



Sketch for a Phenomenology of Gestation

Notas para uma fenomenologia da gravidez

Notas para una fenomenología de la gestación

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Abstract

Philosophy and phenomenology have barely paid attention to gestation and motherhood, and only recently this issue has been addressed, mainly due to the impulse of feminist philosophy. This paper aims to examine this field of human experience from a phenomenological perspective, in order to highlight some of its main features. The research is focused towards perceptions and feelings of pregnancy as a voluntary and conscious choice. Following a brief introduction, the paper analyses the ‘Leib’ of gestation and its peculiarities regarding body experience, among which the sensation of alienation and the patency of visceral stand out, together with the modification of the body scheme to integrate the fetus into it. Later, the paper discusses the perception of time, embedded in an attitude of active waiting. Thirdly, it inquires about the modalities of encounter with otherness fostered by pregnancy, where the haptic dimension has great prominence. The final section gathers some ethical considerations related to the bond of care, hospitality, and dialogue between a pregnant subject and the fetus. The final conclusions summarize the research findings, emphasize the importance of this philosophical approach, and they also aim to settle the grounds for future research on the phenomenology of pregnancy.

Keywords: Alterity. Body. Ethics. Phenomenology. Gestation.

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Resumo

O pensamento filosófico em geral, e a corrente fenomenológica em particular, tem refletido muito pouco sobre a gestação e a maternidade, e só em tempos recentes essa questão começou a ser abordada, principalmente por impulso da filosofia feminista. O intuito desta pesquisa é abordar este campo da experiência humana a partir de uma perspectiva fenomenológica e destacar alguns de seus apontamentos definidores. Esta indagação tem como foco principal as percepções e sentimentos que emergem durante a gestação escolhida consciente e voluntariamente. Após uma breve introdução, a primeira seção analisa o 'Leib' da gestação e as peculiaridades das vivências do corpo que ele possibilita, entre as quais se destacam a sensação de alienação e a perviedade da visceralidade, juntamente com a modificação do esquema corporal para integrar o feto nele. A apreensão da temporalidade, típica deste período, marcada por uma atitude de espera ativa, é então abordada. A pesquisa analisa também as modalidades de encontro com a alteridade trazidas pela gravidez, onde a dimensão háptica tem grande destaque. O estudo encerra com diversas considerações éticas relacionadas ao vínculo de cuidado, hospitalidade e diálogo estabelecido entre a gestante e o feto. Por fim, na seção dedicada às conclusões, sintetizam-se os principais achados desta pesquisa, destacando-se a importância dessa abordagem filosófica e sendo, pois, colocadas as bases para futuras pesquisas voltadas à fenomenologia da gravidez.

Palavras-chave: Alteridade. Corpo. Ética. Fenomenologia. Gravidez.

Resumen

El pensamiento filosófico en general, y la corriente fenomenológica en particular, se han ocupado escasamente de la gestación y de la maternidad, y solo en épocas muy recientes se ha comenzado a tratar este asunto, en gran medida debido al impulso de la filosofía feminista. El presente estudio tiene como principal objetivo abordar este campo de la experiencia humana con perspectiva fenomenológica y poner de relieve algunas de sus notas definitorias. Esta indagación se enfoca primordialmente hacia las percepciones y sentimientos que afloran durante la gestación elegida de manera consciente y voluntaria. Tras una breve introducción, la primera sección analiza el Leib de la gestación y las peculiaridades de las vivencias del cuerpo que posibilita, entre las que destacan la sensación de alienación y la patencia de la visceralidad, junto con la modificación del esquema corporal para integrar al feto en el mismo. Se aborda después la aprehensión de la temporalidad propia de este periodo, marcada por una actitud de espera activa. En el siguiente apartado se indaga sobre las modalidades de encuentro con la alteridad propiciadas por el embarazo, donde la dimensión háptica tiene gran protagonismo. El estudio se cierra con varias consideraciones éticas relacionadas con el vínculo de cuidado, hospitalidad y diálogo que se establece entre la gestante y el feto. Finalmente, en el epígrafe dedicado a las conclusiones se sintetizan los principales hallazgos de esta investigación, se enfatiza la importancia de este abordaje filosófico y se sientan las bases para futuras investigaciones sobre fenomenología de la gestación.

Palabra clave: Alteridad. Cuerpo. Ética. Fenomenología. Gestación.

1. Introduction: philosophy and gestation, phenomenological approach

Throughout the history of philosophy, the question of gestation, and motherhood in general, has received little attention, as has been recently noted (VILLARMEA, MASSÓ & AUSÍN, 2015; FINN, 2021), and the few allusions to the subject are metaphorical in nature. The most famous example in this sense is, perhaps, that of Socrates, who, by means of his maieutic method, 'helped to bring to light' the ideas already contained in the intellect of his interlocutors. Hannah Arendt (1993) is one of the few voices that, in contemporary philosophy, attend to this aspect and vindicates natality as a central concept of political thought. However, her interest is focused more on birth than on gestation itself.

Phenomenology is no stranger to this oblivion, and both in the classical formulations of this philosophical current and in other later proposals, the reflection revolves around concepts such as transcendental subjectivity, or experience, supposedly neutral, but which in a veiled way represent an androcentric point of view, as has been critically pointed out from feminist thinkers (BORNEMARK & SMITH, 2016; YOUNG, 1990). In recent years, mainly due to the growing presence of women in philosophical research, the relevance of analyzing new experiences with a phenomenological perspective has been raised. Thus, López Sáenz (2014) extols the dimension of bodily wisdom associated with gestation or breastfeeding and emphasizes that reflection on these experiences contributes to the advancement of the phenomenology of the lived body, while Al-Saji (2017) states that consciousness is 'fleshed out' and linked to a body with a gender, racial, age identity, etc., factors that structure the intentional activity of that consciousness.

In order to contribute to this current of inquiry, this study proposes a phenomenology specifically oriented towards the experiences of pregnant subjectivity, which complements other reflections that emphasize the importance of gestation as a moment of constitution of subjectivity (MENA MALET, 2021), or that reflect phenomenologically on the pre-constitutive experience of meaning proper to the fetal phase, and which therefore encompasses all individuals (MIGLIO, 2019). In this analysis we will identify some defining notes that are part of a common experiential stratum and that can serve as a point of support for further phenomenological research in this field. Our framework of analysis is rooted in biological corporeality and interprets gestation as a women's experience without implying the adoption of an essentialist gaze.

2. The *Leib* of gestation

In this section, we will approach a somatic analysis to identify the ways in which pregnancy, as a physical process, is apprehended as an experiential content of pregnant subjectivity. The body, usually unnoticed and silent, comes to the fore, and all the physical transformations and alterations provoked by pregnancy attract the attention of those who experience them. In the natural attitude of being-in-the-world, the body itself goes unnoticed by consciousness, intentionally turned towards the world and its stimuli; gestation bursts into harmony and gives greater prominence to corporeality, either because of the physical changes that pregnancy implies, or because of the discomfort that it usually causes.

When examining the experiential aspects that emerge from the organic plane of pregnancy, it becomes clear first of all that the feeling of estrangement or alienation with respect to one's own body is very common during this process, although it is not exclusive to this situation and can also be found in other contexts of illness and pathologies. One of the first allusions to pregnancy in terms of bodily alienation is formulated by Iris Marion Young (1984), who alludes to the breakdown of the distinction between self/other and self/world implicit in the reproductive experience. This alienation implies that one's own body is perceived as a strange and foreign element, subject to unpredictable changes. Although pregnancy is not an illness *per se*, at various times it causes the body to be experienced in its painful and suffering facet: nausea, fatigue or abdominal pressure become daily occurrences and make it difficult for interaction in the world to unfold on the same terms as before pregnancy. Biology imposes its rhythms and hinders the projects that the person aspires to develop. The experience of one's own body in terms of alienation increases as the pregnancy progresses, since there is a physical transformation that becomes more and more evident: the volume

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and weight of the pregnant woman increases and the presence of the fetus, another body within one's own body, is detectable at all times.

During this process, the interiority of the body, determined by its organs and viscera, comes to occupy a preponderant place in the sensory scheme, and every movement of the fetus is felt as an internal pressure affecting the stomach, the bladder, or the lungs. The baby's 'little kicks' provoke the emergence of a corporeal experience in which the internal position of the organs, usually imperceptible, is placed in the phenomenological horizon of the pregnant person.

Elements of the internal visceral that are usually absent from the experience, and to which Drew Leder (1990) has referred to as the 'absent body', come to the surface.

Closely related to this, gestation elicits a modification of the body schema of the person experiencing it. Miglio (2019) mentions this issue, indicating that the fetus is incorporated into the body schema of the pregnant woman. Nuancing this approach, we argue that the modification of the body schema starts long before the fetus is clearly perceptible; for example, once the person knows about her condition, she may begin to perceive her abdomen as a particularly fragile area that needs to be protected, and even if she does not feel any physical discomfort, she modifies her body postures so as not to put pressure on that part of her organism.

When gestation is advanced, and the belly increases in size, the modification of the body scheme is more evident and is directly related to the physical alterations of the *Körper* and to the very conditions that the anatomy imposes on the pregnant woman: she feels more tired, is unable to bend down, changes her point of balance, feels uncomfortable in postures that put pressure on her abdomen, etc. However, our thesis is that this process of modification of the body schema begins at the same time as the pregnancy and is mediated by the assimilation of this situation and by the expectations that the person harbors with respect to the physical phases and changes that she is going to experience.

A third element that characterizes gestation from the perspective of organic phenomenology adopted here is the alternation of bodily sensations of pleasure and pain. During pregnancy, the body becomes an object of experience, not only in a negative sense but also in positive terms (ZEILNER, 2010). The negative experiences rooted in the somatic level, already mentioned, are triggered by the physiological process of pregnancy itself. However, it is not possible to speak of a flat and homogeneous experience of the body, even in these negative terms, since the evolution of the process means that the ailments associated with pregnancy also change. In the beginning, the discomfort has a hormonal origin, and gives rise to nausea, vomiting, or dizziness. In the later stages, physical discomfort is of a more mechanical nature, largely attributable to the pressure exerted by the fetus on the organs and viscera of the body that houses it or also to the discomfort, for the pregnant person, of moving – and moving in – a body that has increased in weight and volume in a short period of time. The very term 'gravidez', used in Portuguese to refer to the state of gestation and etymologically derived from the Latin word *gravis* (heavy, onerous, oppressive), points precisely to this consideration of the body as a burden.

As a counterpoint, we see that gestating carnality can also be an area of emergence of positive aspects of corporeality. This dimension is largely caused by the expectations that the person projects towards pregnancy, particularly when it is desired: in this case, the transformations of the body are not only experienced from the immediacy of the discomfort they generate or from the fear that arises from any uncontrolled physical process, but are assumed as something transitory and necessary for the development of the baby and are interpreted as a positive sign that the process is continuing. The physical experience of pregnancy thus acquires a transcendent and teleological dimension, and it is oriented towards a very specific 'for what', the birth of the offspring, which will give meaning to the sufferings experienced and, in a certain way, will give them a reward.

In relation to this, although focused on aesthetic aspects, it is interesting to note a study by the University of Minnesota which concludes that pregnant women have a more positive view of their bodies than non-pregnant

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women, and this is attributed to psychosocial mechanisms related to the assumption of a new role, that of mother, linked to less pressure with respect to compliance with ideal body proportions (LOTH et al., 2011). This idea is fully in line with Kristin Zeilner's statement that during pregnancy, the gaze of others can be empowering (2010, p. 13), precisely because the value and relevance of pregnancy is socially recognized and this has an impact on the self-concept that the pregnant woman is forging.

In short, one of the important elements for the understanding of the pregnant *Leib* is the capacity of anticipation, which will begin the modification of the body scheme, enables the emergence of positive somatic experiences and supports the articulation of a positive self-image of the changing body.

3. The temporary nature of pregnancy

Waiting is part of the constitutive structure of the human being; it is an ontological category, a modality of our relationship with the world. During the act of waiting, time is perceived as an insubstantial, transitory 'now', and turned towards an anticipated future that will bring negative consequences – which are feared – or positive ones – which are longed for –, since the future is ambivalent and can contain both the hated and the desired (BLOCH, 2017, p. 27). In the horizon of waiting, the present time is grasped as an obstacle that separates us from a future event, the interval that separates us from the not-yet, from what is yet to come, and that we foresee in the present moment. Thus, the experience of waiting is rooted in a particular way of living temporality.

This implies that consciousness is intentionally turned towards the future and subjectivity 'lives', inhabits this waiting in two possible modalities: as passive waiting, where the arrival of the future is awaited, the advent of which is alien and independent of the subject's actions, or as active waiting, which implies the direct intervention of the individual and his/her contribution to bringing about the occurrence of this foreseen future. Our thesis is that the second type of waiting predominates in gestation, since it is a period characterized primarily by action, insofar as the pregnant person 'is an active self whose activity consists of a giving, a creation of another who could not live without it'. (RUDDICK, 1990, p. 210). On the horizon of everyday life, the presence of a new life that sprouts and makes its way into one's own body bursts forth. When procreation is approached as a vital project, the person prepares to change her lifestyle and her way of being-in-the-world to welcome the future son or daughter: she makes an effort to eat a healthy diet, undergoes medical follow-up, readjusts her work and rest rhythms, arranges her home, etc., all in order to successfully complete the process that will culminate in the emergence of a new being. Thus, the temporality of pregnancy and childbirth gives rise to what Kelly Oliver (2010) calls 'women's time'.

Bergson already points out that every individual organism is a sprout that has grown in the combined body of its progenitors, although for the French philosopher, motherhood has a paradigmatic role in this evolutionary process that transmits vital energy throughout the history of humanity. He claims that filial love 'shows us that each generation leans on the one that is to succeed it. It lets us glimpse that the living being is, above all, a place of passage and that the essence of life is in the movement that transmits it' (BERGSON, 1985, p. 122). This implies an intensification of the dwelling of time in its creative dimension, in the sense that the *élan vital*, the force and impulse of life, is transferred and diffused from one living being to another. The time of gestation manifests itself phenomenally as a being-for-life, a new life that unfolds and comes into the world in and through the gestating body, which awaits and longs for the arrival of the baby.

Phenomenology has shown the diverse modalities that characterize our experience of time, revealing its heterogeneity. This approach shows that the subjective perception of time is itself temporal, which gives rise to speaking of a 'subjective time' determined by the ways in which this time becomes present to the consciousness (BARATA, 2009). From our interpretative framework, the peculiarity of pregnancy is that it brings with it an experience of temporality radically marked by the biological rhythms of the life growing inside. Martín Gómez alludes to this when

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she writes 'A baby comes into the world to show us that another rhythm of life is possible. Because with you there is no more hurry, no more time, no more chronometers' (2021, p. 94). The mother-to-be ceases to be the owner of her time; her plans and expectations are subordinated to her new physical and psychosomatic condition; they are at the mercy of the ups and downs derived from her gestational state, which are highly unpredictable. Adrienne Rich refers that 'During my own pregnancy, I had to deal with this waiting, with this feminine destiny, denying any active or vigorous aspect of myself' (1996, p. 80). Pregnancy marks and imposes its own *tempo* on life and existence, bursts into daily life, and disrupts it on many levels. Expanding on this idea, Plugiese (2016) argues that pregnancy not only interferes with the empirical structure of daily life, but can also change the internal feeling of time, since the focus of attention shifts from the exclusive desires of the person to the needs of another being.

Reproduction is also understood as a way of expanding one's own temporality, which grows through offspring: 'In the 'not yet' of parenthood [...] one can live beyond the limits of this life, beyond every possible present for us as finite beings' (DI GIACOMO, 2016, p. 54). By engendering a son or daughter the couple prolongs and perpetuates their genes, and in a certain way survives and remains present in a new generation, both in a biological sense and in a symbolic way. The time of gestation is fully oriented towards 'the dawning of the before-us', to put it with Bloch (2017), and is an opening towards an empirically determined waiting, with defined and more or less predictable limits: it begins at the moment of the ascertainment of the pregnancy, and culminates when the pregnancy comes to an end. In this framework, 'it is the waiting that structures time and gives the different moments their distinct value' (GRIMALDI, 2005, p. 60). This period is marked by unique experiences, 'firsts' that in many cases constitute experiences of great intensity and long remembered: the first positive pregnancy test, the first ultrasound, the first time the fetal heartbeat is heard, and undoubtedly the first time the newborn baby is seen.

This experience is not homogeneous since each pregnancy is unique, and not all subjectivities experience it in the same way, neither physically nor psychically. The waiting associated with gestation itself is not flat either, but goes through various phases and intensities: calmer at the beginning, more pressing at the end of pregnancy, when physical discomfort is more noticeable, and impatience is felt at the proximity of childbirth. In this sense, Miglio (2019) points out the need to reflect on pregnancy from a temporal perspective in order to identify which motor and affective responses are triggered at each moment of the process. The Italian alludes to the multiplicity of complex, non-linear, and emergent temporalities associated with gestation, which give rise to diverse experiences and forms of interaction between a pregnant woman and a fetus.

As the expected date of birth approaches, the sense of waiting intensifies, as she is aware that the process is coming to an end: the closer the anticipated and prefigured future is during the waiting, the more intense and 'burning' is the intention of the waiting as such (BLOCH, 2017, p. 141). However, we know that the anticipated future never fully coincides with the expectations harbored about it, either because it defrauds them or because it exceeds them. Pregnancy is no exception to this, and, despite the certainty that the gestation is about to end, the exact circumstances and the positive or negative outcome of the birth are unknown. Waiting during pregnancy is, therefore, an opening to the unknown, a preparation for the arrival of a new life that is developing inside the body and that will be fully revealed at the moment of delivery.

4. Splintered subjectivity and internal experience of otherness

The philosophy of otherness, developed by Lévinas, Sartre, Buber, or Marcel, highlights the relational character of subjectivity and addresses the possibilities that arise from it. This approach allows us to rethink the boundaries between self and other and emphasizes the radical importance of intersubjectivity in the processes of the constitution of individual identities. Our research takes this frame of reference to analyze the peculiarities of gestating subjectivity as it concerns her experience and encounter with the otherness of the son or daughter growing inside

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her. Bornemark and Smith (2016) affirm that in the experience of gestation the basic questions of transcendental phenomenology emerge: the structure of the self, its relationship with otherness, and the genesis of intentional life as such, hence the relevance of carrying out the inquiry proposed here.

The phenomenology of perception made explicit by Merleau-Ponty (1945) places the body at the core of existence and establishes it as the starting point of every process of construction of the world of life: the body is the vehicle of being-of-the-world and I am only aware of the world through my body. In the horizon of this general experience of the world made possible and mediated by the body, we highlight the aspects linked to gestation, insofar as this implies a radical and inescapable encounter with the otherness lodged inside the pregnant person, concretized in the body of the fetus that manifests itself both as *Leib* and as *Körper* (MIGLIO, 2019, p. 85): the pregnant woman never merely perceives a body in a strictly physical and organic sense, but grasps it as a living body, endowed with mobility and will, which stirs in her womb, which responds to stimuli, which alternates periods of activity and rest, and so on. There is thus an 'analogizing apprehension' in which the fetus manifests itself to the consciousness of the pregnant person as a 'psychophysical' entity composed of subjectivity and corporeality (HUSSERL, 1985, p. 151), another who is not I but who resembles me.

At the beginning of the pregnancy, the presence of the fetus goes unnoticed, but as it develops, it becomes more evident that otherness arises within the pregnant body, and that has in that body its radical condition of possibility. There is a gradual separation between both corporealities, which is experienced as a proliferation of another being that is partly foreign and at the same time belongs to the one who gestates it: 'Not even during pregnancy did I experience the embryo as something decisively internal, [...] but rather as something that was mine and that was inside, and yet every day and every hour it was becoming more and more separate from me,' describes Rich (1996, p. 113). The fetus is not an otherness in the strict sense, nor is it a selfhood that coincides identically with the subjectivity and corporeality of the pregnant person, but it is possible to thematize it phenomenologically as a modality of being-between, in Heideggerian terms (SMITH, 2016).

The pregnant person lives her subjectivity in a non-unitary way; she is a split or dualized subject through her relationship with the Other that is present within herself (NAKA, 2016) and that she welcomes in her body. Irigaray (1992) emphasizes that the female body is able to propitiate the growth of another within itself, whatever its characteristics; that is, it accepts otherness as it arises, which constitutes a metaphor for tolerance. From a phenomenological perspective, the internal experience of otherness made possible by gestation implies a forced departure from solipsism since the gestating subject is, ontologically, a duality, a combination of self and other that occur simultaneously and are constitutively linked. Frances Gray (2012) emphasizes that the relationship between a woman and a fetus clearly expresses the interconnectedness inherent in all human life and anticipates any possibility of intersubjective understanding. The elemental communion between two subjects cohabiting in the same flesh marks the beginning of all individual existence; the first encounter with otherness occurs for the fetus right there, in that inner space of the womb. For the gestational mother, this coexistence opens the possibility of experiencing intersubjectivity in a particularly intense way and not comparable to other experiences of confrontation with otherness. This radical boundary between two bodies takes coexistence to a new dimension, Silva (2018) points out, since it enables the emergence of an intentional alliance between the pregnant woman and her baby.

Access to the otherness of the fetus happens fundamentally through the sense of touch, and it is tangible and sensitive rather than visible. 'The world of bodies is the non-impenetrable world, the world that does not submit to the compactness of space' (NANCY, 1992, p. 27). The interaction between the pregnant body and that of the fetus takes place in this liminal sphere, and the distinction between the two is difficult to define precisely: where does each body begin, and where does it end? There is no 'inside' and 'outside' in the strict sense, but rather the two notions are relativized: the mother's body is 'inside' for her and 'outside' for the fetus, while the 'outside' or the 'otherness' that the fetus represents is

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experienced as a presence situated 'inside' the pregnant woman. The boundaries between interiority and exteriority become blurred to the point that 'both concepts form two *continuum* and not two poles' (RICH, 1996, p. 113).

The encounter with otherness sponsored by the experience of gestation questions the thesis of Levinas, for whom the appearance of the face of the other before me marks the foundational moment of this encounter; the opening to otherness is based principally on the visibility of the body of the other, particularized in the face that individualizes it (1999). The pregnant experience is very different, and although there are technical means that make it possible to capture images of the fetus, this visibility does not constitute the core of the encounter with otherness and is not even essential for this encounter to take place. The pregnant person has the capacity to touch and be touched by the baby growing inside her, and her first contact with this otherness is produced through this haptic exchange. Long before seeing the face of her son or daughter, even long before grasping with precision the exact limits of the baby's body -something that is only possible after birth- she already relates to the otherness that meets her from within, which is invisible to the eyes but already tangible and perceptible through her sensory scheme. Merleau-Ponty's (1964) intuition that everything visible is modeled by the tangible is thus fulfilled, at the same time that every tactile being promises visibility. The fetus is perceived primarily as a tangible being, and this quality captured by the pregnant woman inaugurates the encounter with the otherness that is emerging within her and which will only become visible at a later moment.

5. Ethical openness to others: hospitality, care, and dialogue

Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, or Levinas delve into the existential and phenomenological dimension of being-for-other and describe the experiences associated with this constitutive openness of subjectivity turned towards other subjectivities and exposed to them. From this approach, pregnancy can be interpreted as a radicalization of being-for-another insofar as the pregnant body places itself totally at the mercy of another being. During this period, one is constantly and uninterruptedly available to the fetus, adopting towards it an attitude of solicitous response that has a marked ethical character.

When pregnancy is desired, feelings of love and protection are harbored towards the future son or daughter; there is a longing for their birth and the person feels challenged by this being that is growing inside her: she has the vocation to take care of this defenseless creature whom she does not yet know, but to whom she is intensely committed and towards whom she feels an inescapable bond of responsibility. Gestation links the person to another particular being whom he or she has not chosen but towards whom he or she feels affection. The decision to beget is, for Adrienne Rich, an act of faith, since it presupposes the person's confidence in his or her own capacity to complete the pregnancy successfully and to take care of the offspring, while at the same time, it implies an expression of hope projected towards the son or daughter to be born (1996, p. 207). Gail Weiss (2012) argues that the main ethical learning of pregnancy consists precisely of the experience of taking responsibility for another totally dependent and vulnerable being and assuming all its implications.

The pregnant body is a hospitable body that welcomes and nurtures the new life growing inside it. The pregnant person knows that the development and survival of her baby depend entirely on that availability, and she, therefore, assumes the strangeness of hosting another stranger within the intimate confines of her body and mind (RAPHAEL-LEFF, 2016). For hospitality to occur, Derrida points out, it is necessary that an inhabitable space be constituted of an openness that accommodates the other (1997, pp. 57-59). The gestating body is articulated as an ambit of welcome and hospitality in the broad sense since it does not limit itself to welcoming the stranger in the Derridean manner but rather makes it possible for another – the fetus – to nest in its own body and find in it its primordial home, a safe and protected space in which to grow. The maternal body is an original sphere of hospitality (GRAY, 2012) whose primitivism precedes all interpretation.

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The ethical horizon of pregnancy also includes the principle of care, which includes ethical categories such as solicitude, attention, relationship, interdependence, and vulnerability. All these dimensions are present in the pregnant person, who immerses herself in the relational bond with the fetus, attends to the needs of this extremely vulnerable being who is radically dependent on her, and carries out various actions framed within the framework of care and directed specifically towards the development and well-being of her future son or daughter: she ensures good nutrition and hydration, avoids the consumption of substances that could harm the fetus, or undergoes medical tests to check her state of health and monitor the evolution of the baby. Sara Ruddick reflects on the ethical framework that arises in the context of the maternal-filial relationship since, for her, motherhood is fundamentally a specific activity of care. Being a mother is not reduced to giving birth and breastfeeding but involves an attitude of protection and assistance in the development of another being who is in a situation of dependency. This attitude is not limited to the period of gestation, nor is it exclusive to mothers, since any person who assumes the task of caring for a child can adopt this ethical behavior of care (RUDDICK, 1990).

The care relationship that is established between the pregnant woman and the fetus is asymmetrical, without any possibility of reciprocity: the woman provides care altruistically, without expecting anything in return, because she knows that the recipient of this care is a radically vulnerable, fragile and defenseless being, who is not in a position to reciprocate the care that is given *gratis et amore*.

The awareness of the presence of the fetus in the womb, which most of the time occurs passively and involuntarily, encourages the emergence of more active forms of interaction since the pregnant person feels the need to communicate with the creature inside her (BORNEMARK, 2016). One of the modalities adopted by this intimate communication is dialogue: it is common to talk to the fetus and interact with it through the voice, either by singing songs, pronouncing its name, etcetera. Martín Gómez stresses that pregnancy involves learning a new way of dialoguing that is much more intimate and intimate than other versions of inner dialogue, and she also reflects on the singularity of this experience: 'There is a unique situation in life in which the inner dialogue is not with oneself but with one's baby' (2021, p. 66). The mother-to-be thus communicates with this internally felt otherness, which is in the process of becoming constituted and independent. Symmetry is neither necessary nor possible in this case, which does not prevent this dialogue from being fruitful and having full meaning for the one who engages in it since, as Buber (1995) points out, the relationship can subsist even when the human being to whom I say You does not perceive it in his or her experience. A direct and immediate relationship is established between the pregnant woman and her child, which makes it possible to address words of affection, hospitality, welcome, and recognition to the future baby.

6. Final considerations

This study has analyzed various aspects of pregnancy from a phenomenological point of view, entering a field of research that is still little explored. First of all, some experiential notes of the pregnant body have been highlighted, emphasizing the pathology of visceral – usually unnoticed –, the modification of the body schema that pregnancy brings with it, and the factors that give rise to a positive and pleasurable experience of corporeality. An analysis of pregnant temporality has also been addressed, characterized in terms of active waiting and teleologically turned towards a future event: the birth of a child. The analysis of pregnant subjectivity has led us to identify the radical nature of the encounter with otherness brought about by gestation, and has made it possible to investigate aspects related to the blurring of the boundaries between the self and the other that emerge in this context. Finally, this research highlights the high level of ethical commitment implicit in gestation, which is determined by values such as hospitality, dialogue, and care.

We hope that this approach will contribute to a better understanding of gestation from the point of view of phenomenology and that it will serve as a point of support for further research on this dimension of existence.

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