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The intimate other

**A phenomenology of lucid embodiment in the light
of the lived experience of pregnancy**

For some time now I have been feeling a pain in my chest that is sometimes diffuse, sometimes tormenting. It is insistent when I think about it, but also makes its presence known when I try to ignore it. I feel helpless. The first medical diagnosis, from a gynecologist, is quite telling: she interprets the pain as a “wish for pregnancy.” I have the immediate feeling that the doctor has broached the issue at the right level; her interpretation helps me to reach an opaque and repressed but troubling part of myself.

I awaken one morning with a dream in mind, one that seems to have accompanied me throughout the whole night. The dream is vivid in my mind, like a freshly lived experience: three young girls are leaping about around me as I walk on a forest path with the sun flickering through the trees. It is the end of a summer afternoon. After a while, I call two of them by their first names: “Amrita! Melissa!” I have a very- strange feeling, as if I am naming them for the first time, as if I am christening them. I keep this impressive dream in my memory but tacitly decide not to give it too much significance: at this point I still don’t know that I am pregnant. But after a first test a week later revealing that I am, then a sonogram a month later showing two embryos, and another after three months showing two female foetuses, we must acknowledge the oniric prediction and decide to give the babies the names from the dream.

The pregnant body seems to be endowed with a peculiar form of immanent self-lucidity, which enables us to deeply feel and to intensely anticipate what a reflexive consciousness will only grasp later on and in a more rationalized way. Before embarking, however, on the description of the lived experience of

pregnancy *per se*, which reveals a radical embodiment characterized by the strange othered intimacy of having another living being growing inside my own body, I would like first to account briefly for the different degrees of bodily lucidity at work in our everyday experience.

On becoming bodily lucid

Most of the time our body knows quite well how to behave, needing no particular attention. It knows what to do in order to “work.” *Every morning, after getting up, I repeat a set of activities: I go to the bathroom, get dressed, prepare the milk for the twins, wake up my son, prepare his breakfast while he is dressing, walk him to school, have my breakfast in a cafe nearby, come back home, wake up the girls, feed them and walk them to the day nursery.* I do all this without thinking about it, but I wouldn’t say I do it automatically. There is, of course, a kind of a ritualistic aspect since these activities are repeated every morning in a similar way; but each gesture, act and action require from me a light and thin self-presence and bring me a certain diffuse satisfaction. *One morning, after having been awakened during the night by one of the twins having nightmares, I wake up exhausted. Carrying out the very same set of tasks becomes nearly unbearable. I find myself needing to reflect on each gesture and my actions feel ponderous: I balk before the weight of habit.*

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. To continue with the same example: *one morning, while preparing the milk, I put water in the baby’s bottle instead of milk. “I was not there!” I say to myself.* The shift from the light lived bodily self-presence to absent-mindedness is so easy. Our mind is absent and our body carries on mechanically without any lived consciousness of its acts. The parting of consciousness and body modifies both, the former becoming a reflexive abstraction, the latter a mere physical, automatic functioning. Now, between these two extreme tendencies of disembodiment through reflection or automaticity, our body is operating along a graded scale of modes of embodied consciousness, going from focussed attention to a relative lack of attention, with different degrees of bodily mindfulness in between.

As early as the fourth century B.C., Aristotle, in his *De anima*, gives us an account of the specific power of each sensory modality and postulates a common sense that would not be a sixth individual sense but one that participates in the five existing ones. He is the first to suggest an approach to the lived body as a global organic functioning. Centuries later, Descartes (especially in the Sixth

Meditation and in the *Passions of the Soul*), in opposition, stresses the powerful analogy between the human body and the machine, and thereby attributes a unilateral causal power to the body, in the case of pain for example. Although Descartes mentions the fact that some passions, for example generosity, are in fact positive virtues that can lead the mind, the majority of our passions are but confused ways of thinking which require clarification by the mind. It is only at the very end of the 18th century that Kant, in the *Critique of Judgement*, will come to foreground (in the Aristotelian vein) the global organicity of the body. This global organicity is governed by a unique, immanent self-regulation which excludes a reductionist understanding of the body as the simple sum of its coexisting organs. While the machine (Kant uses the example of a watch) receives its functioning impulse from the outside, that is, from its human producer, the living organism results from an integrated coordination, whose teleological principle is inherent to the body itself. This innovative conception provides the organism with a plasticity which is another way of talking about what we now call the “vicariousness of the organic functions”; that which enables an organ to stand for one that is failing. At the beginning of the 20th century, the phenomenological approach returns to this “holistic” conception of the body. The phenomenologists however, did not merely contrast the machine as a mechanical system lacking autonomous internal motricity and functioning, with the living being endowed with the power of vicariousness; they thematized the “mechanical” part of our lived body, that is, the aspect consisting in sedimented bodily habits that permeate all our actions and performances. Paying attention to this sedimentation of habits is only possible if our lived corporality is not considered as a separate or isolated reality, but as existing, from its very origins, in a generative interaction with both the life-world and its own onto- and phylogenetic history.

Husserl’s innovation is in naming this ambivalence of the lived body that is both mechanical and organic. The living organism is a two-faced reality: as a *Leib* {*chair* in French), it is a lived and living bodily awareness; as a *Korper* {*corps* in French), it is purely a physical body with no consciousness. There is no opposition between these two modes of appearance of bodily reality; there is, rather a kind of intertwining or mutual circulation between them. Like the two sides of the same coin, *Leib* and *Korper* are the two sides of the same reality. The automatic side of the physical body, its reflexes and unconscious stimuli, therefore only exist for a lived-body awareness that knows them as such; on the other hand, the tacit (implicit) knowledge our lived body has of itself, its immanent self-apperception, is supported by the great amount of unconscious mechanisms that permeate us. In short, there are multifarious transitional areas between full-fledged bodily consciousness and the completely automatic unconscious body.

Organic relations, functions, and events arise within me and have a sense in themselves. This passive emergence from bodily roots is not, however, experienced as being based on organic (for example neural) activity: it is lived-through by an embodied consciousness that Merleau-Ponty calls (following Husserl) “operative intentionality.” D. Leder, in *The Absent Body* (1990), has described this “bodily efficiency” as a positive “self-effacement” or a “self-disappearing” of the flesh. This lived bodily intimacy is at the heart of the chiaroscuro of consciousness, at the tenuous and unstable equilibrium between consciousness and unconsciousness that Yuasa, in *The Body* (1987), refers to in his description of the differentiated and subtle transition between “clear consciousness” and “obscure consciousness.” How does consciousness, as a lived global unity, emerge from the organicity of neuronal dynamics while remaining irreducible to it? Furthermore, how does consciousness act experimentally as a non-linear constraint on neural dynamics and reflectively on the understanding of neural dynamics as such? This is a question raised by cognitive scientists who are working to recast more accurately these mixed spaces of bodily intimacy, where our embodied consciousness cultivates its own *habitus* and where the know-how of the body becomes endowed with a remarkable lucidity.

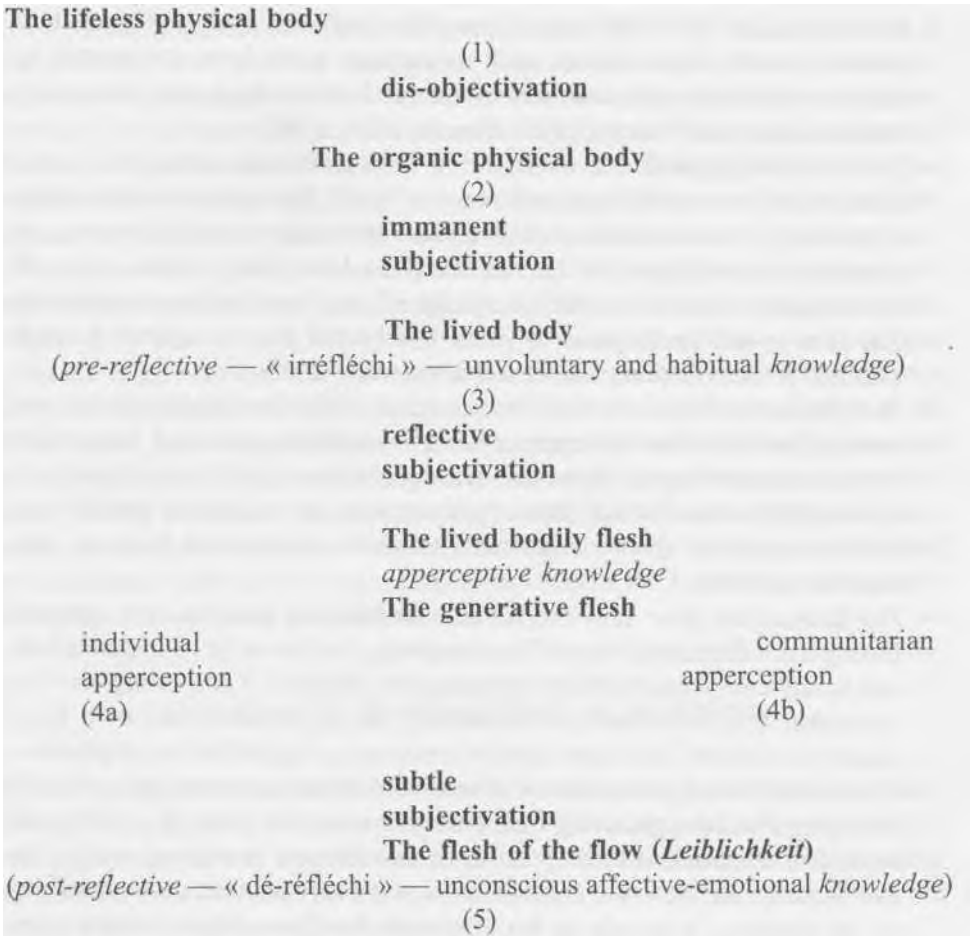
Situating the lived experience of pregnancy

Following Husserl’s analysis of embodiment but also going beyond it by providing a more differentiated analysis of the different dimensions of self-awareness of our bodily experience, I would like to situate within such a generic framework the dimension of bodily self-awareness which seems to me at work in the experience of pregnant embodiment.

- *The lifeless physical body*: the material object is characterized by particular physical properties, above all its volume and its mass, its gravity also. Such a body is completely deprived of flesh. It may be as hard as stone or as soft as mold. We may be able to touch it because it is within our arm’s reach, like stone or mold, or only see it (like the star), or even be unable to see it at all (like the atom).
- *The organic physical body*: in contrast with the lifeless physical body which refers to a sheer *Körper*, the biological body belonging to the vegetable or animal kingdom is a flesh (*Leib*) because of its animate dimension and, more precisely, its self-animation. As a living being, it is endowed with a power of spontaneous sensitive self-development, either a capacity to grow (vegetable) or a self-motricity (animal).

- *The lived body*: the lived body is pre-reflectively self-aware of itself. It is endowed with a spontaneous and involuntary know-how, permeated by a degree of *habitus* and possessed of a natural ability for coping with every concrete situation (Dewey, 1922; Ricœur, 1950; 1988).
- *The lived bodily flesh*: the lived bodily flesh possesses as its own a non-reflected know-how that becomes aware of itself. The immanent knowledge of the body is associated here with a cultivated ability which gives way to a second knowledge that knows itself as knowledge. This stage of embodiment amounts to a self-knowledge of one's own self as a lived body, that is to a self-apperception of one's bodily self that is acquired through a trained *praxis* (Depraz, Varela and Vermersch, 2003).
- *The generative flesh*: whereas the experience of the lived bodily flesh is the result of an *individual* self-apperception, our cultural generative flesh refers to a communitarian and historical self-apperception, which corresponds to an intersubjective *habitus*. Both apperceptions are of course parallel and both are anchored in the immanent know-how of the lived body as their experiential basis.
- *The flesh of the flow*: how are we able to grasp an emotion as it appears? During the infinitesimal time of its emergence, it remains for us imperceptible and in any case inaccessible to apperception. Whether it is a strong emotion (a sudden fear, an immediate awakening, an irrepressible fury or a fit of anger) or a slower and more durable emotion (a fragile feeling of pleasure, a persistent feeling of wonder or of sensual delight, an intense joy gradually emerging from the gathering of a family sharing the event of a birth), the emotional fluctuations correspond to an unconscious stratum of our psyche that is not accessible to our consciousness at the very moment of the occurring of the emotion. It is only in the aftermath that I am able to reflect in an apperceptive way on what I then lived quite intensely on the emotional level (Yuasa, 1987; Mazis, 1993; Cataldi, 1995; and Yamaguchi, 1997).

We can summarize the different modes of givenness of our body in the following scheme:



So I would like to concentrate now on this subtle and the most intimate emotional embodiment I have just sketched out with reference to the transition from the lived bodily flesh to the affective flesh of the flow. In order to do so, I will rely on this very singular first-person experience, which is my lived experience of pregnancy (Levesque-Lopman, 1980; 1984; Young, 1984; 1985; Depraz, 2001).

It happens indeed that some liminal strongly emotional experiences are able to reveal to us such a flowing fleshy intimacy of our body, which remains most of the time unnoticed. Far from being a hidden, diffuse and indefinable state that would be trapped in itself, our intimate flesh can be named and has a face. But in the same manner as we have trouble recognizing our own voice when we hear it on the phone or on a recording machine, our own flesh-intimacy is difficult to identify and we have to reconquer it at every moment. It seems

foreign to us and needs to be reappropriated as being mine. Now, such a dynamics of foreignness and re-appropriation is exactly what creates the emotional flowing of my flesh. Such an intimate alterity and self-alteration of my flesh requires from me an apprenticeship and a cultivation: it belongs so deeply to myself that I can't leave it or move away from it; and when I tend to forget it, it reminds me of its being there.

Most of the time we experience negative bodily sensations such as a sudden tiredness, backpains, or illness as so many ways of manifesting our deeply intimate flesh to ourselves (Straus, 1956; Pliigge, 1967; Zaner, 1981). The lived experience of pregnancy presents us with a unique case where such a self-manifestation of the flesh is not solely a negative and entropic inner-presence, but corresponds to the life of an other in ourself. The emerging life of another human being reminds us of our most precious jewel, our intimate flesh. My leading question therefore will be: who is this other who disturbs so violently the intimacy of my flesh, who looks like an intruder within myself? Who is this foreign human being who compels me to go away from myself by preventing me from withdrawing into myself, and therefore enables me to reconquer myself more deeply, that is, to reconcile myself with myself? *In short, what is this life within myself that is not mine and that nonetheless produces an intensification of my own life?*

Through this very particular but quite daily experience of myself as a pregnant woman, I would like to account for the very constitutive emotional self-alteration that is inherent in our intimate flowing flesh: in the experience of pregnancy, the latter is completely disrupted by the presence of another's life in itself, though such a inner bodily disruption is the condition of a deeper sensitive feeling of our own flesh.

Sensory, emotional and imaginative modes of my previous self in my pregnant embodiment

For some time now I have been feeling a pain in my chest that is sometimes diffuse, sometimes tormenting. It is insistent when I think about it, but also makes its presence known when I try to ignore it. I feel helpless. The first medical diagnosis, from a gynecologist, is quite telling: she interprets the pain as a "wish for pregnancy." I have the immediate feeling that the doctor has broached the issue at the right level; her interpretation helps me to reach an opaque and repressed but troubling part of myself.

On the contrary, a second diagnosis a short time later will completely hide the first one, making it, so to speak, irrelevant: the second doctor, also a woman, appears to be locked up in her professional competence and she dismisses with only one word

the first interpretation, which had touched me so deeply. In fact, through her mostly medicalized behaviour, she will trap me in an indefinite spiral of a technicalization of the illness, with destructive results for me. It is only when we finally decide to resort to surgery and then decide together to have a child that I suddenly become aware of the rightness of the first diagnostic.

As a matter of fact, my flesh had “known” much earlier than I did, as a conscious reflecting “I,” where my deepest desire was, and as I paid no attention to it, did not want to hear it and even repressed it, or at least postponed it, my flesh violently reacted in order to make *me* react.

Such a period of pregnancy is for most woman a particularly intense moment where she discovers a new intimacy with her own body and becomes so intimately aware of it that she does not really need to consciously pay attention to it.

My body urges me to listen to it and I absolutely cannot shy away. Am I going to be able to interpret sensory or emotional forewarnings? A few days after a particularly intense sexual intercourse, I have the feeling of some very subtle and light movements in my belly. Could it be the traveling of the egg before finding its nest? I ask myself. But the doctors say that it is impossible to feel anything at this early stage. After a first objective test I learn that I am pregnant.

In fact, I had spontaneously developed a very thin mindfluness to the so-called “imperceptible” inner sensations of my flesh, so that I had been able to know very early, before the very first medical diagnosis, that I was bearing a new life in me. My first conclusion then is: as we learn to cultivate a certain proximity to our own sensations, we are able to move back the limits that scientific discourse has imposed on us as to what can or cannot be sensorily felt. My second conclusion is: there is something like a paradox in such a realization. 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 statu nascendi* in me brings me back to the depth of my own being.

I awaken one morning with a dream in mind, one that seems to have accompanied me throughout the whole night. The dream is vivid in my mind, like a freshly lived experience: three young girls are leaping about around me as I walk on a forest path with the sun flickering through the trees. It is the end of a summer afternoon. After a while, I call two of them by their first names: “Amrita! Melissa!.” I have a very strange feeling, as if I am naming them for the first time, as if I am christening them. I keep this impressive dream in my memory but tacitly decide not to give it too-much significance: at this point I still don’t know that I am pregnant. But after a first test a week later revealing that I am, then a sonogram a month later showing

two embryos, and another after three months showing two female fetuses, we must acknowledge the oniric prediction and decide to give the babies the names from the dream.

As is well-known, the dreaming consciousness is endowed with a kind of hyper-lucidity. I have a dream about children while it is impossible to know objectively about them already existing: what is this intuitive quality of consciousness that enables me to foresee as an oniric vision the presence of the other? Of course, such a self-knowledge is neither theoretical nor reflexive nor purely sensory or sensitive: it seems to be a strange intertwining of desire, emotion and imagination.

It suggests that such un-reflective (pre- and post-reflective) areas of our awareness are multilayered, situated not only in the realm of the sensory body, but also in the imaginary and emotional realm. The flesh of our subjective flow is so rich and ramified that it is impossible to locate it in an objectified way. As we gradually become sensitive to such a repressed complexity of our intimate flowing flesh, we may become able to penetrate more consciously such an archaic and originary dimension of ourselves.

Coping with the other within oneself: a gradual return to one's archaic originary flowing flesh

As it is well-known, the first months of pregnancy are months of an intense tiredness: the other is progressively settling down in myself and it thus reminds me of its recent arrival.

Although the embryo gives me a certain number of bodily signals, I tend to keep doing what I have always done before, not changing my daily rhythm at all. One day I feel dizzy and finally faint: "I am here!" you are obviously telling me. My only pre-conscious weary answer at this very early stage is the following: "I know you are here, but let me carry on doing what I have to do."

Each time, it is trying to attract my attention, but I leave it in fact little room to express itself. At its birth I suddenly become aware of its being there. I paid so little attention to it during the pregnancy that its presence then seems to me nearly unbearable, the responsibility too heavy to take on. Now, I can't help thinking of the regular signs my body was making to me, that I did not then care about. But I also remember that each gesture that was of course taken for granted before had then required from me a particular mindfulness, bringing me back to myself against my very will (Straus, 1966 and 1969). Consequently such a constrained attention to myself had unavoidably generated a fierce resistance to the presence of this

other, involving quite a radical conflict of interests. Such an ambivalence refers to a tacit refusal to share and to acknowledge this opaque and archaic part of myself that the embryo reveals to myself as it precedes therefrom. This is something that brings me back to my own earliest childhood, to my infancy and furthermore to my generative ancestral previous life. Even if the event of giving birth does not give you a direct access to your own birth, it reveals the experiential intensity that the gradually coming to life goes through and helps you to bodily remember your own coming to life. Truly it is disturbing to be induced to reach the most intimate flesh-core of ourselves. One usually needs time to become aware of our flesh as we reach such a high degree of complicity and abandonment to ourselves: the lived experience of pregnancy provides us with a remarkable unique opportunity for reconquering our emotional flesh.

From the beginning of this new pregnancy onwards, the two embryos who were revealed to me in an oniric way are walking at my side in my every movement, in my travel or my gesture, in every thought or emotion I have. The little girls are so present to me that I am never forgetful of them. I live in them in as much as they live in me, in a kind of familiar presence that is also an abyssal intimacy. They are there in every thing I do (I know that because I live it that way). I therefore find myself more and more deeply attentive to each of my acts, gestures and actions, and such attention is originarily permeated (I feel it so) by a kind of very fragile and thin emotional feeling, which is both (ambivalently) made of euphoria and worry.

The unfathomable intimacy between a mother and her child begins very early, as early as the time of pregnancy, where the mother gradually develops a ceaseless care, an endless protection for the coming child (Wynn, 1997). Now, such a primacy given to the infant is also and indistinguishably a primacy given to herself.

Two and a half months before term I am compelled to nearly stop moving. I am carrying in me the most precious jewel: “don’t be foolish!” Looking back on my first pregnancy, I realize how careless I had been. By contrast, I learn how to know both of you from this very imperceptible embodied presence of yours onwards: at birth five weeks before term I will recognize you immediately: we know each other so well already, we are so close to each other.

From this new conception onwards indeed, my body has accustomed me to your presence. I have welcomed each habitual sign of tiredness and uneasiness without any resistance. I paid an acute and extremely focused continued attention to their existence in me, as I was gradually more and more able to observe my increasing sensations of their presence, their position, their movements. Their coming to the world therefore corresponds to only one more step within a series of other continuous previous steps related to the intra-uterine pregnant state. As

a matter of fact, such an intimacy appears to be so deeply emotional that it has the character of a radical relational immediacy between mother and child, far stronger in fact than the spontaneous intimacy I am able to feel towards myself. Such an astonishing link is more immediate still than a fusional one, because we are not yet two different individuals. In the light of such an archaic mystical communality, the woman is able to come back to the primary affective archaism of her own emotional flowing flesh: the infant she carries is the one who allows such a return to herself.

I serenely welcomed this still other pregnancy as an unexpected and hopeless event.

You are here, I know that, it is marvelous, but you know, I am here as well. From day to day my body is moving and changing, and I change my rhythm as the life of the other is getting more and more urgent in me. I learn quietly to foresee my bodily limits, what I can do, what it is better for me not to do. I learn to live with you from the beginning onwards in a great intimacy, without having to forget or give up what I am.

The more the other gets embodied in myself, the more we end up learning how to live with each other, and such a *modus vivendi* will in fact be exactly the one we will have together after the birth. I succeed in being able to become attentive to its being as I am mindful of many other things: such a double attention with a subtle balance is revealing for a long-trained, light, self-awareness and self-presence full of self-lucidity. The result is that the flesh-intimacy I learn to cultivate with the infant is neither built against myself, nor does it reveal the ancestral archaism of our mutual link: it develops with the solemn lightness of a contained emotion. Such an emotion needs as few words as the two other kinds already described. However, such an emotional self-lucid intimacy is not deprived of words; on the contrary, it is full to the brim and therefore is not in need of words anymore.

Affective Self-anticipation

The pregnancy corresponds to a period of time protentionally oriented towards the near future event: the birth.

Every morning as I wake up, my floating sleepy awareness has a sudden flash: "it is nearly here," I say to myself with a great emotion. Such an expectation triggers each time a feeling of joyfulness that carries me in each of my acts and thoughts of the day. I am literally "carried away" by the expected happy event, even though (and because) I am carrying another person in me.

Such a time of expectation is usually said to be a time of waiting, that is to say, a time of emptiness, deprived of any event, focused on the only event that

I am expecting and that is filling this emptiness (Lewis, 1950). But such a description remains quite limited with regard to the emotional density and the richness of the affective fluctuations that are swarming in me during that period. Such a time therefore is a time of fullness, full to the very brim: first of all I am fully aware that I am carrying another life in myself, which makes me responsible and makes me feel more serious, and endowed with a nearly divine power of creation. Second I have become more and more attentive to this life in me by observing the increasing bodily movements of the latter. The bliss I feel deep inside myself is due to the presence of this so precious life in me, a life that I feel so well, that I hold and protect.

Re-conquering one's own intimate flowing flesh through the other

At the beginning of her pregnancy, the woman is not able to feel in her body the physical presence of the embryo. During the first period (i.e., approximately the first two months) she feels the same as before, except for a few bodily disturbances. She remains the same subjective self, only a bit more tired and ill. Then, around the third to the fourth month she becomes aware of the fact that she has gradually begun to protect "her own body" (so she says and thinks) by avoiding a certain number of movements.

But after one more month the fetus has grown and my body as well. I feel the fetus takes up more and more room in my own body, preventing me from doing more and more movements. I feel it quite localized in me. The more it grows, the more I feel dispossessed of my own body: it literally takes my place. I am only useful for it as a container and as a feeder. Where am I?

This body is my body, and is not mine any longer. What is that body that takes shape in mine, that grows from my own flesh that completely depends on me since I am feeding it, even though it makes me totally dependant on it since it is swallowing me and absorbing me like a sponge?

The lived experience of pregnancy is far more than a mere questioning of the borders between myself and the other. Of course it is such a questioning, but it is not only a blurring and a fluxing of the relationship between me and the other. Such a description is only reactive against another one that would stress only the limits, that is the break and the confrontation between me and the other (Kristeva, 1980).

Both tendencies are coexisting during the pregnancy, depending on the moment, either as a conflictual confrontation or as a diffuse undifferentiation of the limits. Besides, to speak of confrontation does not amount to a complete division. The other is in me not like a sphere within a sphere, or in a way similar

to a set of Russian dolls, but rather like drops of water that fall from the tap and gradually fill the bottle up. Now, the water is not flowing at a regular rate from the tap; sometimes it is just a trickle, sometimes it is gushing out. In a similar way, the dynamics of the growth of the other in me is deeply heterogeneous: it is made of different steps and multifarious phases. Hence the gradual modification of our relationships as the embryo and then the fetus fills up my womb more and more: it took on a limited place at the beginning and had to be protected; it is becoming omnipresent at the end and makes me feel alien to myself. Not only does it fill me up, it overflows me.

I am able to hold it till it trespasses its limits and seems to explode within me, just like a rugbyball that has been pumped up too much. Just at the pitch-moment when my body does not react any longer with all its seemingly inexhaustible elasticity, I collapse to open the way for it. Rather than a blurring of the borders between me and the other, it is more relevant to speak of a fragile and unstable dynamics of an asymmetrical mutual coiling where the distinction between interiority and exteriority does not prevail any longer: I am sheltering it but I am also dwelling in it. The intimacy of my flesh is revealed to me at its height.

Now, such a dynamics of mutual coiling, which the example of the Möbius' strip suggests quite clearly, questions two other well-known but quite limited descriptions. First Merleau-Ponty describes (1966, p. 86 and 1969, p. 187) the experience I have of the other by relying on two models he intertwines; the one, vegetal, of the cutting, the other, biblical, of Eve's birth from Adam's side in the following way:

L'autre naît de mon côté, par une sorte de bouture ou de dédoublement, comme le premier autre, dit la *Genèse*, a été fait d'un morceau de corps d'Adam [...] A cet infini que j'étais, quelque chose encore s'ajoute, je me dédouble, j'enfante, cet autre est fait de ma substance, et cependant ce n'est plus moi.

In both cases, insofar as I am an autonomous lived body, the other is seen as a first useless addition to myself, which "grows" from me, from a part of myself. Not only are these images to be found within the more general context of quite a problematic analysis of the other, but they suggest that Merleau-Ponty broaches the relationship with the other in the light of the experience of birth: "l'autre naît de mon côté [...] j'enfante, cet autre est fait de ma substance, et cependant ce n'est pas moi." Let's take a closer look at this quite peculiar description of pregnancy by which he wants to account for the general experience of the other.

It seems to be quite difficult at first sight to give an analysis of the gestation and then of the birth of the other in me which would be supported by such biblical and/or vegetal models. Can the child who has been carried and then birthed simply be a splitting of myself, a sheer doubling? Could it even be

only an unnecessary addition to myself? Who is this “second” bodily flesh who grows from me like a sponge? Is it really a true second I? The pregnancy and then the birth are these exceptional events where the two come out of the one: the embryo and then the fetus gradually becomes independent as an embodied unity from the mother as a carnal unity. Now, Merleau-Ponty seems to be forgetting that a second bodily flesh becomes an autonomous I only because such a self is the result of the union of two selves, that is because the embryo has first been conceived as such an original individual by the encounter between a spermatozoon and an ovum. How is it possible to describe the experience of pregnancy in the light of a vegetal or biblical parthenogenesis, which means separating such an experience from the global dynamics of human reproduction? The latter indeed is necessarily sexual and includes in this pregnancy as an intrinsic component the previous event of the fertilization, that is the generation of an individual out of the intimate carnal intercourse of two other individuals, its parents.

Second, in another style, pregnancy is considered by Julia Kristeva as the experience of a bodily split, an internal division, a fission of the flesh, which means at once separation and coexistence of myself and the other. The psychoanalyst relies on the psycho-pathological model of schizophrenia and goes even so far as to speak of the pregnant woman in the terms of an “instituted, socialized psychosis” (Kristeva, 1979, p. 16; 1980, p. 238). Like the psychopath, she would be a splitted subjectivity.

Nevertheless, Kristeva is cautious not to rigidify what is a far more complex and unstable relationship. So she goes to the other extreme, going from such a radical dual division to an overfluidification of both parts (Kristeva, 1980, p. 240). Such an excess on both sides makes her miss the point, that is the peculiar dynamics of the fragile mutual coiling that is at the core of the relationship between the bodily self and the bodily flesh of the other. While reacting too violently against the model of the conflictual split, which is, according to her, representative of a previous philosophical tradition anchored in a universalist and masculinist abstract humanism, Kristeva offers a floating fluidity without any structure, therefore completely erasing the very possibility of a dynamics, which always presupposes a minimal polar structuring. In that respect, this extreme position is also Michel Henry’s (1990, p. 137-159) when he describes the non-intentional relationship between a mother and her infant. For the author of *Phénoménologie matérielle*, the emotional flesh-intimacy between a mother and her child is such that it precludes any dynamic intentional structure and requires that it be conceived in the fusional and immediate words of what he calls a ‘*pathos-avec*’ or a ‘communion’.

The pregnant flowing flesh: An exceptional case study of the lucidity of the body

To conclude, these different ways of describing the lived experience of pregnancy are parallel to the multifarious forms of intimacy a mother experiences with her unborn child. We chose to show these modes of intimacy as successive phases that a woman experiences as she lives *through different pregnancies* (which do not exactly amount to different phases of one unique pregnancy) as if she were maturing from one pregnancy to the other in the relationship she has with her child and with herself. Such intimacies, however, also refer to distinctive feminine temperaments. *First pregnancy*, the conflict between a woman and her embryo generates a violence that is revealing for the constitutive difficulty of gaining a spontaneous access to such an opaque and archaic part of ourselves; *second pregnancy* : the fluid and generous welcome of the unborn child makes any wall between the mother and the child collapse, so that the primacy is given to an abyssal and vertiginous link which appears to be more immediate than fusion, since there is no differentiation at all; *third pregnancy* : between both extremes, we find a sort of medium quality of intimacy that grows out of a mindful receptivity to the other and refuses every absorption.

We purposely chose the lived experience of pregnancy as a leading-clue for our analysis of the lucidity of the body. We have to deal here with quite a peculiar experience, which remains quite inaccessible and particular because not everybody is able to live it through in one's flesh: only women are, and, besides, not every woman. Even though a certain number of human beings are able to observe the factual reality of such an experience, they nonetheless remain excluded from its direct intuitive experience. But such an experience contains an irreducible subjective dimension, and reaches its universal character at the expense of every absolute and general validity. Its universality lies in its shared relativity and the quality of its singularity. Moreover, it has an exemplary status: pregnancy is like an ordeal through which my body is revealed and literally becomes another. How is my body able to give birth to a radically singular and different individual that nonetheless grows from my most intimate flowing flesh, from my most deeply emotional subjective I? By generating a dispossession of my superficially closed-up self, the child brings me back to the deep space of my emotional flesh that I am inhabiting most of the time without knowing it at all.

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