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PHENOMENOLOGY OF PREGNANCY

The lived experience of gestation

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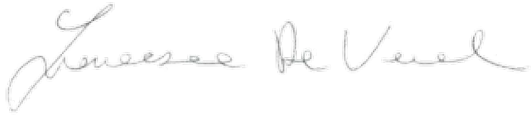

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Abstract

My research sets out to enrich current philosophical debate around pregnancy within the context of contemporary continental philosophy. In response to this theoretical urgency, this thesis offers a robust phenomenological inquiry into the eidetic structures of gestational lived experience. In particular, it shows how the Husserlian eidetic approach can account for the irreducibility of marginalized experiences, and can do so with the same theoretical toolkit serving accounts of so-called "normal" gestational experience.

Part 1 (*Phenomenological accounts*) outlines the original development of phenomenology of pregnancy. Moving from the writings of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and Iris Marion Young, it explores the phenomenological understanding of intra-uterine life, the role played by the pregnant embodiment, the notion of pregnancy as a process and not merely a condition. The main upshot of this part concerns the importance of the paradigmatic shift in considering the pregnant woman, not simply as a patient, but instead as an embodied self.

Part 2 (*Space and Time of pregnancy*) is an exercise in the *epoché*, critiquing common depictions of the pregnant body and pregnant temporalities. By analyzing the paradigmatic "hospitality model" and "container model" respectively, I show why pregnant embodiment might be more profitably explored in terms of *Leib*. Furthermore, I advocate a re-thinking of gestational temporalities, by complementing the rhetoric of "stages" (of the fetal development) with an analysis of the gestating self's temporalities (that I define as "scattered temporalities"). This analysis of time takes issue with the homogenizing accounts of pregnancy as a transitory phase concluding with the childbirth.

In Part 3 (*The who of pregnancy*), I explore the "emergence" of the fetal-other. I begin by giving an overview of the conceptualization of alterity in chapter six, particularly focussing on the process of personalization of the fetus and its consequences for the gestational process. In chapter seven, I argue for the pregnant process in terms of radical intercorporeality, by analysing the role of the touch in defining the gestational polarity and the specific kind of agency the gestating self and the fetal-other have in their mutual and asymmetrical co-constitution.

By shifting the focus from the pregnant condition to the (inter)subjective character of the gestational process, my thesis makes a genuinely original contribution to the field. It offers new phenomenological insight into the structures of gestational experience, and it expands and deepens understanding of the gestating self – both as an object of philosophical investigation and as a subject of knowledge and cognition.

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Introduction – Do we really need a phenomenology of pregnancy?

> La phénoménologie peut ici débrouiller ce qui est embrouillé,
> lever des malentendus qui tiennent justement à ce que nous passons
> naturellement et à notre insu d'une attitude à l'autre[1]

As the title suggests, this dissertation deals with the phenomenology of pregnancy. However, before getting into details, I would like to start with few words about how this dissertation came to light.

I originally set out for my PhD project to develop a phenomenological comprehension of sexual differences, making sense of our being-in-the-world as subjects carrying certain biological, as well as cultural, personal, individual, and psychological characteristics. While collecting texts, reading volumes, and producing my own arguments, I became aware of the absolute centrality of the reproductive potential of female bodies in structuring sexual difference – as well as its epistemic, ethical, and political pertinence. At that point, I noticed that, within the extensive literature available on this issue, I found surprisingly few contributions reflecting on pregnancy as lived experience. I then started wondering why there was such a lack of phenomenological accounts of pregnancy. At that point, I began speaking with many generous scholars about this *lacuna*, and I was lucky enough to receive encouraging feedback and precious bibliographical, methodological, and theoretical advice for my project.[2]

My interest in pregnancy as a topic for philosophical investigations is not autobiographical, and neither does it derive from first-hand life-changing experiences of pregnancy. This thesis is an incarnation of my interest in a certain notion of subjectivity – which I here call the *gestating self* – that has, until now, occupied a peripheral space as

[1] *M. Merleau-Ponty (1953). Le Philosophe et son ombre, In Éloge de la philosophie, Gallimard, p. 230.*

[2] *The first person I had a confrontation about the topic of pregnancy in phenomenological field has been Sara Heinämaa, during the break of a conference she gave a talk as the main speaker. After that fortunate exchange, I had long sessions with my tutors Chiara Cappelletto and Francesca de Vecchi, who approved my topic of research and gave me carte blanche in my study. A couple of months after the beginning of my PhD, I have been accepted to give a talk at the UK SWIP conference in Southampton, where I had the unique opportunity to present my (at that time still in fieri) account and receiving priceless comments by Marjolein Oele (who eventually became my co-tutor), Sara Cohen Shabot, Sara LaChance Adams, and Stella Villarmea. During my research stays in the US and in the UK, Gail Weiss, Luna Dolezal, and Elselijin Kingma tremendously helped me in sharpening my arguments.*

a philosophical topic. Thus, my research explores the heuristic potential of pregnancy as an object for philosophical – and specifically phenomenological – investigation.

Let me say few words about the methodology that underlies my work in this thesis. On a bibliographical level, I have mainly employed phenomenological sources – both traditional phenomenological accounts and contemporary developments. I put into dialogue the writings of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir with the projects of feminist phenomenology – specifically Iris Marion Young – including secondary commentary written from the Eighties up until the present day. Along with this *corpus* of texts, I also employ many sources from other disciplines – history, epigenetics, critical theory, medical humanities, and sociology – to expand the material from which I have carried out my phenomenological research. I owe to feminism the critical audacity to bring into the remit of philosophy some topics which have long been neglected, ignored, or at best labelled as *secondary*. My thesis stands as an exercise in producing a phenomenology *of* something and not merely *on* something. In this thesis, I do not only take into account the available accounts of pregnancy as presented by phenomenologists, but I also try to further push the investigation by questioning what it means to investigate the experience of pregnancy phenomenologically and by trying to offer some alternative theoretical responses to questions such as "what is it like to be pregnant?".

As far as I know, a few theoretically grounded books with similar aims to this thesis have been published in the last decade. In the English-speaking world – but from three different parts of the globe – I am aware of *The Phenomenology of Gravidity*, by Jane Lymer (2016), and the two collected volumes *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Mothering*, edited by Sarah Lachance Adams and Caroline Lundquist (2012) and *Phenomenology of pregnancy*, edited by Jonna Bornemark and Nicholas Smith (2016). All three of these volumes offer ground-breaking insights for expanding and deepening the exploration of the pregnant process. Along with these, other fundamental contributions can be found in the guise of single papers and chapters in edited volumes – mainly in feminist philosophical (only sometimes in contemporary continental philosophy) journals – by scholars who have expertise in phenomenology and/or medical humanities. However, given the present state of the art, I truly believe we are just at the beginning.

Before addressing the overall argument and contribution of this thesis to the ongoing debate, I would like to first discuss an important initial objection one might level against a phenomenology of pregnancy. During an informal conversation, a professor once told me that there is no philosophical value in analysing the pregnant process and that, as opposed to *birth*, pregnancy is a mere sub-personal process which is the proper terrain "hard science". The professor who raised this objection wanted to highlight that pregnancy is only a biological process – something that happens in the body. As such, the professor understood other disciplinary perspectives to be more appropriate for the study of pregnancy: medicine, obstetrics, biology, and physiology. He added, pregnancy may have some effects on a woman's psyche, and then pregnancy could be properly investigated also in its psychological dimensions – but not through philosophy.

I thought carefully about this professor's objections, trying to figure it out how to be absolutely incisive in writing my thesis and justifying my phenomenological engagement with the topic of pregnancy. It seems to me that he implicitly subscribed to the idea that birth is the origin of every (inter)subjectivity and that nothing of philosophical relevance can happen during the pregnant process. According to this reading, pregnancy should be the object of empirical investigation and of psychological inquiry, but it does not have any philosophical value. Reading Jonna Bornemark confirms my intuition:

> In [the] phenomenon [of pregnancy], 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.[3]

[3] *Bornemark, J. (2016). Life beyond individuality: A-subjective experience in pregnancy. In J. Bornemark & N. Smith (Eds.) Phenomenology of Pregnancy (pp. 251-278). Elanders, p. 253.*

Bornemark grasps the central point that the gestating subject has traditionally been absent within history of Western philosophy; taking up this insight, in chapter one I explicate that this absence is related to how women are more broadly belittled as subjects, and that this is counterbalanced by compelling research devoted to the study of pregnancy as a biological process, *and* also as a metaphorical tool. This chapter sketches out the terrain for the development of the whole thesis, the underlying aim of which is to reveal the philosophical potential of the experience of pregnancy by analyzing the experiential structures which constitute the gestational process for the subject. I then explain why I decided to employ the methodological instruments of the phenomenological tradition, presenting an overview of the relationship between feminist philosophies and phenomenology and situating my research within the framework of Husserlian *Eidetics*. All in all, chapter one shows which paths I have followed into my research, and why I think that they may offer a solid ground for investigating the pregnant process as a lived experience. In this chapter, I take also disentangle some theoretical *knots* which are very often taken for granted by authors engaged with the topic of pregnancy from a phenomenological perspective. Of particular importance is the distinction between the bodily experience of pregnancy and the assumption of the identity of the mother. I suggest that a clear terminological distinction between the processes (pregnancy *and* motherhood), and the actors there implied (fetus *and* baby, gestating subject *and* mother), could shed some light on the phenomenological structures of the gestational process. Not only does this approach stress the complexity of these phenomena and the urgency of rethinking this conceptual terrain, this move acknowledges the existential validity of different experiences across the eidetic structure of pregnancy. While maternal experience is not the topic of this thesis, it is necessary to justify why the pregnant process should not be analysed in close reference to motherhood. Throughout my arguments, I show that the correlation between pregnancy and motherhood is not an essential constraint, and that being a maternal subject and being a pregnant self are not two essential moments of the same phenomenon.

After preparing the ground for the rest of my thesis in chapter one, in the next six chapters (divided into three parts) I critically engage with the following separate but strictly related shared presuppositions:

(1) Pregnant experience is a *condition* in which the gestating self finds herself

(2) The gestating self is a mere *container* for a sub-personal phenomenon

(3) The gestational process is a teleologically-oriented process towards childbirth

Part one (*Phenomenological account*) is my response to the idea that pregnancy is, for the gestating self, a *condition* (1). I object to the idea that pregnancy is a phenomenon in which there is no *subject*, by arguing that the gestating self is a subject with peculiar bodily potentials and corporeal experiences. This subject does not only *offer* a potentially interesting example to phenomenology, but it has *in fact* already been thematized in traditional phenomenology. Chapters two and three aim to delineate a critical genealogy of pregnancy as a philosophical problem. Authors in the continental tradition have offered a theoretical basis for further development in this growing field, and have reflected on pregnancy as a corporeal – and not only physical – experience. Phenomenological analyses especially show that pregnancy has multiple and intertwined experiential layers, the dynamic correlation of which should not be over-reduced to sub-personal phenomena.

Let me now get into more details as regards chapters two and three. Chapter two shows that there is a philosophical interest in locating where Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have addressed the topic of pregnancy in their work. While experiences like menstruation, childbirth, and pregnancy have hardly been the central topics in mainstream philosophical projects, they nonetheless appear in ways that enrich the philosophical perspectives of these authors. My goal throughout this chapter is thus to provide a summary of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's respective theoretical toolkits, the development of which is useful for defining the epistemic boundaries of a philosophical phenomenology of pregnancy. From the sparse notes of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the urgency of a phenomenology of pregnancy emerges that, in these authors, remains firmly anchored in the investigation of a generic subject that has once been gestated. I highlight the relevance of the toolkit presented by Husserl for questioning the nature of the relationship between the fetal-other and the gestating subject, as well as in pointing out

the need for an eidetics of birth. As for Merleau-Ponty's analyses, he emphasizes the temporal dimension intrinsic to pregnant experience, the leading role played by contingency, a specific form of opacity from the pregnant body, and the gestating self's unique form of agency. All in all, in this chapter I show that both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty open up a space for recognizing the gestational process as meaningful as the coming into the world of the self. Even if they did not fully develop the philosophical implications derived from the gendered dimension of pregnancy, the reference to pregnant embodiment allows them to engage critically with the intersubjective (and specifically intercorporeal) dimensions of the self.

In chapter three, I then specifically discuss pregnant experience as a *situation.* I consider the accounts proposed by Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Marion Young. From a historical point of view, they are the first authors to explore the experience of pregnancy through the lens of feminist phenomenology. In particular, they both offer a phenomenology of female pregnant embodiment by explicitly linking it more broadly with the situations of women; in a peculiar way, there is a common "feminist" call in both philosophical projects. Moreover, I explicate how their respective accounts may enrich the ongoing debate on the phenomenology of pregnancy, by providing an analysis of the main topics they cover in their reflections. While Husserl and Merleau-Ponty offer premises for understanding gestational experience, Simone de Beauvoir links the problem explicitly to the gendered aspect of experience. I take into account Beauvoir's arguments as deployed in *Le Deuxième Sexe* through the following schema: first of all, I tackle the correlation between the philosophical dualism of immanence/transcendence, and I show how Beauvoir uses it to examine pregnant experience. I then analyze some influential passages of *Le Deuxième Sèxe* through a phenomenological understanding of the text. The first result of my inquiry is that, to fully understand Beauvoir's account of pregnancy, it is fundamental to recognize her work as phenomenological in a technical sense.

Within Beauvoir's framework, the *passivity* of the gestating self is a part of a wider picture; if the body is always a situation, then the pregnant body also expresses the dialectic between immanence and transcendence, activity and passivity, freedom and subjection. Of course, I state that, within the 1949 text, the focus on the passive side of pregnant experience far surpasses its active, creative, and empowering side. That said, the analyses that I find most interesting are those in which Beauvoir addresses the

experience of pregnancy as bodily, taking into account "the thing itself" of the pregnancy – namely, the physical and psychical experiences of the gestating self i.e. the *what it is like to be pregnant.*

I then address Iris Marion Young's reading of the immanence/transcendence divide (when applied to the pregnant experience), and her concepts of split subjectivity and alienation. I show that Young works through her analysis of the pregnant experience by means of a renegotiation of the conceptual dualism of immanence/transcendence, and develops an original account of the bodily experiences of the gestating self. On this matter, I take into account her analysis of the bodily occurrences which are entailed by pregnancy for the gestating self, expanding it through contemporary understanding of the opacity of pregnant embodiment. I conclude my inquiry by showing that the notion of *split subjectivity* illustrates the tensions which structure lived pregnant experience. In Young's analysis, one may see an initial sketch of the phenomenological understanding of pregnancy as an embodied, embedded, affective, emotional, contingent, and potentially (but not necessarily) empowering experience. The main upshot of this part of the thesis is an understanding of paradigmatic shift involved in considering the pregnant woman not simply as a patient, but instead as an embodied self.

Part two of my thesis (*Space and Time of pregnancy)* deals with the idea that the gestating self is a mere *container* of a sub-personal phenomenon (2) and that the gestational process is a teleologically-oriented process towards childbirth (3).

In chapter four, I address the presupposition (2) that the gestating self is a fetal container. My analysis of pregnant embodiment is intended to be substantively different to every possible medical account, for a crucial reason; it prioritises the phenomenological understanding of the body as both an object *and* as a lived reality. This chapter presupposes that the phenomenological account of the body may provide a valuable alternative to dominant biomedical discourse about the gestating body. My primary goal in this chapter is to show the potential and flaws of the *container* and *hospitality* models, and then to propose a conception of the gestating body in terms of a *threshold*, stressing permeability and impressionability as characteristics of the pregnant embodiment – instead of spatial relations (container) or ontological meaning (hospitality). By means of an analysis of the maternal imagination and the presence of microplastics in

placenta, I argue that the idea of the threshold preserves the multiple layers of the experience, and moreover has the positive effect of recognizing the dual aspects of pregnancy – as a process wherein the gestating self is both active and passive in respect to her own milieu. With respect to the whole thesis, this chapter gives further arguments in favor of conceiving the pregnancy as a process entailing multiple layers of experience, and conceiving the gestating self as an embodied subject having peculiar interactions with the fetal-other. In this way, I respond to Stella Villarmea's concern, when she writes that,

> In my opinion, both philosophy and feminist thinking must still walk a long path to achieve a conception of the pregnant subject that is truly a human subject (not just a human body). To start with, they must question the concept of pregnancy, labor, and birth as a non-rational process that is more comfortably placed in the field of nature than in the field of subjectivity and humanity. Furthermore, they can warn us against the use of the metaphor of a container and its (sic) 'content' to describe the relation between the pregnant woman and her baby.[4]

In Chapter five, I discuss the third assumption mentioned above (3). I advocate for a re-thinking of gestational temporalities, by complementing the rhetoric of "stages" (of the fetal development) with an analysis of the gestating self's temporalities (that I define as *scattered temporalities*). This chapter is composed of two sections. § *Against Chronos* is the *pars destruens* that critiques the rhetoric of waiting, as well as the teleological understanding of the pregnancy as a time frame leading to childbirth.

I argue that the idea of pregnancy as a preparatory phase to childbirth is an undervaluation of the experiential richness of the process, and an idealization of one possible outcome of the pregnant process (specifically motherhood). I here further substantiate my claim in chapter one that it is phenomenologically inaccurate to equivocate between pregnancy and motherhood. I discuss the idea that pregnancy is essentially a phase of *waiting*, arguing that it implies a radical passivity on the part of the gestating subject and fails to recognize the role played by the gestating self. The *pars*

[4] *Villarmea Requejo, S. (2009). Rethinking the origin: birth and human value. In J. Yan, & D. E. Schrader (Eds.), Creating a Global Dialogue on Value Inquiry: Papers From the Xxii Congress of Philosophy (Rethinking Philosophy Today). Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 311-329, p. 312.*

construens of the chapter consists in an exploration of what I define as *scattered temporalities* of gestation. In order to grasp the inherent complexity of gestational temporality, I propose to zoom in on three phenomenological timeframes of pregnant temporality: (1) *pre-pregnant temporalities*, (2) *phenomenology of getting-pregnant*, and (3) *what it is like to discover one's own pregnancy*. The main outcome from this chapter is an appreciation of the complexity of the temporal experience of the gestating self; my focus on role of technology in gestational temporalities, as well as the relevance of the emergence of alterity, offers a rethinking of the temporalities of the pregnant self as intrinsically complex.

Part 3 (*The who of pregnancy*) begins with an overview of the conceptualization of alterity in chapter six, where I focus how the fetus is often conceived as a person and the consequences of this for the gestational process. A preliminary mapping of who this *other* is helps to reveal many conceptual presuppositions in understanding what I define as the *fetal-other*. In this chapter, I make a deliberate theoretical choice regarding the *status* afforded to the fetal-other: in the framework I am defending, the fetal alterity represents (1) *a subject of experience*, who calls into question and acts in response to the gestating subject, and (2) a *rhetorical formation*. My position is that the relationship between the gestating subject and the fetal-other is one of *interdependence*; it is phenomenologically impossible to conceive of a gestating subject without a fetal-other and, conversely, there is no fetal-other without gestation by a gestating subject. The corollary of this thesis is not only that the gestating self "makes" the fetal-other, but also that the fetal-other "makes" the gestating self.

Having clarified the nature of the gestational alterity in chapter six, in chapter seven I aim to grasp the eidetic structures of lived relationship between the gestating subject and the fetal-other. In doing so, I maintain the gestating subject's perspective as primary, and I ask what layers of experience the gestational process entails. The investigation then is developed around the following question: how is the fetal-maternal encounter shaped and mediated within the experience of the gestating subject, as an embodied and embedded self? I argue that the fetal-other enters the world well before their biological birth, since they are already in a mutual and asymmetrical relationship with the gestating self. My thesis is that the fetal-other and the gestating subject effectively have some kind

of intersubjective exchange, which I characterize as *radical intercorporeality*. I conceptualize the pregnant process in terms of radical intercorporeality, by analysing the role of touch in defining the gestational polarity and the specific kind of agency the gestating self and the fetal-other have in their mutual and asymmetrical co-constitution.

I then build my argument as follows: first, I frame my analysis within in the context of canonical phenomenological investigations on intersubjectivity, specifying that the gestational process entails a form of radical intercorporeality. This leads me to focus on the role of touch in establishing the maternal-fetal encounter. The experiential richness of touch complicates the activity-passivity balance within the fetal-maternal couple and necessitates a more nuanced comprehension of gestational agencies. In the pages that follow, I substantiate my starting thesis that intra-uterine life is not a period of syncretism between the gestating self and the fetal-other, but instead it is a process of separation between two entities. The gestating subject and the fetal-other share something more than a mere "encounter"; they are constitutively involved in the process of making and being made, by sharing multi-layered interactions. The gestating subject does not pre-exist the making and being-made of the fetal-other; equally, the fetal-other is only an abstraction if considered apart from its emergence through the maternal body. This is a strong argument against the depiction of the fetus as an independent and discrete subject, complementing various other critical biopolitical positions. I also show that the boundaries of the gestating self are changing/changed along the gestational process, and that pregnant embodiment involves a temporally-established self-other continuum *and* distinction.

Revisiting the professor's objection I mentioned earlier in this introduction, we can ask again "do we really need a phenomenology of pregnancy?". I believe that along my thesis I explain why we do need phenomenological investigations into experiences that have been systematically overlooked within philosophical spaces. Furthermore, the heuristic potential that emerges from the investigation of the pregnancy goes beyond this political need, in that it provides arguments in favor of conceiving the human self as inherently and constitutively intersubjective.

My response to the original objection occupies two levels. First, the fact that human beings participate in intercorporeal forms of mutual exchange already *in utero* suggests

that intersubjectivity is not entered into (only) from the abstract egos of adult human beings, and this fact foregrounds the liminal states of the human being. I caution here that this does not mean that every form of intersubjective encounter is *causally* dependent on how one develops in utero. The category of causality is not even considered in this account. What I am suggesting is a methodological note; let us consider pregnancy as a process wherein something *effectively* happens. Let us recognize it explicitly – as a philosophical point, not only as an affective or emotional one – that everyone has been involved as a fetal-other in this process. Put simply, the heuristic potential of gestational experience is at stake: *What does pregnancy tell us about the nature of the human self?*[5]

My second response to the original objection, as I argue in chapter one, concerns the fact that it is simply untrue that pregnancy has never been a philosophical topic. On the contrary, historical accounts clearly show that the interest in human reproduction can be traced back to the (quite literally) origins of the Western philosophy. What is *new* is rather the explicit, thematic, and engaged acknowledgement that pregnancy is performed by a subject. Nonetheless – and this is a crucial and challenging point – pregnancy, as Merleau-Ponty argues, is not an *act* that the gestating self undertakes like other acts she may perform with her body. The gestating self finds herself in an anonymous process, and deals with a unique intimacy with another human being inside her own body.[6] We do need a phenomenology that takes seriously this phenomenon which calls into question our conceptions of ourselves as human subjects and that, in doing so, appreciates that pregnant experience is something more than the mere reproduction of the species. In this regard, the phenomenological gaze may elucidate the feminist point that our original being-in-the-world does not originate from nowhere, but rather from a maternal subject.

1. The problem defined

The goals of this chapter are twofold: I briefly clarify the epistemic motivation for my research, and I present the main methodological considerations arising from a phenomenology of pregnancy. With regard to the first goal, I explore the ancient Greek understanding of pregnancy, focussing on the absence of the *gestating self* as a subject in

[5] *I partially address this point in Miglio, N. (2019). Affective Schemas, Gestational Incorporation, and Fetal-Maternal Touch: A Husserlian Inquiry. HUMANA. MENTE Journal of Philosophical Studies, 12(36), 67-99.*

[6] *I take into account these aspect in chapter two. My indirect reference is to Melreau- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2001). Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant: Notes de cours 1949-1952. Verdier.*

this account. This section neither aims at nor claims to completeness, but rather it is intended as a historical introduction to the topic of pregnancy within Western philosophy. The later methodological section aims at expanding this awareness by adopting a more contemporary phenomenological toolkit to inquire into the gestating process. I discuss the main positions within feminist phenomenology, and I present some key premises of my research – such as the sharp distinction between the phenomenon of pregnancy and that of motherhood. Furthermore, I provide an analysis of Husserlian Eidetics, and suggest that this approach may solve some of the issues raised by feminist phenomenology with regard to pregnant experience.

1.1. On human generation

In what sense is pregnancy a philosophical topic? This question informs my research hypothesis, even if it remains in the background. In fact, this thesis is not intended to trace an history of the cultural conception of pregnancy within Western horizon, as has already been undertaken in other scholarly works. Some of these researchers have focussed their work on the experience of pregnancy within a particular epoch,[7] while others have taken into account some peculiar pregnant experiences, like assisted reproductive techniques from their very origin.[8] Instead, my research focuses on the philosophical potential of the *experience* of pregnancy, and more specifically on the experiential structures underlying the gestational process. Before addressing the methodological aspects of my investigation, let me briefly discuss one of the reasons for my interest in a philosophy of pregnancy – namely the little attention granted to its study by traditional Western philosophy. Although a historical reconstruction is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is nonetheless important to situate the topic of my research within the history of Western philosophy. For the purposes of this thesis, I start with a brief analysis of the Greek conception of human reproduction, which allows me to discuss the general absence the subject of pregnancy as a philosophical *persona*, and to address some theoretical attitudes towards this topic that remain at work to this day.

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[7] See e.g., Hanson, C. (2004). A Cultural History of Pregnancy: pregnancy, medicine and culture, 1750-2000. Springer. Filippini, N. (2020). Pregnancy, Delivery, Childbirth: A Gender and Cultural History from Antiquity to the Test Tube in Europe. Routledge.

[8] See Betta, E. (2012). L' altra genesi: storia della fecondazione artificiale. Carocci; and Baiocchi, M. (2018). In utero: La scienza e i nuovi modi di diventare madre. Sonzogno.

The *How* of human reproduction, and the *Where* from which everyone comes, were central points of interest for Ancient philosophy: the research around the *aition* – which has been investigated primarily under metaphysical and cosmological angles – partially results from interest in embryology. Together, Greek mythology, philosophy, and medicine define some paradigmatic approaches to the enduring issue of gestation within Western Thought.[9] As Nadia Filippini outlines, the conception of human reproduction (how it works, the role played by the woman, to the possibility of predicting pregnancy's outcomes etc.) are subject to cultural representation and inscribed in social, institutional, and cultural histories: "It was the very idea of generation and birth that changed over time, as did of the foetus, forcing a reassessment of its relationship with its mother's body".[10] Conversely, Filippini makes clear that some theoretical constructions underlying the human reproduction tend to be invariant: an example of these "cultural constructs" – that, I add, inform also the philosophical comprehension of the pregnant process – "has consistently played down its value in a variety of ways […] by overstating men's contribution to generation, or by contrasting it with other abilities and generative powers in a subtle game of hierarchies and supremacy, which ended up causing a 'philosophical removal' of birth".[11]

Since philosophical traditions are substantially ingrained within particular cultural contexts and systems of thought, a brief *excursus* will help to better situate why a philosophy of pregnancy is much needed and how it could be fruitful to pursue this line of research. Even if I do not extensively take this aspect into account, it nonetheless represents a central theme; a philosophical investigation of pregnant subjects cannot ignore the social, cultural, political, and historical dimensions of lived experience.

Within Ancient Greek context, mythology gives us indirect information about how the pregnant body has been conceived, while philosophical writings tend to follow two distinct lines: on one hand, we are privy to the ancient metaphysical and biological understandings of what makes human reproduction possible; on the other hand, there is a focus on the political discipline, control, and legitimation of reproductive bodies. In this scenario, Plato's attention to pregnancy represents a key point of investigation. In his two

[9] *From now on, I will not specify each occurrence that I am engaged with the Western horizon, but this point is nonetheless central.*
[10] *Filippini (2020), p. 2.*
[11] *Filippini (2020), p. 9.*

main political texts, *The Republic* and *The Laws*, Plato addresses, more than pregnancy, the very institution of motherhood (to employ a central term in Adrienne Rich's account)[12] that needs to be regulated to permit the flourishing of the polis and the wellbeing of the citizens. The reproductive power of the female body is disciplined by and essentially functional to the achievement of social goals. Women are not conceived as subjects so much as mere reproductive bodies. Of course, it is always important to attend to the complex hermeneutic issues around the reading and interpretation of Plato's texts, and, in fact, the whole world imagined in *The Republic* could be read as an "ironic" exercise. Furthermore, the need to control and discipline the sexualized body applies both to women and men's sexual behaviour, primarily moved by moral reasons.[13] Instead, the experience of pregnancy is commonly recognised among scholars as philosophical tool within Plato's arguments, which works, to borrow an apt expression from Francesca Rigotti, as a declension of the "Arianna's Paradox" (*Il paradosso di Arianna*), substantiated in the "male appropriation of female reproduction".[14] In Rigotti's insightful *Partorire con il corpo e la mente*, the author explains that some activities, while typically performed by women, are insignificant and minor (*artes minores*). Things change if the same activities have been transfigured within a process of "metaphorical purification" (*purificazione metaforica*), through which they eventually become worthy of men.[15]

The *locus classicus* of this "appropriation by metaphoric transfer"[16] may be found in Plato's Symposium. Throughout the development of the arguments, we witness a doubling of what it means to be pregnant: while women may experience physical pregnancy, men who are wise to the Beauty are depicted as having access to a more perfect and complete form of *spiritual* gestation. "I will tell you," Diotima says, "The function is that of procreation in what is beautiful, and such procreation can be either physical or spiritual."[17] At first glance, Socrates seems confused and asks for a plain explanation. The priestess of Mantinea then explains that,

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[12] *Rich, A. (1995). Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution. WW Norton & Company.*
[13] *I thank Marjolein Oele for this clarification.*
[14] *Rigotti, F. (2010). Partorire con il corpo e con la mente: creatività, filosofia, maternità. Bollari Boringhieri, p. 25. My translation.*
[15] *Rigotti (2010), p. 22. My translation. Rigotti considers the acts of spinning and cooking as exemplificative of this attitude, by highlighting that these activities are at least potential performed equally be men and women. The "male appropriation" became even more problematic for the experiences related to the sphere of the maternal (pregnancy, breastfeeding, labouring). A good example is Socrates maieutic.*
[16] *I employ here Filippini's translation of Rigotti (2010), p. 24-25, in Filippini (2020), p. 19.*
[17] *Plato, Symposium, 206.*

> All men, Socrates, are in a state of pregnancy, both spiritual and physical, and when they come to maturity, they feel a natural desire to bring forth, but they can do so only in beauty and never in ugliness. There is something divine about the whole matter; in pregnancy and bringing to birth the mortal creature is endowed with a touch of immortality. But the process cannot take place in disharmony, and ugliness is out of harmony with everything divine, whereas beauty is in harmony with it.[18]

Procreation is "the nearest thing to perpetuity and immortality that a mortal being can attain",[19] but physical reproduction is still too ephemeral and imperfect. In that regard, Diotima makes clear that spiritual pregnancy is axiologically superior, being "the only one that can guarantee a person's immortality, while the female body shows its limitations".[20] This *male appropriation* of gestation is also detectable within the *mythos*: within the rich mythological canon that addresses pregnancy, reproduction, and fertility, the case of Zeus deserves a special mention since it typifies the theoretical attitude of *the male appropriation.*[21] Zeus carried both Athena and Dionysus, and these pregnancies are two vivid examples of the ambiguous and problematic disposition of Greeks towards the reproductive female body.

In analyzing the behaviour of this king of gods, Cantarella argues that Zeus "expropriates his lovers from their maternal role".[22] This is further illustrated by the fact that these gestations take place in his head (Athena) and his thigh (Dionysus) − bodily parts usually

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[18] *Plato, Symposium, 206.*

[19] *Plato, Symposium, 207.*

[20] *Filippini (2020), p. 9.*

[21] *The case of Zeus is also particularly suggestive since it opens up the issue of male pregnancy, which is a steady topos in Western folklore. For more on that issue, see e.g.: Varvounis, M. "The couvade in ancient Cyprus: a folk ritual performance", Butlletí de la Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres de Barcelona 54 (2012-2013), p. 11-27; Bertocchi, A. "Il rito della couvade nel suo rapporto ricorsivo col mito." Studi etno-antropologici e sociologici 23 (1995): 3-31; Trethowan, W. (1972) The couvade syndrome. Modern perspectives in psycho-obstetrics: 68-93; Weigle, M. (1989). Creation and Procreation: Feminist Reflections on Mythologies of Cosmogony and Parturition. University of Pennsylvania Press; Leitao, D. (2012). The pregnant male as myth and metaphor in classical Greek literature. Cambridge University Press; Doja, A. (2005). "Social Thought & Commentary: Rethinking the Couvade." Anthropological Quarterly 78.4: 917-950.*

[22] *"Sono miti celebri, quelli che riguardano gli amori di Zeus sui quali ci soffermeremo. Pur nella loro diversità, hanno in comune un aspetto sul quale non sempre ci si sofferma adeguatamente. Ed è il fatto che, quando lo ritiene opportuno e se ne presenta l'occasione, Zeus riesce a espropriare le sue amanti dal loro ruolo materno, appropriandosi del feto frutto del suo seme che sta crescendo nel loro corpo e trasferendolo nel proprio: riuscendo così, al termine della gestazione, a dare lui stesso alla luce il figlio." Cantarella, E. (2019). Gli inganni di Pandora. L'origine delle discriminazioni di genere nella Grecia antica. Feltrinelli, Milano, p. 24.*

not able to gestate other beings. From this "paternal surrogacy"[23] Cantarella hypothesizes a connection between a kind of "masculine envy" for female reproductive capacity and contemporaneous efforts to discipline female bodies.[24] This brief example from Greek mythology illustrates a primary issue pertaining to the genealogy of pregnancy as a philosophical problem – namely the control and surveillance of pregnant bodies. Following from the "masculine appropriation" of the model of pregnancy, the knowledge and the specificities of the pregnant subject are dismissed. If we consider the philosophical topics of pregnancy and childbirth within the history of philosophy, there are very few references to the lived experience of the female subject, or to the existential and philosophical of another human coming into being. This dispossession of the gestational process through masculine appropriation has key consequences: first, in the philosophical field, it contributes to the effacement of and abstraction from the material process of pregnancy; and second, in lived experience, it reinforces a masculinist approach to pregnancy and childbirth, which is expressed in the hospitalization of reproductive affairs and in the historical passage from midwifery to obstetrics. In this regard, the work of historians and anthropologists have hugely advanced the study of pregnancy as a social and cultural phenomenon, subject to change in time, space, and society. On this former point, the philosophical effacement of the female role within the pregnant process concerns also the dichotomy between production and reproduction. As Stella Villarmea argues that "the woman's capacity to create is identified with the fact of being able to give birth" throughout the history of philosophy, ideas, and culture. [25]

Feminine reproductive ability is thus regarded as inferior and contrasted, in platonic fashion, with masculine creative and mental production. Along with this idea ("woman creates by giving birth"), Villarmea notes that another preconception is at work – namely "the idea according to which the process of giving birth does not need to be reflected upon." [26] Pregnancy is thus considered to be a sub-personal process, the development of which does not need "her will, her ability to decide, or her freedom of expression."[27] As will emerge through my thesis, I argue that pregnancy is instead a

[23] *Cantarella (2019), p. 26.*
[24] *Cantarella (2019), p. 27.*
[25] *Villarmea (2009). pp. 320-1.*
[26] *Villarmea (2009), pp. 320-1.*
[27] *Villarmea (2009), pp. 320-1.*

situation – a bodily experience relating to peculiar existential states. Phenomenological analyses will especially show that pregnancy has multiple and intertwined experiential layers, the dynamic correlation of which should not be over-reduced to sub-personal phenomena.

Following this genealogical inquiry, it emerges that the very material experience of pregnancy is effaced through the filter of metaphor,[28] wherein the gestational process is abstracted from its own materiality and identified with "spiritual pregnancy".[29] Metaphorization and politicization of pregnancy thus turn out to be the two most long-standing and influential paradigms within Western philosophy, for many centuries after Plato.[30] With regard to the metaphorization of lived experience, Tyler argues that,

> Philosophy has thrived upon using metaphors of gestation for the renewal of masculine models of being and creativity, while simultaneously and repeatedly disavowing maternal origin in its theories and models of subjectivity."[31]

Tyler further discusses the correlation between the metaphorization of the gestational process, male appropriation, and identification between reproduction and passivity. As I showed above, in Western philosophy the gestating subject is still *in statu nascendi*. That said, metaphorization and politicization are two notable and long-standing approaches to describing pregnancy, but they are not the only ones. For instance, in Aristotle's work, the issue of human origins is explicitly related to the female human body, mostly considered as the material support of a process univocally determined by the man, who informs the bare and passive feminine matrix. In this context, Aristotle assumes an

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[28] "I am not metaphor, but real alien becoming, perpetually modified." in Tyler, I. (2000). Reframing pregnant embodiment. In S. Ahmed, J. Kilby, C. Lury, M McNeill & B Skeggs (Eds.). Transformations: thinking through feminism. Routledge, pp. 288-301, p. 290.

[29] See especially in details 204d - 209e, which corresponds to Diotima's speech. This theme has received much attention. See e.g., in chronological orders: Burnyeat, M. F. (1977). "Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration", Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies 24, 7-16; Plass, P. C. (1978) 'Plato's "Pregnant" Lover', Symbolae Osloenses 53: 47-55; Tomin, J. (1987) "Socratic Midwifery", Classical Quarterly 37 (1987), 97-102; Pender, E. E. (1992). "Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato's Symposium." The Classical Quarterly, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 72–86; Rawson, G. (2006). Platonic Recollection and Mental Pregnancy. Journal of the History of Philosophy 44(2), 137-155.

[30] See also: Rigotti, F. Il potere e le sue metafore, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1992; S. Chignola, S. (1997). Storia dei concetti e storiografia del discorso politico, in «Filosofia politica», 1, 99-122.

[31] Tyler (2000), p. 91.

assertive-conservative position, in arguing that the female body is totally passive in the gestational process.[32]

Biological, theological, and philosophical considerations of pregnancy have a long history. The topic of human reproduction is at the heart of many philosophical conceptions of the human being, especially where distinctions based on sex/gender underlie such conceptions. Studies of human reproduction throughout history can reveal much about the hierarchy of knowledges within each determinate historical context. Moreover, the material care afforded to pregnant women during these periods can indicate more broadly about the role of women in a given society. The Virginity of Mary, the foetuses drawn by Leonardo da Vinci, the invention of the forceps, the diagnosis of hysteria, Preformationism, Antoni Van Leeuwenhoek's *animalcula*, and the theory of maternal impressions are all examples derived from a long-standing intellectual interest in human generation. In that sense, it is fair to understand human pregnancy as an enduring area of interest within Western philosophy. My thesis is that, despite this interest in human reproduction, the gestating subject emerges as a philosophical object only in more recent phenomenological theory and feminist thought;[33] indeed, it has been only in the last century that pregnancy has been philosophically thematized as a corporeal experience that affects, in a unique way, the female and fetal selves, as well as the gestating self's *milieu*, and her relational and emotional context. More specifically, I argue that the emergence of this *theoretical discontinuity*[34] results in an analysis of the gestational experience as a *situation*, namely as a bodily experience marked by transcendence and immanence, that is constitutively intersubjective, relational, and affective.

In other words, while pregnancy has been at the centre of philosophical inquiry from the discipline's inception, the gestating subject has been a most notable absence in

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[32] See e.g., Aristotle, De generatione animalium, 728 a, 17 ss. Aristotle, Politics, 1254 b, 1-14. Politics, I, 13, 1260 a. Concurrently, the issue of pregnancy has been investigated as well in medicine: the most relevant evidence of this attention is undoubtedly given by the Corpus Hippocraticum, which contains ten treatises on obstetrics. For further literature, see: Bonnard, J.-B. (2014). "Male and female bodies according to Ancient Greek physicians." Clio. Women, Gender, History 37.

Of course, this is only one possible reading of Aristotle's writings, since his metaphysical has been also read in feminist terms. See, for instance, the recent book by Trott, A. M. (2019). Aristotle on the Matter of Form: A Feminist Metaphysics of Generation. Edinburgh University Press.

[33] As Iris Marion Young poignantly points out, "We should not be surprised to learn that discourse on pregnancy omits subjectivity, for the specific experience of women has been absent from most of our culture's discourse about human experience and history" Young, I. M. (2005). "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation", in Throwing like a girl and other essays, Oxford University Press, p. 46.

[34] Foucault, M. (1969) L'Archéologie du savoir. Gallimard.

the tradition. In this sense, feminist reflections have paved the way for a phenomenology of pregnancy – especially the historical and genealogical work of scholars who have raised questions concerning the *why* and the *how* of this problematic removal of maternal point of view. The legacy of misogyny within philosophy has resulted in the dismissal of the first-person perspective of the gestating subject.[35] The question at stake concerns, then, the participation of women both as *object* and as *subject* of philosophy. As I briefly pointed out, it would be incorrect to affirm that "pregnancy" as a theme has been absent from philosophical attention *lato sensu*. On the contrary, matters *related to* human generation have classically been of interest for philosophical reflection.[36] From this perspective, my research aims to take seriously the pregnant process as an experience typically performed by women, but whose meaning should be recognized as relevant for the philosophical understanding of the self.

Indirectly, a problem emerges here that needs to be made explicit – namely the *fact* (both empirical and theoretical) that gestational experience is unequivocally sex-related and, for a very long time, it has been also regarded as unambiguously gender-related.[37] This is precisely one of the historical reasons why gestating subjects have been excluded from the philosophical field. In recognition of this history, in this thesis, I use of pronoun "she" when referring to the gestating subject. Cisgender women are by no means the only people who can experience pregnancy firsthand: non-binary people, trans men, and intersex individuals who experience pregnancy ought also to be included under the term "gestating subject". Nonetheless, statistics acknowledge that the majority (albeit

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[35] For a reconstruction of the female absence in the philosophical field, see e.g.: Cavarero, A. (1990). Nonostante Platone: figure femminili nella filosofia antica, Editori riuniti; Le Doeuff, M. (1998). Le sèxe du savoir. Aubier; Lloyd, G. (1993). The man of reason: "male" and "female" in western philosophy, Routledge; Vassallo, N., & Garavaso, P. (2007). La filosofia delle donne, Laterza; Tommasi, W. (2004). I filosofi e le donne: la differenza sessuale nella storia della filosofia, Tre Lune Edizioni.

[36] Indeed, historians and philosophers are increasingly investigating the participation of women as subjects and scholars of philosophy in many epochs. The most studied and acknowledged examples include authors like Diotima of Mantinea, Hypatia, Hildegard of Bingen, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Emilie du Châtelet, or Mary Wollstonecraft, who are already part of a Canon (that of 'women doing philosophy'), but also to the Canon (that of 'Human beings doing philosophy'), since their intellectual work is also demonstrated to be crucial in a deeper and broader understanding of philosophical issues and methods from a historical angle.

[37] The sex/gender distinction entailed an enduring debate in philosophy (for a good historical and theoretical reconstruction, see Mikkola, M. (2008). Feminist perspectives on sex and gender. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/feminism-gender/). In the phenomenological field, there are some contributions that may help to disentangle this thick controversial question: a remarkable essay by Heinämaa, where the author distinguishes two ideas of gender (substantial and criterial definitions) and proposes a historical and conceptual clarification, suggesting to employ the rich account of corporeality put forth by classical phenomenology (Heinämaa, S. (2012). Sex, gender, and embodiment. In D. Zahavi (Ed.) The Oxford handbook of contemporary phenomenology, (pp. 216-43). A similar theoretical strategy is advanced by Young (2002), and Lindemann, G. (1997). The body of gender difference. European Journal of Women s Studies 3(4):341-361.

not the totality) of people undergoing the gestational process are cisgender women. This does not imply that transgender and intersex people do not deserve attention and visibility in contemporary analysis, but rather accounts for the ways that major issues related to pregnancy (especially from a historical angle) tend to be influenced by the fact that gestating subjects are mostly (cisgender) women. Most part of the literature with which I am engaged tends to uncritically identify all the gestating subjects as cisgender women. For the purpose of my thesis, I make the (imperfect) compromise by adopting she/her pronouns for the gestating subject, and predominantly address the perspective of cisgender women.

As seen from the Greek philosophical tradition that I have briefly sketched above, ancient Greek ideas about pregnancy have shaped future notions of sex and gender, as they emerged more concretely as concepts in the XX century, such that gestational experience is predominantly understood as a problem *both* for females *and* for women. I caution that the same implicit correlation is still at work in the literature I discuss in the following chapter – namely, by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For work by Simone de Beauvoir, the issue is so straightforwardly problematic, but nevertheless she does not distinguish clearly between the social construction of *gender* and the biologically given *sex* on the issue of pregnancy, as her identification between pregnancy and motherhood further shows. This is the case of most contemporary literature, which tends to maintain that pregnancy is a sex/gender-related experience.

This problem is linked with the fact that the gestating subject is by no means the main focus of *all* philosophical reflections about pregnancy: on the contrary, contemporary lines of research also discuss the ethics of abortion; metaphysical accounts of selves, organisms, and persons; or the existential meaning of birth. By omitting the gestating subject from these considerations, these works also run the risk of replicating the same degree of abstraction as ancient accounts. The theoretical *lacuna* that I try to ammend with my dissertation concerns precisely the lived experience of the gestational subject. My distinctive approach consists in unveiling the eidetic structures of a process that is at the very origin of the coming-into-being of the self. Recognizing pregnancy as a philosophical theme necessitates new ways to consider the gestating subject as a subject, and not merely as a patient. Moreover, it directly challenges the Western idea that the Subject is self-discrete, autonomous, and completely independent. As I argue in the next

section, phenomenology provides a unique toolkit for inquiring into the lived experience of the self, as an alternative to the biomedical approach.

Reframing the parameters of the inquiry is key; addressing the question of from *whom* we came – *whom* and no longer from *where*. Cavarero explains this distinction, in relation to the epistemic fracture between philosophy and narration. In *Relating Narratives*, she argues that,

> Indeed, the absence of the mother is immediately perceptible in the question that is inevitable but is destined to remain unanswered: 'who gave birth to this creature?' With this question, the language of the existent reveals its symptomatic opposition to the language of philosophers. The latter, looking for the existent in general, asks 'from where' the newborn came, and is therefore required to confine its explanation to the alternative, as solemn as it is empty, between being and nothingness.[38] But the question that is addressed to the unique, newborn being is precisely that which asks 'from whom' the newborn came.[39]

Cavarero's thesis could be pushed further – and more radically – by addressing the gestational experience that takes *place* and is performed by the gestating subject. I argue that this shift directly challenges two complementary and very persistent ideas related to human generation: first, that birth is the authentic "coming into being" of the self; and, second, that pregnancy is "a mere transit phase, waiting for delivery."[40] I challenge both these assumptions throughout my thesis by showing that pregnant experience involves a specific form of intercorporeality, and that the gestating self and the fetal-other co-emerge within the process itself.[41]

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[38] This is exactly the starting point of my analysis. While Cavarero articulates the shift from the abstract generality of the dialectic being-nothingness to the concrete coming into being of one individual from the maternal flesh, I am trying to push further the argument, in including the gestational experience as philosophical relevant for the self. I am currently working on this topic in the following paper: Miglio, Argirò. Unveiling the Relational Origin of the Self: Hannah Arendt's Notion of Natality in Dialogue with Feminist Phenomenology. In Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology (under preparation).

[39] Cavarero, A. (2014). Relating narratives: Storytelling and selfhood. Routledge, 2014, p. 1.

[40] Smith, N. (2016). "Phenomenology of pregnancy: a cure for philosophy?" in J. Bornemark, & N. Smith (Eds.). Phenomenology of pregnancy, Elders 2016.

[41] According to the good practices that suggest a neutral language for avoiding gender bias and implicit gender assumptions in academic writings (see for instance APA guidelines), I employ the singular they as a pronoun when I am referring to a subject whose gender identity is unspecified or irrelevant for my argument (e.g.: human being, fetal-other).

Along these lines, Iris Marion Young opens her classic essay "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation" (1984) with a short overview of how pregnancy is conventionally understood:

> The library card catalog contains dozens of entries under the heading "pregnancy": clinical treatises detailing signs of morbidity; volumes cataloging studies of fetal development, with elaborate drawings; or popular manuals in which physicians and others give advice on diet and exercise for the pregnant woman.[42]

Pregnancy, she writes, "does not belong to the woman herself" – rather, it is seen as a state of development of the fetus (with the woman as a *container*), a biological process, or again as a *condition* in which the woman should "take care of herself".[43] Thirty-five years after Young's essay, the epistemic object "pregnancy" is gradually considering the pregnant subject herself, since it has been acknowledged that her experience cannot be reduced exclusively to her health condition. Despite this, the main dictionaries in English, French, and Italian tend to persist in depicting the pregnancy as a *condition* or *state*,[44] – which is symptomatic of how pregnancy is commonly thought within Western tradition. Phenomenological reflections and feminist praxis instead look towards understanding what gestation is for the gestating subject and of how the gestating subject could shed light on the concepts of body, subject, intersubjectivity, and many other themes.

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[42] *Young (2005), p. 46.*

[43] *Young (2005), p. 46.*

[44] *Let me give a few examples: Cambridge Dictionary defines pregnancy "the state of being pregnant" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pregnancy); Collins maintains that pregnancy is a condition, but defines that also in temporal terms, as a time frame: 'Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or the period of time during which a female is pregnant." (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pregnancy); According to the Oxford English Dictionary, pregnancy is "The condition of a female of being pregnant or with child; an instance of this" (https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150080?rskey=oyxMNw&result=1#eid).*
In French, Dictionnaire Larousse provide a double definition of pregnancy, both as condition that concerns woman from the insemination to the labour ("État de la femme entre la fécondation et l'accouchement"), or, as alternative, as a set of event during when the embryo - and then the fetus - grows within the maternal womb ("Ensemble des phénomènes se déroulant entre la fécondation et l'accouchement, durant lesquels l'embryon, puis le fœtus, se développe dans l'utérus maternel.") https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/grossesse/38395?q=grossesse#38332.
Similar definitions are available in Italian: according to Treccani, "La condizione (detta anche gestazione) della donna, e in genere delle femmine dei mammiferi, nel periodo che va dall'inizio del concepimento al parto (o comunque all'espulsione del feto), e la durata stessa di tale periodo" (http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/gravidanza/); for Hoepli: "Condizione della femmina dei Mammiferi nei mesi che precedono il parto, durante i quali si sviluppa il feto che essa porta" (https://dizionari.repubblica.it/Italiano/G/gravidanza.html); Nuovo De Mauro: "condizione in cui si trova la donna o la femmina di un mammifero dal momento della fecondazione sino al parto" (https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/gravidanza); Sabatini Coletti: "momento del concepimento al parto; la durata di tale periodo" (https://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario_italiano/G/gravidanza.shtml).

Existential phenomenology and eidetic-transcendental phenomenology respectively have paved the way for the development of Feminist and Critical Phenomenologies in the XXI century,[45] alongside the call to give voice and visibility to a range of human experiences.

With that in mind, the next chapter aims to sketch a critical genealogy of pregnancy as a philosophical problem, starting from themes discussed by authors of continental tradition who have both posed the theoretical basis for further development in this growing field, and reflected on pregnancy as a corporeal – and not only physical – experience. The epistemic object *pregnancy* is much richer than we are used to believing, in that it involves a complex system of different meanings. "Pregnancy" refers to a biological process that starts with *fertilization* and finishes with *childbirth*. Indeed, this process entails a specific personal experience, in that every gestating self discovers herself to be pregnant in a web of emotional, familiar, and affective relations. This involves a certain existential situatedness, which includes her corporeal potential, ethnicity, religious inclination, and sexual orientation.[46] Intersectional feminism (as both theory and practice) has taught us that the performance of one's gender identity – and, I add, the way in which one may imagine, fear, desire, or shun being pregnant – is shaped (read: silenced, misunderstood, rejected) by and within a nonlinear combination of different factors.[47] To paraphrase Orwell, "all pregnancies are equal, but some pregnancies are more equal than others": a plethora of sociological, anthropological, and economic literature confirms this. Reports from world health agencies offer impressive series of data about how different it is to be pregnant in different political and geographical contexts: access to healthcare and the overall quality of the medical system are key elements.[48] Events of accidental death and serious injury to some pregnant (or

[45] *See the volume G. Weiss, S. Gayle, and A. V. Murphy (Eds.), (2019). 50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology. Northwestern University Press, as well as the Journal Puncta (http://journals.oregondigital.org/index.php/pjcp).*

[46] *I employ the expression "found out to be pregnant" precisely for enhancing the contingency and the on-principle unpredictability of the process.*

[47] *Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). "Intersectionality and feminist politics." European journal of women's studies 13.3, 193-209; Carastathis, A. (2014) The concept of intersectionality in feminist theory. Philosophy Compass. 304-314; Cho, S. C., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 38.4, 785-810; In Collins, P. H. (2015) Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. Annual review of sociology 41, 1-20, Collins defines intersectionality in the following terms: "The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities." (p. 1). Duane Davis remarks that some aspects of Husserlian phenomenology go in the direction of a critical phenomenology in a similar way to Collins' view on intersectionality; see: Davis, D. "The phenomenological Method", in G. Weiss, S. Gayle, and A. V. Murphy (Eds.), (2019). 50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology. (pp. 3-11). Northwestern University Press.*

[48] *See e.g.: https://www.unfpa.org/*

labouring) women are not independent from one's situation. Thus, it is essential not to forget how much factors such as class, race, and existential position modify the chance of having a pleasant or safe gestational experience.[49]

While the social sciences address pregnant experience by questioning the particular experiences (qualitative approach) and by analysing empirical data and statistics (quantitative approach), phenomenology may offer a fresh eye. In particular, the phenomenological toolkit has the advantage of recognizing the many tiers of experience, and addressing lived experience by reconnecting the universality of "The Experience of Pregnancy" and the individuality of "my experience". The methodological questions that motivate my research are then the following: How might phenomenology make sense of gestational experience, and disentangle the experiential levels implied in the process?

1.2. Phenomenology and feminist philosophy

As briefly outlined above, addressing the issue of gestational experience allows us to question and challenge the ways in which concepts such as *self*, *body*, and *subject* are traditionally intended within philosophy as a field. Contemporary phenomenological literature focuses on the ways in which phenomenologies of pregnancy revise or reject theories of the subject. After a brief introduction concerning the historical reception of Feminist Phenomenology, Talia Welsh claims that one of the main contributions of phenomenology of pregnancy has been to problematise long-standing theories of the subject, confronting the fact that our uterine life is not autonomous or discrete; as she puts it, "any account of the human subject would have to reconsider its designation of human life as independent monad".[50] The exploration of pregnancy calls to be worked through from the subject's lived experience, which reveals the problem of accounting for the subject as an exclusively "autonomous, rational, genderless, unified and discrete" agent.[51] According to her analysis, the phenomenology of pregnancy and the philosophies of body share the common goal of affirming that mind and body are not separate metaphysical

[49] *It may be sufficient to take a look to Western news: pregnant women who lose their babies-to-be because of violent acts of racial rage; or again, the access to healthcare is still very much limited for some women depending on their race, or their voice risk falling on deaf ears (https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2019/01/giving-birth-in-united-states-suprisingly-deadly/).*

[50] *Welsh, T. (2013). "The Order of Life: How phenomenologies of pregnancy revise and reject theories of the subject." In S. LaChance Adams & C. R. Lundquist (Eds.), Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Mothering. (pp. 283-299). Fordham University Press, p. 289.*

[51] *Welsh (2013), p. 291.*

entities, suggesting that embodiment is prior to all other subjective characteristics. In overcoming the dualistic Cartesian distinction between a mechanical body regulated by a mind-consciousness, the experience of pregnancy provides a bodily phenomenology that is neither universalistic nor generalizable. Rather, it is essential for the *coming into life* of every human being. As Welsh remarks, pregnancy reminds us our original interconnection as human beings, as well as the "primacy of embodiment over a self-enclosed mental experience".[52] While the author suggests pregnancy may disclose the self as embodied and relational, she does not forward alternative theoretical frameworks to better achieve this goal, which would open up a much-needed field of exploration. Similarly, Carol Bigwood points out that phenomenological analysis of pregnant experiences helps in challenging the privileged positions from which male philosophers have extrapolated their male-experience as universal.[53] The theoretical upshot of my analysis therefore exceeds simple acknowledgement of the epistemic potential for pregnancy to re-frame operative concepts, but also highlights the heuristic potential of gestational experience in all its critical flow.

Phenomenology of pregnancy reveals the absurd inconsistency of claims that subjectivity can come from nowhere, and demonstrate instead that we did born from another human being (which happens to be biologically female). This notion parallels other critical reflections on the origin of human subjectivity, which can be traced at least to feminist readings of Hannah Arendt's theses in *The Human Condition*. Moving beyond Heidegger's attention to the ontological (and not merely ontic) structures of human existence, Arendt proposes natality as an authentic existential possibility, and not a merely contingent fact. As Schües notes, the Arendtian category of natality "means that human beings are born from someone in the world" and "it points to the idea that the fact of being born stands for our relationality in the world and leads to the capacity of begin".[54] Many notable works discuss Arendt's proposal through a feminist lens, examining the role of women in giving life, highlighting the materiality of the pregnant process, and refusing the metaphorization of the birthing experience (which can also be found within Arendt's work). Of special interest, Adriana Cavarero's work is a re-reading of the

[52] *Welsh (2013), p. 296.*
[53] *Bigwood, C. (1991). Renaturalizing the body (with the help of Merleau-Ponty). Hypatia, 6(3), 54-73, p. 56.*
[54] *Schües, C. (2017). Natality. Philosophical rudiments concerning a generative phenomenology. Thaumàzein| Rivista di Filosofia, 4, 9-35, p. 10.*

Arendtian category of natality, and a call to include the gestating subject's perspective in discourse around birth. [55] Shifting the perspective from my birth to my mother's labour necessitates the inclusion of the labouring subject's view in the philosophical discourse on self's origin, and also discloses the relational dimension that marks the beginning of life. While it is commonly accepted that everyone comes from a gestating subject who carries and interacts with the gestated self, Cavarero's account of "coming into the world" and other relational accounts of natality have not always permeated the mainstream.

This line of research focuses on the *meaning* of birth for the gestating self, subverting the Western notion of the subject as a self-contained, isolated, and autogenerated ego. In some texts, we find general references to the maternal subject, who encompasses the pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.[56] In this regard, I maintain the importance of distinguishing between the bodily experience of pregnancy and the assumption of the identity of the mother. Refusing biological essentialism, I premise my research on the following phenomenological distinction: pregnancy is not the same phenomenon as motherhood. I suggest that a clear terminological distinction between the processes (pregnancy *and* motherhood), and the actors there implied (fetus *and* baby, gestating subject *and* mother) could shed some light within the phenomenological structures of the gestational process. While the notion of the *fetus* as a baby has already been problematized within the literature, there is a surprising lack of direct engagement from phenomenologists with the status of the gestating subject, who is sometimes simply presented as "mother-to-be".

This categorical distinction responds to the many experiential levels operating within gestational and maternal situations. Not only does this approach stress the complexity of these phenomena and the urgency of rethinking this conceptual terrain, this move acknowledges the existential validity of different experiences across the eidetic structure of pregnancy. Motherhood has been accounted for as a twofold phenomenon – as both Institution and Experience – in notable work by Adrienne Rich.[57] Many other authors have created and developed new concepts, such as the powerful renegotiation of

[55] *Cavarero, A. (1990). "Dire la nascita", in Diotima, Mettere al mondo il mondo. La Tartaruga; Cavarero, A. (1990). Nonostante Platone: figure femminili nella filosofia antica, Editori riuniti; Cavarero, A. (2019). Democrazia sorgiva. Note sul pensiero politico di Hannah Arendt. Raffaello Cortina.*
[56] *See e.g., Bornemark (2016).*
[57] *Rich, A. (1995). Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution. WW Norton & Company.*

mothering as displayed in Andrea O'Reilly account.[58] While maternal experience is not the topic of this thesis, it is necessary to justify why I state that the pregnant process should not be analysed in close reference to motherhood. My thesis is that there is no *eidetic* necessity to link pregnancy and motherhood.

A gestating self may experience her pregnancy as a preparatory phase before motherhood – as a transitory stage leading into the acquisition of a new identity *mother* – and as the material experience of having a child. Nevertheless, the correlation between pregnancy and motherhood is not an essential constraint. Being a maternal subject and being a pregnant self are not two essential moments of the same phenomenon. One could experience pregnancy and not motherhood: indeed, pregnancy may end with a childbirth, or may finish with an abortion or an early loss. Conversely, being mother does not presuppose as a precondition having carried a baby, as the case of adoption well shows. If we want to seriously engage with the eidetic structures of pregnant experience, it is necessary in advance that we dismiss religious beliefs, social norms, and cultural convictions. In phenomenological terms, we need to bracket of our beliefs and personal experiences through the *epoché*.

Indeed, this move liberates the analysis from psychologistic assumptions about the supposedly *welcoming* female body and the desire of every woman *by nature* to become a mother sooner or later in her life. This opens a space for rethinking pregnant embodiment outside various positions of biological essentialism, as well as against the theoretical fundaments of an ethic of care. That pregnancy is a joyful rite of passage towards motherhood is nothing but a contingent norm, which is continuously disavowed by the morphological variety of concrete gestational experiences.[59]

The following preliminary theoretical issues of a phenomenology of pregnancy emerge: the first issue, concerning any phenomenology engaged with the concreteness of

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[58] O'Reilly, A. (2006). Rocking the cradle: Thoughts on motherhood, feminism and the possibility of empowered mothering. Toronto: Demeter Press; O' Reilly, A. (Ed.). (2008). Feminist mothering. SUNY Press; O' Reilly, A. (2007). Maternal Theory Essential Readings. Demeter Press; O' Reilly, A. (2017). Matricentric feminism: Theory, activism. Practice. Demeter Press. For phenomenological-informed works on the topic, see La Chance Adams, S. (2014). Mad mothers, bad mothers, and what a "good" mother would do: The ethics of ambivalence. Columbia University Press. Adams, S. L., Cassidy, T., & Hogan, S. (2020). The Maternal Tug: Ambivalence, Identity, and Agency. Demeter Press.

[59] Moreover, this position may be fruitfully explored for the theoretical outcomes it eventually leads. For instance, this distinction may sustain a position open to surrogacy. Some legal choices are precisely founded in the pregnancy/motherhood divide: see e.g., Baiocchi takes into account a 2016 decision by Italian Corte Suprema di Cassazione, according to which "il divieto di gravidanza surrogata 'non esprime un valore costituzionale superiore e inderogabile'; inoltre, il principio per cui la madre è colei che partorisce 'non può essere assunto a principio inderogabile di ordine pubblico'". Baiocchi (2018), p. 119.

the lived body, is the challenge of accounting philosophically for the uniqueness of the body, in terms of race, gender, physical, and psychical abilities, while maintaining also the "generalizing" gaze of philosophy; the second issue is specific to the phenomenology of pregnancy, since it is yet to be demonstrated under what circumstances and theoretical criteria it is possible, fruitful, or profitable to analyze an experience (that of pregnancy) which only *some* people can experience as maternal subjects. Put another way, it is precisely the heuristic potential of gestational experience that is at stake: what does pregnancy tell us about the nature of the human self?

Feminist philosophy has struggled for decades in reconciling the singularity of one's experience and the so-called *universalizing* gaze of philosophy (individuated as *male*). The challenge is to find a theoretical strategy of universalizing experience without generalizing it. The issue has been further discussed in the flourishing field of Feminist Phenomenology: for example, Fisher has stressed the relevance of this issue for any philosophical project whose aim is to connect "*my* experience of x" with "*The* experience of x". She discusses the possible encounters between phenomenology and feminism, highlighting contradictions, potentialities, and ways to substantiate their mutual enhancement. In particular, she emphasises that feminist theories and phenomenology share the same task of reconciling one's personal experience and a generalization. She argues in particular that,

> Feminist thought has always had to contend, though not always doing so explicitly, with such tensions: the emphasis on specificity and the personal on the one hand-the uniqueness of women's experience that serves as the impetus, as we have seen, for so many feminist critiques and contributions-while at the same time endeavoring to articulate a 'women's situation', the shared and generalized situation or structure of women's place, role, and oppression in society and culture.[60]

Phenomenology, she states, reveals a dialectical tension akin to the feminist predicament, but the complexity of subjective experience is not necessarily problematic. The pillar

[60] *Fisher, L. (2000). "Phenomenology and feminism: Perspectives on their relation." In L. Fisher, & L. Embee (Eds.) (2000). Feminist phenomenology (pp.17-38), Springer, pp. 28-29. For more on feminist phenomenology, see A. Garry, S. J. Khader, & A. Stone (Eds.). (2017). The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy. Routledge.*

goals are then: "to articulate a generalized account of the structures of subjectivity from the perspective of individual subjectivity and ownness; investigating the essence of subjectivity while also elaborating the immediacy, particularity, and intensity of my experience as a subject."[61] Far from being *generic* – or *generalist* – the self analyzed through phenomenological lens is "understandable rather as the thread of invariance; not one model fits all, but structural invariance within variance, that which gives shape and coherence to the variance."[62]

In discussing the classical texts of phenomenology – especially Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's philosophical projects – scholars of feminist phenomenology problematize the neutrality of the phenomenological bodily subject, that, according to their criticism, fails to account for the specific characteristics and distinctiveness of each human body, and which effaces sexual difference, corporeal particularities, and ethnicity. This problem has accompanied phenomenology as a method and a scholarship from the very beginning. Focus on lived experience was a central point in the first few decades of phenomenological scholarship. The case of Frantz Fanon is especially notable: in 1952, only seven years after Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, he published the book *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs*, wherein he uncovered this mechanism of surreptitious generalization, showing how Sartre's phenomenology and ontology of the Look completely *over*looked experiences of otherness among people of colour.[63] Between Merleau-Ponty and Fanon's books, Beauvoir published *Le Deuxième Sèxe* (1949), in which recent readers have seen not only a political manifesto but also a detailed phenomenological analysis that bring women's embodiment into phenomenological debates. Many contemporary philosophers still use Beauvoir's text by way of introduction into theoretical problems and possible paths for accounting for the lived experience of women, in the same way that Fanon's reflections are still renegotiated and employed by phenomenologists in critical race studies. These two examples show that

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[61] Fisher (2000), pp. 28-29.

[62] Fisher (2000), pp. 29. For further critical contributions on the relationship between feminism and phenomenology, see also: Stawarska, B. (2018). "Subject and Structure in Feminist Phenomenology: Re-reading Beauvoir with Butler", in Shabot, S. C., & Landry, C. (Eds.). Rethinking feminist phenomenology: theoretical and applied perspectives (pp. 13-33). Rowman & Littlefield.

[63] On the topic of racialized embodiment, see the notions of schéma historico-raciale (Fanon, F. (1952). Peau noire, masques blancs. Seuil), as well as contemporary developments, among others: Yancy, G. (2019). Confiscated bodies. In Weiss, G., Salamon, G. & Murphy, A (Eds). 50 concepts for a critical phenomenology (pp. 69-75). Northwestern University Press. Petherbridge, D. (2017). Racializing Perception and the Phenomenology of Invisibility. In L. Dolezal, & D. Petherbridge, (Eds.). Body/self/other: The phenomenology of social encounters (pp. 103-133). SUNY Press. Ngo, H. (2017). The habits of racism: A phenomenology of racism and racialized embodiment. Lexington Books.

phenomenology has, in its theoretical premises, a strong call to account for the specificity of individual lived experiences. In this context, the notion itself of *experience* acquires its philosophical relevance and makes possible the investigation of specific human situations.

To return to feminist phenomenology, Heinämaa sums up and expresses the major points of feminist investigation, as well as rejecting a wide and generalist idea of phenomenology as an inquiry into human experience. In a special issue co-edited with Rodemeyer and dedicated to feminist phenomenology, we read that further developments and mutual connections between phenomenology and fields like psychoanalysis, pragmatism, and social theory have "neglected or abandoned the distinction between transcendental or ontological inquiries and empirical investigations."[64] This non-technical sense of phenomenology, they say, has "lost contact with the transcendental aspirations that originally had motivated the undertaking."[65] Heinämaa argues in another text that phenomenology should be understood as "A transcendental-philosophical investigation into the correlation between subjectivity and objectivity, or consciousness and being, characteristic of all experience".[66] The challenge to individuate a continuity between subjectivity and objectivity is probably one of the most long-standing and compelling problems in the whole Western philosophy, and it is a further reason why a phenomenology of pregnancy is much needed today. Not only, as Johanna Oksala has argued, as "a study concerned with regional sub-themes in phenomenology more generally",[67] but also as a way to revitalize and re-signify the phenomenological method itself. [68]

The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, and between personal and philosophical perspective, according to Sandford, becomes even more crucial for feminist phenomenology, due to its interest in gendered bodily experiences. The question is how to build a philosophical phenomenology able to grasp the constitutive and eidetic features of lived experience. The debate involves many different voices, among which we find

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[64] *Heinämaa, S., & Rodemeyer, L. (2010). Introduction. Special Issue: Feminist Phenomenologies. Continental Philosophy Review, 43(1), 1-11, p. 4.*
[65] *Heinämaa, & Rodemeyer, (2010), p. 4.*
[66] *Heinämaa, S. (2011). A phenomenology of sexual difference: Types, styles and persons. In C. Witt (Ed.). (2010). Feminist metaphysics: explorations in the ontology of sex, gender and the self (pp. 131-155). Springer.*
[67] *Oksala, J. (2004). What is feminist phenomenology? Radical Philosophy, 126(July/Aug), 16-22, p. 17.*
[68] *As I argue in the next section, this is what I intend to do in this thesis by means of the eidetic phenomenology.*

Oksala's perspective.[69] She argues that philosophical phenomenology, when inquiring issues related to gender, has to be understood "as an investigation of the constitution of gendered experience", presenting itself as an alternative to the various conceptual analyses of language or biomedical investigations of the body. In her view, the main goal is to understand how phenomenology, as a philosophical method of investigation, could account for the issue of gender. Against Fisher,[70] who argues that the classical phenomenological eidetic or essential analysis is completely adequate in order to account for feminist themes and issues, Oksala states that:

> It is not enough just to give up the phenomenological reduction to transcendental consciousness and the totalizing understanding of the epoché, however. We also have to give up the first-person perspective as the indispensable starting point of our analysis. In striving to understand the constitution of gendered experience it is more helpful to start by reading anthropological and sociological investigations, medical reports on intersexed children, or psychological studies of children's gender beliefs than by analyzing one's own normatively limited experiences.[71]

Oksala proposes a widening of the scholar's gaze – by including first-hand reports issued from sociological or anthropological investigation – and a renouncement of the first-person perspective of the phenomenologist "as the indispensable starting point of our analysis". The traditional objection to this kind of argument is that empathy (*Einfühlung*) and imagination allow the phenomenologist to grasp the structure of an experience, even if it is not lived through in the first person. What is not correctly addressed here is that the concept of *experience* and that of *empirical experience* are not superimposable. In Oksala words, the gaze of the phenomenologist and data from empirical science seem to be mutually exclusive, but I do not believe this is the case. There is a third possibility: as a phenomenologist, I can trace the experiential structures of a phenomenon also (but not only) by reading first-hand diaries and medical reports. I can learn something about the variety of experiences, and I can see how the concepts are constructed and then applied

[69] *Oksala, J. A phenomenology of gender. Continental Philosophy Review, 2006, 39(3), 229-244.*
[70] *Fisher (2000).*
[71] *Oksala, (2006), pp. 229-244.*

to singular experiences. As a phenomenologist, my gaze is situated specifically at the crossroads between the conceptual and the empirical.

This methodological problem is key when studying the experience of pregnancy, since it is typically analyzed in medical terms or as a private idiosyncratic experience. Aiming to sketch a genealogy of pregnancy as a philosophical issue, I start by simply asking how it is methodologically possible to connect the personal and universal, without either losing the irreducibility of individual lived experience or falling in coarse approximations. In the above-mentioned debate, Sandford disagrees with Oksala's view, and emphasises the philosophical value of a transcendental enquiry aimed at grasping the "shared structure" of gendered bodily experiences:

> What is discovered in such a study is only philosophically interesting, and can only have transcendental significance, if it is more than subjectively valid, if the structures revealed are shared structures: that is, only if the reflecting subject is understood in its universal aspect as a transcendental subject.[72]

I personally disagree with Oksala's call for an anti-eidetic phenomenology. I argue instead that the solution to this perpetual riddle can be found in one particular philosopher's work which has not received enough attention in Feminist Phenomenology: I am referring to the *Eidetik* in Husserl's works, especially in Ideas I. *Contra* Lundquist's claim that phenomenology of pregnancy must remain at descriptive level, I suggest that the eidetic approach allows us to preserve the irreducibility of marginalized experiences.[73] I forward my thesis in defense of a renewed conception of *essence* which can address and mitigate the hierarchical connotations of the notion of "normality". An analysis of essence may account for both levels of individual subjective experience (namely individual, singular and, private), and also the features of experience without which it ceases to be one type of experience and becomes something else.

Within this framework, how best to engage with intrauterine existence? What is the eidetic structure of the lived experience of pregnancy, that is to say a *Wesen* shared between every singular gestational experience? In the next section, I show how eidetic

[72] *Sanford, S. (2016) "Feminist Phenomenology, Pregnancy and Transcendental Subjectivity". In J. Bornemark, N. Smith (Eds.), Phenomenology of Pregnancy. Elanders (pp. 51-71), p. 54.*
[73] *Lundquist, C. (2008). "Being torn: Toward a phenomenology of unwanted pregnancy." Hypatia 23.3: 136-155.*

phenomenology can define the self as a thread of invariance – that is to say, a whole with some structural invariances within a set of possible variances. But first of all, let me clarify in what sense I use the terminological notions of "norm" and "normativity". As Heinämaa has argued, the notion (and the term) "norm" does not stand for a general concept having different meanings, but rather for "a peculiar type of ambiguity".[74] When we think about the experience of pregnancy, the primary sense of "normativity" is the one of a pervasive system of thoughts, actions, and social customs that are not as prescriptive as rules, but function as imperative "should/shouldn't" attitudes that may inform individual choices and attitudes. This Foucauldian sense of norm indicates a set of rules that can change over time, and that is reinforced by dominant narratives in given (historical, geographical, cultural) circumstances. This layer of normativity pertains equally to folklorist traditions, biomedical discourses, and cultural convictions.[75] A norm is "what is expected" from you by the society you live in. This sense is rooted in a Foucauldian understanding of normativity, as intertwined with biopower ("Une société normalisatrice est l'effet historique d'une technologie de pouvoir centrée sur la vie"[76]).[77] It is hardly surprising that this sense of normativity is the widespread among reflections on pregnancy. Based on the terminological clarification presented by Heinämaa, all these cases fall under the category of Customs or Social Habits; these norms are variable in time and space,[78] not punishable by law,[79] and relevant for individuals seeking to establish the proper and characteristic ways of living in a given society.[80] In this sense of the term, it could be considered abnormal to opt for an abortion in certain societies, or to offer a birthed child up for adoption. These two cases should not be considered intrinsically as *deviations* from the norm of the pregnancy, as I have shown above that there is no eidetic necessity that pregnancy ends with the childbirth of a baby of whom the gestating self

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[74] Heinämaa, S. (2019). Constitutive, Prescriptive, Technical or Ideal? On the Ambiguity of the Term "Norm". In M. Burch, J. Marsh, & I, McMullin (Eds.). Normativity, Meaning, and the Promise of Phenomenology. Routledge, pp. 9-20, p. 14.

[75] For some good examples of this use of the notion of normativity, see e.g.: Layne, L. L. (2003). Unhappy endings: a feminist reappraisal of the women's health movement from the vantage of pregnancy loss. Social science & medicine, 56(9), 1881-1891; Kofod, E. H., & Brinkmann, S. (2017). Grief as a normative phenomenon: The diffuse and ambivalent normativity of infant loss and parental grieving in contemporary Western culture. Culture & Psychology, 23(4), 519-533.

[76] Foucault, M. (1976) L'historie de la sexualité, volume I. La volonté de savoir. Gallimard.

[77] For some helpful explications of the concept of norm in Foucault philosophy, see: Legrand, S. (2007). Les normes chez Foucault. PUF; Kelly, M. (2019). What's In a Norm? Foucault's Conceptualisation and Genealogy of the Norm. Foucault Studies, 1(27), 1-22; Taylor, D. (2009). Normativity and normalization. Foucault studies, 45-63.

[78] Heinämaa (2019), p. 19.

[79] Heinämaa (2019), p. 19.

[80] Heinämaa (2019), p. 20.

automatically becomes the mother. Of course, one may well invoke moral or ethical arguments against this position, but these cannot undermine the eidetic core of the pregnant experience.

From a certain perspective, pregnant experience itself represents a *deviance* from the "normal embodiment". As Tanja Stähler points out,

> As for the pregnancy, it has been argued that it is in itself an experience of "abnormal embodiment", in that the self partially loses her accustomed bodily habits. Pregnancy means a profound transformation of our normal embodiment. Yet some of these changes can be described as establishing a new normality that is extra-ordinary and even optimal, such a being touched from the inside which is not usually an option for us, and which makes our perceptual landscape richer. […] those changes to my normal embodiment which probably nobody would describe as optimal, yet which reveal features of normal embodiment that I usually take for granted, like my habit body and my habitual access to the world around me. [81]

As I take into account in chapter seven, there are eidetics of pregnant embodiment that concern the lucidity of individual embodiment, the sense of being touched from inside, and the dislocation of weight. In this sense, pregnant experience is abnormal because it involves certain experiential structures that a non-pregnant self does not have:

> On an individual level, the experience of one's own lived body can only be temporarily or partially experienced as abnormal, for example, in contrast with or as interruption to the normal (habitual, familiar) course of subjective experience. From a first-person perspective, the subject experiences any abnormality as a modification of normality, as something that is different from what was expected and that is recognized in reference to an overall frame of normal experience.[82]

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[81] *Stähler, T. (2017). Exploring pregnant embodiment with phenomenology and Butoh dance. Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy (pp. 35-55), De Gruyter, p. 38.*

[82] *Jansen, J., & Wehrle, M. (2018). The normal body: Female bodies in changing contexts of normalization and optimization. In C. Fischer, & L. Dolezal (Eds.). New feminist perspectives on embodiment (pp. 37-55). Palgrave Macmillan, p. 40.*

That the experience of pregnancy represents a break in the normal embodiment of a person has been widely debated. What I would like to stress here is that within the gestational experience there is an eidetic norm – namely, the limits of the invariance of the experiential structures lived by the self.

1.3. *Eidos* and *morphé*

Through an expanded understanding of Husserlian eidetics in this section, I provide an inclusive phenomenological basis for analysing all pregnant experiences. Husserl devoted the first part of the first volume of "Ideas pertaining a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy" to the discussion of *essences*. There he states that individual existence is contingent. This kind of contingency is also referred to by Husserl as "factualness", and it is correlative to "a necessity which does not signify the mere de facto existence of an obtaining rule of coordination among spatiotemporal matters of fact but rather has the character of eidetic necessity and with this a relation to eidetic universality".[83] Every object of the experience could therefore be grasped not only as an individual (this-particular-phenomenon, happened in a specific time and space), but also, when considered "in respect of its own essence", as an object that could have also been in another time and in another space, with another form and other variations: "it is thus; in respect of its essence it could be otherwise". In stating that every matter of fact could be 'otherwise' from what is actual, Husserl argues that every contigency is necessarily correlated to an eidos: "when we said that any matter of fact, 'in respect of its own essence', could be otherwise, we were already saying that it belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence and therefore an Eidos, which can be apprehended purely."[84] The kind of contingency here presented is called by Husserl "factualness", and it is correlative to "a necessity which does not signify the mere de facto existence of an obtaining rule of coordination among spatiotemporal matters of fact but rather has the character of eidetic necessity and with this a relation to eidetic universality". If every matter of fact, in respect of its own essence, could also be otherwise, then anything contingent has an Eidos that could be the focus of phenomenological research

[83] *Husserl, E. (1982). Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First book: general introduction to a pure phenomenology. Kluwer, §2, p. 7.*
[84] *Husserl (1982), p. 7.*

(i.e., investigating the typical features in any instance of the experienced object). An individual object is not merely and exclusively *this here*, as a unique object. On the contrary, it has its "own specific character, its stock of essential predicables which must belong to it".[85] The eidos of any given thing is not a separate universal, like an ontological object abstracted from the factualness of the thing, but instead "it is nothing but a bond or constraint on possible variations of the thing's contents, beyond the limits of which that thing ceases to exist or to be a "good" instance of that eidos."[86] The Eidos comes under eidetic truths and belongs to different levels of universality; in presenting the hierarchical organization of essences, Husserl explains that any material object has its own particular essential species and, at the same time, it is counted under *universal species* – that is to say, the highest eidetic universalities. Husserlian analysis of consciousness, intersubjective levels of constitution, the lived and objective body, and social and political organization, are premised on the structural framework of *Wesen*, thought this has been largely misunderstood in philosophical debate. Eidetic analysis is not limited to material objects, but pertains to the totality of human experience: an example is given by Husserlian analysis of intersubjectivity, in which he investigates the essential features of social encounters.

Husserl argued that *eidos* is a new object of knowledge, distinct from the individual entity, grasped in perception.[87] Arguing that every matter of fact, in respect of its own essence, could also be otherwise, means that anything contingent has an essence that could be apprehended purely through the *Wesensschau* – namely, the *eidetic insight*. The elements of which a particular object consists are discovered through the method of *eidetic variation* – varying all the individual, contingent, and accidental features of one thing, and, in doing so, discovering the invariable features. In other words, this approach unearths the constraints that *resist* variation itself and that constitute precisely the essential structure or the eidos of the object at stake in analysis.

The eidetic approach can respond to Oksala's proposal of giving up the first person perspective in phenomenology. Indeed, eidetic variation allows the phenomenologist to explore the constraints of a given phenomenon by means of free

[85] *Husserl (1982), p. 7.*
[86] *De Monticelli, R. (2019). Edmund Husserl. In G. Stanghellini et al. (Eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology (pp. 11-20), Oxford University Press, p. 13.*
[87] *Husserl (1982), p. 13.*

variations. As Husserl makes clear, pure essence may be exemplified both in experiential data, and in data of "mere phantasy".[88] That means that the phenomenologist may grasp the eidetic structure of any given data by means of free phantasy – that is to say, by varying the accidental elements of a phenomenon with the aim of grasping what remains stable and invariable. This method should, of course, be enriched by careful attention to the Life-World. For example, we might consider Lisa Guether's admirable work in analysing solitary confinement. Guenther has not directly experienced the brokenness of subjectivity caused by prolonged and coerced solitary confinement of supermax prisons. Nevertheless, working through the Husserlian method, she offers an analysis of how subjectivity breaks under this punitive practice. She became aware of the lived experience of inmates by reading their testimonies. Having cultivated appropriate knowledge of their personal experience, she argues that solitary confinement deprives human subjects from *essential* co-existence between subjects: "What would it be like to be blocked from this essential structure of pairing? To be denied the pre-reflective experience of 'a living mutual awakening' of self to other and other to self?"[89] The deprivation of the intersubjective dimension of the self has been grasped by the author through an effort of phantasy. It is certainly true that she did not experience solitary confinement first-hand. At the same time, it is equally right to argue that she carries this analysis from her point of view, of a Western (precisely American) scholar in the XXI century. By contrast, Oksala seems to forget that, in the production of knowledge, it is simply impossible to efface one's own perspective as the starting point of every phenomenological analysis; even the most engaged and critically driven investigation is motivated by a certain being-in-the-world of the phenomenologist.

Eidetics are also criticized for being Platonist. However, the eidetic method does not reflect a denial of reality but, on the contrary, the possibility of imagining things otherwise and of discovering modalities of being-in-the-world. As Francesca De Vecchi has argued, the Husserlian conception of Eidetics is ground-breaking because essences are not some abstract entities relegated to the hyperuranium, but instead they are in the things themselves, constituting the essential and invariant structure of every whole.

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[88] *Husserl (1982), p. 13.*

[89] *Guenther, L. (2011). Subjects without a world? An Husserlian analysis of solitary confinement. Human Studies, 34(3), 257-276, p. 270. See also: Guenther, L. (2013). Solitary confinement: Social death and its afterlives. University of Minnesota Press.*

Essences so understood are the constraints that shape the parts of a certain whole as a certain Type.[90] I am defending is the notion that Husserlian eidetics can best enable a phenomenology of pregnancy, in that presents everyday *experience* as the bearer of meaning – mediated, of course, through the methodological devices of the *epoché*, bracketing, and eidetic reduction. Against accusations of Platonism, Husserlian eidetics strives to repair the fracture between ideal and real, abstraction and experience. To achieve this goal, Husserl puts forward a new and rich concept of *experience*, as well as theoretical (and existential) methods[91] – eidetic variation, *Wesensshau*, and *Fiktion* –that are geared towards showing the concreteness of the essences as a necessary complement to the transcendental structure of Life-World.

Concerning the *what* of the eidos, Piana puts forward a proposal that may help to elucidate some of the peculiar characters of the concept.[92] I would say – as in the Italian proverb "traduttore, traditore" – that every translation is the result of precise linguistic and theoretical decisions. According to Piana, the term *Wesen* could be translated in a more appropriate way with the Italian *struttura* (structure) than with the commonly employed *essenza* (essence). [93] He states that, in the concept of *Wesen,* the notion of structure is operative within the meaning itself, and that this choice has the advantage of avoiding quarrels over phenomenological Platonism.[94] The word *structure* refers to the inner constitution of the phenomenon, and thus could denote specifically the goal of phenomenological research. The brief essay *L'idea di uno strutturalismo fenomenologico* outlines some useful interpretative expedients for understanding Husserlian eidetics by freeing it up from the critical debate around the Husserlian Platonism. Piana explains that the phenomenological method aims to characterize the experiential acts, showing their inner differences and continuities at structural level. This definition places emphasis on

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[90] De Vecchi, F. (2018). Fenomenologia: la filosofia come eidetica e ontologia qualitativa del concreto. Giornale di Metafisica XL, 2, 570-582, p. 577.

[91] Pavie, X. (2009). Exercices spirituels dans la phénoménologie de Husserl. Editions L'Harmattan.

[92] See e.g., Piana, G. (2000). I problemi della fenomenologia, II edizione elettronica a cura di V. Costa, 2000 and Piana, G. (1996). L'idea di uno strutturalismo fenomenologico, in Phänomenologie in Italien, R. Cristin (Ed.), Knigshausen & Neumann. For a recent reappraisal of Piana's work, see in particular the following special issue: E. Caminada, & M. Summa (Eds.) (2020) Giovanni Piana. In memoriam. Phenomenological Reviews.

[93] Piana (1996), p. 3.

[94] "In realtà, se non cediamo alle abitudini della terminologia filosofica, ci è possibile scorgere nella parola tedesca Wesen una sfumatura di significato che potremmo esprimere meglio con struttura che con essenza. In questo modo risulterebbero semplicemente prive di senso le innumerevoli vecchie dispute sul platonismo fenomenologico. La parola «struttura» rimanda all'idea di uno scheletro, di uno schematismo interno, ad un modo della costituzione interna, in breve: all'idea di una forma caratteristica che, a mio parere, indica direttamente la mèta delle ricerche fenomenologiche." G. Piana (1996), p. 3.

what the author calls "the true sense of phenomenological enquiry about essences"[95] – knamely, the disclosing of the form, the structure, or the essence of objectual polarity within an anti-psychologist attitude. The intentional structure of subject-object constitution represents the key to understanding Piana's "structural phenomenology",[96] and to upholding the *polemic* sense of eidetic enquiry, the deepest calling of which is not explicable as a mere descriptivism.[97] Instead, phenomenological goal is to "make evident some meaningful circumstances of structural order", [98]due to the fact that the experience – in every singular form of its manifestation – expresses an inner structural/essential order.

The centrality of the notion of *structure* is also emphasized in the foreword of *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (1945). Merleau-Ponty opens the *Avant-Propos* by noting that the question "What is phenomenology?" may sound quite strange after fifty years of Husserl's work. And yet – we read – this problem is far from being completely solved. Merleau-Ponty then argues that phenomenology should be understood primarily as *étude des essences*, whose essences are not ontologically separated from the phenomena themselves:

> La phénoménologie, c'est l'étude des essences, et tous le problèmes, selon elle, reviennent à definer des essences: l'essence de la perception, l'essence de la conscience, par exemple. Mais la phénoménologie, c'est aussi une philosophie qui replace les essences dans l'existence et ne pense pas qu'on puisse comprendre l'homme et le monde autrement qu'à partir de leur 'facticité' [99]

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[95] *Piana (1996), p. 3.*

[96] *"Se la descrizione fenomenologica cerca realmente di riferirsi alla correlazione intenzionale, essa deve rivolgersi alla polarità oggettuale nel modo del suo configurarsi in una «forma», «struttura» o «essenza» (termini che qui vogliamo considerare come equivalenti) in rapporto agli atti strutturanti del soggetto. Potremmo dire in breve che, nella considerazione intenzionale, l'essenza si presenta come costituita dal soggetto e l'analisi fenomenologica deve ripercorrere la via di questo processo di costituzione." Piana (2000), p. 86. See also: Zhok, A. (2012). "The Ontological Status of Essences in Husserl's Thought". New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy, vol. XI, 99-130.*

[97] *Piana (1996), p. 4.*

[98] *Piana (1996), p. 4. My translation.*

[99] *Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). Phénomenologie de la perception, avant-propos I, Gallimard. Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes the centrality of Husserlian project of eidetic, by noting the continuity between the notion of eidos and the one of Gestalt, whose he dedicated his first work La Structure du Comportement (1942). In exploring the synergies between Merleau-Ponty's notion of Gestalt and Husserl's one of Wesen, Romdenh-Romluc points out that, "Merleau-Ponty's use of the notion of the Gestalt to illuminate Husserl's idea of an essence also points to another important feature of it. The Gestalt form of a momentary perceptual experience is grasped all at once. One cannot grasp a Gestalt merely through reason—one either sees it or one does not […]. But reasoning can only ever be a prop to help me see.*

Merleau-Ponty's words highlight the impossibility of conceiving the self without starting with concrete experiential structures. The study of essence is therefore the work of reading a given reality to grasp its inner structures.

Feminist phenomenology has avoided phenomenological essentialism, because of its general hesitation (if not embarrassment) in defending essentialist positions.[100] This neglect of Husserlian eidetics could be also explained by the most common – biased – interpretation of the static Husserlian approach as abstract, solipsist, and disembodied, and moreover from the assumption that there are other concepts more suitable for a "critical" phenomenology. In particular, the concept of *body schema* is often deployed, as Guenther remembers,

> For example, the body schema is a useful concept for critical phenomenology because it plays a constitutive role in the emergence of meaning, and yet it remains historically contingent and open to reconfiguration *in a way that an eidos or essence is not*.[101]

The idea that seems to emerge is that the essences are universal, a-historical, fixed, and permanent qualities of a given thing. Indeed, Husserlian eidetics could be, on the contrary, a means for subverting the improper "fixity" of essences, as authors like Salamon have shown. In her paper "Gender Essentialism and Eidetic Inquiry", the author recaps the long-standing feminist debate on essentialism, proposing the application of Husserlian eidetics to gender issues within transgender studies. In particular, she conceives "free

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More generally, one cannot identify an essence by merely following a series of steps in anything like the way that one reaches the conclusion of a piece of deductive reasoning […] identifying an essence always requires the use of insight." Romdenh-Romluc, K. (2018). Science in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology. In D. Zahavi (ed.). The Oxford handbook of the history of phenomenology, (pp.340-359). Oxford University Press, p. 352.

[100] For the feminist debate on essentialism, see e.g., Fuss, D. (1989). Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference. Routledge; Malabou, C. (2009). Changer de différence: le féminin et la question philosophique. Galilée; Schor, N. (1989). This essentialism which is not one. Coming to grips with Irigaray. differences, 1(2), 38-58; Stone, A (2004). Essentialism and Anti-essentialism in Feminist Philosophy. Journal of Moral Philosophy, 1(2), 135-53; Witt, C. (1995). Anti-essentialism in feminist theory. Philosophical Topics, 23(2), 321-344. 10.5840/philtopics19952327; Witt, C. (2011). What is Gender Essentialism? In C. Witt, (Ed.), Feminist metaphysics: explorations in the ontology of sex, gender and the self (pp. 11-25). Springer.For an eidetic analysis in a Husserlian sense, see Salamon, G. (2018). Gender Essentialism and Eidetic Inquiry. In S. Cohen Shabot, & C. Landry (Eds.), Rethinking Feminist Phenomenology. Theoretical and Applied Perspectives (pp. 33-51). Rowman & Littlefield.

[101] Guenther, L. (2020). Critical Phenomenology (pp. 11-16) In G. Weiss, S. Salamon, &A. & Murphy (Eds). 50 concepts for a critical phenomenology (pp. 11-16). Northwestern University Press, p. 13.

eidetic variation" and "eidos" as means for continually reconsidering and approaching anew matters of fact, following in that Zaner's statement, who points out that,

> Apprehending an 'essence' or an *eidos* requires what Husserl termed a 'coincidence in conflict' among many variants. The One, the 'common', stands out from but also by means of the Many. In any case, this characteristic suggests why it is, as Husserl repeatedly emphasized, that judgments about kinds must essentially b*e open to error* and, therefore, to continual *criticism*.[102]

Salomon goes further, in arguing that categories of thought are built "not only of our habitual judgements but also for our continual revisions".[103] This reading of *eidos* as permeable to change presents the advantage of thinking through both possible and actual scenarios which *prima facie* seem to be excluded from the category. Salamon makes this point:

> And in this way, in encountering difference and letting that difference revise my sense of what is possible, the uncountably diverse range of beings in the world *that already exist as women* is what then guides my insight as to what the essence of woman is, *even if I do not at first understand these women as belonging to the category*.[104]

This accent on the freedom and plasticity of eidetics with regard to factualness represents a real opportunity to discuss norms of gestational experience, making it possible, at the same time, to situate the discourse at a constitutive level.

I now briefly compare Goethean morphology and Husserlian eidetics with the aim of disambiguating the term *essence*. One of the first and most thoughtful interpreters of Husserl's thought was Spiegelberg,[105] who subsumes Goethe's intellectual production under the category "Pseudo-Phenomenologies", or "Extra-Philosophical

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[102] *Zaner, R. M. (2010). At play in the field of possibles. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology 41.1, 28-84, quot. in Salamon (2018).*
[103] *Salamon (2018), p. 45.*
[104] *Salamon (2018), pp. 45-46.*
[105] *Spiegelberg, H. (1960). The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction. Martinus Nijhoff. p. 8.*

Phenomenologies", and puts forward a correlation between Goethe and Husserl in terms of anti-scientism and a critical attitude towards Newtonian and Galilean philosophies (and ontologies) of nature. Many other contributors also address the continuity between morphology and phenomenology, taking into account the polemic attitude against scientific thought that pervades both Goethe and Husserl's respective work. Especially in the *Krisis,* Husserl problematizes the contemporary idea of science and the disruptive force of the "science of facts", which was building "men of the fact".[106]

Nonetheless, I argue that my analysis of pregnancy could benefit from a Goethean-Husserlian encounter when it comes to two other angles: the inseparability and the ontological continuity between reality and structure; and the meaning of experience. Goethe discussed the issue of grasping the *object* of the experience at length, arguing against the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, as well as showing that in every individual it is possible to see the totality of forms:

> What is the universal?
> The single case.
> What is the particular?
> Millions of cases.[107]

Hennigfeld compares Husserlian eidetics and Goethian morphology, explaining it as follows: "The Urphänomen shapes the absolute limit that essentially and necessarily belongs to this particular phenomenon".[108] It is the essential pattern or process of a thing: *Ur-* deals with primordial, archetypal basic; the ur-phenomenon may be thought of as the "deep-down phenomenon," the essential core of a thing that makes it what it is and what it becomes."[109] Goethe defines the *Urphänomen* as the principal expression, the original and fundamental phenomenon:

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[106] *See e.g.: Simms, E.-M. (2005). Goethe, Husserl, and the crisis of the European sciences. Janus Head 8.1,160-172.*
[107] *Hennigfeld, I. (2015). Goethe's Phenomenological Way of Thinking and the* Urphänomen. *In Goethe Yearbook 22.1 (pp. 143-167), p. 154.*
[108] *Hennigfeld (2015), p. 158.*
[109] *Roszak, T. (1973). Where the wasteland ends: politics and transcendence in postindustrial society. Vol. 903. Doubleday Books, p. 306: "The Romantic poet Johann von Schiller complained to Goethe that his 'ur-phenomenon' was synonymous with the Platonic ideal, but Goethe refused to accept that characterization."*

> We venture, once for all, to call the leading appearance in question, as generally described in the foregoing pages, a primordial and elementary phenomenon; and we may here be permitted at once to state what we understand by the term. The circumstances which come under our notice in ordinary observation are, for the most part, insulated cases, which, with some attention, admit of being classed under general leading facts. These again range themselves under theoretical rubrics which are more comprehensive, and through which we become better acquainted with certain indispensable conditions of appearances in detail. From henceforth everything is gradually arranged under higher rules and laws, which, however, are not to be made intelligible by words and hypotheses to the understanding merely, but, at the same time, by real phenomena to the senses. We call these primordial phenomena, because nothing appreciable by the senses lies beyond them, on the contrary, they are perfectly fit to be considered as a fixed point to which we first ascended, step by step, and from which we may, in like manner, descend to the commonest case of every-day experience. Such an original phenomenon is that which has lately engaged our attention.[110]

Goethean epistemology is then coupled with the anti-metaphysical stance, that the changeable Forms (*Bildung*) and the *sensibilia* are in the same ontological realm.
The distinction between what is given on empirical level and what could be grasped through philosophical intuition is here refused. According to Goethe's project, the investigation of a concrete phenomenon, under the form of an analysis of this particular individual, has universal meaning precisely because this individual displays some characteristics which are common (to different degrees) to every individual. In a similar fashion, phenomenological (Husserlian and Merleau-Pontian) understandings of essence presuppose that every phenomenon displays in itself the conditions of its manifestation.

Through the observation and analysis of the natural realm, one can grasp the very secret of reality, namely its inner *Identität*. Therefore, the concepts of *Wesen* and *Urphäenomen* share some important features for my analyses: (1) the idea of limit (invariable structure that *resists*, passing through the potentially endless exercise of

[110] *Goethe, J. W. (2015) Theory of colors, MIT Press, p. 74.*

Fiktion – in Husserl – and *Phantasie* or *Einbildungskraft* – in Goethe); and (2) their ontological concreteness. Both concepts present a coincidence of the individual phenomenon and its universal, higher unity, which is not ontologically separate but, on the contrary, is *within* the phenomenon itself. This leads to (3) the possibility to directly grasp the objects through an act of intuition, differently understood, and 4) the variability of the same phenomenon, whose changes are possible within the structure of their identity.

If experience itself conveys sense and reveals the inner organization of reality, then corporeal processes and human phenomena could be subjected to a morphological-phenomenological inquiry. In this theoretical framework, the irreducibility of *my* pregnancy and the *model* of pregnancy as such are not separated from degrees of objectivity and scientificity. We might consider a horizontal comprehension of the concrete experiences of pregnancy as an objection to biomedical discourse, which itself treats the phenomenon of pregnancy in a Platonic way. Biomedical accounts present pregnancy only as a physiological phenomenon: in this narrative, there is a universalized notion of pregnancy – more specifically, there is an idealized maternal subject.

On the contrary, I hold that that every experience already unfolds, in itself, all the possible – actual or potential – other experiences, the differences of whichare contingent, and they do not essentially modify the *Typus* of gestating experience. In Goethean discourse, *Bildung* is subject to never-ending modifications and to a nonlinear development, that, far from invalidating the natural rules, confirm them. Natural processes cast off the texture of reality, in which every individuum typifies the underlying and visible rules of development.

Pregnancy is thus conceivable as both a personal and universal experience: in every particular expression, the essential structures emerge as the set of limits and constraints that define the *Identität* of pregnancy itself. All pregnancies require a radical and mutual co-emergence between a gestating self and a fetal-other. Nonetheless, every pregnancy presents some peculiarities, either individual or *quasi-transcendental*. According to Guenther's analysis, there are some structures which are not a priori "in the sense of being absolutely prior to experience and operating in the same way regardless of context", but otherwise that they have a key role in the constitution of our experience of ourselves, others, and the world, and "in shaping the meaning and the manner of our

experience".[111] Patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity, for instance, are properly "ways of seeing", that actively inform our natural attitude and shape the quality of our experiences, becoming ways of "making the world."[112] These structures shape our bodily experiences, often in insidious ways, but accounting for these structures can reveal the power relations and socio-political structures at play.[113] Stanier and I discussed the mediation of these quasi-transcendental structures in the very constitution of many existential experiences, through a specific analysis of painful experience.[114] These attempts go precisely in the direction of dismantling the idea that, if an experience is shared, this means that it is experienced exclusively *in the same way* by everyone, or, alternatively, only in an idiosyncratic manner. Structural conditions deeply inform our experiences in the middle of these extremes. To give a spatial dimension to this intuition, it could be said that the personal-idiosyncratic layer represents the lower level of experience. The structural (here called "quasi-transcendental") layer serves as a permeable threshold, which is located in-between the personal and the eidetic. These three levels are constantly co-constituted, to the point that I renounce any notion *pure* experience, arguing instead that experience is located specifically in the lived situatedness of the subject. How then to complement this critical-awareness with eidetics? According to Husserlian analysis, the *eidos* of something is, in principle, opened up to further configurations and re-negotiations, since it is issued from the concreteness of a given phenomenon. The constraints that shape something, without which this particular *x* ceases to be as such and becomes something else, should be understood as variable and open to further configurations.

I defend the idea that, in order to a pregnancy to be performed, some essential structures and pre-conditions should be fulfilled. I would say, in different terms, that the lived experience of pregnancy would cease to be such if, for instance, the fetal-other was not gestated within a human body, but in an artificial womb. The theoretical and experiential possibility of ectogenesis, in this context, does not invalidate the actual

[111] *Guenther (2019), p .11.*
[112] *Guenther (2019), p. 12. I propose to include the phenomenon of ableism among the quasi-transcendental structure in my paper "Per una fenomenologia critica della gravidanza", forthcoming in Chiasmi International, Issue 23 La Phénoménologie critique après Merleau-Ponty.*
[113] *Weiss et al (2019).*
[114] *Stanier J., Miglio N. (2021) Painful Experience and Constitution of the Intersubjective Self: A Critical-Phenomenological Analysis. In S. Ferrarello (Ed.) Phenomenology of Bioethics: Technoethics and Lived-Experience. The International Library of Bioethics. Springer.*

structural and essential structure of human gestation, but admits the possibility that constraints of the phenomenon may change. Eidetics thus represents a strategy for reading reality and grasping inner structure, without necessarily implying a normativity on fixed principles. The case of ectogenesis is a theoretical possibility that opens up to other potentialities, without effacing the *actuality* of gestational phenomenon. Another order of case is the one of a woman suffering from pseudocyesis, who does not "really" gestate, but *she only feels like* she is gestating. Is the presence of an actual fetus one of the constraints of pregnancy? Does gestational experience cease to be such if the fetus is only imagined, if the gestating subject has bodily indicators *typically* related to pregnancy, and if she experiences *under* and *over* her skin a fetal presence which, in this context, is phantomic? For the moment, I remain aware that the normativity of gestational experience is dependent on many factors that essentially modify its nature, to the point that I believe every attempt to map pregnancy eidetically has to maintain this *caveat* and should have a tentative nature.

As Husserl describes his method along these lines in a manuscript around 1915:

> Prior to all theory the world is given. All opinion, warranted or not, popular, superstitious, and scientific ones – they all refer to the world already given in advance. How does the world give itself to me, what can I immediately articulate about it, how can I immediately and generally describe that for what it gives itself, what it is according to its original sense, as this sense gives itself as the sense of the world itself in 'immediate' perception and experience? [115]

Husserlian phenomenology is particularly powerful for bracketing the contingent elements of an experience, and for grasping the inner structures of a given phenomenon. This does not result in a denial of the variety disclosed by any given experience. On the contrary, the project of an eidetics of pregnancy has the massive potential to unveil forms of social and cultural normativity and, in this way, to distinguish between what pertains to the experience itself and what is the result of contingencies. This form of essentialism

[115] *Husserl, E. (2006). The basic problems of phenomenology: From the lectures, winter semester, 1910-1911. Springer, p. 107.*

also allows us to preserve the irreducibility of marginalized experiences, and provide solid arguments for a critical reappraisal of the pregnant process.

PART 1 - PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS

2. Birth and Pregnancy in Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In this chapter, I explore phenomenological understandings of the gestational process, as presented in the writings of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The aim of my analysis is twofold. First, I argue that there is an uncontroversial philosophical interest in understanding where and how these authors understand pregnancy in the context of their work more widely. From a historical perspective, it is now widely accepted that female embodiment has been severely underplayed by first and second generations of phenomenologists. While experiences like menstruation, childbirth, and pregnancy have hardly been the central topics in mainstream philosophical projects, they nonetheless appear in ways that enrich the philosophical perspectives of these authors. My second aim in this chapter is to provide a summary of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's respective theoretical toolkits, the development of which is useful for defining the epistemic boundaries of a philosophical phenomenology of pregnancy.

2.1. The birth of the Subject

In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl does not only take into account the various forms of crisis affecting European knowledge and culture, but he also poses some of the most influential challenges and themes for the next generation of phenomenologists and continental thinkers – such as the concept of Life-World and the major problems pertaining to Historicity and Genesis.

He then focuses on issues requiring further investigation through a transcendental lens – among them, the problems of *Generativität*, birth, and death, as well as the sexualized aspect of the human self:

> Also appearing thereby, in different steps, first in respect to human beings and then universally, are the problems of genesis [*Generativität*], the problem of transcendental historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*], the problem of transcendental enquiry which starts from the essential forms of human existence in society, in personalities of higher order, and proceeds back to their transcendental and thus absolute signification; further, there are the problems of birth and death and of the transcendental constitution of their meaning as world occurrences, and there is the problem of the sexes.[116]

Each of the cases in the quote above falls within the remit of "occurrences in the pregiven world, and they naturally come under the transcendental problem of constitution".[117] The order of problems concerning genesis – of the transcendental subject and the world – had already been taken up by Husserl in the early 1930s. He entitled the Appendix (VIII) of the manuscripts dedicated to intersubjectivity and the issues of birth and death, "eidetic events of the constitution of the world"; according to his analysis, birth and death should be recognized as events that make possible the constitution of the world – namely, as eidetic (essential) elements of a constituted world.[118] Birth and death are then conceived not just as mere empirical facts, but also as transcendental occurrences, and, as such, their comprehension necessitates an appropriate analysis. Birth is the original moment of one's coming into being, and death is the end of existential experience. As eidetic events that constitute the limits of human life,[119] they are meaning-giving[120] to the extent that it is one of the tasks of transcendental phenomenology to investigate the relationship between birth, death, and the pregiven world.

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[116] *Husserl, E. (1970). The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy. Northwestern University Press, p. 188.*

[117] *Husserl (1970), p. 188.*

[118] *Husserl, E. (2011). Sur l'intersubjectivité. Tome I. PUF, p. 317. See also Husserl (2011) p. 188: "b) Naissance, mort comme événements eidétiques et non comme faits contingents, relation des parents et des enfants (monde environnant), des vivants et des morts (tradition)".*

[119] *Steinbock, A. J. (2017). Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl. Rowman & Littlefield International, pp. 46-47. See also: Steinbock, A. J. (1995). Home and beyond: Generative phenomenology after Husserl. Northwestern University Press.*

[120] *"Or, la naissance et la mort entrent pourtant en scène de façon nouvelle à ce stade de l'expérience: elles sont formatrices du sens des hommes et du monde. La certitude de mon être propre quant au futur, en tant qu'homme parmi d'autres vivant dans le monde parmi les hommes, et celle de l'être de tout un chacun admet une limite infranchissable, et il en va de même, corrélativement, de la certitude de la remémoration de l'être humain passé et des hommes vivant dans le monde." Husserl (2011), p. 318. For further inquiries, see Heinämaa (2010).*

To better appreciate the relevance of a phenomenology of birth which includes the pregnant process as a constitutive moment, I turn to Anthony Steinbock's analyses of limit-phenomena. An oscillation of perspectives is at work here: both of the potential "fetal" perspective, and of the gestating self's perspective. I posit that it is not possible to completely grasp the inner structures of the pregnant process without considering both the gestating self and the fetal-other's perspectives. The following problematic question arises: what is the perspective of the fetal-other, and could this subject of experience rightly be referred to as a self? I propose, as I demonstrate in chapter seven, that the fetal-other exercises a form of agency over the gestating subject – the fetal-other's movements have an effect over the gestating self and her psychological, affective, and corporeal experience. While eidetic phenomenology may help to demonstrate the qualitative richness of the gestating self's experience, generative phenomenology could complement the analysis by taking intra-uterine experience as part of the whole human experience or, even better, as the *condition of possibility* of human experience. According to Nicholas Smith, contemporary scholars often invoke the necessity of complementing the static phenomenological tradition with the genetic perspective. He states that,

> Every birth must be preceded by something which generates it, namely sexual intercourse (at least this was so prior to in vitro fertilization), and then intrauterine life in the pregnant body of the mother. [121]

This move shifts from an ego-logical perspective (the dream of the auto-generative transcendental ego) to that of an intersubjective horizon, where an individual cannot understand their own birth by themselves, but they must necessarily consider a maternal subject, a paternal organism, and a more general *milieu* from which their origin has its roots. This emphasis on the originally relational and embodied character of the self does not fully avoid the question concerning how is it possible to account for an experience which one cannot reach through recollection. On the one hand, I suggest extending Steinbock's proposal of generative phenomenology and his concepts of Limit-

[121] *Smith (2016), p. 36.*

phenomena; on the other hand, I follow Heinämaa's thesis that even if some things are beyond one's own recollection, that does not mean that they did not take place.[122]
In discussing the status of phenomena, Steinbock introduces the notion of "limit-phenomena" to account for "those matters that are on the edge of accessibility in a phenomenological approach to experience."[123] Steinbock is clear that limit-phenomena are not arbitrary, "which is to say, not just anything can become a limit-phenomenon".[124] He adds that,

> They are nevertheless relative determinations, relative to a particular methodological approach. Thus, there will be methodological reasons and justifications for certain phenomena becoming limit-phenomena, and others not being able to have this status at all.[125]

Far from being marginal or secondary issues in phenomenology, these particular kinds of quasi-phenomena are "relatively necessary", and marked by a typical form of liminality.[126] While I cannot have an experience of my own birth – in the same way I cannot have an experience of my own death – other people are privy to this experience. As limits to my own individual experience, they are beyond the reach of my self-temporalization. Nevertheless, as Steinbock argues,

> […] At least my own birth can be experienced by me another way, generatively, through what Husserl calls my "home companions" or "homecomrades" (*Heimgenossen*), for example, my mother, father, guardian, siblings, neighbours.[127]

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[122] *Heinämaa, S. (2014). "An Equivocal Couple Overwhelmed by Life": A Phenomenological Analysis of Pregnancy. Philosophia, 4(1), 31-49.*
[123] *Steinbock, (2017), p. 29.*
[124] *Steinbock, (2017), p. 29.*
[125] *Steinbock, (2017), p. 35.*
[126] *It is quite interesting to point out that Husserl quotes in passing the problem of pregnancy precisely in the Manuscripts dedicated to the discussion of "marginal" or "peripheral" problems. This idea of "liminality" seems to concern both the "act" of birth and the very process of pregnancy.*
[127] *Steinbock (1995), (2017).*

The acquisition of a generative perspective overtakes the limits of an individual sense-constitution, by recognizing the intersubjective dimension of coming into being. On this point, again Steinbock makes clear that,

> From a generative phenomenological perspective, it no longer "makes sense" to restrict the responsibility of sense-constitution merely to the individual (actively or passively). For example, when I have a child, "I" or even "We" do not merely constitute this child as son or daughter; this child generatively constitutes me as "father" – a dimension of constitution to which a genetic phenomenology is essentially blind.[128]

Among other contemporary philosophers who take these topics into account, Heinämaa interprets these passages in a Husserlian account of the constitution of time in relation to conceptions of birth and death. In particular, she outlines three pillar arguments: that birth and death have transcendental significance; that the pure transcendental self is immortal, since "does not arise or vanish";[129] and that we cannot experience our own death as a worldly occurrence.[130] Questions like "How can my own death be given to me as a worldly occurrence?" and "How can the birth of the other extend the temporal horizons of my experience?"[131] pertain to the very temporality of the self. This stands in stark contrast to philosophies that conceive the subject as universal and a-temporal – since, I add, the self is often seen as disembodied, and therefore also lacking lived temporality – and these perspectives therefore do not engage with problems such as natality and mortality, or attend to the intersubjective significance of birth and death. Husserlian phenomenology reveals the temporal constitution of the self as a mortal subject. This birthed and mortal self is not witness to these events, the meaning of which is constructed in continuous reference to an intersubjective horizon beyond individual existence.[132] It is therefore the intersubjective horizon that gives meaning to the eidetic *limits* of the self.

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[128] *Steinbock, A. J. (1995), (2017).*
[129] *Hua 4: 103/109 quot. in Heinämaa, S. (2010). The sexed self and the mortal body. In R. M. Schott (Ed.). Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment (pp. 73-97). Indiana University Press, p. 88.*
[130] *Heinämaa (2010), pp. 87-90.*
[131] *Heinämaa (2010), p. 87.*
[132] *"Birth and death are transcendental problems for the phenomenologists, because the phenomenological method discloses the transcendental self as thoroughly temporal. The self thus discovered is very different from the universal*

Concerning her second argument, Heinämaa proposes that the immortality of the pure self should be understood in temporal terms, arguing that this thesis concerns the unity of inner time: "Every intentional experience directed to whatever object, internal or external, thingly or non-thingly, real or ideal, bears in itself a reference to other experiences, preceding and following it in inner time".[133]

The relevance of the constitutive temporal dimension of the self, as well as the necessity of an intersubjective horizon to subjectivity, gives sense to birth and death: "Without reference to other experiencing selves, my death would be given to me merely as the unattainable limit of inner time".[134] This idea of "unattainable limit" has been classically applied also to birth. According to Heinämaa, the phenomenological method of reflecting on one's own experience through recollection and memory implies that the meaning of birth is not graspable from first-person perspective:

> This is argued on the basis of the existential fact that we all are born but cannot recall our own birth or else on the basis of the transcendental fact that the structure of retention ties each living present to an earlier one and implies that the transcendental ego cannot be subject to generation.[135]

From this view, birth is an unattainable limit, and reflection on experiences of gestation and pregnancy would be secondary since they concern the "nativity of another human being and not the nativity of the reflecting self".[136] Yet, she argues that the meaning of birth could not be completely taken into account by the recollection-paradigm. Furthermore, I believe that the identification of birth as an unattainable limit is too simplistic for several reasons, the most important of which is that this identification totally effaces the *intersubjective* element of the childbirth. Put in other terms, birth is eidetically the birth of a self from another self. Every human self – at least until ectogenesis becomes

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and atemporal subject that Kant presented, and it also differs from all forms of subjectivity that presuppose an all-encompassing world soul. [...] So the transcendental self, as disclosed by phenomenology, is not a universal structure or an empty form but is a temporal person intentionally tied to its own living body and, through its body, related to other intending selves and to material things." Heinämaa (2010), p. 87.

[133] *Heinämaa (2010), p. 88.*

[134] *Heinämaa (2010), p. 89.*

[135] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 32.*

[136] *Heinämaa (2014, p. 32). A parallel could be drawn to Heidegger's ideas about death (Heidegger, 1927), in so far as we cannot have firsthand experience of our own death, but we know what death is because we have indirect experiences of that (Thanks to Luna Dolezal for this comment).*

the exclusive or primary means of reproduction – is born from another human self.[137] This apparently naive specification opens up a hitherto underexplored field of analysis. On this point, I agree again with Heinämaa that birth necessarily implies a horizon of plurality; in the process of coming into being, everyone – who has been gestated, nourished, "carried" – comes from another human being. As she says: "This other human being who 'gave' birth to us or 'from whose flesh we were born' provides us with a unique perspective on our own past, beyond the limits of our own recollection."[138] Her unique perspective does not simply provide an "additional third person viewpoint" on our birth, but she discloses a second person perspective both on our pre- and postnatal life, as well as the passage between them "all of which is beyond our own recollection".[139]

Husserl's conception of the birth still lapses into the "symmetrical model", since he accounts for birth as a counterpart to death and therefore lacks any *positive* account of birth. Indeed, he does not focus on birth as a phenomenon that has specific features and which affects the bodily self of the birth-giving subject. Rather, his notion of birth is confined to identification with the *limit*, as its complementarity with death would confirm. Surely this relation of complementarity between birth and death raises some questions and perplexities; while it may be uncontentious that we cannot have experience of our own birth and death, there is something profoundly different between these two limit-phenomena. We may die by ourselves, but we cannot be born alone. If sexual difference is not only a mundane occurrence – as scholars have abundantly and convincingly demonstrated[140] – then pregnancy must also be understood within the context of a transcendental phenomenology.

To be sure, phenomenology from a first-hand perspective could not engage with this issue unless the subject of the inquiry was the birthing (female) self, and this is not even remotely covered by Husserlian analysis. And yet, I argue that this "second person perspective"[141] – the gestating-birthing subject – discloses a new and unique field of experiencing gaze, since her epistemic status cannot be compared with any other.

Despite these issues, Husserlian analysis deserves credit for preparing the ground to acknowledge the relational and intersubjective features of birth (and pregnancy), through

[137] *See Cavarero (2014).*
[138] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 32.*
[139] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 32.*
[140] *See especially Heinämaa (2003).*
[141] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 32.*

reference to their eidetic aspects. The intersubjective dimension of our own birth discloses a temporal frame wherein we do not yet have being-the-world, but, as Schües suggests, "an existence oriented towards being-there in the world (*Dasein auf der Welt*)."[142] In this sense, Husserlian reflections on birth as an eidetic event suggest it is an intrinsically – or, even better, eidetically – intersubjective occurrence. His main task in the passages quoted above is to explain how the self and the world are constituted: the answer is that human selves are born and die. It applies both to the empirical level and to the eidetic one, since it is simply inconceivable that a human self could have always lived and would continue to be alive forever. Birth and death are thus conditions of human experience, events that necessarily structure transcendental subjectivity. Birth, even if not explicitly mentioned, is always the birth of a self from a self. And if it is an eidetic event, it has to be shared between each and every human being as a very condition of the transcendental self. While Husserl argues that it is impossible to conceive of the world and human beings without birth and death,[143] I state that it seems to be equally impossible to conceive of the world and human beings without generation and pregnancy. He does not explicate this point, but he otherwise acknowledges the meaningfulness of gestational experience for the constitution of the self.

In a brief footnote in *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie. Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908- 1937)*, Husserl discusses the issue of pregnancy in passing, posing questions that raise several lines of inquiry. As we read,

> The child inside the womb, with its sensory fields in even transformation. The child inside the mother. Do we not here have to do with an intermingling of primordialities, that does not depend on empathy? Does the mother amongst her own, inner sensory fields […] also have those of the child, its sensibility of movement, its kinaesthesia? But if that is not the case, then what kind of community is it? How does the mother suffer when the child feels unwell?[144]

[142] *Schües (2017), p. 19.*
[143] *Husserl (2001), p. 318.*
[144] *" Das Kind in der Mutter. Haben wir (da) nicht ein Ineinander der Primordialitäten, das nicht auf Einfühlung beruht? Hat die Mutter unter ihren inneren Sinnesfeldern - die keine objektivierende Ausgestaltung erfahren vermöge ihrer glatten Wandelbarkeit - auch die des Kindes, seine Bewegungsempfindlichkeiten, seine Kin(ästhesen)? Wenn aber nicht, was ist dar für eine Gemeinschaft? Wie leidet die Mutter, wenn das Kind sich nicht wohl fühlt?" Husserl (2014), p. 27. This translation has been provided by Smith (2016), p. 33.*

First, he addresses the essential structural relationship between gestating subject and fetal pole, implicitly acknowledging that pregnancy entails a plurality of different subjects ("what kind of community is this?"). Second, he engages with the boundaries of one's "sensibility of movements" by asking whether the gestating subject has the same kinesthesia as the fetal subject. Gestational experience is described in terms of "being-within" another human being: "The child inside the womb, with its sensory fields in even transformation. The child inside the mother".[145] Husserl then acknowledges that pregnant experience is articulated in *topological* terms, since it implies a complex articulation between the "inside" of gestating bodily subjectivity and the fetal-other. Despite a focus on the *kind* of bodily experience that pregnancy entails for the gestating subject is still lacking, Husserl goes in this direction, asking if gestating subject's corporeal experience is affected by the fetus: "Does the mother amongst her own, inner sensory fields [...] also have those of the child, its sensibility of movement, its kinesthesia? [...] How does the mother suffer when the child feels unwell?".[146]

Consistent with Husserlian interest in the constitution of the transcendental subject, the question concerns what kind of structures are here implied, and not only the qualitative variations of gestating subject's experience. He asks if the "dyad" of this particular "community" made by the fetal and gestating subjects depend on empathy: would *Einfühlung* be the foundation of fetal-gestating encounter – and, then, eventually, of communication and interaction?[147] He does not provide an extensive theory of the fetal-maternal encounter, but he does suggest a theoretical path: "Do we not here have to do with an intermingling of primordialities, that does not depend on empathy?".[148]
Between the gestating self and the fetal-other there is a structural asymmetry: the gestating self has fetal "inner sensory fields", but not vice versa. A form of *Ineinander der Primordialitäten* emerges in the process of pregnancy – namely, a mutual and

[145] *Husserl (2014), p. 27 in Smith (2016), p. 33.*
[146] *Husserl (2014), p. 27 Smith (2016), p. 33.*
[147] *Einfühlung is a key term within phenomenological tradition. For the scope and the purposes of this paper, I accept the "standard" translation of "empathy", even if the German word – and thus the philosophical concept – covers a complexity of meanings that the term "empathy" may fail to account for. A good example of this riddle is given by the different translations proposed in Italian: Einfühlung has been translated as entropatia (Filippini), immedesimazione (Melchiorre), Introsentirsi (Paci).*
[148] *Husserl (2014), p. 27.*

reciprocal encounter that forms this unique kind of partial and univocal overlapping between sensory fields.

All in all, the couple formed by the gestating self and the fetal-other seems to be understood as a complex and multiple Whole, which is not regulated through empathic structures. The concept of "empathy" covers multiple experiences and levels of interactions, but does not fit with the fetal-maternal encounter insofar as pregnancy seems to pertain to what Merleau-Ponty defines an *order of life,* as I analyze in the next section. As we said, Husserl defines the pregnant process as an "intermingling of primordialities", asking what kind of community is constituted by the gestating self and the fetal-other. In Husserlian analyses, the term "Community" may refer to different kinds of plurality, according to the following criteria described in writings on Intersubjectivity belonging to years 1921-1928. A community might be grounded in different forms of empathy: an affective one, as happens in suffering or delighting with another; a sort of "spiritual influence" when one feels empathy for a person in the past; or again a "deliberate" empathy, either asymmetric and unilateral (as the case of master and servant suggests). Moreover, a community is "natural" (love, passion, desire, Christian ethic, family) or "conventionally instituted" (wedding, association, politics). And still, there are communities that are temporarily limited (in linguistic, scientific, or artistic terms). As for the gestational community, the main characters individuated in Husserl's account do not share in a relationship grounded in empathy; this implies a radical form of asymmetry between the gestating subject and the fetal-other that is temporal limited. These three indications touch at the core of gestating experience, which is eidetically intersubjective, temporally constituted, and marked by a radical form of asymmetry, given the different statuses of the selves implied in the process.

A further point that then emerges concerns the nature of the fetal-other. According to Husserl's reflections, in our intrauterine life, the self already has some essential characters of the *born* self. In particular, the fetal-other in the womb has kinesthetic movements; it acquires an original form of experience through the maternal body, and it is already within a specific perceptual horizon. This thesis challenges the idea of a newborn as a *tabula rasa* that "comes into being" at the very moment of birth. On the

contrary, Husserl seems to offer a broader analysis, which Petit describes as a "phenomenology of fetal experience".[149]

Kinesthesia and constitution are the key concepts in Husserlian inquiry into intentionality, since they suggest a hierarchical gradation of the many different forms of intentionality. At this regard, Petit explains that,

> Such an intentional regression toward the origin finds its inaccessible limit in 'hereditary factors' characterized by Husserl as an 'empty horizon' asymmetrical with that other empty horizon which characterizes the totality of all the means of action available to humanity. These two horizons delimit our life-world as a practical field. Their 'emptiness' does not imply any lack of determination but the sedimented foundation of phylogenetic experiences from which nothing stands out at first, even though this horizon is still needed as the indispensable background for our acts. For even if the structural constraints of the species are to be located in it, some activity on the part of the organism is required to expose these constraints. Husserl even goes so far as to outline a phenomenology of fetal experience […].[150]

From this perspective, the fetal-other is conceived as an I, an ego-pole, who "already has kinesthesia and kinesthetically moves its "things" – already a primordiality at an originary level developing itself."[151] Then, at the moment of birth, the newborn "is already an experiencing I at a higher level, it already has its acquisition of experience from its existence in the mother's womb, it already has its perceptions with perceptual horizons."[152] In the neonatal phenomenology that Husserl draws, the newborn is an I "of higher habitualities", despite the fact that they may lack self-reflection, developed temporality, and recollection.[153]

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[149] Petit, J.-L. (2003). "On the relation between recent neurobiological data on perception (and action) and the Husserlian theory of constitution." Phenomenology and the cognitive sciences 2.4: 281-298.

[150] Petit (2003), p. 290.

[151] Husserl, Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität III, 604f, transl. and quot. in Smith (2016, p. 34-35).

[152] Husserl, III, 604f, t. in Smith (2016), p. 35.

[153] Smith (2016), p. 35. For an analysis of the newborn experience, see: Allen, J. (1976). A Husserlian phenomenology of the child. Journal of phenomenological psychology, 6(2), 164-179. As for the relationship between the newborn and the mother, see also the concept of Unipathy in Scheler, M. (1970). The Nature of Sympathy. Yale University Press.

While Husserl's notes on birth seem to suggest a classical framework (I.e. a "coming from nothing" explicative model of birth), his focus on pregnancy opens up a theoretical space to account for pregnancy as a bodily experience. In particular, he states that there is a continuity between the gestating self and the fetal-other, due to their unique bodily com-presence. The analysis of pregnancy as a bodily experience opens up a re-framing of the philosophical reading of birth, that, far from being understandable within the dominant recollection-paradigm[154] as an attainable limit, is instead conceptualized as "a specific type of lived bodily process that is evidenced to us by one single person – our mother – who serves paradoxically as its location, its witness, and its executor (agent)".[155]

In Husserl's writings, we find an embryonic analysis of fetal-maternal schemas; despite the fact that this remains implicit, the philosopher recognizes that the fetal-other has certain motor styles, whereas the lived experience of the gestating subject remains in the shadows. As we will see also for Merleau-Ponty, the main focus of Husserlian analysis is the potential-subject who will eventually be born. From this point of view, the Husserlian account is interesting because it is primarily moved by the necessity of investigating what happens before our coming into the world. On the other hand, the evaluation of birth as an eidetic event, as well as its possible symmetry with the death, does not preclude analysis of what could be called a "phenomenology of the fetal-maternal encounter". In these passages, we find a careful (albeit brief) analysis of the kind of relationship between the fetal-other and the gestating subject. Again, despite the scant attention to the gestating self, the focus on intra-uterine life opens up a space of analysis that challenges the idea of a disembodied, non-temporal, and self-contained subject.

2.2. Coming into Being

In the genealogy that I am drawing, Merleau-Ponty's work represents a further stage in the analysis of the human pregnancy as a meaningful experience for the gestating subject. While I showed that Husserl is interested in the issues of birth and death as the marginal (here intended as *peripheral*) events that eidetically co-constitute selves, in Merleau-Ponty's arguments one may find a more attentive analysis of how pregnancy is experienced from the gestating bodily subject's perspective. An important divergence

[154] *Heinämaa (2014).*
[155] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 47.*

between the two accounts is given by the emphasis accorded to the body. Whereas Husserl only mentions this matter in relation to kinaesthesia and sensory fields, Merleau-Ponty addresses the corporeal experience of pregnancy from gestating subject's point of view. The plan for the next few sections is the following. First, I take into consideration Merleau-Ponty's account of birth, wherein one cannot find reference to the female body. From there, I focus on how Merleau-Ponty addresses sexual differences and how his comprehension of the body congruently leads to his account of pregnant process.

In a series of lectures that Merleau-Ponty gave at the Sorbonne in the years 1949-1952 (later edited under the title *Pédagogie et Psychologie de L'Enfant*), he discusses the status of the pregnant woman, within the context of an introductory class on child and developmental psychology. In these lectures, Merleau-Ponty, in a manner that is consistent with his style of teaching, offers a rich panorama of child development theories, including psychoanalytic literature, philosophical, and anthropological references. Within these lectures, Merleau-Ponty addresses the topics of birth and pregnancy. Starting with birth, Merleau-Ponty argues that "coming into life" is problematic for the main actor involved in the gestational process (the gestating subject), because it implies a passage from it implies a passage from being an organism to being a subject (*en soi, pour soi*);[156] the gestating self's body will shortly bring another consciousness to the world (*mettre au monde une autre conscience*).[157] The intrinsically problematic nature of this passage *from organism to subject* has been likewise tackled during the classes Merleau-Ponty taught at *Collège de France* in the years 1956-1960. In the first two years, he offers a rich analysis of the concept of *nature*, articulating a historical and critical path from nature conceived as a being totally external from human beings (especially in the Cartesian approach), passing through to a humanist view of nature and to the "conception romantique de la nature". Furthermore, he addresses the thorny relationship between science and philosophy, as well as physical problems such as time and space. It is from lessons of 1957 onwards that he engages with biological studies, with the goal of disentangling the relationship between "animalité" and human body; Ashby, von Uexküll, Portman, and Lorenz are the principal references that paved the way for the lectures of 1959-1960, wherein the main riddle eventually became the

[156] *Sartre, J.-P. (1943). L'Être et le Néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique. Gallimard.*
[157] *Merleau-Ponty, M. (1995). La Nature: Cours du Collège de France. Seuil, p. 356.*

human body in its complexity, including its objective, symbolic, and libidinal aspects, as well as the discussion of ontogenetics and phylogenetics, and a critical-historical analysis of Darwinism.

In discussing the complex connection between the ontological object called *Nature* and the human being, Merleau-Ponty focuses on intertwinings and nonlinear continuities, arguing that Nature is not only an object (of knowledge, manipulation, and, I would add, fascination) from the human point of view, but also an "object" from which we "arise" and "emerge" (*surgir*), and that sustains human beings. Nature is then described as "un objet d'où nous avons surgi, ou nos préliminaires ont été peu à peu poses jusqu'à l'instant de se nouer en une existence, et qui continue de la soutenir et de lui fournir ses matériaux".[158] The dialectic between nature (as natural life) and existence is thus expressed within the transit from organism to consciousness which crucially results in a continuous co-presence of natural and conscious features of the human being. In a polemic vein against the sharp Sartrean distinction between the ontological realm of *pour soi* (the existence) and that of *en soi* (the being, the essence),[159] Merleau-Ponty argues that the relation between existence (namely, human being) and being (in this case, nature) is one of continuity:

> Qu'il s'agisse du fait individuel de la naissance, ou de la naissance des institutions et des sociétés, le rapport originaire de l'homme et de l'être n'est pas celui du pour soi à l'en soi. Or il continue dans chaque homme qui perçoit. [160]

The birth of an individual and the birth of institutions share this common intertwining, that Merleau-Ponty further articulates in addressing the issue of the body both as a thing and as a rapport with an *Umwelt*.[161] In defending the relevance of a "theorie de la chair, du corps comme *Empfindbarkeit*", he states that the human lived body is not conceivable as a mere insertion and juxtaposition of a consciousness with a body-object: "Ceci n'a rien à voir avec une conscience qui *descendrait* dans un corps objet".[162] *Descendre* could

[158] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 356.*
[159] *Sartre (1943).*
[160] *Merleau-Ponty (1995) p. 356.*
[161] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 270.*
[162] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 271.*

be translated as ‘coming down’ and, in this passage, this verb seems to suggest a “vertical” idea of lived body constitution, in respect of which Merleau-Ponty is very critical:

> C’est au contraire l'enroulement d’un corps objet sur lui-même, ou plutôt, trêve de métaphores: ce n’est pas un survol du corps et du monde par une conscience, c’est mon corps comme interpose entre ce qui est devant moi et ce qui est derrière moi, mon corps debout devant les choses debout, en circuit avec le monde – *Einfühlung* avec le monde, avec les choses, avec les animaux, avec les autres corps (comme ayant un ‘côté’ perceptif aussi) compréhensible par cette théorie de la chair.[163]

The concept of *chair* is here employed for explaining the essential co-constitution of bodies, subjects, and the world. In the following passages, Merleau-Ponty states that the eye is “tout entier finalité externe [...] fait pour une vision future (l’embryon).”[164] In a comparison between the perceptual structure of vision and the coming into being of humans, “on ne peut pas dire que la vision de l'enfant procède de celle de la mère, l'âme ou la conscience de la mère n’est pas enceinte de l'âme ou de la conscience de l'enfant”.[165] The birth is the event wherein,

> une conscience nouvelle surgit (comme la vie surgit dans la physico-chimie) par aménagement d'un creux, par l'irruption d'un nouveau champ qui vient de l'entre monde et n'est pas effet des antécédents, n'est pas nécessité par eux, même s'il en dépend.[166]

In these lectures, Merleau-Ponty is interested in the genesis of different kinds of beings, offering methodological advice on the way in which this issue has to be addressed. In particular, he states that the genesis of a being is not so relevant – of course, from a philosophical point of view – as an empirical anecdote (“anecdote empirique”) or as

[163] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 271.*
[164] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 271.*
[165] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 271.*
[166] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 271.*

tackled by an explication from inside ("explication par l'intérieur").[167] Rather, genesis is thus articulated: "La genèse, i.e. le passage du rien au quelque chose, comme mode de dévoilement radical de l'Être, épreuve de la totalité, et non comme anecdote empirique, ni comme explication par l'intérieur." [168]

2.3. On sexual differences

Before engaging with the Merleau-Pontinian account of pregnancy, a brief excursus is required. Indeed, one of the main criticisms raised by feminist scholars concerns the surreptitious *neutrality* of body tackled by Merleau-Ponty, and the removal of sexual difference – especially in passages where one might expect the author to deal explicitly with the sexed body, like in the section *Le corps comme être sexué* in *Phénoménologie de la Perception*.

While Merleau-Ponty only explicitly conceptualizes some modalities of female embodiment within 1949-1952 lectures, he also refers to sexual differences in other published texts. In *La Structure du comportement* he criticizes both the explanations provided by descriptive biology and the "imperfect intuitions" of common perception; while male and female types are commonly thought to be different for "certaines constantes de la conduite'",[169] biological sciences argue for the "causal correlation", "par exemple des influences endocriniennes qui sous-tendent l'ensemble des caractères sexuels".[170]

These passages convey a sense that Merleau-Ponty's comprehension of the gendered body may be more nuanced than scholars have hitherto acknowledged. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty has been deeply criticized by feminist phenomenologists for having effaced sexual difference or, in softer versions of the criticism, for not having made it explicit. Of course, the *standard* criticism of his construction of a *neutral* body – implicitly a male, white, middle-aged, healthy, able-bodied person – is still pertinent. Nevertheless, while feminist attention (especially in anglophone area) has privileged the analysis of the texts *Phénoménologie de la Perception* and *Le Visible et l'Invisible*, where there is no explicit mention of female bodily experience, in the 1949-1952 classes

[167] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 292.*
[168] *Merleau-Ponty (1995), p. 292.*
[169] *M. Merleau-Ponty, (1942), La Structure du comportement, PUF, p. 239.*
[170] *Merleau-Ponty (1942), p. 239.*

Merleau-Ponty is directly engaged with this topic.[171] The author opens up discussion on the "feminine issue", focusing on some experiences which are characteristic and unique to female embodiment such as menstruation and pregnancy. It is relevant that this is one of the very rare passages in his whole *corpus* of work wherein a reader finds *explicit* references to the sexual difference – and this is the only one tackling the issue of the female embodiment.[172]

In particular, the classes display some thoughtful reflections on the relationship between physical development and cultural normativity in gendered performance. Merleau-Ponty states that the social category *woman* is separate from the *normal* – that is to say, the male – and that this deeply affects the behaviours and attitudes of women. Hence, they are often educated and nurtured for social expectations and gender stereotypes which put them in a subordinate position to respect their masculine counterparts. And yet, Merleau-Ponty reports how sexual difference is taken up in diverse ways within different societies, which shows that his position is anti-essentialist; he acknowledges that "the fact that sex difference will be constitutive for any society's norms is universally given. The form of those norms is contingent".[173] The relationships entailed by sexual difference are culturally-shaped and are co-constitutively moulded by the kinds of relation and attention that a particular society has with regard to different social encounters:

> Le rapport masculinité-féminité est un élément dans un tissu total qui comprend mère-enfant, rapport de la société en question et de la nature, rapport avec l'étranger, et en général le rapport interhumain, comme il existe dans cette société.[174]

According to Merleau-Ponty, the paradigmatic depiction of femininity is culturally codified as strictly dependent on that of masculinity:

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[171] I developed part these arguments in Miglio (forthcoming). Per una fenomenologia critica della gravidanza, in Chiasmi International, Issue 23 La Phénoménologie critique après Merleau-Ponty.

[172] For further inquiries, see among others; Dillon, M. (1980). Merleau-Ponty on existential sexuality: A critique. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 11(1), 67-81; Preston, B. (1996). Merleau-Ponty and feminine embodied existence. Man and World, 29(2), 167-186.

[173] Welsh, T. (2008). The developing body: A reading of Merleau-Ponty's conception of women in the Sorbonne lectures. Intertwinings: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty, 45-62, p. 50.

[174] Merleau-Ponty, M. (2001), Psychologie et pédagogie de l'enfant: Cours de Sorbonne 1949-1952, Verdier, p. 495.

> Le portrait qu'on fait de la femme implique une certaine représentation de l'homme. Dans certaines sociétés la femme est plus forte que l'homme. La femme fragile est un fait de culture et non un fait de nature.[175]

The critique against the epistemic construction of woman as *other* resonates with Simone de Beauvoir's arguments in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, where she explores the ways in which the woman has become the negation of her masculine counterpart. The otherness of woman takes shape in the *negation* of the male-norm and impacts women's expected attitudes, choices, and behaviors. Merleau-Ponty highlights the fact that women are educated with the aim of adhering to shared social expectations and gender stereotypes that put them in a subordinated condition with respect to the category of men. While he makes clear that there are psychological and biological differences between men and women, the peculiar ways in which both genders are represented are responses to conceptual constructions, to the point that the supposed fragility of women is a matter of culture and not of nature. By criticizing those who essentialize femininity through conceptual definition ("ceux qui cristallisent la 'nature' féminine en la définissant"),[176] Merleau-Ponty states that the body in its physical and biological being could not evidence essentialist positions. This also applies to reproductive power in that it is an exclusively feminine prerogative, but that this should not be employed as an argument for a supposed "feminine nature". The notable point here is that Merleau-Ponty applies to issues of gender his influential idea that a philosophy of the body which is related *exclusively* with its biological status and physiological functioning is neither exhaustive nor adequate. By pointing out that "La structure corporelle, la faculté de procréation sont importantes, mais ne peuvent aboutir à la 'nature' féminine."[177], Merleau-Ponty refuses to identify the biologically female body with a supposed "female nature", arguing instead for a global comprehension of the materiality of the body along with the dimension of the *corps propre.* The idea that the human subject is and has kinesthetic, pathic, and constitutively ambiguous embodiment is profitably applied also to the sexual dimension of the self.

[175] *Merleau-Ponty, (2001), p. 470.*
[176] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 471.*
[177] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 471.*

2.4. The Process of Pregnancy

It is in the same classes, and in particular those dedicated to the topic of *l'enfant vu par l'adulte*, that Merleau-Ponty in two sections (*Avant la naissance de l'enfant* and *Après la naissance*) tackles the "before" and "after" of the coming into being of the child. The first section opens with a reflection akin to the Husserlian notion that the birth of a human being is a thought difficult to conceive, even for those who are directedly interested by the process itself, like the mother.[178] The reference to the gestating subject inaugurates a double perspective in addressing pregnancy: (1) the pre-natal horizon of the self, namely on everything happens "before" the birth; (2) the effects of the pregnancy on the gestating self, where Merleau-Ponty offers some insights in response to questions such as "What does it like to be pregnant?". I would like to stress the fact that the primary intention of Merleau-Ponty is to address human development *in utero* (1), as it can be clearly understood from the context where these passages are discussed. The effects of pregnancy on the gestating self (2) simply arise for the sake of these arguments. It is hardly surprising that the most discussed passages within contemporary debate are precisely those that interrogate the emergence of intersubjectivity in newborns and children, [179] while literature engaging with the lived experience of the gestating self is sparse.

That said, I would like to draw attention to Merleau-Ponty's analyses of gestating lived experience – namely, to the experiential structures that pregnancy entails for the gestating self. My focus is thus on the perspective of the gestating self, and on the bodily and existential changes that pregnancy entails, as well as on the relationship she may establish with the fetal-other. The few passages where Merleau-Ponty addresses the lived experience of pregnancy are extremely interesting on a theoretical level (as well as from the perspective of a genealogy of the topic), because they offer a philosophical description of the lived experience of pregnancy that includes the perspective of the gestating self. Merleau-Ponty proposes some ways to conceive of the experience of pregnancy in the following lines:

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[178] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 471.*

[179] *See e.g., Zahavi, D. (2004). The embodied self-awareness of the infant: A challenge to the theory theory of mind? In D. Zahavi, T. Grünbaum, & J. Parnas (Eds.). Structure and Development of Self-Consciousness: Interdisciplinary Perspectives (pp. 35-64). John Benjamins Publishing Co; Whitney, S. (2012). Affects, images and childlike perception: Self-Other difference in Merleau-Ponty's Sorbonne lectures. PhaenEx, 7(2), 185-211.*

> Ce problème est vécu d'une manière primitive par la femme qui va avoir un enfant. Elle sent son propre corps s'aliéner à elle, ne plus être simple auxiliaire de son activité ; il cesse d'être entièrement à elle pour être systématiquement habité par un autre être et bientôt mettre au monde une autre conscience. Sa propre grossesse n'est pas pour elle un acte comme les autres actions qu'on accomplit avec son corps : il s'agit plutôt d'un processus anonyme qui se fait à travers elle et dont elle n'est que le siège. Ainsi, d'une part, son propre corps lui échappe, mais, d'autre part, l'enfant qui naitra est bien un prolongement de son corps à elle. Durant toute sa grossesse, elle vit ce mystère majeur qui n'est ni de l'ordre de la matière ni de l'ordre de l'esprit, mais de l'ordre de la vie.[180]

From these passages, some preliminary points emerge:

(1) The pregnancy is an experience lived "*de manière primitive*" by the woman who carries the baby, and this may entail two specific feelings – since the gestating subject could perceive her body as both her own and alien at the same time. What is meant by primitive in this context? And what is its relation to the definition of pregnancy as a *mystère majeur* of the *ordre de la vie*?

(2) Pregnant experience is not an act, but rather an anonymous process – in this context, what is the meaning of anonymity with regard to pregnancy?

(3) The gestating subject experiences some specific bodily occurrences which are dependent on her being –pregnant, and these entail a form of alienation marked by the radical intercorporeality of the pregnant process.

2.4.1. *Ordre de la vie*

Welsh explains "Pregnancy's 'primitiveness'" as the anonymity of participation in the gestational process. According to her analysis, it is ambivalent "precisely because it is not just about the mother's decisions, her relationship with society, her desires, and complex".[181] This is not a solution with which I am sympathetic. This brief attempt at

[180] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 471.*
[181] *Welsh (2008), p. 53.*

resolution does not explain why the author employs the term *primitive*, which clearly has different connotations from the other words Merleau-Ponty uses to describe the experience of pregnancy. Concerning the *primitiveness* of gestational experience, an alternative interpretation might derive from the passage in which Merleau-Ponty makes clear that, during pregnancy, gestating subjects experience a major mystery which is *de l'ordre de la vie*.[182] In the passage at stake, the author specifies that gestational experience is "neither the order of the matter of the mind".[183] These lectures had taken place from 1949, four years after the publication of the *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, and nine years after Merleau-Ponty's first book (1942), where one can already find *in nuce* some of the classic themes and issues that eventually became central to his philosophical project.

The third chapter of *La Structure du comportement* is titled "L'ordre physique, l'ordre vital l'ordre humain". In a vein of criticism *contra* philosophical positions such as vitalism, as well as physicalism – which would become the critical *fil rouge* across his whole intellectual oeuvre – Merleau-Ponty states that quantity, order, and value (or signification) are universally applicable categories, and not exclusively (and "no longer") properties of matter, life, and mind. He goes further in arguing that quantity, far from being conceivable as a negation of quality, "comme si l'équation du cercle niait la forme circulaire, dont elle veut être au contraire une expression rigoureuse": [184]

> Les relations qualitatives dont s'occupe la physique ne sont souvent que la formule de certains processus distributifs : dans une bulle de savon comme dans un organisme, ce qui se passe en chaque point est déterminé par ce qui se passe en tous les autres. [185]

Re-framing the connection between the three orders, he argues the following: on the one hand, a philosophy of structure should acknowledge that quantity, order, and signification are principal characteristics in matter, life, and mind; on the other hand, one should be aware that matter, life, and mind take part unequally in the nature of form, since they

[182] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 471.*
[183] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 471.*
[184] *Merleau-Ponty (1942), p. 198.*
[185] *Merleau-Ponty (1942), p. 198.*

participate, to different degrees, in the integration of the whole universe of forms.[186] He then considers the interrelation between the three orders and the overall form in hierarchical terms, in which individuality is progressively achieved. In fact, "Il serait par définition impossible de concevoir une forme physique qui ait memes propriétés qu'une forme physiologique, un forme physiologique qui soit l'équivalent d'une forme psychique."[187] By contrast, the "physical", "vital", and "mental" represent three dialectics, and as such they are structured through an intermingling and correlation that make it impossible to conceive humans' physical nature as subordinate to a vital principle, or to think the organism as a teleological *conatus* to the actualization of an idea, or again to see the mental as the regulatory principle of the body. The three orders are not regulated by a principle of superimposition; rather, each of them is a re-structuring of the others.[188]

This stance emphasizes the complexity of the emergence of life and of the subject, and perhaps also explains how pregnancy pertains to the order of life. Rather than defaulting to a simplistic reading of the 1949-1952 lectures, it seems to me that the 1942 text makes it possible to see the relevance of these problems. Especially in his first published book, he makes it clear that his main aim is to describe the *emergence* of human action and perception, and to state that they are irreducible to the mere dialectic of the organism and its milieu.

If the order of life is strictly connected to dialectics of human life (mind and matter), and gestational experience is primarily related to the order of life, then it is reasonable to state that pregnancy pertains also to the other orders – namely, the physical and mental ones. Effectively, Merleau-Ponty himself acknowledges the *density* of gestational experience – that is to say, the fact that pregnancy involves multiple levels of subjective constitution and personal experience. Carrying another human life is not an act but a process, which deeply influences the gestating subject's bodily experience – especially in terms of alienation and ambivalence. In this sense, there is a specific kind of experience which is gestational and, far from being the result of a precise choice (conscious or unconscious), it is more a process that supersedes the boundaries of action. It is intrinsically intersubjective from its very emergence, since it implies – as minimal

[186] *Merleau-Ponty (1942), p. 200.*
[187] *Merleau-Ponty (1942), p. 200.*
[188] *Merleau-Ponty (1942), p. 184.*

elements and pre-condition of the experience itself – a potentially-productive body and a human *coming into being*, i.e. the fetal other.

2.4.2. An anonymous process

The rich idea of anonymity problematizes the passage from *pour soi* to *en soi,* by conceiving of it as a process. Far from being an act that a pregnant subject accomplishes, pregnancy is rather, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "il s'agit plutôt d'un processus anonyme qui se fait à travers elle et dont elle n'est que le siège".[189] Is it possible to detect this anonymity in the gestating relationship? Is the gestating relationship an antenatal symptom of anonymity that remains in one's personal life? I argue that, in this context, the concept of anonymity works as the necessary complement of the wider re-signification of the notion of body. As Weiss notes,

> To say that an experience operates anonymously, then, is not equivalent to saying that it is universal or that it is trans-historical. It is worth noting that the examples of anonymity provided by Merleau-Ponty are always grounded in the experience of a particular body in its concrete engagement with the world…To say that these transactions tend to be anonymous does not mean that we are not, at the same time, two particular bodies, marked by our race, class, gender, etc., engaged in a social relationship. The point is that this very social relationship is predicated on its anonymity.[190]

Moreover, the notion of anonymity could help to elucidate just what a subjective participation or perspective might mean, and also to move towards the inclusion of gestational experience as a broader universal-singular experience.

Merleau-Ponty explores the idea of anonymity from several perspectives in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), as well as in works dedicated to infancy – in particular in the Sorbonne lessons Psychologie *et Pédagogie de l'enfant* (1949-1952). He discusses the anonymous horizon as the condition of possibility and, at the same time, the boundary of one's possible perception of the world. In the section "Le corps comme objet

[189] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 101.*
[190] *Weiss, G. (2002). The anonymous intentions of transactional bodies. Hypatia, 17(4), 187-200, p. 194.*

et la physiologie mécaniste," he looks at the issue of the temporal horizon as the precondition of the human perception. In analyzing the pathological experiences of anosognosia and phantom limbs, he introduces the topic of *refoulement*, defined as "avènement de l'impersonnel, […] phénomène universel" that helps us to understand our condition as embodied beings (*être incarnés*), as well as disclosing the temporal structure of our being in the world (*être au monde*). Human subjects live in a physical world, where there are constant stimuli (for the subject himself) and recursive situations. The human condition – which is not the result of deliberate choices – "comporte des rythmes qui […] ont leur condition dans le milieu banal qui m'entoure".[191] Human beings live primarily a marge of impersonal experience (*presque impersonnelle*), that is to say a general world, or a style of being to which we belong. This belonging is expressed primarily in the body. As a pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world, the body plays the role of an innate complex regarding my personal life. In other words, Merleau-Ponty is implicitly using the concept of body schema, elsewhere defined as "unité du corps", "texture commune de tous les objets", and "instrument general de mon comprehension".[192]

With regard to the meaning of anonymity in Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Heinämaa compares the two principal readings in the debate: anonymity is considered alternatively as a selfless subject or as a collective of subjects. Accounting for the substantial consistency between Husserl transcendentalism and Merleau-Ponty phenomenology, she rejects *in toto* the possibility that anonymity denotes "a plurality of selves or a system of selves, claiming that "the anonymous subject that Merleau-Ponty's reflections disclose, together with the personal self, is not plural but is an unspecified singular."[193] Conversely, *contra* the Heideggerian-Derridean and Bergsonian-Deleuzian interpretations, the concept of anonymity aims to cover and express "certain hidden ingredients of self-perception, ingredients that are implied by the necessary bodily character of the perceiving self. These ingredients include sedimented accomplishments of earlier acts, some of which are not our own acts but acts of others unknown to us and preceding us in time."[194] The "Others" who preceded me are both a general group of

[191] *Merleau-Ponty (1945), p. 99.*
[192] *Merleau-Ponty, (1945).*
[193] *Heinämaa, S. (2015) "Anonymity and personhood: Merleau-Ponty's account of the subject of perception." Continental Philosophy Review 48.2: 123-142, p. 128.*
[194] *Heinämaa (2015), p. 125.*

strangers and those closer to me, those who were born before me and who give me life.[195] According to the perceptual and bodily structures of human beings, everyone's history has a prehistory. Thus, he focuses on pre-personal traditions as the condition of possibility of one's personal existence.

This other subject (or subjects) play(s) a fundamental role since their acts constitute the whole pre-history of the self, without necessarily having to be "unknown". I argue that, among some unknown and trans-generational "others", there is at least one who is well recognizable and identifiable: the gestating subject. Moving from this analysis, anonymity could be characterized as the shared horizon to which every human subject belongs as *particular* human being – in terms of tradition,[196] cultural world, family history, physical, and psychical particularities – and, at the same time, as a *general* human being – with potential corporeal and perceptual "I can" and "I cannot" possibilities, a biological setting, some boundaries, and potentialities determined by their anonymous body. Furthermore, anonymity does not pertain exclusively to perceptual experience. Rather, it is a pre-condition and a grounding horizon of the structures of human temporality and freedom; the anonymity of our body allows us to centre our existence and, at the same time, prevents us from centring ourselves absolutely. The notion of the subject as discrete or self-disclosed is thus rejected in favour of the relational, embodied, and affective features of subjectivity. The concept of anonymity makes sense only if it is conceived as coupled with the personal, as *two coins of the same subject*. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body should be thought as a mirror, in that the expression of the whole subject is at every moment the expression of a psychological history. In this manner, it emerges that the anonymous development of the body is necessarily intertwined and integrated with its psychological history. In this way, the concept of anonymity makes sense only if it is coupled with the "personal". As Heinämaa poignantly illustrates, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology the personal is not accounted for in terms of a sort of "superstructure" situated on top of an anonymous generality;[197]

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[195] *See my analysis of Steinbock (1995), (2017).*

[196] *"The notion of "pre-personal tradition" is not unambiguous, though. It can be extrapolated to a number of different occasions, above all, as Merleau-Ponty insists, because there must be a resumption of that tradition. I argue that this tradition is not merely the fact of the body and its being in the world, not merely systems of anonymous "functions" but a tradition of pregnant embodiment, of pregnant flesh as original home, framed, ideally by consent and acceptance, welcoming and anticipation." Gray, F. (2013). Original habitation: pregnant flesh as absolute hospitality. In S. LaChance Adams, & C. R. Lundquist (Eds.), Coming to life: philosophies of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering (pp. 71-87), Fordham University Press, p. 77.*

[197] *Heinämaa (2015).*

the personal and the anonymous are rather moments of a whole structure, which is the self:

> La généralité et l'individualité du sujet, la subjectivité pure, l'anonymat de l'on et l'anonymat de la conscience ne sont pas deux conceptions du sujet entre lesquelles la philosophie aurait à choisir, mais deux moments d'une structure unique qui est le sujet concrete. [198]

To sum up, pregnancy is an anonymous process in two senses: first, because it implies the c*oming into being* of pre-personal life (the fetal one); and, second, because the woman herself is not *stricto sensu* the agent of this experience. If we consider the notion of *action'* in terms of "motor acts", touching my foot and childbearing are hardly comparable when it comes to *motor agency*. In accounting for the experience of pregnancy as anonymous, it is possible to analyze both the gestated-other and the gestating self. More specifically, as fetal-other, everyone has taken part in anonymity and has never ceased, as a human being, to remain within this horizon. Conversely, in the position of gestating subject, one lives through the experience of pregnancy as a process that is intimately characterized by a sense of contingency,[199] since it deploys several physical and biological changes in one's body over which one does not have full control.[200] Pregnancy causes a specific renegotiation of body schema and body image, a potential breaking of transparency, or a different kind of lucidity.[201] Many modifications concerning the gestating subject's experience are lived as pre-personal, pre-linguistic, and in unconscious ways. Merleau-Ponty grasps this aspect of pregnancy, defining it as an "anonymous process". This anonymous ground of pregnancy has been inspected from the angles of drives, loss of control, and contingency; it has been argued that a woman "*finds* herself pregnant even though she may have planned and prepared for it",[202] since no one can have complete control over the timing and modalities of getting pregnant.[203] My

[198] *Merleau-Ponty (1945), p. 514.*
[199] *Beauvoir (1949).*
[200] *See Browne V. (2017). The temporalities of pregnancy: on contingency, loss and waiting. In G. Rye, & al. (Eds.), Motherhood in literature and culture: interdisciplinary perspectives from Europe (pp. 33-45). Routledge.*
[201] *See chapter three.*
[202] *Pugliese, A. (2016). Phenomenology of Drives: Between Biological and Personal Life. In J. Bornemark, & N. Smith (Eds.). Phenomenology of Pregnancy (pp. 71-91). Elanders, p. 72.*
[203] *Browne (2017).*

argument is that the anonymous level could be said to be primary in two senses. In the first sense, anonymity represents the fundamental grounding of our perceptual and corporeal experiences; it is the basis of the constitution of one's subjectivity and our ways of being in the world, such as temporality and sexuality. In the second sense, our belonging to anonymity could be understood as "primary" since everyone has been party to the experience of pregnancy, "an anonymous process"; more specifically, I argue that during human gestation, the gestating subject and fetus share an essentially anonymous relationship, especially in the co-constitution of body schemas and in developing new styles in relation to spatiality and motility.[204]

All in all, Merleau-Ponty's discussion provides a theoretical means for bringing intra-uterine life into wider discourse about perception, self/other, and human body, as well as for determining pregnancy negatively as a non-act. However, what remains to be discussed is the specific kind of corporeal experiences that gestating subject may feel due to the co-presence of another human being within her bodily boundaries.

2.4.3. Discovering the Gestating Self

Pregnancy is thus accounted for as a process that happens within and through the gestating body, incomparable to the other actions that the self performs ("Sa propre grossesse n'est pas pour elle un acte comme les autres actions qu'on accomplit avec son corps ").[205] The temporal dimension intrinsic to pregnant experience, the leading role played by contingency, a specific form of opacity from the pregnant body, and the gestating self's unique form of agency are the main features traced by Merleau-Ponty within gestational experience. As I argued, his understanding of pregnancy as an anonymous process theorises pregnant experience as a constitutive part of the emergence of the self, as the anonymity implied by the pre-reflective and ante-predicative horizons which mould human experience.

Within the passages at stake, I state that what I call the *gestating self* emerges; Merleau-Ponty recognizes the pregnant woman has some specific experiential structures, like a kind of auto-alienation, in that her body may become alien and she cannot immediately respond to her bodily goals, experiencing instead a form of broken lucidity.

[204] *See chapter seven.*
[205] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 101.*

Complementarily, the fetal-other is otherwise a constitutive part of her bodily awareness (and body schema, as well), being precisely "un prolongement de son corps à elle".[206] Gestational experience inaugurates a set of bodily experiences from which the body is alienated and fails to translate immediate transparency to action. According to Merleau-Ponty's proposal, a pregnant subject's body ceases to be entirely hers, instead being systematically inhabited by another human being:

> Elle sent son propre corps s'aliéner à elle, ne plus être simple auxiliaire de son activité; il cesse d'être entièrement à elle pour être systématiquement habité par un autre être et bientôt mettre au monde un autre conscience.[207]

Lingering on these passages, Welsh points out that every pregnancy entails a form of alienation for the gestating self; despite the qualitative variability of pregnant experiences (in terms of physiological, biological, and psychological conditions, as well as existential situations), "it is similar in all women given the presence of this alien being".[208] This form of alienation is an essential constraint of gestational experience; it takes place within the experiential structures that are characteristic of *every* gestational experience and, at the same time, this alienation is *peculiar* only to pregnancy. As proposed in chapter one, I maintain that phenomenology is the study of essences, and argue that it is proper to every pregnant experience to be interested by a peculiar tension between the (gestating) self and the (fetal) other, as well as by a non-lucidity of the pregnant body. This eidos concerns pregnancy exclusively, which is a bodily experience that is completely different from which cause a rupture in the immediacy of the instrumental body (i.e. in pathological cases). What happens is that the *I can* of the gestating self encounters a radical and essential intercorporeality, which concerns pregnant experience both on the side of the gestating self and on the side of the fetal-other. This intercorporeality concerns the human self as such, given that everyone has been party to the pregnant process. As Moran correctly points out, "From the point of

[206] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 101.*
[207] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 101.*
[208] *Welsh (2008), p. 53.*

view of genesis, all humans experience the original intercorporeality of living and experiencing within the womb of the mother".[209]

Merleau-Ponty accounts for pregnancy not only from the perspective of the gestating subject, but also from the perspective of a general subject that was once gestated. A *caveat* is at this point necessary; these two levels of analysis are strictly interrelated in the lived experience of pregnancy, which is given by the actual gestating subject and the fetal-other (a subject of the experience *qua* living being but not-yet a subject of acts, namely a *person*). While considering these two perspectives within a phenomenological analysis, some reflections are crucial: while the gestating self is a subject that has a world, the fetal-other is a human being that interacts at some level (motor, kinaesthetic) with the gestating self. By bracketing beliefs about the fetal *person*, I stick to the phenomenological reality that the fetal-other is a living being which interacts with the gestating self. This is a cautionary note against every fallacious ascription of behaviours or thoughts to the fetal-other; empirical studies that take seriously "fetal life" do not overestimate the possibility of effective knowledge of the fetus experience, and so a fortiori neither do we as phenomenologists.[210]

2.5. The Lived experience of pregnancy – some preliminary indications

In this chapter, I have considered experiences of birth and pregnancy from a phenomenological perspective through the writings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.
I believe that acknowledging the historical contributions of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on this matter allows us to work with conceptual tools that interrogate the many levels of gestational experience, working through key theoretical premises and anticipated epistemic outcomes. The primary goal has been to show that the issues of birth and pregnancy, even if not often and explicitly acknowledged as such, represent a philosophical issue that is highly pertinent for phenomenological investigation. While feminist approaches have presented these issues as gendered and politically relevant, it is also interesting to note that they appear as thematic problems for Husserl and Merleau-Ponty – two thinkers whose philosophical projects have been deeply criticized and, at the

[209] *Moran, D. (2017). Lived Body, Intersubjectivity, and Intercorporeality: The Body in Phenomenology. In L. Dolezal, & D. Petherbridge (Eds.). (2017). Body/self/other: The phenomenology of social encounters (p. 269-311). SUNY Press, p. 286.*
[210] *See the analyses in Piontelli, A. (2020). Il Culto del feto: Come è cambiata l'immagine della maternità. Raffaello Cortina Editore.*

same time, actively discussed by feminist phenomenologists. The genealogical work consists in re-tracing the vestiges of philosophical attention devoted to topics that are usually excluded or overlooked within the philosophical tradition. In the case of pregnancy, the analysis is even more radical because, as several feminists have advocated, this kind of experience (not unlike motherhood, abortion, and feminine orgasm, among others) has been so rarely considered in the history of Western philosophy.

From the sparse notes of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the urgency of a phenomenology of pregnancy emerges that, in these authors, remains firmly anchored in the investigation of a generic subject that has once been gestated. I highlighted the relevance of the toolkit presented by Husserl in questioning the nature of the relationship between the fetal-other and the gestating subject, as well as in pointing out the need for an eidetics of birth. As for Merleau-Ponty, the main theoretical upshot is the attention to the embodied experience of pregnancy as a bodily process that involves the totality of the human being. The major objection against Merleau-Ponty's account may relate to an imbalance between what the foetus does to the pregnant subject – in terms of motor and bodily perception – and what the pregnant subject does to the foetus. Put in other terms, the gestating subject may seem to live *passively* through the experience, simply loaning her body to the coming-into-being of another life. Nevertheless, pregnant experience does somewhat display this aspect of passivity, since it presents a peculiar kind of *intercorporéité*. Moreover, pregnancy is not accounted for in terms of biological process – namely, a sub-personal phenomenon totally separated from one's personal experience – but instead as an existential experience that involves the totality of the self. The methodological re-thinking of the correlation individuated between mind, matter, and life acknowledges the complexity of experience. Moreover, epistemological care in avoiding the reductive work of *sciences of matter* allows us to inquire about gestational experience not only as a biological (and bio-medical) phenomenon, but also as a living process that involves the totality of the human *situation*. With the phenomenological premises of Husserl, and the arguments of Merleau-Ponty, gestational experience comes out of medicine cabinets and books on human anatomy, and it ceases to solely be a matter of idiosyncratic experience, instead becoming a philosophical theme.

Along with attention to historical detail, I also showed that these thinkers provide a conceptual background that still needs to be discussed, renegotiated, and developed.

Some concepts reveal their epistemic potential: as for Husserl, I explored the notions of *pregnant community*, the temporal dimension of the gestating process, and the constitutive asymmetry between the fetal-other and the gestating self. All these insights work towards complicating the boundaries and status of the gestating subjectivity. In regard to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, I reflected on the notion of anonymity and his analysis of pregnant embodiment as constitutively inhabited by a tension between two modalities of being, that, following Iris Marion Young, I call *alienation* and *participation*. Within the analysis of Merleau-Ponty, pregnancy becomes properly that the *pregnant experience* which Simone de Beauvoir has extensively considered in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Indeed, in the 1949-1952 lectures, one may find an analysis of pregnancy as a multi-layered experience, of which alienation is one of the structural aspects. This conceptual toolkit resonates with Beauvoir's analysis, where gestational experience and feminine existence are said to be ambiguous and alienated.

For the purpose of my argument, it is interesting to note that both thinkers account for pregnancy not only from the perspective of the gestating subject, but also from the perspective of a general subject that once has been gestated. In other words, Merleau-Ponty and Husserl may seem to be more interested in the fact that everyone was born from a gestating self than the fact that women can be pregnant. As for Merleau-Ponty, this awareness does not undermine nor invalidate the analysis carried out, which undoubtedly represents an original account of gestational experience, especially if confronted with the theses articulated by Beauvoir in those very years. The similarities between the two arguments are so striking that it seems highly probable that the authors had a dialogue around these themes.

Another instructive point in Merleau-Ponty's account is that pregnancy is viewed as the process through which an organism becomes a subject and that this *happens to* pertain to women's embodiment. This process – as opposed to an event or a punctual moment of change – introduces the possibility of regarding the dynamic and complex transition from the biochemical status of the embryo to the birth of a human being. The articulation of this passage has been primarily taken into account in the text *La Structure du comportement* (1942), further developed in the lectures P*sychologie et Pédagogie de l'enfant* (1949-1952), and during the classes on *Nature* (1956-1960).

I argue that these analyses should be integrated within the epistemic line critically pointed out by Cavarero and in which Husserl and Merleau-Ponty could be settled. Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty open up a space for recognizing the gestational process as meaning-making as the coming into the world of the self. Even if they did not fully develop the philosophical implications derived from the gendered dimension of pregnancy, the reference to pregnant embodiment allows them to engage critically with the intersubjective (and specifically intercorporeal) dimensions of the self. In discussing the original intersubjectivity that emerges through birth, Christine Schües puts it:

> Childbirth is not only a transition from the inside out, and the birth is not just the start of a person, but simultaneously the start of a relationship and a change for all of those involved in the beginning in-the-world of that particular person. Birth means to be born from someone (the m-other) and to be born with the m-other. This means: human beings are always born in a context of fellow human beings.[211]

As I explained in the Introduction, my aim is specifically to extend this thesis and to push it more radically in the direction of including the pregnant experience as originary for the beginning of the self. From this perspective, both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty assist in unveiling from "whom" the Western self comes.

3. The s*ituation* of pregnancy

In this chapter, I consider the philosophical accounts of pregnancy proposed by Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Marion Young. From a historical point of view, they are the first authors to explore the experience of pregnancy through the lens of feminist phenomenology. In particular, they both offer a phenomenology of female pregnant embodiment by explicitly linking pregnancy to other situations experienced by women. It is my interest to explicate how their respective accounts may enrich the ongoing debate on the phenomenology of pregnancy, by providing an analysis of the main topics they cover in their reflections.

[211] *Schües (2017), p. 22.*

While Husserl and Merleau-Ponty pose premises for this new phenomenological topic of gestational experience, Simone de Beauvoir centres the problem by linking it explicitly to the gendered aspect of the experience. I take into account Beauvoir's arguments as deployed in *Le Deuxième Sexe* through the following schema. First of all, I explicate the correlation between the philosophical dualism of immanence/transcendence, and I show how Beauvoir uses it to inquire into pregnant experience. I then analyse some influential passages of *Le Deuxième Sèxe* through a phenomenological understanding of the text. The first result of my inquiry is that, to fully understand Beauvoir's account of pregnancy, it is fundamental to recognize her work as phenomenological in a technical sense; within her analysis of pregnancy, we witness the employment of theoretical toolkits from Merleau-Pontinian philosophy.

Although Beauvoir's account of pregnancy is highly biased, I state that it is possible to creatively re-think the gestational process by reading the pregnant experience as a s*ituation*. From there, I show that Iris Marion Young advances her analysis of pregnant experience through a renegotiation of the conceptual dualism of immanence/transcendence, and develops an original account of what it means to be pregnant. On this matter, I take into account her analysis of the bodily occurrences entailed by pregnancy for the gestating self, by expanding it through a contemporary understanding of the opacity of the pregnant embodiment. To conclude my inquiry, I show that the notion of *Split subjectivity* can elucidate the tensions which structure lived pregnant experience.

3.1. Simone de Beauvoir on the *étrange création*

Like others scholars, I regard Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* mainly as phenomenological text in its premises and conceptual framework. In particular, I situate my analysis in line with Heinämaa's reading of *Le Deuxième Sexe* as a phenomenological investigation, by prioritising the hermeneutical lens of the lived body over that of sex/gender distinctions.[212] I agree with Heinämaa's thesis that,

[212] *I am referring mainly (but not exclusively) to Heinämaa, S. (2003). Toward a phenomenology of sexual difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. See also Heinämaa, S. (1999). Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenology of sexual difference. Hypatia, 14(4), 114-132; Kruks, S. (2019/1990). Situation and human existence: Freedom, subjectivity and society. Routledge.*

> *Le deuxième sexe* is not a sociohistorical explanation nor a declaration of women's rights but a philosophical inquiry. Beauvoir's main claims do not concern the sociopsychological construction of gender and its material basis in the natural givens of sex. Instead they concern the ambiguity of the living body and its dual expressions, the feminine and the masculine.[213]

This stance makes it possible to discuss the Beauvorian account of pregnancy without entering in the debate over her conception of motherhood – which is an advantage from the perspective of my research, since it leaves room for an understanding of pregnant experience which does not deal with social issues, but instead with the inextricable complexity of the lived body in situation.

Indeed, feminist scholars have abundantly explored Beauvoir's idea of motherhood by arguing, as Toril Moi does, that the mother *imago* within the 1949 book is "disruptive";[214] or again, by insisting on the ambiguity structuring the lived experience of being a mother.[215] In this regard, Alison Stone points out that Beauvoir has offered a "complicated and multi-faceted appraisal of motherhood", which cannot be read as straightforward hostility.[216] The author emphasises that Beauvoirian refusal of motherhood is not against the institution *per se*, but against the way it has been normed during the twentieth century. In particular, her criticism is *contra* motherhood conceived as an "exclusive vocation" that prioritises a model of "stay-at-home mothers".[217] Stone concludes that the most influential outcome of Beauvoir's analysis of motherhood is that "the mother is always a subject giving meaning to her embodied experience".[218] In this sense,

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[213] *Heinämaa (2003), xi.*
[214] *Moi, T. (2001). What is a woman? and other essays. Oxford University Press, p. 66.*
"Avant même que soit envisagée la maternité, la féminité est d'emblée présentée comme exposée au risque d'un alourdissement aliénant, d'une maternité potentielle et essentielle, présente à la manière d'une menace, même lorsque la femme ne s'engage pas dans cette voie" Schneider, M. (2011). Maternité et aliénation. L'Homme & la Société, 1(1-2), 157-170, p. 158.
[215] *See e.g., Lundgren-Gothlin, E. (1996). Sex and Existence Simone de Beauvoir's the Second Sex. Wesleyan University Press; Chanter, T. (2000). Abjection and ambiguity: Simone de Beauvoir's legacy. The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 138-155; Bauer, N. (2017). Simone de Beauvoir on motherhood and destiny. In L. Hengehold, & N. Bauer (Eds.) A companion to Simone de Beauvoir (pp.146-159). John Wiley & Sons; Stone, A. (2017). Beauvoir and the Ambiguities of Motherhood. In L. Hengehold, & N. Bauer (Eds.) A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir (pp. 122-33). John Wiley & Sons.*
[216] *Stone (2017), p. 122.*
[217] *Stone (2017), p. 124.*
[218] *Stone (2017), p. 132.*

> Lived maternity discloses our fundamental ambiguity, the creativity inherent in our bodies, and the constitutive and corporeal character of our bonds with others. From Beauvoir's work, it emerges that maternity emerges as a source of greater value and existential significance than she herself recognizes it to be.[219]

This reappraisal of the motherhood as a potential sense-making experience makes possible readings of Beauvoir that grasp the phenomenological depth of her philosophy, and avoid reading the 1949 text exclusively as a political manifesto. Said that, it is important to keep in mind the polemical dimension of the *Le Deuxième Sexe*, also when we read the passages on pregnancy.

For approaching Beauvoir's account of the gestational process, it is first of all necessary to problematize a conceptual polarity that plays a central role in thematizing both the position of women in patriarchal societies and the kind of experience that is gestational – that is to say, the immanence/transcendence dialectic. In the Hegelian axis informing the text,[220] transcendence is conceived as the human possibility of overcoming given circumstances through the creation and attribution of new values and meanings in our s*ituation*. On the other hand, immanence is the rootedness of our status as objects. In *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir develops the immanence/transcendence dialectic, making the further step of applying it to sexual difference. Put in other terms, she employs this dialectic to unveil the mechanism of *gendered oppression.*[221] In reading Beauvoir's work, Gail Weiss comments that transcendence as the openness of the subject is a positive connotation, in contrast with the immanence considered as the static being of objectivity.[222] Transcendence is then considered in some passages to be the *proper* human mode of being. Alison Stone follows the same hermeneutical path in arguing that, in Beauvoir's reflections,

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[219] Stone (2017), p. 132.
[220] I follow the reading of Whitney, in Whitney, S. (2019), "Immanence and Transcendence", in G. Weiss, S. Salamon, &A. & Murphy (Eds). 50 concepts for a critical phenomenology (pp. 189-196). Northwestern University Press, p. 192.
[221] I borrow this expression from Whitney's essay, where she puts the works of Beauvoir in continuity with Fanon analysis – the former for unveiling the gender oppression, the latter the racial one.
[222] Daigle, C., & Landry, C. (2013). An Analysis of Sartre's and Beauvoir's Views on Transcendence: Exploring Intersubjective Relations. PhaenEx, 8(1), 91-121.

> [H]uman existence is fundamentally one of transcendence, in which we transcend our given situations by creating new values, goals, and meanings through which we recast and reshape those situations.[223]

The axiological value of transcendence as freedom from animal and biological limits and the value of immanence as persistence within the *natural* realm is maintained. According to Daigle and Landry's analysis,

> [Beauvoir] contrasts immanence with transcendence throughout *The Second Sex* by describing transcendence as constructive activity, progression, and freedom from facticity. Conversely, she describes immanence as life-sustaining activity, passivity, and submission to facticity.[224]

Part of this critical literature highlights how the immanence/transcendence divide has contributed to the oppression of women. As Heinämaa points out, Beauvoir's analysis articulates the concrete and symbolic associations between man/transcendence and woman/immanence, individuated as the origin of the sexual hierarchy.[225] From this perspective, the critical issue lies in the identification of woman with pure immanence, the counterpart of which is the transcendent activity of man. On the other hand, Beauvoir critically reimagines the immanence/transcendence dualism with reference to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and not to a Sartrean-inspired framework.[226] Beauvoir is critical of a hierarchical understanding of the immanence/transcendence divide, but she also maintains that we are dealing with modes of existence,[227] specifically enhanced and influenced by socio-political and cultural circumstances. Partially overlapping with the immanence/transcendence divide, the activity/passivity tension plays a similar role in sexual hierarchy. Beauvoir argues that social and cultural constructions inform the

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[223] *Stone (2017), p. 123.*
[224] *Daigle, & Landry (2013), p. 108.*
[225] *Heinämaa (2003) p. 97.*
[226] *Among others, Andrea Veltman defends this position, in claiming that Beauvoir's dialectics immanence/transcendence has many variations and facets, which cannot be interpreted as masculinist nor classist nor issued from Sartrean metaphysics, as part of the feminist critics are argued. Veltman, A. (2006). Transcendence and Immanence in the Ethics of Simone de Beauvoir. In M. Simons (Ed.) The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays (pp. 113-131). Indiana University Press. p. 115. See also Heinamäa (2003),*
[227] *"Transcendence and immanence are therefore not to be thought of as metaphysical concepts, but rather as modes of existence." Daigle, & Landry (2013), p. 108.*

passivity of the female subject and the activity of the male subject; nonetheless, the male/female distinction should not be translated into an opposition between an active pole (the masculine one) and a passive one (the feminine one), because biological data do not confirm this philosophical and cultural construction. Again, the supposed passivity of the woman is a matter of social narratives, thus not intrinsic to the sub-personal level.

In this regard, the pregnant process is said to be an immanent process but, following Beauvoir, the self is at the same time immanent and transcendent; a *caveat* is thus required in remembering that the polarity makes sense only when applied to the subject as embodied. In this sense, the bodily aspect of subjectivity is key to understanding the immanence/transcendence divide in a fresh thirdway. In the entry "Immanence and Transcendence" of the *50 concepts for a critical phenomenology* volume, published in 2019, Shiloh Whitney grasps this nuance of the immanence/transcendence divide, arguing that:

> Insofar as transcendence is a bodily transcendence, it cannot be singled out from immanence and valorized as an inalienable condition that elevates the human subject from nature and animality: a valorized freedom of consciousness from bodily materiality and social interdependence.[228]

Her comment is particularly helpful because it explains the two dynamics that mould the concrete existence of our subjectivity as embodied – that is to say, "bodily materiality" and "social interdependence". The experiential priority of socio-material instances shapes our concrete experience, as embodied (and then gendered, racialized, and so on) subjects. How so these two dynamics thus shape the experience of pregnancy? In reading Beauvoir's text, we see that an analysis of the specific situation of the woman necessary for any account of the gestational process, such that Beauvoir proposes a sharp distinction between the idea of creation (essentially transcendent) and reproduction (immanent in itself). In particular, she argues that a woman who generates cannot know the pride of creation, due to the fact that she perceives herself just as "le jouet passif de forces

[228] *Whitney (2019), p. 192.*

obscures".[229] Andrea Veltman further comments on the main characteristic of the immanence/transcendence divide:

> In the full development of the dichotomy in *The Second Sex*, transcendence encompasses activities that enable self-expression, create an enduring artifact, or in some other fashion contribute positively to the constructive endeavors of the human race. Labors of immanence required for the sheer perpetuation of existence, on the other hand, are characteristically futile - unable to provide a foundational justification for existence.[230]

Beauvoir does not regard generation as an activity, but merely as a natural function where no project is committed. Pregnancy is then defined as "étrange création qui se réalise dans la contiguïté et la facticité",[231] where the woman is nothing but an "instrument passif de la vie". [232] From this perspective, the woman could be seen as the bare medium by means of which the species self-perpetuates. Thus pregnancy could be conceived as a constraint for the woman, who is the seat of a process where she has neither control nor agency:

> Mais de toute façon, engendrer, allaiter ne sont pas des *activités***,** ce sont des fonctions naturelles; aucun projet n'y est engagé; c'est pourquoi la femme n'y trouve pas le motif d'une affirmation hautaine de son existence; elle subit passivement son destin biologique.[233]

Beauvoir is consistent here with an axiological structure of argumentation, according to which different kinds of creation correspond to respective grades of ontological objects.

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[229] Beauvoir, S. (1949). Le Deuxième Sexe I. Les faits et les mythes. Gallimard. p. 114.
[230] Veltman (2006), p. 115.
[231] Beauvoir, S. (1949), Le Deuxième Sexe II: L'expérience vécue. Gallimard, p. 156.
[232] Beauvoir (1949), p. 156.
[233] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 83. see also: "[...] si les femmes font des fils, elles ne les font pas de leur propre nature, de leur seule initiative. Soit les enfants potentiels sont mis en elles par les dieux ou les ancêtres, on l'a vu, et les hommes façonnent des fils à leur ressemblance, soit la naissance de fils ou de filles dépend de l'issue d'un combat entre puissances, soit, et très fréquemment, c'est de l'homme que procèdent tant les garçons que les filles, la femme fournissant le véhicule ou le matériau brut. Ce paradoxe est très clairement exprimé par Aristote — pensée savante dont on connaît bien des équivalents exotiques : la femme fournit une matière animale proliférante à laquelle le pneuma du sperme confère la forme, l'esprit, la vie ; la naissance de filles signe un déficit de puissance virile, qui dans des conditions normales engendre les bons produits, c'est-à-dire des mâles. L'homme devient ainsi l'élément moteur de la procréation." Héritier, F., Mongin, O., Padis, M. O., Pizoird, A., & Théry, I. (2001). Privilège de la féminité et domination masculine: Entretien avec Françoise Héritier. Esprit (1940-), 77-95, here pp. 84-85.

As I showed in chapter one, this conceptual distinction has its origin in Greek philosophy and medicine, especially in the Platonic tradition.

If we consider this divide in Beauvoir's text, the distinction between "masculine" creation, the authorship of which is clear, and the "repetition" of animal-human generation raises a number of questions regarding the role of pregnant embodiment within the gestational process.[234] In reading and discussing these passages, Françoise Héritier lingers on Beauvoir's terminological decision to employ the verb *engendrer* instead of *enfanter*.[235] In particular, she points out that *engendrer* usually connotes masculine functions, while *enfanter* is more feminine.[236] What seems problematic, according to her reading, is that Beauvoir does not explain why "generate" should exceed the mere "natural function" of pregnancy – unless, she continues, the philosopher conceives the masculine projectuality as beyond the realm of sexuality and natural reproductions. [237] Some passages seem to suggest this much, such as one where Beauvoir writes that females are "vouées à la repetition (et non pas à la création, comme les males.[238] Following this interpretative line, the most prominent feature that defines pregnancy is a kind of passivity of the gestating subject. Re-production is then considered to be ontologically inferior to production; Beauvoir's argument is that pregnancy entails a mere repetition of the species, and that the gestating subject does not have an active.[239] The immanent process *par excellence* is properly the gestational one. As already shown, the sharp distinction between reproduction and production (or creation) is imbued with a strong axiological nuance, according to which creation is preferable to mere reproduction – creation being a matter of transcendence and reproduction being one of immanence. This preconception informs also the comprehension of the gestational process as an extreme form of immanence:

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[234] Beauvoir (1949) I, pp. 82-85.

[235] Héritier, F. (2002). Masculin Féminin II: dissoudre la hiérarchie. Odile Jacob, p. 65.

[236] Héritier (2002), p. 65.

[237] Héritier (2002), p. 65. "Mais de toute façon, engendrer, allaiter ne sont pas des activités, ce sont des fonctions naturelles; aucun projet n'y est engagé; c'est pourquoi la femme n'y trouve pas le motif d'une affirmation hautaine de son existence; elle subit passivement son destin biologique". See Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 83.

[238] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 85.

[239] Hannah Arendt makes a point that for some reasons is close to the Beauvoirian one: pregnancy is not a public activity, since "it is aimed at the maintenance of life, and as such it is unable to disclose the 'who' of a person". See e.g., Fulfer, K. (2017). Hannah Arendt and pregnancy in the public sphere. In H. Fielding, & D. Olkowski (Eds.). Feminist phenomenology futures (pp. 257-274) Indiana University Press.

> Ce qu'il y a de singulier chez la femme enceinte, c'est qu'au moment même où son corps se transcende il est saisi comme immanent […]. Si la chair est pure inertie, elle ne peut incarner, même sous une forme dégradée, la transcendance.[240]

Although the gestating subject could entertain the illusion of being "une *valeur* toute faite",[241] Beauvoir states that she is alienated within her body and her social dignity. The main reason of that alienation is given by the contingency of the gestational process, which exceeds her subjectivity. In Beauvoir words, "elle ne fait pas vraiment l'enfant: il se fait en elle; sa chair engendre seulement de la chair: elle est incapable de fonder une existence qui aura à se fonder elle-même".[242] In the gestational process the fetus is a "prolifération gratuite", a mere fact whose contingency is symmetric to one of the death.[243]

This negative nuance of the pregnant process is linked with Beauvoir's understanding of freedom as *active*. On the same hermeneutical line already discussed (Weiss-Heinämaa), Sara Cohen Shabot poignantly argues that,

> [...] this constrained freedom, which appears to be a critical element in Beauvoir's theory, is the result of a problematic principle in Beauvoir's thought, namely the principle that inescapably connects the authentic mode of freedom (transcendence) with action and immanence with passivity.[244]

The key identification of transcendence with activity, and of immanence with passivity entails a reading of the gestational process as forcefully immanent, and thus passive. The gestational process appears as loss-making, purely biological and within which freedom is impossible. Even when a pregnant woman thinks to play a role within the gestational process, this belief is suddenly revealed as an illusion:[245] "Engendrer, allaiter ne sont pas

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[240] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 156.*
[241] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 157.*
[242] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 157.*
[243] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 157. "Les créations qui émanent de la liberté posent l'objet comme valeur et le revêtent d'une nécessité: dans le sein maternel, l'enfant est injustifié, il n'est encore qu'une prolifération gratuite, un fait brut dont la contingence est symétrique de celle de la mort."*
[244] *Cohen Shabot, S. (2016). How free is Beauvoir's freedom? Unchaining Beauvoir through the erotic body. Feminist Theory, 17(3), 269-284, p. 269.*
[245] *Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 114.*

des activités, ce sont des fonctions naturelles", where no project is involved ("aucun projet n'y est engagé").[246] Cohen Shabot follows Lundgren-Gothlin's proposal in arguing that Beauvoirian freedom has an active character influenced by Marxian philosophy. More specifically, the concept of transcendence is said to be related to Marx's notion of "productive activity",[247] referring to "conscious activity which results in some kind of object in which the individual is objectified, be it a tool, a building, a book, or a piece of music." [248] From there, Lundgren-Gothlin concludes that,

> The bearing or rearing of children is not regarded as an activity that affects or alters human consciousness, social structures, historical development, being seen rather as an animal or biological activity.[249]

3.2. The lived experience of the gestational process

I argue that this idea of passivity can only constitute part of a complete framework; if the body is always in situation, then the pregnant body too should express the dialectic between immanence and transcendence, activity and passivity, freedom and subjection. Of course, within the 1949 text, the focus on the passive side of the pregnant experience far surpasses its active, creative, and empowering side. That said, the analyses that I find most poignantly interesting from my research perspective are those in which Beauvoir addresses the experience of pregnancy as a bodily, taking into account "the thing itself" of the pregnancy – namely the physical and psychical experiences of the gestating self, or the *what it is like to be pregnant*.

During the first semester, a gestating woman may suffer from a lack of appetite and sickness: these signs are all manifestations of the conflict between pregnant self's body and the species. Beauvoir approaches these *polemical* features of a woman's body through an analysis of the "data of biology'", and she offers extensive reflections on pregnancy in the section "La mère". The very first lines of the volume read,

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[246] *Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 83.*
[247] *Shabot, S. C. (2016), p. 269.*
[248] *Lundgren-Gothlin, E. (1996). Sex and Existence Simone de Beauvoir's the Second Sex, Wesleyan University Press, p. 27.*
[249] *Lundgren-Gothlin (1996), p. 28.*

> La femme? c'est bien simple, disent les amateurs de formules simples: elle est une matrice, un ovaire; elle est une femelle: c'est mot suffit à la définir. […] Le mot femelle fait lever chez lui une sarabande d'images: un énorme ovule round happe et châtre le spermatozoïde agile; monstrueuse et gavée la reine des termites règne sur les mâles asservis; la mante religieuse, l'araignée repues d'amour broient leur partenaire et le dévorent. [...] Inerte, impatiente, rusée, stupide, insensible, lubrique, féroce, humiliée. L'homme projette dans la femme toutes les femelles à la fois.[250]

As I have shown, from the very beginning of her arguments Beauvoir makes clear that the opposition between male and female must not be understood under the sign of an opposition between activity and passivity; indeed, in the biological realm, there is no trace of this rule, nor is there in the reproductive process.[251] Nonetheless, men and women's respective physical developments differ a lot; while men have tend to grow up in a linear sense and their bodily activity in the erotic and reproductive spheres are basically identifiable with their own transcendence, for women the process is much less straightforward. The deep conflict between the species and their body starts from birth ("dès sa naissance, l'espèce a pris possession d'elle, et tente de s'affirmer"[252]) and escalates during puberty, where it acquires the semblance of a crisis ("Il est remarquable que cet événement prenne la figure d'une *crise*"[253]). The same logic applies also to pregnant experience, in that it takes the form of a bloody conflict between the woman and the species; far from representing an individual advantage, the gestational process is physiologically an exhausting siege from which the pregnant body tries to defend itself as best it can. During the first few months, lack of appetite and nausea are read as manifestations of "la révolte de l'organisme contre l'espèce qui prend possession de lui'".[254] As time goes by, physical parameters change and a woman's chances of being

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[250] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 39.

[251] "Leur opposition n'est pas comme on l'a prétendu celle d'une activité et d'une passivité: non seulement le noyau ovulaire est actif mais le développement de l'embryon est un processus vivant, non un déroulement mécanique". Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 40.

[252] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 42.

[253] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 43.

[254] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 47. Also in the section dedicated to the situation of motherhood, Beauvoir highlights this aspect: "une existence neuve va se manifester et justifier sa propre existence, elle en est fière; mais elle se sent aussi jouet de forces obscures, elle est ballottée, violentée. [...] Elle forme avec cet enfant dont elle est gonflée un couple équivoque que la vie submerge; prise aux rets de la nature, elle est plante et bête, une réserve de colloïdes, une couveuse, un oeuf; elle effraie les enfants au corps égoïste et fait ricaner les jeunes gens parce qu'elle est elle un être

healthy decrease until she arrives at labour, the description of which starts with the adjectives painful (*douloureux*) and dangerous (*dangereux*): "L'accouchement lui-même est douloureux; il est dangereux. C'est dans cette crise qu'on voit avec le plus d'évidence que le corps ne satisfait pas toujours l'espèce et l'individu ensemble".[255] And again, "Le conflit espèce-individu, qui dans l'accouchement prends parfois une figure dramatique, donne au corps féminin une inquiétante fragilité." [256]

The epistemic, cognitive, and social role of the gestating subject undergoes a dramatic modification as a result of the pregnancy; she ceases to be an object submitted to a subject (as she was before the beginning of pregnancy within the patriarchal society she lives in), and she also lost her subjective character, ("elle n'est pas non plus un sujet angoissé par sa liberté")[257] in becoming "cette réalité équivoque: la vie." [258] The peculiar character of the gestational process is a form of radical contingency. A pregnant woman does not have control over the mysterious process in which she is implied, neither over the creature that is growing inside her bodily boundaries: "La mère se prête à ce mystère, mais elle ne le commande pas; la suprême vérité de cet être qui se façonne dans son ventre lui échappe."[259]

The terminological decisions made by Beauvoir in this passage resonate with those of Merleau-Ponty's 1949-1952 lectures. In particular, Merleau-Ponty writes that pregnancy is a mystery of the order of life – namely that which does not pertain to the personalistic and subjective layers of the self. This is akin to Beauvoir's reflections on pregnancy, where this aspect of the pregnant process emerges as involving the anonymous layer of bodily subjectivity.

Pregnancy and labour are essentially affected by conflictual forces, the results of which are double: on one hand, the intrinsic vulnerability of female body emerges as a constant condition of danger; on the other, this *polemos* causes peculiar experiential responses, that enable in various ways lived experience of feminine alienation. The first layer of analysis concerns the rupture of the instrumentality of the body. From this

humain, conscience, et liberté qui est devenu un instrument passif de la vie." Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 156. For a phenomenological account of pregnancy-induced nausea see Flakne, A. (2016). Nausea as interoceptive annunciation. J., Bornemark, N. Smith (Eds.), Phenomenology of pregnancy (103-118). Elanders.

[255] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 48.
[256] Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 48.
[257] Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 158.
[258] Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 157.
[259] Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 158.

perspective, Beauvoir's account of pregnant embodiment critiques conceptual frameworks proceeding from the idea of instrumentality, which fail to account for the feminine body – since her corporeality is instead influenced by changes and phenomena beyond her control. The intrinsic contingency of female embodiment complicates the framework, disrupting that *lucidity* or *transparency* which male embodiment idealizes with respect to its the surroundings. In a nutshell, female embodiment (along with severe bodily occurrences such as menstruation, puberty, pregnancy, labour, and breastfeeding) is in itself an objection to "normal" embodiment, showing the inconsistency of the "normalcy" and "instrumentality" of the body. For instance, in discussing menstrual experience, Beauvoir argues that during menstruation women may feel their bodies as something opaque and alien [*chose opaque aliénée*]:

> Il est la proie d'une vie têtue et étrangère qui en lui chaque mois fait et défait un berceau; chaque mois un enfant se prépare à naître et avorte dans l'écroulement des dentelles rouges; *la femme, comme l'homme, est son corps: mais son corps est autre chose qu'elle*.[260]

This latter sentence discloses the philosophical richness of the phenomenological conception of the body, acknowledging the plurality and complexity of the constitution of corporeality. Moving from the original passage in Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Beauvoir complicates and put into dialogue the many levels of the bodily experience of gestation. Beauvoir's account of pregnancy is thus not only phenomenologically-inspired, but it is a properly phenomenological inquiry. In this context, Heinäama argues:

> But if we allow for the possibility that Beauvoir was not just acquainted with phenomenology but also carried out phenomenological inquiries, then we can reconcile her principal claims. This is because the phenomenological framework offers a well-grounded and subtle way of distinguishing between different meanings of the body: the body as an object of biosciences, the body as a piece of matter, the body as an instrument of will, and the body as an

[260] *Beauvoir (1949), I, p. 41. My accent.*

> expression of the soul. In Le deuxième sexe, Beauvoir operates on all these levels.[261]

Following this line of investigation, the pregnant process entails an experiential alienation of the gestating self from herself. Heinämaa's reading in this respect grasps the crucial problem of "alien vitality"; by repudiating the reading according to which Beauvoir presents female embodiment as invalid, she argues that we witness an alien vitality which is similar to that of "sickened, diseased, aging, and infantile bodies".[262] To a certain point, men remove the presence of their corporeality from their conception of "normal" embodiment:

> Il y a un type humain absolu qui est le type masculin. La femme a des ovaires, un utérus ; voilà des conditions singulières qui l'enferment dans sa subjectivité ; on dit volontiers qu'elle pense avec ses glandes. L'homme oublie superbement que son anatomie comporte aussi des hormones, des testicules. Il saisit son corps comme une relation directe et normale avec le monde qu'il croit appréhender dans son objectivité tandis qu'il considère le corps de la femme comme alourdi par tout ce qui le spécifie: un obstacle, une prison.[263]

Women tend not to perceive their bodies as transparent instruments, but they feel instead a sort of resistance partially given by the sub-personal layer of their bodily constitution. This tension expands in the pregnant process, since it is further complicated by the presence of an alterity within the bodily boundaries of the gestating self. She may perceive this presence as alien and experience her body as inhabited by something that she cannot conceive entirely as her own. In the experiential structures of pregnancy, we see the paroxysm of alien vitality:

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[261] *Heinamäa (2003), xvi.*
[262] *Heinamäa (2003), p. 71. Alien vitality does apply also to men's embodiment, but women may have some experiences which men cannot (e.g. pregnancy). In particular, Heinamäa highlights that for the women this experience is cyclic and then eradicated to their temporal structures (p. 72).*
[263] *Beauvoir (1949), I, p. 15*

> The living body is not simply an organ of the will nor is it a natural self; it also discloses a vitality that does not belong to us as individuals or as humans. The body that is my own, which is my necessary anchor point in the material world, is also, necessarily, a stranger to me.[264]

In pregnancy, the strangeness is given by my own corporeality, and by this other who escapes my agency. The reference to the temporal dimension of one's embodiment is central in acknowledging the changes the occur during gestational experience.[265] Beauvoir makes an important move in recognizing that pregnancy is a process, and that the effects on the gestating subject may vary with time; after the first few months, we read, the woman has the pregnancy and not, as before, possessed by the pregnancy. The passage from a dis-possession to a re-possession of a new form agency and empowerment for the gestating subject intrinsically modifies the quality of the experience. Beauvoir does not pathologize the experience of pregnancy, recognizing instead that pregnancy is a normal phenomenon that, within physiological contexts, may enhance forms of maternal-fetal interaction.[266] What we witness is thus a precursor to a genuine "phenomenology of pregnancy", in that she takes into account changes in the personal experience of the gestating subject due to various temporal stages, as well as the many experiential levels involved in pregnancy.

At the sub-personal level, the pregnant process is not seen as the masculine-active part acting upon the feminine-passive part ("non seulement le noyau ovulaire est actif mais le développement de l'embryon est un processus vivant, non un déroulement mécanique » [267]), but rather it is a process that involves the anonymous layer of the body ("elle engendre [l'enfant] dans la généralité de son corps, non dans la singularité de son existence"[268]). What Beauvoir is saying here is that pregnancy is not an act, but a process; these passages expand and deepen Merleau-Ponty's understanding of pregnancy as an anonymous process, fully appreciating the lack of control on the part of the subject. In particular, Beauvoir focuses on refusing the idea that pregnancy is an activity, showing that the gestating subject cannot be understood as a transparent self. To quote a popular

[264] *Heinamäa (2003), p. 71.*
[265] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 164.*
[266] *Beauvoir (1949) I, p. 47.*
[267] *Beauvoir (1949) I, p.40.*
[268] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 158.*

passage in the 1949 volume, the gestating subject and the fetal-other become "un couple équivoque que la vie submerge".[269] As a subject, the pregnant woman is a "consciousness and freedom"; but her particular state implies an overcoming of life over existence.[270] The alien vitality of the pregnant process complements the personal experience of the gestating self. For recognising this, I suggest that the notion of *situation* might help to reconnect these levels of pregnant experience.

In *Le Deuxième Sexe*, the concept of s*ituation* designates the integration of the immanence/transcendence dialectic. It is the way in which the subject navigates the world, and her relationship with the others and with herself. Among the many scholars who take this concept into account, Toril Moi aims to offer theoretical alternatives to the sex/gender paradigm. Her point of departure is that, "the phenomenological experience of the body is always historically situated, always engaged in interaction with ideologies and other social practices."[271] According to her analysis, the two pillars "the body is always *in* a situation" and "the body *is* a situation" are equally true, but irreducible one to another.[272] The hermeneutical key put forth by Moi consists of a closer focus on the second claim, whereas some critics have tended to read the second as a simple extension of the first.[273] In particular, she supports a proximity between Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir in understanding human transcendence (as human freedom) as always incarnate, "that is to say that it always presents itself in the shape of a human body".[274] This theoretical awareness opens up an interpretation of the immanence/transcendence dialectic which regards the opposition as dynamically present within the *Lived body.* Put differently, if we understand immanence as our natural-biological rootedness and transcendence as a pure freedom and overcoming our vital circumstances then we have failed to acknowledge the role of the body as our first, fundamental, and original way of being-in-the-world. Acting, thinking, dreaming, having an orgasm, giving birth, running, reading, knitting – all our activities are primarily bodily-intentional processes, where immanence and transcendence present an inextricable dynamic.

[269] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 156.*
[270] *Beauvoir (1949) II, p. 156.*
[271] *Moi (1999), p. 59.*
[272] *Moi (1999), p. 59.*
[273] *Moi (1999), p. 59.*
[274] *Moi (1999), p. 59.*

Through this epistemic lens, Moi's comments on Beauvoir elucidate the continuity between the notions of situation and lived body. Moi explains that:

> My body is a situation, but it is a fundamental kind of situation, in that it founds my experience of myself and the world. This is a situation that always enters my lived experience. This is why the body can never be just brute matter to me.[275]

From these premises, lived experience is our making sense of our existential circumstances; through sedimented acts of interaction with the otherness (people, human beings, objects, values, environments), we build and we are built through and within our lived experience, which "itself becomes part of my situatedness".[276] In this regard, Whitney's point allows a broader comprehension of the notion of "situatedness", including not only the very biological and material fact of our body (as already taken into account within traditional phenomenological inquiries), but more explicitly also the social interdependence through which every lived subject acts. Freedom is then not absolute, but always possible. *Situation* describes our (inter)personal effort to give sense to our lived experience: "To claim that the body is a situation is to acknowledge that the meaning of a woman's body is bound up with the way she uses her freedom".[277] Immanence and transcendence are then intertwined and dynamically co-constituted in how the subject understands their reality and experience.

Is this reading of Beauvoir's notion of *situation* compatible with her reflections on pregnancy? Whereas women can make sense of motherhood in its ambiguity, pregnancy seems to remain a process that eludes and overwhelms women as subjects. While pressures from patriarchal society, as well as the myths built around the experience of pregnancy, could be actively re-negotiated to achieve a value and meaning within the subjective experience of women, the role played by the biological setting of pregnant body seems at odds with the whole Beauvoirian belief that biology cannot ground the totality of human situation. It seems that the gestating subject is at the mercy of Nature, which exceeds the limits of her agency and, more importantly, she cannot grasp the

[275] *Moi (1999), p. 59.*
[276] *Moi (1999), p. 63.*
[277] *Moi (1999), p. 65.*

potential empowerment of pregnant experience. In the case of gestation, biological facts seem *prima facie* to ground the totality of woman's situatedness: the *situation* of the gestating subject is skewed towards biology to the detriment of subjective freedom. Nonetheless, my argument is precisely against this interpretation, which is unable to grasp the original complexity of the gestating body within *Le Deuxième Sexe*. At the heart of my analysis is the refusal that biological entities fully define the totality of the human being. In this regard, Lisa Guenther points out that, within the Beauvoirian framework, the reproductive body cannot be fully explained through biological arguments; woman is then not victim of the species, but rather the victim of some broadly constructed social conventions:

> In this sense there can be no purely biological account of reproductive body; the "victim of the species" is also – if not *primarily* – subject to the social conventions that construct her as a victim, and present this construction as women's biological destiny.[278]

Guenther's focus on the social and cultural construction of the pregnant subject's *imago* is akin to Heinämaa's recognition that "Woman is not defined by the functions of the womb or the ovaries."[279] Following this interpretative line, the gestating self is not completely identified with her sub-personal processes – this fallacious identification is instead the product of narratives about pregnant embodiment which fail to acknowledge for the totality of the experience.

Of course, one may object that Beauvoir's passages on pregnancy do not seem to tackle it as a *situation;* in reading *Le Deuxième Sexe*, it emerges that the gestational process is not an activity. As pure immanence, it cannot open a space for subjective freedom; thus, the tension of transcendence/immanence (or freedom/biology) that moulds the situation of the subject completely succumbs to the side of immanence. Nonetheless, the negative biases around pregnancy are partially understandable within the particular context in which Beauvoir wrote the volume. During the fifties in Western society, the 'where' and 'when' of being or not being pregnant was not usually experienced by women

[278] *Guenther, L. (2012). The gift of the Other, The: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction. SUNY Press, p. 16.*
[279] *Heinamäa (2003), p. 96.*

as a "choice". Leaving aside the extra-textual arguments, I suggest that Beauvoir's reflections have the merit of presenting the gestational process as a multi-levelled experience that concerns primarily the anonymous layer of subjectivity. The comparison between her arguments and those deployed by Merleau-Ponty shows a continuity in the recognition that pregnancy is a complex bodily experience, wherein alterity plays a specific role in affecting the gestating self. In Beauvoir's account, the gestational process is, for all intents and purposes, a specific *situation*, marked by the ambiguous relationship between the gestating self and the fetal-other and subjected to social and cultural narratives. In Beauvoirian framework, I will not say that pregnant experience – like motherhood – is free from negative connotations; the danger entailed by pregnancy and labour, as well as the definition of pregnancy as an immanent process, indicates that the reproductive process is mainly oppressive for women. And yet, in order to trace a path towards a phenomenology of pregnancy, Beauvoir's arguments pave the way for recognizing the difficult balance entailed by pregnancy for the gestating subject, while at the same time seeing it as a bodily experience which is intrinsically ambiguous.

Along these lines, Iris Marion Young proposes an account of the embodiment of the gestating subject that also insists on the empowering and positive features of the experience.

3.3. Iris Marion Young on the pregnant embodiment

Iris Marion Young, an American political philosopher known also for her landmark work in feminist phenomenology, proposed a reframing of the immanence/transcendence dualism applied both to gender-specific bodily modes and to pregnant embodiment. More specifically, through the reconstruction of the salient points presented in the essays "Throwing like a girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality"[280] and "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation",[281] I aim to present her reading of the immanence/transcendence divide (when applied to pregnant experience), and to critically discuss her concepts of *split subjectivity* and *alienation*.

[280] *Presented for the first time in 1977, published in 1980, and then reprinted in the 2005 volume.*
[281] *Published in 1984, and reprinted in 2005.*

3.3.1. Immanence *versus* Transcendence

Young's point of the departure is the phenomenological tradition – in particular the parts of the literature referred to as "existential phenomenology". Her main references are Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, whose theoretical approaches are profitable in letting the "point of view of the constituted subject's experience" speak for itself.[282] The main goal of her phenomenological essays is properly to reflect on the specificity on female body experience, *via* a focus on different bodily actions and processes that typically pertain to women (e.g. menstruating and having breasts),[283] or that may involve them directly (as for pregnancy and childbirth). In "Throwing like a girl", Young seeks to unveil "socially constructed habits of feminine body comportment in male-dominated society, and their implications for the sense of agency and power of persons who inhabit these bodily modalities".[284] In this latter essay, Young moves from the acknowledgment of the situatedness of the human subject, highlighting that the subjective existence of a woman is defined "by the historical, cultural, social, and economic limits of her situation".[285] Consistent with a Beauvoirian understanding, the whole subjective sense of a woman's life cannot be reduced to biological data:

> In accordance with Beauvoir's understanding, I take "femininity" to designate not a mysterious quality or essence that all women have by virtue of their being biologically female. It is, rather, a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves.[286]

Young relies on Beauvoir's reflection on the immanence/transcendence polarity, noting that a woman's lived experience could be defined as b*asic tension between immanence and transcendence.*[287] Thus, she states that woman is not acknowledged intersubjectively

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[282] *Young, I. M. (2005). Introduction. In On female body experience: "Throwing like a girl" and other essays (pp. 3-11). Oxford University Press, p. 8.*
[283] *Young (2005), p. 6.*
[284] *Young (2005), p. 6.*
[285] *Young, I. M. (2005). Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality. In On female body experience: "Throwing like a girl" and other essays (pp. 27-45). Oxford University Press, p. 29.*
[286] *Young (2005), pp. 30-31.*
[287] *Young (2005), p. 31.*

as an agent, capable of creativity. On the other hand, her position is consistent with Beauvoir's, in that: "because she is a human existence, the female person necessarily is a subjectivity and transcendence, and she knows herself to be".[288] Accordingly, the woman subject happens to be *split* between immanence and transcendence, which may entail a form of estrangement and objectification. The split concerning the woman may have deeply negative implications [289] since it could result from a process of auto-reification caused by the patriarchal gaze. The original development of Young's framework consists in the application of this tension to bodily modalities of "feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality".[290] Among the relevant consequences of the female split, we find contradictory bodily modalities: *ambiguous transcendence*, *inhibited intentionality*, and "*discontinuous unity* with its surroundings".[291]

The transcendence has been defined as "ambiguous" as long as "that is at the same time laden with immanence": "Rather than simply beginning in immanence, feminine bodily existence remains in immanence or, better, is overlaid with immanence, even as it moves out toward the world in motions of grasping, manipulating, and so on."[292] As this passage poignantly illustrates, Young affirms that a woman's bodily "I can" is limited by the social *milieu*, as well as by the education given to the young woman. Her grounding idea is that transcendence is currently seen as a positive value – that is to say, the "authentic" achievement of one's bodily and existential potentialities:

> The modalities of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality that I have described here are [...] common to the existence of women in contemporary society to one degree or another. [...] They have their source in the particular situation of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society.[293]

[288] *Young (2005), p. 31.*
[289] *For further analyses, see: Bartky, S. L. (2015). Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression. Routledge; Weiss, G. (2013). Body images: Embodiment as intercorporeality. Routledge.*
[290] *Young (2005), p. 31.*
[291] *Young (2005), p. 35. My accent.*
[292] *Young (2005), p. 36.*
[293] *Young (2005), p. 42. Note that this process of "shaping" female embodiment and motility starts from the childhood. At this regard, see the pedagogical analyses of Gianini Belotti, E. (2011). Dalla parte delle bambine. Feltrinelli editore.*

The critical aspect of Young's essay relies on two different conceptions of the immanent/transcendent divide which seem incompatible with one another. The first is what I defined as a "bodily way" (we are all immanent as embodied and transcendent subjects and, in our lived experience, the two bodily modalities are intertwined); the second – the "ontological way" – follows the hierarchical terms in which the immanence/transcendence divide applies to sexual difference in Beauvoir's 1949 text. In other words, the same tension that characterized *Le Deuxième Sexe* is again operating in "Throwing like a girl". In her *Body Image. Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, Weiss discusses the conceptual dualism of immanence/transcendence, arguing that Young remains firmly attached to a theoretical schema which Weiss aims to overcome. According to her analysis, the concept of "split subject" works in several of Young's arguments, even when it is not explicitly advocated. In "Throwing like a girl", for instance, the woman may feel herself to be divided between contradictory bodily modalities, between a confident "I can" and a diffident "maybe I cannot".[294] The idea of a split implies a lack of maximization of a woman's bodily potentialities. Moreover, it seems to support an artificial dichotomy between transcendent subjectivity and immanent objective body. She comments on the theoretical framework of Young's essay in the following terms:

> Working from a sartrian/beauvorian understanding of transcendence as a sense of openness to future projects as an existence for-itself and immanence as a sense of rootedness to the past stemming from one's objectification as a being-for-other, Young agrees with Beauvoir that the young girl is societally regarded as a more immanent than transcendent and that is not the case of the young boy.[295]

And nonetheless, we read in this 1980's paper that, if the seat of conscience is the lived body, every kind of transcendence has the character of immanence. The body – as material and natural – is in some sense immanent. In the case of women, this original and universal ambiguity is being exacerbated, since she remains in bare immanence. The

[294] *Weiss (2013), p. 49*
[295] *Weiss (2013), p. 44.*

ambiguity of the female subject is given by the fact that she is not acknowledged as an autonomous agent and free subject, capable of creativity and auto-determination; even if she is effectively a subject in every aspect, this aspect is not recognized intersubjectively. In this case, Young's theoretical move is at the very least unclear; the impression is that she implicitly agrees with the target of her criticism.[296] Alternatively, one could read the tension between the two conceptions of the immanence/transcendence divide as productive and sense-making – and this is the path I would like to follow here. In Young's analyses, woman is a *subject*, and then she dwells on the immanence and the transcendence; in other words, this constitutive tension is an *eidetic* feature of the human being, as a self whose being-in-the-world is possible due to her very bodily character, as well as the environment she navigates. And yet, during the particular societal and historical juncture in which Young (and Beauvoir) was working, the circumstances the female subject was perhaps "more immanent" than the male subject. This immanence should be understood primarily in motor terms, and only eventually in existential terms; the immanence of Young's girl is first instantiated by the education she received, and secondarily it becomes a burden for her free development. The philosopher observes that "women tend not to open their bodies in their everyday movements, but tend to sit, stand, and walk with their limbs close to or closed around them", and again, that they tend "not to reach, stretch, bend, lean, or stride to the full limits of their physical capacity".[297] Accordingly, the feminine *I can* is often enclosed and confined in a limited space such that women often fail to achieve their motor goals effectively, because of a form of hetero-induced and self-accepted limitation. The immanence of the female subject also affects women at an existential level. In this regard, Young has no doubt in affirming that "the general lack of confidence that we frequently have about our cognitive or leadership abilities is traceable in part to an original doubt of our body's capacity".[298]

The central idea of Young's investigations is that our body schema is built through sedimentation and stylization of gestures, attitudes, and stances, which are themselves subject to social and cultural dynamics. Within this context, immanence and transcendence are primarily bodily ways of being-in-the-world, and their dialectic is related to the situation which the subject navigates. As I have argued, the concepts of

[296] *Cf Weiss (2013), p. 45.*
[297] *Young (2005), p. 40.*
[298] *Young (2005), p. 45.*

immanence and transcendence within this phenomenological literature cannot be understood through a broader reconsideration of the body in its irreducibility to the objective side, but rather as intrinsically lived body (*Leib*) and body object (*Körper*).
When considering pregnant experience, the conceptual dualism of immanence/transcendence works as a heuristic strategy in showing the intrinsically embodied character of the human being, and providing at the same time a substantial objection to the dream of absolute transcendence of the Cartesian *cogito*.

3.3.2 Bodily awareness and (Split) subjectivity

Four years later, the essay "Pregnant embodiment: Subjectivity and alienation" was published, wherein Young aims to analyze pregnancy by focusing on the level of personal experience, setting aside the ontological paradigm; immanence and transcendence are here conceived as "two modes of bodily being".[299] The main purpose of the paper is to offer an analysis of the lived experience of pregnancy, which takes into account the subjectivity of the gestating subject. More specifically, Young conceives it as a way to "let women speak in their own voices".[300] This is the first ever phenomenological essay completely and explicitly devoted to the discussion of pregnant embodiment. The strategy adopted by Young is to resist the broadly accepted rhetoric of pregnancy, wherein the woman is largely not considered as a subject.[301]

Young's essay opens a path for investigating the experiential structures underlying the pregnant process from the perspective of the gestating self. Compared with Beauvoir's account, Young's framework is less biased by a negative understanding of the motherhood, which may help to balance and express the lived experience of pregnancy as a potentially empowering project for the gestating self. A further element of comparison concerns how the gestational process may necessitate sense-marking for the implied subjects. On this matter, Young's arguments depict pregnancy as a transformative experience for the self, who finds herself in a totally new intertwining of passivity and activity. Contrarily, I showed that Beauvoir – despite her insightful understanding of the pregnant body as situation – still tends to conceive of pregnancy as something detrimental to the woman herself.

[299] *Young (2005), p. 45.*
[300] *Young (2005), p. 46.*
[301] *Young (2005), p. 46*

Before addressing the core of Young's reflections of pregnancy, let me briefly situate it within the immanence/transcendence framework. I state that lived pregnant experience challenges and criticizes the sharp distinction between immanence/transcendence, which the author attributes to Merleau-Ponty. While I disagree with the hermeneutical reading she proposes – since her understanding of phenomenological concept of body is oversimplified – I think it is worth to noting that gestational experience is individuated in her essay as heuristically powerful for re-framing the immanence/transcendence divide. Young herself argues that her understanding of pregnant embodiment provides an argument against the phenomenologically-informed "sharp distinction between transcendence and immanence",[302] in that it has been said that pregnant experience allows the subject to attend positively to itself while "at the same time [the body] enacts its project."[303]

The gestating subject witnesses a partial impediment of her motor possibilities, but also a motor surplus given from movement over which she does not have agency but merely ownership: "Pregnancy, I argue, reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time that it enacts its projects."[304] Within gestational experience, the subject has the unique possibility of being in tune with her body and, at the same time, to achieve some of her motor tasks. Contrary to the exclusive categorization between immanence and transcendence, the awareness of my body in its bulk and weight does not prevent the accomplishment of my aims. Immanence and transcendence have been presented as exclusive categories in the 1980 essay, the distinction of which was the source of the split for the woman; conversely, in the paper devoted to the experience of pregnancy, Young argues for a possible co-existence of both in the pregnant subject. With respect to the axiological value of transcendence and immanence, the first essay is consistent within the "ontological way", instead the second takes as point of departure the "bodily way". Thus, the gestating subject may experience gestational experience in an "aesthetic mode".[305] This happens when "we can become aware of ourselves as body and take an interest in its sensations and limitations for their own sake, experiencing them as a fullness rather

[302] *Young (2005), p. 47.*
[303] *Young (2005), p. 47.*
[304] *Young (2005), p. 47.*
[305] *Young (2005), p. 51.*

than as a lack"[306]. Young talks of a "fleshy relation to the earth", wherein the gestating subject notices the borders of her body "with interest, sometimes with pleasure",[307] ; this "aesthetic" interest is not a source of diversion, but merely a tacit awareness of "the material weight that I am in movement".[308] Is it then possible to be "aware" of the materiality of my body and to accomplish my goals? What kind of "opaqueness" might gestational experience entail?

Being-in-tune with one's body may be one part of the whole experience of pregnancy, the essential side of which is only the sense of alienation that gestating subject may experience. This tension – subjectivity/alienation, as the title suggest – is not solved within the essay; on the contrary, it represents exactly the subjectivity/alienation duplicity that is at work within gestational experience. [309]

Young states that the gestational process entails a form of "split subjectivity"; indeed, a gestating woman feels "herself and not herself", she cannot establish unequivocally whether an inner movement is performed by her or by the fetal-other, and "her body boundaries shift because her bodily-location is focused on her trunk in addition to her head".[310] Feeling my body as "myself and not myself" means, in her view, at least two things: first, the gestating subject has to handle a form of resistance in achieving her motor tasks; second, she feels the movements of another human being inside her bodily boundaries. These movements modify her self-location to the extent that the gestating subject experiences a form of decentralization. In Young's terms, the pregnant subject is "decentered, myself in the mode of not being myself".[311] Her agency is indeed more nuanced, also in another sense; during pregnancy, even in the case of a very healthy and smooth experience, some commonplace (in her pre-pregnant life) movements may become impossible or very hard to make. In pregnancy, her pre-pregnant body image does not entirely leave her movements and expectations. Young notes that,

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[306] *Young (2005), p. 51.*
[307] *Young (2005), p. 51.*
[308] *Young (2005), p. 52.*
[309] *In particular, I address the issue of the regimes of sensible implied in the epistemic relationship between fetus and gestating subject, whose medial character is central not only in determining the quality of lived experience, but also in rhetorics and narratives around the gestational process, as well as the cognitive and political status of the gestational subject.*
[310] *Young (2005), p. 46.*
[311] *Young (2005), p. 46.*

> The integrity of my body is undermined in pregnancy not only by this externality of the inside but also by the fact that the boundaries of my body are themselves in flux. In pregnancy, I literally do not have a firm sense of where my body ends and the world begins. My automatic body habits become dislodged; the continuity between my customary body and my body at this moment is broken.[312]

Within Young's reading, having an intense bodily awareness "occurs only or primarily when my instrumental relation to the world breaks down".[313] The gestating subject is said to experience a form of alienation and extraneity from her body, from which her whole body or a part of it are not recognized as her "own". And yet, Young makes it clear that, during the gestational experience, "I do not feel myself alienated from my body", as may happen within a pathological framework. The main outcome of Young's analysis is then the following: pregnancy entails a form of alienation which is balanced by a potential sense of being-in-tune, given exactly by the nuanced form of agency which the gestating self experiences. These insights have been renegotiated and explored by more recent scholars. In the following passage, Imogen Tyler describes herself pregnant:

> I walk into a philosophy seminar for postgraduates and staff. There are three women present and fifteen men. I am pregnant. I am heavily pregnant. Indeed, to use an obsolete word, I am 'pregrand', extraordinarily large, gargantuan. [...] I have arrived late, I had to pee several times before I went in to make sure I would last the course, now there is no sliding into the room unnoticed. Chairs, tables and aspiring philosophers have to be moved to let me through.[314]

Tyler *has* this body that she can barely control. She occupies much more space than "before" – before her pregnancy and her experiences of her own corporeality in this

[312] *Young (2005), p. 50.*
[313] *Young (2005), p. 50.*
[314] *Tyler (2000), p. 289.*

particular way. Her body is a presence which exceeds the norms of a customary body, which would usually be silent, transparent, and absent in the pursuit of motor goals.

What Young sketches in her essay is a tension between feeling the body as a resistant in a negative fashion and being able to feel its resistance by attending at the same time to some motor goals. While the first kind of bodily awareness is negative (the self has lost some of her motor abilities), the second one is more nuanced and possibly empowering for the self. In particular, she argues that "it is inappropriate, however, to tie such a negative meaning to all experience of being brought to awareness of the body in its weight and materiality".[315] At this regard, I propose to develop Young's insights into Kristin Zeiler's distinction between eu-appearance and dys-appearance. Zeiler explains that many scholars have focused on the phenomenon of "dys-appearance" – cases where the thematic presence of the body is unpleasant for the subject since it is perceived as "ill" or "bad" – while little attention has been paid to the opposite of dys-appearance, that she defines "eu-appearance". This latter expression applies to "bodily modes of being where the body stands forth, to the subject, as something positive."[316] According to her, cases of eu-appearance are overlooked in technical literature, since their negative counterpart – dys-appearance – calls more urgently in terms of visibility and need, whereas bodily modalities experienced as good or easy do not require such attention.[317] Dys-appearance is typically linked with illness and painful sensation. Classically, it is described as a sense of discomfort; the body becomes an obstacle for the subject, and its hyper-presence threatens the continuity between the self and the environment. In 1980, Sally Gadow describes these bodily modalities in following terms:

> The immediacy of [the lived body] is ruptured by incapacity, the experience of being unable to act as desired or to escape being acted upon in ways that are not desired. Immediacy, in short, is shattered by constraint. The lived body becomes conscious of ineptness, weakness, pain...The relation is one of implicit struggle… Body and self are inevitably at odds with one another.[318]

[315] *Young (2005), p. 51.*
[316] *Zeiler, K. (2010). A phenomenological analysis of bodily self-awareness in the experience of pain and pleasure: On dys-appearance and eu-appearance. Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy, 13(4), 333-342, p. 334.*
[317] *Zeiler, K. (2010), p. 334.*
[318] *Gadow, S. (1980). Body and self: a dialectic. The journal of medicine and philosophy, 5(3), 172-185, pp. 175-176.*

The disruption of the body-self relationship is, according to Zeiler's analysis, much stronger in dys-appearance, since it may threaten the whole "mind-body-world" unity. Dys-appearance implies that the body suddenly becomes the thematic object of one's attention. This awareness is accompanied by discomfort. It may often result in bodily experiences of alienation in cases where body-parts are experienced as objects - that is to say, "something other than the body I am". Put in other terms, "I no longer experience that I am my body, but that I have a body".[319] Dys-appearance typically occurs when the subject is in pain.

Eu-appearance also implies that the body is the thematic object of one's awareness, but that self-lucidity entails sensations of comfort, well-being, and harmony with one's body, the others, and the world. Unlike dys-appearance, in eu-appearance "the body stands forth, to the subject, as well as easy, or good."[320] The author proposes three forms of eu-appearance:

> (i) situations where the subject is pre-reflectively aware of the body as good, easy or well;
> (ii) situations where the subject is pre-reflectively and reflectively aware of her or his body as good, easy, or well (example: some moments during wanted pregnancy);
> (iii) situations where the subject is pre-reflectively and reflectively aware of her or his body as good, easy, or well. The subject cannot attend to other things than her or his bodily here and now without this resulting in a diminished bodily pleasure (example: intense bodily pleasure). [321]

Here, gestational experience is tackled only in the case of wanted pregnancy, with the *caveat* that "not all women whose pregnancies are chosen experience these ever as eu-static", and that the very experience of pregnancy may often involve dys-appearance.[322] Zeiler's analysis of pregnant bodily experience is indebted to Young's canonical paper "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and alienation". Zeiler then retains the idea from

[319] *Zeiler (2010), p. 337.*
[320] *Zeiler (2010), p. 338.*
[321] *Zeiler (2010), p. 341.*
[322] *Zeiler (2010), p. 339.*

Young that gestational experience involves both dys-appearance – especially in the first trimester, when nausea, back-pain, or fatigue are typical symptoms – and also eu-appearance – where the body is experienced as something positive and empowered. In particular, Zeiler states that the gestating subject "can attend to her body without this hampering the accomplishment of her aims".[323] She reaches the conclusion that the proposed framework of eu-appearance may challenge the belief that attending one's own body as a thematic object necessarily implies forms of bodily alienation or objectification.[324] As Zeiler points out, "cases of eu-appearance are particularly interesting to analyse given the previously articulated idea that as soon as the subject attends to her or his body or its functions, she or he experiences the body as another".[325] I argue that, in the specific case of pregnancy, the context is much more complicated by two dynamics. First, the gestating subject's bodily awareness is mediated through her gender, made salient by the specific cultural and social context. Second, the presence of another human being within their bodily boundaries may involve unique cases of eu-appearance or dys-appearance, the source of which is not detectable in her bodily agency, but in her ownership.

Moving from similar phenomenological premises, Natalie Depraz, in a 2007 paper, sketches out a phenomenology of the lucidity that may be entailed by gestational experience. Situating her analysis within a Husserlian framework, she explores the complexity of bodily self-awareness, arguing for a unique form of intimacy that occurs specifically during gestational experience:

> The lived experience of pregnancy makes me turn my attention from the world to myself, to my flesh, which bears in itself another flesh. It therefore creates a new bodily intimacy with myself, which is an intimacy through and with another human being that I don't yet know and that is so naturally near to me: the other in *status nascendi* in me brings me back to the depth of my own being.[326]

[323] *Zeiler (2010), p. 340.*
[324] *Zeiler (2010), p. 341.*
[325] *Zeiler (2010), p. 341.*
[326] *Depraz, N. (2003). The intimate other. Theoria et historia scientiarum, 7(1), 163-180, p. 170.*

This idea that the coming-into-life of the fetal-other *calls* the gestating self into a new awareness of her own corporeality is intrinsically double. On the one hand, it represents a form of "new intimacy", which disrupts the normal embodiment pre-pregnancy and makes it possible to become aware of that body "that she does not really need to consciously pay attention to it".[327] On the other hand, this leads precisely to a suspension of the "normal" body, by unveiling the carnal aspect of our subjectivity:

> The less we need to bother with our body, the better it functions. When we are tired, ill or have the tendency to think too much before acting, we reflect on what we do and the pliable sedimentation of our lived bodily *habitus* becomes rigid and compelling, rendering our acts machine-like.[328]

During the gestational process, the subject has a lucid experience of corporeality, and she acquires and cultivates new habits. In particular, Depraz insists on a sense of intimacy with the fetal-other, as well as ambivalent and troubling feelings due to "this opaque and archaic part of myself that the embryo reveals to myself as it proceeds therefrom."[329] Various layers of bodily self-awareness emerge through the gestational process: lifeless physical body, organic physical body, lived body (know-how; habitus; coping with concrete situations), lived bodily flesh ("self-knowledge of one's own self as a lived body"), generative flesh (intersubjective flesh), and flesh of the flow ("unconscious stratum of our psyche that is not accessible to our consciousness at the very moment of the occurring of the emotion").[330] Focusing on the transition between lived bodily flesh and the flesh of the flow, a continuous and mutual sense of mineness and otherness emerges which Depraz describes in terms of "foreignness and re-appropriation". Its processual character requires from the gestating subject "an apprenticeship and a cultivation"[331]

Gestational embodiment does not forcefully imply a negative sense of self-intimacy but, on the contrary, it "presents us with a unique case where such a self-manifestation of the flesh is not solely a negative and entropic inner-presence, but

[327] *Depraz (2003), p. 170.*
[328] *Depraz (2003), p. 164.*
[329] *Depraz (2003), p. 170.*
[330] *Depraz (2003), p. 167.*
[331] *Depraz (2003), p. 169.*

corresponds to the life of an other in ourself."[332] Depraz's passage expresses the idea that pregnancy entails an aesthetic mode of living one's own corporeality. This reconnection between the immanence of the process and the transcendence of the subject is otherwise at work within the oft-quoted and discussed concept of s*plit subjectivity.* This is a promising account for framing gestational experience, since it grasps some inner tensions of the process. In Young's reflections, the very first sense of splitting is motor: "The first movements of the fetus produces this sense of the splitting subject; the fetus's movement are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space".[333] Thew sense of ownership (the fetal movements happen within gestating self's bodily boundaries) does not correspond to motor agency (since the movements are performed by the fetal-other). This tension is individuated as a form of splitting of the self - namely, a suspension of the "unity" of the self. By further exploring the many declensions of the splitting, Young lingers also on the changes between the pre-pregnant habitual body and the pregnant habitual body, which may result in "another instance of the doubling of the pregnant subject". [334] The splitting occurs also at the levels of sexuality and temporality. Leaving aside the former, I focus on the specific temporalities entailed by the pregnant process. The development of chapter five of this thesis responds precisely to Young's critics that gestational temporalities should be understood exclusively in terms of waiting; from a certain perspective, I show that the notion of the pregnant body as a *container* and the temporality of pregnancy as a *condition* of waiting share some philosophical presuppositions that frame the gestating subject as a depowered self.

Coming back to Young's account, a further sense of splitting and potential alienation of the gestating self is traced within the hyper-medicalization of the experience. In particular, the author argues that Western medicine conceives pregnancy as an illness, which leads to an erasure of the gestating self's political agency and epistemic authority.[335] Even if Young's writings come from the eighties, this problem is nowadays crucial both for empirically evidencing phenomena like obstetric violence, and for the philosophical conceptions of these issues. The objectification and the effacement of gestating subjects' voices within medical contexts are ongoing topics of research within

[332] *Depraz (2003), p. 169.*
[333] *Young (2005), p. 49.*
[334] *Young (2005), p. 50.*
[335] *Young (2005), p. 50*

phenomenological and feminist perspectives.[336] The point of medicalization is crucial within the lived encounter between gestating self and practitioners. It is possible today to recognize that gestating subjects' voices are often ignored within particular contexts (see e.g. the phenomenon of gaslighting) precisely because, on theoretical level, the phenomenon of pregnancy has been increasingly conceived as no more than a medical condition. What I would like to stress here is that, when it comes to the experience of pregnancy, transformative practices in clinical encounters are possible because of the work of re-signification made by scholars of pregnancy as an experience and as epistemic object.

All in all, the concept of split subjectivity is itself open to criticism, but it is equally renegotiable. In that, I disagree with Stella Sandford's argument that Young simply confirms Kristeva's theoretical postulate of split subjectivity. On the contrary, within her 1984 essay Young deeply expanded it. I would highlight that the sense of splitting is dynamic: "The pregnant subject is not simply a splitting in which the two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic".[337] This means that the we are not dealing with a metaphysical concept, but with an attempt to grasp the intrinsic dynamicity of bodily experiences which has been traditionally framed as mere biological and physical statuses. Through this lens, Young's account properly sets the tone for a new understanding of pregnancy as a lived experience, which leads to a possible and legitimate inclusion of the pregnant process within the philosophical canon. Pregnancy should be understood as such not only because classical phenomenologists also discuss it (even if this is a good argument), but also because phenomenological analyses demonstrate it as a fertile experience for understanding the human self.

I argue that the gestating subject may experience all the dynamics presented by Young as splits; she lives in the space between personal experience *and* medicalization, sexuality *and* motherhood, self *and* other, present *and* past, lived body *and* objective body. The gestating subject may eventually feel herself to be alienated from her inner experience of pregnancy, but this is equally one of the possible qualitative variation in the process. The experiential structure of pregnant experience is the *eidetic* dynamic

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[336] See e.g., Cohen Shabot, S. (2016). Making loud bodies "feminine": a feminist-phenomenological analysis of obstetric violence. Human Studies, 39(2), 231-247; Cohen Shabot (2020). We birth with others: Towards a Beauvoirian understanding of obstetric violence. European Journal of Women's Studies.
[337] Young (2005), p. 54.

between several forms of alienation and "participation" – where this last concept encompasses that sense of "being-in-tune" with oneself and the environment, but also the physical, psychical, bodily, and existentially creative features of the pregnant process.

From Young's analysis, one may see an initial sketch of a phenomenological understanding of pregnancy as an embodied, embedded, affective, emotional, contingent, and *potentially* (but not necessarily) empowering experience.

PART 2. SPACE AND TIME OF PREGNANCY

4. Pregnant Embodiment

The notion of body plays a crucial role within the phenomenological framework of my investigation. In particular, the topic of pregnancy requires a methodological distinction between layers of bodily constitution, since it is an experience concerning both corporeality and physicality. My analysis of pregnant embodiment is intended to be substantively different to every possible medical account, for a crucial reason; it prioritises the phenomenological understanding of the body as both an object *and* as a lived reality. This chapter presupposes that the phenomenological account of the body may provide a valuable alternative to dominant biomedical discourse about the gestating body. Making use of the famous distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, I briefly attend to phenomenology of medicine – with the aim of showing how this divide is central for grasping the complexity of many pathological experiences. This analysis offers a way to conceive of pregnant people as more than mere patients, by showing instead that they are epistemic, cognitive, and aesthetic subjects.

This point about pregnancy is akin to another expressed by Heinämaa, where she argues that,

> […] There are (at least) two possible attitudes that one can take toward one's own body in labor, the personalistic and the naturalistic. The claim is not that one way is better than the other, but that the difference should not be forgotten. So, instead of justifying the medicalization of childbirth, or condemning it, the phenomenological framework offers a conceptual and

> methodological space in which one can explicate and study arguments for and against such processes.[338]

In accounting for pregnant bodily experiences, this chapter aims to offer an overview of the ways that pregnant embodiment can be conceptualized, insisting on the fact that lived experience encompasses, expresses, and problematizes medical models. As Heinämaa correctly outlines, the point does not prescriptively discuss what gestating subjects should do, but instead to show that the same experience could be tackled from different perspectives – I.e. the personalistic and naturalistic attitudes.[339]

Between these two perspectives there is a "difference of possibility", in the sense that "even if all actual women would "give birth" by taking naturalistic attitudes toward their bodies, it would still be possible for women to give birth without naturalizing their bodies." [340] In the same way that Heinämaa's analyses do not concern *actual* deliveries, but rather the *meaning* of childbirth, my research addresses the many levels of embodied pregnant experience.[341]In the following sections, I compare the so-called "container model" (which I argue is reductively geometrical and spatial) with what I define as the "hospitality model" (based on notions of alterity and sameness). In conclusion, I propose that the permeability and impressionability of the gestating body ought to be the focus of analysis, in order to highlight the transitive and *pathic* role of gestating embodiment with respect to the fetal-other.

The *Leib*/*Körper* distinction offers two important ways to account for the pregnant body: the first is what I define as the "hospitality model", which is based on the concepts of alterity and sameness, and which underlies a conception of the body as lived body; the second is known as the "container model", which considers the pregnant body as a space and which is based on the divide between inside and outside. When the gestating self is presented in terms of a space, a container, or a house for the growing feus inside her, we witness an ambiguous terminological overlap between the level of containment (the body as space) and the level of hospitality (the body as place). My primary goal in this chapter is thus to distinguish between the two levels, and to show their philosophical

[338] *Heinämaa (2003), p. 116.*
[339] *See Husserl (1989), especially §2, §6, §49.*
[340] *Heinämaa (2003), p. 114.*
[341] *See also the different meanings of the object/objectify, in Heinämaa (2003), p. 115-116.*

presuppositions and implications. A comparison between the paradigms of containment and hospitality will clarify contemporary conceptions of the gestating body.

4.1. Leib and Körper

In this chapter, I investigate the characteristics of the gestating body. This approach is simultaneously an objection to and integration of the medical notion of the body (as *Körper*), which dominates popular representations of pregnancy.

Before addressing pregnant embodiment through this lens, I first briefly outline the significance of the lived body within the phenomenological field, starting with Husserlian philosophy. For the sake of my argument, I take into consideration exclusively the theses presented in *Ideas II*, though it is well known that Husserl inaugurated his investigation of the body from as early as 1907 and remained interested in the issue to the end of his life. The first phenomenological insight into the body is that it is simultaneously a material object and a living organism. Moreover, there is no strict separation between the physical and psyshical components, both instead being ingrained within the expressivity of the body itself. My body is an object because it is given to the physical world, with a certain extension in space and subject to temporality through perceptual and motor structures. The body is thus constituted as a material thing of a peculiar kind, different from the other things in the material world.[342] As Husserl explains in *Ideas II*, "each Ego has its own domain of perceptual things and necessarily perceives the things in a certain orientation".[343] As the *zero point* of every orientation, my body has a primary spatial dimension, which makes possible certain relations with the environment. I can perceive and I can interact with worldly things "over there", while my body is "always here".[344] Liberati effectively sums up the twofold intrinsic dimension of the *body* thus: "1. It is active because the subject acts with it. 2. It is passive because it is a material object like the others and it is sensitive to the stimulation of other objects around it."[345] My body is therefore originally both an object can be regarded, touched, explored, and measured, and also the body by which I express myself and have interactions with others and the world.

[342] *A further meaning is that the human self perceives her own body as a living organism and an instrument of relation with the others and the world.*
[343] *Husserl (1989), p. 165*
[344] *Husserl (1989), p. 166.*
[345] *Liberati, N. (2014). Leib and technologies: relations and co-foundation. Investigaciones Fenomenológicas, 2014(11), 165-184, p. 167.*

My body allows me to experience the world, as expressive of the person I am. It is the hub of my actions, thoughts, and interactions with myself, other humans and animals, the natural environment, and social and political surroundings. These two modalities of my corporeality are explored through the distinction between *Leib* (*corps propre*, the Lived Body) and *Körper* (*corps objectif*, the Body Object).[346] Furthermore, in the whole development of the self as embodied corporeality itself has different tiers of constitution and is intertwined with its surroundings. This open and mutual relation incorporates the physical space, cultural and social milieu, historical contingencies, technological modifications, and so on. Within a correlated and co-dependent web of these layers, the human being interacts with other beings (humans or non-human), things, values, institutions, norms, and the environment. This framework concerns not only interaction, but also the openness of the human self, whose very becoming happens through mediation and self/other interactions in quite a radical sense.[347]

This investigation pertains to this thesis in the sense that the notion of the lived body helps to resist the idea that pregnant women are primarily (if not exclusively) patients. As shown in chapter three, Young put forth an explicit critique against this idea. All the while, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir began to radically reconsider pregnant experience in itself and, in this way, they also set up a theoretical toolkit to critique pathologized and hyper-medicalized images of the pregnant self.
As Carol Bigwood notes,

> A serious problem with the scientific account of the body is that science distances the body, admitting only phenomena that can be mathematized and objectified, and thereby ignores the body as it is lived by each of us. In response to the limitations of the scientific method, the phenomenological method entails describing phenomena as they appear to us and are lived by us in our experiences.[348]

[346] *For a philosophical reconstruction of this conceptual couple, see e.g, Shusterman, R. (2010). Soma and psyche. journal of speculative philosophy, 24(3), 205-223.*
[347] *Furthermore, the self embodies the outside world and is embedded within a certain historical horizon, from the sub-personal level of affordances to the situatedness of the self in a Mitwel (existential dimensions of which should include quasi-transcendental structures).*
[348] *Bigwood (1991), p. 61.*

Contemporary phenomenologists critique the tendency of the biomedical approach to reduce the complexity of bodily experience to a merely physical phenomenon.[349] The tools of phenomenology – specifically but not exclusively in the works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty – make possible an investigation of lived experience that can positively affect the spheres of personal care and medicalization, as shown by much contemporary literature.[350] The *Leib*/*Körper* distinction is broadly recognized as the methodological *condition sine qua non* for giving nuance to experiences of health and illness (such as pain and fatigue, to mention two common examples). This distinction also serves as a basis for the phenomenological understanding of bodily awareness, the *corps propre* that Merleau-Ponty explored through case studies of subjects affected by neurological anomalies and dysfunctions (1945).[351] The convergence of phenomenological and medical approaches over the "abnormal" and "pathological" has a long legacy, which has developed in many directions. Specific to the phenomenological gaze is the focus on the phenomenon as lived through in the experience of the subject. As Havi Carel outlines,

> An important feature of phenomenology is the distinction between the objective body (which Husserl called Körper and Merleau-Ponty called le corps objectif) and the body as lived (Leib and corps proper, respectively). If we go back to Merleau-Ponty's view of the body as both object and subject, we can see how these two terms are useful for understanding illness. The objective body is the physical body, the object of medicine. The body as lived is the first person experience of this objective body. In the everyday experience of a healthy body, the two bodies are aligned, in harmony.[352]

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[349] The flourishing of this research line and of this conception of the body as primarily lived by a self in the world is traceable not only in phenomenology, but also in various approaches (in dialogue with phenomenological investiagtions), such as feminist philosophies, transgender studies, queer studies, race studies, disabilities studies, somaesthetics, crip theory).

[350] See e.g., Carel, H. (2011). Phenomenology and its application in medicine. Theoretical medicine and bioethics, 32(1), 33-46; Toombs, S. K. (Ed.). (2001). Handbook of phenomenology and medicine. Springer; Svenaeus, F. (2019). A defense of the phenomenological account of health and illness. In The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine, 44 (4),459-478; Zeiler, K., & Käll, L. F. (Eds.). (2014). Feminist phenomenology and medicine. SUNY Press.

[351] "From its very beginning, phenomenology availed itself of the semantic distinction between Leib and Körper: Leib is the body as experienced, aware of itself, perceiving the world and acting in it by means of its organic, living Körper." See Kottow, M. (2017). Some thoughts on phenomenology and medicine. Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy, 20(3), 405-412, p. 405.

[352] Carel (2011), p. 39.

The biomedical perspective tends to conceive the body as a physical thing, and in doing so it neglects the primary and pre-reflective dimensions of bodily awareness. In her review of the *Phénoménologie de la Perception,* Beauvoir puts it in the following terms:

> Il est en particulier une existence que la science prétend annexer à l'univers des objets et dont la phénoménologie rend à l'homme la possession: c'est celle du corps propre. Dans des pages qui sont peut-être les plus définitives de tout son livre, Merleau-Ponty démontre, par l'analyse de processus normaux et de cas pathologiques, qu'il est impossible de considérer notre corps comme un objet, fût-ce un objet privilégié.[353]

While other forms of knowledge treat the body as an object, phenomenology focuses specifically on our primary access to ourselves and the world through our lived body. Phenomenological investigations thus work at unveiling the epistemic premises of 'hard' science. Along genealogical lines, Costa points out that the medical epistemic privileging of the dead-body over the Lived-body derives from an ontology of the body-machine, which originates in Cartesianism.[354] This machine-like conception of the human body is said to be a fortiori applied to women's embodiment; on this matter, Emily Martin introduces the reprinted version of her classic *The Woman in The Body* by these words,

> In *The Woman in the Body*, I write that women's bodies are often described in medical texts as if they were mechanical factories or centralized production systems. In descriptions of menstruation, birth, and menopause, the machine metaphor is as alive today as it was when I wrote this book.[355]

Phenomenological investigations, by contrast, explore the multiple levels of bodily constitution. As Valeria Bizzarri well notes, disease began to be understood by phenomenologists through its status as experience and the "patient" was understood in terms of lived embodied experience from the subject position rather than merely a patient

[353] *Beauvoir, S. (2020). La phénoménologie de la perception de Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Philosophie, (1), 7-10, p. 8.*
[354] *Costa, V. (2019). Fenomenologia della cura medica. Corpo, malattia, riabilitazione. Scholé-Morcelliana, p. 28.*
[355] *Martin, E. (2001). The woman in the body: A cultural analysis of reproduction. Beacon Press, p. xi.*

in an object position.[356] In this way, contemporary phenomenological research is moving in a twofold direction: on the one hand, the goal is to constitute the epistemic bases for a fruitful application of phenomenology to pathological experience; [357] on the other, there is an interest in taking a phenomenological look at various pathological experiences, such as dementia, agoraphobia, and schizophrenia.

In recent decades, bodily experience relating to human female reproduction (pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding) have become increasingly thematised in phenomenological reflections, particularly (but not exclusively) in feminist literature.

As many theorists argue, the bodily experiences of human reproduction are affected by processes of biopower and are widely subject to medical control, surveillance, and care. This reveals what Young defined as a "split" of the gestating self, between the lived experience and the (medical, cultural, and social) construction of that experience. These two levels need to be carefully distinguished within theoretical practice – mainly to attend to their mutual influences – but it is equally important to keep in mind that, in the flow of experience, they are lived through simultaneously by the self – sometimes in an unconscious way, sometimes in a dramatically urgent mode.[358]

It is especially important to note, on a theoretical level, that the gestating subject emerges as a subjectivity in the philosophical space; on political level, this realisation may make possible a space for renegotiating the treatment of gestating selves as patients, by contributing to contemporary critical arguments (i.e., denouncing both obstetric violence and the denial of agency of the gestating/birthing self).

4.2. The container model: space and relations

"We are containers, it's only the in-sides of our bodies that are important":[359] in the theonomy of Atwood's famously dystopian Gilead, handmaidens are wombs. They are merely the means for reproducing the dynasty of the Commanders. Religious fanaticism, misogyny, and deprivation of human rights are all depicted in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, originally published in 1985. The dystopian

[356] *Bizzari, V. (2017). "Dal "corpo cadavere" al "corpo vivo": fenomenologia e medicina in dialogo". In Pozzoni, I. (Ed.) Frammenti di Filosofia Contemporanea, vol. 13. Limina Mentis, p. 5*

[357] *Cf Carel, 2016; Costa, 2019; Svenaeus, 2019; Zeiler and Käll, 2014; Carel, H. (2016). Phenomenology of illness. Oxford University Press; Costa, V. (2019). Fenomenologia della cura medica. Corpo, malattia, riabilitazione. Scholé-Morcelliana.*

[358] *See the analyses presented in Leder, D. (1990). The absent body. University of Chicago Press.*

[359] *Atwood, M. (2006). The handmaid's tale, p. 196.*

reality here depicted shows a scenario when reproductive work erases women's subjectivities by framing them simply as containers of a process, the result of which is the birth of a baby. While Gilead is fictional, I am interested in the notion of *container* and begin this section with a critique against this understanding of the pregnant process, which cannot grasp the complexity of lived experience. Indeed, I argue that a *file rouge* is traceable between parallel models of conceiving pregnancy, grasping different elements of the process: (1) gestational process is a mere *condition* in which the gestating self finds herself; (2) the pregnant self is a *container* of that process; and (3) this development is structurally based on the experience of *waiting* and teleologically cast towards the childbirth.

I broadly considered this first point (1) within the first part of this thesis, where I showed that the definition of pregnancy as a mere condition fails to acknowledge that we are not only dealing with sub-personal phenomena, but also with complex and multi-layered bodily experiences. As for the third point (3), chapter five is committed to a broad critique on the notion of waiting by offering an alternative through the notion of *scattered temporalities*. The second point (2) will be tackled in this section, where I speculate that the geometrical depiction of the pregnant subject as a container, gives side to criticism, in that it covers only the objectual side of the bodily experience.

Young wrote in 1984 that pregnancy is often conceived as a "state of the developing fetus, for which the woman is a container", and that much is evidently still true.[360] Young forwards an analysis of the *loci* of pregnancy, which one can read as a criticism of the idea of pregnant women as containers. Indeed, dominant cultural representations and visual depictions tend to present idealized images of fetuses as independent creatures moving within an empty space.[361] That is the case in the (in)famous photographic reportage by Nillson, published in 1968 in *Life*. The presented distinction and antagonism between the fetal-other and the gestating subject is based on a

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[360] *Young (2005), p. 46-62.*

[361] *See Kingma, E. (2019). Were you a part of your mother? Mind, 128(511), 609-646.*
"The containment view is heavily promoted by the dominant representation of human pregnancy that pervades contemporary Western culture. This emphasises the physical resemblance and continuity between human fosters and babies, presenting them as already-separate individuals, while at the same time de-emphasising the foster's location within, and connection to, the gravida. Images of human pregnancy, for example, invariably give the foster's skin the colour of (white) babies rather than the dark purple that it actually is. They also tend to de-emphasise, fade out, or omit altogether the gravida, placenta and umbilical cord. Our language similarly reinforces this idea: it is common to refer to human fosters as 'babies' almost regardless of their developmental stage. For example, early ultrasounds are often presented as 'baby's first picture' (Mitchell 2001), and a popular pregnancy-tracking website writes, of the second week, that '[b]y this time, your developing baby is a little ball of cells'." (p. 640).

comprehension of the fetus as a self-contained and discrete subject, which is simply not the case (neither in extrauterine life). This metaphysical way of understanding and representing the process of pregnancy elides the existential dimension of lived experience. It attempts to describe a biological reality, to the exclusion of all the other aspects of experience. This metaphorical apparatus expresses its powerful force both in philosophical and in cultural contexts, unaware and uncritically accepting of the container model applied to the gestating subject. The metaphorical image of the container effaces the personal participation of the gestating subject, depriving them of bodily agency, as well as overlooking the intersubjective and enactive elements of the experience.

Indeed, the "container model" is a paradigm that crops up throughout Western history, linked to the reduction of women to their anatomy. The thesis that I am defending is the following: the "fetal container model" underpins a conception of women as reduced to physical corporeality, namely to *Körper*. When regarded only as biological entities, pregnant bodies can be seen as functioning to feed other human beings and to simply carry them until childbirth. As women, they are expected to ensure the continuity of human progeny. While it might seem *prima facie* oversimplified, this theoretical attitude is well attested by the history of Western philosophies and cultures, as shown from several perspectives. This way of apprehending the (pregnant) body relies on a geometrical understanding of Life: as O'Byrne suggests,

> Geometry supplies the type of which each solid, cone-shaped object is a token, and each object approaches or falls short of the perfection of the geometrical form. Biology indicates the laws with the body and its components must obey and offers paradigms that this or that body may match. Yet the living body has no perfection; it approximates nothing but itself, and this is true at every stage of life.[362]

From this perspective, the idea itself of the container – namely an empty space that encloses something *other* – is a declension and a further extension of the *more geometrico*.[363]

[362] *O'Byrne, A. (2015). Umbilicus.Toward a Hermeneutics of Generational Difference In Kearney, R., & Treanor, B. (Eds.). (2015). Carnal hermeneutics (pp. 182-194). Fordham University Press, p. 183.*
[363] *I owe to Marjolein Oele for this suggestion.*

The expression "fetal container" gained some traction within the contemporary analytical debate, but it is broadly employed also in bioethical discourses.[364] In particular, metaphysics of pregnancy critically confronts different ways of conceiving maternal-fetal relationships such as the *containment view* and the *parthood view*.[365] Even if the theoretical presuppositions of this field are far from my methodological approach, their ontological claims offer a helpful overview of how the gestating subject is sometimes presented in terms of a *container*. In recent years, the University of Southampton has become a centre for these reflections; Elselijn Kingma and her research group are near completion of a theoretical framework aimed both at defining the ontological properties of maternal organism and at showing their ethical implications, especially with regard to abortion and surrogacy.[366]

Kingma argues that the containment view represents *the* dominant conception of pregnancy which is culturally and philosophically pervasive. She points out three main contexts within which it is more or less explicit: the non-identity problem; moral issues around abortion; and problems related to reproduction and morality (such as prenatal screening).[367] This model is seen as highly problematic because it seems widely accepted but not supported by biological and physiological arguments.[368] Other models are more accurate and consistent with the biological data,[369] or again more suitable given their moral implications, yet the containment view still seems to dominate both culturally and philosophically, informing how we account for the gestating subject. Kingma first introduces it in the following terms:

> According to the containment view, fosters are merely inside gravidae, the way the metaphorical bun is in the oven, or the way 'a tub of yogurt is inside

[364] *See e.g., Annas, G. J. (1986). Pregnant women as fetal containers. Hastings Center Report, 16(6), 13-14. Purdy, L. M. (2018). Are Pregnant Women Fetal Containers? In Reproducing Persons (pp. 88-106). Cornell University Press.*

[365] *Kingma, E. (2019). Were you a part of your mother? Mind, 128(511), 609-646.*

[366] *Baron, T. (2019). Nobody Puts Baby in the Container: The Foetal Container Model at Work in Medicine and Commercial Surrogacy. Journal of Applied Philosophy, 36(3), 491-505; Finn, S. (2018). The metaphysics of surrogacy. In The Palgrave Handbook of Philosophy and Public Policy (pp. 649-659). Palgrave Macmillan; Kingma, E. (2018). Lady parts: The metaphysics of pregnancy. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements, 82, 165-187; Kingma, E. (2019). Were you a part of your mother? Mind, 128(511), 609-646; Kingma, E. (2019). Biological individuality, pregnancy and (mammalian) reproduction. Philosophy of Science; Kingma, E. (2018). Nine months. Journal of Medicine and Philosophy.*

[367] *Kingma (2019).*

[368] *Kingma (2019).*

[369] *See Kingma's part-whole claim in Kingma (2018).*

> your refrigerator' (Smith and Brogaard 2003, p. 74). Birth, then, involves a mere change of environment, like opening the fridge or oven and taking out your desired breakfast.[370]

Kingma then lists the main issues of the containment view. First, it reinforces the idea that the fetus is in some sense already a baby, which, as I show in the next chapter, is a notion that is heavily criticized in feminist reflections. Second, the representation of the fetus as an individual who is simply hosted by a pregnant organism de-emphasises the fetal location and, moreover, its connection and mutual relation with the gestating self.[371] From there, Kingma notes that the idea of the gestating subject as a fetal container is culturally pervasive, ingrained in images and words through which we currently use to regard the gestational process. She makes clear that,

> The popularity of this representation does not mean that it is either unproblematic or uncontroversial. A rich tradition in history and sociology both documents its cultural dominance and deconstructs it, arguing, broadly speaking, that the prevalence of what I shall call the 'fetal container model' of pregnancy is a recent and culture-specific phenomenon, one which is contingent on particular historically situated social developments and often on gendered and classed power-structures.[372]

This preliminary critique is completely in line with broader arguments against the understanding of pregnancy as a process wherein the gestating self is reduced to a space of support and growth for the fetal-other. From the perspective of my research, this model is also problematic since the relationship between gestating subject and fetal-other is accounted for in topological terms. There is no reference to the asymmetry of the pregnant process – the gestating self as a self in the world, with the fetal-other as a human organism

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[370] Kingma, 2019, p. 615. As Finn explains, "So, according to this container model, the maternal organism is literally a container for the foetus, where the relationship between the maternal organism and the foetus is like that of a niche to a tenant. A niche is something that encloses something else, such that the smaller thing is inside the larger thing, where the smaller thing is classed as the tenant. Think of this model as being like a tenant in a rented house, such that the house is the niche for its occupant. The foetus, as a tenant, inhabits the maternal organism, as a niche." https://aeon.co/essays/is-the-mother-a-container-for-the-foetus-or-is-it-part-of-her

[371] Kingma (2019), p. 614.

[372] Kingma (2019), p. 614.

within a unique quasi-environment. There is also no comprehension of the subjective dimension of the pregnant self. Pregnant subjects are thus effaced from the gestational process. In a nutshell, the containment model sees pregnancy as a mere object of investigation, and not as an experience. Of course, one may object that it is appropriate for some fields of knowledge to see pregnancy as an object and not an experience; this applies to biomedicine, but also seems to apply to some subfields of philosophy, like metaphysics and bioethics. Nonetheless, I would like to point out that the works of Kingma discuss the abstract models of pregnancy by considering both their political implications and philosophical presuppositions.[373] Her interpretation of the parthood model frame the pregnant process within a broader picture – namely, the fact that it is an experience between a self and a potential self. The phenomenological toolkit may allow me to make a further step to show that pregnancy is first of all an experience, and that every form of knowledge, explication, and abstraction comes *after*.

To sum up, the container model then depicts the pregnant body as *Körper,* related to and containing other *Körper*. This model posits that the pregnant woman simply contains and feeds the fetal-other inside her body – a premise that is philosophically unsatisfactory and comes with dangerous political implications. It effaces the qualitative dimension of the pregnant experience to its detriment, which prevents the recognition of the diverse possible expressions of pregnancy itself. This model operates as independent to the psychic existence of the subject involved in the process. It is unclear what the difference would be between a human pregnancy and an artificial human-like pregnancy, or between a human and non-human (animal) pregnancy, or, again between this-particular-human-being and every other.

Furthermore, the presentation of pregnant selves as containers implies a problematic understanding of women (seen as *disposable* bodies-objects). The gestating self is conceived as a mere *means* to perform the reproductive process; a tension emerges between the duties of the pregnant self and the rights of the fetal-other, which structures the contemporary debates on abortion, surrogacy, and fetal surgery. All in all, the container model is based on an understanding of the pregnant body as a *space* where something happens – and therefore the gestating self is a container of another self, leading

[373] *See e.g. Kingma, E., & Finn, S. (2020). Neonatal incubator or artificial womb? distinguishing ectogestation and ectogenesis using the metaphysics of pregnancy. Bioethics, 34(4), 354-363.*

eventually to a friction between two separate identities. The debate over abortion clearly shows why this model is symptomatic of an effacement of gestating selves' political agency.

Abortion is one of the thorniest issues in the history of human reproduction. Nowadays, national laws allow women to undergo an abortive procedure in most Western countries, under some specific rules, primarily related to the stages of pregnancy and the health status of the fetus. The right to choose to have an abortion has long been a feminist battle ground, and it is linked with national policy and free access to birth control. There is still a long way to go before many women not only have formal freedom of choice but also have readily available and accessible services; many countries do not fund abortive procedures, meaning that women must rely on clandestine abortions. Even in countries where the right is legally enshrined – like in Italy – the issue of accessibility is still far from being solved.[374] Along with practical difficulties, Pro-Life supporters resort to rhetorical strategies wherein the pregnant self is represented as a mere container (in the best-case scenario) but also as the tomb of foetuses (when women exercise their right to interrupt their own pregnancies). A prominent political figure of the City of Florence spoke in a querelle following to a violent anti-choice manifesto by arguing that a woman undergoing a therapeutic abortion (via assumption of the abortion pill RU-486) "becomes the sarcophagus of her own child". [375]

Women who decide to undergo abortion are then simultaneously as associated with homicides and tombs. If the women who undergo abortive procedures become tombs, then women who carry on with the pregnancy are mere incubators and containers, whose primary task is to guarantee the survival of the fruit of their wombs. The metaphorical system which this kind of rhetoric and narrative presupposes is linked to a comprehension of the female body as a physical space to serve reproductive purposes. In phenomenological terms, the lived experience of pregnancy – in which abortion is one possible outcome, along with early pregnancy loss and childbirth – is understood only as a physical experience, and the pregnant person is represented as a body-object, whose primary function in instrumental to the survival and the growth of another human being.

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[374] See the figure of Conscientious objectors, formally recognized by the Italian law in Legge 22 maggio 1978, n. 194, articolo 9 (https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:1978-05-22;194)

[375] https://firenze.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/12/19/news/toscana_con_la_ru486_la_donna_diventa_il_sarcofago_del_proprio_figlio_bufera_sul_consigliere_leghista-279026987/

All in all, the container model presupposes a comprehension of the body which is merely spatial. In other words, the experience of pregnancy is analysed by regarding the pregnant body as a *Körper*. Like a matryoshka containing dolls of increasing size, pregnancy is a matter of inside-outside. Not unlike the votive statues diffused in Spain in the XV century, which quite literally contained and displayed a fetal Christ (still in the stage of a fetus) through a transparent screen,[376] the container model works in a spatial way to erase the existential, agentive, and *pathic* dimensions of the gestating self, who is a bare space where *something* happens.

4.3. The *hospitality* model: hosting and protection

The primary point of interest in what I call the "hospitality model" concerns the co-habitation of two (or more) human organism in a body, where the maternal organism is said to host and nurture the fetal organism(s). In this sense, the lived experience of pregnancy is read as an act of hospitality, as a gift, as the process of *making* space for an alterity with whom the gestating self has asymmetrical relations. Within this conceptual framework, the notions of hospitality, home, host, and guest facilitate ontological reflections on the *meaning* of the pregnant process.

While the *container model* is based on a geometrical understanding of the relationship between the fetal-other and the gestating subject, the *hospitality model* aims to encapsulate the pregnant process in terms of alterity and sameness. This model relies on a focus on the relationship, which is considered to be primary. Its main flaw consists in exacerbating the notion of a welcome, relying on essentialist positions concerning women's body. Furthermore, as shown in the work of Dolezal, this model may potentially erase the agency of the pregnant subject.

In her volume entitled *The hospitality of the matrix*, Irina Aristarkhova offers a comprehensive overview of the concept of "matrix", as well as its possible applications in understanding the gestational process. The author enumerates six characteristics of hospitality, as established within the writings of philosophers associated with this idea – that is to say, Kant, Levinas, and Derrida.[377] First, hospitality is about welcoming,

[376] *I refer to the analyses proposed in Morel, M. F. (2005). Voir et entendre les fœtus autrefois: deux exemples. Spirale, (4), 23-35.*
[377] *Aristarkhova, I. (2012). Hospitality of the matrix: Philosophy, biomedicine, and culture. Columbia University Press, p. 84.*

implying a radical receptivity and then passivity: "to surrender is to receive all, to be responsible for all".[378] Discretion and intimacy are two other key elements. Discretion refers to "hospitality through focusing not on the host, on oneself, but on the guest. Being discreet but at the same time receptive means that welcoming should not be overbearing and that the host should not be selfish and at the center of hospitality".[379] Intimacy pertains to comfort, feeling at home, an enjoyable vulnerability, eventual recollection (memory of a feeling of well-being), and habitation – here meant as familiarity.[380]

All these features offer insight into the connection between hospitality and femininity, which is often taken as a *given*. For example, Aristarkhova quotes Kant and his explication of French hospitality as derived from the "femininity" and "'lady-like' qualities" adopted by the nobility.[381] In Derrida and Levinas' respective thought too, hospitality and femininity are also tightly connected: "it is difficult to conceive any characteristic of hospitality that is not derived from a particular way in which they imagine femininity".[382] While extensive inquiry into how these authors intertwine hospitality and femininity within their philosophies is beyond the scope of this analysis,[383] my interest is to explore the correlation between hospitality and pregnancy, by taking into account both the potentially dangerous outcomes of this metaphorical correlation and the fruitful nuance of hospitality as sense-making. I am starting with a case where the conceptual constellation of hospitality is employed in a way that betrays a positive and empowering nuance of the notion of pregnant self as host. Luna Dolezal reviews the dominant metaphorical terminology employed in debate over commercial surrogacy, and doing so uncovers a critical point in this continuity.[384] Her analysis shows that the metaphor of hospitality could imply an effacement of the gestating subject's lived experience, by reducing the pregnant self to her body understood as a mere *Körper*. In

[378] *Aristarkhova (2012), p. 85.*
[379] *Aristarkhova (2012), p. 93.*
[380] *Aristarkhova (2012), p. 87.*
[381] *Aristarkhova (2012), p. 95.*
[382] *Aristarkhova (2012), p. 96.*
[383] *It is available a rich corpus of critical readings on this matter, see i.e.: Guenther, L. (2012). Gift of the Other, The: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction. SUNY Press. Diprose, R. (2012). Corporeal generosity: on giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas. SUNY Press. Hird, M. J. (2007). The corporeal generosity of maternity. Body & Society, 13(1), 1-20.*
[384] *Dolezal, L. (2018). The Metaphors of Commercial Surrogacy: Rethinking the Materiality of Hospitality Through Pregnant Embodiment. In C. Fischer, & L. Dolezal (Eds.). New Feminist Perspectives on Embodiment (pp. 221-244). Palgrave Macmillan. See also: Ivry, T., & Teman, E. (2018). Pregnant metaphors and surrogate meanings: bringing the Ethnography of pregnancy and surrogacy into conversation in Israel and beyond. Medical anthropology quarterly, 32(2), 254-271.*

the case of commercial surrogacy, the recourse to the terminology of hospitality does not go hand in hand with a philosophical recognition of the complex experience of pregnancy (in terms of sameness, welcoming, and alterity) but, on the contrary, serves as a means to hide the potentially problematic practice of commercial surrogacy for the women implied in the process.[385]

Dolezal starts her analysis by referring to Emily Martin's work on metaphor and women's reproduction, which applies the thesis that "metaphors make reality" to modern medical practice. Her research shows that "the language that is used to articulate reproduction, pregnancy and childbirth shapes the logics through which we perceive women and their social roles";[386] if metaphorical terminology shapes reality,[387] the ethical consequences of some metaphorical constructions about commercial surrogacy tend to be underestimated. Indeed, identifying this linguistic tendency within the commercial surrogacy debate helps us to disentangle the conceptual construction of the hospitality-femininity-pregnancy triad. Dolezal is concerned that common metaphors of "container" and "hospitality" lead us to conceive reproductive practice as an ethical praxis. Following this analysis, I argue that these metaphors may at the same time unveil the philosophical and cultural shaping of the gestating self, and may mould our common understanding of the experience of pregnancy, as well as the practices supposed to discipline and normalize the phenomenon.

In Dolezal's reading, the notion of the gestational body as "a generalized container-like space"[388] is based on the separation between the maternal subject and the foetus, who are conceived as visibly separable entities.[389] Her focus on surrogate mothers, along with her analysis of dis-embodied, de-contextualized, and de-personalized pregnant bellies[390] may be related to a certain paradigmatic idea of gestating subject – namely, one

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[385] As for the commercial surrogacy, the ongoing debate should not be oversimplified; the issue is complicated and invests various levels: legal, medical, existential, political, economic. In a merely abstract way, the practice of surrogacy is a way to open the path for parenthood to individual who cannot carry a pregnancy, for many reasons. The commercial strand of surrogacy raises issues on legal levels (as the many legal actions well attest), bioethical, as well as in the matter of human rights and justice. Cf. Pande, A. (2014). Wombs in labor: Transnational commercial surrogacy in India. Columbia University Press; Lewis, S. (2019). Full surrogacy now: Feminism against family. Verso Books.

[386] Dolezal (2018), p. 221.

[387] See e.g., Ortony, A., & Andrew, O. (Eds.). (1993). Metaphor and thought. Cambridge University Press. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors we live by. University of Chicago press. Lakoff, G. (2008). Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind. University of Chicago press, cf: https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170718-the-metaphors-that-shape-womens-lives

[388] Dolezal (2018), p. 225.

[389] Martin, J. (1988). Scopic regimes of modernity. In Hal, F. (Ed.) Vision and Visuality, 3-23. Dia Art Foundation.

[390] Dolezal (2018), p. 226.

that concerns the case of surrogacy, but that could be traced as well in other contexts, such the above-mentioned case of abortion. In these cases, the metaphor of hospitality collapses into the model of container, in that it conceives the whole experience of pregnancy as a mere sub-personal phenomenon, wherein the gestating subject simply lends her biological body to the development of the fetal-other. What is even more insidious in the hospitality model, Dolezal argues, is that that metaphor is often employed to hide commercial practices, the ethical sustainability of which is debatable.

In paradoxical fashion, some authors have argued that the idea of hospitality may convey a certain biological essentialism. As Sander-Staudt points out, the association between femininity, pregnancy, and hospitality suggests that women are by nature (*peri physis*) loving and caring.[391] Otherwise, it may also suggest that women's innate hospitality should be turned towards the joyful carrying-to-term of the fetus, reiterating an idealized and normative idea of pregnancy. Or again, as Dolezal has argued, this metaphorical strategy makes commercial surrogacy more ethically sustainable or even empowering for women, despite the inequalities and socio-political issues that can go hand in hand with this practice.[392] Altogether, metaphors of homeliness and hospitality can harm pregnant subjects, increasing social pressure on their behaviours and existential choices, as well as diverting political and ethical policies towards pro-life and anti-abortion positions. The main risk of these metaphors, even more so when employed by feminist scholars, is that they tend to marginalize and efface the lived experience of the gestational process, offering instead an idealized image of pregnancy as a gift. Dolezal notes that:

> In order to theorize pregnancy adequately, it must be conceptualized but not reduced to a list of symptoms or social categories, as it will and must overflow any idea we have of it. Concepts such as gift, generosity, and hospitality are often invoked in feminist discussion of pregnancy – and, in fact, have been introduced into the metaphoric

[391] *Maureen Sander-Staudt, "Care Ethics", https://www.iep.utm.edu/care-eth/#SH1a*
[392] *Dolezal (2018), p. 227.*

> landscape of surrogacy in an attempt to reflect its inherent complexity, while making it more palatable.[393]

And yet, although the concept of hospitality may entail further ethical discourses through its aporetic nature, it is not enough to simply acknowledge the ambiguity at the core of gestational experience to understand the significance of pregnancy.[394] Epistemic conceptions of pregnancy are grafted onto what Aristarkhova defines as an "economy of metaphor". In discussing Irigaray's reflections on the womb as a metaphor for space or matter – which eventually leads to an effacement of maternal material dimension – Aristarkhova calls for a critical project of "demetaphorization" aimed to acknowledge the "significant presence of 'actual' mothers".[395] While there is consensus in feminist reflections on pregnancy that *material* accounts of the gestating subjects should be developed, I argue that metaphors are not *per se* harmful to the gestating selves. On the contrary, they may help in unveiling the morphological richness of the pregnant experiences, as well as our philosophical and cultural presuppositions. The metaphorical ground underlying the hospitality model is epistemically valuable in its insistence on the openness of pregnant embodiment. This applies to the sub-personal tiers and eventually to a personal engagement with the experience of pregnancy, which may indeed be lived as an act of welcoming new life.

In the chapter "Original Habitation. Pregnant Flesh and Absolute Hospitality", Frances Gray conceives of the pregnant woman metaphorically as "original habitation".[396] The essay's main outcome is ethical, in that it suggests an ontological priority of the gestational relationship over all human relationships.[397] Gray asserts that "Pregnancy can be seen as the original host-guest relationship: it is ethically primitive".[398] She states that the metaphor of "absolute hospitality" is precisely,

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[393] *Dolezal, L. (2017). Phenomenology and Intercorporeality in the case of commercial surrogacy. in L. Dolezal, & D. Petherbridge (Eds.). Body/self/other: The phenomenology of social encounters. SUNY Press.*
[394] *Dolezal, L. (2017), p. 319.*
[395] *Aristarkhova (2012), p. 67.*
[396] *Gray, F. (2013). Original habitation: pregnant flesh as absolute hospitality, in S. LaChance Adams, & C. R. Lundquist (Ed.), Coming to life: philosophies of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering (pp. 71-87). Fordham University Press.*
[397] *Gray (2013), p. 73.*
[398] *Gray (2013), p. 72.*

> a bio metaphor, a metaphor of life and living being, that permits us to perceive the body as original habitation, but which does not preclude the possibility of the body's own conscious reflection on itself, at times bounded by its own subjective will.[399]

According to her proposal, the human body has an original, primitive, pre-linguistic layer – of "life-will" or "body intentionality" – that is integral to the personal and intersubjective construction of the body. The concept of "absolute hospitality" is identified with this original level, as "an expression of the body's life-will or intentionality", which means that "Pregnant flesh's subjective will and its relationship to its own pregnancy are predicated on the fundamental life will of the body".[400] According to Gray's arguments, a woman's body is by nature the "original home". This may be highly problematic on several levels, not least due to the allusion of biological-essentialism. As I have argued elsewhere,[401] there is no doubt that the pregnant process is key in making sense of the pre-personal. What I contend here, however, is that Gray seems to ontologically naturalize pregnant embodiment as the original home "framed *ideally* by consent and acceptance, welcoming and anticipation".[402] The counterpart to this "ideality" appears where "the provision of original home is an unacceptable choice for many women"[403] – for instance, in the case of a pregnancy resulting from rape.[404] The acknowledgement that some women cannot provide their bodies as an original home is a key point for restoring complexity to the gestational process, as well as maintaining the ambiguity of pregnancy itself, as a phenomenon that defies the apparently sharp distinction between immanence and transcendence, as well as freedom and contingency. Women who *decide* not to host a fetal alterity are contemplated as theoretical possibilities in Gray's work, outside the *norm* she seems to present as women's hospitable embodiment. I would like to stress this point, in order to avoid accounts of pregnancy that surreptitiously recognize it as a "natural" or "normal" existential experience for women.

[399] *Gray (2013), p. 73.*
[400] *Gray, (2013), p. 73.*
[401] *Miglio (2019).*
[402] *Gray (2013), p. 77.*
[403] *Gray (2013), p. 77.*
[404] *Gray (2013), p. 84.*

Alternatively, an insistence on ambiguity also helpfully destabilizes the idea that pregnancy concerns only women. When thinking about pregnancy, we should include biological females who do not recognize themselves as women. The case of transgender pregnancies shows that the welcoming character of female's body cannot be ascribed to the social or philosophical category of "women". Conversely, not every woman has a body which is potentially "welcoming". In this regard, the idea of hostility – as the asymmetrical counterpart of hospitality – crops up in infertility discourses; the expression *hostile uterus*, while not employed within medical terminology, is otherwise quite common in online discourse around infertility. It refers to cases of cervical mucus hostility – encompassing a number of issues with cervical mucus – and by metonymy it includes the whole uterus.[405]

Women who would like to have a pregnancy, but whose bodies do not provide a hospitable and welcoming space for their potential children-to-be can perceive their own bodies as unwelcoming, unsuitable, and dangerous for a new life. These theoretical cautions complement Gray's framework, which has the merit of making an ontological point: the sub-personal tier of the female body (not inherently that of a woman) is potentially open to host a pregnancy, since the female body literally *makes space* for the fetal-other. From Gray's reflections, I evaluate the philosophical recognition of pregnancy as the experience of disclosure. The fact that,

> the material body as the origin of consciousness and flesh, is the logical precondition of personhood: the material body is, in this sense, preconscious, preflesh, prepersonal, and prediscursive. […] Pregnancy, abortion, and unwanted pregnancy will need, then, to be seen within this biometaphorical framework, as a response in other words, to the "life- will" of the body.[406]

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[405] *See for instance some sites of agencies working in the commercial surrogacy: within the blog of the egg donation agency Sunshine, we read that "The hostile uterus is a term defining female hormonal imbalance state. It usually goes with the cervical mucus hostility state, which creates an inhospitable environment for sperm and lowers the pregnancy chances." (https://www.eggdonors.asia/blog/hostile-uterus-meaning-symptoms/). Similarly, the company ConceiveAbilities describes on their site the hostile uterus as an anatomical issue possibly charged of infertility (https://www.conceiveabilities.com/about/blog/what-is-a-hostile-uterus). Quite interesting, the uterus could be described as hostile independently from the fertility issues of the subject. On the level of representation, Okruhlik argues that the hostility of uterus deals with the great enterprise of sperms (active) that gloriously fertilize the (passive) woman's eggs: "The egg waits passively while the sperm heroically battles upstream, struggles against the hostile uterus, courts the egg, and (if victorious) penetrates by burrowing through, thereby excluding all rival suitors. The egg's only role in this saga is to select which rival will be successful". Okruhlik, K. (1994). Gender and the biological sciences. Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 24(sup1), 21-42, p. 22.*

[406] *Gray (2013), p. 74.*

On this point, I have considered the main aspects and the potential flaws of what I define as the *hospitality model*. It is my interest now to present a further declination of this paradigm – namely, the idea of *placental hospitality*. In her insightful paper "Openness and Protection: A Philosophical Analysis of the Placenta's Mediatory Role in Coconstituting Emergent, Intertwined Identities", Marjolein Oele radically rethinks the notion of hospitality by considering the role played by the placenta as the medium between maternal and fetal organisms.[407] She concludes that the notion of hospitality could not be fruitfully applied to pregnancy without carefully considering the constitutive mediatory role of placenta. Rejecting the characterization of the placenta as a "extra-fetal organ", a "maternal-fetal organ", or a mere static "barrier" in between the gestating self and fetal-other, Oele recognizes the generative and affective role played by the placenta, which she defines as a "fetal-and-maternal-place-and-time-making-boundary".[408] By focusing on the process of making and also the temporal dimension of the self/other divide, she opens up to two key aspects of gestational experience: first, what I define the *transitive* character of the pregnant embodiment (hence accounted in terms of *threshold*); and second, the unstable boundaries of the self/other in-making, that I address in chapter seven. As for hospitality, placental work is properly the condition of possibility for the acceptance and the growth of the fetal alterity. In principle, the embryo would be rejected by the maternal organism, since they are "semi-not-self" or a "semi-self", being half-maternal on genetical level.[409] The placenta serves then as a mechanism of protection, since it allows the embryo to be accepted by the maternal organism. As Oele puts it,

> by making itself immunologically neutral or invisible, the placenta makes itself the faceless (unrecognized) face of the other (the baby), and thereby is allowed to live in symbiosis with the mother. We might call this technique one of forcing hospitality upon another – based on appearing to be more neutral or similar than might be the case. The

[407] *Oele, M. (2017). Openness and Protection: A Philosophical Analysis of the Placenta's Mediatory Role in Coconstituting Emergent, Intertwined Identities. Configurations, 25(3), 347-371.*
[408] *Oele (2017), p. 350.*
[409] *Oele (2017), p. 365.*

> faceless face of the other here is notably not transcendent to the process, but materially part of it.[410]

Hosting is then made possible by the placenta, as well as by other biological mechanisms. Among them, Oele considers how the immune system of the gestating self "is partly encouraged to reverse its defense mechanisms, and turn them into acts of hospitality: the NK cells that in the case of a transplant would be activated to reject tissue, instead produce substances that encourage the growth of particular placental cells."[411] This mechanism is not only a shift of the immune system, but properly a "re-constitution and evolvement of the maternal immune system."[412] In the philosophical reading Oele provides of these biological phenomena, what appears relevant is that a system routinely and physiologically aimed at protection of the (gestating) self can transform and reverse its own function and "instead of protecting itself turn towards collaborating with the growth of the other."[413]

By putting into dialogue the placental-maternal immunological system and the narrative of hospitality, Oele offers an alternative model of hospitality to the more common tendency to conceive the mother as a container or an envelope.[414] This version of the hospitality model has the advantage of challenging the self/other distinction, complicating the physical relations at work between the fetal-other and the gestating self. Moreover – and differently from the container model – it presupposes an idea of the human body as a *place* and not merely a *space*, by recognizing the temporal, local, and existential dimensions implied in the process itself. This makes possible an alternative ontology of the pregnant body. As Oele makes clear, her proposed *placental hospitality* comes

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[410] *Oele (2017), p. 365.*
[411] *Oele (2017), p. 366.*
[412] *Oele (2017), p. 366.*
[413] *Oele (2017), p. 366. The specific immunological changes enacted by the fetal/maternal encounter may lead to rethink the language of immunology and its model: this task has been undertaken by Polly Matzinger, who rejects the Self/NonSelf model in favor of what she defines Danger Model: "Imagine a community in which the police accept anyone they met during elementary school and kill any new migrant. Th at's the Self/ Nonself Model. In the Danger Model, tourists and immigrants are accepted, until they start breaking windows. Only then, do the police move to eliminate them. In fact, it doesn't matter if the window breaker is a foreigner or a member of the community. Th at kind of behavior is considered unacceptable, and the destructive individual is removed. Th e community police are the white blood cells of the immune system. The Self/Nonself Model says that they kill anything that enters the body after an early training period in which "self "is learned. In the Danger Model, the police wander around, waiting for an alarm signaling that something is doing damage. If an immigrant enters without doing damage, the white cells simply continue to wander, and after a while, the harmless immigrant becomes part of the community." Claudia Dreifus, "An Interview with Polly Matzinger," New York Times, June 16, 1998.*
[414] *Oele (2017), p. 368.*

"before and beyond any specific hosting of identities".[415] What needs to be further addressed is the phenomenological and situated dimension of pregnant embodiment – namely the recognition of the gestating self as a whole self, whose sub-personal processes are intertwined with the existential ones. The threshold model may help to reconnect the various tiers implied in gestational experience, by recognizing that the experience of pregnancy is not only a biological phenomenon of natural reproduction of a species but also an experience of sense-making.

4.4. Permeability and Impressionability

Phenomenological reflections have made some steps towards recognising the *pathic* dimension of pregnant embodiment. For example, Bigwood rethinks Heideggerian *Dasein*, suggesting it might be suitable to substitute the concept of "world" with "world-earth-home". As the author writes,

> "World" connotes a man's world and his public institutions, thereby tending to neglect the private realm, and, moreover, connotes a human world in opposition to the earth. term "world-earth," by contrast, reminds us that we are here with other animals and on an earth that gives rise to a myriad of life that, unfortunately, has become marginal to our human world (or, worse yet, thoughtlessly used up by it).[416]

Her framework seeks to expand the notion of world, by acknowledging that the milieu of pregnant embodiment is not exclusively human. The focus on interactions and relations leads us then to dismiss the idea that the body "is in the world like an object in a container", by acknowledging instead that it "is with the world-earth-home, oriented toward it and directed toward certain tasks as part of it." [417] Accordingly, pregnant embodiment cannot simply be explained in terms of outside/inside. While it is undeniable that the fetal-other is in some sense *within* the gestating self, it is equally true that the interiority in which the fetal-other lives is continuously mediated through and by pregnant embodiment. As Irigaray puts it,

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[415] *Oele (2017), p. 368.*
[416] *Bigwood (1991), p. 57.*
[417] *Bigwood (1991), p. 62. The author makes clear that the interaction between the phenomenological body and the living world is precognitive one – I add that this interaction has itself many tiers of deployment.*

> It is also important that we restore an environment to the body that each, man or woman, is— an environment in which this body can live, grow, and express itself according to the relational world proper to it. We are not allowed to integrate the other in a spatial, political, or cultural architecture that, warm though it is, prevents this other from living according to what or who he or she is. To approach the other, we must preserve a space where we can welcome them without exiling them from the surroundings that suit them.[418]

Far from being a container, pregnant embodiment is properly a space of *co-constitution* and mutual creation between the gestating self and the fetal-other. In particular, pregnant embodiment is the active and receptive medium of the mutual relation between the outside (of the pregnant self) and the inside; within it and through it, the fetal-other receives nutrition and motor stimuli, and potentially enters into relation with the gestating self. At this regard, Oele argues that human skin – as an affective interface of sense-making – [419] applies to pregnant embodiment in its wholeness. Borrowing from this theoretical toolkit, I call for us to change our attitude towards pregnant embodiment, by recognizing it both as a space of protection and nourishment, and as a *medium* of influences and stimuli on the fetal-other.

Dudens' perspective on the "birth" of the fetus as an epistemic object develops the idea that, in contemporary Western times, the pregnant woman has become conceived as an ecosystem (and the fetus as endangered species).[420] The definition of the pregnant woman as an ecosystem may be read merely in negative terms – as Duden did – or may open up a further sense that I argue is an essential constraint of the pregnant body. In this section, I then explore the osmotic character of pregnant embodiment, by referring to the fact that a pregnant body is a *threshold*. Complementing the biopolitical notion of the pregnant body as a public space or a site of control and care, I propose that the body of the pregnancy is a material passage and continuous contact between the fetal-other and

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[418] *Irigaray, L. (2913). "Toward a Mutual Hospitality. In T. Claviez (Ed.). The conditions of hospitality: Ethics, politics, and aesthetics on the threshold of the possible (pp. 42-54). Fordham University Press, p. 47.*
See also Claviez, T. (Ed.). (2013). The conditions of hospitality: Ethics, politics, and aesthetics on the threshold of the possible. Fordham Univ Press; Fannin, M. (2014). Placental relations. Feminist Theory, 15(3), 289-306; Still, J. (2012). Sharing the world: Luce Irigaray and the hospitality of difference. L'Esprit Créateur, 52(3), 40-51.
[419] *See chapter 5 Oele, M. (2020). E-Co-Affectivity: Exploring Pathos at Life's Material Interfaces. SUNY Press.*
[420] *Duden (1993), p. 53.*

the external environment. If we consider fetal development, the inner body of the gestating self provides the fetal-other with a nourishing space, but the pregnant body is not merely a physical object.

Although both the container and the hospitality model have some potential, I propose a third possible way to conceive the pregnant embodiment – namely, as in its relation with the (natural, social, historical, political, cultural) environment. The grounding idea is that the experience of pregnancy needs to be investigated, not in some abstract and theoretical space, but as it could be deployed in their morphological reality. The philosophical explication of the situation of the gestating self requires further developments, that take into account how the *milieu* where the pregnant experience takes place influences and effects the process itself. This feature of the human embodiment is widely recognized in phenomenological literature; Merleau-Ponty's concepts of *incarnation* and *chair* [421] express the open and chiasmatic dynamics between one's body and the world.[422] What needs to be further investigated instead is the role of the pregnant body in relation to the fetal-other. On the one hand, the pregnant body guarantees a place of protection, nourishment, and sufficient *room* – in a physical sense – for the fetal-other. In this way, the pregnant body makes it possible for a life to grow. On the other hand, the pregnant body is integrated within and moulded by a whole environmental context. From environmental philosophy to cognitive science, from phenomenology to social ontology, from biopolitics to pragmatism, human embodiment is recognized as hetero-affected and co-constituted in a web of dynamics and forces. Saying that the body is *pathic* implies a necessity to recognize its potential to affect and be affected.[423] While I briefly showed that placenta informs, alters, influences, and shapes gestational embodiment, I address here a further implication that should be considered; the *pathic* dimension of pregnant embodiment acquires a further meaning, since the fetal-other's bodily existence is filtered through the gestating self's body, and it functions as a *threshold*.

The idea that the *milieu* of the gestating self has some influence on fetal development is hardly new. On the contrary, it has been a belief for many centuries, which

[421] *Cf. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). Le Visible et l'Invisible. Gallimard.*
[422] *No surprise then that late Merleau-Ponty thought has been re-considered and worked by scholars inquiring the pregnant embodiment, see e.g., Wynn, F. (1997). The embodied chiasmic relationship of mother and infant. Human Studies, 20(2), 253-270; Wynn, F. (2002). The early relationship of mother and pre-infant: Merleau-Ponty and pregnancy. Blackwell Science Ltd Nursing Philosophy, 3, 4-14.*
[423] *For an original reflection on pathos, see Oele (2020).*

eventually became a means to normatively control the gestating self and her behaviors. Zooming in on the *qualitative* nature of this influence shows that pregnant embodiment has this characteristic of a threshold, since the influence of the external environment passes through pregnant embodiment, filtering and transmitting the stimuli. This idea informs so-called theories of maternal impressions. The ascribed role of gestating self's' imagination over fetal development is perfectly compatible with my proposal of the pregnant embodiment as a *threshold* – namely, an understanding of the active and pathic role of the gestating self over the fetal-other.

My proposal is to takes seriously narratives and approaches that seem *prima facie* obsolete or incompatible with contemporary understanding of human embodiment. Maternal impressions theory has mostly been taken up to historical-archaeological ends, such as providing historical explanations for some phenomena (in particular the birth of offspring with malformations) that from the XIX-XX centuries have since been explained mainly through medical knowledge. [424] I want to critically take issue with this naive position, and show instead that the epistemic structures of maternal impressions theory may tell us something about the lived experience of pregnancy, especially about unique kinds of pregnant embodiment. While medical literature tends to focus on the truth value of the theory ("are the fetal malformations *really* caused by maternal impressions?"), my proposal is to assume a different perspective. Instead of asking whether the theory is scientifically evidenced, I instead ask what the theory might mean and suggest about the experience lived through by the gestating subject.

The hypothesis of maternal impressions is a long-standing explanatory theory of the so-called *monstrous births* – namely, the birth of offspring with malformations or congenital diseases. The grounding idea is that imagination is not merely phantasy, but a properly a power of the human being. As Koubova puts it, "imagination must be understood as a

[424] *For some classical loci when the theory of maternal impressions is discussed in French area, see Bablot, B. (1788). Dissertation sur le pouvoir de L'imagination des femmes enceintes. Royez; Buffon, G.-L. de. (1830). Oeuvres complètes.T. Lejeune; Descartes, R. (1677). L'homme de René Descartes, et La formation du foetus; ou Traité de la lumière du mesme autheur (2e éd. rev. et corr.) / avec les remarques de Louis de La Forge. ed. by Clerselier; Du Laurens, A. (1621) Oeuvres. Rouen (Toutes les oeuvres de Me André Du Laurens, sieur de Ferrières, recueillies et traduites en françois par Mr Théophile Gelée); Malebranche, N. (1674-1675). De la recherche de la vérité. Où l'on traite de la Nature de l'Esprit de l'homme, et de l'usage qu'il en doit faire pour éviter l'erreur dans les Sciences. Ed: André Pralard; in English area, see Blondel, J. A. (1729). The power of the mother's imagination over the foetus examin'd. London: John Brotherton. Bmck, C.; Hunter, W. (1794). An anatomical description of the human gravid uterus, and its contents. London: printed for J. Johnson, and G. Nicol; Turner, D. (1731). De morbis cutaneis: A treatise of diseases incident to the skin. (4th ed.) London: Walthoe, Wilkin, Bonwicke, Birt, Ward, and Wicksteed. (First published in 1714.).*

peculiar source of the real".[425] In this sense, maternal imagination influences reality, by actually modifying fetal growth. If it is possible to have such influence over the fetal-other, there should be a bodily relation between the gestating self and the alterity which could not being explained simply in spatial terms – between the (at least) two terms of the *gestational polarity* which represent the threshold, as the affective, interactive, physical, and symbolical place of constitution. The theory's fundamental presupposition is that, as Braidotti argues, pregnancy is an art (*technê*);[426] if we rely on Aristotle's conception in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a technical work presupposes an end and a certain know-how, that in the case at stake corresponds to the delivery of a healthy baby. Within this context, women should behave in certain manners and are then considered responsible for gestational development and its outcomes. In this way, maternal impression theory implies a strict correlation between a woman's perceptual-mental processes and the physical modifications of the fetal-other.[427]

An epistemic construction underlies these theories which is primarily motivated by the aetiology (1). Maternal imagination theory is explanatory, in that it proposes an aetiological cause for what it was "wrong" in the process of generation or gestation. All the complex narratives about "what a pregnant woman should do" aim at avoiding difficulties for the gestating subject and the foetus' health. Within medical literature until the XIX century, women are considered morally responsible for any "negative" outcome of pregnancy, since their thoughts and behaviours were said to be the direct cause of the child-to-be's malformations. As Huet has noticed, the role of womanly imagination in the process of creation is "deceiving" but also "dominant", in that it causes physical and tangible consequences to her fetus.[428]

Maternal impression theory could be further read as a symptom of the ambiguity between the maternal potentiality (in terms of her agency) and the need to control female irrationality – from this perspective, it could be read as a form of biopolitics (2). The impetus to control derives properly from the recognition that pregnancy is an activity or an act that woman may perform in many ways.

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[425] *Koubova, A. (2016). Embodiment, Oikos and Sharing Life in the Pregnant Body. In C. Nielsen, K. Novotný, & T. Nenon (Eds.). Kontexte des Leiblichen (pp. 233-247). Verlag Traugott Bautz GmbH, p. 240.*

[426] *Braidotti, R. (2017). Signs of wonder and traces of doubt: On teratology and embodied differences. In Shildrick, M., & Price, J. (Eds.) Feminist Theory and the Body (pp. 290-301). Routledge, p. 297.*

[427] *For a framing of the maternal imagination within an analysis of the active impagination, see Griffero, T. (2003). Immagini attive. Breve storia dell'immaginazione transitiva. Le Monnier.*

[428] *Huet, M. H. (1993). Monstrous imagination. Harvard University Press.*

As Betterton outlines,

> The maternal imagination, it was believed, had the power to kill or deform the foetus merely through an act of illicit reading or looking. Women in their maternal function therefore had to be disciplined to control their desires for the wellbeing of the child, not unlike modern injunctions on pregnant women not to smoke, drink or take drugs.[429]

Betterton correctly argues for the epistemic *file rouge* of the control and discipline over women's bodies, especially with regard to reproduction. While I disagree with her definition of the pregnant body as "a protective container" (for all the reasons above listed), she grasps the specificity of maternal impression theory, which sees pregnant embodiment as a "conductor", eventually leading to a pathologization of the women depicted as unstable subjects.[430]

Furthermore, the theory of maternal imagination ascribes a creative and productive capacity to the gestating subject's mental faculties and, in this way, it has the potential to destabilize the boundaries between (male) (mental) production and (female) (bodily) reproduction (3). This overlapping of production and reproduction represents a highly unusual occurrence within the Western history of philosophy and culture. As I argue in the chapter one, the surreptitious distinction between the male activity of production and the female passivity of the reproduction is a *topos* of Western Philosophy to which authors like Beauvoir and Arendt refer, partially renegotiating and partially accepting the ontological and axiological distinction.

Maternal impression theory also discloses a further sense that the pregnant body may convey (visive) sensations, feelings, stimuli from the maternal external environment (4). Under this perspective, the generation of Lynch's *Elephant Man* and dietary restriction are two correlated phenomena; the material act of feeding and the material power of the maternal imagination have some effects over fetal development.

Within the epistemic structure of maternal impression theory, I argue that the body of the gestating subject is implicitly depicted as a *threshold* – an osmotic membrane that not

[429] *Betterton, R. (2002). Prima gravida: Reconfiguring the maternal body in visual representation. Feminist Theory, 3(3), 255-270, p. 262.*
[430] *Betterton (2002), p. 262.*

only conveys physical sustainment to the fetus, but also thoughts, fears, desires, traumas, and dreams. As threshold, the pregnant body both filters and protects, being both open and a medium. Transitively, what is physically outside the pregnant body may affect the fetus' environment *via* the body. While maternal impression theory is largely associated with superstitions eventually supplanted by biomedical knowledge and hard sciences, I argue that it has epistemic premises which are, in a certain sense, valid for a phenomenological analysis of pregnant embodiment. As shown in the chapter one, an eidetic and feminist analysis of pregnant embodiment works in a double direction, by maintaining the uniqueness of *this concrete experience* and unveiling the very qualitative structures of *the experience as such*.

In order to further illustrate pregnant embodiment as a threshold, let me discuss an empirical phenomenon studied by obstetrics and environmental science. The fact is quite simple and equally alarming; microplastics have been found in human placenta.[431] We have seen that *placenta* is an interface between the fetal and the maternal environmental, and, more than that, the condition which makes it biologically possible the pregnancy to start. In philosophical terms, Irigaray argues that,

> […] If a woman can give birth to a child, and even to a child of another gender, this is possible because, thanks to the two, a place in her is produced— one could say in Greek *gignestai*— that does not belong to the one or to the other, but permits their coexistence: the placenta. Neither the woman nor the fetus could survive without this organ that secures both the existence of each and the relation between the two.[432]

The placenta is thus the medium which concretely makes it possible for pregnancy to start as a process on sub-personal level. The gestating self does not have perception of this quasi-organ, which otherwise plays the fundamental role in protecting the fetal-other.

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[431] *Ragusa, A., Svelato, A., Santacroce, C., Catalano, P., Notarstefano, V., Carnevali, O., ... & D'Amore, E. Plasticenta: First evidence of microplastics in human placenta. Environment International, 146, 106274; Ragusa, A., Svelato, A., Santacroce, C., Catalano, P., Notarstefano, V., Carnevali, O., ... & D'Amore, E. (2020). Plasticenta: Microplastics in Human Placenta. bioRxiv; Fournier, S. B., D'Errico, J. N., Adler, D. S., Kollontzi, S., Goedken, M. J., Fabris, L., ... & Stapleton, P. A. (2020). Nanopolystyrene translocation and fetal deposition after acute lung exposure during late-stage pregnancy. Particle and Fibre Toxicology, 17(1), 1-11. These studies had a huge media coverage, especially because they are framed in the contemporary (compelling) call for new environmental politics. See e.g.: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/22/microplastics-revealed-in-placentas-unborn-babies*

[432] *Irigaray (2013), p. 44.*

Furthermore, "embryos and foetuses must continuously adapt to the maternal environment and, indirectly, to the external one, by a series of complex responses".[433] So what happens to the immune system if microplastics (MPs) intrude into the process? As the authors of this pioneering study reveal, the presence of microplastics in the placenta "requires the reconsideration of the immunological mechanism of self-tolerance." [434] In other words, microplastics may disrupt the delicate immunological exchange that happens during the early stages of pregnancy. Indeed,

> Inside tissues, MPs are considered as foreign bodies by the host organism and, as such, trigger local immunoreactions. Furthermore, MPs can act as carriers for other chemicals, such as environmental pollutants and plastic additives, which may be released and are known for their harmful effects.[435]

The danger is then twofold: microplastics are *in se* harmful because they may intercede with the immunological system of human organisms, and they represent a threat because of what they may convey. The consequences of these microplastics are potentially harmful not only for the gestating self, but also for the fetal-other; the microplastics may jeopardize the ability to differentiate self and non-self. This disruption may cause a localized toxicity "by inducing and/or enhancing immune responses and, hence, potentially reducing the defence mechanisms against pathogens and altering the utilization of energy stores":[436]

> Potentially, MPs, and in general microparticles, may alter several cellular regulating pathways in placenta, such as immunity mechanisms during pregnancy, growth-factor signalling during and after implantation, functions of atypical chemokine receptors governing maternal foetal communication, signalling between the embryo and the uterus, and trafficking of uterine dendritic cells, natural killer cells, T cells and macrophages during normal pregnancy. All these effects may

[433] *Ragusa et. al. (2020), p. 3.*
[434] *Ragusa et. al. (2020), p. 5.*
[435] *Ragusa et. al. (2020), p. 5.*
[436] *Ragusa, et al. (2020), p. 5.*

> lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes including preeclampsia and fetal growth restriction.[437]

The presence of microplastics in the human placenta has one fundamental meaning: pollution can affect human life already *in utero*. In this sense, the call for an ecological politics should not only address a generic possible future (for the "future generations"), but rather address what is already here, urgent, and materially present. This ecological insight also represents also a fundamental argument for my thesis – namely that the gestating body works as membrane with regard to the fetal-other. The corollary is an indirect confirmation of the thesis that the gestational process should be considered as a constitutive relation with the milieu and the environment of the gestating self.

To conclude, I have shown the potential and flaws of the container and hospitality models, and then proposed a conception of the gestating body in terms of a threshold, by stressing the character of permeability and impressionability of the pregnant embodiment – instead of the spatial relations (container) or the ontological meaning (hospitality). By means of an analysis of the maternal imagination and the presence of microplastics in placenta, I have shown that the idea of the threshold preserves the multiple layers of the experience, and moreover has the positive effect of recognizing the dual aspects of pregnancy, as a process wherein the gestating self is both active and passive in respect to her own environment. The case study of microplastics show us that the sub-personal level of the pregnant experience does not tell the whole story; living in a particular ecological context, having (or not having) all the information concerning one's own body, and navigating a particular lifeworld are all elements that shape the gestational process. In the case at stake, one may see that pregnancy is not a mere biological phenomenon through which the species straightforwardly reproduces itself, but it is instead a process wherein the situation of the gestating self plays a hugely significant role.

5. Gestational temporalities

In this chapter, I show that many levels of temporality are involved in the gestational process. My arguments proceed as follows: first, I challenge the highly

[437] *Ragusa et al. (2020), p. 7.*

medicalized linear conception of pregnancy as a mere succession of weeks and trimesters, arguing against the simplistic homogenization of the experiences of pregnancy into a univocal and standard category. Then, I explore my proposed definition of *scattered temporalities*, which attends to that the fact that many levels of experiential temporality are intertwined and simultaneously active in gestational experience.

This chapter then aims to show the effects of rhetoric about waiting, as pertaining to a teleological understanding of pregnancy as a time frame leading to childbirth. The idea that pregnancy is a preparatory phase to childbirth undervalues the experiential richness of the process, and idealizes one particular outcome of the pregnant process as an expected output. Moreover, the idea that pregnancy is essentially a phase of waiting implies a radical passivity on the part of the gestating subject, failing to recognize the role played by the gestating self and erasing her agency. This temporal connotation aligns with the definition of pregnancy as a *condition* – a critical point that I am actively renegotiating throughout this thesis. The emphasis on the passivity of the process resonates also with the depiction of the pregnant self as a fetal container. All in all, my inquiry into temporality completes my general framework for rethinking the pregnant process as a lived experience.

5.1. Against *Chronos*

In what does the temporality of the gestating subject consist? And how do fetal temporalities impact on gestational experience? Medical temporalities are mainly focussed on fetal development, and are not dissimilar to legal perspectives which are centred on the boundaries of Life and Personhood, e.g. for establishing the legitimacy of abortion. These approaches tend to prioritise fetal temporalities, neglecting the temporalities of the gestating subject. The result is that pregnant temporalities are surreptitiously linked with a "natural flow" of sorts, which is identified with biological development. In this regard, Levesque-Lopman points out that,

> The idea of life as a series of stages through which one moves is a fairly old one. The stages themselves, simple or complex, reflect the society in which they can take place. But practically all delineations of stages in the past have been based on male lives and, as such, may not have provided an adequate

> understanding of the lives of women. One conceptualization of the stages in the lives of women that has been delineated has been in terms of childbirth.[438]

Conversely, pregnancy has long been conceived as a period of waiting. Pregnant women were simply supposed to wait and to behave in the best possible way in order to guarantee fetal health. That is all. Waiting.

Phenomenological investigations may (1) deepen our understanding of what *waiting* might mean for a gestating subject, and (2) unveil some issues implicated by this understanding of the pregnant subject as a passive container of a linear process. In doing so, I aim (3) to dispute the notion of gestational temporality as teleologically oriented through childbirth. These preliminary steps lead into my definition of *scattered temporalities* which encapsulates the dynamic of surprise and waiting as virtual eidetic possibilities among others. (4) Put in other terms, I suggest that waiting and expectation may be included among the experiential structures of the gestating process, but in a wider framework of affective and emotive experiences which are not "abnormal" or "wrong" (4). The aim of this strategy is then twofold. First, this new conception of gestational temporalities encompasses the variable panorama of gestating experiences, offering an organic eidetic of the whole gestational experience. Second, it includes some experiences which are traditionally marginalized or labelled as "exceptional". As for the characterization of the pregnancy as a condition wherein the gestating self is simply waiting, I recall Young's classic passages, where she writes that,

> The dominant culture projects pregnancy as a time of quiet waiting. We refer to the woman as "expecting," as though this new life were flying in from another planet and she sat in her rocking chair by the window, occasionally moving the curtain aside to see whether the ship is coming. The image of uneventful waiting associated with pregnancy reveals clearly how much the discourse of pregnancy leaves out the subjectivity of the woman. From the point of view of others pregnancy is primarily a time of waiting and watching, when nothing happens.[439]

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[438] *Levesque-Lopman, L. (1983). Decision and experience: a phenomenological analysis of pregnancy and childbirth. Human Studies, 6(1), 247-277, p. 249.*
[439] *Young (2005), p. 54.*

Young's analysis is focused on the cultural understanding of pregnancy as a passive state, which is detrimental for the gestating self as she is reduced to being simply a vessel. In these words, we may read a broader critique against that idea that "women have always been seen as waiting",[440] since this presupposition implies certain social roles for women. That the dimension of temporality is intrinsic to the experience itself is broadly recognized; being a process which has a beginning and an end, and a quite easily identifiable timeline, gestational experience has been accounted for in terms of crisis,[441] transition,[442] or alternatively as a preparatory step to the motherhood.[443] Most literature agrees in acknowledging that pregnancy is a time frame during which something happens and which influences the gestating subject. The aforementioned accounts of pregnancy as crisis, transition, and preparatory step perfectly convey a sense of suspension and, at the same time, of waiting, by expressing also the sense of something that has some effects on the gestating self in a univocal sense. The pregnant subject is then the patient of a process that affects her unidirectionally. These concepts of *waiting* and *expecting* problematically presuppose the final destination of childbirth. Guenther adds a further sense in which the rhetoric of expectation is problematic, in that it reduces the possible-future of the fetal-other "to a present waiting to be unpacked from its box".[444] This temporal paradigm is perfectly (and unsurprisingly) compatible with the previously discussed *container model;* a theoretical alliance is retraceable between the gestating body as a space and the pregnant process as a linear timeframe, ideally stretched between the fertilization and the childbirth.

Focussing on the level of subjective experience does not mean neglecting the characteristic temporality of the gestating subject, in which waiting may be an essential part. As Stoller relates,

[440] *Rich (1995), p. 39.*
[441] *Raphael-Leff J. 1991. Psychological processes of childbearing. Chapman & Hall.*
[442] *Imle, M. A. (1990). Third trimester concerns of expectant parents in transition to parenthood. Holistic Nursing Practice, 4(3), 25-36.*
[443] *Bergum, V. (1997). A child on her mind: The experience of becoming a mother. Praeger.*
[444] *Guenther, L. (2013). The Birth of Sexual Difference: A Feminist Response to Merleau-Ponty. In S. LaChance Adams and C. R. Lundquist (Eds.), Coming to life: philosophies of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering (pp. 88-105). Fordham University Press, p. 89.*

> The pregnant woman experiences carrying somebody in her body for nine months, waiting for the birth of her child, being patient, continually recognizing the changes in and of her body, the growing of her child, living an intense double life for a certain time period.[445]

While everyone may agree that the gestational process is *somehow* related to the experience of waiting, the nature of this experience of waiting is up for debate.
What it happens if we consider the experiential structures of waiting from the perspective of the gestating self? In other words, is it possible to understand waiting as it is experienced by the pregnant self? The experience of waiting is not antithetical or incompatible with the transformation entailed by pregnancy as it is lived through. Welsh reminds us that,

> The temporality of pregnancy and the bodily transformations of the woman carrying the foetus, which go together with some of the most profound psychic alterations a human can go through, are all particular to the experience of pregnancy.[446]

Within phenomenological literature, for some, waiting should be accounted as a *passive behaviour*, while for others waiting is instead an *action*.[447] This distinction seems quite naïve, since it implicitly relies on a qualification of behaviour and situation as something essentially passive, and on an understanding of an action as the fulfilment of one's desires, intentions, and choices. Applying this duality to gestational experience does not facilitate a better understanding of its qualitative character. For that reason, I prefer to follow Fujita's suggestion that the intentional experience of waiting may be better grasped by looking instead into two qualities it presupposes – that is to say "what is waited for" and "how we wait".[448] In Fujita's analysis, we read that,

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[445] *Stoller, S. (2011). "Gender and Anonymous Temporality. In C. Schües, D. Olkowski, H. Fielding (Eds.). Time in feminist phenomenology (pp. 79-91). Indiana University Press, p. 80.*
[446] *Smith (2016), p. 41*
[447] *Göttlich, A. (2015). To wait and let wait: Reflections on the social imposition of time. Schutzian Research, 7, 47-64.*
[448] *Fujita, M. (1985). Modes of waiting. Phenomenology + Pedagogy. Vol:3 No.2, 107-115, p. 108.*

> In the world of becoming, there is a particular counterpointal structure, a dialectic if you like, between "how we wait" and "what is waited for." On the one hand, "what is waited for," no matter how vague it may be, prepares a certain mood or certain possible moods of the particular waiting. We wait for the birth of a baby in a quite different manner from the way we wait for our death.[449]

These two experiential levels are said to be "mutually dependent";[450] the objective target of our waiting has the retroactive force to emotionally colour our modes of waiting, which may vary as hope, expectation, or fear. According to the author, there is no deterministic influence from the *how* of waiting over the object of waiting. Applying this intuition to the topic of my investigation reveals that, even when we consider the case of pregnancy, it is untrue that every pregnant subject experiences gestation as a hopeful and empowering process which carries the subject to labour.

A phenomenological analysis of pregnant temporality complicates the common rhetoric of "period of waiting", opening up the complexity of the gestating subject's specific temporalities. The first point of clarification concerns the specific kind of temporality enhanced by female bodies, and then lived through by the female subject. With respect to the specific temporalities of the pregnant self, it is first of all worth noting that, in recent years, feminist phenomenology problematizes the gendered differences implied in the comprehension of lived temporality. Although the gendered dimension of pregnancy seems to be often implicit, I argue that the gender-time relationship is not a point sufficiently explored in relation to pregnant temporalities. The excellent 2011 volume *Time in feminist phenomenology* [451] seeks to address the lack of analysis of the time from a feminist perspective. In its introduction, Schües considers why so little attention has been paid to this issue:

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[449] *Fujita (1985), p. 113.*
[450] *Fujita (1985), 113.*
[451] *See Schües, C. (2011). Introduction: Toward a Feminist Phenomenology of Time. In C. Schües, D. Olkowski, H. Fielding (Eds.). Time in feminist phenomenology (pp. 1-18). Indiana University Press.*
"The field, which had been set out by classical phenomenologists, can be shifted into, even transformed by, gender theory and feminist phenomenology. Moreover, this transformation from classical philosophy of time into time concerning gender theory and feminist phenomenology can be traced back to our ideas about the origins of time itself." (p. 5). For further inquiries, see: Pregnant temporalities: Burke, M. M. (2013). Anonymous Temporality and Gender: Rereading Merleau-Ponty. philosophia, 3(2), 138-157, and Browne (2017).

> Our inability to think about time is due precisely to the fact that we take it for granted. To think our taken-for-granted relations with the world is the basic task of phenomenology, and, of course, time is preeminently taken for granted.[452]

This becomes even more urgent for pregnant experience since it seems to be obvious that it is a time-related phenomenon. Nonetheless, taking for granted the fact that pregnancy is *somehow* related to temporality does not say anything about the subjective experience of a gestating subject. Since Aristotle, the female body has been regarded as unstable due to its continuous changes. The exclusionary gaze of medicine and the subsequent pathologizing of women's bodies is symptomatic of the historically poor comprehension of change in female corporeality. Nonetheless, the risk of biological essentialism is always lurking around the corner. As Stoller points out,

> Theorists of female temporality are right in claiming that there are sexually differentiated time experiences. However, such an approach falsely universalizes gender experiences. It does not take into account that certain experiences can be shared by other genders in one way or another.[453]

In this regard, feminist phenomenology faces the challenge of describing eidetic temporal structures, without in this way supporting positions of biological essentialism. This struggle has been addressed by Stoller, who warrants that "the debate over female temporality should not be reduced to biology in general or the biological bodies of women in particular."[454] While it is undeniable that physical facts have an impact of women's existence (and then also their inner sense of time and temporality), the cultural dimension of the self should be taken into consideration as well.[455] As one may see, this inquiry into time encounters the same issues that Beauvoir raises in 1949 on biological data and the unstable balance between the natural body and the social one. The gendered dimension of the lived body is subject to stratified factors that cannot be accounted for in terms of

[452] *Schües (2011), p. 2.*
[453] *Stoller (2011), p. 88.*
[454] *Stoller (2011), p. 81.*
[455] *Stoller (2011), p. 81.*

culture *versus* nature. Indeed, many scholars have shown that the *biological body* is already itself a construction, since the hard sciences are developed along with specific historical and cultural contingencies; phenomenology followed in this direction (just think of Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception* and his *Cours de la Nature*) and feminist philosophies further centred this point by focussing on gendered experience. Without giving an exhaustive review of this literature, some key works are worth mentioning in this regard: Judith Butler and her radical rethinking of the discursive and performative character of the gender, as well as her acknowledgement that *sex* is already a constructed category;[456] Barbara Duden, with her analysis of the cultural-historical construction of concepts like Life, pregnancy, and fetus;[457] and Donna Haraway, who deconstructs and shows the partiality of hegemonic epistemologies and philosophies of science.[458] All these accounts open up a space of reflection where the gestational process is not a biological destiny, but rather a bodily experience whose rhetoric and representations are socially constructed, refused, and renegotiated. Awareness of this fact must be linked to the temporal dimension of the female pregnant body, precisely because female embodiment has a specific temporality which is far from the conventional understanding of a healthy body as the body in a steady state.[459] The subjective experiential structures are thus informed by the cultural-biological body and enacted by the fetal-other.

Temporalities of fetal development have been central to research about the field of medicine, and they became central also in influencing the qualitative dimension of gestating subject's lived experience. Overall, they inform and shape lived gestational experience by establishing a hiatus of sorts, giving information to the gestating subject about the fetal development. In certain ways, the growing fetus influences the lived experience of the gestating subject, who knows how "far along" the baby-to-be is, at what stages their organs are developed, what kinds of movement they can perform, and so on. Apps can inform you of the probable size of your fetus compared with fruits and vegetables.[460] As we shall see in the next chapter, mediation through visualization shapes

[456] *Butler, J. (1990). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. Routledge.; Butler, J. (1993). Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex. Taylor & Francis.*
[457] *Duden, B. (1993), (1998).*
[458] *Haraway, D. (1991). Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature. Routledge.*
[459] *Young (2005), p. 59.*
[460] *See Cute fruit, one of the leading pregnancy apps, compares the size of the fetus with a fruit or vegetable for each week of pregnancy.*

the quality of gestating subject's experience, by constructing the fetus as a subject. This attention to fetal development seems to confirm that the primary temporal structure of pregnancy is that of waiting. Pregnancy seems to be related essentially to the experience of waiting and with expectation, as popular discourse seems to confirm; the global success of the manual *What you expect when you're expecting* illustrates this tendency.[461] The key issue with this monolithic understanding of gestational temporality as waiting is that it promotes and reinforces an idyllic image of pregnancy as a journey, the final destination of which is labor and the birth of a sweet little baby. Of course, this does not happen in many cases. Bracketing for a while the experience of my own mother who was thrilled to *meet me* and wrote in her journal "I am looking forward to finally seeing and holding my baby, and to growing together", I know from direct and indirect experiences – from other women's voices, from first-person accounts, movies, novels – that a teleological understanding of pregnancy as a phase that leads to childbirth is highly exclusionary and problematic. Practicing the *epoché* with regard to this pervasive prejudice reveals to us that not every pregnancy ends with a childbirth. On the contrary, the lived experiences of women are dotted with miscarriages and abortions, and, in some cases, open adoption.[462] Wtih regard to the teleological understanding of time, it would be incorrect to suggest that every pregnancy is expected to end with a childbirth. Miscarriage is more frequent that it is usually believed;[463] despite the little attention paid to this experience, some recent efforts have attempted to highlight this issue, in particular through the analysis of specific kinds of lived experience which miscarriage entails.[464] Scholars are attempting to deconstruct its aura of taboo, and to take into account the specific temporal flow and phenomenological structures of miscarriage. In doing so, Victoria Browne follows Lundquist's warning against treating pregnancy loss as a "sub-phenomenon" or "sub-

[461] *Eisenberg, A., Murkoff, H. E., & Hathaway, S. E. (1996). What to expect when you're expecting. Workman Pub.*
[462] *On that, see Mackenzie, C. (1995). Abortion and embodiment. In P. Komesaroff (Ed.), Troubled Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Postmodernism, Medical Ethics, and the Body (pp. 38-61). Duke University Press; Stoyles, B.J. (2015), The Value of Pregnancy and the Meaning of Pregnancy Loss. Journal of Social Philosophy, 46, 91-105. See also the stunning autobiographical piece: Lemieux, K. L. (2006). 13 short pieces, but not the whole [t]ruth. Hypatia, 21(1), 74-79.*
[463] *See e.g. Ammon Avalos, L., Galindo, C., & Li, D. K. (2012). A systematic review to calculate background miscarriage rates using life table analysis. Birth Defects Research Part A: Clinical and Molecular Teratology, 94(6), 417-423; Larsen, E. C., Christiansen, O. B., Kolte, A. M., & Macklon, N. (2013). New insights into mechanisms behind miscarriage. BMC medicine, 11(1), 1-10.*
[464] *On memoirs and autobiographical most recent and relevant contributions, see: Freidenfelds, L. (2020). The Myth of the Perfect Pregnancy: A History of Miscarriage in America. Oxford University Press, USA, and: Scuro, J. (2017). The Pregnancy [does-not-equal] Childbearing Project: A Phenomenology of Miscarriage. Rowman & Littlefield.*

category" within the phenomenology of pregnancy.[465] Indeed, this may reinforce the belief that early pregnancy loss, abortion, or miscarriage are exceptional circumstances and extreme cases of "normal pregnancy", thus perpetuating the myth of a "typical pregnancy".[466] This paradigm of normalcy is highly exclusionary and makes it even more difficult for women to deal with the traumas they encounter, by reinforcing associated emotional moods like self-blame, shame, and guilt. As Jennifer Scuro points out in the introduction of *The Pregnancy [does-not-equal] Childbearing Project: A Phenomenology of Miscarriage*,

> When you have been raised and groomed to believe that pregnancy is equivalent to – if not also inherently entailing – the phenomena of labor, childbirth, and motherhood wrapped up in a mythos of unconditional love and desire, anything short of these expectations becomes a site of harm and humiliation[467]

The existential experiences that are counterparts to the "typical pregnancy" – infertility, early pregnancy loss, and abortion – affect from the beginning the qualitative aspects of gestational temporality by jeopardizating the anticipation of a bright future. In this regard, Browne is critical of Young's account of pregnant temporalities, in that there is an insidious identification between pregnant subjectivity and "an expansive sense of time that stretches into a future of motherhood", which overlooks the ways in which loss works to disrupt the idealized and fantasized possible future, "and may indeed be experienced as an arrest, suspension, or undoing of time."[468] A similar objection may be made to Smith's articulation of pregnancy as an in-betweenness. Smith's proposal puts together the issue of temporality and the general – existential – structure of subjective bodily experience. Moving from Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* as stretched between birth and death, and Arendt's remarks on natality, he suggests that we should consider pregnancy as "a particular mode of phenomenological in-between in its own right":

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[465] *Browne, V. (2017), p. 37. Lundquist (2008), p. 137.*
[466] *Mullin, A. (2005). Reconceiving pregnancy and childcare: Ethics, experience, and reproductive labor. Cambridge University Press, p. 45.*
[467] *Scuro (2017), ix.*
[468] *Browne (2017), p. 36.*

> Pregnancy then can be said to be a specific kind of phenomenological "in-between" – a transition between one kind of everydayness (life prior to pregnancy) and the event of birth (termination of pregnancy).[469]

While in this approach Smith reinforces a standard idea of temporal teleology, I should note that concepts of *in-betweenness* and *liminality* have been applied to the gestational experience, but in a totally different and more inclusive context; an example is given by Reiheld's essay *"The event that was nothing": Miscarriage as a liminal event*, wherein the author discusses the liminality of miscarriage, moving from van Gennep and Turner's accounts. In particular, she argues that liminality applies to the construction of identity, given that miscarriage creates a sort of suspension between two clear identities (non-parent and parent):

> Procreation is not only identity-constituting, but sometimes relationship constituting. Pregnancy loss, then, can deal profound damage to both personal identity and to interpersonal relationships. When miscarriage is treated as a medical event instead of an event with a well-understood social place, miscarriage and those who experience it are set off from society, sequestered, and occupy unclear social roles and personal identities.[470]

The person who has experienced early pregnancy loss finds herself "in the archetypal situation of "no-longer" and "not-yet," for she will never parent the child who might have been; neither will any partner she may have."[471] Reiheld singles out other senses of in-betweenness for procreational subjects (the gestating subject and her partner within the process). The first concerns the very phenomenon of procreation: have parents experiencing a miscarriage really procreated? This case applies especially to ART, where the "success" of the procedure is the motivating reason for every step. In this case, the event of miscarriage jeopardizes the phenomenon of the procreation itself, leaving the actors involved unsure and unclear: have they have really procreated?

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[469] *Smith (2016), p. 43.*
[470] *Reiheld, A. (2015). "The event that was nothing": Miscarriage as a liminal event. Journal of Social Philosophy, 46(1), 9–26, p. 11.*
[471] *Reiheld (2015), p. 11.*

A further sense of suspension and liminality is given by the relation between life and death ("Did someone die? Was there a loss of potential life or a loss of life? For many people, this is not clear"[472]), since early pregnancy loss is not easily categorized as the death of a person, due to the uncertain boundaries of fetal uterine life. The dimension of grief derived from an early pregnancy loss could not be framed simply as the loss of another person; what happens instead, as Oele correctly points out, is "a dissolving pregnant body and constellation".[473] Oele's thesis is that early pregnancy loss should be understood within a pre-individual space, as the preterm end of a relationality still in in the process of becoming. This approach acknowledges the liminality of miscarriage, and at the same time it unveils the inadequacy of theoretical and terminological tools commonly used to describe this phenomenon. This is a crucial philosophical point, since it challenges us to understand the *emergence* of the fetal-other as a powerful objection to the notion of the subject as self-discrete and sufficient.

A linear understanding of pregnancy as a condition that starts with fertilization and ends with childbirth completely misses these points, and it also problematically participates in women's senses of shame and brokenness when their pregnancy does not follow the "correct" linear path. As sociological and phenomenological literature has widely argued, miscarriage is often experienced like a failure: your body is not fulfilling the task it is supposed to achieve. Not dissimilar to the experience of infertility, the experience of miscarriage may insinuate to the gestating subject that something is *wrong*.

5.2. The scattered temporalities of pregnancy

As presented in my theoretical framework in section one of this thesis, I am committed to outlining a form of Eidetics that might function as part of an inclusive toolkit for understanding the many declensions and variations of gestational experience. Using this toolkit, the question becomes: what are the essential structures that make gestational experience what it is? Maintaining the gestating subject's perspective as primary (to which the fetal-other emerges in response) leads us to recognize the auto/sun-poietic and inter-subjective features of the gestating subject (as the fetal-other emerges

[472] *"For others, it is – Reiheld (2015) says – But the lack of social agreement puts miscarriage in a space betwixt and between death and life" (p. 13).*
[473] *Oele, M. The Dissolution of the Pregnant City: An Account of Early Miscarriage and the Ephemeral Meaning of Loss, unpublished draft.*

within). As I discussed in the first chapter, the Husserlian method of the *Eidetic* can fruitfully pitch into the contemporary debate, by sketching some essential structures that pertain to every gestational experience. The methodological strategy I apply in the present analysis is based on a revised form of the Eidetics, broadening its scope to include critical phenomenology – in particular the acknowledgement of structural relations that inform one's living experience. The main reason for doing this is that my account should include every possible gestational experience. The richness of the pregnant process does not preclude a philosophical analysis but, on the contrary, it can contribute actively to discussion of *normative* accounts, according to which some pregnancies are said to be more *normal* or *natural* – and, within neoliberal rhetoric, this is often read as *better* – than others. The call for naturalness leads to a form of judgment, e.g. against people who resort to ART. As, Welsh points out that,

> One might experience great anxiety finding out that one cannot have children without medical assistance, thinking one's body is not properly constituted. This kind of brokenness would mirror many other illnesses that bring the body front and centre instead of allowing it to "naturally" fade into the background.[474]

In this regard, Phipps' book *The Politics of the Body: Gender in a Neoliberal and Neoconservative Age* illustrates well how the notion of *nature* functions as a normative concept to blame women who opt for alternatives to normal birth or who are not aligned with the notion that "breast is best", by reversing the originally-empowering call for less medicalization within the reproductive processes.

As it has been observed, gestational experience is subject to *normative* criteria in order to be acknowledged as such. In other words, the very gestational process maintains its identity due to these particular structures, without which it would not be identifiable as *proper* pregnancy. Of course, this methodology seems to present *prima facie* some troubling objections, which I have already briefly tackled – the most insidious of which is the risk of generalization and exclusion. The challenge of including every possible form

[474] *Welsh, T. (2019). Broken Pregnancies. Assisted Reproductive Technology and Temporality. In E. Dahl, C. Falke, & T. E. Eriksen (Eds.). Phenomenology of the Broken Body (pp. 202-215). Routledge.*

of gestational process and bodily experience should not be translated into a normative account of gestating experience, which could exclude some particular experiences. If this happens, the *Eidetics* risks losing its epistemic potential and becomes only another means to naturalize the experience of pregnancy or to draw up another normative account. Rather, if one carries out the analysis carefully, the alternative upshot of an eidetic inquiry may be instead to define a minimal structure of the gestational experience that includes a wide range of experiences. As introduced in the methodological section of my thesis (see chapter one), I employ critical phenomenology, which helps me avoid looking for an artificial and abstract experience of gestation, and rather to acknowledge the micro-perspectives of every possible structural condition that may inform one's personal bodily experience. Following the Merleau-Pontian indication that the human being is constitutively natural-cultural, as well as the influential Beauvoirian concept of situation, I take for granted that the "gestating subject" of my analysis is not an artificial, disembodied, and a-cultural fiction, but has instead an embodied, embedded, and self-navigating experience of pregnancy within a web of social, affective, ecological, and political relationships and forces. As Catriona Mackenzie poignantly argues,

> Pregnancy cannot be thought of simply as a merely "natural" event which just *happens* to women and in relation to which they are passive. Although pregnancy certainly involves biological processes which are beyond the woman's control, these processes are always mediated by the cultural meanings of pregnancy, by the woman's personal and social context, and by the way she constitutes herself in response to these factors through the decisions she makes. [475]

Since pregnancy is a bodily experience, it involves all the complex layers constitutive of the subject. It is epistemically naive to account for pregnancy as a biological or natural experience, due to the fact that it is bodily-situated and, according to the phenomenological approach I employ, originally and eidetically at the very intersection between nature and culture. When we try to grasp the inner temporal structures of pregnancy as an experience, we assume a gaze in dialogue with the various

[475] *Mackenzie (1992), p. 141.*

layers of experiences implied. For this reason, the challenge is to define an eidetic structure open to change and which is reliable in accounting for different kinds of experiences. In this matter, I propose to understand the time of gestation as *scattered temporalities.* I argue that the temporalities of pregnancy are "scattered" precisely due to the experiential structure underlying gestating subject's temporalities – the nonlinear co-existence of medical, social, and personal time, which precludes a homogenous definition of gestational temporality through terms and deadlines. My notion of scattered temporalities is therefore a sharp rejection of the teleological-informed conception of linear gestational times.

To further explore the complexity of gestational temporality, I start with a reference to Alfred Gell's analysis on time in his 1992 book *The anthropology of time: Cultural constructions of temporal maps and images*.[476] In providing a methodological framework of time for anthropological research, he compares Mellor, Gale, and McTaggart's conceptions of time with the phenomenological understanding of the issue (in particular in the works of Husserl). Gell develops McTaggart's idea that time could be conceived respectively as A-series and B-series views, rejecting the relationship of dependence of the B-series on the A-series.[477] The A-series view is premised on pastness-presentness and futurity; time is seen as dynamic and ontological differences individuated between past, present, and future events. That conception implies that "Human subjective time-consciousness (of passage of time) provides appropriate schema for understanding time. Subjective temporality reflects 'becoming' as an objective phenomenon of the universe."[478]

The B-Series view is, instead, constructed around idea comparison between the *before* and *after* of a given event in the temporal flow:

> We also categorize events temporally according to whether they occur before or after one another. Events do not change with respect to this criterion in the way that they do with respect to the criterion of pastness, presentness and futurity.[479]

[476] *Gell, A. (1992). Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images. BERG.*
[477] *Gell (1992), p. 156.*
[478] *Gell (1992), p. 157.*
[479] *Gell (1992), p. 151.*

According to this conception, the sense of pastness, presentness, and futurity arises from "our relation to them as conscious subjects."[480] For the purposes of my analysis, it is important to note that there is no incompatibility between the "event's changing A-series status" and "permanent temporal attributes in the B-series".[481] A pregnant subject dwells within a liminal temporality: on one hand, she begins "counting" from her first missed period (something commonly thought as the beginning); on the other hand, events-to-come establish the sense of her time – the date of presumed term, the morphological ultrasound, the monthly blood test. Intertwined with this B-series time, she is also experiencing clock time: morning, Monday, three p.m.
Meanwhile, she is simply experiencing the flow of time, being and acting according to the A-series:

> Through every waking moment we sense the passage of time, and our daily lives are lived within a set of temporal "horizons" which shift continually, like the landscape viewed from the windows of a moving train, while always retaining their underlying continuity and uniformity of structure. The time we experience immediately – as opposed to the time we "construct" as part of a cultural schema or scientific theory about how the world works – is A-series time.[482]

Within the pregnant self, the two ways of experiencing the time mutually mould one another; pastness, presentness, and futurity are enterlaced with what it was and what will potentially be. In the case at stake, the flow of temporality is in some sense unveiled and disturbed, made salient for the gestating self by the presence of the fetal-other and its medicalization.

It is therefore crucial to make explicit the basic dual levels of temporality; as Wehrle argues, it is possible to "differentiate between a twofold temporality that corresponds with the double aspect (being and having a body) of human embodiment."[483] Having built my

[480] *Gell (1992), p. 157.*
[481] *Gell (1992), p. 158.*
[482] *Gell (1992), p. 221.*
[483] *Wehrle, M. (2020). Being a body and having a body. The twofold temporality of embodied intentionality. Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, 19(3), 499-521, p. 511.*

whole analysis on the distinction between *Körper* and *Leib*, a careful analysis of temporal gestation should attend to the dual levels of temporality at work. If this is true for every embodied experience, this doubling of the body is particularly central to pregnancy due to the rich and complex narratives and prescriptions which govern and norm the pregnant body as an object of medicine. Moreover, pregnancy is an experience where gestating subject's own temporality is partially hetero-directed by fetal growth. The third-person perspective is particularly powerful in the measurement of time, which is clear especially from stages of fetal development. Maintaining that being and having a body are two dimensions of the same bodily experience, pregnant embodiment happens to be doubled or, to employ Young's expression, "split" between medical temporalities and those that the subject lives through. As Browne puts it, "Within lived time, there is no neat division between past, present, and future, and no compulsory or rudimentary chronological temporality."[484] By relying on Husserlian analyses of time, Browne effectively sums up the thesis that lived temporality is not a linear succession of punctual "now" moments, neither is it organized around a static past, present and future. Instead, she points out that,

> The way that time is lived does not conform to a simple, sequential temporal order; rather, temporal experience is always a complex blend of presence and absence, retention and protention, recollection and expectation.[485]

Within her framework, the notion of *polytemporality* refers to the idea that historical time is inherently complex and "produced through the intersection of different temporal layers and strands that combine in distinct ways to produce particular experiences and discursive formations".[486] Browne puts forward a feminist reading of historical time, by focusing on the many layered levels of temporality that mould the epistemic object of Time – as narrative, calendar, and generational time. What is interesting for the present analysis is that this stratification is at work also at a micro-level – namely in the lived experience of the individual i.e. the gestating subject.

In order to grasp the inherent complexity of the gestational temporality, as well as its dynamical modifications in resonance and in response to the emergence of the fetal-

[484] *Browne, V. (2014). Feminism, time, and nonlinear history. Springer, p. 31.*
[485] *Browne (2014), p. 31.*
[486] *Browne (2014), p. 31.*

other, I propose to zoom in on three phenomenological timeframes of pregnant temporality: (1) pre-pregnant temporalities, (2) phenomenology of getting-pregnant, and (3) what it is like to discover one's own pregnancy.

(1) Pre-pregnant temporalities – "Time is running out!"

With the expression *pre-pregnancy*, I refer to the frame of time during which a person may wish to be pregnant at some point in her life and also to the frame of time during which she may actually be pregnant. Before a person is pregnant, she is a person who may or may not wish to become pregnant. Having a certain biological makeup does not imply desire to have a child – refusing every possible form of biological essentialism is a precondition for correctly understanding the temporality of women. Nonetheless, common expressions like "body clock" and "biological clock" convey an idea of temporal flux as something alienated from women's bodies. This widespread Western rhetoric implies that female embodiment should go along with reproduction, which is often considered to be the highest achievement of a woman's life, especially in societies where heteronormative systems of thought and politics are prominent. In Italy, where *new momism*[487] and *intensive mothering*[488] are internalized habits, in 2016 the government, along with the health minister launched a campaign aimed to increase Italians' awareness of their reproductive health, and to give them "useful tools to protect their fertility". According to the governmental website, the target market for the campaign was the young Italian population. In fact, it was a spectacular show of ageist and sexist presuppositions as one of the billboards well shows, where the slogan "Beauty knows no age. Fertility does" goes with a picture of a young, slim, white, smiling woman touching her belly with one hand, and in her other hand she displays an hourglass.[489]

The first layer of women's temporality involves the biological body, which corresponds to the current social normativity around reproduction (and productivity). While the pre-linguistic and objective body is subject to the laws of nature, the "body clock" is socially-constructed and functions to blame women for their choices. If it is indisputable that the production of ovocytes effectively decreases with increasing age, rhetoric parroting "time is running out!" reinforces a sense that "it's now or never",

[487] *Douglas, S., & Michaels, M. (2005). The mommy myth: The idealization of motherhood and how it has undermined all women. Simon and Schuster.*
[488] *Ennis, L. (Ed.). (2014). Intensive Mothering: The Cultural Contradictions of Modern Motherhood. Demeter Press.*
[489] *https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/05/italys-fertility-day-posters-sexist-echoes-of-fascist-past*

putting women under pressure. The desire to have a child, often overlapping with the fear of not having a child, exacerbates the feeling that the body has an "expiration date". The subjective experience of a woman is thus shaped by this complex rhetoric concerning women's bodies, as well as by the increased risks and decreased fertility with higher maternal age. The age factor is a determinant of the qualitative experiences of the pre-pregnant and the un-pregnant phase.

(2) Phenomenology of *getting* pregnant

It may be argued that pregnancy commences with fertilization. This answer, furnished by biomedical knowledge, does not say anything about the lived experience of the gestating subject. *Not* getting pregnant is the counterpart to the realization of the choice/desire to become pregnant. The impossibility of absolute choice over the circumstances of pregnancy precisely raises the issue of *scattered temporalities*. Classical feminist phenomenological reflections around the *contingence* and the *immanence* of the pregnant process help here to understand that one cannot ever have complete agency over the gestational process: neither the "beginning", nor the course or the output of pregnancy itself. As Browne reminds us, "Women with access to birth control may have some control over *not* becoming pregnant, but despite the continuing development of reproductive technologies, no one can fully control when or if they do."[490] On an existential level, a person can simply decide to open a space for pregnancy, but this decision may be taken only under certain privileged circumstances. Not every pregnancy originates from a choice or a desire; for that reason, the categories of wanted and unwanted pregnancy are at the same time unstable and ambiguous, and they fail to account for the contingency intrinsic to the gestational process. As addressed in the methodological section, every pregnancy is peculiar, and yet all pregnancies share *something*. Due to its *morphological* character – in a Goethean sense – philosophical works on pregnancy are always working at the edge of abstraction and normalization. By recognizing that reasons, desires, and involvement of gestating subjects may significantly, we can see that these qualitative variations are not secondary to, or superficial in respect of, the core of the experience – but on the contrary they structure it.

[490] *Browne (2017), p. 33.*

Within the time and existential frame of *getting pregnant*, the cases where the subject is gestating *against* her will reveals a detachment between the anonymous body as a source and place of hospitality and the subjective situation. As Koukal points out,

> The aversely pregnant bodysubject must experience the changes that wash over and through them differently. Insofar as pregnancy is a state they do not desire, and birthing is a possibility they want to refuse, they will experience these phenomena as things that will resist integration into their lived world, and so there will be no gliding, reintegrating 'flow' back into their own bodysubjectivity. [491]

The qualitatively different case of unwanted pregnancies is then explained by Koukal as pertaining to the degree of "unwantedness"; if this helps in distinguishing between wanted and unwanted pregnancies, I state that it is not enough to grasp how the temporal flow may be modified by the circumstances of procreation. One could "not want" a pregnancy simply because it is not the "right time" or because one does not wish to embark upon a path leading to motherhood. Or again, pregnancy may be the outcome of a rape, which makes the temporal mood of the gestation very different.

The common denominator emerging from this analysis is that *getting pregnant* is not a punctual moment, but rather a nonlinear combination of different punctual moments, whose levels are continuously slipping and partially overlapping. Several possibilities may actually happen: one can be pregnant without being aware of it, or *feel* that one is pregnant while not being so, or again one can strongly desire or fear pregnancy to the point that one actually experiences the delusion of being pregnant even if no fetus is present. Furthermore, one might discover pregnancy only when birth pains arrive, or never discover it due to unconsciousness. These possibilities lead us to acknowledge that the qualitative sense of the experience precludes an understanding of pregnant temporalities in terms of trimesters.

Returning to the timeframe of getting pregnant, the gestating subject may find herself in a liminal time zone, wherein she may desire/fear pregnancy. For a woman who is actively looking for a pregnancy – both naturally or via ART (Artificial Reproductive

[491] *Koukal, D. R. (2019). Precarious Embodiment. Feminist Philosophy Quarterly, 5(3), p. 13.*

Technologies) – her fundamental mood could be described in terms of a specific *in-betweenness*. She may be pregnant sooner or later, but there is no guarantee that she will. The kind of temporality the pre-gestating subject experiences is in itself stratified: it is totally subjective and stretched between her present and a *possible* future, but at the same time the biological time of one's anonymous body influences the prospect of pregnancy. As for so-called "wanted pregnancies", a further qualitative difference should be taken into account. Pregnancy may *happen* through natural fecundation or may be *chosen* and *reached* through assisted technologies. The *how* of getting pregnant shapes the temporal structure of the lived experience, by making the moment of the *discovery* of pregnancy present or indefinitely projected in the future. Welsh strongly makes this point, saying that, "One is stretched toward a future where one may or may not experience this situation and to experience it one now needs technological assistance."[492] Relying on her personal experience as a woman in a heterosexual couple who wish to have children, and as a phenomenologist who investigates the issue of pregnancy, she discusses the notion of *brokenness* as applied to the body involved in ART. The temporal dimension is said to be central: in particular, past, present, and future are intertwined and modulated through complex emotional experiences, where hope and fear mark the rhythm of the time,

> The virtual possible child is tied up with the evaluations of if one would need such elaborate measure if one's life had been different, if one had made different choices perhaps. Time extends strangely in the future even when one has received a bad result since the progressive nature of ART often means that one can always try again. Another IVF trial, or now perhaps an egg donation, a sperm donation, an embryo donation.[493]

Past, present, and future slip continuously over one another. Furthermore, the extensive use of technology in these experiences deeply shapes the nature of the experience: "Testing shapes temporality, not just in the sense of the horizon that might hold a child or not shifts with the medical practice, but also insofar as temporality returns again and again to the past." [494] An alternative and complementary temporal experience is rather

[492] *Welsh (2019), p. 208.*
[493] *Welsh (2019), p. 208.*
[494] *Welsh (2019), p. 208.*

given by the disruption of natural time. Sociological inquiries reveal that people undergoing ART experience time as blocked and broken. Far from the normal flow of daily life, a huge number of deadlines begin to structure one's personal sense of the temporal flow:

> Our participants' narrations continually referred to the present moment in its immediacy. It was described referring to an interruption of the flow of time, age and the biological border of one's own possibilities, the perception of being ready, and the present body. ART represented an interruption of our participants' ordinary lives. [...] The flow of time during ART was described with contrasting images of fleeting moments and standing still, duration and waiting, worry about the possibility of losing the moment, and impatience.[495]

The experience of artificial reproductive technologies is so highly medicalized and subject to technological control that biological time becomes the only reliable indication for the gestating self. Time is instead clocked by the emotional moods, the hope, or the exhaustion that the process may provoke in the subjects implied:

> The flow of chronological time implied that biological boundaries were overcome as the biological reproductive deadline approached. This feeling was not affected by age, sex, or number of ART cycles, but by the number of treatments one was willing to endure, the desire for a child, and the fatigue experienced during the reproductive journey.[496]

ART could be understood as an extreme case of the past-present-future scheme that Young argues is present in every experience of pregnancy. In her 1984 essay, she writes that, "pregnant existence entails, finally, a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between past and future".[497] In her framework of splitting subjectivity, the experience of temporality reinforces the

[495] *Cipolletta, S., & Faccio, E. (2013). Time experience during the assisted reproductive journey: A phenomenological analysis of Italian couples' narratives. Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 31(3), 285-298, pp. 289-290.*
[496] *Cipolletta, & Faccio (2013), p. 290.*
[497] *Young (2005), p. 47.*

impression of being stretched between different bodily and existential experiences. The gestating self has a temporality "of movement, growth, and change", [498] where the sense of splitting is made intense by her own affective and emotional responses to the pregnancy itself. In this framework, the presence of the fetal-other is integrated within her temporal structures and, at the same time, this colors and shapes her own sense of waiting for fetal coming-into-being. I thus argue that pregnancy is precisely that experience which unveils human splitting in various modalities of time; the gestational splitting is exacerbated by the fact that fetal-other's growth and development reflect upon her own temporalities. The radical intercorporeality of pregnancy entails that the gestating self's temporality Is intimately co-constituted with the life of the (fetal)other. As Young poignantly puts it,

> The pregnant subject is not simply a splitting in which the two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic. The pregnant woman experiences herself as a source and participant in a creative process. Though she does not plan and direct it, neither does it merely wash over her; rather, she is this process, this change. Time stretches out, moments and days take on a depth because she experiences more changes in herself, her body. Each day, each week, she looks at herself for signs of transformation.[499]

(3) What it is like to discover one's own pregnancy

Nowadays, in Western societies, a woman finds herself pregnant through an investigation and a hermeneutical effort to interpret symptoms commonly related to a (wanted or unwanted) pregnancy, such as a missed period, nausea, or swollen or tender breasts.[500] She cannot be certain of being pregnant until she takes tests that confirm it – her inner instinct, her beliefs, dreams, or fears play a crucial role at this stage of pregnancy, but the ultimate confirmation comes from a biomedical point of view, whose incarnation may be the pregnancy test, and later the medical practitioner:

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[498] *Young (2005), p. 54.*
[499] *Young (2005), p. 54.*
[500] *In a poll on pregnancy symptoms conducted by the American Pregnancy Association: 29% of women surveyed reported a missed period as their first pregnancy symptom 25% indicated that nausea was the first sign of pregnancy 17% reported that a change in their breasts was the initial symptom of pregnancy https://americanpregnancy.org/getting-pregnant/early-pregnancy-symptoms/*

> Women are informed by mail, when the test results come from the lab, or they buy the latest "do-it-yourself" test kit and discover the circular precipitate at the bottom of the urine jar in their own bathroom. [...] The lab report constitutes privileged information supposedly shielded from any third party.[501]

That the discovery of being pregnant comes from a test or a lab report has an effect over gestating self's own temporality; these data open up the possibility of wondering and guessing the biological moment the pregnancy's inception. Indeed, there is no single moment of getting pregnant, but instead we witness different moments that build together the history of one's getting pregnant. This third party information may potentially open up a past frame; the gestating self can retrace moments that may eventually lead us to the current pregnant state. In this regard, technological influence on this frame of pregnant process substantiates in an added complexity through the co-emerging of the sub-personal and personal stages of pregnancy. To better grasp the effects of technological knowledge over the pregnant self's temporality, and to highlight the points of break and overlap within different stages, I briefly propose an excursus in which I consider the thesis that until the XXIth century women may know they are pregnant by relying on their own physical embodiment.

Historically, phenomena expressed through female embodiment have been taken as sign of a pregnancy. Since I cannot extensively give an overview of this topic, I limit myself to the consideration of two case studies. The first is the painting: *A Monk and a Nun*. In 1591, Cornelis van Harlem depicted a scene which was part of a genre widely popular in the XVI century – amorous nuns and monks. The painting may represent a quite popular legend, according to which a Haarlem nun has been accused of having become pregnant. The common belief was that "her motherhood could be detected by squeezing her breast: if milk was expressed, the accusation was true."[502] To try the nun, and prove eventually her guilt, "a monk 'experienced in the medical sciences' squeezes the nun's breast."[503] Instead, a miracle occurs, since "it was not milk, but wine that flowed

[501] *Duden (1993), p. 80. see also: Freidenfelds, L. (2020), in particular chapter 8 "Detecting the baby"; DiCaglio, S. (2017). Staging embryos: Pregnancy, temporality and the history of the Carnegie stages of embryo development. Body & Society, 23(2), 3-24.*
[502] https://www.franshalsmuseum.nl/en/art/a-monk-and-a-nun/
[503] https://www.franshalsmuseum.nl/en/art/a-monk-and-a-nun/

from her breast."[504] Leaving aside the miraculous production and spilling of wine from a nun's breasts, what is interesting to me is that the *confirmation* of nun's pregnancy could be easily obtained by a breast palpation. Her body simply cannot hide – and then should express – her pregnant condition. Another relevant point is that the discovery of her pregnancy must pass through an external examination – in this particular case, as carried out by a monk with some medical knowledge. This ostensibly trivial case brings me to the discussion of the discovery of pregnancy as an intersubjective enterprise. While it could be the case that a woman *feels* her pregnancy, and *guesses* it because of her missed periods, in most cases the ultimate confirmation of her *pregnant condition* needs an external point of view – the one given by a pregnancy test, or by a doctor, or by whomsoever knows something about the functioning lived body. In the case at stake, it is worth noting that the validation comes from a tactile encounter between someone who is recognized as expert and the living body of the pregnant self. It was believed that pregnant embodiment expresses its own condition in the tactile encounter with another person, which leads me to highlight the primary role of *touch* in this encounter. The pregnant body was seen as *Leib*, and believed to express something in an immediate and direct way; by contrast, today's practices of examination take the potentially-pregnant body as a biological entity and process the physiological data issued from examinations.

This leads me to the second case study, which is the phenomenon of quickening. As historians of pregnancy and maternity have shown, between the end of the XVII century and the beginning of the XVIII century, pregnancy has increasingly become an object of study and medical observation, shifting from knowledge of women *for* women to an enterprise in which everything related to reproduction is custody of men. This process comes gradually to fulfilment and, from the second half of the XVIII century, the medical and scientific interest in pregnancy acquires the epistemic boundaries of a topic of knowledge and surveillance of the male gaze.[505] It is highly indicative that, historically, the signal that confirms a pregnancy has been quickening, which could be read as the bodily and motor emergence of the fetal-other. According to the entry 'quickening' in

[504] https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/a-monk-and-a-nun-cornelis-cornelisz-van-haarlem/0wG45kEeBHYdXw?hl=en

[505] *Cossutta, C. (2015). Maternità e biopolitica. Nodi di potere tra scienza e naturalizzazione, in E. Bellè, B. Poggio, & G. Selmi (Eds), Distrincare il nodo genere-potere: sguardi interdisciplinari su politica, lavoro, sessualità e cultura. Atti del III convegno nazionale del Centro di Studi Interdisciplinari di Genere Trento 21 e 22 Febbraio 2014, pp. 420-437, p. 426.*

The Embryo Project, "the point at which a pregnant woman can first feel the movements of the growing embryo or fetus, has long been considered a pivotal moment in pregnancy"[506]. This bodily phenomenon has been employed in various contexts, "ranging from representing the point of ensoulment to determining whether an abortion was legal to indicating the gender of the unborn baby".[507] Duden, in taking into account these societal and epistemic transformations, proposes a comparison between contemporary ways of discovering one's pregnancy and the ancient – immediate and directly self-confirmative – awareness of pregnancy, which usually happened through quickening.[508] She argues that the contemporary belief that women in 1720 "were at the mercy of their bodies",[509] fails to recognize the epistemic authority women had over their own bodily sensations: "A modern woman has no comparable power to redefine her social status by making a statement about her body. In our society, we are accepted as sick, healthy, or pregnant only when we are *certified* as such by a professional".[510] When quickening ceases to serve as an immediate epistemic confirmation of the pregnancy, third-perspective testimony from a medical practitioner became the *conditio sine qua non* of the sedimentation of pregnant identity. Duden makes this point by relying on the studies of Ploucquet, a medico-legal expert and physician who has lived between the XVIII and the XIX century. It is in these years that the sense of touch acquires a new epistemic significance; practitioners stop merely listening to women's sensations and feelings, and they start touching women's bellies. The palpation revealed the presence or absence of a fetus inside the women's body and gave the ultimate validation of her pregnant condition.[511] Ploucquet – Duden states – "wants to transform quickening into an event that can be witnessed by the physician".[512] In doing so, his main goal had been to "bypass society's dependence on the testimony of women", by directly and first-hand touching the woman's belly. In Duden's analysis, this change of paradigm is symptomatic of the

[506] https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/quickening
[507] https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/quickening
[508] *"In this older tradition, pregnancy was a pondered expectation that never became a proven fact. More than a hundred 'signs' for pregnancy were listed in Zedler's Encyclopedia of 1730. They are all presented as mere indicia, or indications, that added new probability to a suspicion. Neither singly nor taken together did they have the power to establish an incontrovertible certainty. Until the moment of quickening, amenorrhea was one more instance of stagnation. Only quickening gave pregnancy an exceptional, hopeful meaning. But even this privileged sign could mislead." Duden, B. (1994). The fetus as an object of our time. RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, 25(1), 132-135, p. 135.*
[509] *Duden (1993), p. 94.*
[510] *Duden (1993), p. 94. My accent.*
[511] *Cossutta (2014), p. 7.*
[512] *Duden (1993), p. 96.*

deprivation of women of their epistemic authority over their bodies. Duden highlights a fracture between the immediacy of one's lived experience and the third-person-perspective of biomedical knowledge.

Along the same lines, the artist El Putnam comments on her artwork entitled *Quickening* (2018), insisting on the immediacy of the affective-motor experience:

> The term quickening refers to the movements of the fetus in early pregnancy. These sensations can only be experienced in the physical state of pregnancy: they are internal, haptic, and also phenomenological, making the pregnant woman the communicator of experience. Antenatal technologies, such as ultrasound, have surpassed reliance on a woman's experience of quickening as indicating pregnancy. The notion functions as an apt metaphor for the border, which encompasses a phenomenological quality that is experienced affectively and cannot be simply reduced to a line on a map.[513]

A point to learn from the notion of quickening is that pregnancy manifests itself as a presence through a motor signal. The being of the fetal-other expresses itself primarily through movements, as I argue in the section dedicated to affective motor schemas. Thus, the first encounter with the possible-other is not given as auto-evident, instead, it is a matter of a nonlinear coupling of her inner feelings and a third-person testimony (objective or subjective) that informs her of the possible-other's presence. The boundaries of the "beginning" are blurred, multiple, and scattered. Thus, the "punctual" occurrence of the beginning of pregnancy is multiple as well: biologically, you become pregnant through sexual intercourse or ART; emotionally, you can find yourself pregnant way before someone confirms that you are (or you are not); at the medical level, analysis gives you the ultimate confirmation that this is happening in your flesh. Despite other cultural contexts establishing the beginning of pregnancy on other bases, the common traits are that being-pregnant at its very beginning is a condition in which you find yourself, due to the presence of some symptoms eventually attributable to a pregnancy, and from that, further investigation can start. Not all the symptoms related to a prospective pregnancy are unequivocal signals of the beginning of the gestational process (e.g.

[513] *http://www.elputnam.com/quickening.html*

amenorrhea could have an alimentary origin). In some cases, women find themselves pregnant only during miscarriage or labour. This may happen in dramatic circumstances, such as when pregnancy is the outcome of the rape of a woman or if it is a case of "denied pregnancy", which Del Giudice defines as "cryptic pregnancy",[514] or again if the pregnancy originates from non-consensual sexual intercourses with women who are psychologically disabled or in a state of unconsciousness. This latter case presents a further specificity, in that the woman cannot participate first-hand in an experience that happens through her body. These considerations show that pregnancy is, from its very origin, an intersubjective experience – intersubjective in that it is mediated through many gazes, voices, and data, as well as cultural, social, historical, and political factors.

In conclusion, I have shown the naïveté and the phenomenological inaccuracy of understanding pregnancy as a mere period of waiting, by insisting instead on the fact that multiple levels are implied in the various timeframes of the pregnant process. From the present analysis, I have demonstrated the complexity of the temporal experience of the gestating self; my focus on role of technology, as well as the insistence of the internal-external points of view, do not convey a complete framework, but rather they have been presented as a means to rethink the temporalities of the pregnant self more broadly.

SECTION 3. THE WHO OF PREGNANCY

6. Fetal alterity

In outlining a phenomenology of pregnancy, the category of *alterity* emerges in all its relevance. While I focused extensively on the experiential structures of the gestating self in chapters two, three, four, and five, I now turn my attention to that *other* which shapes and is shaped by the gestational process – namely, what I define as the "fetal-other". To propose a comprehensive account of the gestational relationship between the fetal-other and the gestating subject, two elements need to be considered: first, the temporal dimension of the gestational process; second, the *in fieri* encounter between the gestating subject and the fetal-other. With regard to the former, I explore gestational temporality as the foundational structure of the self/other distinction from which the fetal-

[514] *Del Giudice, M. (2007). The evolutionary biology of cryptic pregnancy: A re-appraisal of the "denied pregnancy" phenomenon. Medical hypotheses, 68(2), 250-258.*

other *emerges*. For the latter, I argue that the fetal-other and gestating subject are reciprocally shaped by their multi-sensorial relationship, as well as through the mediation of visual, cultural, and social imaginaries and technological devices.

A preliminary mapping of who this *other* is helps to understand the fetal-other philosophically, and open up a space for thinking the fetal-maternal encounter otherwise than the common rhetoric of fetal personalization and personhood. This analysis results in a new conception of fetal alterity, which I argue is comprehensible as eidetically related to the gestating self. By offering an alternative to conceiving the fetal-other the terms of "subjectivity", "rights", and "Life", I pave the way for an eidetic of gestational intersubjectivity. In this thesis, I make a deliberate theoretical choice regarding the *status* afforded to the fetal-other. In the framework I am defending, the fetal alterity represents (1) a subject of experience who calls into question and acts in response to the gestating subject, and (2) a rhetorical formation.

The relationship between the gestating subject and the fetal-other is one of interdependence; it is phenomenologically impossible to conceive of a gestating subject without a fetal-other and, conversely, there is no fetal-other without gestation by a gestating subject. Of course, one may object to this impossibility. In particular, it could be argued that it is, in fact, theoretically possible to conceive of a fetus without a gestating subject (as it may eventually happen in ectogenesis) and, conversely, a gestating subject without a fetus (as effectively happens in cases of pseudocyesis). Since these claims entail various complex arguments, objections, and contra-objections within the metaphysical debate around the ontological category of *pregnancy*, I cannot forward exhaustive explications here, since the trajectory of my analysis follows a different order of consideration and conceptual tools. While ontology aims to define boundaries, to circumscribe fields of existence, and to explain the relationship between organisms and entities, I am not interested in engaging with ontological positions related to the biological realities of the phenomenon of pregnancy. My choice has been, from the very beginning of my research, to treat the gestational process as a phenomenological category, investigating the structures underlying the variety of related experiences.

Thus, my central hypotheses are that the *emergence* of the fetal-other corresponds to the emergence of the gestating subject, and that it is phenomenologically impossible to separate the fetal-other from the gestating subject. Paraphrasing Guenther's statement,

"the child makes the woman a mother, even as the woman 'makes' the child within her own body",[515] I would argue that the fetus indicates the subject is a gestating subject. By contrast, the main focus of many pregnancy narratives (both past and contemporary) tends to be on reproduction as the *act* which entails the coming-into-being of the fetus. This framing fails to acknowledge the temporal dimension of gestating subject's constitution, as well as the complex interactions between plural agents and circumstances.

My point here is intended to clarify that the gestating subject is *also made* through the emergence of the fetal-other. While in the previous chapters I explored the complementary point – that is to say, that the gestating subject *makes* the fetal-other (e.g. *via* maternal imagination) – I would suggest that the constitution of the gestating subject has thus far received insufficient attention from phenomenologists. The question I address in this is therefore as follows: how does the co-constitution of the gestating subject and fetal-other work? Which *phenomenological structures* underlie the givenness of the gestating process? In order to substantiate these two complementary theses (of interdependence and temporal co-constitution), I first try to delineate the blurred boundaries of this *otherness* which authors generally referred to as "baby" or "child". I investigate this terminological choice by mapping out how it bears out in conceiving the gestating subject – her lives sense of the *I can*/*I suffer*, her role, and her participation within the gestational process are also dependent on the status of the being the gestating subject is "carrying".

6.1. The fetus as a *rhetorical formation:* person and patient

Why is it important for a phenomenology of pregnancy to clarify the nature of the fetal alterity? This question is part of a wider call to counteract the general absence of the gestating self from accounts of the gestational process itself, as well from philosophical reflections. To prove my point, I first need to investigate how this alterity is often described, with the aim of disambiguating its status and attending the complexity of the maternal-fetal encounter. As said at the beginning of this chapter, the fetal-other is a subject of experience and a rhetorical formation at the same time. While the layer of lived experience is the topic of the next chapter, I focus now on the construction of the fetal-

[515] *Guenther, L. (2012). The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction. SUNY Press, p. 99.*

other. This step is key to unveiling some tacit presuppositions that *also* actively shape the lived experience of fetal alterity. To put it simply, we cannot understand what is like to be pregnant if we ignore the cultural construction of the fetal-other.

My thesis is that the fetus is, following the apt expression of Michelle Condit, a *rhetorical formation.*[516] As David Thornton explains, "rhetorical formations are historically specific patterns of discourse, or recurring rhetorical forms-images, metaphors, narrative devices."[517] The fetal-other is codified within given societies with a rich apparatus of images, narratives, technological interventions, and beliefs that inform the ways in which people respond affectively to the existence of this alterity. In what follows, I show that the ascription of personhood to the fetal-other is one visible effect of the constructions underlying the fetal-other. The *invention* of the *fetus* as a person with rights, a prospect citizen, and a person has been made possible by the development of techniques of visualization.[518]

With the term fetus, we then refer to a *rhetorical construction;* we are dealing with a fiction of sorts, the characters of which are ascribed by specific and historically-informed ways of conceiving life and death, rights, and the human being. Duden effectively sums up the many facets implied in the definition of the fetus, by arguing that,

- It is an emblem of pop science and is concocted from fragments of laboratory findings detached from their disciplinary context.
- It is the emblem of an object in the womb that reduces the pregnant woman to a transparent vessel.
- It is a fetish for religious scientists. For one sect, this fetish stands for "a life." For others, it is a symbol of manipulation.
- It is used as a flag that symbolizes universal humanity, a banner affirming the object-nature of all fetuses unborn or born.[519]

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[516] *Condit, C. (1999). The meanings of the gene. University of Wisconsin Press.*
[517] *Thornton, D. J. (2011). Brain culture: Neuroscience and popular media. Rutgers University Press, p. 11.*
[518] *For some classical contributions, see e.g., Cartwright, L. (1995). Screening the body: Tracing medicine's visual culture. University of Minnesota Press; Kevles, B. (1997). Naked to the bone: medical imaging in the twentieth century. Rutgers University Press; Van Dijck, J. (2011). The transparent body: A cultural analysis of medical imaging. University of Washington Press; Elkins, J. (2001). The domain of images. Cornell University Press; Morgan, L. (2009). Icons of life: A cultural history of human embryos. University of California Press. Morgan, L. M., & Michaels, M. W. (Eds.). (1999). Fetal subjects, feminist positions. University of Pennsylvania Press. Something similar happens in neuroscience, where the visualized brain has become regarded as independent from the concrete subject, and this perceived independence has been leveraged in causal explanations.*
[519] *Duden (1994), p. 135.*

The notion of the fetus is then an emblem and a fetish, whose ascribed personhood basically makes the gestating self "a transparent vessel" by erasing her political and epistemic agency. Duden's account is precisely concerned with the effects of this conception of the fetal-other on the woman. From the perspective of my research, this definition of the fetus tells only part of the story. To disambiguate the nature of the fetal-other, I first delve into the complex riddle of nomination for this unique kind of alterity.

In constructing the fetal-other, the media implied are of different kinds, with particular potentials; for instance, in the Western world, pregnancy is highly technologically-mediated. Medical visualization influences the relationship between the gestating subject and the fetal-other. By means of images (originally 2d) and videos (4d ultrasounds), the gestating self has a lived experience of expectation, curiosity, and decisions that are specifically enacted through this medium. A good example of this non-immediate character of the fetal-maternal encounter is given by the anticipated sex of the baby-to-be:

> What do we expect when we're expecting, if not a girl or a boy? Prospective parents may choose not to discover the sex of their child until the moment of birth, but this only postpones the inevitable question. At some point, the pronoun "he" or "she" begins to insinuate itself, structuring almost everything that can be said about the newborn. Whether in pregnancy or in the first chaotic weeks of taking care of a new baby, the duality of sexual difference may seem like the only legible signpost in an otherwise inscrutable landscape of tears and other leaky fluids. [...] And when infants are born who do not fit neatly into one or the other category, efforts are routinely made to disambiguate the intersex infant, as if the child would have no future unless recognizable as one or the other sex.[520]

In an era where the sex of fetuses could have been only inferred from maternal physical symptoms or other signs (like her dreams or cravings), the lived experience of the gestating subject was somewhat *more opaque* and the expectations around the sex of the

[520] *Guenther (2013), p. 88.*

baby-to-be only very generic. This example is just one of the several kinds of *mediation* of which pregnant experience is comprised. This mediatory aspect of intersubjective experience in the gestating process does not *follow from* a basic form of intercorporeality, but *originates within* the very process. Nowadays, a Western pregnant woman may imagine and dream about her baby-to-be having some particular traits and dimensions, because she knows about these in advance.

There is agreement within feminist literature in attributing the resignification of fetal status within the XX Century to the popular 1965 issue of *Life*, entitled "Drama of Life before Birth". The Lennart Nilsson's photographs make history, in offering a "portrait" of the "living embryo". I would here like to discuss the linguistic choices made by the editors of that issue. Karen Newman dedicated some interesting pages in her 1996 book "Fetal Positions. Individualism, Science, Visuality"[521] to the captions that go along with Nilsson's pictures. She focuses on the opening assertion "This is the first portrait ever made of a living embryo inside its mother's womb", arguing that the word "portrait" implicitly recognizes the status of personhood to the fetus – through this implicit rhetorical move, the fetus is comparable to a person (since the category of "portrait" applies exactly to individual persons).[522] Furthermore, she points out that the term "mother's womb" is "connotatively powerful in a quite different way from 'uterus'".[523] Indeed, I state that the reference to the mother is intended to give the impression of referring to an actual woman, who is actually carrying a baby – which is not the case since all the pictures of the series except the initial photography do not depict a living embryo, but rather surgically or spontaneously aborted fetuses.[524] Moreover, the use of the expression "mother's womb" apparently attempts to make a scientific picture more personal, whereas it has, in fact, been *constructed* through the mediation of the photographic device. Careful consideration of the "right" words is therefore integral to the contemporary debate around women's and fetal rights, which still turns to similar rhetorical affectations fifty years after this Life issue.

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[521] Newman, K. (1996). "Fetal Positions. Individualism, Science, Visuality". Stanford University Press. On rhetorical apparatus of pregnancy, see among others: Gardner, C. B. (1995). Learning for two: A study in the rhetoric of pregnancy practices. Perspectives on Social Problems, 7, 29-51; Seigel, M. (2013). The rhetoric of pregnancy. University of Chicago Press.
[522] Newman (1996), p. 10.
[523] Newman (1996), p. 11.
[524] Newman (1996), p. 11. For an analysis of the contemporary development of the phenomenon, see: Morgan, L. M. (2006). Strange Anatomy: Gertrude Stein and the Avant-Garde Embryo. Hypatia, 21(1), 15-34.

Indeed, the various expressions we use to refer to a particular object afford meaning to our dispositions and (personal, social, cultural) beliefs constructed around this object. Within the succession of epistemic paradigms and terminological changes, it is possible to read political and technological revolutions. Nowadays, the term *fetus* has increasingly become an intersection of several debates. On juridical level, in some countries the fetus is conceived as a legal person and as a citizen; on rhetorical level, the fetus is constructed as an epistemic subject, able to exercise influence both over itself and the gestating self. These two conceptions feed into one another. The term *fetu*s has the full status of *subject* within legal and medical discourses, where the fetus is, for all intents and purposes, understood as to be a fully-fledged medical *patient*.[525]

At the same time, the visual and rhetorical representations of the fetus have been dramatically decoupled from any reference to the female, maternal body – which is hardly anything new, as various researchers have demonstrated. All in all, the fetus is conceived as a human subject *in fieri* and, for all intents and purposes, a citizen. Commenting on this epistemic framework, Deborah Lupton, researching the status of the *unborn* within contemporary Western society, points out that,

> Unborn human organisms – embryos and foetuses – experience an unprecedented level of discursive prominence in the contemporary era. Debates about the moral status of the unborn, about their claims to personhood and whether they should be treated as full human subjects, have been continuing for a long time, particularly in areas related to religious philosophy, bioethics, and abortion politics. Over the past half-century, however, these debates have become more diversified, intense, and complex in response to a number of social, technological, and economic changes.[526]

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[525] *The nonlinear and mutual relationship between law and medicine in determining the status of the fetus has been a key point at least from Ancient Roman society: see Yan T. (2003). La rilevanza giuridica del venter E. Vezzosi & G. Fiume. Forum: La cittadinanza del feto, Genesis. II/1 (pp. 179-182). See also: Lenow, J. L. (1983). The fetus as a patient: Emerging rights as a person. Am. JL & Med., 9, 1; Harrison, M. R. (1991). The unborn patient: prenatal diagnosis and treatment. Journal of the Japanese Society of Pediatric Surgeons, 27(3), 402-403. Casper, M. J. (1999). The making of the unborn patient. The Lancet, 353(9158), 1103-1104; Dickens, B. M., & Cook, R. J. (2003). Ethical and legal approaches to 'the fetal patient'. International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics, 83(1), 85-91.*

[526] *Lupton, D., The Unborn Human, Living book about Life. http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org/books/The_Unborn_Human*

The pro-life *versus* pro-choice debate epitomises the power of the signification of the unborn.[527] The terminology itself in this debate could be otherwise subject to an alternative re-signification: indeed, the *life* which anti-abortionists purport to defend is already a conceptually specific artefact, which is far from being "natural" or "naïve". The terminological constructions deployed in pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric assume specific ways of considering human life and personhood. As Newman points out,

> Its deliberate linguistic strategies of persuasion – "baby", "person", "life", "womb" – and its mode of visual and rhetorical presentation helped to produce the ideology of "fetal personhood" that has become the centrepiece of the "pro-life" movement.[528]

In support of the emotional impact entailed by fetal imagery, nationalist rhetoric in the US has worked in depicting the fetus as a person:

> The emotional effect and the consequent political support for anti-abortion campaigns depend in large measure on the manipulation of visual images and a nationalist rhetoric that metamorphoses fetus into "baby" and leads to the right claims entailed by that production of "personhood"".[529]

Newman quotes another case in her argument, highlighting that within pro-life rhetoric, the use of the word *fetus* is strongly discouraged. According to Joseph Scheidler, founder of the Pro-Life Action League (PLAL), followers should avoid as much as possible the word "fetus", preferring "baby" or "unborn fetus".[530]
The Pro-Life Action League website still follows these measures. The section "Learn the facts" offers technical advice:

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[527] *On that, see: Manninen, B. (2012). The pro-choice pro-lifer: Battling the false dichotomy. In S. LaChance Adams, & C. R. Lundquist (Eds.), Coming to life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering (pp. 171-192) Fordham University Press; Railsback, C. C. (1982). Pro-life, pro-choice: Different conceptions of value. Women's Studies in Communication, 5(1), 16-28.*
[528] *Newman (1996), p. 10.*
[529] *Newman (1996), p. 23.*
[530] *Newman (1996), p. 23.*

> Some of the most impactful pieces of pro-life information you can share are the details of the development of human life in the womb. Try to memorize as much of this information as you can. In this section, use of the word "baby" has been avoided, because this word presupposes the very thing you're trying to show – the humanity of the unborn – and it may make a staunch abortion supporter tune out the information you're trying to share. Of course, there may be times when you're talking to someone who will respond positively to hearing about "the baby's heartbeat"; in such a case, you should feel free to modify your language.[531]

The suggestion is then to employ the word *fetus* when approaching an individual about whom you do not know their conviction and belief. You might want to use the most common term (fetus) and then switch to the word "baby", which presupposes the humanity of the unborn – only if your interlocutor shows a form of sensitivity related to the humanity of the unborn. Pro-life advocates conceive of the growing being within the gestating subject as a human person who is *not born yet, but who eventually will be born.* While "baby" clearly reveals this teleological nuance, "unborn" appears, at first sight, to be a more neutral term. Unpacking the word shows instead that "unborn" could be read as "not-born" or "not-yet-born"; the unborn is then someone who is expected to be born at a certain point. Thus, in a paradoxical fashion, birth is considered to be the central category of coming into being, but it has also a retro-active power even during the gestational process. The category of birth as *coming into being* is surreptitiously ascribed to the beginning of life marked by the fertilization.

Consistent with this paradigm, biological birth (namely, the very moment of separation of the fetal-other from the gestating body) is marked by ruptures that do not invalidate the underlying continuity between the eggs' fecundation and childbirth, no matter what can *actually* happen during the gestational process. In answer to the question "What are the various stages of development in the womb?", the PLAL website lists the following stages:

[531] *https://prolifeaction.org/fact_type/life-in-the-womb/*

> Zygote – A single-celled human being from fertilization until the first cell division; Embryo – A human being from the time of the first cell division until approximately the eighth week of life; Fetus – A human being from approximately the eighth week of life up until birth.[532]

The "humanity" of the unborn is sustained by the word "embryo", and endures horizontally along all the postnatal development 'stages': "To this list of stages of human development might be added: newborn, infant, toddler, child, adolescent, adult and senior – the continuum of human life which begins with conception."[533] This continuity, if taken for granted, follows a linear developmental succession, wherein the "human fetus" is already a human being, only "smaller and more delicate":

> Human life is a continuum, beginning with the newly conceived zygote, moving through the stages of embryo and fetus on through to adult. Although a fetus doesn't look like an adult yet, neither does a newborn baby.[534]

The same website page offers an etymological parenthesis, intended to reinforce the idea that, from the stage of the embryo, the creature inside the woman's body is a human being and therefore a person; in this case, biological and juridical definitions collapse into a univocal definition. They argue that the word "fetus" is comparable with "infant" or "adult", being a term "used to describe a stage of development": "According to the law of biogenesis, a fetus conceived by human parents, and growing according to the instructions in its own human genetic code, is by definition human."[535]
These passages instructively demonstrate a key *mis*reading of the etymological derivation of the term "fetus". Indeed, the word fetus is not originally related to an unborn human. Instead, it refers to *any* creature developing inside a maternal organism, deriving from the Greek verb *phuo*, which means "to be, to become, to generate, to grow up".[536] As Duden confirms in her analysis of the use of this word, *fetus* originally had a use comparable to

[532] https://prolifeaction.org/fact_type/life-in-the-womb/
[533] https://prolifeaction.org/fact_type/life-in-the-womb/
[534] *And again: "For that matter, neither is an embryo less human, though it looks quite strange to our eyes, even in comparison to a fetus. Still, it is our duty to recognize our common humanity at all stages of development."* https://prolifeaction.org/fact_type/life-in-the-womb/
[535] https://prolifeaction.org/fact_type/life-in-the-womb/
[536] https://www.etimo.it/?term=feto&find=Cerca

the term *soma*, which is translated as *body* but has been used to signify *corpse*.[537] In the essay "The Public Fetus" from the classic book *Disembodying women. Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, we read that,

> After 1800, fetus is occasionally used in speaking of a miscarriage in domestic animals to mean that something has gone wrong and that the unborn creature is dead. Physicians then adopt the term, but theologians stay with the Greek word *embryo*. [...] But up until the time my mother was expecting me, using the term fetus made you into a social worker or a nurse. Ordinarily, a woman was pregnant with a child, would beget a child, or go with child, or she would carry a burden, a birth, a fruit of the womb, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the now obsolete terms of the old vernacular.[538]

Duden further historicises the epistemic status of the pregnant subject and the fetal-other, arguing in particular that contemporary biotechnologies have deeply modified the very experience of pregnancy. Through a combined analysis of the impact of medical-technological mediation and public discourse, she endorses the thesis that, in contemporary Western times, the gestating subject has become framed as an ecosystem and the fetus as an endangered species. Duden argues that this recent change of terminological use is symptomatic of the new epistemic, political, and legal positioning of the subject "fetus", following the intervention of ultrasounds technologies on the politics of "life". Her focus on the term "fetus" is motivated by the constant reference to the mutual shaping of the fetus and the modern woman,[539] as well as to the *fictional* feature of the fetus-subject.[540]

On this subject, Samerski points out that, "Practices and notions of childbearing and personhood center around a newfangled subject: the fetus, an individual hosted in a pregnant woman's womb. Here, human beings do not come into this world by being born

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[537] *See Snell, B. (1953). The discovery of the mind. Blackwell; see also: Holmes, B. (2010). The symptom and the subject: the emergence of the physical body in ancient Greece. Princeton University Press.*
[538] *Duden (1993), p. 53.*
[539] *Duden (1993), p. 5.*
[540] *See: Rapp, R. (2017). "How/Shall we consider the fetus?" in S. Han, S., T. K. Betsinger, & A. B. Scott (Eds.). The Anthropology of the Fetus: Biology, Culture, and Society. Berghahn Books.*

but by being objectified and managed as fetal individuals".[541] The fetus, as a potential human being, is framed through power relations, epistemic assumptions, and socio-technological practices; in the long feminist endeavour to demystify the sacred aura of "Life", understanding the concept of the fetus has been central. The Human Life Protection Act is a startling example of the effacement of gestating subject from the gestational process, in which the life of the fetus is prioritised above the will, feelings, and decisions of the gestating subject – no matter the circumstances of the conception.[542] This responds to the attitude of sacralization presented in the famous issues of "Life".[543]

At the very moment of writing, the Italian Pro-Life movement – called "Provita e Famiglia", "Pro-Life and Family" – recently posted an image on their official Facebook account which sparked public outcry and made the news.[544] The image shows two identical ultrasound images side by side, depicting a "baby-to-be" in a stereotypical pose that resembles a newborn more than a fetus. On the top of the image, a brief caption makes sense of this juxtaposition: "Which of the two has been conceived by a rape?" ("Quale dei due è stato concepito in uno stupro?"). This slogan is intended to present two innocent creatures, supporting the idea that the circumstances of the conception are not relevant because a helpless little creature is growing inside a woman's womb. This depiction is factious and generalist in itself; it works by homogenizing the experiential richness that a gestating subject may navigate and through the idealization of pregnancy as a positive experience *in se*, no matter the concrete situation of the gestating subject. Moreover, there is an implicit threat towards the woman to fulfil a duty – I would say, almost *peri physis* – and preserve the "fruit" of her womb. This kind of toxic narrative is made possible precisely through the construction of the fetus as a creature to be defended, used to compel a woman to "be strong" and make a "choice for the better" – that is to say, with regard to the future of her child. Psychoanalyst scholars and philosophers have

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[541] Samerksi, S. (2016). Pregnancy, Personhood, and the making of the fetus. In L. Disch, & M. Hawkesworth (Eds.). The Oxford handbook of feminist theory. Oxford University Press, p. 699. For further references, cf: Aksoy, S. (2007). The beginning of human life and embryos: a philosophical and theological perspective. Reproductive BioMedicine Online, 14, 86-9; Relph, M. S. (2011). Personhood and the fetus: Settling the dispute. Online Journal of Health Ethics, 7(2); Tauer, C. A. (1985). Personhood and human embryos and fetuses. The Journal of medicine and philosophy, 10(3), 253-266; Williams, C. (2005). Framing the fetus in medical work: rituals and practices. Social Science & Medicine, 60(9), 2085-2095.

[542] See also: https://www.fertstertdialog.com/users/16110-fertility-and-sterility/posts/14376-23617

[543] On the issue of fetal sacralization/fetish, see e.g.: Duden (1994); Taylor, J. S. (2004). A fetish is born: Sonographers and the making of the public fetus. Consuming motherhood, 187-210.

[544] https://www.facebook.com/provitaonlus/photos/a.454494691256425/3105770002795534/?type=3&theater

deeply analyzed (male) projections of heroism, fears, and hope onto the fetal creatures,[545] as possibly-better future citizens. Neurologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst Alessandra Piontelli takes a similar position in her latest book *Il culto del feto. Come è cambiata l'immagine della maternità*,[546] where she employs the powerful expression *fetal crusades* ("crociate fetali") to refer to various forms of extremism, the common denominator of which is the depiction of fetuses as already-born babies in need of protection against the homicidal violence of pro-choice positions.[547] According to her analysis – partially based on her studies and academic references, partially on her direct experience as an academic and a woman – fetuses tend often to be perceived as sweet, undemanding babies, who do not make the mother anxious or keep her awake during the night. They are simultaneously seen as invulnerable and immortal creatures, and also as fragile, pure, innocent souls in need of protection.[548] In resonance with Duden's analysis of *Life*, Piontelli adds that there is a psychoanalytic reason that motivates this connection, related to the need for hope and immortality to exorcise human vulnerability and precarity. From these perspectives, it becomes clear that, in order to make the projection complete, the fetus is characterised as an independent creature, a neoliberal citizen, and a fragile individual. Where, in this framework, is the gestating subject?

The gestating subject is conceived as a mere container of a fetal individual, as recent legal acts have confirmed (see e.g. the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, 2004). In the oft-quoted essay "The Public Fetus", Duden addresses the political meaning of the public showcasing of the fetus, and argues that "the public proliferation of the fetuses has strengthened the demand for administrative control of pregnant women and the extension of legal protection for the fetus against its mother".[549] The perceived antagonism between the gestating subject and the fetus has arisen through the idea that pregnancy is a relationship between two separate and autonomous individuals; this is the same thesis developed by Piontelli, who summarizes the bioethical issues around these issues as a choice between one (the gestating self) and the other (the fetus). She reminds the reader that, until the 1950s in Italy, the husband of the "mother-to-be" was commonly asked to

[545] *On that issue, see e.g., Shildrick, M. (2002). Embodying the monster: Encounters with the vulnerable self. Sage, and Braidotti (2017). This point is central along with my analysis of the monstrosity of the offspring, as well as the maternal imagination.*
[546] *Piontelli, A. (2020). Il culto del feto. Come è cambiata l'immagine della maternità. Raffaello Cortina Editore.*
[547] *Piontelli (2020), p. 145. See in general the whole chapter six, "Il Cittadino feto".*
[548] *Piontelli (2020), p. 146.*
[549] *Duden, (1993), p. 52*

choose whether to save his wife's life or the fetus' life, in cases where one of the two was at risk of death. Furthermore, until the Legge 194 (the Italian law that enshrines the right of abortion), a woman could not undergo the termination of a pregnancy, since the abortion was conceived as a crime against Religion and the Nation.[550] The rise of the fetal-patient as legal and biomedical figure is conceptually linked with this (more or less explicitly alleged) antagonism between the gestating subject and the fetal-other – especially under the influence of two obstetricians: Asim Kurjac in Croatia, and Frank Chevernak in the US. The pair founded the "The Fetus as a Patient" movement,[551] which eventually became the "Association of Perinatal Medicine".[552] This conception of the maternal-fetal relationship is highly influential in decisions about fetal surgery, and poses new challenges in bioethical discourses to which many feminist scholars are responding.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, my question is this: how can feminist scholars take action and unpick this web of presuppositions and operations which dis-empower the gestating subject? According to Samerski, there are three research approaches aimed at deconstructing the interpretation of the fetus as an *unborn person*: (1) giving a historical account of increasing medicalization and technologization of the gestational experience, through which gestating subjects become "managers" of the fetuses; (2) analysing the "culturalization" of the fetal subject, through pre-20th century contexts or non-Western belief systems, to challenge the idea that the meaning of the word "fetus" is an ahistorical and natural fact; (3) re-framing of the theoretical notion of the "subject", with a focus on "relationality, contextuality, and every-day experience"[553] rather than the pre-eminence of autonomy, individuality, discreteness, and self-closure.

The construction of the fetus as a subject (and, on a legal level, as a *person*) is bound up with the words used to signify this; terminological choice implies and expresses beliefs, ontological suppositions, and cultural sedimentations. Austin's famous idea that words make and do things[554] applies here in a peculiar context; the illocutory and

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[550] *Piontelli, A. (2020), p. 157.*

[551] *Indeed, the movement is still active, and it organizes an annual conference, as one can read on its website: https://fetusasapatient.org/ Some further references related to the fetal as a patient, cf. Gallagher, J. (1989). Fetus as patient. In Reproductive Laws for the 1990s (pp. 185-235). Humana Press; Chervenak, F. A., & McCullough, L. B. (1996). The fetus as a patient: an essential ethical concept for maternal-fetal medicine. Journal of Maternal-Fetal Medicine, 5(3), 115-119; Lyerly, A. D., Little, M. O., & Faden, R. R. (2008). A critique of the 'fetus as patient'. The American journal of bioethics, 8(7), 42-44; Chervenak, F. A., & McCullough, L. B. (2017). Ethical dimensions of the fetus as a patient. Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics & Gynaecology, 43, 2-9.*

[552] *Piontelli (2020), p. 157. See Casper (1998).*

[553] *Samerksi (2016), p. 701.*

[554] *Austin, J. L. (1975). How to do things with words. Oxford university press.*

perlocutory levels of communication convey the actual *episteme* and, at the same time, performatively reinforce (or challenge) the possible roles played by the actors implied within the gestational process. Historical and anthropological findings reveal to us that the fetus as a subject is a localized and quite recent invention; Foucault's concept of *archéologie* sheds light on the artificial and highlights the relevance of the words employed in the process of signification. As we read in the conclusive words of *Les Mots et Les Choses*:

> Une chose en tout cas est certaine : c'est que l'homme n'est pas le plus vieux problème ni le plus constant qui se soit posé au savoir humain. En prenant une chronologie relativement courte, et un découpage géographique restreint – la culture européenne depuis le XVIème siècle – on peut être sûr que l'homme y est une invention récente. [...] L'homme est une invention dont l'archéologie de notre pensée montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine.[555]

While Foucault has taken into account the invention of Man, feminist perspectives are, according to my reading, carrying archaeological inquiries through into the study of the fabrication of the subject Fetus. Duden's work has been central in demonstrating the chronological limitations and, indeed, the historical absence of anything understood as a fetal life in the XIXth century Western world. In her analysis in *The woman beneath the skin: A doctor's patients in eighteenth-century Germany*,[556] as well as her essays in *Disembodying women: Perspectives of Pregnancy and the Unborn*, she makes the epistemic limitation of the concept *fetus* clear through a comparison with physics:

> Now, the fetus is definitely not an elementary particle. But it is a notion as alien to whatever was formerly understood to be the contents of the pregnant womb as Planck's nuclear particles are to the atoms of Democritus or Empedocles. I hope I find it easier to argue the past nonexistence of the fetus

[555] *Foucault, M. (1966). Les mots et les choses. Gallimard, p. 398.*
[556] *Duden (1998).*

> than did the great philosopher to argue the nonexistence of physics before Newton.[557]

Newman's work complements that of Duden, showing us that the fetus emerges as a discrete and autonomous subject during the Renaissance, within the same cultural humus that gives birth to the object "Man". This is paralleled in Filippini's research, which traces the European history of the chronological and epistemic correspondence between the emergence of the fetus as a self-contained and discrete *individuum* and of the definition of the human being as a Citizen-Subject. In the late XVIII century, the two processes (the *personalization* of the fetus and the birth of the political and social Citizen) contaminate and reinforce each other.[558] The personalization of the embryo-fetus occurs from mid-XVIII century, when there was a growing interest in the mystery enclosed in the pregnant body, which lead to an unprecedented flourishing of museums displaying foetuses and wax figures of pregnant woman, as well as scientific hypotheses on fetal development.[559] In that context, preformist theories imagine and depict the embryo as a miniature human being; even a weeks-old embryo was conceived as a tiny newborn, having the same expressions and likeness.[560]

Anthropologists have also dismantled the surreptitious universality of the fetal subject by looking at non-Western contexts. In the foreword of the collective volume *The Anthropology of the Fetus: Biology, Culture, and Society*, the anthropologist Rayna Rapp strongly makes this point:

> There is nothing standard about this biological universal as an imagined and material object. Indeed, it is open to the ascription of a surplus of meanings as various stakeholders with interests in gender and generational, institutional, and religious relations all imagine, image, and sometimes contest the status of these creatures-becoming-us.[561]

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[557] *Duden (1993), p. 56.*
[558] *Filippini, N. (2003). La personificazione del feto e l'eclissi della madre. In E. Vezzosi & G. Fiume (Eds.). Forum: La cittadinanza del feto, Genesis. II/1, pp. 182-186. p. 184. See also Filippini, N. (2020).*
[559] *Filippini (2003), p. 183.*
[560] *Quite interesting, I would note that this humanization is at work even two centuries later, in the image that sets the tone to contemporary iconography of the fetus, namely Life reportage by Nillson (1965).*
[561] *Rapp (2017), xii-xiii.*

These two approaches (archaeological-historical and anthropological *lato sensu*) work together in showing the questionability, the unstable boundaries, and the uncertain status of the fetus as an epistemic object. Nonetheless, in Western societies, the fetus is often seen as a natural object, and the stratified construction of their social, cultural, visual, rhetorical, and political meanings is often insidiously hidden. In this context, it becomes necessary also to note the political breadth of these presuppositions; as Grewel notes,

> By making the mother into both the subject and the agent of security, motherhood becomes governmentalized. However, the increasing power of the religious right and the control of reproduction suggest that this subject is also the focus of sovereign and disciplinary power, producing domestic subject-citizens whose empowerment coincides with the needs of the nation and the state.[562]

These considerations compliment Newman's analysis of the role played by visual apparatus and nationalist rhetoric in making the fetus an unborn 'baby' with recognized rights. In exploring the analogy between babies and American war veterans in terms of heroism, innocence, and national martyrdom.[563]

6.2. Naming the alterity

If words are never innocent, which term should we use to describe fetal otherness? The way we choose to define this *coming-into-being* reveals the epistemic and political roles played by the gestating subject. Language can be understood precisely as a "sensitive register of transformations in cultural meanings".[564]

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[562] *Grewal, I. (2006). "Security Moms" in the Early Twentieth-Century United States: The Gender of Security in Neoliberalism. Women's Studies Quarterly, 34(1/2), 25-39, p. 30. On that, see also: Gentile, K. (2013). Biopolitics, trauma and the public fetus: An analysis of preconception care. Subjectivity, 6(2), 153-172; Wetterberg, A. (2004). My body, my choice... my responsibility: The pregnant woman as caretaker of the fetal person. Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 26-49; Ruddick, S. (2007). At the horizons of the subject: Neoliberalism, neo-conservatism and the rights of the child part one: From 'knowing' fetus to 'confused' child. Gender, Place and Culture, 14(5), 513-527.*

[563] *Newman (1996), p. 21. Newman argues that the whole complex corpus of projections of qualities, agencies, and meanings assigned to fetal persons resonates with the those uncritically attributed to American soldiers within American nationalist rhetorical strategies. Newman writes that "A similar equation was set up by Robert Dornan, Republican representative from California, at a so-called Right-to-Life march in January 1991 when he regaled the public with his comparative view on the then-in-progress Gulf war and abortion: 'three babies are lost every minute [to abortion] and in six days we've only lost thirteen soldiers" (pp. 20-21).*

[564] *Basso, K. H. (1967). Semantic Aspects of Linguistic Acculturation 1. American Anthropologist, 69(5), 471-477.*

In her article "Framing the fetus in medical work: rituals and practices", Clare Williams starts her investigation with this useful remark:

> Even the use of the word fetus can be controversial. For obvious reasons, anti-abortionists prefer to use terms such as baby, or unborn child. In contrast, many feminists shy away from using the word baby, not wanting to give the fetus human status. There is a tendency to use the word fetus, although this leads to a further dilemma, as they recognise it to be a word that pregnant women themselves rarely use.[565]

The riddle of nomination appears in its complexity, surpassing the boundaries of a straightforward theoretical investigation. I follow Williams' suggestion and expand it; I contend that many levels organize the linguistic and lived experiences of the "fetus" – among others, there are the medical, the phenomenological-philosophical, and the subjective levels. These three are, of course, co-dependent and draw their respective epistemic premises and outcomes in a flow of exchange with one another. Using different words for the same phenomenon implies specific perspectives – that is to say gazes – on that object. While for doctors and practitioners that creature seen on the ultrasound is a fetus of *x* weeks, for the pregnant subject this could be her child-to-be, a promise of happiness, or alternatively an undesired guest for whom she is perhaps considering a pharmacological or surgical abortion.

On a medical level, denomination relies exclusively on a quantitative ground. The measurable-observable stage of development determines a fetus' potential as a human being, and informs legal and therapeutic decisions. The most common expressions are *Embryo* and *fetus*. The first "is used broadly to denote the conceptus (product of fertilisation of a human ovum by a human sperm) from the moment of fertilisation until the eighth week of development (tenth week of gestation)".[566] From there, the operative concept becomes "fetus" until birth, when medical terminology labels them as infant or baby. [567] This distinction is very useful for translating the gestating experience from an

[565] *Williams, C. (2005). Framing the fetus in medical work: rituals and practices. Social Science & Medicine, 60(9), 2085-2095.*
[566] *Lupton, D. (2013). The Social Worlds of the Unborn. Palgrave Pivot.*
[567] *Lupton (2013).*

experiential to a medical level and then for taking therapeutic action. On the other side, the fact that the process of pregnancy is read through measurable parameters may affect also the auto-representation of the experience as lived through by the gestating subject. Indeed, even before quickening, which has classically been seen as the sign and the confirmation of being pregnant, medical technology can mediate the gestating subject's experience, communicating more than she may otherwise know. As I argued in chapter five, the linear temporality of medicine does not overlap with the affective and emotional inner time of the gestating subject. This issue is an instance of the particular-universal problem I raised within the first chapter, making clear that it represents the backdrop of my whole research.

The continuous conflagration of the third-person and the first-person is a crucial aspect of gestational experience both theoretically and politically, of which the denomination of the *conceptus* is only a symptom. It is in this spirit that, in the book *La rappresentazione del nascituro nell'iconografia anatomica fra Cinque e Ottocento,* Claudia Pancino states that the terminological framework we currently use in referring to the conceptus is one derived from infancy, fairy tales, and ancient words. Italian expressions like "aspetto un bambino" (literally "I'm waiting for a child") or "sono incinta" ("I'm pregnant") are commonly used, while it could be weird to hear a pregnant woman saying "I have an embryo in my uterus".[568] Lupton notes that this is also the case of the anglophone world:

> The very use of the terms 'embryos' and 'foetus', although they are technically medically correct, is highly politicised. Their use positions the unborn as somewhat less human or adorable than do the terms 'infant', 'unborn child' and (especially) 'baby' and such terms are chosen carefully by protagonists in contestations over such issues as abortion and hESC research. Most pregnant women do not use these technical words to describe the unborn entity growing within them, preferring to think of it and talk about it as 'my baby'[569]

[568] *Pancino, C. (2006). La rappresentazione del nascituro tra Cinque e Ottocento. in C. Pancino, & J. d'Yvoire (Eds.) Formato nel segreto: nascituri e feti fra immagini e immaginario dal XVI al XXI secolo. Carocci, p. 23.*
[569] *Lupton (2013), p. 27*

Pancino points out that the expressions *embryo* and *fetus* have only recently entered common discourse, thanks to the development of imaging techniques that make fetal development visible. And yet, there remains a slight discordance between medical definitions and those in lay speech, to the point that Pancino hypothesizes the difficulty of defining clear boundaries between the embryonic and the fetal phases.[570] Deborah Lupton has the same opinion: "These very precise scientific definitions fail to recognise the blurring of the boundaries between embryo, foetus and infant that regularly takes place both in medical and popular discourses and images."[571] In this case, functional medical terminology does not give any information about the lived experience of the gestating subject.

Obstetrics texts also reveal common conceptions of what/who the fetal-other is. In this regard, there is a double theoretical attitude; the fetus is increasingly seen as a separate entity from the gestational subject, and the *in utero* and *post utero* lives have collapsed into the singular definition of a fetus-baby.[572] As I argued in the last section, these two mechanisms are well grounded in Pro-Life rhetorics and in all the movements supporting the 'Fetus as Patient'. According to Nicole Isaacson's analysis, these two "cognitive processes" inform the overall cultural classification of reproduction, being first of all expressed within obstetrics textbooks:

> Close reading of the obstetric narrative indicates that, in addition to these changes, the fetus is not only personified in general terms but is also specifically characterized as a child with a known uterine history. As the category of the fetus-infant becomes more established as a legitimate medical concept, embryology and fetal development researchers write (albeit unwittingly) a history of intrauterine life. This history is created and documented through the fashioning of increasingly elaborate descriptions of the behavior and 'experiences' of this new medical subject.[573]

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[570] *"La scansione delle fasi è diversa nel dizionario medico e in quello della lingua italiana. Un diffuso dizionario presenta definizioni non perfettamente congrue, come se lì si insinuasse chiaramente, tra una definizione e l'altra, la difficoltà di porre un limite preciso, al di là del quale una cosa si trasforma nell'altra" Pancino (2006), p. 25.*
[571] *Lupton, D. (2013), p. 78.*
[572] *Isaacson, N. (1996). The "fetus-infant": Changing classifications of In Utero development in medical texts. In Sociological Forum, 11(3), 457-480.*
[573] *Isaacson (1996), p. 460.*

The process Isaacson is describing here is the personalization of the fetus and the identification between fetus, person, and child; her analysis reaches the conclusion that "the fetus and baby are lumped together to create the fetus-baby, this new category gains status as a separate being legitimately entitled to rights."[574] I am particularly interested in the attribution of childlike qualities to the fetus for a crucial reason. I believe the overlapping of the concepts of motherhood and pregnancy should be carefully distinguished and disambiguated within a phenomenology of the gestational process.

Indeed, referring to the fetus *as if* they were a baby tacitly implies that the gestational process is conceived as a part of the wider experience of motherhood and, specifically, as the preparatory phase to parenthood. The idea that pregnant subjects may inevitably assume the role of mother is quite popular.[575] This presupposition smuggles at least two myths around pregnancy. The first is that the gestational process will end with a childbirth, which does not happen in a very high percentage of the cases. The second is that the gestational process is a phase preceding parenthood, which may not be the case when, for example, a person adopts a child whom she has not gestated or when a person delivers a baby and eventually gives them up for adoption. The concrete potentialities of gestational experience are much more complicated than they appear *prima facie*, and contemporary reproductive technologies further complicate this framework (as in the case of surrogacy). I therefore propose to maintain the distinction between pregnancy as experience and motherhood as institution.

To return to the previous point, Isaacson identifies the process of "extension of childhood into the womb"[576] as entailed by the characterization of the fetus as a child *in utero*, having a known uterine history.[577] A parenthesis is here needed to express a question that I otherwise take for granted, but that is widely discussed within philosophical literature: is the fetus a part of the gestating subject or an independent organism? In spite of the centrality of this issue, I am concerned neither with metaphysical nor bioethical consequences, but rather with the question of intersubjectivity – that, according to some, pertains already during the gestational process, while for others is relevant only after birth. Since I come back to this point in the

[574] *Isaacson (1996), p. 460.*
[575] *Popular literature and self-help books reinforce this idea: see e.g., the best-sellers Murkoff, H. (2016). What to expect when you're expecting. Workman Publishing.*
[576] *Isaacson (1996), p. 460.*
[577] *Isaacson (1996), p. 460.*

next chapter, I limit myself here to a simple distinction. As Heinämaa has argued, in contemporary feminist philosophy there are two conceptions of human generativity, which also inform how the gestational process is conceived. On one hand, some scholars follow Young in accepting that the experience of pregnancy "undermines several distinctions that are central to western philosophy, most importantly the subject-object distinction and the self-other and own-alien distinctions."[578] On the other hand, many scholars state that our birth is the punctual moment when intersubjectivity properly arises, asserting a sharp distinction between "the self and the other". According to this line of argumentation, "the mother-fetus relation would not involve any relations between two corporeal selves; all such relations would be postnatal."[579] With this premise, this process of infantilizing the fetus takes for granted that the gestating subject and fetal-other are separate entities, and that the fetus could be seen as a special kind of newborn.

Isaacson argues that the category of fetus-infant is an extension of babyhood "back in time into the womb as the fetus becomes a specialized type of infant rather than a distinct mental entity different from a baby".[580] Several arguments may advocate that there is a substantial difference between a fetus and a baby – some of them are based on biological findings, others argue on a phenomenological level. Of course, it would be categorically wrong to argue that there is a clear distinction between the kinesthetic movements of the fetus and those of a newborn. For instance, the limbic movements of a newborn are attempts to reach the placental borders, since fetal habits do not abandon the body schema of a newborn immediately. What is interesting for the sake of my present analysis is not so much this *continuity* between the fetal and the newborn behaviors,[581] but rather that the construction of fetal personhood is related to the infantilization of the fetus. The ascription of the capacities of will, desire, thinking, or dreaming to the fetus is problematic when considering the ethical effects they may have on gestating self's agency, but this also gives us important information about what it is like to live *in utero*.

Disambiguating the fetal-infant nexus is then very much needed. The theoretical solution offered by Isaacson to disrupt this paradigm is to look into other disciplines, where the opposite process happens; newborns are seen as postnatal fetuses. As she

[578] *Heinämaa, (2014), p. 12.*
[579] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 1.*
[580] *Isaacson (1996), p. 472.*
[581] *As for a comprehensive analysis of the fetal movements, see Piontelli, (2015).*

argued, the *infantilization of the fetus* poses serious issues for the gestating subject – she fades into invisibility and she has no full agency nor control over her own body. Rather, the inverse process of *fetalization of the infant* is a cognitive strategy employed i.e. by paleoanthropological discourse. The two attitudes respond to epistemic exigence particular to the respective fields of application, but nonetheless a comparison may help to shed light on our common understanding of the fetal-other, which is influenced by medical narratives.

In the classic book *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*,[582] Gould argues that there is a gap between human neonates' physical and cognitive abilities and those of their chimpanzee and gorilla counterparts; human neonates are helpless in comparison. From this finding, Isaacson concludes that "From an evolutionary standpoint, human infants could be classified as fetuses, as they do much of their brain growth and development during their first years of life, growth that in other nonhuman primates occurs within the womb".[583] Applying paleoanthropology's classification may help in understanding the specificity of a particular class of newborn – namely the preterm – since from evolutionary and biological perspectives "a very small preemie is still, by rights, a fetus".[584]
Concluding her analysis, Isaacson provocatively asks, "If we can agree that despite the material evidence to support the newborn's fetus-like characteristic, a baby is not a fetus, why is it that the fetus is increasingly characterized as a baby?"[585]

While an extensive inquiry into this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, it has been my interest in these pages to show that there is an established scholarship, as well as a growing contemporary literature, which is highly engaged in this order of problems. For the sake of my arguments, it is crucial to note that there is no general consensus over the nomination of fetal alterity. Furthermore, the most theoretically problematic issue is that the terminology applied to the pregnant process may reinforce and challenge our common understanding of who the gestating subject is and how she is part of the whole process. The collapse of the category *fetus* into the category *baby* signals a troubling neglect of the gestating subject and raises political and existential issues for the actors

[582] *Gould, S. J. (1977). Ontogeny and phylogeny. Harvard University Press.*
[583] *Isaacson (1996), p. 471.*
[584] *Henig, R. M., & Fletcher, A. B. (1983). Your premature baby. Ballantine Books, p. 4.*
[585] *Isaacson (1996), p. 472.*

involved. On the other side, technological interventions into human reproduction are further complicated by the general framework. In the words of Lupton,

> Further definitions around the unborn have been generated by the IVF, stem cell research and regenerative medicine industries. The cryogenically preserved embryo occupies a particularly ambiguous ontological state. [...] Like the donor cadaver, this type of embryo therefore occupies a marginal state of aliveness, not quite living and not quite dead, not quite human, not quite non-human (Ellison and Karpin 2011, Karpin 2006, Waldby and Squier 2003).[586]

I have briefly outlined some of the most relevant issues deriving from the use of the expression "fetus" within medical discourse, and I also pointed out the tension between the first-person (my baby) and third person (the fetus) perspective. In this regard, what is are the *philosophical* positions in contemporary debates about this? Kingma employs the word "foster", which is broadly employed within metaphysical debates. [587] This term, she explains, "will be used as a term for anything that a gravida can be pregnant with: anything from an early embryo, or perhaps even zygote, up to a fetus-about-to-be-born."[588] Her terminological choice does not imply an homogenous development of the human being gestated by the maternal subject, "but merely that, in terms of their mereological relationship to the gravida, and thus for the purposes of this paper, they can be treated alike."[589] In this perspective, Kingma is not committed "about the precise spatial and temporal boundaries of fosters, and on whether zygotes are fosters"[590]. According to her framework, her inquiries apply to every mammalian organism, and thus the pregnancy of a guinea pig and the pregnancy of a woman are ontologically on the same level. As I mentioned in chapter four, research on the metaphysics of pregnancy is is impressively contributing to discussion on the sub-personal layer of the pregnant

[586] *Lupton (2013), p. 30.*
[587] *Kingma, E. (2020). Nine months. In The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine, 4 (3), 371-386, p. 372.*
[588] *Kingma (2019). Were you a part of your mother? Mind, 128(511), 609-646, p. 611.*
[589] *Kingma (2019), p. 611.*
[590] *Kingma (2019), p. 611.*

process. From the perspective of my investigation, these efforts address the process to a certain extent, but still neglect the lived experience of the gestating subject.

I thus focus on another line of research; within biopolitical reflections, different approaches to denomination are available. As an (emblematic) example, Duden employs the word *unborn* for indicating an embryo, a formed fetus, and a preterm newborn alike. Again, what is overlooked here is the qualitative nuance of experience, as well as an account of temporal distinction and fetal-maternal development. In this way, the embryo and fetus are not explicitly recognized as different (symbolic and existential) interlocutors for the gestating subject.

Within phenomenological literature, there is no significant attention devoted to the notion of coming-into-being, since the analysis tends to centre the lived experience of the gestating subject and centres the relationality of the fetal-maternal encounter. I believe that Young's already-classic idea that *pregnancy does not belong to the gestating subject* defines and at the same time sets the tone for the scope of my inquiry. One of the main criticisms against Young is that she abstracts the fetus from the maternal bodily subject – this is widely acknowledged from feminist critics, according to whom contemporary technologies of visualization and medical surveillance work to erode the experiential co-constitution of the gestating subject and the fetal-other. On this line of research, Francine Wynn proposes an alternative to the common term fetus. Her point of departure is the late Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology, here re-framed within the maternal-fetal encounter as "chiasmatic". Leaving aside for the moment her interesting analysis, I consider here her proposal to substitute the denomination "fetus" with "pre-infant". The reasons she invokes for this change, which is not merely lexical but has a grounded philosophical reason, are double. First, she problematizes the symbolic and medical construction around the term and the concept of *fetus*, which implies a specific bio-politics and control of the baby-to-be, as authors like Duden have largely shown. Wynn claims that this obscures the "chiasmic relationship" that she holds to be the grounding of the experience of pregnancy: "Another obscuring of the chiasmic relationship is demonstrated by the prevalent use of the term 'fetus', a recent technical invention, that appears to have replaced the terms embryo and 'with child'".[591] Narratives of the fetus rely on the basic assumption that technologies of visibility play a larger role in

[591] *Wynn (2002), p.7.*

establishing the health status of the baby-to-be than the personal testimony of the pregnant subject, thus effacing the lived experience of the woman and undermining her epistemic authority. As this order of reflection shows, the main criticism of the concept "fetus" is that it effaces the maternal corporeal potential, which eventually leads to a failure to recognise the gestating subject's role in the process. Given the lack of explicit acknowledgement of her participation within Western culture and philosophy, a phenomenological stance is made much more urgent here because of the political significance of relating one's personal experience. And indeed, underestimating the maternal role could further enable structural violations such as obstetric violence – that I consider, under the suggestion of Sara Cohen Shabot, to be a specifically *gendered* violence. The missing link is here the issue of epistemic authority, and in this regard many scholars follow Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice to conceptualize the power dynamics entailed in the experience of childbirth.[592] Moreover, the preeminence of the fetus' "interests" (as framed in bioethical literature) over the gestating subject's needs, desires, and health have deep consequences on an ethical level.

In order to avoid these issues, Wynn proposes use of the term "pre-infant", by relying on Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the issue of origin, especially in his late work *Le Visible et L'Invisible* (1964). As she notes, the prefix "pre" signifies "the originary, the primordial, the latent and the virtual." "Pre" does not merely indicate the "before" in a linear temporal usage – which, in the case at stake, may have also a problematic connotation of teleological determinism – but it has a fundamental ontological meaning, as it points to irreducibility and to foundation. The expression pre-infant thus "anticipates but does not necessitate the baby's existence".[593] One of the issues with the term "pre-infant" concerns its ethical outcomes; one could argue that the self/other distinction in gestational experience, and the continuity between pre- and post-natal lives, may points towards a pro-life theoretical position. As a possible counter-objection, the term pre-infant perfectly fits with the general idea that everyone has been part of the gestational experience. Put another way, it may convey the idea that every human subject has been a

[592] *Chadwick (2019); Cohen Shabot (2019); Freeman, (2015). Cf. C. Pickles, & J. Herring (2020) (Eds.). Women's Birthing Bodies and the Law. Unauthorised Intimate Examinations, Power and Vulnerability. Hart Publishing; Dotson, K. (2011). Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. Hypatia, 26(2), 236-257; Freeman, L. (2015). Confronting Diminished Epistemic Privilege and Epistemic Injustice in Pregnancy by Challenging a "Panoptics of the Womb". The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine, 40(1), 44-68.*
[593] *Wynn (2002), p. 8.*

pre-infant in the past (namely, in their *in utero* life). In this case, the argument does not work in the opposite sense; the pre-infant is not a subject of experience who will eventually become a person a *person*. My point is much more straightforward: a pre-infant, who would eventually become a child, during the gestational experience, is simply a human being who has a specific kind of relationship with the gestating subject.

Nonetheless, given the difficulties and perplexities that could arise from the term "pre-infant", I suggest instead the expression "fetal-other". While I agree with Wynn, in that the term "fetus" is problematic, it nonetheless helpfully refers to a particular human being in a particular process (the gestational one) without implying teleological development. Moreover, the term *infant* privileges language as the main criterion of human being, since it means literally "who is not able or cannot speak", which only serves to reinstate the teleologically-oriented approach that I rejected in chapter five. Thus, I believe that the expression "pre-infant" simply circumvents the problem, and fails to offer a richer concept on an epistemic level.

The expression *fetal-other* perfectly conveys the sense of a subject of experience who responds to and acts with the gestational subject, in a polarity of (at least) double co-participatory bodily experience; furthermore, the expression *fetal-other* reminds us of the indissoluble inter-corporeality that gestational experience entails, and foregrounds the gestating subject's experience in my analysis. This strategic choice is openly critical of various philosophical positions which, more or less deliberately, assume the fetal point of view as primarily important in the fetal-maternal relationship. This has both epistemic and political implications – for example, in pro-life rhetoric, which tends to present the fetal-other as an independent person e.g. arguing that they enjoy the same rights of an already-born person.

My aim throughout has been to eidetically grasp the *lived relationship* between the gestating subject and the fetal-other. In doing so, I maintain the gestating subject's perspective as primary, and I ask what layers of experience the gestational process entails. This chapter began with an inquiry into the constitution of the fetal-other within the gestational process: when does the fetal-other come into being? I now move onto a new question: how is the fetal-maternal encounter shaped and mediated within the experience of the gestating subject, as an embodied and embedded self?

7. The lived experience of the gestating self

In chapter one, I proposed that Husserlian eidetics might help to demonstrate how every experience of pregnancy involves some essential structures. These structures can be operative to a greater or lesser extent within one's personal experience, but all of which are potentially experienceable by every gestating subject. In this chapter, I here substantively describe the specific kind of bodily modification which the gestating subject may experience as pregnancy.

With these premises in mind, which essential and constitutive features are constitutive of the experience of pregnancy? The most intuitive response may be that pregnancy requires the physical co-presence of a fetal organism and a gestating organism. This answer has already been taken up as the focus of much metaphysical research on pregnancy, as mentioned in chapter four. From a phenomenological perspective, this answer is unsatisfactory, since it does not adequately grasp the corporeal specificity of the experience from the point of view of the gestating subject. Answers founded on a scientific basis – broadly understood, as biological, physiological, or neuroscientific – do not engage with the experiential aspect of the gestating subject. Moreover, this kind of inquiry completely effaces the lived experience of the subject. In other words, the biological presence of a human being within the subject's bodily boundaries does not give information about the kind of experience this subject is navigating. For that reason, I propose a conception of the many intertwined levels of pregnant experience as reciprocally co-constitutive and mutually influenced one another. In this chapter, I then build my argument as follows. First, I situate my analysis within the context of canonical phenomenological investigations into intersubjectivity, by specifying that gestational process entails a form of *radical intercorporeality*. This leads me to focus on the role of touch in establishing the maternal-fetal encounter. The experiential richness of touch complicates the activity-passivity balance within the fetal-maternal couple and opens up a nuanced comprehension of gestational agencies.

7.1. Intersubjectivity and intercorporeality

The topic of intersubjectivity has long been central to the study of phenomenology, and has been intensively debated throughout the whole history of

Western philosophy. Nowadays, the notion of intersubjectivity is expanded and understood from several perspectives beyond the boundaries of phenomenological investigation. With the term *intersubjectivity* one may refer to many phenomena generally attributable to the social dimensions of human life, as well as the many degrees of inter-human interactions. Contemporary phenomenological literature investigates this field, often through the analysis of cases in which the "normal" or "natural" experiences of intersubjectivity are broken or disrupted – for instance, in the pathological phenomena of agoraphobia, dementia, panic, anxiety, schizophrenia, melancholia, depression, or again in case of racist, ableist, and sexist contexts. In considering the case of pregnancy, my thesis is that the experience of pregnancy is intersubjective in that it can be understood eidetically as an embodied relationship with a particular form of otherness – namely, the fetal-other. Hence, an ontological concern with the existence of the fetal-other is beyond the scope of the inquiry; rather, the focus of my analysis is the concrete experience of the gestating subject, the ways she experiences her body as pregnant, and the complex construction and *in fieri* re-framing of her sense of her own corporality, as well as her interactions with an alterity that radically calls into question her navigation of her Life-world, temporality, sense of the reality, and self. Accounts that explain the experience of pregnancy in terms of a rite of passage and preparation for motherhood tend to ignore the fact that the gestational process is first and foremost a specific kind of bodily episode, the realization of which cannot be explained merely through the lens of sociological or psychological analysis or in mere biological terms. The phenomenological approach demonstrates the epistemic benefit of regarding the structures of the experience, being able to maintain the sub-personal level (cells, ovaries, hormones, heartbeat, sight) and the personal level (volitional acts, thoughts, questions, desires) as strictly related and continually in mutual co-constitution.

So, what does it mean that pregnancy is an intersubjective experience? At first sight, this could be framed in at least in two senses. The first is that pregnancy happens within an intersubjective context. This allows us to frame the pregnant process as one of the many bodily experiences which have conditions that are primarily intersubjective, in the very basic sense that it happens because at least two subjects are involved. Since parthenogenesis is not a possibility given to the human body, this seems to be almost tautological; sexual intercourse or techniques of fertilization are the *conditio sine qua non*

for the beginning of a gestation. And yet, one may argue that pregnancy could be given as a personal decision outside the dynamic of a couple. This is, of course, true but does not invalidate my point. Indeed, ART also involves more-than-one subject: not only practitioners and medical staff but also donors. Even if we want to maintain that, in these cases, we witness a mere exchange of bodily parts, one cannot efface the fact that a subject has decided to give away these parts to another. Even maintaining the minimum possible level of personal involvement, this is still an issue of intercorporeality since we are dealing with subjects of experience.[594] In this sense, the intersubjective feature of pregnancy is an essential constraint.

The second sense in which pregnancy might be conceived as an intersubjective experience opens up a more nuanced terrain of investigation. One could argue that pregnancy is intersubjective precisely because it is *made up* of more than one subject or because at least two subjects are involved in the bodily process. This applies both to the sense previously mentioned – that reproduction is not an auto-poietic act – and also, more problematically, in the sense that the gestating subject interacts with another subject, who is the fetal-other. This latter position may be very difficult to sustain in all its possible facets: is the three-weeks-old-fetus-to-be a subject? If yes, how could the practice of abortion be ethically, morally, and legally sustainable? And whose life matters more: that of the fetus or the maternal subject? It is clear that, put in these terms, the investigation reaches a dead end. Or better, I would say that this research becomes extremely salient from the bioethical and moral perspectives, but not equally central for my analysis. I am rather interested in problematizing the relationship between the gestating subject and the fetal-other – that is to say, the *how* of the fetal-maternal encounter.

In chapter six, I briefly considered the distinction between the self as subject of experience (which applies both to the gestating self and to the fetal-other) and the self as a person with self-reflective agency (which applies to the gestating self). This further articulation helps me to frame the pregnant process as an intersubjective experience (in the sense that involves at least two subjects of experience), without any assumptions about the potential status of personhood of the fetal-other.

Having argued that the fetal-other is a subject of experience, and leaving aside questions about their potential personhood, the core questions become the following: how

[594] *Cf: Waldby, C. (2002). Biomedicine, tissue transfer and intercorporeality. Feminist theory, 3(3), 239-254.*

does the gestating subject come to acknowledge the fetal-other as a subject? And what are the mechanisms underlying the constitution of the maternal-fetal polarity? In this regard, my first concern is to show that the perspectives implied within the gestational process are multiple from its very origin. As Beauvoir has helped me to argue, the gestating subject is in a situation and the pregnancy itself is both in a situation and is a situation itself. This means that the gestating subject is not conceived as a philosophical abstraction – namely an artificial and fictional self – but rather as a subject embedded in particular contingencies. The gestating subject has a specific relationship with the fetus; it is simply unsustainable to argue that the pregnant self has a relation with the fetal-other akin to those with her partner or her gynaecologist. A form of mediation is always present within the maternal-fetal relationship.

Within my conceptual proposal, I would like to address the fact that the fetal-other does not *suddenly* appear as a subjectivity, but rather it emerges in a continuous process of interaction and co-constitution with the gestating subject. What is exactly specific to the gestating couple, many authors have argued, is the indeterminacy of the self-boundaries – is this me or you? In this part of my thesis, I suggest that this question could make sense only if we consider the processual and dynamic aspect of the gestational experience. Through acknowledging the temporal feature of the gestational process, the self/other distinction acquires a wider meaning and specifies the changeable kind of relationship between the gestating subject and fetal-other, as a specific form of intercorporeality.

In particular, we are dealing with is a form of *radical* intercorporeality. Dermot Moran notes that the issue of intercorporeality, namely "the manner in which lived bodies interacts with each other", has not received much attention from phenomenological investigations, which have tended to focus on the "first-personally experienced lived body".[595] In considering gestational experience, the lens of intercorporeality allows us to grasp a common feature of the human being – namely, the fact that our own embodiment is not private affair,[596] but originally intercorporeal. As Moran points out, "From the point of view of genesis, all humans experience the original intercorporeality of living and

[595] *Moran (2017), p. 286. See, also: Moran, D. (2010). Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on embodiment, touch and the 'double sensation'. In K. J. Morris (Ed.). Sartre on the Body (pp. 41-66). Palgrave Macmillan; Moran, D. (2015). Between Vision and Touch: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty. In R. Kearney, & B. Treanor (Eds.). Carnal hermeneutics (pp. 214-234). Fordham University Press*
[596] *Weiss (2013), p. 5.*

experiencing within the womb of the mother".[597] The human self finds themselves in an intercorporeal dimension even before their own birth, and conversely the gestating self has some experiences of the fetal-other as living organism inside her – namely kicking, moving, and being *with(in)* her.[598] On a philosophical level, the fact that the human being participates in intercorporeal forms of mutual exchange already in utero means that "the question as to which comes first – monadic egoic consciousness or intersubjectivity – is a false question." [599]

For this reason, I do not empathize with accounts according to which intersubjectivity first emerges at the punctual moment of biological birth, which is conceived as the separation of the fetal-maternal dyad and thus the very condition of every intersubjective possibility. What I find highly problematic is that these accounts overlook the intercorporeal dimension of the intra-uterine experience (from the side of the fetal-other) and of the gestational experience (from the side of the gestating self).

Criticizing Heidegger's silence on the matter of birth, Schües argues that birth is the "original differentiating from the prenatal existence", and the "condition of the possibility of intentionality".[600] Her analysis acknowledges birth as the beginning of one's intentional life, and as the moment from which the subject can make sense of themselves. In her essay *The birth of difference*, we read that, "the child lives in the womb in a steady vital and parasitic symbiosis with the mother and through her with the world."[601] Pre-natal existence is then marked by a certain Being-Toward-Being-There: the life of the fetal-other starts in the gestating self's womb, but their "mode of existence does not have the status of *Dasein* in-the-world".[602] In Schües' view, "The mode of existence of the prenatal being-with is characterized by way of its enclosure since even influences of the environment are 'filtered' through a certain embodiment."[603] Gestational embodiment functions in its permeability with regard to the fetal-other, as I demonstrated in chapter four. However, *contra* Schües, I argue that this actually facilitates a form of

[597] *Moran (2017), p. 286.*
[598] *Moran (2017), p. 286.*
[599] *Moran (2017), p. 287.*
[600] *Schües, C. (1997). The birth of difference. Human Studies, 20(2), 243-252, p. 243. On the philosophical relevance of birth, see Stone, A. (2019). Being born: Birth and philosophy. Oxford University Press.*
[601] *Schües (1997), p. 246.*
[602] *Schües (1997), p. 246.*
[603] *Schües (1997), p. 246.*

mediated *Dasein* for the fetal-other. The pregnant body is not a wall between the fetal-other and the external environment of the gestating self, but rather it has active features.[604]

When the author describes the intra-uterine environment, she simply relies on "constant temperature and light, by the limit of the tactile movement, by a unique acoustic field which consists of the bodily sounds of the mother and the sounds of the world, water and a kind of weightless".[605] This description of fetal-life might be biologically accurate, but it problematically omits all tactile contact between the gestating subject and the fetal other. In other words, it ignores the phenomenological core of the lived experience. According to this description, one may conceive of pregnancy as a period of containment of a potential human being by a self in the world. If we accept this account, it would follow that there is no form of intersubjective encounter between the gestating subject and the fetal other, but rather an indistinct duality that may have some interrelations; the fetus is an undefined entity *inside* a female's body. While I agree that the status of birth should be reconsidered with respect to the constitution of the intentional self, I find this effacing of intra-uterine experiences quite problematic, especially because it overlooks the fact that at some point this alterity who is, as Young has famously said, "me and not me" may potentially become another subject. Taking the perspective of the gestating self as primary, I argue that the fetal-other enters the world well before their biological birth, since they are already in a mutual and asymmetrical relationship with the gestating self.

My thesis is that the fetal-other and the gestating subject effectively have some kind of intersubjective exchange on multisensory levels. Even without assuming a position about the type of subject (or non-subject) the fetal-other may be or not, it is simply undeniable that a specific form of intercorporeality is present and this radical intercorporeality is sense-making. As I have clarified, the fetal-other is a subject of experience and any experiences the fetal-other has happen within and alongside the gestating self. I thus follow Heinämaa, who advocates for an antenatal, intersubjective relationship between the gestating self and the fetal-other. In doing so, she argues that pregnancy involves a unique self-other divide and not forms of "non-distinction" or self-other fusion;[606] the maternal subject and fetal-other, she concludes, are two "separate subsystems". They share an essentially asymmetrical relationship, wherein the gestating

[604] *See chapter four.*
[605] *Schües (1997), p. 246.*
[606] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 43.*

subject is a self and the fetal-other has this potential – a self who may or may not have an experience of the world as an individual and a person. Her central claims are that,

> a primitive self-other relation of mutual awareness and reciprocal gesturing is established prior to the birth of the infant and that the newborn baby is not an egoless tabula rasa for us but has a sensory-motor identity and a potential for communication.[607]

Feminist accounts that assert an oscillation between the self and the other do not clarify the basic structures of intersubjectivity within the pregnant process, since they evade the question as to the relationships are built. Besides, I argue that any account of the specific intersubjectivity constituted and reinforced through gestational processes requires sufficient attention to the *development* of the experience of pregnancy, especially the temporal dimension. Within the experience of pregnancy, the intersubjective relationship is a specific kind of "encounter". There are various reasons why we might conceive of the relationship like this. First of all, the fetal-other is not even understood as another subject from the (ideal) beginning of pregnancy. We are not dealing with another person or individual, rather with an in-process and *in fieri potential* subject, whose structures of existence cannot themselves unfold without depending on continuous interactions with the gestating subject. It is therefore necessary to reconsider what intersubjectivity means, or at least to highlight the specific *quasi* nature of gestational experience and its temporal dimensions. On this matter, Jonna Bornemark states that,

> 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.[608]

In reading the interrelation between a-subjectivity and subjectivity within the gestational process, Bornemark notes that the riddle of the formation of subjectivity in intrauterine

[607] *Heinämaa (2014), p. 44.*
[608] *Bornemark (2016), p. 251.*

life presents a particularly meaningful and powerful challenge to the well-established Western idea of the self. She lingers on the dis/continuity between our intrauterine and post-natal lives, acknowledging that these different kinds of experience equally participate in the "horizontal consciousness of pulsating life within which we live together".[609] Within this anonymous horizon, the oscillation between subjectivity and a-subjectivity is experienced by the gestating subject, "through which both she herself and her child take form."[610] I follow her intuition that the intersubjective relation between the gestating subject and fetal-other is built up *via* mutual and continuous adjustments, and I add that this is constitutively motivated by affective structures such as vulnerability, indeterminacy, and asymmetry.

Bornemark's point allows us also to recognize that several layers are implied both for the fetal-other and the gestating subject. For the fetal-other, while biological birth represents a radical change – entailing multi-sensory stimuli, a new way to experience themselves and alterity, a new encounter with the world – some *traces* of the radical intercorporeality of intra-uterine life nonetheless remain. As for the pregnant self, this means that some "a-subjective" traces also inform her experience after pregnancy. Bornemark includes pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding with the category *Maternal*, as "extraordinary experiences of a-subjectivity that take place within an already develop subjectivity".[611] With this account, we find an implicit acknowledgment of the temporal – or processual – character of pregnancy; in her analysis, the acknowledgement of a specific form of otherness (the fetal-other) is implicit, entailing correspondingly specific forms of intercorporeality and intersubjectivity.

In similar way, Adrienne Rich presents a phenomenology of the fetal-other emergence:

> I [did not] experience the embryo as decisively internal in Freud's terms, but rather, as something inside and of me, yet becoming hourly and daily more separate, on its way to becoming separate from me and of- itself. In early pregnancy the stirring of the fetus felt like ghostly tremors in my own body, later like the movements of a being imprisoned in me; but both sensations

[609] *Bornemark (2016), p. 277.*
[610] *Bornemark (2016), p. 277.*
[611] *Bornemark (2016), p. 277.*

were my sensations, contributing to my sense of physical and psychic space.
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What is described here is a sort of liminal state, that may vary with the passing of time. The degree of corporeal interaction possible between a gestating subject and a three-week-old embryo is hardly comparable to interaction with a forty-week-old fetus. While on a psychological level, it is possible to feel like a mother *before* missed periods, the phenomenological structures of fetal alterity are dependent on the motor development of the fetal-other. This point does not invalidate my thesis; indeed, from the perspective of my investigation, what is interesting is that the relationship between the sensory data (e.g. the fetus moves their limbs) and the lived experience of the gestating self ("I feel it – that's someone else inside me" or, eventually "It's my little girl!"). All in all, it is clear that the quality of the experience is heavily informed by fetal development, which is basically temporal.

In order to explore gestational intercorporeality, contemporary literature has especially engaged with the concepts of *chair* and *chiasm*, as developed in *Le Visible et l'Invisible* or again in the passage in *Psychologie et Pédagogie de l'enfant* dedicated to the gestational experience.[613] As I argued in the second chapter, Merleau-Ponty inaugurates an investigation of the *how* of the gestational polarity, taking it as an established given that the gestating self and fetal-other are two different selves. Still maintaining the perspective of the pregnant subject as primary, a further question needs attention: how does the pregnant subject come to experience the alterity of the fetal-other? A preliminary response may foreground motility; the gestating self feels that someone else is making movements inside her bodily boundaries. On a phenomenological level, the gestating subject and the fetal-other represent a polarity wherein the extremes of distinction are slowly defined over time. In early phases of pregnancy, the self and the other take part in an anonymous relationship, where the boundaries of (inter)subjectivity are blurred. The gestating subject may be involved in the gestational process merely on the sub-personal level, at which point she may be unaware of being effectively pregnant.

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[612] Rich (1995), p. 63.

[613] See Lymer, J. (2011). Merleau-Ponty and the Affective Maternal-Foetal Relation. Parrhesia: a journal of critical philosophy, 13, 126-143; Lymer, J. (2015). Alterity and the maternal in adoptee phenomenology. Parrhesia: a journal of critical philosophy, 24 (189), 189-216; Lymer, J. (2016). Phenomenology of gravidity: Reframing Pregnancy and the Maternal Through Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Derrida. Rowman & Littlefield International; Welsh (2008) and Wynn, F. (1997), (2002).

Biological events like the moment of fertilization are not experienced by the subject; she does not have a proper *experience* of these phenomena. In this phase, the fetal-other is a phantasmatic presence: a hope, a fear, and a pure possibility among many other affective modes. I propose a reading of the emergence of the fetal-other in the gestating subject's perspective through Merleau-Ponty's analysis of child development. I appropriate his analysis of the emergence of children's intersubjectivity in order to describe the gestating self's emerging awareness of the fetal-other.

If we interrogate the concrete experience of the child, intersubjectivity cannot be fully explored from the perspective of empathic encounters; the child is not a solipsistic ego who has to establish a relationship with another ego. As Merleau-Ponty has argued, the child has a syncretic status, where there is no sharp distinction between the self and the other: "Première phase: existence d'une sorte de précommunication, de collectivité anonyme, sans différenciation, sorte d'existence à plusieurs."[614] This collective existence is understood as a sign of plurality and undifferentiation. From there, Merleau-Ponty hypothesizes a second stage of distinction between child's own body and others':

> Deuxième phase : objectivation du corps propre: ségrégation, distinction des individus. [...] La conscience individuelle n'apparaît que plus tard, ainsi que l'objectivation du corps propre qui établit une cloison étranche entre autrui et moi et la constitution d'un autrui et d'un moi comme "êtres humains" en rapport de réciprocité.[615]

Merleau-Ponty's analysis carefully takes into consideration the various phases of the child's life, by engaging with the formation of the body schema and a sense of self. What it is interesting from the perspective of my research is that his point of departure is not a distinct individual Ego, but instead a syncretic non-differentiation from which the subject emerges. Something similar happen precisely within the gestational process, where the fetal-other comes into being through continuous interaction with the gestating self. Conversely, the gestating self is already formed as a self who – unlike a child – already has a mature sense of ownership, agency, and body schema, developed through

[614] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 312.*
[615] *Merleau-Ponty (2001), p. 312.*

sedimented actions, acquired bodily and perceptual habits, and existential situation. Nevertheless, the very experience of pregnancy represents a radical change to the normal or "habitual" body for the (pre)gestating subject. The kind of intersubjectivity that emerges through the progressive "coming into the world" of the fetal-other breaks the status of fusion and ambiguity familiar to the gestating self in the early stages of pregnancy. Young's oft-quoted idea that "I don't feel myself" accurately describes the inception of the pregnant process, but this framing does not grasp the self/other distinction at play while the gestating self perceives the fetal-other as such – that is to say, as an alterity. The process of pregnancy is thereafter a discovery for the pregnant subject, who acquires new bodily habits by learning to live in the world as a pregnant subject. The emergence of the fetal-other enhances and enacts a renewed re-appropriation of bodily integrity.[616] The fluid boundaries of the early stages of pregnancy – when it is effectively impossible to distinguish with certainty the body of the other from my own – leaves room from a renewed sense of self, along with the actual presence of the fetal-other. Bigwood recognizes change and re-configuration in the experience of the gestating self, by pointing out that,

> [The pregnant self] creatively takes up the profound changes of her body, constantly readjusting her body image and weaving subtle relations to a phy sical pulse that has emerged from elsewhere. Motivated by her new mothering body, she makes dramatic changes in her cultural, social, and personal life.[617]

In the experience of pregnancy, she argues, "the metaphysical dichotomous categories of subject and object, and self and other, fail to describe our incarnate situation, for the "subject" is blurred and diffused in pregnancy. A woman is inhabited by a growing sentience that is not truly "other" to herself."[618] This idea that the sense of the self is blurred and uncertain follows Young's thesis that the pregnant subject is splitting. If we carefully follow Young's words, we read that the gestating self experiences her body as her own and, at the same time, as something other than herself,

[616] *See chapter three, in particular: Young (2005) and Depraz (2007).*
[617] *Bigwood (1991), p. 68.*
[618] *Bigwood (1991), p. 68.*

> She experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift and because her bodily self-location is focused on her trunk in addition to her head.[619]

If we delve into the phenomenology of pregnant experience, what we see is instead a new form of subjectivity, the essence of which (in the Husserlian sense of *eidetics*) is *radical intercorporeality* lived through the encounter with the fetal-other. I argue that Young's description is inaccurate if applied to the whole gestational experience, since it fails to account for the *emergence* of the fetal-other. Here is another example from the essay:

> The first movements of the fetus produce this sense of the splitting subject; the fetus's movements are wholly mine, completely within me, conditioning my experience and space. Only I have access to these movements from their origin, as it were. For months only I can witness this life within me, and it is only under my direction of where to put their hands that others can feel these movements.[620]

I disagree with the thesis that fetal-others "are wholly mine", since the gestating self may well perceive the distinction between her own bodily status and the fetal movements. Of course, a state of ambiguity and uncertainty may persist – especially in the early phases of pregnancy. While this is undeniable, the lack of temporal consideration in Young's analysis remains highly problematic, since the sense of alterity is progressively reinforced throughout respective (fetal and gestating) bodily habits. The gestating subject instead experiences a kind of *radical intercorporeality,* which I argue is an eidetic constraint of the gestational process. This form of radical intercorporeality could be easily understood through Merleau-Ponty's notion that the other and I are "organs of the same intercorporeality: "Autrui apparaît par extension de cette compresence, lui et moi sommes come les organes d'une seule intercorporéité".[621] Intercorporeality is thus the key idea for

[619] *Young (2005), p. 46.*
[620] *Young (2005), p. 49.*
[621] *Merleau-Ponty, M. (1965). Éloge de la philosophie. Gallimard, p. 214.*

understanding the radical bodily proximity which characterizes the gestational process. The fetal-other is properly inside the pregnant self's flesh, structuring her bodily boundaries, her sense of ownership, and her agency. In another sense, the gestating self interacts through her own corporality and the multiple relationships (motor, affective, emotional) she develops towards the fetal-other.

7.2. The doubling of touching and being touched

The doubling of the gestating self in terms of self-manifestation (my body as *mine*) and other-manifestation (fetal movements) may be best understood through a phenomenology of gestational touch. In this section, I show that the self-other distinction is well maintained, and even reinforced, with the progression of gestational process. Phenomenological investigations on intercorporeality, along with new materialist insights into the intra-active features of gestational polarity, lead us to ask how this encounter is constituted on a sensory level.

The question I focus on is the following: what happens in the co-constitution of the fetal-self and the gestating-self? Having defined the notion of intercorporeality above, my focus now centres on the role of tactile interactions in constituting this encounter. To grasp the phenomenon of touching in all its relevance, a preliminary step is required which I, in fact, addressed earlier in the thesis. In chapter four, I argued that gestational embodiment must be recognized as having the characteristics of permeability and impressionability, and that this is necessary for understanding fetal-maternal interactions as deployed along different layers. The critiques against the container model and the issues raised by the hospitality model point towards the fact that *something* happens between the gestating self and the fetal-other. This section is aimed at more closely examining this "something", starting with the classical case of two hands touching.

In §36 and §37 of the *Second Volume of Ideas Pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, Husserl focuses on the concept of Sensing (*Empfindnisse*) and offers an explication of the relationship between tactile and visible domains. Notoriously in these writings, the author addresses the issue of corporeality from several angles, opening up a radical re-framing of the simplistic distinction between body and mind. The fine-grained analysis of body offered here could be applied to the unique case of pregnancy, in which two (or more) different bodies exist

in a particular condition of asymmetry, overlapping, and co-constitution – not only at a biological level but also at a phenomenological one. In the Husserlian analysis, the body turns out to be "the perceptual organ of the experiencing subject".[622] The body is perceived from outside, with all the limits and structural rules that pertain to the process of visual perception, some of which can be perceived by touch but cannot be *seen*:

> Touching my left hand, I have touch-appearances, that is to say, I do not just sense, but I perceive and have appearances of a soft, smooth hand, with such a form. The indicational sensations of movement and the representational sensations of touch, which are Objectified as features of the thing 'left hand', belong in fact to my right hand. But when I touch the left hand I also find in it, too, series of touch-sensations, which are 'localized' in it, though these are not constitutive of properties (such as roughness or smoothness of the hand, of this physical thing).[623]

To speak of the physical thing (the left hand) requires an abstraction from the sensations entailed in the act of touching; but including them in the reflection is not merely the additive result of the physical thing plus the sensations: "Then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, but instead it becomes Body, it senses."[624] This case shows that touch between two parts of one's body entails a doubling of the sensations in the two parts of the body engaged in the process. In Husserl's words,

> If this happens by means of some other part of one's body, then the sensation is doubled in the two parts of the body, since each is then precisely for the other an external thing that is touching and acting upon it, and each is at the same time Body.[625]

Hence the body is originally constituted as a physical thing with extension, exhibiting in perception some real properties such as colour, smoothness, hardness, and so on; and the

[622] *Husserl (1989), p. 152.*
[623] *Husserl (1989), p. 152.*
[624] *Husserl (1989), p. 152.*
[625] *Husserl (1989), p. 153.*

body also senses "on it and in it", through a "specifically bodily occurrence" that Husserl defines as *Empfindnisse* and that is missing in the mere physical thing.[626] These localized sensations are defined as "effect-properties"; they arise when the body is touched, pressed, etc., where it is touching and at the time it is touched; "only under certain circumstances do they still endure after the touching takes place".[627] The where and the when of touching entail particular kinds of Sensing; while two inanimate objects can touch each other, the touching of the body provides typical sensations "on it or in it". In the example of one hand touching the other, we witness the unfolding of two sensations, where "each is apprehendable or experienceable in double way".[628]

In discussing the utility of the Husserlian theoretical approach for feminist phenomenologists, Al-Saji argues that the concepts of *Leib* and Sensing might helpfully re-frame classical dichotomies such as subject/object and activity/passivity. Al-Saji re-reads the Husserlian emphasis on touch as an emphasis on affectivity, arguing that,

> through touch, body and world are given in necessary proximity and reciprocity. It is due to this intimacy of touch and because the entire body is a touch surface, continuously in contact with itself and its surroundings, that touch has primacy for Husserl.[629]

The primacy of touch may be detectable in the original fetal-paternal interrelation, where touch is precisely how the gestating self and the fetal-other are constituted experientially. From the point of view of the gestating self, her own body is involved in an internal doubling of tactile sensations that points to a multiple and a continuous slipping of touching and being –touched; she may touch her own belly (the belly also coming into contact with her hand), and in that moment the belly may touch her because the fetal-other makes a movement that reveals them as a living body. "La chose physique qui s'anime"[630] in this case is not a part of her own body, but another organism which is within her body and has its own movement.

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[626] *Husserl (1989), p. 153.*
[627] *Husserl (1989), p. 154.*
[628] *Husserl (1989), p. 154.*
[629] *Al-Saji, A. (2010). Bodies and sensings: On the uses of Husserlian phenomenology for feminist theory. Continental Philosophy Review, 43(1), 13-37, p. 19.*
[630] *Merleau-Ponty (1953), p. 211.*

In discussing the discovery of the intrinsic activity and passivity of the human body, Talia Stähler takes into account the gestational process, by pointing out that,

> […] Pregnancy is not a double sensation in Merleau-Ponty's sense. Double sensations involve two parts of my body touching each other, such that I sense each part from the inside (as touching) and from the outside (as being touched). In pregnancy, my body acquires an additional surface since I can now be touched from the inside. Yet what is touching me is not a part of my own body, but a creature with its own movements which are not in my control, as becomes increasingly clear.[631]

Stähler rethinks Merleau-Ponty's (and Husserl's) analysis of the touching-touched hands, exploring the many other layers involved in gestational touch; the gestating subject's hand touching the belly already demonstrates a double sensation (the hand touching belly's surface and the hand being touched by the belly). A further dimension is given by the internal touch of the fetal-other, which could be fully grasped only (but still tentatively) from the first-person perspective; the touch that the gestating self feels as coming from inside, "the touch by the alien body inside me".[632] At this point, Stähler postulates that the gestating self knows (and she specifies "on the level of theory rather than experience"[633]) that the fetal-other has a human body whose parts and organization she knows and, I add, this is possible due to her experience as a human subject among human subjects. From the kinds of movements that she feels from her inside, she can guess as to whether the touch has been provoked by a foot, a hand, or the head. That a form of *Einfühlung* is possible here is not a matter of "nature"; rather, the gestating self knows that the fetal-other has some physical characteristics, like a head, some limbs, a human-like appearance and *then* may imagine fetal movements. The condition of possibility of this kind of interaction is technologically mediated, to the point that people in the past could not have comparable ideas about fetal movements, nor imagine the shape of the fetus in real time. To better explain this point, physicians may have assumed that the fetus (as a medical idea) has certain features, but they could not predict the shape of

[631] *Stähler (2017), p. 47.*
[632] *Stähler (2017), p. 47.*
[633] *Stähler (2017), p. 47.*

'the fruit of the womb' in a particular woman. Duden explains well that the result of the pregnancy was in principle unknowable until the childbirth ("Pregnancy was a period of uncertainty that would not become a fact until the woman had given birth to a child").[634] In a sentence, "the fetuses we live with today were first conceived not in the womb, but in visualizing technologies."[635] Maintaining that the fetal-other is a rhetorical formation – in the broader sense I considered in chapter six – is helpful in the task of outlining a phenomenology of pregnancy that recognizes the transcendental, the quasi-transcendental and the mundane layers are mutually interrelated, by preventing a lapse into a metaphysical abstraction. The *multimedial* construction of the fetal-other is not phenomenologically secondary to the core of the experience, but instead sneaks into the "pure" experience itself and implies the *homo* is *technologicus* from his very origin.[636] As for touch, my analysis shows that the bodily phenomenon of maternal-fetal touch is in itself multi-levelled and its comprehension is partially mediated by the knowledge the gestating self has of the fetal-other corporeality. In this regard, the mere physical sensations may be immediately correlated with the technologically-fabricated image presented to the gestating self of her growing potential child. The original experience of intercorporeal relations between the fetal-other and the gestating subject is held in the multi-layered processes of motion, which primarily pertains to the sense of touch. In the present analysis, I focus exclusively on touch carried "voluntarily" by the maternal subject; nonetheless, most touch that provokes responses by the fetal-other are unconscious – digestion, and involuntary muscular movements play a key role in the motor process and self-constitution of both selves. According to Bornemark, there are at least three kinds of motion: "motions that include a change of position, pulsating motions, and smaller motions of touch".[637] If the first two are mostly kinaesthetic, the third constitutes an interplay between different parts,

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[634] *Duden, B. (1999). The fetus on the "farther shore: Toward a History of the Unborn. In L.M. Morgan, M. W. Michaels (Eds.). Fetal subjects, feminist positions. (pp. 13-25), p. 16.*
[635] *Duden (1999), p.14*
[636] *I borrow here the expression coined by Longo, G. O. (2012). Homo technologicus, Meltemi. Taking into consideration the fact that pregnancy is nowadays a highly-medicalized phenomenon is not only a merely empirical note, since it rather modifies the very experiential structures of what is like to being pregnant. The medicalization of pregnancy could be expressed in two facets related to the touch: the sometimes-neutral touch of the (diagnostic) objects and the violent and undesired touch of practitioners, when it comes to cases of obstetric violence.*
[637] *Bornemark (2016), p. 255.*

> The third kind of motion includes the difference between touching oneself and touching the womb or placenta. 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.[638]

In the intra-uterine experience, the role of touch is then crucial in the constitution of gestating and fetal selves. More specifically, touch exemplifies the liminal relationship between the gestating subject and fetal-other; always in-between subject and object, activity and passivity, the fetal-maternal relationship is constituted by reciprocal and rhythmically-adjusted movements. Furthermore, touch represents the first medium of interaction between the fetal-other and gestating self, and it involves not only the development of the fetus but also the self-awareness of the gestating subject. A counterexample is given by the empirical fact that the denial of pregnancy[639] may be related to the impossibility of acknowledging the presence and movements of the fetal-other.

Engaging with epigenetic studies gives a complementary explanation to this intuition; the first sense to emerge in child's development is touch, at around eight weeks of gestation.[640] From there, "The developing fetus is constantly touched by its environment, the placenta, the umbilical cord, amniotic fluid, and the uterine surface and touches its body passively or actively as self-initiated movements develop."[641] From 26 weeks, the fetal movement rates increase, and develop into a form of body schema:[642]

> Hand-to-face interaction appears early on (Myowa-Yamakoshi & Takeshita, 2006) and the aim of such movements are becoming goal-oriented (Trevarthen, 1985), that is intentionally initiated by 22 weeks of gestation (Zoia et al., 2007).[643]

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[638] *Bornemark (2016), p. 255.*
[639] *On the condition called pregnancy denial, see e.g.: Jenkins et al. (2011).*
[640] *Hooker, D. (1952). Early human fetal activity. The Anatomical Record, 113(4), 503-504; Humphrey, T., Hooker, D. (1959). Double simultaneous stimulation of human fetuses and the anatomical patterns underlying the reflexes elicited. The Journal of Comparative Neurology, 112, 75-102; Piontelli, A., Bocconi, L., Kustermann, A., Tassis, B., Zoppini, C., & Nicolini, U. (1997). Patterns of evoked behaviour in twin pregnancies during the first 22 weeks of gestation. Early Human Development, 50(1), 39-45; Piontelli, A. (2015). Development of normal fetal movements. Springer.*
[641] *Marx, V., Nagi, E. (2017). Fetal behavioral responses to the touch of the mother's abdomen: A Frame-by-frame analysis. Infant Behavior & Development, 47, 83-91, p. 83.*
[642] *Lymer (2011), (2016).*
[643] *Marx & Nagy (2017), p. 83.*

Early on, touching becomes the means of exploring themselves and their surroundings; the fetal-other touches themselves, but they also touch and are touched by all the elements that constitute their environment. Since the (fetal) body is not only *Körper*, but also *Leib*, the gestating subject may respond to fetal movements by re-adjusting her actual bodily position, or by simply acknowledging the presence of another self within her bodily boundaries in emotionally composite and differentiated ways. Even though a large body of research shows empirical evidence of the importance of touch to the healthy development and growth of child (especially in cases such as premature neonates, for whom in many countries "kangaroo care" is standard practice,[644] little attention has been paid to gestational touch. Nonetheless, in a 2017 study, Marx and Nagy argue that,

> The mother is a special source of somatosensory stimulation during fetal development. It is plausible to assume that mothers' touch of the abdomen during pregnancy affects the fetus directly via external tactile stimulation exerted by the pressure of the hands via the abdomen and via internal maternal muscle and accompanying body movements. Mothers automatically engage in tactile stimulation of their abdomen, 'rubbing their bellies' in order to feel, to calm, to stimulate, or to interact with the fetus. This abdominal stimulation exerts a slight pressure, and as a result, the abdomen, including the uterine environment moves and thus, passively stimulate and touch the fetus.[645]

In their research, fetuses were observed to increase their movements (with arm, mouth and head movements) when the maternal subject touched the abdomen compared when she did nothing in a control condition. Maternal touch, therefore, triggers fetal responses that actively help them to develop their sense of spatiality. Touch, in this condition, helps to reinforce the intertwined and mutual distinction between the gestating subject and fetal-other. Protosocial interactions are attested also in cases of twin pregnancies; in 2010, a study has revealed that, from the fourteenth week of gestation,

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[644] *Feldman, R., Eidelman. A. I. (2003). Skin-to-skin contact (Kangaroo Care) accelerates autonomic and neurobehavioural maturation in preterm infants. Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology, 45(4), 274-281.*
[645] *Marx & Nagy (2017), p. 84.*

the two fetuses show different movements of the upper limbs when aimed at their own body or at the twin's.[646] From there, Ammaniti and Gallese conclude that even before birth the human motor system displays some functional properties that enable social interactions.[647]

Fetal-maternal touch is emblematic of this "proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself".[648] Touch is a means of making the subject.[649] If we follow Karen Barad's intuition that "measurement is surely a form of touching", [650] fetal-maternal touch includes, as a phenomenon, all forms of measurement *via* skin – including, and perhaps above all, ultrasound scans. The touch of others (gestating self's partner, family, friends, midwives, obstetrics, even strangers), and of other-objects, participate in fetal-maternal touch, which is not *only* a private affair between the gestating self and the fetal-other, but rather it is mediated by the situatedness of her being-in-the-world. The pregnant self is thus touching and touched by the many others. This touch is sometimes materially led by an object, like in the case of ultrasound. Lingering on Barad's account, De La Bellacasa points out that "It is not only the experimenter/observer/human agent who sees, touches, knows, intervenes and manipulates the universe: there is intra-touching."[651] In the case of ultrasound, the gestating self's belly is touched by a device the aim of which is to see inside her body and, in particular, the fetal-other:

> touching technologies are material and meaning producing embodied practices entangled with the very matter of relating-being. As such, they cannot be about touch and get, or about immediate access to more reality. Reality is a process of intra-active touch.[652]

This pertains to this kind of interaction explored by Duden – namely, the transition between a carnal tactile self-comprehension of the pregnancy and the "optical hexis",

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[646] *Castiello, U., Becchio, C., Zoia, S., Nelini, C., Sartori, L., Blason, L., ... & Gallese, V. (2010). Wired to be social: the ontogeny of human interaction. PloS one, 5(10), e13199.*
[647] *Ammaniti, M., & Gallese, V. (2014). The birth of intersubjectivity: Psychodynamics, neurobiology, and the self. WW Norton & Company.*
[648] *Barad, K. (2012). On touching – The inhuman that therefore I am. differences, 23(3), 206-223.*
[649] *Fugali, E. (2016). The Role of Tactility in the Constitution of Embodied Experience. Phenomenology and Mind, (4), 54-60.*
[650] *Barad (2012), p. 208.*
[651] *De La Bellacasa, M. P. (2009). Touching technologies, touching visions. The reclaiming of sensorial experience and the politics of speculative thinking. Subjectivity, 28(1), 297-315, p. 309.*
[652] *De La Bellacasa (2009), p. 309.*

which occurs "when the 'state' of a person is oriented primarily by visual representation, imagination, or graphics." [653] Despite the relevance of Duden's arguments, I argue that a typical ultrasound exam exemplifies the intertwined relations between touch and vision in human life, showing also that the pregnant process is still a matter of touch, and not exclusively of "optical hexis".[654] Having investigated the phenomenon of touch from the perspective of the gestating self, I consider how touch is performed and experienced by the fetal-other.

Jane Lymer argues that pregnant embodiment includes choreographic movements; on her reading, pregnancy entails a form of continuous bodily negotiation and renegotiation which, as we have seen, may lead the gestating self experiencing her own corporeality more intensely than before the pregnancy. The mutual adjustments acquire the form of a choreography, in that "We need to *choreograph* – he moves and then I shift to facilitate the pressure – I walk rhythmically and he lolls off to sleep."[655] These choreographic movements require mutual adjustments and a peculiar bodily modality which responds to the other and enhances certain responses from the other, in a biunivocal and reciprocal corporeal dialogue. This also means that the gestating subject's "I can" is partially moulded by fetal-other's own movements, to the point that they have motor agency that is shared and continuously re-negotiated; the gestating self may want to walk, but she suddenly stops because of a (possible) kick of the fetus, or again, she may want to sleep, but cannot because of the abrupt and intense changes of position of the fetus. If we translate this intuition into phenomenological terms, we discover that the gestating self has a peculiar form of bodily agency which is constitutively mediated by the presence of the fetal-other. The first character of gestating self's agency is that it is eidetically dependent on an alien presence the weight and movements of which may prevent her from fulfilling certain actions, or from completing some tasks that she used to perform routinely. Some habits are thus impossible to maintain, and some new (temporary) habits are performed and reinforced during pregnancy. While this kind of change of bodily habits is powered by and through many circumstances – momentary or

[653] *Duden, (1993), p. 91.*
[654] *Duden (1993), p. 91. A further sense of the touch that I limit myself to quote here, is the one of vaginal examinations: the intrusive touch from outside-inside. the intrusive touch from inside (vaginal examination) see Cohen Shabot, S. C. (2020). Why 'normal' feels so bad: violence and vaginal examinations during labour–a (feminist) phenomenology. Feminist Theory.*
[655] *Lymer (2011), p. 130. My emphasis.*

chronic illness, sport, ageing, or physical development – pregnancy exhibits a specific detachment between one agency and ownership. In fact, the gestating self may be aware of some movements that she does not perform in first person, but that she feels and recognizes as effectively happening in her own bodily boundaries. This case is complementary to those happening in a pathological context, where one may feel a part of their body but be unable to move it, or again where one does not recognize a part of their body as one's own. The main difference that I would like to stress, in order to prevent any misunderstanding, is that within the pregnancy the "disruptions" to bodily experience is primarily enhanced by the fetal-other. When the gestating self feels the other kicking, she acknowledges that she is not the agent of that movement, while at the same time she feels it in her own body.

To sum up, my starting thesis was that intra-uterine life is not a period of syncretism between the gestating self and the fetal-other, but instead it is a process of separation between two entities. Having explored the phenomenological level of this interaction, the main finding is that the fetal=other emerges through time and not suddenly. While biological, anatomical, and physiological micro-separations happen from the very beginning of fertilization, on phenomenological level the gestating subject may encounter the alterity of the fetus across many emotional and affective experiences. After the phenomenological reduction, it is clear that embryonic forms of intersubjectivity mould the sense of self/other for the gestating subject. The dialogue between classic phenomenological literature (especially Husserl and Merleau-Ponty) and some instances proposed by new materialism (such as in Barad's philosophical work) enable an understanding of the gestational process as a relation, which performatively constitutes the gestating subject and the fetal other.

7.3. The gestational *agency*

Thanks to this analysis of touch, we are now able to respond to the following question: How is it that the fetal-other became a pole of interaction along with the gestating self? The gestating subject and the fetal-other share something more than a mere "encounter"; they are constitutively involved in the process of making and being made, sharing multi-levelled interactions that reinforce their respective beings. To explain this crucial point, let me refer to anthropologist Alfred Gell's analysis of maternal-child

relations. He explains that the mother and the child are two terms or *relata* of a relationship that constitutes both of them as such:

> But it is not the visible, physical, woman who is the term in the relation she has with her child (also a term). A woman is a mother not because she physically exists, has arms and legs and other functioning biological organs, and not necessarily because she has physically given birth. Not only are there many non-biological forms of motherhood (by adoption, for instance) but there is also no logically necessary reason why parturition, as such, should result in the particular relationship we think of as being a mother.[656]

Within his reflections, the mother-child relation belongs to the category of social relations where "relating relata (or terms) [...] are identifiable only in and through the relationship itself, as with mothers and children."[657] The gestational polarity exists and can be grasped phenomenologically only through the relations by which it is moulded. This life of the *other inside* gives the gestating self her status as such, both on corporeal and affective levels. Between the two poles there is a process of mutual co-constitution, which deeply redefines the *agency* of the gestating self. As I showed earlier, the pregnant subject's sense of self *qua* pregnant proceeds through adjustments primarily enhanced by the fetal-other, as well as by her existential situation, and the *agency* of the gestating self is mediated (modified, moulded, hampered, redefined) by this alterity.

Staying with the concept of *agency*, it is quite simple to fall into misunderstanding. Within phenomenology alone, the term has different meanings, and these literally explode in other fields. The idea of agency is internally complicated, and by relying on Husserlian philosophy, it has at least three facets: "I move", "I do", and "I can". As Sheets-Johnstone points out, the temporal sequence from the one to the other "constitutes the three phenomenological insights that are the foundational stepping stones of agency."[658] In talking about the agencies implied within the gestational process, it is clear that there is an asymmetry between the gestating self and the fetal-other; while the

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[656] *Gell, A. (1999). The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams. Athlone.*
[657] *Gell, A. (1999), p. 70.*
[658] *Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2017). Agency: Phenomenological insights and dynamic complementarities. The humanistic psychologist, 45(1), p. 4.*

gestating self is an agent in the sense of *I can*, the fetal-other is only involved in primal animation, which Sheets-Johnstone defines as "the foundational reality of being a moving being, and a moving being from embryonic-fetal development onward, including being an affectively moving being."[659] The primal animation – namely the I move – is "simply there" and "there from the beginnings of life in utero".[660] This analysis leads me to argue that the fetal-other has a form of peculiar agency, *qua* lived organism and potential subject.

Along similar lines, Karen Barad argues that agency "is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has."[661] In her framework, agency is not an attribute of subjects or objects that exist as such, but rather "is a matter of making iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity (including enfoldings and other topological reconfigurings)."[662] Agency then emerges in particular "material-discursive"[73] apparatuses and always in a relation. It is specifically in relation to fetal alterity that Barad raises the issue of the potential agency of the fetus. The macro-topic she addresses is the attribution of agency to non-human animals and eventually to objects, which is something broadly debated both in the literature of new materialisms, posthumanism, and realist ontologies, but also within the field of anthropology and philosophy of art. At this point in my argument, it is clear that the fetal-other exercises a specific kind of agency, in that the gestating self is *affected* by their lived presence. In some sense, the gestating subject displays a primary agency with the potential to affect and be affected by the fetal-other; in the pregnant process, we witness a unique juxtaposition of agency and *pathos*, along with a detachment between agency and ownership. This does not emerge only within the lived bodily experiences of the gestating self, but pertains the totality of the experience. Through the analysis of Barad, I am going to ask what kind of agency could be attributed to the fetal-other.

Barad addresses the issue by considering Casper's pivotal critique of the fetus as patient; her argument is that the construction of the fetus as patient effaces maternal subjectivity; the attribution of agency to the foetuses "may render pregnant women invisible as human actors and reduce them to technomaternal environments for fetal

[659] *Sheets-Johnstone (2017), p. 5.*
[660] *Sheets-Johnstone (2017), p. 5. See also Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2011). The primacy of movement. John Benjamins.*
[661] *Barad, K. (2007). Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning. Duke university Press, p. 214.*
[662] *Barad (2007), p. 214.*

patients".[663] Barad responds to Caspar's position by raising the objection that in some circumstances it could be strategically necessary to "invoke fetal agency to counter the material effects of sexism or other forms of oppression",[664] by considering the case of aborted female foetuses in some Indian contexts. Barad's point is primarily motivated by a political urgency and in line with a comprehension of agency as intrinsically relational, which leads her to offer a nuanced understanding of fetal agency. I cannot say I fully agree with the thesis she expresses when she provocatively asks: "Where would particular kinds of feminist interventions, such as midwifery as an alternative to (over)medicalized birthing practices, be without acknowledging the fact that the fetus 'kicks back'?" [665]

I regard feminist interventions as aiming to give back pregnant women the epistemic agency they deserve, which eventually means taking into account the fetal-other as such. This project is aligned with a restoration of the *epistemic* agency of pregnant and labouring subjects, and the recognition that foetuses are not enemies. The construction of fetal interests *versus* maternal ones belongs to an history that deprives women for determination over their bodies. What Barad seems to overlook in her critique is that the acknowledgment that the fetus "kicks back" may be fulfilled only if the gestating and labouring self is believed to be entitled to epistemic agency, which sometimes does not happen because practitioners believe what they "see" or "know" instead of women's testimony. My response to Barad is that the fetal-other may have some form of agency only if we recognize that gestating self does not only have motor agency, but also epistemic agency.

Barad follows her argument by suggesting that the core point of the issue is not the attribution of agency to the fetus itself, but rather "in the framing of the referent of the attribution (and ultimately in the framing of agency as a localizable attribution)", [666] which leads her to explore the crucial question "Who or what is this "fetus" to which agency is being attributed?[667] The main point I would save from her analysis is that the fetal-other does not exist without the gestating self:

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[663] *Casper, M. J. (1994). Reframing and grounding nonhuman agency: What makes a fetus an agent. American behavioral scientist, 37(6), 839-856, p. 844. See also: Casper, M. J. (1994). At the margins of humanity: fetal positions in science and medicine. Science, technology, & human values, 19(3), 307-323.*
[664] *Barad (2007), p. 216.*
[665] *Barad (2007), p. 216.*
[666] *Barad (2007), p. 216.*
[667] *Barad (2007), p. 216.*

> From the perspective of agential realism, the fetus is not a pre-existing object of investigation with inherent properties. Rather, the fetus is a phenomenon that is constituted and reconstituted out of historically and culturally specific iterative intra-actions of material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production. The fetus as a phenomenon 'includes' the apparatuses or phenomena out of which it is constituted: in particular, it includes the pregnant woman (her uterus, placenta, amniotic fluid, hormones, blood supply, nutrients, emotions, etc., as well as her 'surroundings' and her intra-actions with/in them) and much more.[668]

Barad's conception of fetal agency helps to maintain the correlation between the comprehension of the fetal-other as a rhetorical construction and the lived experience the gestating self effectively has concerning the fetal alterity.

Thus, between the gestating self and the fetal-other there is a relation of "intra-action". Barad explains that understanding the relations between *relata* allows us to recognize "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies".[669] The project of rethinking the epistemological, ontological, and political potentials of new realism in reading the gestational process could represent a new strand of research, [670] especially if considered in dialogue with phenomenological positions. In particular, the notion of intra-action may to further explain the process of subjective constitution. As Barad puts it,

> That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction", which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the "distinct" agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements. [671]

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[668] *Barad (2007), p. 217.*
[669] *Barad (2007), p. 33.*
[670] *Cf. Yoshizawa, R. S. (2016). Fetal–maternal intra-action: politics of new placental biologies. Body & Society, 22(4), 79-105.*
[671] *Barad (2007), p. 33.*

When applied to gestational polarity, the notion of intra-action helpfully explains that the agencies of the gestating self and the fetal-other do not precede one another, but rather emerge together as a continuous mutuality. The gestating subject does not pre-exist the making and being-made by the fetal-other; equally, the fetal-other is only an abstraction if considered as other than emerging through the maternal body. This is a further argument against the depiction of the fetus as an independent and discrete subject, complementing the various other biopolitical critical positions. As for the gestating subject, through my arguments I show that the boundaries of the gestating self are changing/changed along the gestational process, and that pregnant embodiment involves a temporal-established self/other continuum and distinction.

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