its emergence (not to mention the history of matter). You miss the continuum of interlinkage, feed-forward and feedback, by which movements capture and convert each other to many ends, old, new, and innumerable. The world is in a condition of constant qualitative growth. Some kind of constructivism is required to account for the processual continuity across categorical divides and for the reality of that qualitative growth, or ontogenesis: the fact that with every move, with every change, there is something new to the world, an added reality. The world is self-augmenting. Reality "snowballs," as William James was fond of saying. Perhaps "productivism" would be better than constructivism because it connotes emergence. "Inventionism" wouldn't be going too far, for even if you take nature in the narrowest sense, it has to be admitted that it is inventive in its own right. There is a word for this: evolution. There is no reason not to use the same word for the prolongation of "natural" processes of change in the emergent domain of "culture." Is a constructivist evolutionism conceivable? An evolutionary constructivism (chapters 4, 9)?

(13) If you want to adopt a productivist approach, the techniques of critical thinking prized by the humanities are of limited value. To think productivism, you have to allow that even your own logical efforts feed-back and add to reality, in some small, probably microscopic way. But still. Once you have allowed that, you have accepted that activities dedicated to thought and writing are inventive. Critical thinking disavows its own inventiveness as much as possible. Because it sees itself as uncovering something it claims was hidden or as debunking something it desires to subtract from the world, it clings to a basically descriptive and justificatory *modus operandi*. However strenuously it might debunk concepts like "representation," it carries on as if it mirrored something outside itself with which it had no complicity, no unmediated processual involvement, and thus could justifiably oppose. Prolonging the thought-path of movement, as suggested here, requires that techniques of negative critique be used sparingly. The balance has to shift to *affirmative* methods: tech-

niques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagerly) to reality. There is a certain hubris to the notion that a mere academic writer is actually inventing. But the hubris is more than tempered by the self-evident modesty of the returns. So why not hang up the academic hat of critical self-seriousness, set aside the intemperate arrogance of debunking—and enjoy? If you don't enjoy concepts and writing and don't feel that when you write you are adding something to the world, if only the enjoyment itself, and that by adding that ounce of positive experience to the world you are affirming it, celebrating its potential, tending its growth, in however small a way, however really abstractly—well, just hang it up. It is not that critique is wrong. As usual, it is not a question of right and wrong—nothing important ever is. Rather, it is a question of dosage. It is simply that when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting. You are that much less fostering. There are times when debunking is necessary. But, if applied in a blanket manner, adopted as a general operating principle, it is counterproductive. Foster or debunk. It's a strategic question. Like all strategic questions, it is basically a question of timing and proportion. Nothing to do with morals or moralizing. Just pragmatic.

(14) The logical resources equal to emergence must be limber enough to juggle the ontogenetic indeterminacy that precedes and accompanies a thing's coming to be what it doesn't. *Vague* concepts, and concepts of vagueness, have a crucial, and often enjoyable, role to play.

(15) Generating a paradox and then using it as if it were a well-formed logical operator is a good way to put vagueness in play. Strangely, if this procedure is followed with a good dose of conviction and just enough technique, presto!, the paradox actually becomes a well-formed logical operator. Thought and language bend to it like light in the vicinity of a superdense heavenly body. This may be an example of miraculation. (As if lucidity itself could be invented.)

These are just some of the directions that the simple aim of integrating movement into the account gets going: a lot of leverage for a small amount of applied conceptual pressure. A lot of new problems.

This is without even mentioning the associated problem of sensation. Briefly: sensation also presents a directly disjunctive self-coinciding (how's that for vague?). It's simply this: sensation is never simple. It is always doubled by the feeling of having a feeling. It is self-referential. This is not necessarily the same as "self-reflexive." The doubling of sensation

does not assume a subjective splitting and does not of itself constitute a distancing. It is an immediate self-complication. It is best to think of it as a resonance, or interference pattern (chapters 1, 9). An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonance is not on the walls. It is in the emptiness between them. It fills the emptiness with its complex patterning. That patterning is not at a distance from itself. It is immediately its own event. Although it is complex, it is not composed of parts. It is composed of the event that it is, which is unitary. It is a complex dynamic unity. The interference pattern arises where the sound wave intersects with itself. The bouncing back and forth multiplies the sound's movement without cutting it. The movement remains continuous. It remains in continuity with itself across its multiplication. This complex self-continuity is a putting into relation of the movement to itself: self-relation. The self-relation is immediate—in and of itself, only its own event—even though it requires distance to occur. The best word for a complicating immediacy of self-relation is “intensity” (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4). Resonance can be seen as converting distance, or extension, into intensity. It is a qualitative transformation of distance into an immediacy of self-relation.

With the body, the “walls” are the sensory surfaces. The intensity is experience. The emptiness or in-betweenness filled by experience is the incorporeal dimension of the body referred to earlier. The conversion of surface distance into intensity is also the conversion of the materiality of the body into an *event* (chapters 2, 3, 6, 8). It is a relay between its corporeal and incorporeal dimensions. This is not yet a subject. But it may well be the conditions of emergence of a subject: an incipient subjectivity. Call it a “self-.” The hyphen is retained as a reminder that “self” is not a substantive but rather a relation. Sorting out “self-reflexivity,” “self-referentiality,” and “self-relation” and, in the process, distributing subjectivity and its incipency along the nature-culture continuum, becomes another major theoretical stake.

The feeling of having a feeling is what Leibniz called the “perception of perception.” That raises another thorny issue: the identity or difference between the terms “sensation” and “perception” (chapters 2, 4, 5).¹¹ It gets thornier. Leibniz notes that the perception of perception “occurs without characters and therefore that memory does also.”¹² Add memory to issues of sensation and perception. Then pause. Memory, sensation, perception occurring without “characters”? In other words, without

properties? Without determinate form or content? What is a memory without content? One answer might be that it is just pastness, a pure pastness that would be the condition of emergence for determinate memory. But that would make the past contemporary to the present of sensation and perception. Leibniz goes on to say that although the perception of perception is without characters, it does carry a “distinguishing sense of bodily direction.” Distinguishing bodily direction without a determinate form? (chapter 8). In other words, without distance? That could only be *tendency*, pure tendency (chapter 4).¹³ Tendency is futurity: pure futurity. So there is a futurity that is contemporary with the past’s contemporaneity with the present.

All of this is to say that feedback and feed-forward, or recursivity, in addition to converting distance into intensity, folds the dimensions of time into each other. The field of emergence of experience has to be thought of as a space-time continuum, as an ontogenetic dimension prior to the separating-out of space and time (adopting the same approach as with nature-culture; chapters 2, 8).¹⁴ Linear time, like position-gridded space, would be emergent qualities of the event of the world’s self-relating.

Leibniz’s allusion to tendency brings up one more issue and also points to a way of making the link between movement and sensation developed in the work of Spinoza. Spinoza defined the body in terms of “relations of movement and rest.”¹⁵ He wasn’t referring to actual, extensive movements or stases. He was referring to a body’s *capacity* to enter into relations of movement and rest. This capacity he spoke of as a *power* (or *potential*) to affect or be affected. The issue, after sensation, perception, and memory, is *affect*. “Relation between movement and rest” is another way of saying “transition.” For Spinoza, the body was one with its transitions. Each transition is accompanied by a variation in capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected are addressable by a next event and how readily addressable they are—or to what degree they are present as futurities. That “degree” is a bodily intensity, and its present futurity a tendency. The Spinozist problematic of affect offers a way of weaving together concepts of movement, tendency, and intensity in a way that takes us right back to the beginning: in what sense the body coincides with its own transitions and its transitioning with its potential.

The link to sensation comes in with the added remark that the variation in intensity is *felt*. This brings us back to where we just were, at self-relation: the feeling of transition by nature stretches between phases of a

continuing movement. The sensed aspect of intensity doubles the affect understood as pure capacity: we are back at self-multiplication. And we are back at emergence, because the sensation is the first glimmer of a determinate experience, in the act of registering itself as itself across its own event. A first glimmer of definable self-experience: back at incipient subjectivity. We have looped, taking an affective shortcut across many of the salient problems raised by the question of the body's passing powers of "concreteness."

Where we might loop into shortly is empiricism, at the other end of its history. William James made transition and the feeling of self-relation a central preoccupation of his latter-day "radical" empiricism. "The relations that connect experiences," he wrote, "must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system."¹⁶ If incorporeal materialism is an empiricism it is a radical one, summed up by the formula: *the felt reality of relation*. A complication for radical empiricism is that the feeling of the relation may very well not be "large" enough to register consciously. It may be what Leibniz termed a "small perception," or microperception (chapter 8). The vast majority of the world's sensations are certainly nonconscious. Nonconscious is a very different concept from the Freudian unconscious (although it is doubtless not unrelated to it). The differences are that repression does not apply to nonconscious perception and that non-conscious perception may, with a certain amount of ingenuity, be argued to apply to nonorganic matter (chapters 1, 8, 9). Whereas the feeling of the relation may be "too small" to enter perception (it is *infraempirical*), the relation it registers, for its part, is "too large" to fit into a perception since it envelops a multiplicity of potential variations (it is *superempirical*). A radical empiricism, if it is to be a thorough thinking of relation, must find ways of directly, affectively joining the *infraempirical* to the *superempirical* (chapters 2, 6). "Actualization" does this.

Affect, sensation, perception, movement, intensity, tendency, habit, law, chaos, recursion, relation, immanence, the "feedback of higher forms." Emergence, becoming, history, space, time, space-time, space and time as emergences. Nature-culture, matter, feeling, matter feeling. Event, capture, possible, potential, power. Not all the concepts in this crowd figure in each essay, of course. And when they do come up, it is often to different emphasis, in different constellations. Other concepts slip in like uninvited guests (image, effect, force, new, openness, sin-

gularity, situation, belonging). The concepts appear and reappear like a revolving cast of characters, joining forces or interfering with each other in a tumble of abstract intrigues—at times (I admit) barely controlled. (Or is it: with miraculous lucidity? I might as well also admit that my prose has been compared to a black hole.) The first chapter, “The Autonomy of Affect,” sets the stage. It begins by following a long-standing engagement with the work of Deleuze, Guattari, and Deleuze/Guattari back to some of their inspirations, in particular Bergson, Spinoza, and Simondon. It is in the concluding essay, “Too-Blue: Color-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism,” that incorporal materialism meets up with radical empiricism. Bergson, Spinoza, and Simondon make way for James, who tumbles onto A. N. Whitehead and Isabelle Stengers. The intervening chapters bring together the usual conceptual suspects in varying combinations. At times, under the pressure of the uncouth company they find themselves keeping, they undergo a bit of a personality change or may even assume a pseudonym.

The reason for the constant reconstitution of concepts, and the differences in their casting when they make repeat appearances, is that I have tried to take seriously the idea that writing in the humanities can be affirmative or inventive. Invention requires experimentation. The wager is that there are methods of writing from an institutional base in the humanities disciplines that can be considered experimental practices. What they would invent (or reinvent) would be concepts and connections between concepts. The first rule of thumb if you want to invent or reinvent concepts is simple: don’t apply them. If you apply a concept or system of connection between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the material by the concepts’ systematicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system. This is all very grim. It has less to do with “more to the world” than “more of the same.” It has less to do with invention than mastery and control.

One device for avoiding application is to adopt an “exemplary” method. Logically, the example is an odd beast. “It holds for all cases of the same type,” Giorgio Agamben writes, “and, at the same time, is included in these. It is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all.”¹⁷ An example is neither general (as is a system of concepts) nor particular (as is the material to which a system is applied). It is “singular.” It is defined by a disjunctive self-

inclusion: a belonging to itself that is simultaneously an extendibility to everything else with which it might be connected (one for all, and all in itself). In short, exemplification is the logical category corresponding to self-relation.

As a writing practice, exemplification activates detail. The success of the example hinges on the details. Every little one matters. At each new detail, the example runs the risk of falling apart, of its unity of self-relation becoming a jumble. Every detail is essential to the case. This means that the details making up the example partake of its singularity. Each detail is like another example embedded in it. A microexample. An incipient example. A moment's inattention and that germ of a one-for-all and all-in-itself might start to grow. It might take over. It might shift the course of the writing. Every example harbors terrible powers of deviation and digression.

The essays in this volume work through examples. The writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but also to invite it. Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn't think you thought. Letting examples burgeon requires using inattention as a writing tool. You have to let yourself get so caught up in the flow of your writing that it ceases at moments to be recognizable to you as your own. This means you have to be prepared for failure. For with inattention comes risk: of silliness or even outbreaks of stupidity. But perhaps in order to write experimentally, you have to be willing to "affirm" even your own stupidity. Embracing one's own stupidity is not the prevailing academic posture (at least not in the way I mean it here).

The result is not so much the negation of system as a setting of systems into motion. The desired result is a systematic openness: an open system. For the writing to continue to belong in the humanities, it must take into account and put into use already established concepts drawn for one or another humanities discipline, or better, from many all at once (philosophy, psychology, semiotics, communications, literary theory, political economy, anthropology, cultural studies, and so on). The important thing, once again, is that these found concepts not simply be applied. This can be done by extracting them from their usual connections to other concepts in their home system and confronting them with the ex-

ample or a detail from it. The activity of the example will transmit to the concept, more or less violently. The concept will start to deviate under the force. Let it. Then reconnect it to other concepts, drawn from other systems, until a whole new system of connection starts to form. Then, take another example. See what happens. Follow the new growth. You end up with many buds. Incipient systems. Leave them that way. You have made a systemlike composition prolonging the active power of the example. You have left your readers with a very special gift: a headache. By which I mean a problem: what in the world to do with it all. That's their problem. That's where their experimentation begins. Then the openness of the system will spread. *If* they have found what they have read compelling. Creative contagion.

As mentioned earlier, in this project scientific and mathematical models are often foregrounded. The concept of field was mentioned. Concepts from chaos theory come in time and again (chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, 9). And, given all the doublings back and foldings over on itself that characterize the body's dynamic unity, models from topology take on increasing emphasis (chapters 5, 8). Given the touchiness surrounding the issue of thefts from science for the humanities, it is probably wise to say a word about it. Defenders of the disciplinary purity of the sciences consider it shameless poaching. I wholeheartedly agree. It's not science anymore, they say, once those silly humanities people get their hands on it. It's all "wrong."

As well it should be. Getting it "right" could only mean one thing: applying the results of science to the humanities. If carried out systematically, this simply annexes the target area to the sciences, in what amounts to a form of imperialist disciplinary aggression. The success of this approach would crase whatever specificity or singularity a humanities discipline might have. Sociobiology and its younger cousin evolutionary psychology are prime examples. This kind of wholesale application is usually practiced by scientists without training in the humanities (and often with a great deal of animus toward trends in the humanities of the last few centuries). People in the humanities, for their part, tend to take a piecemeal approach to application. They will isolate an attractive scientific or mathematical concept and add it to the repertoire of their own disciplinary system, like an exotic pet. Scientists might rightly object that the concept has ceased to have anything remotely scientific about it and is just functioning as a metaphor. Statements like "James Joyce's *Finnegan's*

Wake is a chaotic system” too often and too easily translate as: “the rhetorical form of the text is ‘like’ a chaotic system.” A more deliberate “chaos” you could not find. Is it really chaos, a scientist might be forgiven for asking. An even worse case scenario, however, is when “chaos” is treated as a theme. This boils down to the banal observation that the novel might be illustrating a scientific concept, representing it on the level of its content.

The optimal situation would be to take a scientific concept and use it in such a way that it ceases to be systematically scientific but doesn’t end up tamed, a metaphorical exhibit in someone else’s menagerie. This might be done by treating the scientific concept the way any other concept is treated in the approach advocated here. It was said that a concept could be severed from the system of connections from which it is drawn and plopped into a new and open environment where it suffers an exemplary kind of creative violence. This is only half the story. A concept is by nature connectible to other concepts. A concept is defined less by its semantic content than by the regularities of connection that have been established between it and other concepts: its rhythm of arrival and departure in the flow of thought and language; when and how it tends to relay into another concept. When you uproot a concept from its network of systemic connections with other concepts, you still have its *connectibility*. You have a systemic connectibility without the system. In other words, the concept carries a certain residue of activity from its former role. You can think of it as the rhythm without the regularity, or a readiness to arrive and relay in certain ways. Rhythm, relay, arrival and departure. These are relations of motion and rest: *affect*. When you poach a scientific concept, it carries with it scientific affects. Thus the transmission is two-way. The activity of the example is transmitted to the scientific concept, and affects of science are transmitted to the example. A kind of conceptual struggle ensues, producing a creative tension that may play itself out in any number of ways (depending in part on how much the importer of the concept actually understands of the system left behind—or cares). However it plays out, it is certain that the humanities project into which the concept has been imported will be changed by the encounter. This is the kind of shameless poaching from science I advocate and endeavor to practice: one that betrays the system of science while respecting its affect, in a way designed to force a change in the humanities.

The point, once again, is not to make the humanities scientific. The

point is to borrow from science in order to make a difference in the humanities. But not only that. The point is not just to make the humanities differ, but also to make them differ from the sciences in ways they are unaccustomed to. In other words, part of the idea is to put the humanities in a position of having continually to renegotiate their relations with the sciences—and, in the process, to rearticulate what is unique to their own capacities (what manner of affects *they* can transmit). This imperative to renegotiate adds an element of diplomacy to the piracy. Although it is unlikely that the sciences for their part will feel much inclination to negotiate. Having an immeasurably more secure institutional and economic base gives them the luxury of isolationism. The fact of the matter is that the humanities need the sciences—entirely aside from questions of institutional power but rather for their own conceptual health—a lot more than the sciences need the humanities. It is in this connection that the issue of empiricism takes on added importance. Reopening the question of what constitutes empiricism is perhaps one way to get the attention of the sciences (chapter 9).

Scientists shouldn't feel threatened by these respectful betrayals. If it is any consolation, concepts from humanities disciplines undergo similarly "diplomatic" treatment. Aside from that, poaching a scientific concept in no way prevents it from continuing to function in its home environment. It's not a zero-sum game. It's additive. The concept still belongs to the culture of science but has also been naturalized into the humanities. If I were a concept, I could emigrate *and* stay behind in my home country. (I have tried this, but it didn't work.)

Which just leaves the title. The genre of writing most closely allied with the logical form of the example is the *parable*. A word for the "real but abstract" incorporeality of the body is the *virtual*. The extent to which the virtual is exhausted by "potential," or how far into the virtual an energeticism can go, is a last problem worth mentioning. For only "an insensible body is a truly continuous body": there's the rub.¹⁸ There's the ultimate paradox of the dynamic unity of movement and sensation: the unity is purely virtual. For the virtual to fully achieve itself, it must recede from being apace with its becoming. This problem (of the void) is not entirely absent from the "parables for the virtual" that follow (chapters 4, 6). But a thorough grappling with it will have to wait for a next project, whose own problems are perhaps already just beginning to be felt in these essays.