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**Beyond the Skin Line:
Tuning into the Body-Environment.
A Venture into the *Before* of Conceptualizations**

Abstract

The article explores embodied critical thinking (ECT) for engaging with the enfolded and trans-corporeal self on an affectual and experiential level. By discussing three exemplifying affectual instances that expose the experiential level of processuality, emergence, and intercardinality, the article shows the methodological use of ECT as a fruitful approach to developing embodied ontologies and a toolkit for the experiential reflection of one's enfoldment, as *tuning into* the body-environment.

Keywords

Emergence, Processuality, Intercardinality, Embodiment, Embodied Critical Thinking

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Introduction: The Conceptual Background

Today there are plenty of methodological approaches to tackle the dominating dualist and anthropocentric narratives of the Global North. The scholarly endeavors often agree that a shift in ontological presuppositions might be needed, especially in the looming environmental crisis. Yet, what is still lacking in these approaches is a way to achieve such a shift on an experiential level practically. Moreover, although theoretical discourses have refuted a dualist lifeworld in a biophilosophical context (Thacker 2008; Radomska 2016; Radomska and Åsberg 2020), the same cannot be said for the social field that keeps reinforcing dualist (albeit, a “reversed dualist,” see Sauka 2020a) biopolitics, and thus also maintains a human-nature alienation in an experiential context.

Although it is clear that what “we are” is a trans-corporeal transspecies assemblage (Alaimo 2010; Radomska 2016), it is still unclear as to how far and in what way one can experience this blurring of lines between oneself and the environment or even between the conscious intentionality and the unconscious functioning that channel nature-cultured activities of the lived body. Namely, to what extent, if at all, can the experienced lifeworld change? Even if it is conceptually straightforward that the body-environment is an interconnective processual becoming, is it possible to experience oneself as embodied and embedded? Moreover, is there a way to conceptualize processual selfhood, or does maintaining a stable self always presume the expulsion of environmental embeddedness as *object* (Kristeva 1982) that disturbs the maintenance of coherent selfhood and setting and continuously reaffirming clear boundaries between life and non-life, self and the other? Since it is impossible to fathom that a change in ontological presuppositions will arise from previously non-existent sources, in this article, I argue from the point of view that if an experiential ontological shift is possible, it is to be sought for in some already present felt senses that allow experiencing enfleshed becoming.

I thus venture to consider embodied critical thinking (ECT) (Schoeller and Thorgeirsdottir 2019) as an approach for capturing how humanity already *is* in touch with the blurred boundaries of the self, both regarding the lived-body felt sense beyond the I-consciousness, i.e., the lived-body as the supposed Other within us, and regarding the outside-other beyond the supposed “skin line.” Thus, the title of this research refers both to the “beyond of the skin line”—as the de-centered felt sense of the bodily self that is concealed by the imaginary dominance of the intentional I-consciousness and the “beyond the skin line” that connects us to the surrounding world as

body-environments (Gendlin 2017) breaching the lines between the self as a skin-sack and the Other as the environment. I assume here (based on the parallelism in discourses of nature and the human being, especially the woman) that parallelism in both accounts ensues and breaching the lines in both directions co-occurs.

I, hence, explore the assumption that the first-person experience includes a body-environment felt sense that functions as a *before* of the conceptualized dichotomies. The operative task of this exploration is to test the assumption that the body-environment bond is experienced as a *before* the I-conscious differencing from the environmental embeddedness. With this, I hope to add to the discussion of processual ontologies in societal and political contexts and evidence their presence and beforeness in our everyday experiences.

My approach rests on a new materialist approach that theorizes ontogenealogies of body-environments in a broad context. It broadens the conceptual scope of genealogy, restating the bio(il)logical lifeworld as genealogical upon the premise of senseful materiality (Sauka 2020b) and thus regards culture as *before* human I-consciousness, where the human being is not the origin but rather the result of nature-culture. Thus, it should be emphasized that I do not propose a reconnection with essential naturality but rather the possibility to consider ECT for the exploration of the multiplicity of enfolded and experienced genealogies.

Method: Embodied Critical Thinking as a Methodological Tool

ECT is an experimental approach in first-person science that draws inspiration from the 4E approach to cognition, micro-phenomenology, and Eugene Gendlin's process model and is mainly inspired by the TAE (Thinking at the edge) approach (Gendlin 2004; Krycka 2006). ECT can be described as a phenomenological practice that allows "felt experience in phenomenological methodology and theory construction" (Krycka 2006, 1).

Recently, philosophy's turn towards the body has undergone a turn towards materiality that allows reflecting upon the experienced transcorporeality of bodies. While thinkers such as Annemarie Mol (2021) and Astrida Neimanis (2017) reflect upon the phenomenology of eating and water, sound and listening provide another potential modality for experienced transcorporeality. The phenomenology of the body in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty is traditionally sight and space-oriented (Mol 2021, 26-32) and thus follows the general pattern of Western thinking in disconnecting the

subject from the objective lifeworld. Sound and listening provide a radically different viewpoint: a personally experienced material entanglement with the world that is critical towards a sight-oriented understanding of subjectivity, challenging it conceptually and experientially.

While thinking can never be said to be disembodied, ECT highlights the necessity for considering the felt sense of the world; it is a move from inspecting via intentionality from a “zero subject” position toward a reflection *in tune* with the embodied self. Thus, as a method for developing theory, embodied critical thinking necessitates balancing intentionality and responsiveness, including responsiveness towards oneself as an enfolded, transcorporeal selfhood. *Listening* here is used both metaphorically and literally as *tuning into* the rhythms of the embedded enfleshment and *tuning into* the environmental embeddedness amid which the self is in perpetual *becoming*. Thus, it is also a move from *inspecting* to *listening* to the experiential dimension of lived materialities and an embodied reflection.

The conceptual approach of ECT, especially in the context of looking beyond dominating narratives and the first-person phenomenological investigation, is also firmly in line with the idea of “Écriture féminine” (Cixous 1976) employed by Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and, more recently Bracha Ettinger (Zajko and Leonard 2006), and similarly aims to escape discourse via a personal, embodied approach to thinking.

Instancing is one of the steps of the TAE and the developing embodied critical thinking methodology. *Instancing* allows exploring a concept via experiential instances to develop the concept further via an embodied reflection of that instance. I start here, especially with the contribution of Guðbjörg R. Jóhannesdóttir and Sigridur Thorgeirsdóttir in their article “Reclaiming Nature by Reclaiming the Body” (2016), which explores the potential of reconnecting with the world at large via an affectual and experiential reconnection with one’s enfleshment (in a first-person sense, without falling into the trap of essentialism). My analysis is further supported by the reflections of Herbert Schroeder on felt-sensing natural environments (Schroeder 2008), as well as Donata Schoeller’s and Neil Dunaetz’s (Schoeller and Dunaetz 2018) commentary on thinking *with* and *in* an experience in the context of Eugene Gendlin’s process model.

This paper explores *instancing* as a methodological tool *in application* by peeking beyond the “skin line”¹ to exemplify some of the ways in which the

¹ By using this concept, I do not intend to state the ontological validity of such a line. In contrast, the “skin line” is employed as a conceptual device for illustrating the social and perceptual misrepresentation of the selfhood entrapped. Here I refrain from providing conceptual models that successfully overstep this problem, yet the reader is encouraged

already present co-becoming with the environment emerges. To do this, I refrain from discussing theoretical models (such as posthumanist, new materialist, phenomenological, etc. accounts) that explain the necessity to seek new ontological approaches and conceptualize them, to instead focus on the experience of instances that allow seeking the universal in the personal. Here, I follow the claim that:

We are so lost in our ideas of nature (and the idea of getting rid of them) that we neglect the fact that we *are* something before we start thinking and having ideas. We thus suggest that we should stop *thinking* like a mountain or a mall, and rather start *sensing and experiencing* like embodied beings" (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdóttir 2016, 41).

To demonstrate the different aspects in which feeling and listening to our *being as becoming* can help conceptualize an ontological shift in thinking, I chose three exemplary vignettes. Since ECT is an experimental approach, I took the liberty of devising my own writing protocol to document the *instances* and conceptualizations they resulted in. I call these instances here "vignettes" since they function as illustrations, descriptions, and source material for theorization that follows from the phenomenological reflection. Each consists of context (experience horizon), description/felt sensing (instancing itself), and theorization (conceptual results).

The instances are affectual examples of the *beyond* that is exposed in experience. With the *beyond*, I here mean three significant aspects that need to be highlighted as present in our experiences of the body-environments: a) *processuality* (Vignette 1), b) togetherness or *intercarnality* (Vignette 2), and c) a carnal *emergence* of creative practices (Vignette 3) that together evidence the nature-culture continuum as the source rather than the result of human activity and allow constituting the experiential domain of responsiveness (instead of intentionality) by *tuning into* the environment.

The main goal is to explore embodied critical thinking (ECT) as a tool for engaging with the en fleshed and trans-corporeal self on an affectual and experiential level. Namely, (1) to demonstrate that an embodied theorization allows developing embodied ontologies that can be experientially fruitful, and (2) that the methodological use of ECT facilitates the reflection of one's en fleshment as a form of *tuning into* the body-environment.

to look into Ettinger (2005) on borderspace, Alaimo (2010) on trans-corporeality, or Neimanis (2017) on the concept of pourousness for different conceptualizations that step beyond the "skin-line."

I intend to demonstrate first-person insights as a valuable way for grounding and embedding one's research in the context of experienced materiality, thus, allowing a reconnection with the *beyond* the skin-line of the lived body to partake affectually in theorizing embodiment and embeddedness. If thinkers such as Alva Noë (2009) and Francisco Varela (Varela and Thompson 1991) are correct in assuming that the mind is embedded, extended, and embodied, and thus, much more responsive (instead of merely intentional) and processual than it has often been theorized or socially constructed to be, this assumption can also be phenomenologically tested through the first-person shift of perspectives. It is a move from inspection and conceptualization to a listening/sensing or *tuning into* the environment—be it interpersonal, inner, or outer experienced otherness, to reveal the often neglected parts of conscious everyday life (as well as aesthetic and ethical experience). I also use listening and sensing to accentuate the link between the seemingly disembodied mode of “inspecting” as developed in connection with the dominance of sight-centered thinking. Sight, in contrast to hearing, can only be directed outwards, thus building an illusory line between oneself and the other that also upholds the illusion of an objective outlook (a sort of “zero subject” position), while hearing breaches the line between self and the other, and voice and sound provide transcorporeal, intercaral and notably material connections of body-environments. I call it *homing*,² both in context with the first vignette, as well as to highlight that *the closest to us* can also be *the most underappreciated* because of its natural presence and pinpoint the inherent ability to *tune into* one's embeddedness by changing perspectives.

It is my hope that with the help of ECT, and here, in particular, the step of *instancing*, it is possible to get in touch with the already present variability of genealogies that make up human becoming on nature-cultured premises.

In this, I follow the acknowledgment that:

Perhaps the only way for us to stop seeing nature as something outside of us and truly sense and understand ourselves as natural beings that are a part of the earth's ecosystem is to start focusing more on nature as experiences in our bodies (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdóttir 2016, 41).

² Dictionaries define *homing* as “relating to an animal's ability to return to its territory after traveling away from it,” which seems a fitting definition of *tuning into* the environment as part of ourselves.

Next to such an environmental concern that leads to the need to reconnect with our naturality, it seems necessary to also recognize culture as a continuation and part of nature, thus demonstrating consciousness as a result rather than the source of culture.

I thus intend to integrate the theoretical/conceptual background with the first-person exploration of the body-environment experiences, zigzagging between the theoretical plane and the felt sense. The main goal of this research project is to conceptualize the persistence of embedded and processual embodiment as a continuously present part of the experience and a viable source of inspiration for theorizing affirmative environmental ethics and philosophy as an art of living.

Vignette 1

Processuality: A House Becomes Home

Conceptual experience horizon

Home's problematization is associated with political issues regarding transnationalism and localism (i.e., refugee situations, border control, etc.), social or feminist issues regarding the division of lived space and the possibility of feeling *at home* in one's body and immediate surroundings, or philosophical issues of homelessness and home-making in the world and within one's self. Furthermore, the question of a home can be contextualized with today's understanding of the self as a transformable and transformative subject-in-process. Thus, what emerges is whether a self could be a nomadic subject (Braidotti 1994) juxtaposed to the question of a sense of place, a dwelling, or rootedness (Heise 2008, 29-49). In the context of environmental philosophy, it is also the juxtaposition of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Heise 2008, 51; Deleuze and Guattari 1977; 1987). Intuitively, both the setting of boundaries and the connectedness to the world at large seem equally important.

However, change and transformation often seem contradictory to settlement and dwelling or anchoring within a particular context when posited conceptually. This phenomenon counts for several levels of discussion, starting from globalist/localist debates to the discussion of selfhood and its processual engagement in the world. Moreover, such concepts as "re-wilding thinking" again muddle the waters of how to perceive and think about a sense of belonging: do we need to reterritorialize belonging to a *wilder* region of the self, and if so, what does that mean for our sense of being at

home with oneself? The paradoxes that emerge from the conceptual accounts, however, seem to all rely on a similar image of what “being at home” means, associating “settlement” with fixedness and thingness (a home is a set and safe space, an anchor of sorts), and familiarity—with static, non-changing surroundings. A familiar place thus becomes a sort of atypical and atemporal haven outside of time, space, and energy exchange. That already poses problems for a processual self that needs to be repositioned as a *nomadic subject* since it does not feel at home in an unchanging environment. However, such a reposition seems to establish a new dichotomy of subject and object while trying to deconstruct the dichotomy of a self and its continuous becoming. Thus, an embodied phenomenological account of the home offers a revision of the perspective from which home and belonging are usually perceived.

Instance: Home is coming back with the heating

During my first winter in a small-town house where I lived with my family, I suddenly realized the importance of a dynamic interaction with my immediate surroundings to maintain belonging and rootedness. We have a traditional tile stove and a kitchen stove, and before the heating came, a felt difference appeared in the immediate surroundings that crept in with the decrease in indoor temperature. The feeling of rootedness and belonging, as well as the “naturalness” of the home, gradually self-destructs, meaning that while I do not feel the home while it is warm (but instead feel like a fish in its water), I start to notice my surroundings more starkly with the chilly temperature. Visually, as well as in feeling, the surroundings become unhomey and uncanny. The home becomes a house, and then a shed, or a random collection of wreckage. A pile of garbage, randomly set in a foreign garden. The outside creeps in and takes over. I disassociate and lose the self-evidence of what a home, my home, is. Is this supposed to be my home? Where am I? What are these breadcrumb-ridden objects in front of me? How come I can live here? Shortly, the home lost its cognitive coherence for me as the inhabitant. After feeding wood to the stove and the oven, with the heating, the home comes suddenly back. Things reconnect in patterns, and objects become familiar as an extension of the self. “I” inhabit the space again and re-connect with my surroundings. The warmth brings a return to the home environment, and a tragedy is averted; the self is content.

Conceptual Afterthought

Instances such as this that change the perspective from third person to first person phenomenological account are exemplary of the potential of alternative ontologies and the need for a change of perspective in the conceptualization of home and dwelling as well as the sense of place:

1. The sense of place is unimaginable without the dimension of temporality. That does not necessitate a linear temporality but could be connected to an imaginary of an eternal return or identity as a stabilized but transformative process.
2. Being and home is a becoming, namely, a process rather than a state, yet the modern world often eliminates the felt sense of it being a process. Advertisements promise that we can obtain a home, while what they sell are empty carcasses that must be continuously lived in and lived *with* to *become home* again and again.
3. The body-environment embeddedness and connectedness are affectually felt, especially in the moments of crisis, when a disruption nears. The negative connotation that comes with the disruption facilitates viewing the tie itself in a negative light, while precisely, the disruption of the connection brings negative feelings. When one freezes in the frosty air without a jacket, one is convinced that the environment is only alienated and detached because a disruption from the usual homeliness in one's immediate surroundings is felt.

The affectual experience of home is revealed in its disruption and the consequent *coming back with the heating* that allows recognizing "being at home" and "homing" as a pre-conscious process that exposes the human being in its embeddedness *beyond* the skin-line. The beyond is exposed via its counterpart in the abject (Kristeva 1982) of the suddenly foreign home, thus, creating a square of the concepts: subject, object, abject, and the *beyond*, where the beyond is also the before and enables the emergence, motion, and becoming of the four interacting elements. In heating one's own home (but also in many other activities, such as tidying, dusting, etc.) that reveal the deterioration that results from the standstill, time is felt as circular or spiral.³ Refraining from action quite literally facilitates deterioration, while dynamic interaction leads to the maintenance of the felt security of the

³ Here a connection to the issues in feminist philosophy could be made (see Söderback 2019).

self. Here, the human being is part of the ecosystem of a home that resembles a turtle's shell rather than an outside object. The *instance* of heating is expository since it allows direct *tuning into* the environment—a responsive experience of the body-environment continuum that is necessarily present, thus allowing the overthrow of the narrative of alienation.

Therefore, a home is revealed as a becoming place, a process that requires dynamic interaction with the self to exist. Processual selfhood is not only a possibility within a settlement or a dwelling but a pre-requirement. Safety demands movement, change, and fragility stillness requires attention, care, and activity. The local and the global reconnect; deterritorialization and reterritorialization combine as coherent presence in the felt sense of our body-environments. Again, the body-environment bind is revealed as one that is already present in the affectual experiences, even though it might not be consciously reflected upon very often. *Homing* is a process, and no finite objects are possible.

Vignette 2

Intercarnality: Otherness and Children

Conceptual experience horizon

As mentioned previously, embodied, responsive thinking is critical today to seek (re)connection with the environment. How can “I” be an “I” without constituting an autonomous identity that presupposes detachment from the *Other*? It can be hoped that the fear of the impossibility of shifting ontological preconceptions could be alleviated by searching for the elements of connection that are *already there*, namely, by listening to our ontological engagement in the world and rethinking the presence of embeddedness and embodiment in the senses, thus, going beyond the dominant genealogies of today's capitalist societies. With this vignette, I propose to reflect on this question through the eyes of a child, who is *tuned into* the environment and the multiplicity of the otherness yet still autonomous and self-affirming, to decipher the seemingly contradictory concepts of interdependency and independence, and selfhood and intercarnality. As in the case of the previous instance, these point toward significant theoretical discussions of oneness and difference, sociality and individuality, and even socialist and capitalist debates.

Instance

Mom: "Sleep!" she says and gets comfortable. She wraps me around her as she wishes and gives me a tiny kiss. Then, she turns her back on me and sleeps. It reminds me of breastfeeding, now already so long ago—she latches on the breast to get her nourishment, no questions of the following kind: Do I use my mom? Do I lack independence? Am I allowed to be a "me" if I need her? No contracts of any kind and no given consent, yet the ego expression is not without care. The slightest expression of pain can disturb the peace... A hit?... Her face mirrors my pain and her shame. When we lose the "we," we lose the "I" as well—horror, panic-stricken shriek on her part. She does not apologize but just stands there pouting, confused. I say: "I was hurt, darling. Why are you so angry?" She hugs me and says: "Let us kiss with our noses, ok?" We make up and become joyful together.

Conceptual Afterthought

In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1999), after the subservient camel and the rioting lion, the third metamorphosis of the child represents the free and playful producer of new values. The child is thus exemplifying a unique ethical and aesthetical disposition in the world, a subjectivity engaged in the world, an unruptured connection with one's fleshliness and intercardinality (namely, *Zwischenleiblichkeit*, Merleau-Ponty 1966) that does not come into contradiction with self-affirmation and expression of the will (Sauka 2021). The primordial ethicality expressed in the imaginary of the child by Nietzsche today seems compatible with the ethics of care (Gilligan 1982), highlighting the necessity to supplement the usual normative ethics with ethics beyond morality that evaluates each limit-situation contextually and focus on relationality and caring response.

For Nietzsche *becoming a child* is the highest stage of human becoming. Things often go quite the contrary in life, and from joyful troublemakers, we grow into rebellious lions that become brooding carriers of burdens. In embodied critical thinking, one could also say that philosophical thought is also not safe from a similar development path. The feminist philosopher Sigrídur Thorgeirsdóttir underscores the significance of the figure of the child in the framework of ECT (Thorgeirsdóttir 2021) and notes that thinking itself might need rethinking from the standpoint of children's affective experiential perspective that expresses the direct connection with the world (Sauka 2021).

Silence has always been the most significant part of my relationship with children. Children can teach me the most about the things where language is lacking without words or even before they know how to speak. Again, sound and sense work together as directly reciprocal and intercarnal modes of becoming; pain resounds in a cry while it breaches the ears of a loving parent, invoking a strong sense of sympathetic pain, a wave of anguish amplified by the veil of the child. Silence stands on the border of feeling and hearing, a felt sense that oversteps all the imaginary dichotomic lines between self and the other. Is silence a sense or a sound? It is impossible to tell, yet it delivers an intrinsic experienced intercarnality that can speak of isolation and ignorance and understanding and connection. Whatever the situation, silence itself is already intercarnal in the mode of *tuning into* that it anticipates. Conceptual language often operates on the premise of division, distinguishment of elements, and separation. Finding connections to the other *within* or *without* the self or a way to conceptualize *otherness* as inseparable from selfhood can therefore be hard to do in language. Some existential experiences are easier to grasp in everyday life than they are perceivable *after* exploration in language that muddles the felt sense of seemingly self-evident phenomena. This problem is particularly exemplified in psychoanalytic feminist philosophy and feminist phenomenology.

Feminist phenomenology (Oksala 2004; 2016) problematizes the tradition of the transcendent subject in phenomenology by considering the experience of giving birth and breastfeeding, which is often undervalued in the conceptualization of subjectivity. How can we understand the self without otherness if everyone is born from someone? Furthermore, why are these blurred lines of subjectivity (which are most evident in pregnancy) regarded more as a problem to be solved than an exciting horizon for innovative embodied philosophical thought? One answer relates to the tradition of substance ontologies (Meincke 2018) in the Global North that finds it hard to conceptualize a “subject-in-process” (Kristeva 1984; 1995) and maintains the subject-object distinction that also necessitates refuting otherness through the process of abjection.

Psychoanalytic feminist philosophy criticizes the insufficiencies of conventional language. For example, Kristeva’s conceptualization of the semiotic and symbolic demonstrates that the “symbolic ‘law of the father,’ that is, the orderly aspects of our signifying practices, never triumphs over what she calls the semiotic (the more fluid, playful, instinctual aspects of our signifying practices)” (McAfee 2004, 43). The possibility to communicate and feel *beyond* the symbolic order points out the necessity to rethink the hierarchy of

knowledge, in which the symbolic realm (that is also most stifled by dominating discourses) is valued far over the semiotic realm. "The semiotic" can also be argued to be more open to children's thinking and understood as a gateway to embodied thinking and felt sense perception, beyond abstract reasoning, yet including it. Another version of a critique of the abstract thought is endeavored by Luce Irigaray, who notes the rigidity of the symbolic field that subordinates all multiplicity to the "Same" (Irigaray 1985), excluding otherness. Those other to the Same in this context can, therefore, more easily slip out of the webs of the discourse. In this sense, children are more in touch with otherness and multiplicity of becoming and can therefore think and feel outside of discursive structures that restrict grown-up thinking and being in touch with their embodiment.

Being and becoming with children teaches about the inconsistency and variability of existence, the coherency of contradictions, and thus, love and the blurring of the boundaries of the self—about a becoming in togetherness, and the significance of intercarinality, touch, caress, or even a hit. Children teach what is *before* and *between* words and that which is said—the felt sense of being with others and how we learn to think and understand concepts through the *logic of touch*. These themes and lived experiences are often undervalued in traditional philosophical contexts.

The fragility and processuality of selfhood are self-evident in infancy and childhood; so is the co-dependency of seemingly autonomous subjects. Yet, what is most striking for me via the instance at hand, is the consistent and confident self-affirmation that does not contradict the co-dependency with others that children communicate. Being individualistic does not stand in contradiction with caring interdependency in children, and they feel entirely comfortable affirming their independence while also depending on one another in everything they do *before* reflecting on where an "I" is divided from "other." Children realize their will without doubting their dependency on others. It could even be said that self-affirmation in children is possible precisely *because* of their inherent bond with the other, practiced within these terms of intercarinality. Expression of the ego comes from intercarinality that is inherent and awaited as a given dependency. It does not question the intercarinality or the hierarchy of the parent-child relationship. It is just there. Attachment allows the expression of the ego: I am nourished with you (by breast, a hug, the helpful hand). On the other hand, detachment allows the questioning of the ego and exposes its fragility. Both are necessary, yet the significance is in the order (attachment before detachment) and the connection between attachment with ego expression vs. detachment and fragility, "for when we lose the 'we,' we lose the 'I' as well."

This ability to maintain selfhood without (or before) disconnection and detachment leads to question the struggle to do so in grown-ups. Today's society in the Global North strongly advises self-sufficiency and self-realization, thus, causing suffering in alienation both from nature and others, yet it is feared that an endeavor of reconnection could cause the loss of freedom. To enable thinking of these seeming contradictions as combinable, it could be necessary to analyze how children communicate their dependent interdependencies, demonstrating the possibility of independence as embedded in interdependency, demonstrating how we need a connection to be free.

Through the parent intercaral bond with children, the fragile boundaries of the self lose their uncanniness. A child harnesses the power of intersubjectivity, through which we come into the world to make it circle us.

Vignette 3

Emergence: I Meet Myself in Music

Conceptual experience horizon

Finally, I want to reflect on embodiment as a meeting of the supposed Other in oneself *before* I-consciousness. It is an everyday occurrence, much more common than a reflected, voluntary activity might be, the communication of the pre-conceptual, pre-conscious realm within ourselves as part of ourselves.

Are our freedom, free will, and self-determination contradictory with pre-conscious self-constitution and decision-making? Can a pre-conscious self-constitution support the view of an undetermined and "free" will and selfhood? The contradiction of freedom vs. natural embeddedness has constituted much Western philosophical thought. It relates to significant theoretical discussions regarding selfhood and the origins of meaning and culture since the pre-conscious is imagined as pre-cultural and/or presupposes a deterministic understanding of the self.

Here, I forgo the argumentation of embodiment and embeddedness in this exploration (see further Sauka 2020a; 2020c) to reflect on the potential of embodied critical thinking for reconnecting with the *beyond* of the enmeshment that alienates itself from itself via the constitution of the I-consciousness. ECT, thus, again is employed as a tool for the reconciliation of conceptual contradictions by demonstrating the synthetic co-dependency of seeming opposites on an experiential level.

Instance

I am at an exam at my music school. I am maybe 13 or 14. I am already playing, and my sweaty palms are all I can think about. Does the teacher see that my blouse is a little bit ruffled? What if I make a mistake right then and there? I tune into the piece I am playing, yet I must tread lightly in doing it; if I “move” too roughly or too intentionally in my mind, I will lose the thread of music flowing through me and stop. I can only tune into myself very lightly. To be a bit more “present,” to feel into the music and play more musically. I move with the music to a forest, to a grove, between animals and a flowing river. I ride the crescendos and tiptoe around the pianos. It is hard since I think about my palms again and again. When the music stops, I have not “done” it. I was there. It flew through me and took me for a ride. I do not look into the eyes glaring at me and go out of the room. I wait for the grade, get praised, and go home relieved. I did it! Was it me?

Conceptual Afterthought

Nietzsche states that the lived, carnal body is the “big mind,” the herd that is only seemingly controlled by the less critical shepherd or the “small mind” that is human I-consciousness (Nietzsche 1999). However, the dominating genealogies of the Global North place importance on the “small mind,” stripping the flesh of meaning and thus maintaining a dualist cultural imaginary, often contrary to scientific claims. The dominance of intentionality’s over-responsivity in the social field is conceptualized variously in the fields of biopolitics (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013) and the phenomenology of the lived body (Waldenfels 2000; 2003; Böhme 2019), yet the main problem is still the inability to shift the ontogenealogies of the self on perceptual, experiential, and affectual levels.

Embodiment is commonly connected to negative feelings like shame, anger, and fear that are starkly felt throughout the body. Positive emotions and pleasure are also sometimes directly felt as embodied. However, the problem of shifting the ontological preconceptions in the experienced social field comes with the idea that culture and the symbolic field emerge only in *I-consciousness*. *Tuning into* everyday experiences allows remembering embodiment as the source of the cultural and symbolic, aided by the I-consciousness only in a particular, reflective sense. Experientially carnality is felt and practiced “auf den höchsten Gipfeln des Denkens” (Waldenfels 2000, 246), and the *I-consciousness* reveals itself as a result rather than the source of culturality and symbolic potential that is present in materiality itself.

The “I” continuously watches the flow of the Other, realizing the potential of the embodied selfhood, often standing on guard and hardly participating at all. By a responsive *tuning into* the environment of the self (within and without the skin line), one creates and plays, as well as runs, cleans, and cooks, leaving only the decision to *tune into* the I-conscious part of the mind. In creative activities, like writing and music, the meeting with the other most evidently demonstrates the variability, the polyphony of the carnal self, and the potential of pre-conscious decision making, which is still very much our “own.” The boundary between the otherness of the flesh and the “I” becomes blurred, and one is not that sure of the “I” as a consistent or fixed self anymore. However, as the polyphonic anchor of a subjectivity-in-process, the carnal self is much more profoundly exposed as the “home” of the selfhood that can be understood and known before words as something familiar yet unbounded. The polyphony is here expressed as a polyphony of senses, as well as breaching of boundaries, or rather—as the experiential *before* boundaries that is characteristic of sounding and sense—outside and inside are the markers assigned *after* via conceptualization, which is why it is effortless to sense and experience the self as embedded and enfleshed. At the same time, it is notably harder to conceptualize this *becoming* via conventional conceptual tools that have developed via domination of a univocal, sight-oriented understanding of senses, subjectivity, and subject-object/self-other duality. Describing processual selfhood as a polyphonic anchor, I accentuate that the clarity of selfhood is possible precisely because of its processual embeddedness, rather than despite it, thus, refusing that the selfhood is to be thought of as fragile or non-existent because of its non-fixity. The metaphoric and experienced sense of listening and sound can further provide experiential evidence of how an intercaral becoming enables the carnal self as a processual becoming. Thus, polyphony characterizes enfleshed selfhood as transcorporeal and, in a narrower sense, notes the character of listening and sound as polyphonic, thus accentuating the manifoldness of the experiential plane. While the polyphony of the world resounds within us, embedding the self firmly *within* the *without*, the singing and crying bodies also reach beyond the skin line, entangling in intercaral relations. The singing selfhood is reciprocal and polyphonic as it voices its song and simultaneously hears the world’s echo; a dance of life ensues. Contradictions coincide in this self that draws from the environment and the deepest depths of the unconscious to realize itself in perfect harmony with its multiplicity.

Conclusory Crossing: Joyful Resilience—The Art of Homing Together

All three of the instances revealed a different aspect of *otherness* as *selfhood*. “Meeting the other” was accomplished through a) meeting the other as our surroundings, b) meeting the other as our contemporaries, and c) meeting

the other as the carnal body we are (Böhme 2019). Rather than horrific encounters with the abject, the instances explored otherness as *homing*, suggesting thinking of the other as no “other” at all, but rather a pre-conscious, transformative and transformable home that accompanies and steers the conscious, intentional selfhood in everyday life.

The three modalities all relate to the different ways in which conventional thinking patterns build dialectical contradictions (such as local/global, dwelling/nomadism, self/other, and subject/object) that can be surpassed on an experiential level via the use of the tools provided by ECT, showcasing ECT as a viable method for developing embodied ontologies that can provide significant insight in different domains of theory. Due to the polyphonous, transcorporeal character of the enfleshed selfhood, the involvement of felt sense and listening as direct experiential planes of transcorporeality and enfleshment proved necessary for employing ECT as a practice in developing theory. Listening provides the experience of materiality neither within nor without—an involvement that is before conceptualizations, yet reciprocal and polyphonous, and thus enables agency via *tuning into*—attentiveness, care, and response. Both literally and as a metaphor for the broader understanding of a senseful, transcorporeal, and enfleshed selfhood, listening and polyphony provide the experiential space for capturing the becoming of subjectivity in its manifoldness. Thus, by substituting *seeing* and *inspecting* with *listening* and *sensing*, environmental embeddedness proved to be easily graspable by the embedded selfhood, without alienation mediated by an abject that tries to maintain an unruly and fragile autonomous selfhood, constrained largely in I-consciousness. Quite the contrary, *tuning into* the sensed environment allows freely constituting a processual yet secure selfhood. The felt sense of selfhood *in the process* is evident, yet when striving to understand the self as an unchanging identity or capture a moment of its movement, it necessitates laborious inspection that delivers doleful results.

The metaphor of a home or a shell (which is much less noticeable by the one living in the shell) can be broadened toward the world at large in the case of environmental ethics. A final instance that came into my mind during the reflection of *tuning into* the environment was when I brought back my third baby girl from the hospital. Everyone fell sick with a stomach virus, and we all sat home for maybe ten days or so. I remember the felt sense of joy of being at home distinctly. Although it seemed illogical to be content in this chaos, it was a calm feeling of connection, and it rested within a complex and disorderly environment. My joy, defined in abstract terms, was illogical and contradicted the situation. A second feeling that emerged in this experience

was the feeling of resilience and flexibility. I joyfully accepted my environment and decided to nestle down with the baby within this ensuing chaos.

This instance, for me, crosses over the three fields of homing body-environments in an ethical sense. First, it shows relationships as beyond words and concepts, togetherness across the skin-line, and an understanding born *before* its abstraction and conceptualization—a safety born out of the precarity of intercarinality. Second, it also reflects the otherness of the selfhood itself that is noncontradictory in conceptually contradictory situations and reflects the *emergence* of meaning via felt sensing. The felt sense of a situation—here, a possibility to spend time together at home—often delivers a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of experienced phenomena that delivers contradictions when voiced through concepts and conventional language. Third, it reflects *tuning into* the environment as a dynamic process requiring ethical attentiveness toward the situation and refraining from demanding conditions for self-realization to endeavor *homing* with the tools at hand.

In summary, the phrase “joyful resilience” encompasses the concepts of processuality, emergence, and intercarinality via an affirmative ethical attentiveness that emerges in the crossing of the three conceptual realms. Such joyful and resilient dynamic attentiveness to one’s surroundings alleviates the contradiction between the seemingly chaotic changes of one’s surroundings and the orderly and comfortable sense of a place as an anchor of identity. Namely, it allows *homing* without essentialist demands for fixed, unchanging conditions, instead depicting identity and home as dynamic processes in need of care and affectual relation.

Here, it is essential to note that finding such an experiential ground for shifting the ontological perceptions could have far-reaching positive consequences for our relationship with the environment, as well as with each other in political and social spaces in context with questions regarding gender, race, xenophobia of any kind and general social conflicts. Hence, today, in the time of climate crisis and the sixth extinction, a broadened understanding of a felt, joyful resilience in an environmental context might show the way for environmental ethics beyond ego-centric fragility and could be further investigated with the tools of embodied critical thinking.

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