Life beyond Individuality: A-subjective Experience in Pregnancy

Jonna Bornemark

Birth has most often been seen as the starting-point for the living being, and human life has in modern times been understood as the autonomous life of the subject, and intersubjectivity as an encounter between two grown-up human beings. Taking pregnancy into account changes all of these Western philosophical presumptions, and so in the following I want to ask some central questions. Can we reach a-subjective experiences in pregnancy and in the life of the foetus or infant? If so, how are they structured and what are their relations to (inter)subjectivity? How can we understand the formation of subjectivity from a starting point in a-subjective life? And how can we understand subjectivity and a-subjectivity beyond a binary division between the two?

Methodology

Investigating a-subjectivity is no easy task. The experience of the foetus withdraws from our investigations and every experience of pregnancy has its own character. So how could we ever reach a layer of pre-subjectivity in the foetus, or a-subjectivity within the already constituted subjectivity of the pregnant woman? As discursive beings, within language, we are already constituted subjects. Defined in this way one could say that writing and talking about an a-subjective layer is exactly what is impossible. On the other hand, to talk about what withdraws from subjectivity as the presupposition for subjectivity, hasn’t that always been a central task for philosophy? In trying to touch upon these questions I will mix three philosophical approaches: a phenomenological, a psychoanalytical, and a Deleuzian. The phenomena of pregnancy might also be an area where these approaches can come into dialogue with each other.
My starting point is phenomenological, and if this means starting in first-person experience, the experience of the foetus and the infant is deeply problematic as it withdraws from description and can’t be discursively communicated. Few phenomenologists have dared to touch upon this theme, since it is so alien and lies beyond experience as we know it. In order to go there we need to get outside of a first-person perspective. It is not a pure transcendental phenomenology, since it includes an analysis of specific experiences, but at the same time these specific experiences tell us something about the genesis of all experiencing and subjectivity. The specific experiences of pregnancy and infancy become a means to reaching a layer present in every subjectivity. In this respect, the analysis of pregnancy and infancy has a stronger resemblance to Heidegger’s discussion on anxiety than to what Husserl called positive science.¹

In order to reach the evasive experience of the foetus and infant, Gail Soffer has argued that we can use some empirical data and observations of others in order to find “likely stories.” We can use empirical research as material, but in order to understand it as a living reality we need to add a certain kind of meditation, not very far from Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, in which we use imagination, memories, and sensations in order to understand a certain kind of phenomena or experiences.²

Having a starting point in experience is crucial to phenomenology, but it can also be a strait-jacket if we would restrict phenomenology to experiences of an already constituted human subject, making everything that falls outside of this scope inaccessible to phenomenology. In this case phenomenology could only contribute with a limited and twisted philosophy, and it could only discuss life and being very partially. But this has been the case neither in early nor in contemporary phenomenology. Since Descartes, making subjectivity the starting point is supposed to be a safe haven, but one does not need to be a psychoanalyst to acknowledge that we do not know ourselves and that subjectivity is not fully transparent to itself—this is in fact one central lesson that phenomenology teaches us. Instead phenomenology constantly finds that life and being overflow the conscious self and that there is no such safe haven. I would also argue that neither is there any

¹ There is also within phenomenology a tradition of a-subjective phenomenology, most explicit in Eugen Fink and Jan Patocka, but this is not the place to examine their philosophies further.

total inaccessibility—at least, not if philosophy is allowed to go outside of a purely cognitive rationality. Only in a philosophy thatformulates subjectivity as a safe haven can there be any total inaccessibility, as full transparency on one side and radical alterity on the other tend to presuppose each other. Instead, thinking in different ways can reach the multitude of being and life, but without making the positivist mistake to believe that thinking at once can control and fully embrace life. On the contrary, life and being ground thinking which makes it possible for thinking to move around within it—and this makes all the difference. The borders between subjectivity and a-subjectivity are points of contact, open to be investigated, rather than fixed borders that cannot be crossed.

_Philosophy and pregnancy_  

One way to investigate the limit between experiences of an already constituted subject and a-subjectivity is through an analysis of the phenomena of pregnancy. In this phenomenon we encounter both a grown-up subject, the mother to be, and a pre-subjectivity, the foetus. Very little has been written on this topic, for several reasons. The subject involved is not a subject that historically has been active in philosophy: not only is the subject a woman, but a woman involved in procreation. Women have rarely had the chance to be heard within philosophy, and once they have been given that chance they often have had to refrain from having children (and this is still often the case). The focus on birth as the starting point for intellectual life also expelled pregnancy and the life of the foetus to a purely biological sphere without philosophical interest.

In the feminist tradition pregnancy has often been seen as crucial to the subordination of women. Pregnancy binds the woman to biology and to being a passive vessel (this would be the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir, for example); for the active philosophizing subject, pregnancy is rather a hindrance than an advantage. But as Myra Hird states, what Beauvoir understood as a hindrance can be understood as an advantage to feminists of today. Whereas Beauvoir fought for recognition of women as independent, autonomous subjects, later feminists have questioned the whole focus on autonomous individuality. And in the quest for exploring life beyond autonomy, the phenomenon of pregnancy provides us with a rich material. But even so, there is still a hesitation to analyse pregnancy, because of its strong socio-cultural association with biological determinism. In the Deleuzian tradition it has thus mainly been brought up in relation to cross-boundary practices and in analyses of socio-cultural aspects.
bodily ones. Bracha Ettinger argues that this avoidance of the female body and bodily experiences limits our understanding of the human being and paves the way for a phallic understanding of life. As we will see, she wants to broaden the analysis of the human through theorizing life in pregnancy and infancy.

To reach the phenomena of a-subjectivity in pregnancy I will draw on material from a rich variety of sources. My starting-point is phenomenological, in the works of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gail Soffer, but also in my own experiences from pregnancy and childbirth. But this will be complemented with Deleuzian discussions by Myra Hird and Margit Schildrick, Bracha Ettinger’s psychoanalytical work (which is also Deleuze-inspired), and scientific research on the foetus.

I will investigate the phenomena of pregnancy and infancy through three approaches: from the point of view of the foetus, from the point of view of the mother, and as a-subjective life. In the first two approaches the limit of personal experience is investigated: in the first one where subjectivity grows forth, and in the second one where a-subjectivity announces itself in the midst of subjectivity. In the third approach, a-subjectivity is considered in relation to life rather than to personal experience.

A-subjective experience in the foetus and infant

A Husserlian analysis

How is experience structured in the uterine life? Let us use the knowledge we have in combination with some imagination. We have all been there, but no one can remember it as it is before subjectivity and before any self-consciousness.

Here too there are perceptions and sensations; empirical research shows that the existence in the womb includes the growth of perception starting from the age of a few weeks. But perception is here of another character.

---


Vision is less important, and hearing takes precedence. There is taste and smell (of the amniotic fluid)—but not connected to feelings of hunger.⁵

There are no objects in the sense of autonomous and thematized “things” that are identified as one and the same in the stream of perceptions. The perceptions are thus not understood as belonging to objects, but flow in a stream, intertwined with other perceptions. These perceptions also linger, in what Husserl calls retention: i.e. non-thematized memories. As retentions they linger and affect the following experiences.⁶ The layers of perception are still few, and each moment is more filled by its presence than by earlier perceptions or expected later perceptions. Patterns are formed through what Husserl called passive synthesis, in which layers of experiences through retention are put on top of each other and form patterns.⁷ Some of these patterns are continually there: the rhythm of the mother breathing, of her heartbeats, of the foetus’s heartbeats, and more sporadically of the mother’s intestines. These rhythms are felt and heard in a perception where touching and hearing are not separated. Every sound or pulsation is also magnified through the amniotic fluid. The kinaesthetic feeling of movement is not yet connected to movement in a world, and there are no bodies experienced as entities that would be held together, neither of the self nor of others. Instead there are a lot of motions going on, though these are not yet separated into inner and outer.

These motions are nevertheless different in kind. There are motions that include a change of position, pulsating motions, and smaller motions of touch. The first two are mostly kinaesthetic, engaging an “all,” whereas the third rather forms an interplay between parts. The third kind of motion includes the difference between touching oneself and touching the womb or placenta (or a possible twin). Even if there is no face-to-face meeting with another person, this is a central experience in order for alterity to be developed later on. But in the intrauterine experience the differences between

---


touching oneself and touching the womb or placenta are probably not yet filled with “alterity”—i.e. an unknown other side—as this demands a quite high level of abstract thinking. (Although there might be a kind of fantasy that mixes retentions with present sensations.) Different kinds of movements are rather parts of one stream of life that appears in manifold ways. Later on, one will find oneself in the midst of all these motions and enlarge the difference between them, as part of a world-self-other-formation.

This situation can be further understood through Husserl’s analysis of experience as two kinds of intentionalities, which he developed in his analysis of inner time consciousness. Husserl distinguishes between a transverse intentionality and a longitudinal intentionality. Through transverse intentionality, we experience an object as one and the same in many different and overlapping perceptions. The object is also often understood as independent of the one experiencing it, and it can be understood as existing “before” it was anticipated and “after” it left our memory (or retention). Longitudinal intentionality, on the other hand, does not constitute objects, but is present in every transverse intentionality. This intentionality forms the consciousness of the continuity of the movement itself, instead of the continuity of the objects. Through this intentionality, consciousness is aware of its own unit. This unit is not thematized, and thus objectified, or put at distance from itself; rather it is an immediate consciousness that is always present in the background.8 The experience of kinaesthesia is intimately connected to this longitudinal intentionality since the feeling of the living, moving body always is there as a background experience.

The experience of the foetus could be characterized as an experience where transverse intentionality is unusually inactive, and where the longitudinal intentionality is prominent. The kinaesthetic longitudinal intentionality of the foetus includes the rhythms of the mother’s heartbeats and breathings, since these have always been there and are constantly present. These movements affect the foetus that moves with it: what is later understood as inner and outer are thus closely intertwined here. These do not come and go in the experiencing stream, and thus they belong to longitudinal rather than to transverse intentionality. Motions that are constantly there, such as the rhythm of the mothers’ heartbeats or breathing, belong to a longitudinal, kinaesthetic intentionality.

In relation to this, birth is a radical change. It turns out that some of the rhythms that had always been there, of the mother’s heartbeat and breathing, could disappear, whereas others stay (such as the rhythm of one’s own heartbeat). But these rhythms can also—in a new way—come back when one is held close to their mother’s chest. The infant has the retention of the pulsating life in the womb, with its background sounds, motions, etc., that follow their rhythms, which disappeared all of a sudden. Since these sensations put together were not single, exchangeable perceptions, but intertwined with, or part of, the continuity of experience, once they disappeared—even though they partly could come back—continuity itself was split up, opening up into a system. It turned out that life was larger than first experienced, that it expanded and created a space. The intrauterine experience of pulsating, kinaesthetic movement is longitudinal and as such constitutive of life. Experiencing life is what is constantly there. In birth this element of life is broken up and spread out, creating space and world. The world is opened up, so to say, from within, creating room for all the following experiences, which can take place within the element of life.

Birth opens a crack where hunger, breathing, and being held all imply a need for something that can be missing, and a syncretistic sociability, and later on an “outside” and an “inside,” can be developed. In the opening up of space, birth opens a system with different parts. But it is opened up from within the experience of pulsating, continuing life.

After birth it turns out that there could be distance. Experiencing life divides itself into a system with its different parts and the possibility of distance and lack is unfolded. Later on it shows pockets of inaccessible life, what we call “the others’ experiences.” It also turns out that life can be shared between two and within a multitude. But the very first experiencing of pulsation stays as a horizontal consciousness in which we live together. After birth pre-subjectivity is distributed into a life with different poles that can be developed into an ego-pole and m/other-pole: i.e., subjectivities.

*Ettinger’s matrixial analysis*

The experience of pre-subjectivity has also been investigated by the artist and psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettinger, who formulates what she calls a “matrixial” that binds subjectivity to pre-subjectivity. She argues that subjectivation takes place already in the intrauterine life, but in a different way than after birth. Freud’s and Lacan’s phallic analysis is only applicable after birth and her matrixial subjectivation is informed by touching, hearing, voice, and moving—which all can take place in the womb—instead of ero-
genous zones of one’s own body. This subjectivation includes a co-emerging of I and non-I, which is prior to an I that is in opposition to the other and relates to the other as an object. There is here a transforming borderspace of encounter between the emerging I and the uncognized, neither rejected nor fused non-I. To a certain extent what she calls matrixial sphere, or a part of it, can be understood as the subjectivizing process of longitudinal intentionality—a kinesthesis without opposition between self and other. A transverse intentionality can, on the other side, be related to a phallic order with its cognition of objects.

Ettinger describes how intrauterine life is characterized by hearing rather than by sight. In contrast to sight, hearing is not built upon distance and does not separate the hearer from the sound in the same way as the seen is separated from the seer, but nevertheless there are two co-subjects involved in this phenomenon, two that are border-linked by frequencies, waves, resonance, and vibrations. They share and are shared by the same vibrating and resonating environment, where the inside is outside and the outside is inside. The borderline between I and non-I as co-poietic poles of the same vibrating string are transformed into a threshold and transgressed.

There are a series of motions that carry I and non-I alike, separated only through a difference between the smaller motions of touching oneself and touching the other. In this stream of life there are no clear borders between different senses; the acoustic is entwined with touch, touch with movement, and all these with fluctuations of light and darkness.

In the matrixial late-prenatal period, when fluctuations of light and darkness accompany a touching-in-separating movement within the shadowy, palpable world of the visible and invisible, pre-subject and pre-object intersect and imprint poietic, archaic traces in a web that is plural-several from the outset. This process involves imprinting, and being imprinted by, a pre-other, or archaic non-I—the m/Other.

This sensitivity is intertwined with affection. Compassion, in Ettinger’s analysis, is an originary psychic manner of accessing the other, and in relation to the foetus she often writes it with a hyphen, as com-passion, in

---

9 Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 47, 63.
10 Ibid., 185.
11 Ibid., 186.
pointing out that this is a way to relate and being together without having an other as an object, and without an I. Com-passion here is an interest in sensitivity and what comes about in this sensitivity, and an “I want this to be” that can be understood as a primary love. She also formulates the inter-twinement between emotion and sensitivity as a capacity to feel-know the m/Other and the world. This “feel-knowing” is not structured in subject-object relations, but of, by and in the other. Ettinger describes the difference between the experiences of the foetus and the constituted subjectivity in the following way: “Primary compassion directs a touching gaze to eternity and to the Cosmos while mature compassion is already interconnected to responsibility. Compassion is a primordial way of knowing.” Eternity should here not be understood as a harmonious whole, but rather as an experience where strict borders between the knower / feeler, and the known / felt is only about to take form, but not yet fixated.

The feel-knowing is also a capacity to respond, what Ettinger calls a co-response-ability where one part of the system responds to other parts as a com-passionate affective, psychic, and mental resonance chamber. There are no distinct borders between oneself and the other in this experience, but there is what she calls an almost otherness and a proximity rather than co-presence. In this there is a response-ability before there is someone being responsible for someone, and there is com-passion before there is someone having compassion for someone else.

Just as with the longitudinal, kinaesthetic experience, these are experiences within which different subjectivities can be developed. I would understand the primary love as the emotion-side of the longitudinal kinaesthetic consciousness, and response-ability as a way to formulate motion as interplay (the third kind of motion above). And just like in the Husserlian analysis, this opens up an area within which knowledge, self, and otherness can take place. Compassion and response-ability thus grow out of feeling and sensing as an intertwined capacity and the capacity to respond in an intertwined nexus. These capacities stay with the developed individual as an

---

13 Ibid., 128.
14 Ibid., 111.
unconscious basis. It is from this basis that the possibility of empathy, economy of exchange, response-ability, cognition and recognition arise.\textsuperscript{15}

Ettinger states that it is central to take such a pre-subjectivity into account, and that many problems in psychoanalysis can be traced back to being blind to pre-subjectivity as an archaic, unconscious basis. In a similar way she wants to point to com-passion as a deeper layer in Levinas’s philosophy, a layer that grounds responsibility.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Chiasmic intertwinement}

This intertwined nexus could be further understood from a starting point in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, through which the intrauterine experience can be described as a chiasmic structure. Merleau-Ponty describes the close intertwinement between seeing and the seen, feeling and the felt, etc. These two sides belong together and cannot be separated into a seeing individual and something seen, as if the seen would exist without the seeing, and the seeing without the seen. These are instead two sides of one and the same element: the flesh. Everything sensing and sensible belongs to this element. It is an element we take part of and which is the presupposition for every sensible being as well as for everything sensible. But there is also a radical difference between these two intertwined sides: what is sensing cannot at the same time be sensed; that is, it can be sensed the moment after it has been sensing (as when one hand senses the other, and then reverses the roles) but it cannot be sensed \textit{in its} sensing. The necessity of two separated sides as a starting point is also why birth is so important to Merleau-Ponty: it is only after birth that the human body is both visible and seeing.\textsuperscript{17}

Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on birth has been criticized by Francine Wynn. She nevertheless points out that his philosophy is an important starting point for understanding the experience of the foetus. Following her lead we can understand birth as a radicalization of the intertwinement where the two sides of sensibility are further separated; yet, in the womb a closer intertwinement can be found. Merleau-Ponty’s overemphasis on birth also indicates an overemphasis on sight. As we have seen, there is in

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{16} Ettinger even discusses this in a dialogue with Levinas where it becomes clear that he cannot follow her into pre-subjectivity, see “‘What would Eurydice say?’ Emmanuel Levinas in conversation with Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger,” \textit{Athena} 1 (2006).
the uterine life hearing and sounds of different characters, but no experience of sound as pointing toward something else from which the sounds originate. In this experience sound and hearing are more closely intertwined, as they are not understood as belonging to another or oneself. There are sounds and there are hearing, and these are two sides of one and the same stream that is not split up into different individuals. Wynn formulates it as a flexing towards each other including a sedimented complex of senses.\(^\text{18}\) As we have seen, this is especially the case in movement. Nevertheless, it is central to Wynn that the intertwining between foetus and mother also includes an independence of the two sides. I think independence is too strong a word here; rather I think that Wynn points toward the particularity of the foetus, which is developed already in the womb in a chiasmic intertwining with the mother.

According to Merleau-Ponty, life in the womb involves an opening of a dimension than can never be closed, even though the refinement of this only happens after birth.\(^\text{19}\) Wynn builds on the field of newborn and infant research and claims that the refinement also takes place before birth; she formulates this in the following way:

> the pre-infants ‘innate’ particularities become enfleshed in the womb; through a chiasmic interlacing his preferences or dispositions for lying, sucking, pushing, burping, kicking, stretching, resting, touching, cringing, relaxing, seeking contact become to be specified.”\(^\text{20}\)

There is thus at birth already a history of experiences, which have figured a certain predisposition: that is, as noted above, there is retention and passive synthesis. Many mothers also testify to a continuity between the behaviour in the womb and after birth, certain times of the day when the baby is more active, degree of physical activity, etc.

The intertwined relationship also includes an opening up of sociality. We have already pointed out that different kinds of touching open up the difference between feeling one’s own body and other bodies. Wynn also points out that the soothing effect of the sound of the mother’s heartbeats,


\(^{19}\) Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” 151.

\(^{20}\) Wynn, “The Early Relationship of Mother and Pre-infant,” 10.
and the positive reaction infants show to the mother’s voice, indicate an emerging sociality with intertwined emotions. In the light of the earlier Husserlian analysis, there are differences which prepare for sociality in uterine life, but the social space is only opened up through birth where parts of the pulsating system are thrown away—but also could come back. Like Ettinger, Wynn also points out that emotions not should be understood as a separate layer to perception, instead every perception is mooded. 21 Fundamental dimensions of sociality, motility, and perception are thus opened up in this prenatal time. This “opening up” includes a close proximity, intertwinement, and mutual dependence not only between the two sides of sensibility (sensed and sensing), but also between perception and emotion. There is difference in uterine life, but this difference is without established limits; instead it is establishing limits, it is “limit-drawing.” This limit-drawing character shows life as pre-subjective, but it also shows that as soon as life takes form limits are drawn, limits that are the presupposition for subjectivity.

Even if Merleau-Ponty might overemphasize birth, his description of infancy contributes to an understanding of how pre-subjectivity becomes subjectivity. He describes infancy as having a character of an anonymous collectivity, which he understands as the first phase of experience, from which distinct individuals grow forth. In relation to the Husserlian analysis, this group-life is the result of the space-creating event of exploding longitudinal kinesthesia. There is still one life, but with its different parts. Merleau-Ponty also points out that this process is never finalized: we are never totally distinct from each other but, it could be added, continue to live in the same element of pulsating life. 22 In line with this Merleau-Ponty describes the psyche as a relation to the world rather than as an inner phenomenon. And as a relation to the world, it is not something private, since the world is exactly what is not private. The body, and thus kinaesthesia, is not a bundle of private sensations, but a corporeal schema and a position in a world: and the world is a situation rather than a content. This structure of the world is more obvious in the experience of the infant than in adult perception. In this relation there is a self-pole and an other-pole in a flowing exchange of meaningful gestures and situations. This meaningfulness comes before cognitive content and concepts; it is a bodily,

21 Ibid., 11.
perceiving, and emotional attunement in a sharing of experience before communication. It is only from this starting point that language can arise, which, as Eva-Maria Simms points out, also includes a repression of the vital stratum as a global and uncategorized lived experience. In this way a preverbal intelligence, a longitudinal intentionality, is the forgotten stratum of higher cognitive functions.23

In accordance with psychological research of his time, Merleau-Ponty points out that the very first experiences of the infant do not include control over the perception and thus display no organized experience of the world. The world is not yet a world and it is not yet inhabited by different persons: it is, for example, not a parent as an individual that is leaving the room, but a safe and well-known smell, face and touch, through which an experience of incompleteness appears. The child does not experience a self, but rather a system where certain parts can leave and others cannot. “System” should here be understood as an organic whole, a continuum with different parts that belong together, without sharp limits. This system includes among other things motility and perception, which are intimately connected—a connection that is explored and through which a world can grow. A movement in one part of the system is also often mimicked by another part, an operation that leads to new perceptions. Empathy grows out of this overlapping of perception and motility, “the other” lives in “one’s own” bodily movements and “I” am totally present in the emotion in the other’s face.24

The child does not distinguish herself as one part of the system, rather her attention moves around in the system. The system can thus also be understood as a situation. Without an ego and a fixed perspective of their own, the child identifies with the whole situation. In role playing children can move between different roles, since they understand the situation and do not identifies with specific people within it. Merleau-Ponty calls this kind of experience syncretistic sociability, which, we could note, is a kind of pre-subjectivity. This sociability never fully leaves us; feelings and experiences that we can have as adults are traces of this way of being. Adults too can sometimes have difficulties remembering if an event was really one’s own experience or that of one’s sibling. In a similar way, Merleau-Ponty understands jealousy as a way of not being able to distinguish between one-

self and the other, but instead to seek to take over the life of the other as one’s own life. In love also there is a communal situation where it sometimes can be difficult to distinguish between individuals. All these examples show that we continue to live in a shared space of exploded life.

Merleau-Ponty gets his material from the psychoanalytical tradition as he states that it is the mirror-stage that breaks up the syncretistic sociability and gives way to a growing subjectivity. The visual image of the body reveals an unexpected isolation of one’s own body, and in the prolongation also of the self, and thus also of other selves. The objectification of the body reveals it as separate, and thus also the other person as separate. The mirror-image turns the child away from its immediate reality of lived experience: it “turns the child away from what he effectively is, in order to orient himself toward what he sees and imagines himself to be.” After this the child belongs in two places: one where the tactile, kinaesthetic and interoceptive body is situated, and one where it is visible. The child looks into the mirror and sees the image over there, but feels their body over here. It is crucial for Merleau-Ponty to point out that the mirror image is not just an image that plays a role in a private universe, but that it is the image of the other. The child understands in the mirror-stage that this image of their self is connected to the vision of the other person. It is “me” seen from another position in the room, the position of the other person. Therefore the attempt to synthesize these two images of oneself is the attempt to exist together with others. It is from a starting point in this intersubjective structure that the intellect grows forth and the capacity for reflection is born, and it is from here that a more individualistic understanding of oneself and the other can arise. We could add that the position of the other person that the I takes on in the mirror-stage is one possible place in the space of exploded life, and thus not strange to the I, which more and more identifies with only one place in this space.

The full constitution of subjectivity from a pre-subjectivistic sociability is a very complex development, but I would nevertheless like to quickly point toward Gail Soffer’s account of how subjectivity, otherness, and intersubjectivity can arise from what Merleau-Ponty called syncretistic sociality. Soffer notes that the first stage of this is not the absolutely first stage, but

25 Ibid., 143 and 154.
26 Ibid., 146.
27 Ibid., 137.
28 Ibid., 137–139.
only a very early stage, and in the light of the present discussion it is even a quite late stage. She calls this stage “the complementary other,” in which recurrent responsive and complementary sensibility is present: visions, sounds, touches, smells, and tastes that communicate with other experiences, such as feelings of hunger and discomfort. The other, Soffer claims, is at this stage “an emotive being in that it is associated with the emotive states produced in the infant by reaction and contagion.”29 The other is here not differentiated from the self, it is an other that is, with Merleau-Ponty’s formulation, a completion of the system. The shift from the first to the second stage comes through tactile experiences: for example, the difference in sensation for the child when the mother picks up a toy and when the child does it. The increasing control over the body reinforces this difference. In this second step, the other appears as an “introjective other.” The child now has the insight that experience is structured differently in different parts and an “I can” is developed. In the third stage, the other is developed into a “perspectival alter ego”, as the child discovers that we have different perspectives. It never questions whether the other at all is experiencing, rather the other is constituted as the one that experiences differently, from “over there.” In the fourth and last stage, the other is no longer “me as I would be if I was over there”; instead an insight of the radical alterity of the other person emerges, through which the other is individualized. In this way alterity is developed, and the last stage leads to a more advanced subjectivity.

The process of subjectivity is thus a “closing up” and an increasing fixation into one bodily perspective, which goes hand in hand with a radicalization of the other person’s alterity. Only in the third and fourth stage do questions on intersubjectivity—how we can reach the experience of the other person—become urgent. In the terminology of Ettinger, through this process co-response-ability, com-passion, and feel-knowing are transformed into responsibility, love, and cognition.

Pre-subjectivity involves an experience of communicating vessels without any strict borders. The two sides of experience, sensing and sensed, are not fully separated, but belong closely together; one is not possible without the other. Only later are these two sides separated and understood as relating to different entities, one sensing and one sensed, independent of one another: entities that can be experienced through transverse inten-

29 Soffer, “The Other As Alter Ego,” 154.
tionality. The longitudinal intentionality is after birth re-constituted and now provides a self, that which continually is there, *within* the earlier exploded longitudinal intentionality. The early longitudinal kinaesthetic experience includes a pre-subjective experience within which subjectivity can emerge. As such, a space of a-subjectivity continues to work in (inter)-subjectivity.

We have seen how (inter)subjectivity emerges from pre-subjectivity, but in this intertwining there is also an already constituted subjectivity involved: the mother. Let us now see how the relation between subjectivity and a-subjectivity can be understood from her point of view.

**A-subjective experience in the expecting mother**

In pregnancy a-subjectivity can come forth and become a specific experience, one experience among many within the stream of experiences. Since individuality is already developed, a-subjectivity is here part of subjectivity. But a-subjectivity is on the other hand always the background out of which subjectivity can grow. A-subjectivity is always already there, in the background, and thus not foreign to subjectivity.

Even if there is an adult, an already constituted subjectivity, deeply involved in the experience of pregnancy, this experience is almost as difficult to reach as is the experience of the foetus. There is no *one* experience of being pregnant, since constituted subjectivity is multiple and developed into manifold cultures and individuals. Nevertheless, I build upon my own experience as one of these perspectives, and I will only speak about wanted pregnancies that result in an infant.

**An experience of pregnancy and childbirth**

When you are pregnant the world is centred differently: there is a “here” that is intensified. I am no longer directed ahead of myself as always; it is enough to stay right here in order to have the world, to be active and even central in the world. In relation to the outer world the centre of this centre, which is my body, is the womb. This is the area that I protect, that gets all the attention, and where the largest change takes place.

But this is in relation to the surrounding world. To understand what I am in relation to the foetus is a different question. To my foetus, I am the surrounding, a shelter and comfort, but also sensed as resistance to movements. I don’t have an outer limit, since such an outer limit is irrelevant to
the foetus. A space is created between me, as I direct my attention towards the foetus, and the foetus experiencing me (without identifying its experiences). This space is psychic, or rather vital, since the psyche is too individualizing. This space is alive, nurturing, and sensing. It is experiencing, but it doesn’t have a perspective among others in a world which it is part of. There is a “turning inward,” an experience of my body with its different rhythms. But this body is not only mine. We are a system that is alive and experiencing, but where experience is something very different compared to the everyday understanding of experience. On one level we experience the sound of a heartbeat or of breath with two different sets of ears and kinaestheses; on another we experience only pulsations and rhythms that carry. The pulsations carry us; they carry both you and me, and at the same time they carry an “us” who cannot be divided into a “you” and a “me.” There is no mother, since she doesn’t experience any limits in relation to the foetus; at the same time, there is a knowledge of the difference between us, preparing for the experience of being two. If we would need to give the experience of pregnancy a biological location, it would be the placenta—the placenta as nurturing, pulsating and “in-between.” But such a location would be an abstraction or a metaphor for an experience beyond biological concepts.

As pregnant I become more attentive to atmospheres and to the feelings of others. Knowing that there is a foetus in my womb makes me want to communicate with this creature inside: I want to get to know it; I want to know its specificity—that is, know how it differs from other persons. But this is not all that pregnancy makes me attentive to. It also makes me attentive to an increased feeling of what has traditionally been called life, existence, or being. I have an outer experience that is mine and not yours; I don’t have your hearing and sensing. But when I eat, I eat for you, and when I breathe, I breathe for you. I try to understand, but understanding is already at a distance, already in a logic of being two. I am, and we are. I no longer experience this and that. In experiencing you, I experience myself in a new mode, beyond myself.

If everything goes well, this pregnancy ends in giving birth. Just like pregnancy, giving birth is a paradoxical experience: if I try to take control, every kind of control will disappear. If I try to fight or escape pain, I will become tense and pain will increase. Midwives instead advise mothers in labour to work with the pain, to follow, and to let go of the urge for control. Paradoxically, only through letting go can a certain kind of control take place. Only through actively choosing passivity, can one work with and not
against labour pains. Passivity is here not “to do nothing” but to follow what comes from beyond consciousness. I cannot by pure will interrupt what happens, or take a break; neither can I by pure will push ahead. Instead I can only use the breaks that are given, and push when the opportunity is given. I can only be active by an attentive passivity. I would even claim that the opposition between passivity and activity is not in place here; another word is needed, maybe “pactivity.”

If subjectivity includes a certain kind of independence, control, and closeness between will and body, there is in giving birth a touching upon a-subjectivity. The forces that move my body are not only mine, but part of a wave of life that goes through my body: it overwhelms me and the “I” has to work with it. The movement of life is violent and doesn’t really care about me, i.e. about that already constituted subjectivity. It breaks up and redraws the limits, and in this way creates new subjectivities. New forms are shaped, new distinctions are made, and new borders are drawn. In the midst of this violence there is still a small room left for a subjectivity that can think: “This will end. There will be time again.” My subjectivity is not fully erased, but it is drawn toward its limits.

Once I have been so deeply under the power of a-subjective life, I realize how it is always present, how life is continually reshaped. I also realize that my subjectivity, what I understand as myself, owes everything to form-taking, a-subjective life. I am part of this a-subjective, form-taking system, partially reflecting it in a system of knowledge. Coming back from this experience I return to a “myself,” I find again the limits and protect them in order to protect this “us” without a strict separation between “you” and “me.”

After the birth, my centre is suddenly “out there.” We were formed by the same a-subjective force of life. Borders are established, but both of us are formed through the same limit-drawing, form-taking, a-subjective violence. Without fully losing my subjectivity, I am elsewhere.

Analysing this meditation, I would argue that there is in the experience of pregnancy a layer that does not immediately divide us or relate to us as two. It is a kind of kinaesthetic, but without a holding sway, without control. The motion is here only the passivity of the living body. But could the same meditation not be done starting in one’s own, not-pregnant body? Doesn’t it just show a layer of the living body? Yes, but this doesn’t change the fact that this layer of the living body is something that can be shared, and goes beyond us as experiencing individuals. It rather shows that it is a layer that
we all start out with, and that continues to be present within every subjective experience, as discussed earlier.

What I here have tried to describe provides us with an alternative way beyond pregnancy as a private possession of the mother that denies the ontological status of the baby, pure biology beyond experience, or a technological tyranny where the control over pregnancy is given over to technology. Even if Wynn emphasizes the “individuality” of mother and foetus, her Merleau-Ponty-inspired analysis of pregnancy is close to this alternative understanding. Wynn has described it as intertwining and dispossessive: “not a grasping, controlling or owning but an intertwining that overlaps and spreads away, and maintains the individuality of both the partners in the relationship.”\(^{30}\) In this chiasmic interaction both mother and infant are continually modified. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty points out that our senses are glued to that which is sensed. Sensed and sensing are two sides of one and the same element, one and the same vitality. The mother is being touched and touches the touching. As the hand responds to the kicking foot, there is no longer only an experience of one’s own body, instead there is a meeting: the kicking foot is experienced as experiencing. And as an experiencing is experienced, a response is immediately there: the hand that is moved to the belly is probably a universal gesture—there is a response-ability standing by. This response-ability builds upon an indeterminacy and ambiguity in moving/being moved, touching/being touched, seeing/being seen, feeling/being felt.\(^{31}\)

The mother is moving the foetus, it is moving her, and beyond this separation between moving individuals, there is movement. Wynn claims that mothers “becom[e] more sensitive to the very indeterminate dimensions and traits of human existence (which is this existence’s nature-ality) through attuning themselves to their pre-infants, and to their own bodiliness.”\(^{32}\) Instead of focusing on the separation between sensed and sensing, and on the individuality that constantly is formulated in the division included in this activity, there is room for an experience of the closeness and inseparability between the two—or even more: a focus on the common movement, the vitality that is the separating movement.

I would claim that the layer in constituted subjectivity that does not separate me from you, most explicitly so in pregnancy, is the separating

---

\(^{30}\) Wynn, “The Early Relationship of Mother and Pre-infant,” 5.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 13.
movement itself. A-subjectivity is separating and limit-drawing. I am thus not arguing in favour of an area or experience without borders as being a harmonious sphere on its own, instead this communality is the point where we are separated from each other. This line of thinking has its similarity to Ettinger’s claim that “in the matrixial sphere, it is the limit itself that is transformed by events in jointness, turning into a transgressive threshold.”

There is here a differentiating-in-joining, a becoming two through one and the same movement, which it is impossible not to share. The borderline does not function here as a barrier, but as a matrixial swerving and differentiating of affective gestures and transmissive spasms that implicate borderlines as weaving psychic elements and threads that “belong” to several individuals. Ettinger also points out that this does not include a union or symbiosis, but what she calls a field of differential transsubjectivity. In this field there is a certain kind of knowledge, not a cognitive knowledge, but a knowing of the non-I that is a knowing in the non-I. We are both becoming within this limit-drawing motion: becoming means being separated and this in closest interconnection to other becoming beings as the other side of the same movement. Knowledge grows as the separating movement takes place, knowledge about and within the matrix of I and non-I. Non-I is not Other, but the co-emerging partial self and Other. Ettinger concludes that becoming-together thus precedes being-one.

This double becoming includes a “pactivity” (even if Ettinger does not use that word) as subjectivity is being born. A pactivity is present in both mother and foetus as will and control is given: “She is weaving. She is Woven.” This state is in between receiving biology and active self-controlled consciousness. Ettinger therefore claims that experiences concerning the prenatal, the intrauterine, gestation, and pregnancy can deconstruct and dissolve the concept of the unitary separate subject, which she understands as split by the castration mechanism. We can here find a pre-subjectivity, but also a transsubjectivity that accompanies the phallic subjectivity: i.e. an a-subjectivity that remains within subjectivity. Ettinger’s main idea is thus that the matrixial makes it possible to think transmissivity and co-affectivity that supply an apparatus of sense-making.

---

33 Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 178. This point also has its similarity to Jacques Lacan as showed by Bryngelsson in the previous chapter of this book.
36 Ibid., 191–193.
The subjectivity of the mother is also a jointness and proximity to that which will surpass and (hopefully) live once she is gone. Birth includes that the centre of her body suddenly is outside of her. That which is not herself, but closely aligned to her and intertwined at the depth of pre-subjectivity, will live on. The I, as including pre-subjectivity, is thereby spread out in the world. The I is here, on the location of her individual body. But as pre-subjectivity, it is also elsewhere, taking the form of another subjectivity. The matrixial is thus also a relation to the future as that which goes beyond one’s own subjectivity.

What started out as a pre-subjectivity doesn’t disappear when the subject appears, Ettinger instead claims that a transsubjectivity traverses each subject and permeates it. It is an archaic sharing at the bottom of our subjectivity. Ettinger calls this a matrixial eros, through which subjectivity in itself transgresses the individual subject. In this way a matrixial gaze provides us with a larger subjective web. Ettinger claims that female subjects have a double access to this matrixial sphere because of their relation to the womb. The different relations to the matrixial womb are even the origin of the gender difference. Differently structured relations to the womb on one side and the phallus on the other side provide us with two genders. These genders are not biologically determinate, but different symbolical structures. Both sexes experience the womb as an archaic out-site and past-side—out of chronological time as “anterior.” In this experience, it is inaccessible and beyond any subjectivity. But female subjects also experience the womb as an in-side and future-side—as an actual, future, and “posterior” time—whether they are mothers or not. This futurity is, as we have seen, due to the womb’s symbolical relation to the future, as the promise of time beyond—but connected—to myself. According to Ettinger, there is one route through which males can also come in contact with the matrixial: art.

For Ettinger the matrixial gaze doesn’t replace the phallic, but complements it. It provides us with a shared psychic space in which we live and within which we can be separated from each other. The matrixial provides a space for phallic cuts and separations. Ettinger claims that responsibility, choice, and liberty are all phallic notions that require an irreplaceable subject relating to an object. On the other hand, in the shared space of pregnancy there is no subject-object division, but an in-between-ness and

37 Ibid., 104–105.
38 Ibid., 142. Art is a key theme for Ettinger, one that I will not discuss further here.
uncognized co-presence. Instead of cognitive knowledge, there is a “feel-knowing” and a com-passionate knowledge. She formulates this state in the following way: “I and non-I are trembling in different ways along the same sensitive, affective and mental waves, sharing in different ways the same affective waves to create a feeling-knowledge of different aspects of a shared encounter-event.” What we see here is thus not an annihilation of the individual, but the birth of the individual, or rather a pre-birth where a relation of proximity involves an overlapping and separation of subjectivities. This shared matrixial space could with another terminology be described as a kinaesthetic longitudinal intentionality that provides a common space within which we can move away and toward each other.

A-subjectivity as life: A Deleuzian-inspired analysis of pregnancy

Neither Ettinger nor Wynn nor I want to describe pregnancy as a harmonious state of communality where there is no particularity. A-subjectivity comes before self-consciousness and reflection, and provides a kind of particularity before subjectivity. On this point the three of us agree. But I would also like to point toward the limit-drawing activity through which particularity is formed. This activity is also the power of vitality. In the search for formulating such a power of vitality, a Deleuzian-inspired approach is fruitful.

To begin with, we can, following Margrit Schildrick, note a similarity between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze. Schildrick writes that “human corporeality always goes outside of itself, enfolded in and enfolded by the indeterminate flesh of the world.” In this way Merleau-Ponty leaves an individualizing and anthropological perspective. He also claims that the flesh is the element of being, not only of the human being. In pregnancy mother and foetus do not make up an isolated, self-sufficient dyad, but are rather invested in a wider social and environmental field. Schildrick nevertheless argues that Merleau-Ponty remains at the side of subjectivity, which also results in his focus on birth, as noted above. I think it is correct

40 Ibid., 120.
41 Ibid., 132.
42 Schildrick, 1.
44 Schildrick, 2–3.
to say that Merleau-Ponty remains at the side of the experiencing body, and thus on the border to subjectivity. He does not analyse movements of the world beyond an embryotic subjectivity. One could say that he continues to take experience as the starting point, and, I would add, thus remains within phenomenology. Deleuze on the other hand builds upon certain perspectives in theoretical biology: i.e. what the phenomenologist would understand as a third person perspective.

Let us follow Myra Hird in her Deleuzian approach, where she draws on biology in order to describe the pregnant body and mother-infant as one and the same body and as a system of exchange: that is, a system with different poles. Pregnancy is here not the possession of the mother and gifting doesn’t only take place from mother-pole to foetus-pole. Neither is maternity a closed economy—where I receive only in proportion to what I give—but an excess of corporeal generosity, which makes it potentially transformative. Gifting is not mainly contractual here, but opens a network of unknowable and immeasurable outcomes. In this network it is not one side that is giving and one that is receiving, as motherhood has often been understood. It is instead a symbiotic relationship where millions of microbes circulate between child and mother—microbes that are both necessary for life and extremely damaging.

Through the placenta oxygen, nutrients, blood, DNA, RNA, bacteria, etc. are given. The placenta produces chemicals that provide the foetus with an immune system, and which also alters the mother’s immune system. This gifting in the womb blurs the border between child and mother, a blurring that continues after birth, not least in breastfeeding. When, for example, a new germ turns up in the baby, it is transferred to the mother through the breast where immunoglobulin is produced and sent back through the breast to the baby. As the immune system develops, the antibodies of the infant gradually learn to differentiate between pathogens of her own body and pathogens from the outside, but each body continues to carry a microbiological trace of the other. The gifting of blood and milk is impossible to calculate and a process constitutive of life. On this level there are no autonomous individuals that interact; rather, as Hird points out, the interaction creates individuality, to be recreated in every encounter. In this way, preg-

nancy borders on the more-than-human world(s) with a multifarious world full of myriad bodies.

Deleuze is influenced by Bergson’s notion of vitalism where endless generation and elaboration of ever-new forms of life come about through rhizomatic spread of nodules and connective channels. The rhizome is composed not of units as mother/womb/foetus/infant, but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. As such it is a multiplicity in continual metamorphosis and a power that exceeds the singularity of lived experience and personal interest. Understood in this way, “life” is not born at birth, a conclusion that calls for a radical rethinking of maternity and natality. Life is here a generative power sustained through multiple connections, without closure and self-sufficiency. From this perspective, subjectivity is a multiple web of connections. This rhizomatic nature of life breaks with the notion of atomistic subject, and in Schildrick’s analysis becoming-maternal turns out to belong to a pre-personal power beyond individual life and individual lived experience. She understands what Deleuze calls the plane of immanence as a non-temporal and unstructured coalescence of creative forces, continually actualized in every body. In his discussion on Bergson’s concept *élan vital*, Deleuze describes how this movement of life turns into forms:

> Life as *movement* alienates itself in the material form that it creates; by actualizing itself, by differentiating itself, it loses ‘contact with the rest of itself.’ Every species is thus an arrest of movement; it could be said that the living being turns on itself and *closes itself*.

This formulation, it could be argued, fits well with the phenomena of pregnancy where a-subjectivity goes through the woman and forms individuals. I would claim that this “losing contact with the rest of itself” can be experienced in pregnancy and childbirth as an experience of life beyond one’s own subjectivity: forming new subjectivities. But such a reading would also imply that new individuals are not the result of, for example, the will of individuals. Pregnancy here becomes a double phenomena: it both takes place in an individual, a woman as an individual progenitor of life, “but more importantly,” Schildrick argues, “that singular process is subsumed in

---

46 Ibid., 10–12.
the intensity of the irreducible and dynamic force of becoming.” Schildrick strongly emphasizes this a-subjective force that goes beyond-subjectivity to such a degree that it acquires ethical implications. She claims:

[I]f life is rethought as an energetic and proliferative force, no longer defined by any specific trajectory, then the individual mother’s existence and expression are not the center of ethical concern. Instead, becoming-maternal encompasses all those linked together in the connective tissue that constitutes a more extensive and substantive version of the flesh of the world.

Here we find a danger that might lurk in the Deleuzian perspective. The subjectivity of the mother, and in the prolongation her power over her own body, is here at stake. I guess that Schildrick in this way wants to make different kinds of technologies, and queer parenting, etc., more accepted, as we all are part of this force of life, not only the pregnant woman. But it is also an argument that could be used in order for a patriarchal culture to once again take control of women’s bodies by declaring that they do not belong to themselves but to an a-subjective life force. One might ask if this is not just another way to make the woman invisible?

Above I accused both Ettinger and Wynn of emphasizing “individuality” too much, and now it is the lack of subjectivity that appears as a danger. Perhaps this calls for a re-examination of the concept pair subjectivity/a-subjectivity. Subjectivity can, in Ettinger’s terminology, be understood as a phallic concept working with binaries such as either-or, absence-presence, oneself-other etc. It is cognitive, or centred around cognition, tending toward a closed subjectivity in strict difference toward otherness. On the other hand, in Schildrick’s version a-subjectivity tends to be identified with the force of life and the flesh of the world, as a power that moves subjectivity, but does not move into subjectivity. Just as Ettinger wants to formulate the feminine as the other to masculine-feminine opposition (an opposition that precisely makes the women invisible, as pure lack in relation to what men have), a move beyond the subjectivity/a-subjectivity divide is needed here, or rather a move into relating subjectivity and a-subjectivity. Ettinger talks about the matrixial as an archaic subjectivity that is not closed, and Deleuze too tries to formulate subjectivity in a new way. Brian Massumi, who has written extensively on Deleuze, and also has

50 Ibid., 7.
written an afterword on Ettinger’s *The Matrixial Borderspace*, formulates it as focusing not upon self and alienation, but on matter and abstraction. He understands the feminine in Ettinger’s analysis as an intensely self-abstracting matter of subjective weaving.\(^{51}\)

I believe that the process of self-abstracting matter is crucial to understanding the phenomena of pregnancy and not making subjectivity/a-subjectivity into a mutually excluding duality, but also to understanding how phenomenology and Deleuzian philosophy can meet and thus to exploring some methodological questions regarding a-subjectivity. I would like to relate the question of self-abstracting matter to the earlier findings regarding pactivity. Pactivity is from the point of view of the subject a receiving (of subjectivity) that is immediately transformed into an activity (being a subject means to be active). “Pactivity” tries to formulate a process through which matter becomes abstracting, able to relate to itself, and thus conscious. Because of the abstracting capacity we can follow pactivity through an experiencing subjectivity that relates to its limits, and thus to an alterity. But we can also understand pactivity through an analysis that follows the pactive movement as a continual movement of a limit-drawing event that gives birth to experience. Seen from the point of view of subjectivity, the life-force can be experienced through pactivity. Life-force as self-forming matter is active as it takes form, but in giving birth to abstraction it also “gives” passivity. It is active as formation, but not as intentionality. Maybe it could be understood as a pure activity that constantly gives rise to passivity. This pure activity is a limit-drawing that relates and separates two interconnected sides. The life-force is thus “pactivating” in its giving birth to abstraction. Pactivity could thus be understood as the pact of matter and abstraction, and thus as the continuity between them.

**Conclusion**

The question of a-subjectivity in pregnancy points in two directions: toward the formation of subjectivity and toward form-taking matter, or life-force. In relation to (inter)subjectivity, we have from a starting point in Husserl seen how an intrauterine experience of continuity through birth is spread

---

\(^{51}\) Ettinger *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 210. On the question of a concept of matter that is not estranged from abstraction, see also Isabelle Stengers’ article “Diderot’s Egg—Divorcing Materialism from Eliminativism,” *Radical Philosophy* 144 (July/August 2007).
into a system, with its different parts and places. This system is alive and thus experiencing, but experience takes place “everywhere.” There is a horizontal consciousness of pulsating life within which we live together. In this horizon the element of sensibility, what Merleau-Ponty calls flesh, takes place. When life takes on new forms it experiences in new ways, a motion that includes the separation of sensing and the sensed. Each experience, or stream of experience, is also separated from other experiences in the birth of subjectivity. The living system is not only sensing, every sensation is also mooded in a similarly intertwined way and abstraction is born within it. In experience there is an affirmation, a “wanting this to be,” what Ettinger calls love and com-passion. This love includes an ability to respond, by which interplay between different parts of the system comes about.

The ability to respond within a joint system sets the stage for each experience. Gail Soffer points to this through the example of young children who often assume that the other person sees what the child itself sees; for example, a young child can point at a picture in a book saying, “Look, moo”, and not realizing that the mother sits across the table, not being able to see the picture. The child presupposes that experience is shared, that her mother sees what she sees and that she only need call attention to the picture. The child has to learn that we have different perspectives and do not experience in the same way. The question at work here is “why don’t we experience the same things in the same way?” rather than “does the other person really experience?” (This is how it has mostly been formulated in philosophy.) We can therefore conclude that experiencing life binds us together: it is our way of togetherness, the common element in which we move. But at the same time as experience binds us together, it separates us in our subjectivity, as we experience differently. Life, or the vital force, here turns out to be the separating movement itself rather than a harmonious origin.

Instead of dissolving women’s subjectivity into an a-subjective life force, I argue that we need to see the connections between a-subjectivity and subjectivity that are present here. There is in the maternal (pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding) extraordinary experiences of a-subjectivity that take place within an already developed subjectivity. The mother experiences an a-subjectivity through which both she herself and her child take on form. The above description of being in labour, as one example, points toward the interconnection between the activity and passivity of the subject through which she can experience the movement of a-subjectivity, the force of life that goes beyond her own life and experiences. I believe this meeting point between personal experience and beyond experience is important in under-
standing a large variety of philosophical topics: the nature of the human being, intersubjectivity, life, etc. It tells us that human beings are not autonomous individuals, but part of a life that goes beyond them; that humans are bound together in intersubjectivity, since their experiencing comes before their subjectivity; and that life is experienced in constantly new ways as subjectivity continues to be born.

Instead of a division between subjectivity and a-subjectivity we need to see their intertwinement. I believe this is the question that needs to be explored further and that a joint phenomenological, psychoanalytical, and Deleuzian approach is most suitable for such a task.