

In relation to things and bodies

by Louise Haugaard Jørgensen

In the earliest stages – when it isn't yet possible to dissociate oneself from the body, since the I isn't segregated from anything and therefore hasn't begun to reflect on itself yet – one can consider the whole to be the body and the body alone. It has subdivisions, of course, but these are really only potential, as such still just possibilities not yet realised. How extensive one wishes to view the concept of the earliest stages depends on how near- or farsighted one chooses to look at it. In the former, if taken to the extreme, it can restrict itself to maybe only the moment of creation – the meeting of two things and their fusion into one. Therefore, in the latter there really isn't any limit either to how long the infantile period could be said to last. And this clearly depends on each single case, which might deviate to different degrees from the norm or the average, whose number is really only a cut through the mass.

So there is somehow an unselfish and uncritical unit, which for most people can be assumed to be dissolved, that is to say segregated into a respectively selfish and critical, maybe at best also self-critical duo, at some point during the first part of the life-cycle.

From this time on a duet can be sung. Maybe. No, in fact this is more likely a question of falling on deaf ears – because it seems like the voice that comes out of the body at the top doesn't actually belong to the body. Sure the voice has volume and scale, one might be tempted to say body, but at the same time it is strangely disembodied; it happens in the body, but still isn't really a part of it – and its essence seems to lie in *what* it is saying, not in the fact that it is *saying* something at all. Or does it? Yes, we'll have to stick with that, because several other parts of the body are capable of saying something without actually *saying* something. And one can easily talk to one self and with one self – but on the other hand if this is supposed to work, one also has to answer one self, otherwise it couldn't rightfully be called a conversation. And thus it becomes clear that this is not a case of actual exchange between the two members of the duo, but rather a kind of lonely mirror gymnastics.

But it seems like the segregation happens, and yet doesn't happen at the same time: The I makes choices, looks inward and is estranged from its own body. Meanwhile, chemistry is pulling the strings and experience shapes our neurons in constant impact loops, where free will has no say – here things happen completely automatically and this whole reflective de-route is devoid of any potential for inconsistency. But in this perspective one might also ask how a segregation could be considered possible at all? To believe such a thing in the first place might be a mere fancy? Basically there is no difference between person and body. There is no ghost in the machine, but still there is a self-awareness, which hasn't got full access to what is going on in the machine. And undeniably this provides a brilliant opportunity to assume that there must still be a difference between what could be called the machine and the part of this machine which then should not be called a ghost.

If nothing else, I guess I have to think like that in order to encourage myself to do anything at all. I guess the problem with all this is the passivity which occurs in comfort and the paralysis which falls on a machine, when it realises its own limitations – a bad cocktail. But before the limitations are realised, when they are forgotten or not recognised they are in fact put out of play, regardless of whether they are actually there or not. Things which do not exist can still be known – and maybe we have to know something in order to bother doing something?

I recently read an exciting and instructive book. It was also reassuring because one of its morals was that if you don't know how to use a thing, then it's very likely *not* because there is something wrong with you. It was a great comfort to read that. At a power plant the author had seen that the staff had mounted beer taps on the switches in order to be able to tell them apart, otherwise it was just a row of totally identical handles. It also shows a picture of a door in an English train, where it says on a sign that if you want to go out, you'll have to roll down the window and find the handle on the outside of the door. Also, a curious observation is that the most advanced and complicated copy machines are sold to law firms, who place them in the waiting room. Then you can sit there and admire them while you languish. Of course it also has a couple of chapters on system development and how to organise it best. Among other things it suggests a structure like a surgical team for development of larger complex systems, where one is wielding the knife and the others have support functions. That thought comforts me.

One possibility is, for instance, to focus on one part of the developmental process in order to zoom in on some of the subdivisions' infantile stages. You could start with the tongue; it starts developing in the 4th week, which is quite early in the overall process. It starts out as a small bud at the back of the oral cavity, and by the formation of cells a natural swallowing reflex is started. First a swelling in the midline arises and is flanked by two other bulges – the lingual swellings. During the course of a few weeks these swellings enlarge and finally merge to form a larger mass from which the mucous membrane of the anterior two thirds of the tongue is formed. The root of the tongue is formed from a large midline swelling developed from the mesenchyme of the third arch, which quickly overgrows the second arch and thereby excludes it from further involvement in the development of the tongue.

Likewise other parts of the organism follow similar developments from germ to endpoint or from potential to potency,

and it is difficult to say how present all these parts are before they are fully developed, and at which point a critical difference occurs in something like degrees of 'I' and gradual I-formations.

The antique surgeon Galen of Pergamon gained his anatomical knowledge from dissecting live pigs and Barbary apes. In front of large audiences he would demonstrate the functions of the body by placing a series of incisions along the spine of a pig and thus show how the animal gradually lost the ability to move, became completely paralysed, and finally with the last incision, died. One would probably say that the 'I' of the pig – if one thinks the pig has an 'I' – would be fully present until it dies, and then one could either think that it dissolves or perhaps that it joins a suitable section in the afterlife. But it might also be that the 'I' of the pig through Galens treatment is destroyed gradually, just like one might assume that it is created gradually?

When I was walking on the harbour the other day looking at all the new buildings, I happened to confuse a pile of junk with a person squatting against the wall of a warehouse, sleeping. I wondered why anyone would sit there and relax, because it was very cold that day and the wind was biting. The persons scarf was fluttering violently in the wind. As I got closer I began to worry, because it was not until I was within about 10 meters that I was able to see that it was just a plastic bag wrapped around a pile of stuff.

A thing is something that was once something different, which has the ability to transform and merge with other things and become something else again. At night the moon is the largest thing I can see from down here. Just after the formation of the solar system a small planet the size of Mars struck the Earth, ejecting large volumes of material from the outer layers of both objects. This collision ejected large volumes of material from the outer layers of both objects, and a disc of orbiting material was formed. This matter eventually stuck together to form the Moon. Like my wisdom tooth when it was pulled from my mouth - it stopped being me and became a thing.

At a certain point difference happens. Something becomes two. A distance between these two is created, their interrelations, bodies change places. Differences can be cancelled, distances annulled – this often happens but isn't recognized as formations in their own right and are amputated from the book. The differences are connections which are rejected to demarcate a body. Identity is about being identical, the same as one self.

One might say that the I is a kind of gravitation or capacity for collapse. Everything is pulling at everything else, material is clustered together and entities grow from the swarm. The bud becomes something identifiable within a few weeks and culminates in something that we are completely certain we know the extent of. All around, a dizzying selection of collapsed points rotate and we have no problem separating ourselves from all the rest¹.

1 In the sound track the text is read by actor Bodil Lassen