

A Phenomenological-Structural Approach to Suicide in Adolescence: Between Structural Vulnerability and Clinical Possibility¹

Daniela Ceron-Litvoc

Abstract

Suicide in adolescence is often approached through epidemiological risk factors or diagnostic categories, yet these perspectives frequently fail to account for why this life stage is marked by such intense vulnerability to existential suffering. This article argues that adolescence constitutes a singular condition of risk not primarily because of external factors, but because it involves a radical reorganization of the basic conditions of subjective experience. Drawing on a phenomenological-structural framework, the paper examines how the profound reconfiguration of temporality, spatiality, embodiment, and intersubjectivity during adolescence creates a terrain in which suicidal ideation may emerge as a response to overwhelming instability rather than as a discrete pathological symptom.

The analysis shows that the adolescent experience is characterized by an excessive openness to the future, a destabilization of embodied self-experience, an abrupt expansion of social and symbolic space, and a shift from vertical to horizontal forms of intersubjective support centered on peers. These structural transformations are further intensified in contemporary digital contexts, where fragile bonds, collective narratives, and online exposure amplify both contagion and vulnerability, as illustrated by the Werther and Papageno effects.

Clinically, the article proposes that effective intervention requires more than risk management or symptom reduction. While pharmacological measures may reduce acute danger, therapeutic work must primarily aim to restore temporal movement and biographical continuity through singular intersubjective engagement. By reframing adolescent suicide as an expression of structural vulnerability rather than mere pathology, this phenomenological-structural approach offers a conceptual and clinical framework capable of integrating individual suffering, social context, and therapeutic responsibility.

Keywords: Adolescence; Suicide; Phenomenological-structural psychopathology; Temporality; Embodiment; Intersubjectivity; Digital context.

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Uma Abordagem Fenomenológico-Estrutural do Suicídio na Adolescência: Entre Vulnerabilidade Estrutural e Possibilidade Clínica

Daniela Ceron-Litvoc

Resumo

O suicídio na adolescência é frequentemente abordado a partir de fatores de risco epidemiológicos ou de categorias diagnósticas; contudo, essas perspectivas frequentemente deixam de explicar por que essa etapa da vida é marcada por uma vulnerabilidade tão intensa ao sofrimento existencial. Este artigo argumenta que a adolescência constitui uma condição singular de risco não primordialmente por causa de fatores externos, mas porque envolve uma reorganização radical das condições básicas da experiência subjetiva. Com base em uma perspectiva fenomenológico-estrutural, o artigo examina como a profunda reconfiguração da temporalidade, da espacialidade, da corporeidade e da intersubjetividade durante a adolescência cria um terreno no qual a ideação suicida pode emergir como resposta a uma instabilidade avassaladora, mais do que como um sintoma patológico discreto.

A análise mostra que a experiência adolescente é caracterizada por uma abertura excessiva ao futuro, uma desestabilização da experiência corporal de si, uma expansão abrupta do espaço social e simbólico, e uma passagem de formas verticais para formas horizontais de sustentação intersubjetiva, centradas nos pares. Essas transformações estruturais são ainda mais intensificadas nos contextos digitais contemporâneos, nos quais vínculos frágeis, narrativas coletivas e exposição online amplificam tanto o contágio quanto a vulnerabilidade, como ilustram os efeitos Werther e Papageno.

Clinicamente, o artigo propõe que uma intervenção efetiva requer mais do que manejo de risco ou redução sintomática. Embora medidas farmacológicas possam reduzir o perigo agudo, o trabalho terapêutico deve visar primariamente à restauração do movimento temporal e da continuidade biográfica por meio de um engajamento intersubjetivo singular. Ao reformular o suicídio adolescente como expressão de vulnerabilidade estrutural, e não como mera patologia, essa abordagem fenomenológico-estrutural oferece um arcabouço conceitual e clínico capaz de integrar sofrimento individual, contexto social e responsabilidade terapêutica.

Palavras-chave: Adolescência; Suicídio; Psicopatologia fenomenológico-estrutural; Temporalidade; Corporeidade; Intersubjetividade; Contexto digital.

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Introduction

Part I

Psychic Structure in Expansion and Reconfiguration

Development may be understood, within this framework, as the continuous expansion of a psychic structure in dynamic equilibrium, a conception elaborated in previous phenomenological-structural work on developmental processes (Ceron-Litvoc & Messas, 2016; Ceron-Litvoc, 2020). This structure is composed of fundamental dimensions—embodiment, temporality, spatiality, and intersubjective relations—that articulate and reorganize at each stage, forming the structural conditions of lived experience across development (Ceron-Litvoc & Messas, 2016). Psychic health is understood as a balanced and harmonious proportionality among these dimensions, sustaining the expansive movement of human becoming without rupture or disfiguration, while preserving a stability of self- and world-experience—a notion previously developed in phenomenological-structural analyses of normal development (Ceron-Litvoc, 2020).

During childhood, the structure expands in a relatively stable manner. Embodiment is the major source of anchorage: the body provides continuity, flexibility, and the basis of the experience of self. Intersubjectivity likewise plays a fundamental role, especially in its typical childhood format: a verticalized relation in which the adult transmits stability, protection, and a reference to the world. In this relation, the child finds anchorage in an other who bears authority and offers the ballast required for experiences to find sense and organization. Temporality expands progressively, allowing development from a predominantly presentified experiencing toward a tripartite temporality (protention, present, and retention). Spatiality expands horizontally, opening onto a socialized world (from home to school, to the neighborhood, to the wider world), and vertically, through a progressively growing capacity for inward spatialization (in the existential sense), which supports the emergence of introspection.

In adolescence, however, this relative equilibrium in the expansion of temporality and spatiality is profoundly altered. Classical developmental accounts have long described adolescence as a period of crisis and structural reorganization

rather than linear continuity. Piaget, for instance, emphasizes that adolescence involves a profound transformation of previously established structures, marked by instability and the search for a new equilibrium, as well as by an opening to the realm of the possible that introduces new tensions in the relation to reality (Piaget, 1958/1972). Building on these observational descriptions, the present study proposes a phenomenological-structural reading of adolescence as a phase of intense structural reconfiguration, in which former forms of support lose their organizing force while new ones have not yet been consolidated.

The adolescent is thus thrust into a movement of radical reorganization, giving rise to multiple intense and unstable experiences until a less fragile equilibrium in the mode of being-in-the-world can be re-dimensioned. At this point of maximal expansion—characterized by expected disproportions and moments of disequilibrium in search of a new proportion—suicidal ideation may emerge as one possible way in which the anguish of existing is expressed.

A metaphor helps clarify the process: if childhood may be compared to the unfolding of a poem, adolescence is the moment when, suddenly, that poem seems to lose its meaning. The adolescent feels cast into writing a new text without ballast, with words not yet known. It is the experience of biographical rupture, of discontinuity of the self within the world as it has been until then.

Temporality: Excess of Future, Loss of Past

Temporality is perhaps the dimension most radically transformed in adolescence. The child lives a tripartite temporality in which past, present, and future articulate in a balanced way. By contrast, the adolescent experiences a hypertrophy of protention: the future invades experience and dominates psychic life.

This expansion of the future comes accompanied by a devaluation of the past. Personal history loses importance; what has been lived no longer seems significant. In the metaphor of self-writing, an adolescent might say, when invited to reread the poem written thus far: “I was writing this poem and suddenly none of that made sense. I need to write about a future for which I have almost no ballast.”

The present, in turn, becomes an anguishing space: it is where the task of constructing the one desired to become is installed—but without guarantees. This configuration can generate a feeling of emptiness and discontinuity. This

disproportional temporality may be understood as the source of extreme existential anguish: an unrestricted openness to the future side by side with the absence of internal tools to sustain the construction of a biographical project. Within this framework, suicidal ideation can thus be seen as emerging from the experience of having to endure an infinite, formless, ballast-less future.

Spatiality: Expansion and Dislodgement

In childhood, spatiality expands linearly and continuously: from early attachment relations with caregivers to the family; from home to school; from neighborhood to city—in a progressive enlargement of the lived world. In adolescence, that linearity is replaced by an abrupt leap: the young person awakens to the conceptual vastness of the world, finding themselves before infinite horizons. This opening is a source of fascination but also of helplessness: the world shows itself as too vast, demanding choices and positions for which there are not yet resources.

On the horizontal vector, the social and symbolic field of presence widens. This is not only a geographic enlargement, but also a conceptual and relational one: new groups, codes, and ideals come to compose the adolescent's horizon. Faced with so many places to inhabit, displacement and inadequacy may arise. On the vertical vector, the relation with values, projects, and belongings deepens; the dimension of "me with myself," the conceptual introspective space, increases abruptly. Space becomes broader and deeper in a tensional dialectic of vectors never before experienced. Thus spatiality, which previously offered support, is now lived as a field of passage and trial, wherein belongings are tested and boundaries between what is one's own and what is of the world are redefined.

Embodiment: Lived Body and Object Body

Embodiment, in turn, is reconfigured so intensely that it must rebuild its capacity to provide the experience of stability so fundamental throughout childhood. In childhood, the body was lived as anchorage and a source of stability. In adolescence, puberty transforms the body into a territory of novelty and estrangement: growth, hormonal changes, emerging sexuality, and comparisons with social standards place the young person before a body no longer recognized as their own.

Here the dialectic emerges between the lived body (Leib) and the object body (Körper). The concept of Körper can be understood as the plain experience of having a body, as biological mass—an element present from the outset. This predominated in the previous stage. The child's world is governed by the law of a sensory body: psychic reality is determined by what the body can assimilate. Now, in adolescence, embodiment expands into a dialectic between Körper and Leib. The novelty is a consequence of the adolescent's enormous expansion of lived experience. Added to Körper is the experience of a body that, beyond its concreteness, also becomes the dwelling of a being, sustaining a dialectic laden with meanings. Leib transforms the experience of intercorporeality: from an intercorporeality that began with rhythmic attunement between the baby's and caregiver's bodies to an exchange that transcends matter, rhythm, and movement, becoming atmospheric.

This new psychic reality places the adolescent in a double dimension: the presentified concreteness of Körper and the protentional potency of the possibilities of Leib. As in everything bound to the tension between the present and the desire for future-directed transformation, the dialectic is taut. Körper—matter—which once was potency and mobility, may now become retention. No opening to the future can dispense with concrete reality. The present body, captured by the gaze of others and by social and digital standards, determines who one is and sets the concrete path to be traveled toward the future. Leib, open in the potency of transformation, resents this Körper that holds it back within the tempo of material transformation, even as Körper incarnates and enables the intentions of self-construction. Leib may offer vitality and openness, but Körper may become obstacle and estrangement at a moment of such transcendence of matter. As a young woman reported: "I looked at myself in the mirror and didn't recognize myself. It was as if I were outside of me, seeing a stranger."

The ambivalence between the lived body (Leib) and the object body (Körper) may give rise to experiences of depersonalization and bodily estrangement. In attempting to turn the body into a sign of identity, the adolescent risks losing the sense of familiarity that is the bodily pillar—self and body are inseparable elements. This combination may produce a profound dislodgement: being in the world without recognizing oneself either in it or in oneself.

Intersubjectivity: the Role of Peers

In childhood, intersubjectivity is organized into two broad modalities with distinct possibilities: a verticalized one (in which the adult promotes stability for the child) and a horizontal but partial one (between children). In childhood, when intersubjectivity develops between two children, it remains partial, for both are still excessively centered in their own perspectives, with only a restricted capacity to open to the other. Despite the intention to open to the other, the experience remains centered on one's own embodiment, allowing both poles of subjectivity to construct experience in a more partial way than in adulthood.

Drawing on classical developmental research, adolescence has been widely described as a period marked by the reorganization of relational hierarchies, the growing centrality of peer relationships, and the intensification of emotional and social experience (Piaget, 1958/1972; Hopkins, 2005). Building on these descriptions, the present analysis proposes a structural-phenomenological interpretation of adolescence as a phase in which the vectors of psychic organization change both in direction and in potency.

Within this transitional field, verticalized intersubjectivity—previously organized around asymmetrical adult–child relations—loses its structuring force, giving way to a horizontal configuration in which relational poles acquire comparable valence. At the same time, openness to the other expands beyond body-centered experience toward forms of intersubjective engagement grounded in interspatiality and intercorporeality. As a result, adolescent experience comes to be sustained by two intersubjective poles of equivalent valence, inaugurating a fundamental challenge: recognizing the autonomy of the other while simultaneously sustaining one's own. It is intersubjectivity in its most complex face. In this context it becomes clear why adolescence is also the time of passions: intense forms of co-construction of a world between two subjects who share empathic attunement, mutual presence, and symbolic co-habitation.

By expanding to horizontal (not partial) intersubjectivity and extinguishing the vertical, the adolescent finds themselves in an unfamiliar position: the task of constructing new sources of support in the world now falls primarily to communion with peers. Parents cease to be central anchors, since the structural characteristics of adolescence lead parents and children to inhabit distinct worlds. Parents cease to

be central anchors once vertical intersubjectivity has been extinguished. With the collapse of that asymmetrical structure of support, the adolescent becomes aware of the structural difference determined by each one's position in the life cycle. The parents' world now appears as belonging to another temporal and existential order—one governed by consolidated meanings and sedimented rhythms—whereas the adolescent experiences a world still in movement and reconfiguration. This divergence in existential structures makes the parents' perspective feel distant and often incomprehensible, generating the lived sense that they no longer share the same world. It is therefore age-peers—just as avid for partnership as each adolescent is—who provide the new world-sustaining anchorage.

Yet peer groups are formed by unstable subjects, afflicted by the existential anguish expected at this stage. Horizontal intersubjectivity thus becomes intrinsically ambivalent: a source of protection and recognition, but also a field of risk and contagion. It may offer belonging and recognition, and it may also become a pathway for suicidal contagion when the death or suffering of a peer is internalized as a way to elaborate one's own anguish.

It is in this field that the so-called Werther and Papageno effects are inscribed. The former designates the risk of imitation and contagion stemming from exposure to suicidal behavior within the group; the latter, the protective potential of narratives of overcoming that offer alternatives to death.

The Werther effect refers to increased suicide risk through social contagion, especially when adolescents are exposed to the suicide of peers, public figures, or sensationalist media narratives. As Mueller (2019) showed, the probability of ideation and attempts grows in contexts of strong identification—same age range, gender, or emotional proximity—helping explain the occurrence of clusters in schools and communities. Psychological autopsy studies (Balt et al., 2023; Arendt et al., 2019) indicate that farewell messages and content circulating on social networks often functioned as action models, frequently without peers or family recognizing the risk. The Werther effect thus illustrates how adolescent vulnerability may be amplified when the death of the other is internalized as a possibility for one's own anguish.

The Papageno effect, in turn, designates the protective function of coping and survival narratives that offer alternatives to suicide by showing that crisis may be traversed. Mueller (2019) emphasizes that, just as death-centered narratives can

foster imitation, stories of survival can open horizons of hope and inhibit suicidal behavior. This potential was confirmed empirically by Hamilton et al. (2024), who demonstrated that positive social-media experiences—support, validation, belonging—may reduce, albeit more weakly and transiently, the proximal risk of suicidal ideation. Moreover, Giordano (2003) points out how friendships and romantic partnerships function as protective factors in adolescent development, resonating with the Papageno effect by offering bonds of recognition and belonging as alternatives to isolation and despair.

Seeking in peer relations a base of support is the expected—and potentially powerful—way to ease the tensions proper to this life period. Hours spent together in seemingly trivial activities—producing videos, gaming, inventing short-lived fads—are in fact foundational experiences of belonging. The group functions as a prop against the excess of future and against bodily estrangement. However, the direction each group takes—toward support or contagion—is decisive and requires constant attention from adults as well. Here the family's role becomes crucial which, although reconfigured in relation to its prior form, remains absolutely fundamental. This new configuration of peer bonds also reverberates within the family.

Family in Transformation

Family organization changes—at least from the adolescent's perspective. Intersubjective experience now consists of a dialectic between two subjective poles of equivalent weight. The adolescent no longer submits unconditionally to the other's perspective but begins to co-construct experience, including the other as a partner in an equivalent position. At this point, a fuller experience of alterity begins, one that carries the possibility of reciprocal transformation.

This displacement is expressed in daily life: unidirectional rules are now met with resistance. The adolescent demands explanations, formulates arguments, and challenges positions. The adult's authority is no longer sufficient in itself—precisely because it is no longer sustained by verticalized intersubjectivity; it must instead be continually constructed within the relationship, through dialogue and negotiation. This does not signify the absence of limits but rather a change in how limits are lived: previously, they were obeyed under an authority that imposed itself almost “naturally,” supported by a verticalized intersubjective structure; now, they are

disputed and reconstructed through the equivalence of the subjectivities that contest them.

This movement profoundly marks family relations, turning them into a fertile terrain for tension. The adolescent confronts the idealized image of the parents, questions their ways of being, their habits, and their limitations. It is the moment when parents “stop being cool,” when a language once experienced as familiar and comforting begins to sound foreign or intrusive. The other must be deconstructed for the self to emerge—and this process is often turbulent.

Within this new structural configuration, parents cease to be central anchors once vertical intersubjectivity has been extinguished. With the collapse of that asymmetrical structure of support, the adolescent becomes aware of the structural difference determined by each one’s position in the life cycle. The parents’ world now appears as belonging to another temporal and existential order—one governed by consolidated meanings and sedimented rhythms—whereas the adolescent experiences a world still in movement and reconfiguration. This divergence in existential structures makes the parents’ perspective feel distant and often incomprehensible, generating the lived sense that they no longer share the same world.

The role of the family does not disappear, but it is transformed. This is not a matter of the absence of limits or of the failure of parental relations to provide direction, but of a change in form. What once imposed itself almost naturally, sustained by a verticalized intersubjective structure, must now be reconstructed within a relation that presupposes equivalence of positions—at least from the adolescent’s point of view. This process, inevitably, generates conflict.

The family can still play a fundamental role, provided it recognizes and assimilates this new possibility of relationship: within what is feasible for each familial reality, accompanying the adolescent’s reorganization, offering support, and accepting the desire for autonomy—without attempting to suppress it—while also delineating new limits. Parents who recognize that they have lost their exclusive role as stabilizers and accept a place of partial support can help their children traverse this stage without rupture. Conversely, when the family insists on maintaining a rigid verticality, the risk of distance and isolation increases. In such circumstances, the adolescent may find themselves among fragile peers and a distant family, losing their

main forms of anchorage and becoming more vulnerable to suicidal ideation.

These internal transformations in the adolescent become even more complex when situated within the contemporary social context, marked by fragile bonds and digital mediation. It is within this historical terrain that structural vulnerabilities find the conditions for their intensification.

Part II

Does Contemporary Society Increase Vulnerability to Suicidal Ideation?

The rise in suicide rates among adolescents cannot be understood solely through a structural analysis of the experience of this life stage. It is also necessary to consider how contemporary society organizes bonds, frameworks of meaning, and opportunities for belonging. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Émile Durkheim pointed to the relationship between social transformations in industrial society and the occurrence of suicide, describing how the weakening of collective bonds could increase individual vulnerability. More than a century later, his analysis remains strikingly relevant. We live in a society in which the valorization of individualism, the overinvestment of expectations in the future, and the radical assignment of responsibility to each subject for their own destiny create a specific field of risk. Authors such as Bauman (2000) describe this process as a “liquid” modernity, marked by the fluidity of bonds and the fragility of references, while Byung-Chul Han (2017) identifies the “performance society” as a producer of excessive freedom and responsibility—a configuration in which each subject feels constantly compelled to self-construct without collective support. Freedom, presented as the highest achievement of modernity, becomes a source of anguish when it is unaccompanied by solid references of belonging and shared limits.

This social dynamic must be understood in direct correlation with the structural dimensions described in Part I. The excess of hope and expectation resonates with adolescent temporality, already characterized by the hypertrophy of protention; thus, the future appears not only limitless but also burdened with an impossible demand for realization. Individualism weakens intersubjectivity, displacing the adolescent from a field of shared support toward an experience of solitary autonomy in which equivalence with the other loses ballast. The radical responsibility for one’s own destiny reverberates in spatiality, demanding that the

young person define their own paths within a world of vast and unstable horizons. Finally, the overload of performance and social comparison falls upon embodiment, which becomes the stage for external expectations and incessant judgments.

If industrial modernity had already weakened the bonds of belonging, this process is radicalized in the digital context. Community ties become more fluid, social norms lose stability, and individuals are constantly exposed to new demands for adaptation, performance, and visibility. The adolescent, amid a psychic structure in reorganization, is especially vulnerable to this dynamic: what is already lived as an internal excess of future, spatial dislodgement, bodily estrangement, and the search for horizontal intersubjectivity finds, in contemporaneity, a terrain that intensifies each of these tensions.

Social Fragmentation and Its Radicalization in the Digital World

The loss of former sources of stability—family, religion, and predefined social roles—had already been described in industrial society as a generator of anguish. As Durkheim observed in *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897/1951), the weakening of collective structures and the erosion of shared moral frameworks lead to a state of anomie, in which individuals are left without stable references of belonging or direction. Whereas the individual's place in the world had once been delimited by collective structures, industrial modernity opened a broader yet more solitary field of possibilities: it became the task of each subject to construct a biographical trajectory without external guarantees of meaning.

The contemporary social context is marked by profound modifications in the organization of social groups, in the possibilities of belonging to the world, and in the ways relationships are established. Over the past decade, the massive intensification of relationships mediated by online connections—in multiple formats—has profoundly transformed the forms of human relation. The self and the other can now initiate and sustain a relationship of any kind without bodily presence, without shared temporality or spatiality, sustained only by a **diluted form of intersubjectivity shaped by online mediation**. We thus live a radicalization of social fragmentation: fragile bonds, unstable belonging, instantaneous cancellations, and absence of ballast. Bauman (2000) had already described how fragile and disposable relations, typical of liquid modernity, could undermine the construction of lasting identities. In

phenomenological-structural terms (Fuchs, 2018), the consequence is the loss of intersubjective continuity necessary for the adolescent to organize their biography within a shared field of meaning.

The Virtual World as a New Spatiality and Weakened Intersubjectivity

Since the possibility of carrying a virtual world in the palm of one's hand—with the introduction of smartphones in 2010—a radical transformation has taken place in how peers interact. In 2015, adolescents spent an average of seven hours per day on screens; by 2022, an astounding 46% reported being online “almost constantly” (Common Sense Media, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2022).

The establishment of a regime of interactions mediated by smartphones has produced a structural alteration in the forms of sociability. Anthropologically, face-to-face social interactions possess four central characteristics: (1) they are embodied, requiring physical presence, the perception of the other's embodiment, and reciprocal response to bodily cues—both conscious and unconscious; (2) they are synchronous, occurring in real time and dependent on subtleties of rhythm, alternation, and bodily temporality; (3) they are singular, tending to occur one-to-one or in small groups, preserving reciprocal attention within a bounded relational space; and (4) they unfold within communities of greater stability, with costs of entry and exit that foster affective investment and reconciliation after rupture.

Virtual interactions, in contrast, exhibit four inverse characteristics: (1) they are disembodied, dispensing with physical presence and even replacing human interlocutors with algorithms or artificial intelligences; (2) they are largely asynchronous, based on posts and reactions that occur outside real time; (3) they are structured as one-to-many models of communication, allowing parallel interactions and the reach of mass audiences; and (4) they take place within communities with virtually no costs of permanence, where blocking or abandoning relationships becomes trivial.

These differences imply a qualitative transformation in the social experience of adolescents. While the physical world once offered a stable ballast, promoting the dialectic between self and other essential to self-construction, the virtual world favors fragile and disposable relations. This loss of the stabilizing potency of intersubjectivity may be one of the factors correlating greater screen time with increased depressive

symptoms and suicidal ideation in adolescents (Twenge et al., 2018; Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

However, it is important to emphasize that although these studies indicate associations between screen time and depressive symptoms or suicidal ideation, there remains debate in the literature regarding the strength and causality of this relationship, suggesting that other contextual factors must also be considered. Furthermore, the digital logic transfers the potency of singular intersubjectivity to collective intersubjectivity, fixing identities into rigid categories—“accepted” or “canceled,” “influential” or “irrelevant”—and thereby diminishing the expansive and transformative power of singular intersubjectivity.

Singular versus Collective Intersubjectivity

The constitution of the self-pole arises from a dialogical opening toward the pole of the other. As described in Part I, adolescence promotes a structural opening toward an expansion of intersubjectivity—an embodied, interactive process in which lived bodies intertwine and constitute a shared intercorporeality (Fuchs, 2007). At this stage, therefore, what would be expected is the consolidation of a singular intersubjectivity—along the lines of the I–Thou relationship described by Buber (1974)—in which two poles recognize each other as historical singularities in a living dialogue. This relation may occur within dyads or groups, provided that it preserves interspatial porosity and the integration of new experiences without nullifying individuality (Messas, 2021). It is this openness that enables the fluid and protentive transformation of both poles, allowing maturation and the creative sedimentation of experience.

However, in the predominant relational modalities of the digital world, collective intersubjectivity prevails. The collective pole—composed of anonymous audiences, algorithms, and influencers—dominates the individual, fixing identity within homogeneous molds. Identities are transformed into rigid categories: being “influential” or “irrelevant,” “accepted” or “canceled,” aligned or not with certain social narratives. Byung-Chul Han (2017), in *In the Swarm*, argues that digital media freezes temporality, creating a space without age, destiny, or death, in which identities are fixed into immutable images. In this process, the expansive potential of singular intersubjectivity—which would sustain the mutual transformation of self and

other—is lost. Biographical potency is thus reduced to fleeting digital spotlights, crystallized into unchangeable representations.

The Virtual World and the Dialectic Between Körper and Leib

This displacement can also be understood through the dimension of embodiment. Collective intersubjectivity, which fixes the individual within a social identity, finds its parallel in the objectification of the body as that which is displayed in the virtual environment. As Han (2017) notes, “digital media accomplishes an iconic inversion, making images appear more alive, more beautiful, and better” (In the Swarm, p. 53). In this context, the body ceases to be lived as Leib—the inhabited and transformative lived body—and becomes reduced to Körper, the objectified body that is exhibited and compared.

This virtual logic echoes what was described in Part I: adolescence demands a synthesis between the real body, in transformation, and the ideal body, projected toward the future. In the digital space, however, this synthesis is distorted: the body is frozen into edited images, unattainable social standards, and public performances that preclude the oscillation inherent to the process of maturation. The discrepancy between the lived body and the displayed body may intensify experiences of estrangement, depersonalization, and inadequacy, heightening vulnerability to suicidal ideation.

This ensemble of digital transformations affects not only intersubjectivity but also all structural dimensions—time, space, and embodiment—leaving the adolescent on a ground of expanded instability. It is precisely at this point that phenomenological-structural clinical work must intervene.

The Ambivalence of Peers

In Part I of this article, the relationship with peers was described as ambivalent in its role in protecting against suicide—capable both of safeguarding and of exposing the adolescent to risk. In the digital environment, this ambivalence is intensified. The instability of online groups, combined with the rapid circulation of suicide-related narratives and the dominance of collective intersubjectivity that places the concept above the individual, broadens the possibilities of contagion. When a peer dies by suicide, their story is quickly shared across social networks and messaging apps,

often without adults' awareness. If this was already difficult to trace within families, in the virtual world it becomes nearly impossible to grasp the scope of adolescents' exposure. These digital clusters create a sudden and invasive temporality in which the event repeats itself indefinitely through messages, images, and comments, amplifying collective vulnerability.

Epidemiological research data can be better understood in light of this phenomenon. Social media platforms have created new spaces for the Werther effect: farewell messages, memes, and images of self-harm or suicide circulate rapidly among adolescents, functioning as models of action (Balt et al., 2023; Arendt et al., 2019). Algorithmic reinforcement heightens exposure: searches for content related to depression or suicide on platforms such as Instagram generate even more of the same, creating the impression that "this is all there is" (Balt et al., 2023). In addition, digital communities may consolidate a suicidal identity, offering belonging around risk behaviors, while the speed of applications such as WhatsApp accelerates the formation of clusters (Mueller, 2019).

At the same time, social networks also foster the Papageno effect. Many adolescents find support and recognition in virtual communities, discovering that they are not alone in their suffering (Hamilton et al., 2024). Online stories of recovery function as protective narratives, normalizing crisis and offering models of coping (Mueller, 2019). Initiatives such as the #chatsafe project demonstrate that it is possible to use social media safely to communicate about suicide and strengthen protective strategies (Arendt et al., 2019). This ambivalence shows that the same virtual environment can operate either as threat or protection, depending on how it is used, the nature of the bonds formed, and the kind of recognition the adolescent encounters in their network.

A crucial aspect of this ambivalence is that many adolescents who died by suicide had left explicit signs on social media that were not recognized as indicators of real risk. Psychological autopsy studies show that posts, messages, and status updates on platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram contained direct references to death wishes or farewells, yet peers and family members did not interpret these as cries for help (Arendt et al., 2019; Balt et al., 2023). In some cases, the content was perceived as jokes or typical adolescent expressions, underscoring the absence of shared codes among peers, adults, and institutions. As Hamilton et al. (2024)

observe, messages of distress on social media can intensify suicidal ideation without being recognized as immediate risk, revealing the profound ambivalence of digital communication.

The fragility of this form of intersubjective belonging becomes evident. Digital communication is disembodied: the affective signals of the body—gaze, tone of voice, rhythm of breathing—disappear, making it difficult to perceive the seriousness of a message. It is also asynchronous: a message posted may be read hours later, outside the rhythm of the crisis's urgency. Furthermore, it is collective and diffuse, addressed to multiple audiences, diluting individual responsibility for response. Finally, belonging to virtual groups is unstable, subject to instant blocking, exclusion, or “cancellation,” which weakens the durability of bonds. These very elements explain why pleas for help, though widely disseminated, often fail to elicit effective support. The same environment that can provide connection and belonging may simultaneously neutralize signs of imminent danger.

In the digital age, peers thus include not only those who share the same physical space but also those who inhabit the same virtual environment. The reference group can be simultaneously protective and destabilizing, and it is up to clinical work to recognize this ambivalence. Supporting adolescents within this context requires integrating the understanding of both physical and digital intersubjectivity, acknowledging how each traverses the structural dimensions: temporality marked by the speed of collective narratives, spatiality expanded yet unstable, embodiment reduced to comparative images, and intersubjectivity fixed in collective categories. Only from this integrated vision can the clinical field offer genuine support for adolescents as they navigate their structural vulnerability.

Part III

The Clinic of Phenomenological-Structural Psychopathology

Recent empirical studies have raised important questions about the effectiveness of suicide prevention campaigns centered primarily on media visibility and universal messages. An ecological time-series analysis of the Brazilian “Yellow September” campaign, for instance, found no significant reduction in suicide mortality following its implementation, and even identified increases in risk in specific years and age groups, particularly among young people (Cruz et al., 2024). These

findings are consistent with broader international literature indicating that campaigns based mainly on publicity and negative imperatives tend to show limited or inconsistent effects, especially when not articulated with sustained clinical, educational, and community-based interventions (Torok et al., 2017; Oexle et al., 2019). The need to rethink suicide prevention is not only a theoretical demand of phenomenological psychopathology, but an empirical necessity highlighted by the limited effectiveness of current campaign-based strategies.

From a phenomenological-structural standpoint, such limitations can be understood as reflecting a mismatch between the complexity of adolescent suffering and the reductive logic of prohibitive messages. When prevention is organized primarily around negation—"don't kill yourself"—it risks foreclosing spaces of meaning-making and dialogue precisely at a life stage marked by structural reconfiguration and heightened existential vulnerability. The present approach therefore proposes that prevention strategies be reconsidered in light of adolescents' modes of inhabiting time, space, embodiment, and intersubjectivity, offering a complementary framework oriented toward openness, recognition of anguish, and relational containment rather than interdiction alone. Within this framework, clinical practice is invited to recognize crisis not as an anomaly to be immediately neutralized, but as a constitutive dimension of adolescent experience.

From a phenomenological-structural standpoint, responding to suicide therefore requires replacing negation with openness: fostering narratives that acknowledge anguish as meaningful and worthy of expression, and that create relational spaces oriented toward dialogue rather than interdiction.

Psychic Structure, the Digital World, and the Clinical Task: Restoring Temporal Movement and Singular Intersubjectivity

Recognizing the world in which the adolescent is embedded requires two simultaneous gestures: first, acknowledging the pre-reflective conditions of possibility specific to this stage of life; and second, understanding the radical transformations brought by the digital world over the past two decades. The digital reality prevents the constitution of a stable intersubjective ballast, such as that expected in embodied relations with peers. It intensifies the distance from parents—already part of the reorganization proper to this phase—making it even more difficult

for the family to function as a source of support. It also weakens both embodiment and temporality: the body is reduced to editable images, and time is frozen into instantaneous and repetitive narratives.

By recognizing the psychic structure and the world in which the adolescent exists, the central objective of phenomenological-structural clinical work can be delineated: to recognize the temporal protentive paralysis and to foster the resumption of movement. This process may be aided by pharmacological interventions, which act as immediate protective measures capable of buffering anguish and reducing imminent risk. However, it is above all within singular intersubjectivity with the therapist that the clinical task finds its fullest realization. Through interspatial porosity, a field opens in which the adolescent, despite the expected anguish of this stage, may once again recognize themselves as a viable project—resuming the path toward a protention that is uncertain (by its breadth) yet possible (by its individual potency).

In this sense, it is essential to sustain all processes that foster singular intersubjectivities capable of counterbalancing the fixity imposed by the collective intersubjectivity of the virtual world.

The Clinical Task as Co-habitation of Crisis and Concluding Synthesis

When working with an adolescent who questions their own existence, the clinician is called upon to co-inhabit the crisis. Simplified responses or immediate solutions tend to have little temporal ballast and may even damage the therapeutic relationship. The clinical space is one of presence and support: to be with the adolescent, to share their instability, and to help them endure the tension between body and image, between future and present, between open space and dislodgement, between fragile peers and a transformed family.

From this perspective, clinical work resembles sculpture: each adolescent is a singular material that must be shaped according to its own form, seeking to give expression to what within it holds potential. The clinician's task is to help the young person glimpse and sustain that potential—without losing faith in the possibility of becoming.

In summary, phenomenological-structural clinical practice in the face of adolescent suicide requires integrating the singular and the collective, the finitude of

individual biography and the radicality of the shared world. It is in this intersectional space that a clinical field can be built, one capable of supporting the adolescent through their structural vulnerability—not by negating their existential crisis, but by recognizing and sustaining it.

Conclusion

Understanding suicide in adolescence requires a shift of perspective: it is not merely a matter of identifying risk factors, but of recognizing the vulnerability intrinsic to this phase of life as the expression of a structural process of reorganization. The phenomenological-structural perspective illuminates this field by showing how temporality—hypertrophied by an excess of future—expanded and unstable spatiality, embodiment traversed by the dialectic between the lived and the objectified body, and intersubjectivity transformed from verticality to horizontality, together create a terrain of intense anguish. Suffering does not appear as an exception, but as a constitutive possibility of a subject thrown into the task of radically reconfiguring their way of inhabiting the world.

In the contemporary context, this structural vulnerability encounters a landscape that intensifies it. Liquid modernity, the performance society, and, above all, digital radicalization produce fragile bonds, unstable belonging, and frozen identities. The adolescent, already facing a process of structural reorganization, finds in the digital sphere a field that amplifies this condition of groundlessness: singular intersubjectivity gives way to collective intersubjectivity; the lived body is reduced to a comparable image; temporality is fragmented by instantaneous narratives; and the anguish of existence is amplified in virtual clusters. If peers in the physical world were already an ambivalent instance of protection and contagion, in the digital environment this ambivalence acquires unprecedented force, demanding from clinical practice a broader and more attentive response.

It is within this horizon that phenomenological-structural clinical work finds its task: not to deny anguish, but to recognize it as legitimate; not to offer simplified answers, but to co-inhabit the crisis; not to limit itself to risk protocols, but to work with the singularity of each young person in their relation to the collective. The clinical space thus becomes one of reconstruction—of temporal continuity, intersubjective support, and the possibility of biographical reinscription. Like the sculptor's craft, it

consists in helping the adolescent to give shape to themselves, preserving the potency of their singularity in the face of the pressures of the world.

To think of suicide in adolescence through the phenomenological-structural lens, therefore, is to propose a mode of listening that goes beyond prevention and risk, affirming both the dignity of anguish and the transformative potential of the clinical encounter. Only through such recognition can we offer adolescents not merely survival, but the possibility of inhabiting the world anew.

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