

A Life Form is a Lived Body: the Fundamental Biocentric Level of Empathy and Intercorporeality

Beniamino Cianferoni[†]
beniamino.cianferoni@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Phenomenological approaches to empathy and intersubjectivity have overcome some critical and open issues of traditional representationalist accounts, placing the embodied character of the social encounter at the centre of the debate. At this stage, I suggest that it would be possible and important to take a further step away from Cartesian vestiges by abandoning the affective and ontological dualism between human beings and other living beings (animals and plants). I argue that phenomenological and enactivist accounts (e.g. that of Thomas Fuchs) based on characteristics such as pre-reflectivity and sensory experience should posit the fundamental level of empathy and intercorporeality as not anthropocentric, but biocentric. To demonstrate my thesis about the presence of an extended embodied intersubjectivity, I investigate Edith Stein's taxonomy of empathy and I point out how life forms are lived bodies that share a mutual empathic space with human beings. In conclusion, I outline a biocentric refinement of the model of intercorporeality.

Introduction

In recent years, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and neuroscientists have devoted much attention to empathy, investigating it from multiple points of view. Many works remind us that empathy is not only what made the survival of *homo sapiens* possible, but also what we must invest in, because our psychological well-being and hope of living in more cohesive societies depend precisely on our capacity to empathize¹. Such an interest in empathy, however, goes hand in hand with the observation that the difficulty of feeling the other is one of the great issues of our time (Boella, 2006).

[†] University of Florence, Florence, Italy.

¹ One might mention, for example: Hoffman M. (2000) *Empathy and Moral Development*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK; Rifkin J. (2010) *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*, Jeremy P. Tarcher Inc: New York; de Waal, F. (2009) *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder*, Society Harmony Books: New York.

In this paper my aim is to outline a way out of some anthropocentric aporias concerning empathy and intersubjectivity. I believe that some of the questions we need to ask (however radical they may seem) are: do the concepts of empathy and intersubjectivity still entail a Cartesian structure, if only in an implicit way? Do these concepts remove from the explanatory scheme experiences that are activated in an act of empathy? How does the difficulty of feeling empathy for the natural world – which is so significant in the contemporary context – depend on cultural patterns that justify only a spectrum of empathy reduced to an anthropocentric ability to feel?

In the first part of the article I present the phenomenological debate on the concepts of empathy and intercorporeality, dwelling on common characteristics such as pre-reflectivity and sensory experience. Then I examine Stein's thesis about sensory empathic objects and lived bodies, which encompass human beings and life forms. In the third part, to propose an affective and ontological perspective that tries to overcome anthropocentrism, I integrate Stein's discussion of empathic acts with Fuchs' model of intercorporeality. In conclusion, the biocentric dimension is presented as the fundamental level of our intercorporeal empathic experience.

1. Empathy and intercorporeality in the phenomenological debate

1.1 The fundamental level of empathy: the pre-reflective experience of another as an embodied subject like oneself

Evan Thompson and Natalie Depraz present a phenomenological model of empathy, based on the fundamental studies of Edith Stein. Depraz introduces the taxonomy as follows:

Within the full performance of empathy [...] we can distinguish at least four possible kinds of empathy: (1) The passive association of my lived body with the lived body of the Other (2) The imaginative transposal of myself to the place of the Other (3) The interpretation or understanding of myself as an Other for you (4) Ethical responsibility in the face of the Other.²

The first level is empathy as a preliminary act, whereby we “grasp” that the other feels, but we do not distinguish any specific content. The second level is empathy as an understanding of the particular experiences of another person. The third

² Depraz N. (2001).

level regards empathy as self-empathy: one of the biggest challenges in terms of our psychological well-being is to have an empathic experience of ourselves as we would have of another subject.³ A further empathic act corresponds to feelings of sympathy, love, compassion, etc.

Thompson explains what this first level consists in:

The first sort of empathy is passive (not voluntarily initiated on the part of the ego), pre-reflective, and bodily; it serves as the support for the others. When we see another person, we do not perceive his or her body as a mere physical thing, but rather as a lived body like our own. Thus empathy is not simply the grasping of another person's particular experiences (sadness, joy, and so on), but on a more fundamental level the experience of another as an embodied subject of experience like oneself.⁴

This first level concerns empathy as the emotional apprehension of the reality of another's sensations and feelings. The empathic experience begins long before the moment in which one understands the particular experiences of another (e.g. sadness, joy, fear). Empathy is something deeper and more preliminary, like the discovery of the existence of the other (Boella, 2006). It is also a way of accessing the whole person of the other and therefore represents the condition of possibility of feelings of sympathy, love, hatred, pity, and compassion, as well as of the many ways of understanding others. Through empathy we are able to feel the presence around us of beings with a lived body, and grasp how they differ from a rock or a house.

The model of empathy and particularly the discussion of its basic level by Thompson and Depraz can be viewed in relation to Thomas Fuchs' enactivist and phenomenological studies on the concept of intercorporeality. Indeed, it can be shown that Stein's taxonomy is fruitful and consistent with this current debate.

³ See Depraz N. (1998) and Thompson E. (2001). Thompson states that it is through empathy as the experience of oneself as another for one's alter-ego that one gains a viewpoint of one's own embodied being beyond the singular first-person perspective. Depraz observes that the second person is, first and foremost, a picture that frees the first person from his or her constituent internal limitations.

⁴ Thompson E. (2001).

1.2 Empathy and intercorporeality

The first level of empathy, as a pre-reflective, embodied experience of the other as a lived body just like one's own, presents itself in social interactions as a process of mutual modification of bodily states. Fuchs explains:

In every face-to-face encounter, the partners' subject-bodies are intertwined in a process of bodily resonance, coordinated interaction and 'mutual incorporation' which provides the basis for an intuitive empathic understanding⁵.

It is the structure of the body which enables the interlacement of self and other in the process of mutual empathic experience. Fuchs explains that this analysis may be regarded as an articulation of Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'intercorporeality' (*intercorporéité*)⁶, by which he intended to complement Husserl's account of intersubjectivity as the constitution or 'appresentation' of the other by a conscious ego⁷. Intercorporeality means a pre-reflective bodily intertwining whereby my own body is affected by the other's body as much as his is by mine, leading to an embodied communication.

Sociality, therefore, in the phenomenological and enactive perspective, does not start from isolated individuals and their respective inner states, but from the priority of intercorporeality and interaffectivity⁸.

As bodily subjects, we are always already involved in a shared affective and expressive space. In social contacts, our lived bodies become extended such that they are intertwined with those of others in a way that prevents any conceptual or ontological reduction to isolated entities⁹.

Internal and external are not separate domains, but only directions of movement inserted in a mutual transition between expression and impression, between "e-

⁵ Fuchs T. (2017), p. 2.

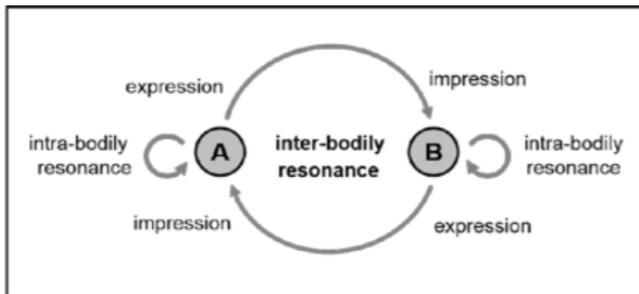
⁶ Merleau-Ponty M. (1964).

⁷ Husserl E. (1960)

⁸ Fuchs T. & De Jaegher H. (2009); Froese T. & Fuchs T. (2012).

⁹ Fuchs T. (2017), p.18. Merleau-Ponty states that «my two hands "coexist" or are "compresent" because they are one single body's hands. The other person appears through an extension of that compresence; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality» (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.168). This compresence is «the reason why I am able to understand the other person's body and existence "beginning with" the body proper, the reason why the compresence of my "consciousness" and my "body" is prolonged into the compresence of my self and the other person» (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 175).

motion” and “affection”. Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty, the central property of intercorporeality is that we are able not only to embody the other while the other simultaneously embodies us, but also to embody ourselves in the same way as we embody the other. Our body can be a subject or object for us in the same way as the other can be¹⁰.



Mutual incorporation and inter-bodily resonance ¹¹

Concerning the relationship between empathy and intercorporeality, I argue that it is the occurrence of an empathic experience that reveals the presence of a mutual incorporation, that is, of intercorporeality. As we have observed through Thompson and Depraz, empathy – at a fundamental level – is the intuitive recognition that the other is a lived body like oneself.

2. The ontological level of empathy is biocentric

2.1 What is still unsatisfactory: an anthropocentric conception of empathy and intersubjectivity

I would now like to offer a further phenomenological investigation of the fundamental layer of empathy as a bodily and pre-reflective experience.

The underlying assumption of my investigation stems from a significant criticality in relation to the concept of empathy, which is mentioned in particular by Thompson. He writes:

When discussing the phenomenological conception of empathy, I raised the question of the limits of empathy: how far can empathy radiate beyond the human

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty M. (1968) , p. 123.

¹¹ Fuchs, T. (2017), p. 7.

case? Here the wisdom traditions give different answers. The extension of empathy and compassion to the non human world seems rather foreign to the Judaeo-Christian tradition (at least until recently), but is central to the Buddhist ideal of compassion for all sentient beings, and to the Neo-Confucian ideal of “forming one body with the universe”¹².

As Thompson points out, our culture today finds it hard to comprehend such a perspective. The basic premise that empathy is what distinguishes human beings from other animals, is still familiar to us from phenomenology. The Cartesian postulate of a pure consciousness has been dropped in favour of an embodied subjectivity, but researchers have yet to present models that openly question the more tacit Cartesian assumption of an ontological distinction between the human body, which for Descartes was open to the intervention of the soul, and all other living bodies, which for Descartes were closed mechanisms incapable of any awareness¹³. To do this, we need explicitly biocentric phenomenological accounts that highlight – from a specifically phenomenological point of view, which is to say in relation to first-person experience – the partiality and insufficiency of an ontological and affective explanatory framework that cuts out the connection with living beings that are not human.

Thompson concludes his essay by observing that it would be particularly important to develop “a more refined taxonomies of empathy and value-sensing”. A further reflection in this direction comes from Bruce Alan Wallace¹⁴, who speaks of “biocentric intersubjectivity”. He states that «while Western thought, inspired by the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions, is largely anthropocentric when it comes to intersubjective relationships, Buddhism [...] may be deemed biocentric, for its central emphasis is on all sentient beings, and not on human beings alone».

In this respect, the current debate on empathy seems to disregard the different nuances, related to the idea of empathy for the natural world, also present in the Western history of the concept¹⁵.

¹²Thompson E. (2001), p. 23.

¹³ Descartes R. (1986), pp. 36-38.

¹⁴Wallace B. A. (2001).

¹⁵Italian philosopher Andrea Pinotti (2011) reminds us of how the reflection on empathy does not arise with regard to another subject, but rather to the non-human world, to the natural dimension as a whole. Already in Herder and Novalis there is the verbal form “hinein-fühlen”, which indicates an experience sympathetic toward nature. Protoromanticism committed itself to

My claim is that Stein discusses a biocentric level of empathy and that her studies could serve as a premise to delineate a broader ontological perspective.

2.2 Edith Stein: empathy is one single act which, at a fundamental level, concerns the relationship between human beings and all other living beings

Edith Stein has re-evaluated sensory and pre-reflective empathy: in this experience, the empathizing subject realizes that he or she is facing a living and sensitive body, a *Leib* – and not a mere material body, a *Körper*. Stein calls this empathy “sensual empathy” (*Empfindungseinfühlung*: please use italics). According to Thompson, it can be in turn divided into four levels. In experiencing another as an embodied subject, we perceive the Other (1) as animated by his or her own fields of sensation; (2) as animated by general feelings of life or being in one’s own living body (growth, development, ageing, health and sickness, vigour and sluggishness, and so on); (3) as expressive of his or her own subjective experience; (4) as another centre of orientation in space; and (5) as capable of voluntary action.

The novelty in Stein’s studies is the thesis that the experience of the other as *Leib* is no longer considered exclusively in relation to empathy linked to representationalist accounts¹⁶. As Stein observes, «this basic level of constitution has always been ignored so far». In contrast to previous studies that ignore the role of pre-reflective and sensual empathy by favouring the identification of empathy with higher-level inferential empathy, Stein points out that this distinction is improper, as empathy is one type of act:

thinking of Nature as an animated whole where man is harmoniously immersed in a universal “feeling-with”: this is the case in the *Effusions from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk* (1797), in which Wackenroder speaks of the capacity to empathize with all foreign beings; it is also the case in *The Disciples of Sais* (1798), in which Novalis states that one cannot understand nature unless one mixes with all natural beings, almost feeling oneself within each of them. Herder, in his short 1778 treatise on *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* invites us to grasp the harmony of the cosmos and its creatures, the life that feels life.

¹⁶ From a representationalist point of view, internal cognitive mechanisms such as a “theory of mind” enable an observer to “mentalise” or “mind-read”, i.e. to infer others’ hidden states of mind. Fuchs explains that «Regardless of whether these mechanisms are described as akin to a scientific “theory” or rather as a mental “simulation” routine this general framework has mostly remained true to its origins in classical cognitivism and representationalism (Baron-Cohen et al. (1985), Stich and Nichols (1991), Carruthers and Smith (1996))».

Emotional reasons should not cause us to separate what essentially belongs together. The comprehension of foreign experiences – be they sensations, feelings, or what not – is a unified, typical, even though diversely differentiated modification of consciousness and requires a uniform name.¹⁷

Consistently with these assumptions – empathy can also be non-inferential and it generally presents itself as one single act – Stein observes that this experience also involves living beings that are not human beings:

The type “human physical body” does not define the limits of the range of my empathic objects, more exactly, of what can be given to me as a living body.¹⁸

The sensory level of empathic experience, then, also concerns what Stein defines as “the phenomena of life” and it includes growth, development and ageing, health and sickness, vigour and sluggishness. It is shared by all living beings.

We not only see such vigor and sluggishness in people and animals, but also in plants. Empathic fulfilment is also possible here.¹⁹

According to Stein, the recognition of the phenomena of life takes place – just like the recognition of sensations more generally – through empathy: «I see no possibility of detaching the phenomena of life from the individual’s other constituents or of exhibiting anything but an empathic comprehension of them»²⁰. Stein argues that I do not have any right to ascribe an “awake” “I” to the plant, or a reflective consciousness of its feelings of life. A plant is not the centre of orientation of the spatial world nor voluntarily mobile, even though it is capable of alive movement, by contrast to the inorganic. Nevertheless, the absence of this constitution does not justify us in “interpreting what is present in a new way and distinguishing the phenomena of life in plants from our own”.

The experience of other’s sensations is thus emerges as the basic level of empathy. It allows us – without the need for other levels of the empathic act – to recognize who or what is another sentient being.

¹⁷E. Stein (1989), p. 60.

¹⁸*Ibid.* p. 59.

¹⁹*Ibid.* p. 69.

²⁰*Ibid.* p. 68.

2.3 Sensory experiences can be “personal”

The idea that empathy should be considered fully expressive in a social encounter only in the presence of inferential and mental states is one of the consequences of the predominant theories of emotions, which describe them as private mental states²¹. But, as Fuchs reminds us, we should abandon the idea that emotions are only “mental” phenomena: the introjection of feelings into an inner “psyche” is a vestige of Platonic and, later, Cartesian dualism. So, in most everyday situations, we do not use introspection, simulation practices or inferences when interacting with others. On the contrary, through an act of empathy we perceive their intentions and emotions in their expressive behaviour in relation to a significant context. Thus, empathy is based on the perception of the bodily presence of the other and may require inference in difficult or problematic situations²². Even if the intersubjective experience is sensory, it is to a large extent shaped by one’s individual life as well as cultural background.

From early childhood on, patterns of interaction with others are sedimented in the infant’s implicit or bodily memory, resulting in what may be called intercorporeal memory.

In addition, developmental psychology studies show that empathy is based on an intercorporeal memory or a pre-reflective relational knowledge of how to interact with others: «in each social encounter, both partners unconsciously re-enact a history of embodied socialization and relationships that have shaped their styles of interaction, their empathic skills and intuitions, as well as their class- and culture-specific habitus»²³.

I would add that also from this point of view Stein’s studies have anticipated many of the current researches in cognitive science and analytical philosophy, and specifically in the assignment of fundamental importance to affectivity as concerns perception, knowledge and action²⁴. Like Fuchs’, Stein’s thought is based on the conviction that sensory experiences have an autonomous value that guides social interaction. For Stein, “sensual feelings”, even though they have not yet reached the full cognitive level of evaluation, open up a type of evaluation of the present state of the organism and of the context that surrounds

²¹ See Solomon R. (1976), Lyons W. (1980), Nussbaum M. (2001).

²² Gallagher S. (2008).

²³ Fuchs, T. (2017), p. 19.

²⁴ See for example Colombetti, G. (2014), *The feeling body: Affective science meets the enactive mind*. Cambridge. MIT Press.

it. Moreover, they can represent real pre-reflective moral feelings, also guiding my action, for example in relation to the case of the bodily expression of suffering of a person in front of me.²⁵

2.4 Personal “higher-level” empathy is based on sensual empathy

In relation to the difference between sensual empathy and inferential empathy, as Fuchs recalls, the embodied and enactive concepts of pre-reflective empathy and intercorporeality do not exhaust the possibilities of empathic understanding and intersubjectivity:

On the basis of primary bodily empathy, we are also able to explicitly represent, to imagine or to question the other’s situation. [...] Through additional information and inference, we can then try to enhance our understanding, infer possible hidden intentions and in this way often deepen our empathy. A further possibility is to transpose oneself into the other’s situation and imagine how one would feel or react in his place.²⁶

Such higher-level forms of social understanding develop later in life, mainly from the 2nd to the 4th year. Knowledge about others that is based on language and narrative reports plays a crucial role for these later stages of intersubjectivity.²⁷

As Fuchs recalls, though, sophisticated cognitive capacities are neither necessary nor sufficient to enable empathic intersubjective relations: «despite those later developments, our everyday social understanding remains based on embodied intersubjectivity, which is to say on intercorporeal.²⁸

Even when it comes to the subject of the difference between empathic acts, Fuchs’ position can be read as a development of that of Stein. As we have seen, according to Stein, the fundamental level of the empathic act is sensory. This means that the bodily empathy process is at

²⁵ As F. Svenaeus (2018) explains, also relevant moral feelings are already at work in sensual empathy: «the bodily expressions of the other person draw me into her presence and by way of this process I not only attend to but also spontaneously follow her experiences through. This means that if the other is suffering in front of me, I will acknowledge this in the manner of feeling along with her and will possibly also sympathize with her and attempt to help her as a result of this».

²⁶ Fuchs T. (2017), p. 19.

²⁷ Gallagher & Hutto (2008).

²⁸ Fuchs (2017), p. 19.

work in all cases of empathy and that in some of these cases empathy may also stop at step one. According to Stein, despite the possibility of adding inferential knowledge about the state of oneself and of the empathic object, empathy in all forms has a sensory basis.

3. Intercorporeality as a biocentric bodily intertwining

3.1 Phenomenology and the scientific and cultural dualisms of Western societies: a way to regain access to pre-reflective experience

Fuchs states that phenomenology has the ability to offer a way out of the scientific and cultural aporias of Western societies.

Granted, the rise of dualism and individualism in Western societies has also changed our subjective experience to a significant degree. The way we conceive of our emotions and of our body certainly influences our affective and bodily self-awareness, at least on the conscious level [...]. Phenomenology precisely offers a way to regain access to this pre-reflective dimension of experience, namely through methodically “bracketing” our culture-bound and science-based assumptions about the nature and causes of affective experience²⁹.

In particular, I believe that the new consolidated attribution to social encounters of characteristics such as pre-reflectivity, bodily resonance and intuitive reciprocity, but also the fundamental importance of embodied experiences as concerns perception, knowledge and action, should make it possible to take a step toward the overcoming of other Cartesian vestiges in our narratives. But a model of embodied intersubjectivity that does not describe the mutual incorporation between human beings and other living beings is precisely another anthropocentric model, because it fails to recognize that an empathic and emotional inter-bodily pre-reflective space is shared by all living bodies. Phenomenology and enactivism have overcome the opposition between mind and body and between self and other, thus creating the conditions to dismantle even the Western ontological and affective dichotomy between human beings and life forms, but they have yet to reach a genuine perspective of a biocentric intercorporeality.

²⁹ Fuchs (2013), p. 225.

3.2 The inclusion of the fundamental biocentric level in intercorporeality

In the previous sections I have investigated the relationship between bodily empathy and the theme of intercorporeality. I now wish to suggest that empathy, at its fundamental and primary level, can be interpreted as the very experience of the existence of an intercorporeal relationship. In the empathetic act one can grasp in an embodied and not inferential way that the other is a lived body like oneself and this sensory recognition is exactly the experience of the reciprocal incorporation characteristic of intercorporeality.

According to Stein, the objects of sensual empathy include also animals and plants. We can therefore speak of an empathic inter-bodily resonance that involves all living forms. Stein further claims that a life form is a lived body: if intercorporeality consists of embodied subjectivities, it must also include non-human subjectivities.

Two possible objections to the inclusion of non-human living beings within the ontology of intercorporeality could be put forward: empathy for animals and plants is different from empathy for human beings; animals and plants are lived bodies ontologically different from those of human beings. But we have already seen, with Stein, how both these theses must be rejected: empathy is one single act and the phenomena of life in life forms cannot be distinguished from our own.

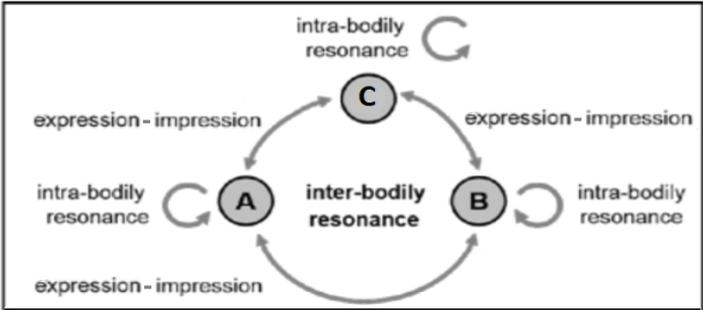
From an ontological point of view, a *Leib* thus no longer represents a human being, but the physiological body, with the power to respond to other bodies and to resonate with things simply through sensory and vital feelings³⁰.

Therefore, I propose that the concept of intercorporeality be extended to include empathic biocentric dimensions. This extension responds to

³⁰ The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that non-human living beings can be appropriately defined as “objects” of empathic experience / as lived bodies and hence the need to extend intercorporeality. The first result is achieved starting from Stein’s studies. For reasons of space, I cannot provide a more detailed discussion of the different levels of empathy / the lived body within sensual empathy or between sensual and inferential empathy. For an in-depth study, see for example San Martín J. Pintos Peñaranda M. L. (2001) or Di Martino C. *Soggettività animali? La concezione fenomenologica dell’animalità in Edmund Husserl in Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia*, vol. 4, 2013, pp. 22-48. San Martín and Peñaranda recall how, according to Husserl, we are able to experience the animality of other animals through empathy and that we perceive them as being, like us, “subjects of a life of consciousness” – subjects who have, in a certain manner, «a “surrounding world” given to them as their world in ontic certainty» (Hua 15, p. 177).

Thompson’s request in relation to the need for a new taxonomy of empathy and intersubjectivity. The model of intercorporeality – which presupposes that social encounters are determined at a fundamental level by embodied interactions – offers the opportunity for a correct interpretation and enhancement of the effective ontological and affective interdependence of all living beings.

Intercorporeality already provides a perspective able to hold together the individual lived bodies of human beings, but without falling into any ontological or affective dualistic perspective. Now we should push this concept beyond the boundary of anthropocentrism. If the phenomenological discussion of this concept has dismantled the mind-body and self-other dichotomies, this concept can now serve to overcome the last remaining Cartesian vestige in our narratives, the dualism between the human body and the body of life forms.



The extension of mutual incorporation and inter-bodily resonance to all lived bodies (A-self, B-other, C-non-human lived bodies).

4. Applications and future developments of the concept of biocentric intercorporeality

In what follows, I will briefly introduce some possible fields of application of my argument.

A new taxonomy of empathy: towards a multi-dimensional and intra-connected model. Empathy should be understood as the feeling of intercorporeality in itself and as “regional” empathies, in the sense of empathies that are perceptually, but not ontologically, diversified. I can focus my empathic attention on the whole body (on intercorporeality), or on a part of it (on the self,

on others or on non-human living beings), through “regional” acts of empathy. Moreover, a correct multi-dimensional and intra-connected phenomenological model of empathy must detect its relationship to corporeity as a whole or to regional bodily otherness, but also their interdependence. My proposal is to consider this interrelation in terms of conditions of possibility and quality. We know that empathy for the other also depends on the capacity of the subject to access his own feelings and emotions: if the subject has difficulty recognizing himself as a sentient body, his empathy for the other will also be limited. Coherently with an antidualistic and interrelated phenomenological approach, as self-empathy is a condition of possibility and quality for empathy for others, this must also apply to the relationship between the self and non-human living beings. In conclusion, it is necessary for all definitions of the experience of affective life to contain a qualitative reference to the affection of the three intercorporeal othernesses of the self, the other and non-human living beings.

Biocentric intercorporeality and ethical responsibility. We need to develop a new conceptual scheme to highlight the legitimacy and importance of empathically recognizing ourselves, others, and the natural world as “subjects” of experience and feeling (lived body). This is the precondition to feel responsibility towards others and to see them as the goal of our action. Moreover, the concept of intercorporeality could serve to ensure not only a multi-dimensional and extended sense of responsibility, but also an intra-connected relation, according to the idea that my well-being depends on the well-being of the other parts of my (inter)corporeity.

Expanding the study into a interdisciplinary research. I might mention phenomenology, cognitive science, ecological political philosophy, but also the recent scientific hypotheses called “Biophilia”³¹.

As Husserl recalls³², the animals of one species feed on animals of others species and on plants; the very life of men would obviously not be possible without animals and plants. Therefore, directly or indirectly, all species are linked together and constitute «an infinite-total-living being [*ein unendlicher All Lebewesen*], the unity of an animation [*Beseelung*] of nature». For Husserl «single life [*einzel Leben*] is only an “abstraction”»: both animals and men live only as members of the community of all sentient beings. Paraphrasing Husserl,

³¹ The idea that humans have a biologically rooted affinity for the natural world. See Wilson, E.O. (1984), *Biophilia*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

³² Husserl E. Ms. K III 4/34b.

we might say that our disembodied and individualistic life is only a scientific and cultural abstraction, because we only survive if the intra-connected community of all lived bodies survives.

REFERENCES

- Abram, D. (1996) *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World*, Vintage Books: New York.
- Aaltola, E. (2013) Skepticism, Empathy, and Animal Suffering, *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 10:4.
- Baron-Cohen, S., Leslie A. M., Frith U. (1985) Does the autistic child have a “theory of mind”? *Cognition* 21, pp. 37–46.
- Boella, L. (2006) *Sentire l’Altro*, Raffaello Cortina: Milano.
- Carruthers, P. & Smith, P.K. (ed. 1996) *Theories of Theories of Mind*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Depraz, N., Varela, F.J. & Vermersch, P. (2000) The gesture of awareness: an account of its structural dynamics, in *Investigating Phenomenal Consciousness*, ed. Max Velmans .A John Benjamins Publishing: Amsterdam/Philadelphia.
- Depraz, N. (2001) The Husserlian Theory of Intersubjectivity as alterology. Emergent theories and wisdom traditions in the light of genetic phenomenology, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8(5-7):169-178.
- Depraz, N. (2004) Empathy and Compassion as Experiential Praxis. Confronting Phenomenological Analysis and Buddhist Teachings, in *Space, Time, and Culture* pp. 189-200.
- Descartes, R. (1986) *Discourse on Method*, trans. Laurence Lafleur, Macmillan: New York.
- Fuchs, T., De Jaegher H. (2009) Enactive intersubjectivity: participatory sense-making and mutual incorporation, *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, Dec; 8(4):465–86.
- Froese, T., and Fuchs, T. (2012) The extended body: A case study in the neurophenomenology of social interaction, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 11, pp. 205-236.
- Fuchs, T. (2012), The phenomenology of body memory, in Koch S., Fuchs T., and Müller C. (eds.) *Body memory, Metaphor and Movement*, pp. 9-22, John Benjamins: Amsterdam.
- Fuchs, T. (2013) Depression, Intercorporeality and Interaffectivity, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 20, No. 7–8, pp. 219–38.

- Fuchs, T. (2017) Intercorporeality and interaffectivity, in: Meyer C, Streeck J, Jordan S, editors. *Intercorporeality: emerging socialities in interaction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; pp. 3–24.
- Fuchs, T. (2018) *Ecology of the brain. The phenomenology and biology of the embodied mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fuchs, T. (2019) The Interactive Phenomenal Field and the Life Space: A Sketch of an Ecological Concept of Psychotherapy, in *Psychopathology* 52(2), pp. 67-74.
- Gallagher, S. (1997) Mutual enlightenment: recent phenomenology and cognitive science, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 4 (3), pp. 195–214.
- Gallagher, S. (2008) Direct perception in the intersubjective context, *Consciousness and Cognition*, 17, pp. 535-543.
- Gallagher, S., Hutto D. (2008) Understanding others through primary interaction and narrative practice, In: Zlatev, J., Racine, T. P., Sinha, C., Itkonen, E. (eds). *The shared mind: perspectives on intersubjectivity*, pp. 17-38. John Benjamins: Amsterdam.
- Goldman, A. (1995b) In defense of the simulation theory, in Davies & Stone, *Phenomenology*, 31, pp. 116–30.
- Husserl, E. (1960) *Cartesian meditations*, Transl. D. Cairns, M. Nijhoff: The Hague.
- Husserl, E. (1973) *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität I, II, & III*. (Husserliana Vols. 13, 14, & 15.) ,Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague.
- Lyons W. (1980) *Emotion*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith Routledge: London.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) The Philosopher and his Shadow, In *Signs* trans. R. McCleary, pp. 159–181, Northwestern University Press: Evanston.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*, rans. A. Lingis, Northwestern University Press: Evanston.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2001) *Upheavals of thought. The intelligence of emotions*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge UK.
- Pinotti, A. (2011) Questione di carattere. Empatia, espressione, analogia. *Rivista di Estetica*, 48.
- J. San Martín, M. L. Pintos Peñaranda, (2001) Animal Life and Phenomenology, *The Reach of Reflection. Issues for Phenomenology's Second Century*, Edition: Electronic,

Chapter: 15, Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, ed. S. Crowell, L. Embree, Samuel J. Julian, pp. 342-363.

Solomon, R. (1976) *The passions*, Anchor/Doubleday: New York.

Stein. E. (1989) *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. Watraut Stein, ISCPublishing: Washington.

Stich, S., Nichols S. (1991) *Folk psychology: Simulation or tacit theory*, Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, NJ.

Thompson, E. (2001) Empathy and Consciousness, in *Between Ourselves: Second-person Issues in the Study of Consciousness*, E. Thompson, Imprint Academic: Thorverton.

Wallace, B.A. (1999) The Buddhist tradition of Samatha: Methods for refining and examining consciousness, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Imprint Academic, 6 (2-3), pp. 175-87.

Wallace, B.A. (2001) Intersubjectivity in indo-tibetan buddhism, In E. Thompson (ed.), *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Imprint Academic, 8(5-7), pp. 209-230.

Zahavi, D. (2001) Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity, in *Between Ourselves: Second-person Issues in the Study of Consciousness*, E. Thompson, Imprint Academic: Thorverton.