

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

# Psychoanalysis of Nature

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## The Mutual Transference Between the Body and the World

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to pursue the posthumous conversation started by Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty during the last century. We are entitled to think that the friendly and critical exchange between psychoanalysis and phenomenology has not reached a climax point in which it can be asserted that there is no place for further research in this field. The legitimacy of our project is proven by the common preoccupation of Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, namely, the human enigma and the relation with the other. The investigation of the human leads Lacan to elaborate a topology that will help us to grasp the spatial structure of being, and which Merleau-Ponty will investigate, at the end of his work, as the ontology of the flesh. Conversely, thanks to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Lacan's psychoanalysis sees itself stripped of mathematic dogmatism.

For Merleau-Ponty, renewal of philosophy cannot be achieved without the contribution of psychoanalysis. The new approach will lead to a new elucidation of the notion of *being in nature*. Returning to the things themselves, Merleau-Ponty shows that Nature is not an object of knowledge or a positive science, but an original dimension of Being from where we emerged. In his last work, Merleau-Ponty is inspired by Freud's psychoanalysis; he is immediately interested in the *chiasm* that exists between spirit and body, flesh and language and human and nature. The concept of chiasm and the related concept of flesh, allow Merleau-Ponty to think the openness of being as a movement of the *seeing-seen*. Flesh is another notion for the unconscious. The unconscious will change the conception of the human being. Freud argues that there is an unconscious determinism that organises our life. This determinism is revealed, later, by Lacan,

as the function of language.

The apparent obvious function of language is, for Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, the notion that describes the way in which we house the world, namely, *chiasmatically*, through transferral. I will show that the psychoanalysis of nature denotes the ‘tangled’ connection between human and nature, spirit and body, a connection that is intrinsically supported by language.

## Contents

<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>LIVING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THE WORLD .....</b>	<b>14</b>
THE BODY AS THE FIRST INSTITUTION IN THE LEWORLD .....	19
<i>The Body and its psychoanalytic implications</i> .....	30
THE MIRROR STAGE IN MERLEAU-PONTY’S THINKING .....	35
THE MIRROR STAGE IN LACAN’S THINKING .....	41
<b>THE CONCEPT OF NATURE IN MERLEAU-PONTY’S THINKING .....</b>	<b>48</b>
THE PROGRESSIVE FORM OF NATURE .....	52
THE UNCONSCIOUS, LIBIDINAL BODY, DESIRE AND THE TISSUE OF THE WORLD .....	57
AGAINST THE CURRENT .....	66
<b>THE CHIASMATIC WORLD .....</b>	<b>80</b>
THE SENSIBLE WORLD AND THE USE OF LANGUAGE.....	81
SEXUALITY AND EXPRESSION .....	83
TOPOLOGY OF THE BODY AND TRANSFERENCE .....	86
<i>Lacanian topology</i> .....	91
<i>The possibility of transference</i> .....	94
THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF NATURE .....	98
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>115</b>

## List of figures

Figure 1 The Saussurean algorithm, Jacques Lacan <i>Écrits</i> .....	73
Figure 2 The Diagram of sexual difference, Jacques Lacan, <i>Séminaire XX</i> .....	76
Figure 3 The Torus, Jacques Lacan, <i>Séminaire IX, 1961-1962</i> .....	88
Figure 4 Möbius Strip II, M. C. Escher, <i>The Graphic Work of M.C. Escher</i> .....	94

# **Psychoanalysis of Nature,**

## **The Mutual Transference Between The Body and The World**

### **Introduction**

During the 1950s and 1960s in France, both psychoanalysis and phenomenology changed the way the world was to be seen. The roots of this new perspective are at the beginning of the twentieth century, when both psychoanalysis and phenomenology were born. Beginning with Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis was meant to be an applicable set of psychotherapeutic theories and associated techniques, used in order to reset the hysterical and obsessional neurosis. At the same time and on the other side of scientific world, Edmund Husserl developed a new philosophical method, phenomenology, in his work, *Logical Investigations (The Prolegomena of Pure Logic)* 1900-1901. Later, Husserl elaborated a theoretical structure of experience and consciousness, while looking to develop a new rigorous science, transcendental phenomenology. Therefore, in the France of the 1950s and 1960s psychoanalysis and phenomenology met through their most important representatives at that time, Jacques Lacan and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This thesis will discuss some aspects of this union.

Merleau-Ponty was one of the first scholars who tried to include some concepts from psychoanalytical literature in phenomenology. Lacan affirms, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, that Merleau-Ponty's direction is towards a metaphysical

perspective on psychoanalysis.<sup>1</sup> In some of his working notes from *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty refers to a “psychoanalysis of nature” and an “ontological psychoanalysis”: “Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother (*Faire une psychanalyse de la nature: C’est la chair, la mère*). A philosophy of flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis remains anthropology.”<sup>2</sup> In this way, Merleau-Ponty clings to Freud’s work, whose interrogations are centered on humans and their impulses and desires as elementary principles of life. This perspective allows us to understand the anthropomorphic structure of nature and the living and to reverse the ontological paradigm: the human and cultural dimension is repositioned and redesigned in the context of an ontology that defines Being as nature.

The psychoanalysis of Nature, for Merleau-Ponty, posits a unity between Nature (*Physis*) and *Logos*: the relation between Nature and Logos emerges in a primordial world, a world that is already there. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty affirms that there is no nature in itself. Nature and history are inseparable, because all natural phenomena are, from the beginning, part of cultural and historical orders: “Laplace’s nebula is not behind us, at our remote beginnings, but in front of us in the cultural world.”<sup>3</sup> How is this unity, between Nature and Logos, possible? Merleau-Ponty’s answer is: the body, because the body is the first institution in the world. The world and its significations lie in front of us from the beginning of our physical birth as natural organisms. Thus, the body becomes a cultural object, expression itself, the trace or the sedimentation of an existence. Michel Foucault says about the *Phenomenology of Perception* that nature and logos form a unity from the beginning of the world: “In this text, the body-organism is linked to the world through a network of primal

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1998), p., 90.

<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (North Western University Press, Evanston 1968), p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, London and New York, 2002), p. 502.

significations, which arise from the perception of things.”<sup>4</sup> The body becomes the first institution in the world. The body is, furthermore, committed to otherness. The concept of the body is developed in psychoanalysis in the same ‘key’.

The non-specific character of the body places it *entre-deux* (between two). It allows the intertwining between organic and psychic, nature and culture. The dualism psychic-organic is overcome by Freud’s theories of hysterical conversion and drives (and, later, by Lacan, through the introduction of the concepts of specular image, Borromean knot and subject as the effect of language). Hysteria made Freud understand the sensitivity of the body to unconscious representations. The unconscious is the psychical system through which Freud unifies the human being as organism (the organic body) and as psychical/spiritual being. According to Merleau-Ponty, the unconscious is the element that Freud introduced *entre-deux* the somatic and the psychic:

With psychoanalysis the spirit passes into the body and, vice versa, the body passes into the spirit. This research cannot miss the reverse, the idea that, at the same time, our body is what we know about its partner [concept], spirit. I have to admit that there is a lot to do in order to understand the whole content of the psychoanalytical experience [...] To take into account this osmosis, between the anonymous life of the body and the official life of a person, and this is Freud’s great discovery, we have to introduce something between the organism and us, as made up of deliberate acts and express knowledge. This is Freud’s unconscious.<sup>5</sup>

Freud’s unconscious represents the starting point, for Merleau-Ponty. He will use the analytic process of the unconscious as an introductory method to show the primordial or natural

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Theatrum philosophicum*, Critique 282 (1970), « ici, le corps-organisme était lié au monde par une réseau de signification originaires que la perception des choses mêmes faisait lever. » pp. 885-908.

<sup>5</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L’homme et l’adversité*, in *Signes* (édition électronique réalisée par Pierre Patenaude, Québec, 2011) : « Avec la psychanalyse l’esprit passe dans le corps comme inversement le corps passe dans l’esprit. Ces recherches ne peuvent manquer de bouleverser en même temps que notre idée du corps, celle que nous nous faisons de son partenaire, l’esprit. Il faut avouer qu’il reste ici encore beaucoup à faire pour tirer l’expérience psychanalytique tout ce qu’elle contient [...] Pour rendre compte de cet osmose entre le vie anonyme de corps et de la vie officielle de la personne, que est la grande découvert de Freud, il fallait introduire quelque chose entre l’organisme et nous-mêmes comme suite d’actes délibérés, de connaissance expresse. Ce fut l’inconsciente de Freud. » p. 227.

dimension of human existence, which Freud calls ‘instinctual drives’ and Merleau-Ponty ‘flesh’ (*chair*).

Merleau-Ponty approaches Freud’s thinking by way of the notion of flesh: “the philosophy of Freud is not a philosophy of the body but of the flesh.”<sup>6</sup> The organic and the psychic are mediated, according to Merleau-Ponty, by *flesh*. The flesh is “this fact that the body is passive-active (visible-seeing), mass in itself and gesture.”<sup>7</sup> The body becomes a mirror phenomenon, when the body has its own relation with itself: the body is visible but, also, it is a seer. According to Renaud Barbaras, the concept of the flesh in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy represents one of the deepest connections between psychoanalysis and phenomenology. The flesh corresponds to the Freudian process of *cathexis*.<sup>8</sup> *Cathexis* is the psychic energy, in the psychoanalytical model, of a postulated unconscious mental functioning on a level between biology and consciousness. Accordingly, flesh can be defined as a process of investment of mental and emotional energy in a person; flesh denotes the limit-concept that brings together the somatic and the psychic.

The articulation of the *flesh* will allow Merleau-Ponty to develop the concept of *chiasme*. The relation between somatic and psychic, mediated by flesh, is an intertwining relationship. The notion of chiasm designates the relation of a human being to herself and also the relation with the other, and with the world. The chiasm is a reversible and simultaneous movement, whereby any activity is, as an interior condition of its process, at the same time, a passivity. For instance, the one who sees, touches or speaks, is, as well, visible, tangible and spoken.<sup>9</sup> This relation is reversible, but it is actualized only in the moment when Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 270.

<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Le conscient et l’inconscient*, in *Notion de philosophie, Tome I* (Paris, Gallimard, 1995), pp. 489-548.

<sup>9</sup> Pascal Dupont, *Dictionnaire Merleau-Ponty* (Ellipses Édition, Paris, 2008), p. 20.

the *flesh*: flesh represents the invisible membrane that makes possible the unity of opposites. The unity is a process, a relation between us and the body, and as well between us and the world. The exterior-interior, passive-active reciprocating process, which is mediated by the flesh, resembles a mirror that reflects in its interior the exterior of the world. “The flesh is a *mirror phenomenon*”, as Merleau-Ponty asserts in *The Visible and the Invisible*, which allows communication between the image of the body and us, or between the image of the world and us.<sup>10</sup> As a mediator, the flesh is the flesh of the body (the perceiving body) and tangible objects (perceived objects) are the flesh of the world. The flesh is an organ of knowledge; the body as flesh is a privileged way through which the limit between spirit and world is themed. The body becomes that ‘entity’ that supports the cross of the chiasm.

Now, if we move our gaze to psychoanalytical discourse, we can observe a synonymy between the notions of transference and chiasm. Establishing this synonymy is one of the goals of this thesis.

The notion of transference arose in Freud’s work as a common term for displacement of affect from one idea to another:<sup>11</sup>

... ideas which originally had only a *weak* charge of intensity take over the charge from ideas which were originally *intensely* cathected and at last attain enough strength to enable them to force an entry into consciousness. Displacements of this kind are no surprise to us where it is a question of dealing with quantities of *affect* or with motor activities in general. When a lonely old maid transfers her affection to animals, or a bachelor becomes an enthusiastic collector, when a soldier defends a scrap of coloured cloth – flag – with his life’s blood, when a few seconds’ extra pressure in a hand-shake means bliss to a lover, or when, in *Othello*, a lost handkerchief precipitates an outburst of rage – all of these are instances of psychical displacements to which we raise no objection.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Basic Books, New York, 2010), chapter V and VII.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Later, Freud will use the concept of transference to designate the patient's relationship with the analyst. Freud observed the intensity of the patient's affective reactions to the doctor, for the first time, in Breuer's treatments of Anna O. Freud affirmed that the patient transfers unconscious ideas onto the doctor.<sup>13</sup> At first, Freud saw transference as a resistance that obstructs the recall of repressed memories, an obstacle that must be eliminated. As he developed psychoanalytical theory, Freud found a 'positive' view of transference. The analysand is facing her history in the immediacy of the present relationship with the analyst. In transference, the analysand, inevitably, repeats earlier relationships with other figures (especially with parental figures).

The dynamic of the analysand-analyst relationship will become the central meaning of transference, and this sense remains, till today, a summary of the entire psychoanalytical process. In Lacan's theory we may observe some annotations regarding transference. Lacan's notion of transference goes through several stages. In *An Intervention on the Transference*, Lacan affirms: "Transference does not fall under any mysterious property of affectivity and, even when it reveals itself in an emotional [émoi] guise, this guise has a meaning only as a function of the dialectical moment at which it occurs."<sup>14</sup> For Lacan, transference is not defined in terms of affects; even if transference manifests itself in the form of particularly strong affects, such as love or hate, it does not consist of such emotions, but in the structure of an intersubjective relationship. In this respect, Lacan locates the essence of transference in the symbolic rather than the imaginary order.<sup>15</sup>

The function of the symbolic is clarified in Lacan's development of the theory of transference in relation to the concept of gift exchange in Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-

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<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Study on Hysteria* 1985 d (Ivan Smith 2010, pdf edition), pp. 268-269.

<sup>14</sup> Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, London and New York, 1996), p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Strauss. In a gift economy the value is not traded or sold, but rather given without an explicit agreement for immediate or future rewards. Unlike the market and barter economies, where goods and services are primarily exchanged for value received, in gift exchange (or the gift economy) the object (or service) that is given is not alienated from the giver; the object is lent rather than sold or ceded. The identity of the giver is bound up with the gift. Being part of a subject, the given object acquires a power that compels the recipient to reciprocate; so the inalienable object must be returned, because the act of giving creates a gift-debt that has to be repaid.

The notion of an expected return of the gift creates a relationship over time between two individuals: giver and giftee. According to Levi-Strauss, the giver-giftee relationship is structured by certain laws which regulate kinship relations.<sup>16</sup> These structural laws are atemporal and regulate social life. For Levi-Strauss, these laws, as an aggregate, form what psychoanalysis would call the unconscious.<sup>17</sup> The unconscious is a trans-individual psychological system. The unconscious is reducible to a function, specifically, according to Levi-Strauss, the *symbolic function*. The symbolic function, which no doubt is specifically human, and which is carried out according to the same laws among all men, is, for Levi-Strauss, nothing but the aggregate of these laws.<sup>18</sup>

For Lacan, the symbolic function acts as a fundamental substrate of the world by way of gift exchange type relations. The world is sustained by reciprocal ‘transactions’ that act like a symbolic network. Transference involves an exchange of signs in which speaker and listener are transformed, as the other is ‘compelled’ to reciprocate. This unified active-passive process defines, as we shall see, Merleau-Ponty’s theory of chiasm as well.

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<sup>16</sup> Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Basic Books, New York, 1963), pp. 202-203

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

For Merleau-Ponty the intertwining process is named chiasm. A chiasm unites opposites and, at the same time, allows a reversible movement between them. Chiasm is defined as identity through opposition, a process which opens the doors to the world's phenomena. In explicit contrast with Hegel, for whom the dialectical movement was, Merleau-Ponty claims, an "explicative principle",<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty's dialectic consists in the *incompletion in principle* of the world. The incompletion founds an indefinite and permanent *opening*.<sup>20</sup> The double movement of the thing itself is the point where the two movements making up this single movement cross. This is where "there is something,"<sup>21</sup> where there is "an openness."<sup>22</sup> The essence of this process, stated above, is flesh. The flesh 'allows' the inscription of the psychic on the body. According to Renaud Barbaras, in the flesh, the unconscious constitutes the essence of the conscious;<sup>23</sup> the unconscious has the power to determine conscious life. This relationship between unconscious and conscious is yet more complex.

Barbaras holds that Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm designates a complex relation between body and world.<sup>24</sup> Perception, as part of the flesh, is my initiative and a manifestation of the world.<sup>25</sup> The structure of this relation contains four notions, which are grouped two by two in an intertwining relationship:

- the perceiving subjectivity (the touching),
- the body (the touched),
- the world as a space which contains the body,

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<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 91-93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 26-28.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Le conscient et l'inconscient*, pp. 489-548.

<sup>24</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Merleau-Ponty*, (édition Ellipses, Paris 1997), pp. 52-53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

- the world as it appears to this body.<sup>26</sup>

As Merleau-Ponty explains, a chiasm is a reversible process:

The chiasm, reversibility, the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter perception (Kant's real opposition), is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity (it is because of it that it seems to us that perception forms itself *in the things themselves*) – Activity = passivity.<sup>27</sup>

Between activity and passivity there is a line, a boundary surface, where we find the veering *I-Other* and *Other-I*.<sup>28</sup> The *I-Other* and *Other-I* cannot be understood as two 'entities', for example, for itself and for other: "In reality there is neither me nor the other as positive, positive subjectivities. There are two caverns, two openings, two stages where something will take place – and which both belong to the same world, to the stage of Being."<sup>29</sup> The *I-Other* and *Other-I* are each the other side of the other, "they incorporate one another."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the line that borders the surface of this passage is the flesh, which acts like a mirror. The mirror creates the image of the body and the world.

To show that the psychoanalysis of nature refers to the (intra) worldly relation, between us and the other, and between us and world, I will start this dissertation with an analysis of Husserl's concept of *Lebenswelt*. The late Husserl prepared, indirectly, the 'field' for a theoretical debate, a possible meeting, between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. This 'field' brings together "two different forms of psychoanalysis."<sup>31</sup> One is Lacan's psychoanalysis, which remains, in some way, circumscribed to the history of psychoanalysis, starting with Freud. The other one is Merleau-Ponty's psychoanalysis, namely, the *psychoanalysis of nature*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 264-265.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, *Les institutions du monde de la vie, Merleau-ponty et Lacan* (édition Jérôme Million, Grenoble, 2008), p. 221.

The intuition of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) – originally used by Husserl in *The Crisis* in the sense of the world of life or the world for life – unfolds only in its dependency on life as meaning. The lifeworld, for Husserl, is the world experienced in relation to the determinations of our values, our practices and the end of our experiences.<sup>32</sup> Lifeworld is also the ‘surrounding world’ (*Umwelt*) that we take for granted.<sup>33</sup> For Husserl meaning is imposed by the transcendental ego, the conscious.

There is an original meaning of nature, Merleau-Ponty states, which is not linked with any transcendental activity of the ego, but is closer to vegetative life.<sup>34</sup> In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, life as meaning is nature.<sup>35</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, people are the subjects of the lifeworld. For that reason, a person cannot be reduced to an act or a representation, because he is life itself. If ‘to live’, for Husserl, means to live in a certainty of the world, and this certainty is given by conscious life, for Merleau-Ponty, ‘to live’ means to be, in a way, a being of ‘meaning’. And such meaning is first institutionalised by the body as the first expression of the world.

To treat the body as the first institution in the world is a first step to a psychoanalysis of nature. As part of nature, the body has an impulse to create meaning, as Merleau-Ponty states: “There is nature wherever there is a life that has meaning, but where, however, there is no thought; hence the kinship with the vegetative: Nature is what has a meaning, without this meaning being posited by thought: it is the auto-production of a meaning.”<sup>36</sup>

The second step in my approach to a psychoanalysis of nature is to expound the concept of nature. Nature, the primordial, in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, is the original constitutive

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<sup>32</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970), p. 218.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature, Notes Cours du Collège de France* (édition du Seuil, Paris 1995) pp. 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature, Notes Cours du Collège de France* (Edition du Seuil, Paris 1995), « *Il y a nature partout où il y a une vie qui a un sens, mais où, cependant, il n’y a pas de pensée ; d’où la parenté avec le végétal : est nature qui a un sens, sans que ce sens ait été posé par la pensée. C’est l’autoproduction d’un sens* », pp. 19-20.

principle; nature is the tissue of the dynamism of our existence, and of life. Merleau-Ponty develops the idea of natural production as ‘latent intentionality’. Accordingly, Nature is not causality or finality, but *will*. And this principle – Nature as will – supports us and helps us to bring to the surface – from its silence – the meaning of the world. Nature is meaning in itself; it is the auto-production of its own meaning. The body is embedded in nature. This nature becomes the sensible support for the body. The world acquires its meaning through a sort of transference between nature, as a whole, and the body. Transference is the psychoanalytic instrument through which Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology touches the beginning (*Anfang*) dimension of the world.

In a typically enigmatic manner, Merleau-Ponty says of nature: “Nature is at first day: it is there today.” Nature transcends the past-present tense distinction. Nature is the union of what is past and what is present. Past and present are in each other. For Merleau-Ponty, this *atemporal* process is *chiasm*: a crossing, of one, over and into the other. The chiasm reveals the fact that nature has a present continuous tense form that brings together past and present.<sup>37</sup> Nature is a concept that brings together opposites. All relations emerge in a primordial world that is always already there; there is a primordial unity from where all things emerge into the world.<sup>38</sup> However, this primordial unity neither creates itself (*naturans*) nor is it created by some other being (*naturata*); its paradoxical structure displays a unity in diversity: the being is created and, at the same time, is creating.

The third step of a psychoanalysis of nature relates together chiasm and transference. Apparently two different concepts, with operational meanings in two different fields, they come together via Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh. The psychoanalysis of nature means the reversible relation between the body and the other that is nature.

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<sup>37</sup> The future is a potential tense and it is part of the imaginary order.

<sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp, 193, 229, 230.

Conducting a topology of the body demonstrates that the body is a libidinal body. The libidinal body is the body that wants to *jouir* (“to enjoy”) inasmuch as there is a meaning that can mediate its *jouissance* (“enjoyment”). The topological analysis of the body expresses the meaning of the ontological metamorphosis of the body. The body expresses dimensions; to be more specific, three-dimensions: real, symbolic and imaginary. These three ‘dimensions’ or orders are connected, in Lacan’s theory, by three rings, showing the interdependence of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. The imaginary order, in quick outline, is the effect of the specular image of the body in the mirror. The real is the order which cannot be symbolised. The *real body* is, every time, “lost”. What is lost is replaced by the symbolic. The symbolic body is constituted by language, by signifiers.

The multi-dimensional body is part of the world, as a constitutional element of an ontological intertwining, a body-world. To live in this world is possible only through the sensible embodiment of the perceiving and the perceived, which is a result of the carnal connection between exterior and interior. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the *psychoanalysis of nature* denotes the transference – a reversible ‘movement’ mediated by the flesh – between myself and the other. This intertwining originates in the life movement which separates and connects contraries.

In closing, we will show that a psychoanalysis of nature is closely linked to the reversible passage that occurs *in between* and which defines the term ‘chiasm’. This passage is the interval that allows the ‘embodiment’ of language as a path from a silent stage of nature to an *uttered stage* (*logos proforikos*) and vice versa. The structure of this passage (part of the transference structure or chiasm) is organized like a language. The passage is the moment when and where language is born. There is a dimension of silence through which we cast meanings, symbols, etc; as Merleau-Ponty states: “... language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the other

has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, every time we speak, listen or look to the other, and vice versa, the passage is open (is active, or as the Greeks would say, *energeia*). As speaking beings, we can say that we are, all the time, in a perpetual passage. We could say we are in a perpetual cultural contract, because “the vision itself, the thought itself, are, as has been said, structured as a language, are articulation before the letter, apparition of something where there was nothing or something else.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, a psychoanalysis of nature presupposes, like in standard psychoanalysis, a passage between the body (as embodied being) and world.<sup>41</sup> This passage is automatically established, since our ‘fall in to the world’. We will show that the psychoanalysis of Nature is about this passage, as “barbaric principle,” that underlies the entire *socius*. The passage remains, necessarily, at the same time, open and unknowable, but this is the way in which Merleau-Ponty sees the psychoanalysis of Nature: as something open towards a philosophy of interrogation.

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<sup>39</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 126.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> In standard psychoanalysis, the link is between a patient and the psychoanalyst.

## Living with One Another in the World

In his essay ‘A Phenomenology of Life’, Renaud Barbaras asserts that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology “is really a *phenomenology of life*” and that this approach has its roots in Husserl’s phenomenology. According to Barbaras, “Merleau-Ponty’s main purpose, from beginning to end, is to give sense to the Husserlian lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) as it is described in *The Crisis*.”<sup>1</sup> Beginning with *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty tried to complete Husserl’s phenomenology, reconfiguring what he took to be both Husserl’s dualist and transcendental thinking. The author of *Phenomenology of Perception* calls into question the distinctive, strict opposition, in Husserl’s thinking, between the world and transcendental subjectivity. There is a connection, according to Merleau-Ponty, between the natural and transcendental attitudes. If we refer to the “life” of worldly existence, the life of a living being as *Umwelt Ding*, then we have in view a natural existence in the world. Merleau-Ponty conceives natural life as a matter of a primal faith in existence which cannot be overcome (unless we define the natural world by already projecting into it the attitude and categories of science.)<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if we refer to life as an object of a scientific discipline, as *Naturding*, we will change the natural attitude of the world into a naturalistic one. The concept ‘naturalism’ has no very precise meaning in contemporary philosophy. In this case, it denotes objectivism because the construction and conceptual signification of philosophy is nothing else than faith, a belief from which emerge all our practical and theoretical actions. This belief, as constituent of our

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<sup>1</sup> Renaud Barbaras, “A Phenomenology of Life”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (Cambridge University Press 2006), p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

subjective activities, is identical with Husserl's concepts of *Urdoxa* or *Urglaube*, an opinion or primordial faith that represents for Husserl all intentional relations. For Husserl this kind of opinion was not sufficient and he adds, to this belief, an act or a judgement as a primordial 'gesture' ('*these*' or *Weltthese*).

Merleau-Ponty's aim is to develop a new phenomenology that takes into account the irreducibility of the *Lebenswelt*. The "saga" of the natural and transcendental attitudes will lead Merleau-Ponty to assert: "There is no intelligible world, *there* is the sensible world."<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty differs with Husserl regarding the concept of lifeworld:

Husserl in his last period concedes that all reflection should in the first place return to the description of the lifeworld (*monde vécu*) (*Lebenswelt*). But he adds that, by means of a second "reduction," the structures of the lifeworld must be reinstated in the transcendental flow of the universal constitution in which all the world's obscurities are elucidated. It is clear, however, that we are faced with a dilemma: either the constitution makes the world transparent, in which case it is not obvious why reflection needs to pass through the lifeworld, or else it retains something of that world and never rids it of its opacity.<sup>4</sup>

If the lifeworld refers to a *Weltthesis*, prior to all theses, then, according to Merleau-Ponty, this *Weltthesis* gives us not only a representation of the world but the world itself, as a full unity.<sup>5</sup> If *Lebenswelt* involves an irreducible opacity, then the world is not constituted entirely in a transcendental subjectivity. The prior presence of the world is inconsistent with the acts of transcendental subjectivity, the opacity of the world with the transparency of the constitution of the world. This is the moment when Merleau-Ponty leaves Husserl's phenomenological project. The transcendental subject is, then, not relevant for a description of the natural world, and for that reason the subject of the *Weltthesis* must be explained.<sup>6</sup> According to Barbaras, Merleau-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, New York and London, 2005), p. 425.

<sup>5</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

Ponty is trying to define more precisely the status of the subject as a subject of *Weltthesis*, or, in other words, as subject of a lifeworld. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the subject of a lifeworld cannot be reduced to an act or a representation.

So what does it mean to live? According to Husserl “to live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world.”<sup>7</sup> For Husserl, this certainty of the world is given by conscious life, and so transcendental activity is part of life. He writes in *The Crisis*:

The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily, as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon. To live is always to live-in-certainty-of the world. Waking life is being awake to the world, being constantly and directly “conscious” of the world and oneself as living in the world, actually experiencing [*erleben*] and actually affecting the ontic certainty of the world. The world is pregiven thereby, in every case, in such way that individual things are given. But there exists a fundamental difference between the way we are conscious of the world and the way we are conscious of the things or objects (taken in the broadest sense, but still purely in the sense of the life-world), though together the two make up an inseparable unity.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, to live is the momentary phase of consciousness. It does not refer to the present tense in relation with past and future tenses, but to a living present, in which the subject is aware of a temporal extent. For example, the subject is aware of a present perceiving as having originated with past, elapsed phenomena, as extended to the present, and as anticipating continuing appearances as the perception continues to develop into the future. The living present is a composite intentionality that includes *primal impression*, *retention* and *protention* and that explains the inner time-consciousness as well as the awareness of objective time. To live in certainty of the world means to live in a world that is taken for granted by the subject.

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<sup>7</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of Transcendental Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970), p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

In *The Crisis*, Husserl's concern is also the dual status of the subject: a part of the world and as the condition of the world. To explain this duality, Barbaras analyses the German term *Lebenswelt*:

We must take into account the word Husserl originally used to refer to this world, namely, *Lebenswelt*, that is to say, the world of, or for, life. Husserl did not choose this word arbitrarily: he took advantage of the double meaning of *Leben* in German, which is ambiguous in French as well. The meaning of "to live" is originally intransitive: to live means to be alive; life is that which characterizes living beings. In German the verb *leben* becomes the verb *erleben*, which has a transitive meaning (as does *vivre* in French): it means to experience, to feel, to perceive, and thus refers to an object, either immanent (one can *vivre* or *erleben* an emotion, as in having a passionate love affair) or transcendent (*vivre* or *erleben* a situation). This duality corresponds to the duality between life as the object of biology and life as dimension of the transcendental flow, that is to say, as constituting the world. To ask about the subject of the *Lebenswelt* is to ask about life – life for which and by which there is a world, and this is to call into question the duality of the natural subject and the transcendental subject, to look for the unity of the subject beyond the distinction between empirical and the transcendental levels.<sup>9</sup>

Barbaras' perspective shows us the parallel Husserl established between transcendental and empirical consciousness. According to Husserl each attitude has the same goal, as a whole domain of transcendental experience.<sup>10</sup> Yet, there is an irreducible difference between the two. On the one hand, psychology, as the field of empirical consciousness, refers to the subject as a part of the world.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, transcendental consciousness is the condition of the possibility of the world as phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> According to Jacques Derrida, these attitudes build an irreducible unity that in the end represents *life*:

But this strange unity of these two parallel, which refers the one to the other, does not allow itself to be sundered [*partager*] by them and by dividing itself, finally joins the transcendental to its other; this unity is *life*. One finds quickly enough that the sole nucleus of the concept of *psuchê* is life as self-relationship, whether or not it takes place

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<sup>9</sup> Renaud Barbaras, Op. cit., p. 210

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Husserl refers to phenomenological psychology.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

in the form of consciousness. 'Living' is thus the name of that which precedes the reduction and finally escapes all the divisions which the latter give rise to.<sup>13</sup>

The parallelism between empirical consciousness and transcendental consciousness shows that life is itself 'double'. Yet, unlike Merleau-Ponty, for whom both 'attitudes' are interconnected, in Husserl they are distant from one another. Derrida affirms that this difference represents "nothing", because, in the end, *nothing* is the concept that defines the rupture between transcendental and empirical consciousness.<sup>14</sup> As *to be* refers to a living being, that is, a worldly existence, 'life' presupposes the existence of the natural world. However, Husserl describes transcendental activity as life using, in his descriptions, concepts that are extracted from the domain of life in truth (*Leben, Erlebnis*, etc).<sup>15</sup> In this way, life appears again on the transcendental level. Life cannot be (anymore) the object of the phenomenological reduction. Therefore, the distinction between transcendental and empirical consciousness is avoided. This means that life, as a fundamental characteristic of living beings, involves a dimension that exceeds the natural level, and that overlaps with the transcendental level.<sup>16</sup> Life seems to acquire, thereby, a neutral meaning. Life is *nothing*, on this account, except as it sustains, in some way, the transcendental dimension, without being merged with it. At the same time, the nothing divides the transcendental and the empirical, or, as Barbaras states, "life is the condition of the possibility of the nothing as peculiar unity of transcendental phenomenology and phenomenological psychology."<sup>17</sup> Life as nothing gives a new meaning to worldliness as pre-given world. In other words, life refers to a living being that is a worldly existence; it

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973), pp. 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Renauld Barbaras, *Op. cit.*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

presupposes a natural existence of the world, and this existence divides the transcendental and psychological.

Husserl's pre-given world cannot be known in its entirety by the subject that appeals to the *epoché*. The world precedes the representational acts of transcendental subjectivity;<sup>18</sup> life as transcendental subjectivity, thereby, does not make sense for Merleau-Ponty, for whom the subject is a natural individual in the lifeworld, one that cannot be reduced to a representation.<sup>19</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty living (*leben*) and live (*erleben*) are forms of mutual coexistence:

Living is a primary process from which, as a starting point, it becomes possible to live this or that world, and we must eat and breathe before perceiving and awakening to relational living, belonging to colors and lights through sight, to sounds through hearing, to the body of another through sexuality, before arriving at the life of human relation.<sup>20</sup>

To live means to live through the body. At the same time, life itself transcends the organic body and involves the whole realm of meaning: “thus, as we need a sexual body to develop meaningful relationship with others, so, too, we must be alive and have sense organs to experience everything and, finally, to perceive the world.”<sup>21</sup>

## **The body as the first institution in the lifeworld**

The natural world is the “*Weltthesis* prior to all theses,” as Merleau-Ponty highlights in *Signes*.<sup>22</sup> This point of view will change in *The Visible and the Invisible*. In his later work, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the world is not a being, the Supreme Being, or the largest of objects that would contain within it all things. The world is the assembly of our experience as sensible

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 208-209.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, London and New York, 2002), p. 185.

<sup>21</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *Op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (édition électronique réalisée par Pierre Patenaude, Québec, 2011), p. 162.

beings and as humans. Therefore, when we open our eyes we see the world itself. The world is what we see, yet, even so, we must learn how to look at it “in the sense that we must match this vision with knowledge, take possession of it, say what *we* and seeing are.”<sup>23</sup> We have to act like we knew nothing about it and we have to learn everything from the beginning.<sup>24</sup> Such a philosophy does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we perceive, but a new attitude of the philosopher which allows the world to take form continually within him. In this way, ‘the new philosopher’ can observe how the things themselves emerge from the depth of their silence.

The philosopher acquires a new role in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible*, replacing the psychoanalyst in the pursuit of a psychoanalysis of nature. The philosopher becomes a psychoanalyst of nature charged with interpreting the “symptoms of the world”. For philosophers, in Merleau-Ponty’s conception, the unmediated contact with the world (in other words a pre-reflective stage) presupposes a phenomenological reduction, a return to the things themselves from where begins the analysis of the world.

Merleau-Ponty affirms, right at the start of *The Visible and the Invisible*, that the philosopher is:

... obliged to reinspect and redefine the most well-grounded notions, to create new ones, with new words to designate them, to undertake a true reform of the understanding – at whose term the evidence of the world, which seemed indeed to be the clearest of truths, is supported by the seemingly most sophisticated thoughts, before which the natural man now no longer recognizes where he stood.... The fact that the philosopher claims to speak in the very name of the naïve evidence of the world, that he refrains from adding anything to it, that he limits himself to drawing out all its consequences, does not excuse him; on the contrary he dispossesses [humanity] only the more completely, inviting it to think of itself as an enigma.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 3-4.

The pre-reflective stage is a stage of interrogation. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical method is a philosophy of interrogation. Interrogation is a form of expression through which one sees "our relationship with Being".<sup>26</sup> The interrogation is not "a mode derived by inversion or by reversal of the indicative and of the positive, is neither an affirmation nor a negation veiled or expected, but an original manner of aiming at something, as it were a *question-knowing*, which by principle no statement or answer can go beyond."<sup>27</sup> Interrogative philosophy is not a philosophy that offers answers or spreads theses; it is not a science that takes Being as an object. Interrogation is a permanent attitude attempting to question Being. Interrogation remains open as a manner of gearing into the trajectory of sense. Philosophy looks for a mode of interrogation that takes up a trajectory of meaning. That trajectory repeats and reshapes sense through a coherent deformation, as the world itself is a coherent deformation. The pre-established harmony of the world is a unity prior to division into "me-world, world and its parts, parts of my body."<sup>28</sup>

In order to implement this philosophy of interrogation the philosopher will go back to a pre-reflective stage, in the sense of a naïve, natural attitude, which helps her to dispossess humanity of all predicates.<sup>29</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, through perceptual faith I perceive the world itself, not a representation of the world. The word 'faith' should be understood as something before any position, a *foi animale*.<sup>30</sup>

The field of faith is not a transcendental realm. Life, therefore, is not any longer understood as transcendental life. Life as world is given to us, through perceptual faith, in a pre-reflective stage. This is, in fact, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reduction. Whereas, for Husserl, transcendental life objectifies itself in the empirical world, for Merleau-Ponty, life is

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-129.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 261-262.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (éditions Gallimard, Paris, 2007), p. 17.

already objectified in *chiasm*. The *chiasm* shows that the meaning of *to be in the interior* and the meaning of *to be in the exterior* are not two different phenomenological perspectives. In other words, the passage that begins with the exteriorisation of the expression (enunciation) is the only way towards the interior of thinking. The *chiasm* is “the inside and the outside articulated over one another.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike Husserl, Merleau-Ponty does not put the entirety of existence under the notion of the ‘transcendental ego’. Chiasm denotes *in itself*, if I can say so, a simultaneous process that refuses to break the world down into dichotomies (interior-exterior, finite-infinite and body-world).

In *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl writes:

Transcendancy in every form is an immanent existential characteristic, constituted within the ego. Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, according to Husserl, the constitution of life is world thematization, as formation of sense. The constitution of the world supposes a field of semantic possibilities within the transcendental ego.<sup>33</sup> These semantic possibilities should be understood as a group of possible significations that always precede the facts as given. The transcendental self-explanation of the ego, as a field of transcendental experience, puts us in front of an ensemble of the senses of possible beings.<sup>34</sup>

In order to constitute the world from inside, Merleau-Ponty takes from Husserl the transcendental world, i.e. semantic possibilities for nature. Thus, Merleau-Ponty considers nature a field of semantic possibilities. In his last works, Merleau-Ponty’s approach starts from a

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<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation* (Publisher, The Hague, Boston 1982), pp. 83-84.

<sup>33</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, *Les institutions du monde de la vie, Merleau-Ponty et Lacan* (Jérôme Million, Grenoble 2008), p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

perceptual faith, from the *Lebenswelt*. As Duportail says, the lifeworld is intrinsically linked to the expressive operation.<sup>35</sup> Lifeworld becomes part of ontological and semantic genres.<sup>36</sup> To return to the things themselves means to understand the ‘meaning’ of *to be* in the lifeworld. What is the relation of ‘world’ to language? To return to the lifeworld means, for Merleau-Ponty, to return to the speech of the world, the expression of the world.<sup>37</sup> If we look from the opposite direction, the silent experience of the world is always already expressive. The meaning of experience already lies in the silent experience of the world:<sup>38</sup>

The task of language is similar [to painting]. Given an experience, which may be banal but for the writer captures a particular savor of life, given, in addition, words, forms, phrasing, syntax, even literary genres, modes of narrative that, through custom, are already endowed with a common meaning – the writer’s task is to choose, assemble, wield, and torment these instruments in such a way that they induce the same sentiment of life that dwells in the writer at every moment, deployed henceforth in an imaginary world and in the transparent body of language. There is, then, on both sides, [painting and language] the same transmutation, the same migration of a meaning scattered in the experience that leaves the flesh in which it did not manage to collect itself, mobilizes already capitalized instruments for its own profit, and employs them so that in the end they become the very body it had needed while in the process of acquiring the dignity of expressed meaning.<sup>39</sup>

The world is already expressive in itself. We can conclude that the transmutation of the meaning of the world in cultural meanings is possible. But this metamorphosis of meanings is *a priori* doomed to failure.<sup>40</sup> The creation of significance in language implies a distortion of the symbolic instruments available to the speaker:<sup>41</sup>

The speech, as distinct from language, is this moment where the intention of meaning, still silent and in action, proves itself to incorporate in my culture and as well in the other culture, also it constitutes both, me and the other, transforming [thus] the meaning of cultural instruments. In turn, the speech becomes available because it gives us afterwards

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973), pp. 47-48.

<sup>40</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the illusion that the speech was contained in the significations already available, whereas, by a sort of *trick*, the speech attaches itself only to infuse a new life.<sup>42</sup>

The expression of the world refers to an infinite lack, which cannot be filled or satisfied, and that will haunt consciousness.

Meanings emerge from the world, but essentially they are incomplete and create a state of permanent (unconscious) dissatisfaction. Merleau-Ponty's collocation speaking-speech cannot answer to the call of the silent life unless, perhaps, there is an intertwining of expressive acts with each other, in the same chain of repetition, opened *ad infinitum*.<sup>43</sup> In his *Themes from the Lecture at the Collège du France*, Merleau-Ponty raises the concept of 'institution of expression':

We understand through institution these events of an experience that endow it with sustainable dimensions through which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, forming a thinkable suite (series) or history – or, again, these events that deposit in me a meaning, are not about survival or rest, but as we will say, requirements for the future.<sup>44</sup>

According to Duportail, the logic of expressive acts places itself in a history, starting from a founding event.<sup>45</sup> Only through this foundational act may we understand speech. For instance, the founding event of painting is, according to Merleau-Ponty, the pre-historic cave wall paintings. These images constitute the tradition of painting that still requires, today, a future, or

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<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (édition électronique réalisée par Pierre Patenaude, 20 juin 2011 à Chicoutimi, Ville de Saguenay, Québec.), p. 91. « *La parole, en tant que distincte de la langue, est ce moment où l'intention significative encore muette et tout en acte s'avère capable de s'incorporer à la culture, la mienne et celle d'autrui, de me former et de le former en transformant le sens des instruments culturels. Elle devient « disponible » à son tour parce qu'elle nous donne après coup l'illusion qu'elle était contenue dans les significations déjà disponibles, alors que, par une sorte de ruse, elle ne les a épousées que pour leur infuser une nouvelle vie.* »

<sup>43</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lecture at the Collège du France*, cited in Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 34. « *On entendait par institution ces événements d'une expérience que la dotent de dimensions durables par rapport auxquelles tout une série d'autres expériences auront sens, formeront une suite pensable ou une histoire – ou encore ces événements qui déposent en moi un sens, non pas à titre de survivance ou de résidu, mais comme appel à suite, exigence d'un avenir.* »

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

as Merleau-Ponty says, “*un champ de recherches illimité*.”<sup>46</sup> These pictures create the institution of a world of painting through which we make the world speak through us.<sup>47</sup>

Thinking through the founding event, Merleau-Ponty tries to grasp the conception of the first utterance. The first utterance is, according to him, *chiasmatic*. To be more specific, the first utterance is the effect of the body’s experience in the world, a corporeal exchange: “Only when the painter lends his own body to the world, then he changes the world in the painting.”<sup>48</sup> Or, as Duportail states, paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty: “The world speaks to us and we listen and reply to it, in silence, with our body.”<sup>49</sup> With this first moment the history of the perceived world is created. At the same time, the world is a cultural “realm”, a *diacritical world*.<sup>50</sup> The historicity of perceived meaning and of the perceived world is embodied. My body is the *Stiftung* (foundation) of the lifeworld,<sup>51</sup> or, as the author of *The Visible and the Invisible* writes: “My body is to the greatest extent what every thing is: *a dimensional this* [*en ceci dimensionnel*]. It is the universal thing –. But, while the things become dimensions only insofar as they are received in a *field*, my body is the field itself, i.e. a sensible that is dimensional of *itself*, universal measurant

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> According to Duportail, painting plays a very important role: painting possesses power through which the world can reveal meaning.

<sup>48</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’Esprit* quoted in Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 35: “*C’est en prêtant son corps au monde que le peintre change le monde en peinture*.”

<sup>49</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 35 : “*Le monde nous parle et nous l’entendons et lui répondons, en silence, avec notre corps*.”

<sup>50</sup> I borrowed this concept from Ferdinand de Saussure to show that the cultural world in Merleau-Ponty’s view is itself linguistic. The world is articulated through symbols. To make meaning possible, the symbols are constituted in chains of symbols, in which each symbol is different from the other. This difference between symbols (letters) makes possible the meaning. The world is possible only through language; therefore, I choose to name it diacritical world.

<sup>51</sup> The term ‘lifeworld’ denotes the ways members of a community or a social group use to structure the world into objects. Thus, the lifeworld is fixed by a system of intersubjectivity. And because the body is the first institution through which I can identify myself as a unity in the world, in other words I constitute myself as an ego, then, my body becomes the foundation of the lifeworld.

[measuring].”<sup>52</sup> My body can be understood as the topology of meaning, because it is the place where the immanent meanings of the world are hidden and from where they come to ‘light’.

Merleau-Ponty’s theory is not a form of intellectualism, which analyses perception as a thinking process. He is looking to give perception its initial meaning, that is, as opening (*Offenheit*) and an introduction to the world (our insertion into nature, into an animated body). Merleau-Ponty activates a regression to reach the body as the native expression that constitutes, for the first time, the “operant language.”<sup>53</sup> Merleau-Ponty asserts, in his last work, “Philosophy would have to plunge into the world instead of surveying it.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, before any reflection on the world, we are already plunged into the world with our bodies. The body is the first institution in the world in that it alone can perceive the silent meaning of the world and also ‘mediate’ between *logos endiathetos* (*logos* of the aesthetic world, interior) and *logos prophorikos* (*logos* of utterance, language or spirit). The body mediates between the world of silent things (*logos* of the sensible, *logos* of life) and the world of spoken things (the operant language). However, the body as a binder between these two worlds is a lived body and not a sort of mechanism. The body “is the intertwining of visions and movement, it is a seeing force that constitutes a system of systems, which acts as a span of distances, which designates in the inconceivable triviality of being hollows and reliefs, distances, deviations, a meaning.”<sup>55</sup>

If we really want to understand the origin of meaning, Merleau-Ponty says in *The Prose of the World*, “we shall not understand any other creation or any other culture, for we shall fall back upon the supposition of an intelligible world in which everything is signified in advance –

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<sup>52</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 260.

<sup>53</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, *Op. cit.*, pp. 36-37

<sup>54</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L’Oeil et l’Esprit* quoted in Guy-Félix Duportail, *Op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*: “il est entrelacs de vision et de mouvement, il est un force voyant qui constitue un system de system voué a enjamber les distances, de percevoir l’avenir perceptif, de dessiner dans la platitude inconcevable de l’être des creux et des reliefs, des distances, des écarts, un sens...”

we must give up every signification that is already institutionalized and return to the starting point of nonsignifying world.”<sup>56</sup> Merleau-Ponty expects to find something that provokes the desire to signify (painters to paint, writers to write) somewhere inside the world or, more specifically, inside of our life. What is that thing that makes us act and to bring new meanings into the world? Lack may be the answer here, which relates, in Merleau-Ponty’s work, to foundation, *Stiftung*.<sup>57</sup> The foundation of life is lack, an invisible meaning of the visible world. The meaning is not a subjective “product”; it is deposited in me in order to “attend” an event. The event represents the meeting of the world with the subject (artist, writer and painter) as a discovery of her creative reason. This event brings out – in art, in painting, in writing – a perceptual meaning able “to gather up a series of antecedent sedimented expressions in an eternity always ready to be remade.”<sup>58</sup> Meaning reveals itself in an institutional world because of a *Stiftung*. The institution represents “these events of an experience that endow it with sustainable dimension through which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, forming a thinkable suite (series) or history.”<sup>59</sup> This history is the history of the perceived. Variations on this history, Duportail affirms, represent the institution of the lifeworld. For instance, painting is a good example of an institution of the lifeworld:<sup>60</sup> “there is a history of life [...] it is the one who lives in the painter when he works, when the painter unites in one gesture

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<sup>56</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Prose of the World*, p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> In one of his working notes, in 1960, Merleau-Ponty substitutes the term *Stiftung* with the terms *Grund* [foundation] and *Abgrund* [abyss]. I will take this last meaning used by Merleau-Ponty in his last book: “The progress of the inquiry toward the centre is not the movement from the conditioned unto the condition, from the founded unto the *Grund*: the so-called *Grund* is *Abgrund*. But the abyss one thus discovers is not such *by lack of ground*, it is upsurge of a *Hoheit* which supports from above (cf. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*), that is, of a negativity that *comes to the world*.” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 250).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>59</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, *Op. cit.*, « ces évènements d’une expérience qui la dotent de dimensions durables par rapport auxquelles tout une série d’autres expériences auront sens, formeront une suite pensable ou une histoire. » p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

the tradition that retakes him and founds him.”<sup>61</sup> There is a continuity between the perceptive and the significative acts; in other words, the history of the lifeworld shows linguistic expression as the recovery of perceptual meaning. For instance, as Merleau-Ponty says, “Pictorial expression assumes and transcends the patterning of the world which begins in perception.”<sup>62</sup> Duportail considers that perception in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking is already a distorted expression of the perceived, because the perception *stylises* the perceived.<sup>63</sup> Thus, “the perceptual meaning is nothing other than the coherent deformation of the visible by the act of perception.”<sup>64</sup>

The example, through which we can observe how perception stylizes the perceived, is given by Merleau-Ponty in the form of an example from Malraux:

A woman passing by is not first and foremost a corporeal contour for me, a colored mannequin, a spectacle in a given spot. She is an individual, sentimental, sexual expression. She is a flesh in its full presence, with its vigor and weakness there in her walk or the click of her heel on the ground. She is a unique way of varying the accent of a feminine being and thus of a human being, which I understand the way I understand a sentence, namely because it finds in me the system of resonators that it needs.<sup>65</sup>

The body, through its gestures, constitutes the pedestal of expression. The way in which the body moves already implements a meaning into the world. Hence, the alleged body shape that I see in the distance is nothing but a linguistic form that resonates with me.

Genealogic inquiry moves back in time to those days when the body was the primordial form on cave paintings; when the body, as the first expression in the world, established the first *operant language*: “It is the expressive operation of the body, begun in the least perception, which amplifies into painting and art. The field of pictorial signification was opened the moment

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., “*Mais il y a une historicité de la vie [...] c’est elle qui habite le peintre au travail, quand il noue d’un geste la tradition qu’il reprend et celle qu’il fonde.*”

<sup>62</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-60.

a man appeared in the world. The first sketch on the walls of a cave founded a tradition only because it gleaned from another – the tradition of perception.”<sup>66</sup> The body, as first perceived object in the world, creates a tradition of perception that is immortalized in works of art. In turn, the work of art builds a history of perception created by the body: “The quasi eternity of art compounds the quasi eternity of our corporeal existence. It is through our body that we have the first experience of the impalpable body of history prior to all initiation into art.”<sup>67</sup>

In painting we can find a tradition of perception or style, originated in the body as first object perceived. Style is something that occurs between painter and world, between perceiving and perceived. The one who perceives is the one that stylized the perceived. In painting, style becomes visible only when the painter applies on canvas the perception and representation of an “intensity” of the world.<sup>68</sup> Before any artistic expression, between the painter’s body and the world, in their eternal embodied existential relation, there is a presupposed meaning, an invisible “entity” that emerges stylized, later, on canvas.

My body brings to light the expression of the world. Consequently, my body, as a “seeing force” in the world, can be understood, on the one hand, as an articulation before perception, as an apparition of something where there was nothing. It can, on the other hand, be something that expresses freedom, history, and productivity, or, in other words, expresses the creation of meaning. My body in the world seems to be a hinge of the *for itself* and the *for the other*. In this respect, the body become an *ontological currency* that supports the reversible movement between perceiving and perceived, or the invisible and the visible.

The dual significance of the body becomes the pivotal element in psychoanalysis, because it puts in balance the interior world (psychic) with the exterior world (the perceptual

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<sup>66</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Prose of the World*, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

reality). Freud's concept of drive (*Trieb*) denotes a borderline concept between *psyche* and *soma*; it designates the energy sent to the psychic by a *somatic* impulse. Drive denotes, also, the relation of the body with an exterior object. The body is the hinge that allows drives to reach their purpose. This purpose is not defined by some sort of ultimate given that must be reached in order to be fully satisfied, but by an eternal return to an indefinite source of enjoyment that makes the drives have a circular path. Unlike the instinct, which defines the sexual life of animals, the drives differ from biological needs in that they can never be satisfied. The drives do not aim at an object and the goal is not to reach a final destination, but to follow its aim, which is to circle round the object. Drives may be conceived as cultural or linguistic constructs.

As a first institution in the lifeworld, the body becomes, in the first place, an event circumscribed in the order of wild being, a "primitive" *topos* where world meanings are engraved. The body appears every day as shaped flesh, but it is not just a corporeal contour or a colored shape; it is a potential stylized linguistic form.

### **The Body and its psychoanalytic implications**

In one sense, the intellectual meeting of psychoanalysis and phenomenology began when Freud introduced the concept of hysterical conversion<sup>69</sup> and drives in the theory of the body. Working with hysterics, Freud came to understand the special sensitivity of the body in relation to unconscious representation.

The relation psyche-body is a relation of two separated dimensions mediated by the unconscious. Therefore, Freud claims that repressed representations 'speak in the body'. This latter aspect leads Freud to highlight a paradox regarding the body's hysterical phenomena. The

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<sup>69</sup> Freud introduced the concept of hysterical conversion in *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, 1905.

hysteric suffers from nervous disorder that cannot be assimilated to any localized organic lesion, which why the hysteric behaves, for instance when he is paralysed, as if anatomy did not exist, or as if he had no knowledge of it. The symptom, in this case, is a coded message.

To designate the transportation of libidinal energy and the inscription of ideas in the body, Freud appeals to the concept of hysterical conversion. The hysterical conversion is defined by the intensity of emotional crisis and diversity of somatic effects. The causes of hysteric symptoms are, according to Freud, psychic traumas. The hysteric suffers because of reminiscence. In other words, the affect has not discharged the energy of the cause, verbally or somatically: the mental representation of the trauma is absent, prohibited or unbearable. The defensive mechanism that helps form the hysteric symptom is a repression of mental representations that is incompatible with the Ego. What repression keeps away from the conscious represents the impulses that disturb and cause inconvenience. If the repression, as defensive mechanism, is not functional, then the impulses are diverted by other processes, typically neurosis.

If the practical side of psychoanalysis, instituted by Freud, is enriched by a human component and unconditional clinical education, the theoretical side is mindful of a true naturalism; this proof that Freud has adhered to the materialist and the scientific movement of the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The interest of French philosophers in the Freudian clinic, at the beginning of the 1950s, facilitated the access to Freud's terminology.

In 1951, Merleau-Ponty, at a conference called *L'homme et l'adversité*, affirmed: Our century has erased the dividing line between the body and the spirit and now human life is seen as corporeal and spiritual, through and through, always supporting the body, always interested, even in its most carnal modes, in relation with people. For many thinkers, at the end of the nineteenth century, the body was a piece of matter, a beam

mechanism. The twentieth century rehabilitates and deepens the concept of flesh, that is, the living body.<sup>70</sup>

The osmotic relation between the anonymous life of the body and personal life, between the organism and our mundane life: the unconscious. Merleau-Ponty claims that the Freudian unconscious is a ‘protean’ notion with different meanings. At first glance, the unconscious denotes a *topos* which circumscribes a dynamic of the drives, a dynamic which cannot be known.<sup>71</sup> The unconscious is not a third-person process. It is not in-itself a process, with meaning. The unconscious avoids ‘coherence’, and also avoids situations in which there is resistance; as Merleau-Ponty states, it “is not a *non-knowledge* but rather an unrecognized knowledge, unformulated, which we do not want to assume.”<sup>72</sup>

Through the unconscious, Freud posits a close connection between the spiritual function of the body and the embodiment of the spirit. Accordingly, the interpersonal relationship is not an organic relation (between two *Körper*), but a relation between two living bodies (between two *Lieb*).<sup>73</sup> The embodied subject shows the tautological system of projection and introjection, the *chiasmatic* relation between two incarnated subjects:

In his late work he [Freud] speaks about aggressive sexual intercourse with the other as a fundamental given of our life. As the aggression does not refer to an object but to a person, the intertwining of the sexual and the aggressive means that sexuality has, so to speak, an interior, which is doubled, throughout its range, by a relationship from person to person. The sexual is our manner, fleshly, because we are flesh, to live our relationship with the other. Since sexuality represents the relation with the other, and not only with another body, it will weave between the other and me the circular system of projections

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<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « *L'homme et l'adversité* » in *Signes*, (édition électronique réalisée par Pierre Patenaude), « Notre siècle a effacé la ligne de partage du « corps » et de l' « esprit » et voit la vie humaine comme spirituelle et corporelle de part en part, toujours appuyée au corps, toujours intéressée, jusque dans ses modes les plus charnels, aux rapports des personnes. Pour beaucoup de penseurs, à la fin de XIX siècle, le corps, c'était un morceau de matière, un faisceau de mécanisme. Le XX siècle a restauré et approfondi la notion de la chair, c'est-à-dire du corps animé » p. 225.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Husserl's concept of *Lieb* is translated in French phenomenology as *chair*.

and introjections, bringing to light the indefinite series of reflecting reflections and reflected reflections, that means I am another and he is myself.<sup>74</sup>

The body is an enigmatic thing; as Merleau-Ponty states, it is part of this world, but in a strange way, as it is led by an enigmatic desire that lives within. This desire aims to approach the other and to make it join in its body.

Freud observes a sort of corporeal signal, in hysteria, that denotes that a repressed representation was ‘nestled’ in our body. Neurosis, for Freud, allows one to observe better the meeting between the biological body and the drives’ representative (signifiers). The drive representative belongs to the order of language, in other words, to the symbolic order. The symptom, in this case, indicates a message ignored by the hysteric. The message has a metaphorical value and it appears “written in symbols on the body” (the classic symptomatology of hysteria involves physical symptoms such as local paralyses, pains and anaesthesia for which no organic cause can be found). The subject suffers a constitutive trauma (constituted by language). Stated otherwise, the causative event of the emotive condition of the neurotic was not released verbally because the psychic trauma (symbolic representation) was prohibited or unbearable. Ultimately, the subject, as speaking being, does not have direct access to her object of desire (to the original cause of the trauma); the subject is, thereby, engaged in demand and is compelled to *jouir* through language.

Merleau-Ponty understood that the idea of symbol was a great discovery of psychoanalysis. Thus, in his conversation with George Charbonier, Merleau-Ponty attributes to

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<sup>74</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'homme and l'adversité*, in Op. cit., p. 228. « Dans la maturité de son œuvre, il parle du rapport « sexuel-agressif » à autrui comme de la donnée fondamentale de [292] notre vie. Comme l'agression ne vise pas une chose mais une personne, l'entrelacement du sexuel et de l'agressif signifie que la sexualité a, pour ainsi dire, un intérieur, qu'elle est doublée, sur toute son étendue, d'un rapport de personne à personne, que le sexuel est notre manière, charnelle puisque nous sommes chair, de vivre la relation avec autrui. Puisque la sexualité est rapport à autrui, et non pas seulement à un autre corps, elle va tisser entre autrui et moi le système circulaire des projections et des intro-jctions, allumer la série indéfinie des reflets reflétants et des reflets réfléchis qui font que je suis autrui et qu'il est moi-même. »

Freud the merit for reaffirming the term ‘symbol’, which, before, was a significantly faded concept.<sup>75</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, “a symbol is an emblem, it is more than a sign;” he adds “it is the very opposite of the sign.”<sup>76</sup> A symptom, like other unconscious formations, e.g. the dream, the Freudian slip, misreading, mishearing and temporary forgetting, receives the symbol of sexual status. Furthermore, every worldly existence expresses the libido: “Literally, the Freudian symbolism appears at the beginning as a relation that exists between all of what we see, live, think [...] and sexual life. Everything is, in this narrow sense, symbol of sexuality.”<sup>77</sup>

According to Duportail, psychoanalysis finds common ground with phenomenology in introducing sexuality into the thinking of the symbolism of the world.<sup>78</sup> One of the concepts accepted by both psychoanalysis and phenomenology is the concept of narcissism. Firstly, narcissism indicates a stage of subjective development and it is an effect of this development. The child, in his development, will discover his own body as an erotic object. This form of narcissism, called *autoerotism*, will be followed, necessarily, by a second form of narcissism. The child will externalize his sexual drives towards the image of his body (in the mirror) and he will assume the new object-body as his own body. In other words, the sexual drives take the exterior body as the object through which they (the drives) can find satisfaction. From this very moment the child invests his sexuality in his own body. This new form of narcissism starts when the *libido* manifests attaches to external objects. Based on the mirror identification, the imaginary identifications of the Ego appear. Nonetheless, the mirror image is the external representation of the body and for this reason *the I is an-other*.

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<sup>75</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Narcissism, when used as an ontological term, refers to both, the seer and the visible. We can find in every vision the identity seer – visible, because the seer, being caught in what he sees, is still himself who sees; thereby there is a fundamental narcissism in all vision.<sup>79</sup> Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, mediates between 'classic phenomenology' and psychoanalysis, and so rediscovers the Freudian meaning of the *libido*. For Merleau-Ponty there is nothing that is not sexual.<sup>80</sup>

### **The mirror stage in Merleau-Ponty's thinking**

The theory of the mirror stage in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is close to the psychoanalytical view, especially that of Lacan's theory. In 1951, Merleau-Ponty lectured at the Sorbonne and published these lectures as *The Child's Relations with Others*. In this course he analyses the phenomenon of the mirror stage in order to explain the social behaviour of the child. Merleau-Ponty treats two theories regarding this phenomenon: Henri Wallon's and Jacques Lacan's. Both have the body as a starting point.

The body is the first element that a child can identify in relation with the other. According to Wallon, the recognition of the other's specular image is more precocious than the child's recognition of her own specular image. The same is true of the image and the reality of the other.<sup>81</sup> But this recognition cannot be a recognition in the true meaning of the word. For instance, the child experiences the specular image of her father and this image cannot be distinguished from the father's real body, even if both images appear at the same time in

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<sup>79</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 134-139.

<sup>80</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours, 1959-1961* (Paris, NFR, Gallimard) p.150-151.

<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Child Psychology and Pedagogy The Sorbonne Lecture 1949-1952* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2010), p. 250.

different places.<sup>82</sup> In other words, before the mirror stage, the child takes as real any image around, because she experiences spatiality in such a way that she attributes reality to all images. According to Merleau-Ponty, at this stage, all images are quasi-realities or phantoms.<sup>83</sup> This is the first stage, in which the child thinks the images have their own independent existence.<sup>84</sup> At the next stage, the child faces a dilemma. She has two visual images of her father: father and father's specular image. Moreover, children have only one complete image of their own body: the mirror image. According to Wallon, the child must understand that the image is not her because she is "where he interoceptively senses herself when she sees her image in the mirror."<sup>85</sup> The Wallon solution is provided by the development of the child's intelligence; thus the child has to learn that the specular image is not real.

However, Wallon's theory is not complete, according to Merleau-Ponty. Lacan's point of view provides a phenomenological solution rather than an intellectual one. Merleau-Ponty asserts that Wallon's intellectual point of view does not answer why the child is interested in her specular image or why the child finds this experience so amusing.<sup>86</sup> When children identify with the specular image they do not face only their own ego<sup>87</sup> but also a spectacle.<sup>88</sup> Before the mirror stage, on the Lacanian psychoanalytical view, the child is at the *id* stage. Through the mirror stage, the child experiences her self-image as an alienated body and this will make the constitution of the ego possible. According to Merleau-Ponty, this stage is not at all an acquisition of a new content, but an acquisition of a new function, "*a self-contemplation, a*

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 250-252.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

*narcissistic attitude* taking on a cardinal importance.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, the identification with the specular image makes the child leave her lived reality. Henceforth, the child will refer, constantly, to her ideal, fictive or imaginary *I*, whose specular image is her first draft, her first symbol, of her corporality. Now, the child is able to be sensitive to others and to consider herself a fellow being among other humans. The child is tied to its immediate reality. Her reality is captured by her ego, which the child finds to be the first symbol of the specular image. Now the image prepares me for another alienation, “*the other’s alienation of me.*”<sup>90</sup> Thus, the child will put herself in relation to the other as the other: “I have an exterior aspect; I am visible for the other. The other has a view of me. *The relation with the other has the value of a real structure*; it is a system of relations at the interior of my experience.”<sup>91</sup> This experience, once again, is given by a visual perception. For psychoanalysis, the visual is not only a sense feature but it has the significance of spectacle, or the imaginary. The narcissistic function represents the matrix of all intersubjective relationships and also institutes verbal communication.

The difference between Wallon and psychoanalysis, says Merleau-Ponty, is that psychoanalysis accentuates the affective essence of the phenomenon, whereas for Wallon it is an issue of the work of consciousness.<sup>92</sup> Merleau-Ponty asserts further:

For psychoanalysts, the visual is not only a sense mode; it has an entire different significance. *The visual is the sense of spectacle, the imaginary.* It is where the integration of different sensations becomes a way of relating to self and even to the other. At the same time, psychoanalysis places an accent on anticipation and the always possible regression. The child defines himself by a kind of anticipation taken by the subject on his current resources. Birth is characterised by pre-maturation: *the first Oedipal drive is a sort of puberty or psychological puberty.* The child lives in the future, but only the adult can regress. Childhood is never fully realized. We continue to see, by a kind of magical belief, a double of ourselves in the image.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Op. cit., p. 254.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

The child's image in the mirror is not a constitutive image until the Other ratifies the image as the image of the child. The mirror stage is the moment when the child moves from a primitive form of language (screams, laughter, etc.) to language itself (the child becomes aware of his body). This is a progression from need to desire. In the stage of need the child lives in the future; after, living in 'demand', as an effect of desire, the young man can regress; he has a past, memories.

The mirror stage as narcissistic function is related, by Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*, to the concepts of chiasm and reversibility. Vision can be understood in two ways, referring to seeing (the one who sees and is invisible) and being seen (to be visible). In all vision there is an identity between the seer and the visible:<sup>94</sup> "Since the seer is caught up in what he sees it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision."<sup>95</sup> The person who looks is not external to the world that he looks at: both vision and the world are part of the flesh. Flesh is the principle that puts seer and vision into relation with each other. Thus, "as soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the mist of the visible..."<sup>96</sup> The narcissistic desire of the person who sees explains that he sees only because he needs to be seen by the other, to be visible to the other:

Thus since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision. And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity – which is the second and more profound sense of narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of the body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer

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<sup>94</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 134.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.<sup>97</sup>

This reversible ‘movement’ of perception, which is doubled by a counter-perception, is the *sine qua non* condition for Merleau-Ponty in explaining the function of the flesh; as Merleau-Ponty says, the flesh is a mirror phenomenon. The mirror helps me to create the image of my body; the mirror is “an extension of my relation with my body.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the flesh constitutes these intersections of “fields” – between me and the other, between me and the sensible world, etc. – where subjectivities are integrated. This structure of intersection exists in one sole ‘element’, namely, the flesh of the world. Thus, the world is doubled by these coupled concepts: the world is outside and inside in reciprocity, the world is phenomenal and objective, in brief, the world is *chiasmatic*. This reciprocity reveals Merleau-Ponty’s idea of transcendence, “that is, of the world seen within inherence in this world, by virtue of it, of an Intra ontology...”<sup>99</sup> In this way, Merleau-Ponty tries to think our opening towards Being as a relationship with the Being that has place inside the flesh of the world. Intra-ontology denotes a relationship with Being which takes place within Being.<sup>100</sup>

Merleau-Ponty does not try to overcome the dualism between *seeing* and *to be seen*. He internalises it, bringing it into the world, making the dualism “live” in the visible. But what is the visible in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking? The visible is nothing else than “this generality of the sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh.”<sup>101</sup> Flesh represents the dehiscence of being: “the flesh is the tissue common to the seeing body and the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

visible world, thought as inseparable, nascent to one another, one for the other, a dehiscence.”<sup>102</sup>

Flesh is an ontological element, “in the sense of *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea.”<sup>103</sup>

The flesh becomes “the *mirror phenomenon* and the mirror is an extension of my relation with my body.”<sup>104</sup> The flesh an intermediary, an included middle between *I* and my “shadow”.

The flesh creates the *Bild* of the thing, the *Wesen* in a verbal sense.<sup>105</sup> Bringing together Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the specular image and Lacan’s mirror stage, I could say that the flesh is the ontological element that splits in order to institute language. Creating this *écart* between me and the other, the world becomes visible or becomes a world of language, a *diacritical world*:

To touch oneself, to see oneself, is to obtain such a specular extract of oneself. i.e. fission of appearance and Being – a fission that already takes in the touch (duality of the touching and the touched) and which, with the mirror (Narcissus) is only a more profound adhesion to Self. The visual *projection* of the world in me to be understood not as intra-objective things-my body relation [.], but as a shadow-body relation, a community of Verbal *Wesen* and hence finally a “resemblance” phenomenon, transcendence.<sup>106</sup>

Narcissism passes from the field of psychoanalysis to the field of ontology. Merleau-Ponty introduces narcissism into the theory of flesh and reversibility. Everything happens as if the visible arises at the moment when a certain visible focuses and collects for itself its own visible, which is dispersed first into the world. In the same way the child is born as a self – in the sense of a person – at the moment in which the child recognises her image in the mirror, assuming a visibility that passes through others and through the world, returning on herself.<sup>107</sup> Vision is

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<sup>102</sup>Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible* (édition Tel Gallimard, Paris 2007) p. 190; “*la chair est l’étoffe commune du corps voyant et du monde visible, pensés comme inséparable, naissant l’un à l’autre, l’un pour l’autre, d’une “déhiscence”*”

<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 139.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>107</sup> Pascal Dupond, *Dictionnaire Merleau-Ponty* (Édition Ellipses, Paris 2008), p. 152.

narcissistic inasmuch as the body must be visible and visible for itself. Thereby, the child is its own narcissistic object.

In the end, mirroring is not complete, because every time something is lost. In touch, for example, when the right hand is touching the left hand, the left hand is not merely touched, since, in reverse, the left hand is touching the right hand. I can never have the experience of one hand as the realised touching-touched. We should understand the chiasm between seeing and being seen in the same way. The mirror image of one who looks in the mirror is not a complete image. The child's image in the mirror is a self-alienation. When the child recognises his body in the mirror, the child finds himself the object of his desire. Freud calls this object *das Ding*. The object is lost in the moment in which it is constituted through language. The mirror stage is the moment of a permanent loss. Primordial loss creates a permanent need to recoup the negated or lost.

The object (*das Ding*) cannot be substituted. The object is the object and cause of desire. According to Lacan, the object is *l'Objet petit a*. The mirror stage shows that the constitution of language and of Ego is the product of a gap that allows the subject to be alienated from himself.

## **The mirror stage in Lacan's thinking**

In his paper on the mirror stage, Lacan speaks about the formation of the body image as a totality and as the birth of the ego. The mirror stage (or the looking-glass phase) was described for the first time by a friend of Lacan, Henri Wallon, in 1931, although Lacan attributes its discovery to James Mark Baldwin.<sup>108</sup> The mirror test, attributed to Wallon, is a particular experiment which differentiates the human infant from the chimpanzee. The six month old child

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<sup>108</sup> Dylan Evans, Op. cit., p. 118.

differs from the chimpanzee of the same age in that the former becomes fascinated with its reflection in the mirror and assumes it as its own image, whereas the chimpanzee loses interest in its image in the mirror. Unlike the mirror test, Lacan's mirror stage represents a fundamental aspect of the structure of subjectivity.<sup>109</sup> This is the moment in which the child is permanently caught and captivated by her own image. According to Lacan, at between six and eight months of age, the infant forms her ego via the process of identification; the ego is the result of anticipated identification with one's own specular image.<sup>110</sup> Lacan notes, in *The Mirror Stage*, that:

This act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in the series of gestures in which he experiences in play relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body, and the person and things, around him.<sup>111</sup>

The recognition of the child in the mirror should be understood as an imaginary identification, as a transformation of the subject when he assumes the image. This aspect is circumscribed in a homeomorphic identification order. The child is exposed to an exclusively visual action, provided it by others. The specular image, which gives the child the intuitive form of its body, institutes a relation between the child's body and the environment. The environment, as an exterior 'object', relates to a fashioning activity of the child. Thus, the environment receives only the form of the subjective. The child "destroys" the independence of the object at the moment in which the ego is realized in the mirror. The other is just an image, and so the child does not attain any existence in the object because he stylises the exterior.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrit, « La stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique »* (Edition Du Seuil, Paris 1966), p. 93.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. « Cet acte, en effet, loin de s'épuiser comme chez le singe dans le contrôle une fois acquis de l'inanité de l'image, rebondit aussitôt chez l'enfant en une série de gestes où il éprouve ludiquement la relation des mouvements assumés de l'image à son environnement reflété, et de ce complexe virtuel à la réalité qu'il redouble, soit à son propre corps et aux personnes, voire aux objets, qui se tiennent à ses côtés. »

In order to recognise herself in the mirror, the child stylises the object, but this presupposes a movement from *I am* to *I have*. Desire pushes me to possess the exterior.<sup>112</sup> From *I am* to *I have* may be expressed in philosophical terms as a movement from inner world as imaginary dimension of the 'I' (*Innenwelt*) to environmental world as physical world (*Unwelt*).<sup>113</sup> We can find the same idea in *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

... the objective I acquires the determination of *another I*, and hence arises the relationship of *one self-consciousness* to *another self-consciousness*, and between these two the *process of recognition*. Here, self-consciousness is no longer merely *individual* self-consciousness, but in it there already begins a unification of *individuality* and *universality*.<sup>114</sup>

My desire faces the other. The image of the other can lure me in, show me the challenges of the other Ego.

The mirror stage is also closely related to narcissism: Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection. Narcissism indicates death, a vital insufficiency. The insufficiency is identification with oneself. This moment of narcissism is the period when the ego is constituted in the mirror. Narcissism is operative now, when previously the ego did not exist. The child "falls into the world". The child identifies herself only through the imaginary order. As Lacan would say, the other has the object of my desire. What is this object? The object is me or, in this case, the child. The child is his own object, but he can aspire to this object only through the other.

In Lacan's theory, identification is complete only when the child interiorizes the specular image, and this process needs help from the Other. The Other, in this case, is the mother that helps the child to recognize herself. The mother tells her child that the image from the mirror is himself. She makes the transition from *you are* to *I am*, from the *imaginary* (the realm of the

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<sup>112</sup> I am not referring to physical possessions, but to imaginary and symbolic possessions, in other words I am referring to language, because through language I can have the object and, in the end, myself.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, Op. cit., p. 154.

Ego) to the *symbolic* (the realm of the subject). *I am* represents the very first “utterance” of the child after the mother ratifies his or her image in the mirror. Her body, as *I am*, becomes the first symbol. As Merleau-Ponty would say, the body is cut out from the flesh of the world and now is a part of the cultural world.

In the same essay, *The Mirror Stage*, we can observe the gearing of the three registers: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The body image is a result of the conjunction between the real body, as organic body, and the image of the Other. In terms of the *real body*, Lacan asserts it has at least three connotations: it is impossible, it opposes resistance, and it is the object of rejection. The *real body* is constituted by all things that escape attempts to be symbolized and imagined; for that reason, the concept *real* denotes *impossible*. Resistance of the real body refers to a real *element* we face every day, which returns always in the same place and which imposes an obstacle to our will and desire. For instance, we circumscribe under the concept of real body the anatomical difference of the sexes and death as the inevitable destruction of *soma*. In terms of rejection, the real body constitutes the object that can be rejected by the child. For instance, Lacan argues, a child can reject the anatomical difference of sexes between himself and his mother.

Now, in terms of the symbolic body, Lacan has introduced the term *body of signifiers* in his seminar on psychosis.<sup>115</sup> He used the concept of *body of signifiers* to designate all signifiers: conscious signifiers, repressed signifiers and repudiated (foreclosed) signifiers. These are the signifiers of the subject. The body of signifiers designates, also, the way in which signifiers organize themselves. All these elements that constitute the body of signifiers and the subject of the unconscious (linguistic elements like words, syllables, phonemes, and letters) may have been spoken and thought before childbirth. First of all, these signifiers denote the child’s identity (first

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<sup>115</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses, Book III 1955-1956* (Routledge, UK London, 1993), p. 150.

name, last name, the child's birthplace, her race, the social environment etc.). To this heritage (that the child acquires before birth) will be added a constellation of signifiers; such a constellation brings in the unconscious and the conscious, desire of Others (represented, in this case, by the parents, *les Autres parentaux*). Through these signifiers the child gains her symbolic alienation. In other words, the child will recognize her own image in the mirror and she will internalize this image with help from the Other. After the child recognized herself in the mirror, the child needs someone to ratify the specular image. This person is the mother.

In psychoanalytical literature the body is also called a *book of flesh*, where signifiers of demand are registered. In other words, the body is the place where the signifiers of desire of the Other endure. Consider, for instance, the conscious and unconscious desire of parents regarding their children: my child should be a doctor, my child must play football, my boy must have long hair, my daughter must have straight teeth, my daughter should be a boy because she behaves like a boy, etc. Any of these signifiers can change the child's behaviour. Correlatively, Lacan asserts that the body speaks: "Through his own body the subject utters a word which, as such, is the word of truth, a word which he (the subject) does not know he releases as signifier. In this way the subject always tells more than he means."<sup>116</sup> Any gesture or movement of the body, represents a signifier. The signifiers are encrypted in the body and exhibited by gestures. Therefore, the body 'speaks' and the subject is not aware of this form of utterance, because the signifier is an autonomous element of discourse. The signifier is that linguistic element that represents and determines the subject.

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<sup>116</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les écrits techniques de Freud 1953-1954*: « par son corps même le sujet émet une parole qui comme telle est parole de vérité, et une parole qu'il ne sait pas même qu'il émet comme signifiante, c'est-à-dire que le sujet en dit toujours plus qu'il ne veut en dire, toujours plus qu'il ne sait en dire. » (édition Point, France, Paris 2009), p. 275.

The *symbolic body* appears also as an “existent” in every nomination, independent of the presence of the organic body. Thus, the symbolic body can manifest its “existence” before its physical birth and after its complete extinction as biological entity. Mortuary rituals and all that relates to the memory of the dead are testimonials of this special existence of the symbolic body.

Ultimately, we can see a very close relationship between three registers. We cannot function only in one register (for instance, in the pure symbolic order), independent of any other significance. This is especially true when this signification is repressed and, moreover, when it bears a desire. The symbol acquires its full value as ‘language’. Language separates *parlêtre* (speaking being) from the immediate thing (object). Language is, at the same time, something that makes the object subsist beyond its transformation or physical disappearance. Therefore, language is the constituent of life; the platform that organizes reality and, moreover, is the only way to access both reality and the other. If the world is seen by Lacan as a structure organised by language, which in turn regulates the social laws of exchange – as a symbolic pact – then the body becomes the fundamental institution of the world. Now, to some extent, I can affirm about body what Merleau-Ponty states on nature: “Body [Nature] is at the first day... The sensible, body [Nature], transcend the past present distinction, realise from within a passage from one into the other. Existential eternity. The indestructible, the barbaric Principle. Do a psychoanalysis of the Body [Nature]: it is the flesh, the mother.”<sup>117</sup>

The analysis of the body, as part of a psychoanalysis of Nature, includes the body as phenomenon and the body as expression. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the speaking body lies between the soul and the body and holds a symbolic dimension. The symbolic dimension of the body includes the body’s intentionality.

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<sup>117</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 267.

The next chapters will reveal the meaning of *interrogation* as a new method. It claims to be the instrument of the philosopher and the psychoanalyst, by which they attempt to bring light to the ‘symptom of this world’.

## The Concept of Nature in Merleau-Ponty's Thinking

Beginning with *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty defines nature in relation to body and spirit. Nature designates that which links human being with the “given”, or with passivity.<sup>1</sup> Nature is the foundation (*Stiftung*) which supports existence, the background for human life. Nature, as background, defines a dimension where Being is not separable from spirit, history or culture. As part of nature, the body is our medium for having a world.<sup>2</sup> Things do not form the medium of experience, Merleau-Ponty holds; the body suffers modifications. The ‘experience’ of the thing “exists primarily in its self-evidence.”<sup>3</sup> As Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*: “What is given is not the thing on its own, but the experience of the thing, or something transcendent standing in the wake of one’s subjectivity, some kind of natural entity of which a glimpse is afforded through a personal history.”<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty describes experience here as an ‘interior creative process of nature,’ a nature that opens a space of freedom for us, which allow us to perceive things by living them: “in order to perceive things, we need to live them.”<sup>5</sup>

Nature does not refer only to physical processes, things or animal life; it refers to everything that manifests itself as a living existence in the world. The relation between spirit and nature is one of reciprocal foundation, an articulation between passive and active principles. Nature designates the passive existence of every being as it appears at birth. The spirit denotes

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

the active principle, the existence and freedom that, constantly, invents and reinvents itself. The articulation of nature and spirit shows a mutual envelopment, as the notion of *Fundierung* (mutual foundation) denotes in phenomenology.<sup>6</sup> The entrance into the enigmatic world passes through spirit, which is embodied into nature.

Merleau-Ponty's perspective on nature and spirit will bring forward the idea of *Naturphilosophie* in his courses from the Collège de France 1956-1960. The philosopher maintains the mutual relationship between nature and spirit but the entrance into the world is nature. Nature is "the entity" that has its own meaning and this meaning is not placed there (in nature) by thinking. In the Introduction to *La Nature* (1956-1957) Merleau-Ponty states that:

We are investigating primordial non-lexical meaning, still seen by people who speak of "Nature". In Greek the word "Nature" is derived from the verb *φύω*, referring to the vegetal; from the Latin word *nascor*, to be born, live; it is deduced from the first meaning, which is fundamental. There is nature everywhere there is life that has a meaning, but where, however, there is no thinking; there is the relationship with the vegetal: it is nature that makes sense, without this sense being established by thinking. It is the auto-production of meaning. Nature is, therefore, different from a simple thing; it is an interior, it determines itself from within; from here comes the opposition of natural and accidental. And yet, Nature is different from the human; it is not instituted by the human, it is opposed to custom, to discourse.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature, Note Course du Collège de France* (Edition du Seuil, Paris 1995), « Recherchons le sens primordial, non lexical, toujours visé par les gens qui parle de « Nature ». En grec, le mot « Nature » vient du verbe *φύω*, qui fait allusion au végétal ; le mot latine *vie de nascor*, naître, vivre ; il est prélevé sur le premier sens, plus fondamental. Il y a nature partout où il y a une vie qui a un sens, mais où, cependant, il n'y a pas de pensée ; d'où la parenté avec le végétal : est nature ce qui a un sens, sans que ce sens ait été posé par la pensée. C'est l'autoproduction d'un sens. La Nature est donc différente d'une simple chose ; elle a un intérieur, se détermine du dedans ; d'où l'opposition de « naturel » à « accidentel ». Et cependant la Nature est différente de l'homme ; elle n'est pas instituée par lui, elle s'oppose à la coutume, au discours. » pp. 19-20.

The main idea of *Naturphilosophie*, which Merleau-Ponty borrows from Schelling, is that nature is a barbaric principle; nature is above all reflections on being and any other things in general. Nature must be conceived as before any being, because nature is already there as the oldest element; a productive and perpetual principle.

Another important influence of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is the redefinition of nothingness. According to Merleau-Ponty the notion of nothingness involves two aspects. On the one hand, Schelling starts from nature as *pre-objective* foundation of every being in the world and, as such, an absolute Being, without exterior.<sup>8</sup> Thereby, there is no nothingness next to Being; thus, Being cannot be defined in opposition with nothingness.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the existence of nature implicates a certain negativity, namely, nature is, at the same time, active and passive. Nature contains in itself a double movement: expansion and contraction. This duplicity shows that nature is *self-differentiation* and is *opposed to itself*; its infinite productivity manifests in individual forms. Furthermore, the negative that operates in nature is not suppressed by a superior synthesis. There is no dialectical result. Negativity is irreducible to nature.<sup>10</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, nothingness is the absolute non-being; to perceive nothing means that one is not able to perceive. There is this possibility of not seeing, of not thinking; the spirit, which always is thinking, stops. The spirit dies, but the meaning of death is not defined by the passage from existence to nothingness; death is different but not in opposition to life. These two notions, Merleau-Ponty states, are interlaced; one can fold over the other and become non-distinct. Therefore, existence (being) can be defined by the notion of indistinctness and not by the notion

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandra Renault, *Nature et Subjectivite, L'enigme de l'homme chez Freud et Merleau-Ponty*, (HAL, tel.archives-ouvertes.fr, 2012), pp. 327-328.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

of identity. Nothingness can be defined by the notion of distance or gap (*écart*) and not by the notion of otherness.

For the later Merleau-Ponty, nature and spirit are mutual enveloped: neither is prior to the other.<sup>11</sup> In *The Visible and the Invisible* he finds in nature the foundation for his new ontological psychoanalysis, or his psychoanalysis of nature;<sup>12</sup> “Nature is at the first day” or, as he writes in *La Nature*:

Nature is primordial, that is, the non-built and the non-instituted; from where comes the idea of an eternity of Nature (eternal return), of a solidity. Nature is an enigmatic object, an object that is not entirely an object; it is not entirely an object in front of us. It is our soil, not the one that is ahead, but the one that leads us.<sup>13</sup>

Nature is everywhere where there is life and meaning. Nature has a meaning in itself. Nature is the auto production of its meaning. Before the formation of the ego, and so, before language, the human being is an integral part of nature with no distinction between ‘my body’ and nature. Before the mirror stage, the infant lives with the impression, somehow unconsciously, that every object is part of his body. The mystery of natural production remains an enigma. Before language, the human being lives in a sort of ‘intellectual intuition’; this, according to Merleau-Ponty, is perception itself, before any link with language: Merleau-Ponty calls it the perception asleep in itself “where all things are me because I am not yet the subject of reflection.”<sup>14</sup> And he adds: “At this level, the light and the air are not yet, as in Fichte, the medium of vision and

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<sup>11</sup> Pascal Dupont, *Dictionnaire Merleau-Ponty*, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 267, 270.

<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature*, “Est Nature le primordial, c’est-à-dire le non-construit, le non-institué; d’où idée d’une éternité de la Nature (éternel retour), d’une solidité. La Nature est un objet énigmatique, un objet qui n’est pas tout à fait un objet; elle n’est pas tout à fait un objet devant nous. Elle est notre sol, non pas ce qui est devant, mais ce qui nous poste.” p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. « où toutes choses sont moi parce que je ne suis pas encore le sujet de la réflexion. » p. 363.

hearing, the medium for reasonable beings to communicate, but the symbols of native knowledge (*Urwissen*) and the eternal inscribed in Nature.”<sup>15</sup>

## The progressive form of Nature

In *The Visible and the Invisible* working notes, Merleau-Ponty claims that “Nature is at the first day: it is there today”. He claims further that: “The sensible, Nature, transcend[s] the past present distinction, realizes from within a passage from one into the other.”<sup>16</sup> Nature is “existential eternity, the indestructible and the barbaric principle.”<sup>17</sup> All these latter appellations show that time has a close relationship with nature. Merleau-Ponty’s concern is to free the concept of time from philosophy of consciousness. Inspired by Freud’s idea of the unconscious and of the past as timeless, he eliminates the idea of time as a series of subjective experiences. Time is an opening that “contains in itself simultaneity;”<sup>18</sup> it is a sort of passage that allows for the transference between the present and the past and vice versa. The past tense is a past that constitutes the temporal object of my subjectivity, a past as foundation (*Stiftung*): for example: the oak I saw in my childhood institutes within myself the concept of oak, hence, the real oak is the oak of the past that was present and remains present regardless of my subjectivity. Therefore, time is not anymore a series of experiences that involves the subjective meaning of the past and present, but the relation between past and present as a relation “from a *noema* to a *noema*.”<sup>19</sup> There is a natural passage which connects the world, that is time as eternal existence (*nunc stans*), that

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid: « A ce niveau, la lumière et l’air ne sont pas encore, comme chez Fichte, le milieu de la vision et de l’ouïe, le moyen pour des êtres raisonnable de communiquer, mais « les symboles du savoir originel (*Urwissen*) et éternel inscrit dans la Nature ». »

<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 267.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 244.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

holds an intentional reference in itself which is not only from the past to the factual present, but also ‘in reverse’ from the factual present to a dimensional present or *Welt* or Being, where the past is simultaneous to the present.<sup>20</sup> Time is the pulse of Nature, which crosses us, our spirit.<sup>21</sup> As I mentioned above, Merleau-Ponty’s goal was to break down the question of time exhibited by Husserl’s philosophy of consciousness. He states in *The Visible and the Invisible*:

“The whole Husserlian analysis is blocked by the framework of acts which imposes upon it the philosophy of consciousness. It is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende* (operative) or *latent* intentionality which is the intentionality within being. That is not compatible with “phenomenology,” that is, with an ontology that obliges whatever is not nothing to *present* itself to the *consciousness* across *Abschattungen* (shadowing, sketches) and as deriving from an originating donation which is an *act*, i.e. one *Erlebnis* (experience, lived) among others.”<sup>22</sup>

Thereby, consciousness and the flux of phenomena with all its intentional threads do not represent a primary philosophical conception. Time is, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, like a vortex, a schematized flux of phenomena, “the spatializing-temporalizing vortex,” which is flesh and not consciousness facing *noema*.<sup>23</sup>

Nature is a cosmological principle, for Merleau-Ponty that gives birth to the world. Nature is a carnal principle, because it is *the sensible*. Merleau-Ponty, describes the flesh as the *sensible in itself*: “the old term element, in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.”<sup>24</sup> The identification of nature with the flesh is seen

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature, Note Cours du Collège de France*, p. 162.

<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

in the already cited ground-statement: “Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother.”<sup>25</sup>

If we want to find the origins of the English word ‘flesh’ we do not have to dig too far. The first dating of this word is around 1661, referring to the hue of Caucasian “skin”; in old English, flesh is understood as “meat” and in Old English poetry the word is used to mean “body.”<sup>26</sup> The word ‘flesh’ is translated as ‘body’ in the first years of French phenomenology: *chair* is the usual translation for the German word *Leib*, the word used by Husserl in the *Ideen II* for the living body. Merleau-Ponty will use the concept of *chair* in the sense of *Leib* in his later work, where he states that *chair* is a *living body*.<sup>27</sup> Before this, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty translated *Leib* through *the phenomenal body*, *the lived body* and *the body of the subject*. At that time *chair* designated *the body as object*. In his later work flesh is put in relation to the opening of being; flesh is the tissue of the seeing body and the visible world, born one from another and one for the other.<sup>28</sup> Flesh is the element that is situated between two (*entre deux*); flesh keeps together the *components* of the body (organs, bones, skin, blood vessels and nerves). Flesh keeps the body alive.

If we are looking for an ancient Greek equivalent for the flesh, closer to Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, it is the word *Khora*. For Plato, nature (*phýsis*) is related with *genesis*: it is “the growth process or genesis.”<sup>29</sup> Plato states, in *Timaeus*, that genesis takes place midway between true being and nonbeing.<sup>30</sup> Plato calls this place *hypodochē* or *khora*, a sort of receptacle, space or

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Chambers Murrar, Op. cit., p. 454.

<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L’homme et l’adversité*, in *Signes*, « Pour beaucoup de penseurs à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, le corps c’était un morceau de matière, un faisceau de mécanismes. Le 20<sup>e</sup> siècle a restauré et approfondi la notion de la chair, c’est-à-dire du corps animé. » p. 225.

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> Plato, *Legile (Laws)*, 891 c (editura Iri, Bucharest, 1995), p. 296.

<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 52 a-c (editura Stiintifica, Bucharest, 1993), p. 186.

interval. *Khora* is the third kind of being,<sup>31</sup> beside the unchangeable and invisible, and the visible and changeable.

The flesh, according to Marc Richir, like *Khora*, is a sort of “bastard concept,” “half-way between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea,” to the very extent that it is the element of intersection, of chiasm, or, to speak like the Greeks, of the *composite*.<sup>32</sup> The concept of flesh has a *cosmological* dimension, not in the sense of an eternal cosmic harmony, “but in the sense that the field of phenomena already constitutes *a priori* a certain arrangement, a wild *cosmos*, a nature, whatever these phenomena might be in other respects.”<sup>33</sup> Merleau-Ponty does not have a theory of origins, “nor of a series of events going to a first cause, but one sole explosion of Being which is forever.”<sup>34</sup> This “explosion” is the phenomenon itself, ‘phenomenalized’ by a sort of torsion or folding of the flesh onto itself.<sup>35</sup> The world as *cosmos* is a phenomenological field rising on a horizon of invisibility or the non-phenomenal:<sup>36</sup> “It is as if the essence, hidden in a hollow and constantly about to appear, occurs as a controlling principle of the phenomenon, but a principle which is always anticipated and never seen coinciding with or being transparent in the phenomenon itself.”<sup>37</sup> Richir calls this ‘phenomenalization’ a distortion of the phenomenon:

...every phenomenon is affected by an *originating distortion* by virtue of which, on the one hand, there is only a phenomenon for *another* phenomenon, therefore *for* a sensation or a *embodied* vision, by necessity transferred in parts to the register of the sensible or the vision, so that the vision or the sensation of the phenomenon in that sense forms part of the phenomenon itself; on the other hand, and correlatively, by virtue of this the phenomenon appears, and is by necessity phenomenalized as incompleting and this very incompleting as hinting at the imminence of the *illusion* of a completion. This is incessantly deferred insofar as the completion, the phenomenalization, of the non-phenomenal (the invisible) that there is in it, in its horizons, will always only lead once

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<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* (Echo Library, Teddington, 2006), p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> Marc Richir, *The Meaning of Phenomenology in The Visible the Invisible* (in *Thesis Eleven*, Number 36, pp.60-81, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993), p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 256.

<sup>35</sup> Marc Richir, *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

again to the phenomenon which is itself incomplete. It is by virtue of this originary distortion, which Merleau-Ponty calls a “good error,” that the phenomenon is contained within itself, that is to say it is phenomenalized.<sup>38</sup>

The perception acts only in the phenomenon (in the visible or the perceptible); the non-phenomenal side of the phenomenal is constitutive of perception itself (seeing, perceiving).

There is a reversibility and enjambment, or chiasm, of all these terms, which we only differentiate in reflection.<sup>39</sup> The phenomenon is not complete, but it offers, to the naked eye, the *illusion of completion*, because of language. Language “is a power for error, since it cuts the continuous tissue that joins us vitally to the things and to the past and is installed between ourselves and that tissue like a screen.”<sup>40</sup> Language governs our life, as Merleau-Ponty states, “language is a life, is our life and the life of the things.”<sup>41</sup> Life is structured by language. Vision itself, thought itself, are structured as language.<sup>42</sup> This language lives only from silence. Language brings to the surface, from the anamorphic stage of silence, our lived experience; this is what Merleau-Ponty calls the “language of life and of action, of literature and of poetry.”<sup>43</sup>

The theory of the flesh does not allow us to think Merleau-Ponty’s ontology as an eschatological ontology, nor as a cosmological one. In Merleau-Ponty’s thinking beginning and ending fold back on each other: “they have never been apart.”<sup>44</sup> Nature remains a sort of potentiality principle of this world. It is a continuous presence, yet with past and future, but not beginning or ending.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 125-126.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

## The unconscious, libidinal body, desire and the tissue of the world

In 1951, Merleau-Ponty participated in a conference, called *The human and adversity*,<sup>45</sup> where he argued that our century, the 20<sup>th</sup>, had erased the border between the body and spirit. Until this moment, the body was a piece of matter, a sort of mechanism. The 20<sup>th</sup> century restored the notion of the body in the sense of an animate body (*Leib*). Human life is supported by the body. Life, in its carnal mode, is oriented to inter-personal relationship.<sup>46</sup> To prove his point, Merleau-Ponty follows the notion of *Leib* (lived body) in Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Freud supports his theory with the concept of instinct. The notion of instinct is an "apparatus" inside of the body, which ensures a minimal movement or provides tailored responses to specific situations.<sup>47</sup> Instinct cannot denote the way in which the infant develops love towards her parents. The infant's relation with the other is mediated by her body, in other words, by the different areas and functions of the body, which are not capable of discrimination and articulated actions (a mouth that cannot distinguish between sucking and biting e.g.).<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, the relation with the other remains trapped in a sort of 'difficulty' expressed by the body's unmediated relation with the other. The body remains an enigma abandoning itself to a peculiar desire to lure the other and to rejoin its body. The body is animated and animating, a natural appearance of the spirit.<sup>49</sup> Psychoanalysis, Merleau-Ponty states, brings together spirit

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<sup>45</sup> *L'homme et l'adversité*.

<sup>46</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (édition Gallimard, Paris 1960), p. 225.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225-226.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

and body: spirit passes into body and body passes into spirit.<sup>50</sup> The psychoanalytic concept that links body and spirit is the unconscious.

A first meaning of the unconscious, in Freud's work, is the *topos* of the basic impulses which operate according to "the pleasure principle". However, as a distinct 'element' of the psychic system, the unconscious cannot be described as a separate process: the unconscious is part of the psychic system alongside the conscious and preconscious. According to Merleau-Ponty, the unconscious does not oppose the conscious: in fact, it dominates 'psychic life'. The unconscious will shape the entrance of our conscious life; it will elude all the thoughts or situations that represent resistance, trying to satisfy its libido. The unconscious is not non-knowledge, but, Merleau-Ponty states, it is unrecognised knowledge, which we do not want to assume.<sup>51</sup> However, the author of *Phenomenology of Perception* proposes an emendation of the Freudian concept of the unconscious. Because it is inseparable from the desire of the body, the unconscious becomes a universal power of incarnation.<sup>52</sup> The body, which is entirely sensual, is a desiring body. The unconscious is the sense itself: the sense is not an intellectual possession of what is felt, but a dispossession of ourselves: openness to something that we do not have to think in order to recognize.<sup>53</sup>

I have argued, in chapter one, that desire is an auto-affection of the sensing body, a desire for oneself. To be more precise, through desire we try to recuperate what we have lost by self-alienation in the visible world (the voice, feces, mother's breast, the look and the phallus). The specular body (as visible body) represents, for Merleau-Ponty, an incomplete body because of these lost "objects." These objects are lost in an imaginary way and for that reason we have

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>52</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature, Notes, Course du Collège de France* (édition du Seuil, Paris 1995), p. 380.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 379-380.

tendencies to fill the hole created by desire (*l'objet **petit a***) by looking in the other body. Through this looking, the body's orifices (like mouth, eyes and anus) and also other parts (breast or penis) become sensitive to sexual stimulation. For Merleau-Ponty, orifices are not figurative; they are actual holes. According to Merleau-Ponty, the corporeal scheme is as follows:

My own body scheme, because I see myself, is applicable to all other bodies that I see, it is a glossary of corporeality in general, a system of equivalences between inside and outside which requires one to be accomplished in the other. The body that senses is a desiring body, and *esthesiology* is extended to a theory of the libidinal body. The theoretic concepts of Freudianism are rectified and strengthened when we understand them, as Melanie Klein's work suggests, starting from corporeality that becomes itself research of the outside in the inside and of the inside in the outside...<sup>54</sup>

The body is narcissistic, but it is also an object, in the sense that it stays for the other, for the desire of the other. The libidinal body defines the structure of perception that provides a natural foundation for *the other*. And as I have shown above, in the mirror stage, the process is reversible.

As a phenomenon, our body obeys the flesh principle: the body is a phenomenon 'phenomenalized'. As a narcissistic entity, the body simultaneously loses and gains its identity through the other. What the body loses, in order to achieve its identity, it loses in virtue of a primal repression. In phenomenology, this primal repression has been called the phenomenon 'phenomenalized' – a mythical forgetting of something that was never conscious to begin with, an original psychical act by which the unconscious is first constituted.<sup>55</sup> Bodily alienation,<sup>56</sup> at

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., "*Le schéma du corps propre, puis que je me vois, est participable par tous les autres corps propre que je vois, c'est un lexique de la corporéité en général, un system d'équivalences entre le dedans et le dehors, qui prescrit à l'un de s'accomplir dans l'autre. Le corps qui a de sens est aussi un corps qui désire, et l'esthésiologie se prolonge en une théorie de corps libidinal. Les concepts théorétiques de freudisme sont rectifiés et affermis quand on les comprend, comme le suggère l'œuvre de Mélanie Klein, à partir de la corporéité devenue elle-même recherche du dehors dans le dedans et du dedans dans le dehors...*" p. 380.

<sup>55</sup> Dylan Evans, Op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>56</sup> In the mirror we perceive our body as individuality, as a whole; yet, unconsciously, the child will be haunted, for the rest of her life by old phantasms linked to her body before mirror stage (an absolute body that incarnated the

the mirror stage, involves this primal repression, a repression which represents the alienation of desire, *when need is articulated in demand*.<sup>57</sup> At the mirror stage, for the first time, the child “speaks,”<sup>58</sup> recognising his body in the mirror. Lacan asserts in *Séminaire 20* that “From the moment he speaks, from that precise moment and not before, I understand that there is repression.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the first repression is more important, not as a specific psychical act, but as a structural feature of language itself.<sup>60</sup>

Repression, according to Lacan, makes language necessarily incomplete. What makes me articulate language is the gap between me and the other. The repression of the first signifier creates the necessary space (passage) from where expression emerges; it creates the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic order, from mute things to spoken things. Between these orders lies the space of expression. The space of expression is an ontological “power” because it is the shell of being and meaning, of the visible and the invisible: it is the power that brings the opposites *into each other*; it is the *Ineinander*. The *Ineinander* is a principle of internal organisation with an internal intentionality: it is the keeper of language, or, in terms of Lacan’s ‘philosophy’, it is the Other. The Other is a place that is given to us as absence and designates radical alterity; it is other-ness, which is not an otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. In other words “there is no Other for the Other”.<sup>61</sup> However, Lacan asserts that there is a lack in radical alterity because there is always a signifier missing

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mother’s breast, feces, the voice, the look and later the phallus). Thus, through the cleavage, created in the mirror, the child gains her corporeal individuality.

<sup>57</sup> Need is never present in a pure pre-linguistic stage in the human being – such purely biological needs, primordial satisfactions, are subject to the law of signifiers – need can only be hypothesised after it has been articulated in demand. In other words, the demand is primordial to need. The need must be first symbolised in demand.

<sup>58</sup> Speaking in the sense of conscious act – for the first time the child sees himself in the mirror as a unity.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire 20* (Publication hors commerce. Document interne à l’Association freudienne internationale.) « *A partir du moment où il parle, à partir de ce moment-là très exactement, pas avant, je comprendre qu’il y ait du refoulement* » p. 53. .

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, (English version), p. 866.

from the signifying chain constituted by the Other. This incompleteness is necessary as feature of language itself; for that reason, we do not have access to absolute knowledge: we are in the impossibility of ever saying “the truth about truth.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the Other is the locus in which language is constituted. For Lacan speech and language originate outside consciousness; as a result, the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.

The unconscious is structured as a function of the symbolic order. For that reason, the unconscious becomes a trans-individual topology. Language presupposes intersubjectivity. As Merleau-Ponty asserts in *The Visible and the Invisible*:

In fact what has to be understood is, beyond the “person,” the existentials according to which we comprehend them, and which are the sedimented meaning of all our voluntary and involuntary experiences. This unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our “consciousness,” but in front of us, as articulations of our field. It is “unconscious” by the fact that it is not an *object*, but it is that through which objects are possible, it is the constellation wherein our future is read – It is between them as interval of the trees between the trees. Or as their common level, it is the *Urgemeinschaftung* of our intentional life, the *Ineinander* of the other in us and of us in them.... It is these existentials that make up the (substitutable) meaning of what we say and of what we understand. They are the armature of the “invisible world” which, with speech, begins to impregnate all the things we see – as the “other” space...<sup>63</sup>

The unconscious represents the *topos* of language, of our conscious life: “Language is a life, is our life and the life of the things.”<sup>64</sup> The unconscious is placed *entre deux* as a presence-absence. Therefore, language is born from “silence” and it “lives only from silence;”<sup>65</sup> and “everything we cast to the other has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave.”<sup>66</sup> Since speech and language are intersubjective phenomena, the unconscious is trans-individual.<sup>67</sup> According to Lacan, the unconscious is not, anymore, placed in the interior of the psychic; this reference, as

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 737.

<sup>63</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 215.

interior, is an effect of the imaginary. In fact, the exteriority of the symbolic in relation to the other is the very relation of the unconscious.<sup>68</sup>

Nothing can help us to answer the question why language is born from silence. Merleau-Ponty says that there is, somewhere in the interior of language, an intention to signify. Language in itself is an autonomous system with an internal organizing principle. Before any human convention – I am referring to the need of human beings to translate experience into signification or thoughts – there is a language-thing “which counts as an arm, as action, as offense and as seduction because it brings to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience wherein it takes form, and which is the language of life and of action...”<sup>69</sup> This mute land is not an absolute silence or absolute absence of language:

born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but ... the most valuable witness to Being, [...] the vision itself, the thought itself, are, as has been said, structured as a language, are articulation before the letter, apparition of something where there was nothing or something else.<sup>70</sup>

Merleau-Ponty affirms here exactly what Lacan asserts about the unconscious, namely, it is structured as a language. The depth of the world would be, for Merleau-Ponty, the invisible part of the flesh of the being of things. The unconscious is part of the tissue of the world. The unconscious is that part of the world that can only be understood through its relation with *logos*, formed as it is by invisible meanings, the inner framework of speech. The unconscious is the invisible face of the flesh and the ego is the visible part: both are the “basis of the flesh.”<sup>71</sup> The flesh of the world takes into account the dehiscence of being through these two faces: the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

unconscious as a seeing body (*corps voyant*) and the conscious as a visible world (*monde visible*).

Trying to lay down a psychoanalysis of Nature I have to consider that my relation with Nature is my relation with the flesh, with the mother, as Merleau-Ponty says.<sup>72</sup> This relation is mediated by spirit (*Geist*). Nature is the field of experiences in which spirit (*Geist*) links brute and expressed being. Only through language can we discern invisible perception. Spirit is the ‘element’, so to speak, that unites the passage formed in between. The passage is the place from where emerge the invisible ideas (flesh essences, as Merleau-Ponty calls them); it is an interior principle which organises a linguistic structure: “Thus, there is indeed an interior of language, a signifying intention which animates linguistic events and, at each moment, makes language a system capable of its own self-recovery and self-confirmation.”<sup>73</sup> This principle is both intra-subjective and intersubjective and is called spirit (*esprit*): “the anonymous spirit which, in the heart of language, invents a new mode of expression.”<sup>74</sup> This new mode of expression is, from an operational point of view, a dualist one. From an ontological point of view, it is diversity in identity. On the one hand, what is given to us in perception would not be evident for us if the things were exhaustible. On the other hand, “expression is never absolutely expression, what is expressed is never completely expressed.”<sup>75</sup> Merleau-Ponty continues: “It is as essential for language that the logic of its construction never be of a kind that can be put into concept as it is to truth never to be possessed, but only transparent through the clouded logic of a system of expression which bears the traces of a past and the seeds of another future.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 267.

<sup>73</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Prose of the World*, p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

In the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty specifies that spirit (*esprit*) is not subjective or objective. What is missing when we affirm that spirit is subjective is the conjunctive tissue that unifies speakers in the psycho-historic *Lebenswelt*.<sup>77</sup> And what is missing when we claim that spirit is objective is the other, or the problem between *Egos*.<sup>78</sup> Merleau-Ponty differs here from Sartre:

for the argument against the alternative thought of Sartre, which is that it does not make up the world, that it does not admit a *Weltlichkeit of Geist*, that it remains at the subject spirit, must not serve to justify a philosophy where all Egos would be on the same plane, and which thus would purely and simply ignore the problem of the other, and can be realized only as a Philosophy of the Absolute Subject.<sup>79</sup>

As unifying principle, spirit has a place in the passage between *logos ediatheos* and *logos prophorikos*; it denotes a permanent activity, which can be expressed (or can exist) only through the ‘present participle’. The activity of the spirit brings meaning from a silent past to a spoken present. Past and present coexist in the moment of the present participle. Spirit emerges in realizing a unified structure of unique signification. The structure of unique signification is prone to failure. Meaning remains invisible and, for that reason, conscious life is divided.

Merleau-Ponty understood, following Freud, that conscious life is necessarily fragmented (under the name of complex, regression, repression or resistance). The unconscious represents everything that is, in our history, locked and on the margins of the *passage* (between expressions), a *passage* whose function is to create unity of meaning in our life, which Merleau-Ponty calls spirit. Even if the unconscious is the place where our deepest desire, repression and resistance are kept, there is still a common language. The unconscious is structured like a

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<sup>77</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 175.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 174-175.

language: <sup>80</sup> “we only grasp the unconscious finally when it is explicated, in that part of which is articulate by passing into words.”<sup>81</sup> Reference to language, speech, discourse and signifiers displays, according to Lacan, that the unconscious is an instance caught in symbolic order.

Language is an intersubjective phenomenon in which the unconscious is ‘trans-individual’, ‘outside’ itself. This kind of exteriority of symbolic order in relation to human being denotes the very notion of the unconscious. In other words, the unconscious represents a necessary distance, lack or fragmentation in conscious life. “Consciousness”, as something positive, recommences the duality of the reflecting and the reflected, the touching and the touched. The untouchable is not an inaccessible touchable and the unconscious is not an inaccessible representation. The negative here is not a *positive that is elsewhere* (a transcendent):

It is a true negative, i.e., an *Unverborgenheit* (*unhiddenness*) of the *Verborgenheit* (*hiddenness*), an *Urpräsentation* (*primordial apparition* or *pre-apparition*) of the *Nichturpräsentierbar* (*non-primordial-apparition*), in other words, an original of the *elsewhere*, a *Selbst* (*Self*) that is an Other, a Hollow – Hence no sense in saying: Thought or Consciousness is *Offenheit* (*openness*) of a corporeity to .... World of Being.<sup>82</sup>

Merleau-Ponty, like Lacan, claims that the unconscious, as the untouchable, is a place that manifests its absence through what appears as meaning, through something that is visible, touchable. Hence, there is no splitting between unconscious and conscious. Speaking broadly, Lacan states, one can say that the unconscious is on one side and the conscious on the other:<sup>83</sup>

It is not coextensive with that order, for we know that, while unconscious motivation manifests itself as much in conscious psychical effects as in unconscious ones, conversely it is elementary to note that a large number of psychical effects that legitimately designated as unconscious, in the sense of excluding the characteristic of consciousness, nevertheless bear no relation whatsoever, by their nature, to the unconscious in the Freudian sense.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar III*, p. 25.

<sup>81</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethic of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (London: Routledge, 1992.) p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 254.

<sup>83</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrit*, Op. cit., p. 428.

If the unconscious, structured as language, defines the assembly of the world as chiasm, as refusal to separate what is exterior from what is interior, then the tissue of the world is a field of semantic possibilities. Merleau-Ponty's theory of fundamental *chiasmatic* reciprocity in which everything is individualized and brought together by language is not to Luce Irigaray's liking. For Irigaray the intertwining relationship, sustained by language, cannot express, exhaustively, the entire structure of the world; the examination of language, as a structure that shores up or interlaces between opposites, opens out the "silent discourse".

Although Merleau-Ponty tends to universalize embodiment, I shall argue that his thinking is so focused on the concrete and the corporeal that it offers great potential for feminist philosophy. Starting from Merleau-Ponty's thinking Irigaray seeks to make woman's bodily experience visible in light of so called phallogentric distortion.

## **Against the current**

In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty is looking for a new beginning in philosophy, a "recommence of everything"<sup>85</sup> where the oppositions between subject and object, visible and invisible, and I and the world are abolished. Through the notion of the flesh, he will unsettle these dichotomies. Flesh is the principle that unifies the opposites. In the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty states that the flesh is the principle that supports a reversible process called *chiasm*. The *chiasm* is identity by opposition and the process which opens the phenomenality of the world. This is the true philosophy: "apprehend what makes the

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<sup>85</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 130.

leaving of oneself be a retiring into oneself, and vice versa. Grasp this chiasm, this reversal. This is the spirit.”<sup>86</sup> Reversibility is the ultimate truth.<sup>87</sup>

Luce Irigaray disagrees with Merleau-Ponty’s view of the chiasm: it is not an open structure but, rather a “closed system”<sup>88</sup> or a “closed world.”<sup>89</sup>

This reversibility of the *world* and the *I* (which Merleau-Ponty refuses to dissociate, to separate into two) suggests some repetition of the prenatal sojourn where the universe and I form a closed economy, which is partly reversible (but only in the opposite direction, if reversibility can have meaning: the in utero *providing* it, the [*substratum*] *hypokeimenon*, is more on the side of the maternal-feminine, the future “subject” or seer on the side of the world or of things), or some anticipation of a heavenly sojourn, unless it is an alliance or a love pact between the world and things.<sup>90</sup>

This sort of indivisibility between the seer and the visible, or between I and the world, does not allow for anything new in Merleau-Ponty’s discourse: “Everything is unceasingly reversible.... Nothing new happens, only this permanent weaving between the world and the subject.”<sup>91</sup> If everything is always the same and everything is given, then, for Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of flesh is without questions: “It has no spacing or interval for freedom of questioning between two. No other or Other to keep the world open.”<sup>92</sup>

The occlusion of otherness, in Irigaray’s view, excludes the feminine. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is, accordingly, part of a universal tendency of homogenizing, unifying and refusing to accept otherness. In this respect, the feminine was considered as a complementary or inferior variation of masculinity, but not thought on its own terms.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>88</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Cornell University Press, New York, 1993), p. 172.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-180.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>93</sup> Tina Chanter, *Wild Meaning: Luce Irigaray’s Reading of Merleau-Ponty*, in *Chiasm, Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh* (State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 226.

In Irigaray's view, the obliteration of otherness misdirects the feminist towards an ideal of equality that tends to eliminate sexual difference. Thematizing the idea of sexual difference, Irigaray prepares the way for a philosophy of alterity, where the other is a radical other, disproportionate in relation with the I. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray states that without determined alterity perception is not possible, nor language:

If I cannot see the other in his alterity, and he cannot see me, my body no longer sees anything in difference. I become blind as soon as it is a question of a differently sexed body. I may barely perceived some exterior phenomenon that reveals a little of the flesh of the visible. Where this is concerned, I remain in darkness, operating on "premonitions", "tact", "radar", "wavelengths"? And the abundance of vestimentary compensation [*suppléance*] hardly makes up for the nudity, this dereliction? of my sexed body, devoid of carnal visibility.<sup>94</sup>

Chiasm is, accordingly, a repetitive *process*, without a beginning or an ending. The absence of an opening is not a concordance between my body and the other's body. Chiasm is unachievable without a starting moment. For this reason Irigaray introduces the concept of *sameness*, a concept that opens the floor for a "cosmological" debate. Sameness is introduced by way of a *maternal-feminine* concept, through which Irigaray designates *the beginning*:

The sameness is the maternal-feminine which has been assimilated before any perception of difference. The red blood, the lymph, for every body, every discourse, every creation, every making of the world... The sameness is matter and place, universe and things, container and contained, contents and envelope, water and firmament. (In the beginning, says Genesis, God divided the waters and made the firmament between the waters: those under and those above the firmament.)<sup>95</sup>

For Irigaray, the concept of *maternal-feminine* is a "principle" that makes life possible and, at the same time, remains unthought and exposed to a "certain forgetfulness".<sup>96</sup> The mother's body "remains a dusk background, a sleep of oblivion" out of which man erects.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Luce Irigaray, Op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>95</sup> Luce Irigaray, Op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

The *mother-feminine*, or the *sameness*, introduces a new way of thinking, by Irigaray, on the singularity of the body and the flesh of the feminine. Even if Merleau-Ponty accentuates vision as a primary element of our perception that defines the body, he does not articulate the dimension of touching as Irigaray does through *sameness*. According to Irigaray, touching is the dimension of the sensible which is, with predilection, feminine.<sup>98</sup> Before any vision the sensible touches the sensible from which she emerges:<sup>99</sup>

The woman being woman and potentially mother, the two lips of which Merleau-Ponty speaks (*the body unites us directly through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two lips*) can touch themselves in her, between women, without having recourse.<sup>100</sup>

Irigaray argues for the invisibility of “*prenatal sojourn*”. Accordingly, a daughter is the only one that can have the experience of the mother: “being able to palpate the invisible as the mother does (the as is meaningful only through its difference from the impossibility of one who never carries an infant in her womb).”<sup>101</sup>

Irigaray seeks a sort of *topos* where women will meet their own *essence*, a place where the lack of the imaginary and the symbolic will facilitate the relation between women and, thus, an escape from the male, patriarchal world. This place should be a new beginning, prior to the master-slave dialectic; a place that would create proximity without distance between women.<sup>102</sup> For these reasons, Irigaray proposes a regression in time, to a moment where nothing is yet formed, delimited, identified or spoken.<sup>103</sup> Starting here, the identity between women will be a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 98

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>102</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (Routledge, New York, 2002), pp. 237-246.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

perpetual re-engendering of the maternal, giving further rise to a new identity of mother and daughter in a never accomplished progression.<sup>104</sup>

Mother is she who in shadow is in possession of the subterranean resource; daughter is she who moves about on the surface of the earth, in light. She becomes woman who can in herself unite in her body-womb the most secret, the deepest energy, to life in the light of day. Then no longer is the alliance attraction in an abyss, but encounter in the flowering of a new generation.<sup>105</sup>

The notion of mother-feminine (mother-daughter) will overcome the notion of *chiasm* that Merleau-Ponty elaborated in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The proximity without distance, between mother and daughter, ensues directly, without mediation by the mirror. What seems to be in opposition, as mirror reflection, is reversed in a face-to-face, leaving no place for reflection in the other.<sup>106</sup>

In psychoanalytical terms, the notion of mother-daughter limits the possibility of transference, because the symbolic order does not intervene, as mediator, between mother and daughter. In other words, the foundation of language is missing in the relation mother-daughter – phallus. In Lacan's psychoanalysis the notion of phallus denotes the *imaginary* and the *symbolic* function of the masculine genital organ.<sup>107</sup> The concern of psychoanalysis is not the male genital organ, in its biological reality, but the role that this organ plays in our life as speaking beings. The penis has an important role to play in the Oedipus complex of the little boy, for it is precisely via this organ that his sexuality makes itself felt in infantile masturbation; this intrusion of the *real* into the *imaginary* preoedipal triangle is what transforms the imaginary relation, between mother and child, from something pleasurable to something which provokes anxiety.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 240-241.

<sup>107</sup> Dylan Evens, Op. cit., p. 143.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

The child cannot be the object of the mother's desire, because the father intervenes as a fourth element in the imaginary triangle – mother, child and the object (the imaginary phallus) – by “castrating” the child. The child cannot identify any more with the imaginary phallus. The *real phallus* is located in the *real father*, because he is the one that imposes the law, interrupting the imaginary “reverie” of the child, as the object of the mother's desire.<sup>109</sup> The real phallus is the law (the father) and the imaginary phallus is the object of the mother's desire (from the child's perspective). The child seeks to identify with this object; the phallus is symbolic.

Since the beginning, as imaginary object, the phallus circulates between mother and child. Becoming an object, the symbolic phallus establishes a structural cycle of imaginary threats that limits the employment of the real phallus;<sup>110</sup> in other words, the child, caught in the castration complex, will replace what is missing in relation with the Other (mother). First, the child gives up being the object of the mother's desire, because she lost this position in favor of the law (the father that has the real phallus), which introduces a distance between mother and child. Second, the child will plug this gap with the symbolic, with the child's desire to signify. Desire mediates between the “power” of the symbolic to signify and the experience of the child to perceive the object. The child will replace what he lost from the beginning, *l'objet petit a*, with a new “object”. Lacan sees the game of the child with the reel, which Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as a good example of the child's entry into the symbolic order. Thus, the two sounds made by the child (*fort/da*) represent the first phonetic opposition that denotes the presence and the absence of a person or a thing.<sup>111</sup> In the end, language is the only possibility for

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<sup>109</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire IV 1956-1957* (Publication hors commerce. Document interne à l'Association Freudienne et destiné à ses membres), pp. 223-227.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>111</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrit* (Édition du Seuil, Paris, 1966), pp. 41-42.

human beings to integrate a significance (of course through a symbol), which will express, first of all, the *death of the thing*. The object is not anymore a material thing, it becomes a concept.

The symbolic denotes what is missing. Castration is the event that places the child in relation to language, because, from now on, the child, noticing the distance from the desired object, is obliged to use language to articulate its desire. Therefore, for the child, the correlation of language and the ability to symbolize lack is fundamental to coherent discourse and social life. The child loses something from the beginning (primal repression), something that is not articulated in demand, something that will be lost forever. Through repression, the child will sacrifice any *jouissance* (enjoyment). The imaginary object, the phallus, which signifies *jouissance*, is lost, and the child will sacrifice all his impulses towards his mother.

According to Freud's psychoanalytical approach, the father is the initiator of castration; due to his presence, he makes the child give up the imaginary object. The mother's desire to give birth to a child represents, according to Freud, the symbolic substitute for the phallus which she lacks.<sup>112</sup> Lacan states that the substitute never satisfies the mother: her desire for the phallus will persist, even after she has a child. The child will realise that the mother's desire is the imaginary phallus and he will seek to satisfy the mother's desire by identifying with the imaginary phallus. Castration is the crucial event in the child's life, making the transition from the partial object, an object lost forever, to the object *a*. The object *a*, as effect of castration, replaces lack with fantasies stoking a perpetual desire. The object *a* is the cause of desire; the object lost and replaced by fantasies is the phallus. Therefore, what cannot be articulated in demand (the child cannot overcome the authority of the father, the child cannot "ask" to be the phallus for the mother) forms a cavity because of the element of primal repression. This loss is symbolised in

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<sup>112</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex, Complete Work* (The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1961) pp.173-179.

the unconscious and, at the same time, separates the subject (the child) in his relations with the signifier.<sup>113</sup> It is in this cavity of the signifying chain that the phallus is deposited as signifier.

The phallus, in traditional psychoanalysis, is the signifier that determines the first dialectic of the child with the other. Lacan states in *La Signification du phallus*:

The phallus, in Freudian doctrine, is not a fantasy, if by that we mean an imaginary effect. Nor is it as such an object (partial, internal, good, bad, etc...) to the extent that this term tends to value the reality of a relationship. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris that it symbolised. And it is not without reason that Freud took the meaning of the notion of simulacrum in the sense used by the Ancients. Since the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the inter-subjective economy of the analysis, reveals, perhaps, the veil that held in the mysteries. It is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified...<sup>114</sup>

Whereas Saussure argues that the signifier and the signified are mutually interdependent, Lacan states that the signifier is primary and determines the signified. Unlike Saussure, Lacan accentuates the autonomy of the signifier in relation with the signified, saying that the signifier can have a different function than that of signification, namely, the function of representing and determining the subject. What the Lacanian algorithm,

$$\left( \frac{S(\text{signifier})}{s(\text{signified})} \right)$$

Figure 1 The Saussurean algorithm, Jacques Lacan *Écrits*.

<sup>113</sup> Jacques Lacan op cit., p. 689.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 690 : “Le phallus dans la doctrine freudienne n’est pas un fantasme, s’il faut entendre par là un effet imaginaire. Il n’est pas non plus comme tel un objet (partiel, interne, bon, mauvais etc...) pour autant que ce terme tend à apprécier la réalité intéressée dans une relation. Il est encore bien moins l’organe, pénis ou clitoris, qu’il symbolise. Et ce c’est ne pas sans raison que Freud en a pris la référence au simulacre qu’il était pour l’Anciens. Car le phallus est un signifiant, un signifiant dont la fonction, dans l’économie intersubjective de l’analyse, soulève peut-être le voile de celle qu’il tenait dans les mystères. Car c’est le signifiant destiné à désigner dans leur ensemble les effets de signifié, en tant que le signifiant les conditionne par sa présence de signifiant.”

shows is that the human, as a speaking being, is determined by the signifier without being linked with the meaning denoted by the signified.

Consider the following example and analysis:

a homosexual confesses his taste for young boys with a certain style, a certain age, young boys that can be designated by the expression '*les p'tite soldats*' (little soldiers). The analysis will reveal a memory linked with his mother and long summer afternoons when, after long walks, his mother took him to a coffee house and ordered for him, *ah, pour lui, un p'tit soda* (a small soda).<sup>115</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that according to psychoanalysis, everything is elucidated only by remembering some words that a child has heard in childhood. Such a memory may, however, contribute to characterise the function of the signifier for a person. How one names the object of one's desire connects to a signifier heard in childhood. Such a signifier persists, if not recognized as such. According to Lacan "a signifier represents a subject for another signifier."<sup>116</sup> What matters, in the above example, with the notion of *soldat* (soldier), is not the relation with military life, but the relation of the word with what is produced directly by the acoustic image of the word, what is produced by the signifier. The denotative function is not given by the word, but by the signifier, namely, by the acoustic image that is susceptible to taking on different meanings.<sup>117</sup>

Lacan states in *Écrits* that: "The phallus is a privileged signifier of that mark in which the logos links with the apparition of desire."<sup>118</sup> The phallus is linked with the notion of *jouissance*. Desire is constituted by a relationship with language. We enjoy only because we are speaking beings. Our relation with the world is not immediate: it is mediated by language. Lacan uses,

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<sup>115</sup> Roland Chemama, *Dictionnaire de la psychanalyse* (Larousse in extenso, Paris, 2009), p. 532.

<sup>116</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire 11*, « *C'est qu'un signifiant est ce qui représente un sujet, pour qui? non pas pour un autre sujet, mais pour un autre signifiant.* », p. 234

<sup>117</sup> Roland Chemama, *Op. cit.*, pp. 532-533.

<sup>118</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 692.

many times, the expression *j'ouis-sens* to break up the mythic idea of an animal that can enjoy itself absolutely, alone, without words, without the intersubjective dimension of language.<sup>119</sup>

Even though she was a follower of the psychoanalyst, Irigaray's break with Lacan is clearly made in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. She criticizes the misogyny of philosophical and psychoanalytical theories. Later in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray disagrees with Lacan's depiction of the symbolic order and the theory of the phallus as master signifier. According to Irigaray, the symbolic is not ahistorical and unchanging.<sup>120</sup> Language, for Irigaray, is a flexible system, largely determined by relationships that define the condition of the human being as a cultural being. Irigaray is not convinced by Lacan's affirmation that the phallus is an ahistorical master signifier of the symbolic order, with no connection with male anatomy. For Irigaray, the phallus is not a pure symbolic category, but, rather, an extension of Freud's description of the world according to a one-sex model.<sup>121</sup>

In Irigaray's philosophy, the signifier phallus is missing in the mother-daughter relationship. Equally missing is the link with language, which Irigaray sees as a construct of masculinity. In *To Speak is Never Neutral*, Irigaray states:

Unable to create words for themselves, women remain and move about within an immediacy having no transitional object or transactional object. They take-give without mediation, commune unknowingly with, and within, a flesh they do not recognize: maternal flesh, not reducible to a reproducing body, amorous matter more or less unformed, with respect to which there is supposedly no debt and no possible return.<sup>122</sup>

Irigaray's theory regarding the relationship between women (especially the mother-daughter relation), originates in Lacan's theory of *jouissance de l'Autre*. In the 1960s, Irigaray started

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<sup>119</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Encore, Séminaire XX*, p. 27.

<sup>120</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One, Così Fan Tutti* (Cornell University Press, New York, 1985), pp. 86-105.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (Routledge, New York, 2002), p. 237.

attending the psychoanalytical seminars of Lacan, where she became familiar with Lacan's theory of *jouissance*. Later, in 1973, in *Séminaire XX*, named *Encore*, the concept of *jouissance* became a landmark in Lacan's psychoanalysis. Lacan states, as does Freud concerning *libido*, that *jouissance* is basically phallic: "Jouissance, insofar as it is sexual, is phallic, which means that it does not relate to the Other as such."<sup>123</sup> However, in the same seminar, Lacan states that there is a specific feminine *jouissance*, a *jouissance supplémentaire* (supplementary *jouissance*), which is not related to the phallus; Lacan named it *jouissance de l'Autre* (*jouissance* of the Other). The feminine *jouissance* is beyond the phallus and is of the order of the infinite, like mystical ecstasy.<sup>124</sup>

The Other, in *jouissance*, denotes the other sex.<sup>125</sup> The Other, as the other sex, in Lacan's theory, is woman.<sup>126</sup> Woman is inscribed on the right side of the psychoanalyst's diagram of sexual difference:<sup>127</sup>

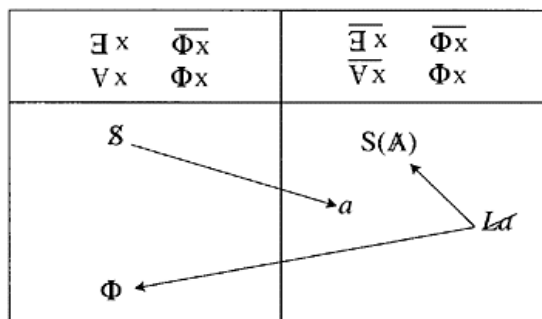


Figure 2 The Diagram of sexual difference, Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XX*.

In order to understand the diagram, first note that there is a divide between biological sex difference and the theory of the unconscious. The reproductive function of sexuality, for

<sup>123</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Encore, Séminaire XX*, p. 14. « La jouissance, en tant que sexuelle, est phallique, c'est-à-dire qu'elle ne se rapporte pas à l'Autre comme tel. »

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp.70-71.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 40: « L'Autre, dans mon langage, cela ne peut donc être que l'Autre sexe »

<sup>126</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Guiding remarks for a congress on feminine sexuality* in *Écrit*, p. 732.

<sup>127</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire 18, 1970-1971*, p 100.

example, is a function that cannot be represented in the unconscious. Nothing can situate, in the psyche, the subject as a male or female being.<sup>128</sup> In Lacan's psychoanalytic terms, there is no signifier of sexual difference in the symbolic order. The only sexual signifier is the phallus and there is no female equivalent for this signifier; in other words, there is no symbolisation of female sex, as such. In the diagram of sexual difference, above, the left side represents the male position and the right side the female position. On the male side,  $\exists x \sim Fx$  can be read as follows: there is at least one x which is not submitted to the phallic function;  $\forall x Fx$  can be read: for all x, the phallic function is valid. On the female side,  $\sim \exists x \sim Fx$  can be read: there is no one x, which is not submitted to the phallic function.  $\sim \forall x Fx$  can be read: for all not x, the phallic function is valid.<sup>129</sup>

The last formula illustrates the relationship of woman to the logic of the not-all. What is clear is the fact that the two formulae contradict each other; each side is defined by both an affirmation and a negation of the phallic function. The left side represents the subject and the phallus and the right side woman and the big Other. As we can see from the diagram, the relation of woman to the Other is not mediated by the phallus. Woman has direct access to the Other; her relation with the phallus is partial. There is no symmetry between the two sides. Lacan shows by this asymmetry that there is no sexual relationship between man and woman. Lacan does not deny the act of sexual intercourse; what he denies is the relation between sexes. In other words, Lacan refers to the relation between the masculine sexual position and the feminine sexual position in terms of his diagram. There is no suitable *jouissance*: *jouissance* is marked by a rupture between *jouissance phallique* and *jouissance de l'Autre*.

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<sup>128</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XI*, p. 204.

<sup>129</sup> Dylan Evans, *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

The jouissance phallique is the only operator through which we can think the question: what is the status of the jouissance of the Other in language? Is the unmediated relationship of woman with the Other beyond language? Irigaray's answer would be affirmative because the Other, in her view, is another woman, namely, the mother. Mother is the Other, because she designates the maternal and material cause, out of which each of us is formed. Between mother and daughter, Irigaray sees a relationship without mediation, a "sameness" that has been assimilated before any perception and difference.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, the primordial relation maternal-feminine overcomes the castration conducted by the father. This unmediated relationship is possible, because woman is not, entirely, part of the phallic *jouissance*; she has a direct relation with the Other. Because there is no mediation "women remain and move about within an immediacy having no transitional or transactional object."<sup>131</sup>

The mother-daughter relationship, Irigaray states, limits transference by "this proximity without distance between women, because no symbolic process is able to account for it."<sup>132</sup> We are entitled to ask, what is the destiny of women and what do women want? Irigaray's answer is Lacanian: "The wanting of the Other. Not the want of the God-Father, but wanting more. Women want the mystery of the infinity of enumeration, the infinitely great, for lack of tactile perception for infinitely small, or the infinitely close."<sup>133</sup> According to Lacan, the *jouissance* of the Other is infinite,<sup>134</sup> because woman does not "exist" entirely in phallic *jouissance*; in other words, the relationship of woman with the Other is not mediated by language, by the phallus signifier.

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<sup>130</sup> Luce Irigaray, Op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>131</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 237.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>134</sup> Jacques Lacan, Seminar XX, p. 13.

For Irigaray sexual difference is a paradox that requires our attention. In contrast, Lacan takes the “paradox” of sexual difference as an essential part of the world. He does not place women and men in a hierarchy based on sexual position.

Irigaray’s goal is to bring the maternal-feminine into language. Her answer to Merleau-Ponty’s theory of chiasm stays at the level of a project. Irigaray’s theory remains suspended today. The magnitude and difficulty of the task that she proposed lies in performing a change in a world where the subject is, in some way: “archaeologically structured by an already spoken language.” Irigaray’s position is to change the entire speaking body, to change the flesh.

If the change proposed by Irigaray is possible, it should occur beyond the prerogative of language, or as Irigaray would say, beyond sexual differences.

## The Chiasmatic World

From *Phenomenology of Perception* onward, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between the notions of universe and world. The concept of universe claimed by science denotes “a completed and explicit totality, in which the relationships are those of reciprocal determination.”<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the world we live in is “an open and indefinite multiplicity of relationships which are of reciprocal implication.”<sup>2</sup> The world is not an object without fissures and gaps; it is an unfinished and indefinite ‘piece of work’. The world has its counterpart within me.<sup>3</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the world is “the whole of our experiences of sensible being and of men.”<sup>4</sup>

The world is not separated from our existence, our birth and dwelling in the world. The world is not a thing; at the same time, world is not separate from things and things are not separate from world. Things have roots in the world from where they receive meaning. The intertwining of the world and things is the world.<sup>5</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, the world “seems indeed to be the clearest of truths,”<sup>6</sup> because what we see is the world itself. When we try to articulate the meaning of the world we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradiction.<sup>7</sup> The world is “*what we see* yet, nonetheless, we must learn to see it – first in the sense that we must match this vision with knowledge, take possession of it, *say what we* and what *seeing* are,

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Scott L. Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self, Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity*, (State University of New York Press, New York, 2012), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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act therefore as if we knew nothing about it, as if here we still had everything to learn.”<sup>8</sup>

Merleau-Ponty’s goal is to “observe” how things themselves emerge “from the depths of their silence.”<sup>9</sup> The philosopher invites us to go back to the things themselves, to find the naïve contact with the world and face the “deep-seated set of mute opinions implicated in our life.”<sup>10</sup>

## The sensible world and the use of language

In opposition to a *pensée de survol*,<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty attempts to revalue the sensible through a philosophy of interrogation, a new form of reflection from within the situation of human existence. For Merleau-Ponty, our being in the world is characterized by a *faith in the world*, not by a *knowledge of the world*:

... it is our experience, prior to every opinion, of inhabiting the world by our body, of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves, without there being need to choose nor even to distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the truth because in principle they are one and the same thing – faith...<sup>12</sup>

Perceptual faith, for Merleau-Ponty, is pre-conceptual. It cannot be reflectively instituted by consciousness. Being conceptless, perceptual faith is rooted in the contingency of the *Offenheit* (opening). Perception provides us “with deeper opening upon things... a conceptless universality and a conceptless opening upon things.”<sup>13</sup> Perceptual faith transposes us from the materiality of *thing* to a *dimensional this*, which reveals a ‘semantic topology’ of the world. For

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty likes to name the un-situated point of view of objectivism thought a *pensée de survol*, a *bad dialectic* that expresses scientific thinking.

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

instance, the vision of the *rose* is already an introduction into *roseness*, into the species rose, not by an intellectual operation of generalisation, but by a style of visible being.

All perceptions emphasize our *chiasmatic* unity with the flesh. As part of the world, perception is not rupture (between subjects and objects).<sup>14</sup> Everything we perceive is the world.

Barbaras, following Merleau-Ponty's working notes, claims the sensible gives us a new meaning for the verb *to be*, beyond the dichotomy of existence and essence, objective and subjective. In *The Visible and the Invisible* working notes, Merleau-Ponty writes:

What is proper to the sensible (as to language) is to be representative of the whole, not by a sign-signification relation, or by the immanence of the parts in one another and in the whole, but because each part is *torn up* from the whole, comes with its roots, encroaches upon the whole, transgresses the frontiers of the others. ... Perception opens the world to me as the surgeon opens a body, catching sight, through the window he has contrived, of the organs in full functioning, taken *in their activity*, seen sideways. It is thus that the sensible initiates me to the world, as language to the other: by encroachment, *Ueberschreiten*.<sup>15</sup>

Flesh is a primordial condition; it guarantees each moment of visibility. Bodies are sites for the coiling back upon itself of the visible. To be in the world presupposes sensibility, sensitivity, visibility and tangibility. These *qualia* reveal nothing less than an intra-ontology, or ontology of intertwining. Here begins the paradox of expression.<sup>16</sup>

The new "ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" describes what Merleau-Ponty has in view in the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*, *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*: a philosophy of the flesh in which the appurtenance of perceiving in the world is itself a constitutive dimension of the world. Ontological rehabilitation of the sensible is now everywhere decided by language, by the structure of desire, by the matrices of history.

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<sup>14</sup> Renault Barbaras, *Merleau-Ponty* (Ellipses, Paris 1997), p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

## Sexuality and expression

Psychoanalysis and phenomenology connect in the context of the *Lebenswelt*.<sup>17</sup> By introducing sexuality into the reflection on the symbolism of the life world, it becomes possible to think that: “life is equally sexual life and sexuality is associated, at the question of its relation on the symptomatic world, with the totality of existence.”<sup>18</sup> Life possesses a sexual dimension.

Merleau-Ponty elaborates:

the true formulation is not ‘everything is sexual,’ but there is nothing that is not sexual, there is nothing that can be asexual; beyond the genital is not a distinction or an absolute cutting, an ontological character of sexuality, *i.e.* it is a major contribution in our relation with Being.<sup>19</sup>

Sexuality is not explicit; if everything is sexual then sexuality cannot be explained by a single direct cause, entirely genital or corporeal. Sexuality cannot be found, as an explicit cause, in our daily activities. Being an indirect cause, sexuality gains ontological character: it becomes universal.<sup>20</sup>

In *Les institution du mode de la vie*, Duportail affirms that: “the extension of sexuality over the entirety of existence is not the result of a forcing interpretation, of a hermeneutical delirium, which suspects the apparent meaning of words. It is the universal issue of our

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<sup>17</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail, Op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., « ...la vie est également vie sexuelle et que la sexualité est associée à la question de sa relation sur un monde symptomal avec la totalité de l'existence. »

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., « la vraie formulation n'est pas «tout est sexuelle », il n'est rien qui ne soit sexuelle, rien n'est asexué, le dépassement du génital n'est pas distinction ou coupure absolue, caractère ontologique de la sexualité, *i.e.* elle est contribution majeure a notre rapport a l'Être. » p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

relationship to being that, itself, will be ‘sexual.’”<sup>21</sup> The question, according to Duportail, is: what is the ontological character of sexuality? And what is the right signification of the sexual character in relation to Being? Sexuality, without being an object of consciousness, influences aspects of our experience; sexuality is coextensive with life:

What we learned, through the material of dreams, phantasms, behaviours and, in the end, reverie on the body, it is to discern an imaginary phallus, a symbolic phallus, oneiric or poetic. It is not the useful, functional, prosaic body which explains the human being: it is, inversely, the human body that recovers its symbolic and poetic significance.<sup>22</sup>

Thinking of the body as an expressive corporeality opens the prospect for a psychoanalysis of Nature, or an ontological psychoanalysis.<sup>23</sup> The body is the unmediated signifier, which does not need to be related with an Ego or consciousness to make sense in the world.

The body is expressive, in two ways: as moved and as unmoved body. The body’s expression has its origins in its unmoved experience, as part of the flesh of the world. Consider, for instance, a baby, which for its first six months sees herself as an “absolute being”; for that reason, her movement appears as a sort of *unmoved movement*. To extend this analogy I would say that unmoved movement can be likened to *coincidentia oppositorum*. The child will be a “baby god” because of her corporeal features, which seem to be, from her point of view, boundless. Until the child reaches the mirror stage, we cannot speak about communication, or bodily identification. Nevertheless, the child will keep, somewhere in her background (unconscious), this image of absolute corporeality. Thus, after the mirror stage, we will be

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., “L’extension de la sexualité a tout le reste de l’existence n’est donc pas le résultat d’un forçage interprétatif, d’un délire herméneutique qui soupçonnerait le sens apparent des mots. C’est la question universelle de notre rapport à l’être qui, en elle-même, serait « sexuelle ».”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. “Ce qu’on appris, a traves tout un matériel de rêves, de fantasmes, de conduites et finalement jusque dans la rêverie propre sur le corps, c’est à discerner un imaginaire de phallus, un phallus symbolique, onirique ou poétique, Ce n’est pas le corps utile, fonctionnel, prosaïque qui explique l’homme : c’est inversement le corps humain qui retrouve sa charge symbolique ou poétique.” Cited by Duportail from Hesnard Angelo, *L’œuvre de Freud et son importance pour le monde moderne*, (Payot, Paris, 1960), p. 279.

<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 267, 270.

situated in a sort of dual life: on the one hand, the child will accept the mirror image of her body; and, on the other hand, the child lives with a permanent anxiety of her absolute body, because her body is now a fragmented body.

The fragmented body is the imaginary one, that is, a sort of ‘drill bag’ of *l’objet petite a*, because pieces of our body are lost, so to speak, in the imaginary. Pieces include the mother’s breast, feces, voice, and the look. To this list we will add the phallus, because its absence, constituted by *l’objet petite a*, creates desire, namely, the desire to look in the other’s body for an imaginary object *a*, for an imaginary phallus. Thus, the fragmented body can worship a fetish object, in relation to the desired body. Any object may do, for instance, a shoe, a hair extension.<sup>24</sup> However, according to Duportail, the repetition of some erotic emblems in the history of literature (the breast, the look, the hair, etc.) can be “considered as a clue of an ontological constraint determining the desirable objects.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, what we want is “the clues of an irreducible lack.”<sup>26</sup> Every day, we annihilate this lack through displacement by natural need. But this displacement is nothing other than the everyday fiction played by desire.<sup>27</sup> Through a sort of sublimation (by language or partial objects) we satisfy our “desire,” only, in part, because we will never get the object that we really want. In other words, I will satisfy the (false) need but not the desire. Desire is perpetual because it signifies the effect of primordial loss, represented, in Lacan’s theory, by *l’objet petite a*.

Duportail affirms that *erotic symbols* constitute the sensible tissue of *nothingness*.<sup>28</sup> Nothingness, which is, in essence, erotic, is, in its withdrawal, the being of the being perceived

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<sup>24</sup> Duportail, Guy-Felix, Op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

and desired.<sup>29</sup> According to Duportail, this is Merleau-Ponty's view regarding the rehabilitation of the sensible, namely, thinking a sort of accession to Being through the libidinal investment of the being. As to the relation of the visible and invisible, being is inseparable from our desired being. Our relation with nature is based on our desire for the other, and the other is none other than me.

## Topology of the body and transference

According to Lacan, the body is not a positive and available being; in fact, it is, as Merleau-Ponty affirms in his last work, something dimensional, a living letter, very close to a mobile ideogram, instituted by intertwining.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the body is instituted by dimensions which also form the body's background: "My body is to the greatest extent what every thing is: a dimension this. It is the universal thing – But, while the thing becomes dimensions only insofar as they are received in a field, my body is this field, i.e. a sensible that is dimensional of *itself*, universal measurement."<sup>31</sup> The body is a dimensional thing, a living letter, due to its expressiveness, an ideogram established by the interlacing of several dimensions that constitute their own dimension.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the body is the 'element' that mediates the identity of subject and object. In the same way, intertwining institutes the identity between subject and the Other, or, in terms of psychoanalysis, an identity *between-three*, namely the symbolic, imaginary and real.<sup>33</sup> The Lacanian concept of the *Borromean knot* expresses the intertwining of these three dimension (symbolic, real, imaginary); as Duportail states, "the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., « *Le rien érotique dans son retrait est l'être de l'étant perçu et désiré.* »

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.115.

<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 260;

<sup>32</sup> Duportail, Op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

institution of the expressive body, hinge of the experience of the world, happens only if it is favored by the ‘event,’ of the Borromean Knot.”<sup>34</sup> The Borromean knot is the “keystone” of the world as it appears.

To construct a psychoanalysis of nature presupposes constructing a topology of the world different from Euclidian spatiality. Body, as flesh and first institution in the world, is instituted, at the beginning of its life, into a topological world. The child’s spatiality represents his manipulative field; the child’s spatiality is created by his coordinated movement. Every movement that generates pleasure or displeasure constitutes the topology of the world of the child. Even the gesture of caress is part of this topology. In the same way, Lacanian psychoanalysis exposes the topology of “*le champ de la jouissance*” (the edges of the body, those areas of the body that open and close). Accordingly, for Lacan, the entire field of being is a field of *jouissance*. The body wants to *jouir*; but, the body is *jouir* insofar as it is body as expression. Therefore, for Lacan, topology represents the tissue where the patient lives the analytical experience. It is where the analytical discourse operates its “notch” (like an indenture or a rift). In Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, it is the *entre-deux*. For Merleau-Ponty, topology exhibits the conjunctive tissue of the world, its flesh. The task of language is to articulate the world of mute things and the world of things *spoken*, the *logos ediatheos* and the *logos prophorikos*. Therefore, both conceptions expose the structure of language conceived as the apparatus of the *jouissance du corp*.<sup>35</sup>

To understand better the concept of *jouissance du corp*, I consider here another aspect of psychoanalytical experience, namely, the relation of the psychoanalyst and the analysand, which is described very well by the *torus* topology. The torus is a three-dimensional object formed by

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., « *l’institution du corps expressif, charnière de l’expérience du monde, n’advient qu’à la faveur de cet événement qu’est la nouage borroméen.* »

<sup>35</sup> Duportail, Op. cit., p. 106.

taking a cylinder and joining the two ends together. According to Lacan, the torus represents the chaining of desire with the desire of the Other. Thus, *the signifier of the claim*<sup>36</sup> is repeating and making an incision, which is rotating around both a circular hole (as Lacan called it, the current-of-air hole) and the central hole of the torus:

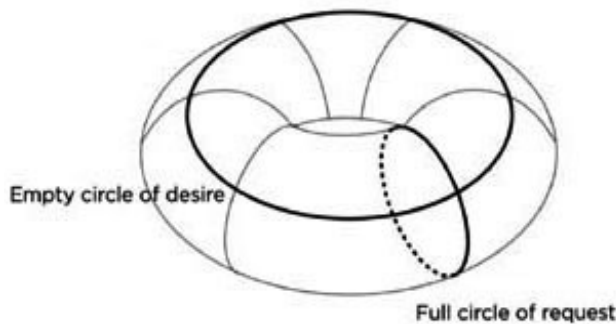


Figure 3 The Torus, Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire IX*, 1961-1962.

Observe that the claim is rotating around an object, but it is missing the true object of desire, which is situated at the central hole. The centre becomes the void of the *torus*. The hole determines the repetition of the unconscious request, the *topos* of perpetual desire. In Lacanian terms this is the place of *l'objet petit a*. In the psychoanalytical cure, the analysand exhibits his unconscious request through repetitive expressions and gestures; in fact, it is a basic psychoanalytical principle that a person is condemned to repeat something when he has forgotten the origin of compulsion. Thus, if the subject cannot integrate this event into his symbolic representation or abstract it from his field of consciousness (through repression), then, according to Freud, that event has the value of a trauma. To release the subject, the trauma needs to be reduced to a symbol. The trauma perpetually returned – as images, dreams and acting out –

<sup>36</sup> This claim refers to the request that a subject addresses the Other.

becomes integrated in the symbolic organisation of the subject. Through the unconscious request of the analysand, the psychoanalyst should be able to identify the alleged trauma, to break the circle of repetition, by helping the analysand remember and, at the same time, to help the analysand accept that his request will remain unanswered.

Freud and Lacan give a second interpretation of repetition. Freud radicalises the concept of trauma, asserting that there is a primordial trauma that is an intrinsic element of life itself. This trauma is the very fact of being born (being in the world).<sup>37</sup> To live means to take on all kinds of roads to reach the point of origin – death. Repetition is subsumed to the death drive. The death drive is a general tendency of biological organisms not only to reduce internal vital stimulation, but to return to a primitive, unorganized form. Repetition is, accordingly, nothing else than a mark left by original and structural trauma and the “infirmity” of the subject. For Lacan, the origin of repetition is the meeting of the subject with something that cannot be avoided, with something unbearable. If, for Freud, this unbearable meeting refers to death, for Lacan it denotes *the real*, because the real ‘is impossible to be symbolised’.

According to Lacan, the essence of transference is located in the symbolic order. Symbolic transference involves the signifier chain (*chaîne du signifiant*),<sup>38</sup> in which, Lacan states, the human being finds himself as *parlêtre*. If the signifiers return ceaselessly, it is because they depend on the disappeared primordial signifier; in this way, the perpetual return of signifiers expresses the eternal nature of desire. Disappearance has the value of an inaugural trauma that represents the origin of human desire. In terms of Lacanian topology, disappearance is the place of the *l’objet petit a*, the hole of the *torus*.

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<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (W. W. Norton & Company, New-York, London, 1961), pp. 31-33.

<sup>38</sup> In English *chain du signifiant* is translated by ‘signifying chain’. I opt to translate it as *signifier chain* because *signifiant* in English is translated through signifier and in the end it is about a chain formed by signifiers.

The goal of transference is to clear the *place of absence* and to make the analysand aware that his request to the Other will not be answered. The symbolic brings the real to silence; the real becomes a silent platform for symbolic order. The relation of the subject, as *parlêtre*, with objects is a mediated one. The real, defined as the impossible, cannot be completely symbolized. The real never ceases to “manifest” itself symbolically. The symbolic introduces a cut in the real in the process of signification. In other words, “the real is that which comes back to the same place.”<sup>39</sup> The real comes back to the same place, the place where the subject is “in so far as he thinks, where the *res cogitas* does not meet it.”<sup>40</sup> The real appears to “describe” something that is lacking in the symbolic order: “the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic.”<sup>41</sup> The real, in Lacan’s view, is a *topos* that supports the symbolic order of our existence. The subject is ‘expelled’ from her representation, into her own reality.

In terms of *The Visible and the Invisible*, the real may be identified in the concept of flesh. Flesh is the tissue that links seeing and the visible, that allows the emergence of intersubjective relationship and the chiasm. Merleau-Ponty states:

There is no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.<sup>42</sup>

Like flesh, the concept of the real, in Lacan’s theory, exhibits a primordially that will become the centre of all the representations of the subject. Primal repression is real, inaccessible, lost to language, but still in a relation with the symbolic and imaginary order. *L’objet petite a*, as lost

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<sup>39</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Norton & Company, New York 1998), p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Op. cit., p. 142.

object, constitutes also the intersubjective dimension between analyst and analysand. This object represents what the subject is looking for and what she thinks the analyst is hiding.

The end of analysis refers to the point when the analysand has traversed the radical fantasy and accepts the facticity of the real, the facticity of the inaccessible object. In terms of Lacan's topology, the end of transference will reinforce the relation between the three rings (symbolic, real and imaginary) by a fourth ring, called *sinthome*. The *sinthome* is what allows one to live by providing a unique organization of *jouissance*.

The binding that brings together phenomenology and psychoanalysis is the topologic institution of the body as flesh. The body as flesh, through the *nothingness of desire*, binds with the image of the body and favours an event that constitutes the three-dimensional body: real, symbolic and imaginary. Hence, the image of the body and the entire visibility that animates this world emigrates, abandoning the body as flesh, into the body as language.

### **Lacanian topology**

Lacanian topology does not lay the foundation of a new metapsychology, or, as Duportail puts it, a mathematical metaphysics of the soul; it is, rather, a schematic reconstruction of the sensible space lived through the expression of the body.<sup>43</sup> I am not referring here to Euclidian topology, but to a field of experience based on the bodily experience of the world. Duportail examines Jean Piaget's work on the child's conception of space. The child's space is not tridimensional: it is correlated with his movement. The child's space becomes a place elaborated by the child according to his *drives' movement*. In the same way, says Duportail, Lacanian

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<sup>43</sup> Duportail, Op. cit., p. 106.

topology underlies the corporeal experience of space.<sup>44</sup> Before the six month, the child does not have a perception of space or time. In the mirror stage the child begins to perceive his body in the mirror at the end of his gaze. Therefore, the space that appears between the child and the mirror image is an experimental space created by the child's movements. The child interacts with the other through this space, a space that allows for the reversibility of language. The relation of the subject, as speaking human being, with the other, or with his object, is mediated by *language*. Therefore, the child's mirror image represents only the symbol body of the child.

The *jouissance du corp* finds its rigor only in the interlacing of desire with language and, obviously, in the relation with the other. Consequently, the *jouissance du corps* is opposed to the pleasure principle that involves relief of psychic tensions. The body is not a receiver that satisfies its need through an object that can fully please its desire. Pleasure and displeasure are concepts whose meanings belong to symbolic network systems (to language), hence relief of tension transforms into *satisfaction of sense*. Being-in-the-world means being-in-language as the symbolic introduces 'a cut in the real,' constituting the process of signification. As Lacan states: "it is the world of words that creates the world of things – things originally confused in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of coming-into-being."<sup>45</sup> For this reason, the *jouissance* of the body is a *jouissance* in the field of language: as Lacan used to assert, *jouis-sens*. Lacan shows that *jouissance* presupposes the intersubjective dimension of language. We cannot *enjoy this world* except insofar as there is another like me who is looking for and needs the same as me. In the moment I discover the other, I am into the sensible world and my body begins to *jouir*. As Merleau-Ponty says in *The Visible and the Invisible*:

For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with his

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp.106-107.

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, cited by Dylan Evans in *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p. 162.

hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goal, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, and making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside.<sup>46</sup>

The “silent labor of desire” allows the body to *jouir* and “henceforth movement, touch, vision applying themselves to the other and to themselves return towards their source” and with this “begins the paradox of expression.”<sup>47</sup>

The relationship with the other – and, implicitly, the *jouissance* of the body – is supported in Merleau-Ponty’s work by the concept of flesh; flesh is the tissue of the seeing body and the visible world. Body and world exist inseparably, one born from another and one for another, in a dehiscence which represents the opening of the world. The flesh is being-as-seeing-visible.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless,

this flesh that one sees and touches is not all there is to flesh, not this massive corporeity all there is to the body. The reversibility that defines the flesh exists in other fields; it is even incomparably more agile there and capable of weaving relation between bodies that this time will not only enlarge, but will pass definitively beyond the circle of the visible.<sup>49</sup>

The flesh of the body is a double sided sheet of being. On one side is a thing among things and, on the other side, is the body with which one is seeing and touching.<sup>50</sup> This dual aspect of the flesh of the body – visible and invisible – can be topologically represented by the Möbius strip or by the ant drawn by Escher in *Möbius Strip II*. If we try to imagine some line drawn on the Möbius strip we will observe that at a certain moment in time we can see only one aspect of the line, we cannot see the other part of the Möbius strip where the line continues. The visible has, on its reverse, the invisible and this constitute a structural part of the visible corporeity.

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<sup>46</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Voyant-visible*.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

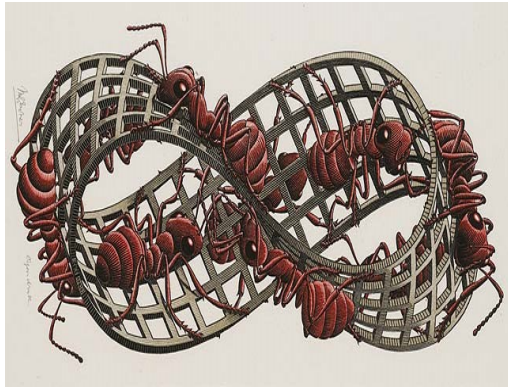


Figure 4 Möbius Strip II, M. C. Escher, *The Graphic Work of M.C. Escher*

In psychoanalysis the analysand discourse analysed by the psychoanalyst (analysing speech) is a sort of line drawn unconsciously that reveals a forgotten topological space;<sup>51</sup> this topological space is the primordial structure of the body in the world.<sup>52</sup> Speech, like the line drawn on the Möbius strip, reveals an invisible *topos* isomorphic to the structure of the child's expressive body. The analysis of analysand discourse (analysing speech) reveals the spatiality of being in the world in accordance with the desiring body.<sup>53</sup>

### **The possibility of transference**

Lacan's theory of transference, like Freud's, passes through several phases. In *An Intervention on the Transference*, Lacan describes transference as a dialectical process occurring between analysand and analyst. Transference is not affect displacement from analysand to psychoanalyst. Even if transference reveals itself under the appearance of emotion, it only

<sup>51</sup> Duportail, Op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

acquires meaning by virtue of the dialectical moment in which it is produced.<sup>54</sup> Lacan argues that despite the fact that transference manifests itself under the form of strong affects, such as love and hate, it does not set its meaning from such emotions. Transference reveals the symbolic structure of intersubjective relationship. The essence of transference is located by Lacan in the symbolic order, not in the imaginary, in spite of powerful imaginary effects resulting from the process. Transference involves an act of speech and an exchange of signs that transforms the speaker and listener. Hence, the transference is symbolic. Lacan equates the meaning of the symbolic with the concept of the gift, similarly to Levi-Strauss. Transference, accordingly, relates to the system of exchange that regulates kinship relations. For Marcel Mauss, gifts are not free, but compel receivers to respond.<sup>55</sup> Through the gift, the donor gives a part of themselves. The giver instills in the gift a certain power, which requires a response. Gift exchanges play a crucial role in creating and maintaining social relationships, by establishing bonds and obligations.

In order to articulate the theory of transference, Lacan returns to Freud and identifies symbolic transference in the compulsion to repeat. In Seminar Eight, named *The Transference*, Lacan illustrates in detail the nature of the relationship between analyst and analysand, by discussing Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates will play the analyst and Alcibiades the analysand. According to Lacan, the analyst-analysand relationship is based on love. But what kind of love does Lacan have in view? The Greek concept of love, because this concept is the only one which describes, in an authentic way, the relationship between analyst and analysand:

In any case, to enter into this subject, into this dismantling through which this discourse of Socrates about Greek love will be something illuminating for us, let us say that Greek love allows us to separate out in the love relationship the two partners in a neutral way (I

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* "Presentation of Transference" (translated by Bruce Fink, Norton & Company, New York, 2006), p. 226

<sup>55</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2002), pp. 10-24.

mean by this something pure which is actually expressed in the masculine gender), it is to allow there to be articulated at first what happens at the level of this couple who are respectively the lover and the beloved, *erastes* and *eromenos*... We stopped the last day at the position of the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, of the lover and the beloved, as the dialectic of *Symposium* will allow us to introduce it as what I have called the basis, the turning point, the essential articulation of the problem of love. The problem of love interests us in so far as it is going to allow us to understand what happens in transference, and I would say up to a certain point, because of transference.<sup>56</sup>

At the beginning, Lacan explains, the love of Alcibiades for Socrates is Eros, something that denotes erotic love. Yet, Socrates becomes, through the course of the dialogue, a kind of box which encloses something precious. Alcibiades wants, at any cost, the content of that box. This latter desire reveals the other type of Eros that we can find in *Symposium*, namely, divine Eros, which begins with physical attraction, i.e., love for the beautiful forms of bodies, but transcends gradually towards the Idea of Beauty. However, Supreme Beauty remains something unattainable. Thus, just as Alcibiades attributes a hidden treasure to Socrates, so the analysand sees his object of desire in the analyst; the object of desire is in this case *l'objet petit a*: the object that the analysand seeks in the Other:<sup>57</sup>

And it is indeed here that the question is posed for an analyst, namely what is our relation to this being of our patient? Nevertheless we know well all the same that this is what is in question in analysis. Is our access to this being one of love or not? Has our access some relation with what we know about the point we place ourselves at as regards the nature of love? This as you will see will lead us rather far, precisely to know that which - if I may express myself in this way by using a metaphor - is in the *Symposium* when Alcibiades compares Socrates to some of these tiny objects which it seems really existed at the time, to little Russian dolls for example, these things which fitted into one another; it appears that there were images whose outside represented a satyr or a Silenus, and within we do not really know what but undoubtedly some precious things.<sup>58</sup>

The analyst, in our case Socrates, becomes the *subject supposed to know* (*sujet supposé savoir*); as soon as Socrates fulfills this function, transference becomes possible. But how does the

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<sup>56</sup> Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan; Book VIII: Transference*; [www.lacaninireland.com](http://www.lacaninireland.com); pp. 26-28.

<sup>57</sup> Evans, Dylan. Op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Lacan. Op. cit., p. 29.

analyst accomplish this role? This role is assigned to the analyst by the analysand;<sup>59</sup> the analysand assumes the existence of the subject who knows. He assumes that the analyst knows the secret meaning of the analysand's words, the signification of her utterance, of which even the speaker is unaware. According to Lacan, this is the moment that initiates the analytic process.

The analysand wants to know the secret of the psychoanalyst. For that reason he is attracted by the analyst. According to Lacan, the lack that the analysand met in transference represents the 'object' of desire, and, at the same time, the 'object' of love:

Between these two terms which constitute, as I might say, in their essence, the lover and the beloved, you should notice that there is no coinciding. What is lacking to the one is not this "what he has," hidden in the other. And this is the whole problem of love. Whether one knows this or not is of no importance. One encounters at every step in the phenomenon, its splitting apart, its discordance and a person has no need for all that to dialogue, to engage in dialectics, *dialektikeuesthai* about love, it is enough for him to be involved, to love, in order to be caught up in this gap, in this discord.<sup>60</sup>

In the end the analysand should be led by the analyst on that path where she begins to recognize that her problems are, in part, the result of her own action, and, hence, of an invisible desire. The task, in the primary stages of psychoanalysis, was the recollection of memory and the utterance of trauma. The end of analysis, for Lacan, is defined by a moment of enjoyment (*jouissance*), immune to the efficacy of the symbolic.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the end of analysis would be that pure *jouissance* addressed to no one, because it cannot be shared with anyone; it is a subjective 'experience' beyond language. The end of the analysis is when the analysand 'gets' the *sinthome*, or, as some of the French psychoanalysts call it today: to become a *saint homme* (holy man).

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<sup>59</sup> In our case by Alcibiades.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Lacan. Op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Evans, Dylan. Op. cit., pp. 188-190.

## The psychoanalysis of nature

Merleau-Ponty is not only able to connect phenomenology and psychoanalysis, but, if Jenny Slatman is right, he even considers phenomenology to be “the implicit philosophy of psychoanalysis itself. Phenomenology and psychoanalysis are not parallel; much better they are both aiming toward the same *latency*.”<sup>62</sup> In his phenomenological reading of psychoanalysis, Merleau-Ponty provides the key for understanding intentionality within ontology. Intentionality does not represent, anymore, a possession of the *cogitatum* but is, instead, an immediate relation of a body with another body, an “inner intentionality of Being.”<sup>63</sup> In this way, expression, which is an intentional act, has its origin in the flesh. If “there is no intelligible world, there is the sensible world”<sup>64</sup> then there is an inner intentionality that animates the world; with it begins “the paradox of expression.”<sup>65</sup> This *inner* intentionality is Merleau-Ponty’s view regarding the possibility of an interior ontology, an endoontology. *To be* means, for Merleau-Ponty, to be into the world as a part of the world’s flesh.

The phenomenology of flesh denotes the dehiscence of being; it is the joint tissue of the seeing body and the visible world, they are thought of as inseparable because they are born one from the other, from dehiscence.<sup>66</sup> The implication of the flesh in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking leads us exactly to the core of his project, namely, the enterprise to make understandable how language is based upon and intertwined with the natural, anonymous life of the body. Merleau-

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<sup>62</sup> Jenny Slatman, *The Psychoanalysis of Nature and the Nature of Expression*, in *Chiasm International* (Vrin, Mimesis, University of Memphis, 2000), p. 212.

<sup>63</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *De l’être du phénomène* (édition Jérôme Million, Grenoble 2001), p. 313.

<sup>64</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 214.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145, (Note).

Ponty shows in his last work that his project must be understood as an attempt to explain the transition between the body and cultural institutions. This transition is a mutual transference between the natural side of our existence and the articulated part of life. Merleau-Ponty names this mutual transference chiasm, an intertwining between personal and anonymous life. The idea of chiasm concords with that part of the philosopher's phenomenology that reveals the origin of *Logos* (as linguistic essence) in nature. If the chiasm is the principle that keeps together the interior and the exterior, *Logos* is the law that make a cut into the flesh. *Logos* is in a diacritical relationship with nature, which creates a necessary distance between me and the world.

What creates the *écart* (distance, gap) between me and the world is language. To be a *parlêtre* (a speaking being) presupposes a pseudo-parallelism between the transcendental and the empirical. Merleau-Ponty's task is to search for a new balance between these two attitudes. In *Signes* Merleau-Ponty affirms that there is undeniably something between nature as transcendence and the immanence of the spirit. The *entre-deux* brings up for discussion the existential variable "x." What is this "x" between subject and object? The answer, according to Duportail is:

The element "x", which contests, in act, the annihilation of the Cartesian world, as its naturalisation and objectification among things, is, of course, my body. My body is certainly an irreducible intra-mundane thing, included in the space-time world and submitted to natural causalities, but it is also, and mainly, a thing by which objects exist, at least as objects of perception, so that it is not entirely an object like other objects, and it appears equally as quasi-subject, as an *I-can*, carnal, and, at the same time, close and different from the *I-think*.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Duportail, Op. cit., "L'élément x qui conteste in acte la néantisation cartésienne de monde, de même que du sa propre naturalisation ou objectivation parmi les choses, c'est bien, bien sûr, mon corps. Mon corps est certes une chose irréductiblement intra-mondaine, incluse dans l'espace-temps du monde et soumise à la causalité naturelle, mais il est aussi et surtout une chose grâce à laquelle il y a des objets, au moins à titre d'objets de la perception, de sorte qu'il n'est pas tout à fait un objet comme les autres, et qu'il apparaît tout autant comme un quasi-sujet, comme un jeu peu charnel, à la fois proche et différent du « Je pense »" p. 70.

Our body is neither subject nor object; it is situated before the junction of the subject and the object. The anteriority of *l'entre-deux* appears now as a resumption of the “pre-human” (*pre-humain*). The concept of “pre-human,” which is common to psychoanalysis and phenomenology, represents, thus, the body of the flesh, the famous *Leibkörper* and not the *ego cogito*. The sheer point of psychoanalysis and phenomenology will not be the *Cogito*, but the onto-erotic character of the expressive body.<sup>68</sup>

For Duportail, the body in question is the phenomenal body. Duportail follows Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* in speaking of the true “reflexivity of the body,”<sup>69</sup> a carnal reflexivity: “The feeling that one feels, the seeing that one sees, is not a thought of seeing or of feeling, but vision, feeling, mute experience of mute meaning.”<sup>70</sup> The body constitutes what Merleau-Ponty calls identity in diversity; it may be understood as an intersection of mute experience and language (cultural experience), or, as I already claimed, *logos ediatheos* and *logos prophorikos*. Being *entre-deux*, the body is not visible but rather invisible: it is “a hollow in the visible, a fold in passivity,”<sup>71</sup> a *topos* that constitutes the passage between mute nature and cultural world. The body is the root of language, because it is the first institution that opens itself, as expression, toward the world; it is, a *déplacement quasi naturel* (almost a natural displacement). The body, as expression, is both natural expression (passive because it is a thing among other things) and intentional expression (active because it has the power to perceive). This double nature of the body presupposes a quasi- “reflective” perception of the body; in other words, the reversibility between seeing and to be seen, or between touching and the touched,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

denotes the relation between the body and the world. The body and the world are made from the same flesh and the world shares the flesh of the body: the world reflects the image of the body:

The quasi “reflective” redoubling, the reflexivity of the body, the fact that it touches itself touching, sees itself seeing, does not consist in a connecting activity behind the connected, in a reinstalling of oneself in this constitutive activity. Self-perception (sentiment of oneself, Hegel would say) or perception of perception does not convert what it apprehends into an object and does not coincide with a constitutive source of perception. In fact, I do not entirely succeed in touching myself touching, in seeing myself seeing. The experience I have of myself perceiving does not go beyond a sort of *imminence*, it terminates in the invisible, simply this invisible as *invisible*, i.e. the reverse of *its* specular perception, of the concrete vision I have of my body in the mirror. The self-perception is still a perception, i.e. it gives me a Night Urpräsentierbar (a non-visible, myself) but this it gives me through an *Urpräsentierbar* (my tactile or visual appearance) in transparency (i.e., as a latency).<sup>72</sup>

The reflexivity of the body is not similar to the mirror perception of the body, because it respects the torsion of the body in the non-coincidence of a touching-touch. The recovery of the body is not fulfilled due to the *l’objet petit a*.<sup>73</sup> The specular perception of the body will lead us to the same conclusion, namely, my perception of the body in the mirror belongs to the imaginary order. In other words, it belongs to the speculative reflection that also displays the structural delay of consciousness and the withdrawal of consciousness from itself in its own reflection (in which consciousness appears as an opacity and latent area).<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the corporeal reflection puts in act an identity between two dissymmetric elements, seeing and seen, perceived and perceiving. This kind of identity does not accomplish itself as a consequence of something (as you bring some elements together), but only in maintaining a double *écart* (distance) and an *entrelacs* (interlacing), making an identity in chiasm.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 249-250.

<sup>73</sup> Duportail, Op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

On the other hand, (beyond the body) there is the flesh, which, according to Duportail, represents a form of reflexivity, which envelopes a part of the unconscious, an irreducible rest.<sup>75</sup> The body is nothing other than an exemplary instance of the flesh as the ontological general element.<sup>76</sup> Merleau-Ponty proves that the instance which unveils the world is, at the same time, part of the world. Therefore, the appearance of the world, for the body, is the appearance of the world through the body; this latter becomes, at the same time, a transcendental *element*.<sup>77</sup> The notion of transcendental denotes here the seeing body (the perceiving body) that is not visible; the body that incorporates in itself the visible part, as a natural part, of this world. For Merleau-Ponty the openness of the world is envisioned from the interior of the body. The openness is possible only by a quasi-tactile reflexivity as part of the body's topology. The perceiving body touches visible things. In turn, the visible knows the general reversible law of the sensible. What is visible sheds light on what was invisible; the perceiving body becomes visible because everything that is touched is, at the same time, touching. In other words, what Husserl calls *transcendental ego*, in the *Fifth Meditation*, becomes possible within an empiric body. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy the border between empiric and transcendental is erased by the embodiment of psychic life and, vice versa, by the conceptualization of the world. Regarding the intertwining of transcendental and transcendence, Merleau-Ponty states: "The transcendental field is a field of transcendences. The transcendental, being a resolute overcoming of the *mens sive anima* and the psychological, goes beyond the subjectivity in the sense of counter-transcendence and immanence."<sup>78</sup> For that reason, Merleau-Ponty asserts that there is no

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>78</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 172.

intelligible world; there is only a sensible world.<sup>79</sup> The constitution of another monad in me is possible only if we put the pure ego in an empirical body. Consequently, the body constitutes the other as monad, not the pure ego as such.<sup>80</sup>

Although the body is the space where the reversibility between interior and exterior, takes place, Merleau-Ponty refuses hylozoism. If the body is a *topos* of subjective life, then the body is that space where all phenomena intertwine. The mereology of phenomena is linked with a particular spatiality, distinct from physical spaces and times, as a subjective flux of experiences. The *body image* (*schema corporel*) conjugates the internal sensibility and the exterior in the image of the body.

The body is not visible, it is only a part of the visible; it is incorporated in the visible and in this way it can prove its openness to the world from the interior. Merleau-Ponty proves the dehiscence of the world by subjecting the body to its tactile reflexivity. For *seeing* to accomplish its vision from the interior of being, since the interior of the world splits to make itself the apparition, the eye must be touching things as a hand touches them. As Merleau-Ponty says, the gaze envelopes, touches or marries visible things.<sup>81</sup> The visible lives through, experiences, the reversal of the sensible; it starts to see the seeing that sees, in the same way as the touched is touching. According to Duportail, the concept that satisfies this dialectical simultaneity of interior and exterior is the corporeal schema. The body provides the transference between interior-exterior and exterior-interior, because it is animated by desire. The image body (corporeal schema) is the element that allows Merleau-Ponty to extrapolate the topology of the perceptual field, starting from body as a universal exterior-interior system. The body becomes a

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

place that connects the transcendent and transcendental fields, and where the sensible reveals itself.

A psychoanalysis of nature represents the perpetual ‘movement’ between the gaze and the eye (or my invisible body as seeing body and the visible body as seen body) that seeks to bring out ever anew the genetic moment of expression. The perpetual interrogation of the “voice of silence” characterises the essence of the psychoanalysis of nature. The aim of the psychoanalysis of nature is to restart, permanently, our contact with the forgotten, unbearable moment of our life that is repressed (*mise à l’écart*) because it represents an absolute trauma. This invisible trauma represents the cause of our cultural world, the cause of language and, in the end, the cause of our permanent “research” (desire) as a touching-touched being, whose object of perpetual interrogation is placed *entre-deux*.

Perpetual interrogation leads towards an intellectual development that doesn’t have a theoretical or contemplative purpose. On the contrary, it aims towards an ethical perspective. The ethics, in this case, are not about a behaviour adjustment in accordance with a transcendent, universal goodness. Ethics here takes the Aristotelian meaning. Ethics is the field of mores and human praxis, burdened with contingency. Ethics implies that the value of an action can emerge only after a personal process of deliberation that exhibits the power of choice of the subject and its capacity of thinking and desire. Psychoanalytic knowledge of the unconscious and its desire mechanisms that animate the subject’s power of decision and reflection, displays an ethical perspective: e.g. the subject has to find its desire and place itself in accordance with it. On the other hand, if the analysand submits to the force of desire then he will act in agreement with a false promise that will lead him to an apparently psychological relief. The fact that the desire

returns, shows the true ‘tragedy of the desire’ that it is unfulfilled, anguished and wants to be suppressed.

The ethic of psychoanalysis is the power to assume dissatisfaction in order to create a perpetual engine of human desire that leads humans towards an infinite and painful quest.

In the same manner Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy shows human “tragedy”. His philosophy affirms the human reality that obeys a perpetual desire which cannot be completely fulfilled; reality as a self-riddle that becomes clear as a perpetual interrogation.

Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of flesh must remain a paradox, an interrogation or an unthinkable thought that will lead to reasonable thinking.

## Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty's goal is not just to finish Husserl's philosophy of consciousness, by adding to the subject the embodiment phenomenon and to the object the world as a constitutive field. Merleau-Ponty aims at an intra-ontology, to elaborate the ontology of the flesh. The ontology of the flesh is not incarnation, but an intertwining phenomenon, the *chiasm* between the world and the subject, flesh and language. The world has its foundation in a reversible relationship or *chiasm*. This relation keeps the world united and, at the same time, allows the (same) world to be split in order to create meaning.

To show that the psychoanalysis of nature refers to this (intra) worldly relation – between 'me' and the other, between 'me' and nature – I began by examining Husserl's concept of *Lebenswelt*. The late Husserl of *The Crisis* is the philosopher who found, indirectly, the 'field' for a theoretical debate and possible meeting between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. This 'field' intersects and binds "two different forms of psychoanalysis."<sup>1</sup> The idea of the intuition of the lifeworld, in the context of meaningful life, appears in *The Crisis*, but, as we saw, meaning is not, as Husserl thought, imposed by the transcendental ego. For Merleau-Ponty, the human being is an agent in the lifeworld and for that reason he cannot be reduced to an act or a representation. Human being is life itself. If 'to live,' for Husserl, means to live in a certainty of the world and this certainty is given by conscious life; for Merleau-Ponty 'to live' means to be a being of meaning, institutionalised by the body as the first expression of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Guy-Félix Duportail. Op. cit., p. 221.

The body is the first element in the world and it mediates the first transfer – between the gaze and the eye – that leads to the constitution of the ego, for both Merleau-Ponty and Lacan. Analysis of the body, as the first institution in the world, represents a first step in showing how a psychoanalysis of Nature is possible. The body as the instituted element that mediates the relations of seeing-seen and touching-touched represents, in the end, a mutual transference, a ‘movement’ between a body and the other, and between flesh and language. The flesh of the world, in the last analysis, explains the lived body and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup> The flesh is not the body itself and it cannot be reduced to a thing.

A *chiasm* is the non-coincidence and intertwining of opposites. The flesh sustains the chiasm: “The flesh is a mirror phenomenon and the mirror is an extension of my relation with my body.”<sup>3</sup> A mirror phenomenon is the achievement of the image of the thing. The flesh includes both active and passive principles. The flesh, as passive principle, supports the relation of the body with its image in the mirror, as a reflection and projection of the ego. As active principle, flesh designates an otherness, a radical alterity. Flesh is the Other, the radical alterity inscribed in the symbolic order, “beyond” the imaginary, in the domain of language and law. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, the flesh “is the mother”<sup>4</sup> because she is the first big Other for the child. She is the first to deal with the child’s primitive cries and retroactively sanctions them as particular messages. The symbolic order is present in the figure of the mother, who carries and supports the child. The mother ratifies the child’s image in the mirror. Hence, the child identifies herself only through the eye of the Other. The flesh as the mother (as another subject) must be interpreted as secondary to the meaning of the Other as the *topos* of language. Language emerges from the flesh, from the mother, from Nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

Language originates, for Lacan, not in the ego, not in the subject, but in the Other. Language is beyond one's conscious control. Language emerges from another place, outside consciousness, from an *anonymous locus*; hence the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.<sup>5</sup> Discourse of the other place, or discourse from another place, denotes Merleau-Ponty's sense of Nature: "Nature is what has a meaning without this meaning being posited by thought: it is the auto production of meaning."<sup>6</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature finds its roots in Husserl's fight against naturalism, where Merleau-Ponty discovers the concept of *Verflechtung* (the intertwining) that brings together the psychic and the corporeal. If the subject wants to reach the intuition of nature he has to turn against his own nature. Nature is the *topos* in which the distinction between subject and object, spirit and body, language and flesh is abolished. A psychoanalysis of Nature requires mediation by a principle of reversal, a reciprocal intertwining of opposites.

Reflection, through which the subject detaches from the world, can only be motivated by a prior intertwining of the same subject with the world. Such a thought of intertwining (*chiasme*) is not, for Merleau-Ponty, a result of the overcoming of opposites, as in Hegel's dialectic. Chiasm, according to Merleau-Ponty, is prior to any dialectical progression. The chiasm is supported by the principle of this world, which is flesh. In an attempt to rehabilitate the idea of Nature, Merleau-Ponty disagrees with Hegel's dialectic of negativity. For Merleau-Ponty there is a prior and simultaneous process that allows a double polarity of reflection. The reflection by which the subject is trying to detach itself from the world is a reflection that is, at the same time,

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrit*, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Nature, Course Notes from the Collège de France*, p. 3.

a part of the world. It is a reflection that cannot be installed in an active constituting agent, but finds itself as self at the origins of every reflection.<sup>7</sup>

Nature, for Merleau-Ponty is primordial, the non-built, the non-instituted; Nature and history are inseparable. Every phenomenon is part of culture and history. Nature is the auto production of its own meaning. The body, which is part of nature as organism, is as well a ‘cultural object’, a power of expression, the trace or the sedimentation of an existence. Nature is the perceptible support for the body; the body becomes the first expression of nature in the world. Perception belongs to a *natura naturata* insofar as the subject is embodied in nature. Perception is part of *natura naturans* insofar as the perceiving subject is spirit, history, productivity and liberty. In this respect we are compelled to admit that all meanings are not the product of our consciousness, but part of an ontological structure, which Merleau-Ponty calls chiasm.

Nature embodies passive and active principles indicating both a *cosmology* and an *entelechy* of Nature. The world as *topos* of phenomena already establishes a priori a certain arrangement, a wild cosmos, a nature. For Merleau-Ponty, the world is not only what appears to us as Cartesian “artefacts”, or as a place of beings gathered together by the opening of *being around (in-der-Welt-sein)*; it is a carnal universe, a “polymorphic matrix”<sup>8</sup> of phenomena, held together by the flesh as principle of the world. The chiasm is a sort of “bastard concept,” an element of intersection, situated *in between*. Nature, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, is reversibility, enjambment and caesura, in other words, chiasm. Reversibility as “ultimate truth,”<sup>9</sup> is based on a principle that is turning on oneself, which Merleau-Ponty calls *flesh* and which does not require any synthesis. Flesh lies on the non-absolute feature of the opposition between negative and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

positive and active and passive. Flesh is not the antithesis of the idea or of speech; it is a passage from the mute world to the speaking world. Chiasm is a two-way passage that institutes almost carnally the idea as a “sublimation of the flesh”.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of flesh “intrudes” upon Freudian psychoanalysis. By way of ‘flesh’, psychoanalytic architecture, based on notions like pleasure, desire, love, Eros, is suddenly explained. One stops seeing all these notions as positive or negative. The way one should see the world is “as *differentiations* of one sole massive *adhesion* of Being which is flesh.”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Freud’s psychoanalysis is, Merleau-Ponty states, not a philosophy of the body, but a philosophy of the flesh.<sup>12</sup> Concepts, such as the conscious, and the unconscious should be understood thorough the notion of the flesh.<sup>13</sup> Flesh, or, in other words, Nature, must be seen as the other side of man, as a description of the man-animality *intertwining*<sup>14</sup> and a place from where Logos emerges.

Lacan conceives the *Id* as the unconscious origin of speech. The symbolic pronoun ‘it’ is beyond the imaginary ego. The happy error of the fall into language is the effect of an unknown phenomenon that is itself structured like a language: for Lacan this is the unconscious and for Merleau-Ponty this is Nature. There is a place where vision and thought “are articulation before the letter,”<sup>15</sup> before the symbolic, but also before the imaginary. The Id content is occupied by signifiers, and all this ‘structure’ is already in the real.<sup>16</sup> The unconscious is ‘already there’ as trans-individual<sup>17</sup> *topos*, placed in-between. It guarantees the intertwining transference from the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Lacan, Séminaire 4, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, Écrits, p. 214.

mute state of Nature, as *logos endiathetos* (logos of life) to the cultural world, as *logos prophorikos* (the operating language).

According to Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty's theory of chiasm is a repetitive process without a beginning or an ending. Irigaray introduces the concept of *sameness*. Sameness brings forward, prior to Merleau-Ponty's concept of vision, the experience of touching. For Irigaray, 'touching' before 'vision', describes a primordial dimension lived by the relation mother-daughter. The concept of mother-daughter, according to Irigaray, shows proximity without distance; this means that there is no room for language and, therefore, no room for any kind of relation mediated by language. The concept of mother-daughter limits the theories of transference and chiasm because the symbolic, as mediator, between mother and daughter, does not exist. Accordingly, the foundation of language is missing: thus, the relation mother-daughter is outside Lacan's theory of transference and Merleau-Ponty's theory of chiasm. Both latter theories are structurally supported by language, which, in Irigaray's view, is inconceivable. The relation mother-daughter is beyond language. For Irigaray, the mother-daughter concept is supposed to be a new beginning in philosophical reflection and in psychoanalysis. If for Merleau-Ponty the foundation of language is supported by a reversible principle, for Irigaray, language, which is sexuated, should encounter, through speech, a sex which is irreducible to it and with which it is impossible to have a relation of reversibility without remainder.<sup>18</sup> Irigaray argues that mother-daughter will introduce a new "dimension" in psychoanalysis: "touching". The concept of touching generates a sort of harmony with the self, both prior to and beyond the closure of language, a harmony that lets the other be. "Touching" opens up towards a sort of reserve beyond the symbolic order, a

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<sup>18</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 184.

*topos* where transference takes place, allowing the analyst to guarantee his or her own seclusion, and to guide the other in or toward his or her own.<sup>19</sup>

Even if Irigaray's work is best understood as input in a fecund exchange with Merleau-Ponty's texts which contributes to an ongoing project to show the failure of philosophy and psychoanalysis as a whole to address the feminine, in Merleau-Ponty and Lacan's defense, it should be said that both of them leave room for the other, which saves them from the baits of solipsism.

In the third chapter I focused on the concepts of chiasm and transference: apparently two different concepts, with operational meanings in two apparently different fields, yet they come together in Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh. The libidinal body is the body that wants to *jouir* inasmuch as there is a meaning that can mediate its *jouissance*. In other words, the topological analysis of the body helps to express and to understand the meaning of the ontological metamorphosis of the body. The multi-dimensional body involves, as well, the possibility of the human being as part of the world, as a constitutional element of the intertwining (body-world). To live in this world is possible only through the sensible embodiment of the perceiving and perceived, as a result of the 'carnal' knot between exterior and interior. As I showed above, this knot exhibits Merleau-Ponty's concept of the *psychoanalysis of nature*. It denotes the transference movement – which is a “movement” of the flesh – between me and the other. This intertwining originates in the life path of a foundational dimension (the real), which separates and connects the dimensions.

Starting from the posthumous meeting between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, I show that phenomenology and psychoanalysis are rejoined via the topology of the body, as first institution in the world, through the perspective of the ontology of the flesh that brings forward a

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<sup>19</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, p. 245.

philosophy of chiasm. The analysis of the topology of the body allowed understanding of the ontological metamorphoses of the body, namely, body as flesh. The body of flesh is not a positive entity, but a 'dimensional thing' or, rather, a tridimensional thing. I articulated three forms of the body (real, symbolic and imaginary) through the concept of the Borromean knot, or, in other words, the Borromean knot of the body as flesh. The intertwining of the three dimensions, as an internal constitutive process of the 'institution' of the body, shows that housing the world is possible only by virtue of the embodiment of the sensible and of the perceiving-perceived reversibility: the carnal intertwining of the exterior and the interior.

The constitution of the ego obeys the structure of the phenomenon that Merleau-Ponty calls *chiasm* or reversibility. This structure is articulated around a hole or an empty centre, that is formed, in psychoanalysis, by *l'objet petit a* (*object little-a*). It is the immemorial aperture, that precedes us every day and which is instituted on the *I* (am) perceiving, *I* (am) speaking, *I* (am) thinking; on someone who does not know anything; the first person who is a non-person. The constitution of the subject has its place in the moment of *chiasm*, which is the medium of the work of culture.

The psychoanalysis of Nature, proposed by Merleau-Ponty, can be defined as a new dialectic without synthesis as the third moment. Synthesis is implied from the beginning and supports the chiasm. We do not presuppose that we can find an absolute. To speak and to live are the source of this anonymous included middle that forms the chiasm. The indefinite middle is the pre-personal subject, that brings together corporeal life and human life, the present and the past. There is something (a synthesis) that brings together and, at the same time, refuses to break up its opposites (interior and exterior). The anonymous is conceived by Merleau-Ponty as the

primordial *One* (Other) that has its own authenticity; it never ceases, but continues to support adult life and to be experienced anew in each of our perceptions.<sup>20</sup>

To repeat Merleau-Ponty: "Nature is at the first day": it is there today. This does not mean Nature has an original first day, a time of indivision. The beginning is a principle still between us today: it is the flesh of the world, which is "ever anew" and "always the same."

If there is truly a link, as we stated in this work, between Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of chiasm and Lacan's psychoanalysis (theory of transference), then this meeting point is a psychoanalysis of Nature. Through psychoanalysis of Nature, Merleau-Ponty will change the way in which philosophy elaborates the structure of the world. A psychoanalysis of Nature, in my opinion, attempts not only to theorize an abstract philosophical idea, but, also, to construct a new "course of action" for philosophers. A first step for the philosopher is to accept and embrace the unknown as something that emerges in between and constitutes the human being. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological structure named chiasm is articulated around a hole, an absence. The abyss is the Anonymity that holds itself as the enigma of the world and reveals itself as an immemorial aperture, which precedes us. The acceptance of the unknown puts the philosopher in a permanent state of interrogation, which will lead her to be more adaptive, more aware of what motivates her in the first place.

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<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 173.

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