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## **MERLEAU-PONTY DE LA NATURE À L'ONTOLOGIE FROM NATURE TO ONTOLOGY DALLA NATURA ALL'ONTOLOGIA**



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Sede legale e casella postale:

**via Torricelli 9 – 20136 Milano**

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Redazione:

**Alzaia Nav. Pavese 34 – 20136 Milano**

tel. **02/89400869** - telefax **02/89403935**.

Per urgenze: **0347/4254976**

e-mail: **mimesis1000piani@galactica.it**

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France:

Librairie Philosophique J. VRIN

6, Place de la Sorbonne

F - 65005 Paris.

Téléphone: **(33) 01 43 54 03 47**

Télécopie: **(33) 01 43 54 48 18**

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*Chiasmi International* is available in North America from:

**The University of Memphis, Department of Philosophy,**

**Memphis, Tennessee, USA 38152;**

telephone: **(901) 678-2553**; fax: **(901) 678-4365**;

e-mail: **lrlawlor@memphis.edu**.

JENNY SLATMAN

## THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF NATURE AND THE NATURE OF EXPRESSION<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

In some of his last working notes, Merleau-Ponty refers to a “psychoanalysis of Nature” or an “ontological psychoanalysis”.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I wish to examine what he could have meant by such a psychoanalysis. It seems to me that what is called psychoanalysis here, involves one of the most essential themes of his work. Namely it seeks to understand how language and other cultural expressions can have their foundation in something natural. In this sense, the psychoanalysis of Nature coincides with the later ontology that aims at a reconciliation of Nature (*Physis*), *Logos* and History.<sup>3</sup> I will not take the notion of history into consideration here, but will restrict the question of psychoanalysis to an investigation of the relation between Nature and *Logos*. In my view, Merleau-Ponty generally explains the notion of *Logos* on the basis of the phenomenon of expression. Therefore, this essay will focus on the relation between Nature and expression.

In order to make visible how the psychoanalysis of Nature comes into being in Merleau-Ponty’s work, I will follow some of the lines of thought that lead from the earlier work to the later work. First, I will relate Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the mirror stage to the principle of reversibility. This means that I will proceed from “The Child’s Relations with Others” (1951) to the phenomenon of the mirror in vision such as it appears in *The Visible and The Invisible* and in *Eye and Mind*. Second, I will explore the way in which Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in general relates to Freudian psychoanalysis. Following this second line, we will discover that the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious, strangely enough, coincides to a certain extent with the phenomenological notion of intentionality. At first glance, we might be inclined to oppose psychoanalysis to phenomenology, because it seems that phenomenological notions such as “consciousness” and “intentionality” could not do justice to the repressed or unconscious sides of our life. However, as we will see, in Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy, which is still phenomenological, it is no longer possible to make a distinction between the conscious and the unconscious. As he points out: “The Id, the unconscious – and the Ego (correlative) to be understood on the basis of the flesh” (VI: 270). In short, the notion of the flesh makes understandable how phenomenology and psychoanalysis converge in Merleau-Ponty’s later work.<sup>4</sup>

It is often claimed that the later Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of intentionality as such. I will argue, however, that his “psychoanalysis of Nature”

unveils a certain intentional structure, which can be discussed in terms of *desire*. What is at stake here is a transformation of the conception of intentionality, which makes it possible to retrace the “natural origin” of expression. As I see it, the notion of desire redefines the manner in which “cultural” expression (that is: language and art) emanates from the “naturalness” of sensory perception (*sentir*). In my view, Merleau-Ponty’s use of the term *sentir* can be related back to the Greek understanding of *aisthēsis*, meaning sensory perception. According to the Greeks, this experience of the senses does not coincide with an inner, immanent experience. It was only in Modernity, since Descartes, that *sentir* (feeling) obtained the meaning of an inner experience. As a matter of fact, this Cartesian determination of perception caused the unbridgeable ontological gap between an inner and an outer world within the theory of perception in Modern thought. As we know, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy seeks to provide an alternative for this problem. As I see it, the return to the Greek sense of sensory perception is essential to overcome the dualism between inner and outer world. As far as I know, Merleau-Ponty never speaks explicitly about *aisthēsis*. In the later work, however, he speaks several times about *esthétique*. I will thus claim that the psychoanalysis of nature allows us to understand the intrinsic relation between *aisthēsis* and expression. For this final analysis, I will address the lecture notes from Merleau-Ponty’s last course on nature, “Le concept de nature, Nature et Logos: le corps humain” (1959-1960).<sup>5</sup>

## 2. *The Mirror Stage and the Principle of Reversibility*

In the course “The Child’s Relations with Others” (1951), Merleau-Ponty discusses the phenomenon of the mirror stage in order to explain the social behavior of the child from six months onwards.<sup>6</sup> He discusses Henri Wallon’s and Jacques Lacan’s interpretation of this phenomenon. Both these interpretations make visible that the child’s relation with the other is related to the experience of her own body. Henri Wallon observed that the child recognizes the specular image of the other prior to the recognition of her own specular image. Before the mirror stage, the child experiences spatiality in such a way that she attributes reality to all images. Both the other and its specular image are appreciated as real beings, even if this implies that the other and its specular image exist at the same time at two different places. The specular image of the other is not understood as the image *of* the other, but rather as a kind of “phantom” or “quasi-reality” (AS: 315). This so-called “spatial realism” diffuses the space of the child’s body. The child, whose experiences and perceptions in the first months are oriented around the proprioception of her body, cannot connect the place of the body that is felt, with the place of the body that is seen as an image in the mirror. The problem which the child has to “solve” at this stage consists in connecting its internal image of the body – the so-called body image or proprioceptive self – with her external image – the visible self. According to Wallon, the solution is

provided by the development of the child's intelligence. Spatial realism will be overcome by intelligence. The child has to *learn* that the image is "unreal". Thus, the mirror stage indicates the realization of "the disillusionment with which the child deprives the specular image of the quasi-reality she gave it at first" (PrP: 135). What Wallon's interpretation makes clear is the phenomenon of "transitivism", which implies that the introceptive body, the visual body and the other have to be understood as one system (AS: 318). What seems to be lacking here, however, is an explanation for the fact that the child is so interested in, and amused by, her own specular image. We have to ask what it means for the child that she has a visible image (PrP: 135).

According to Merleau-Ponty, Lacan's interpretation of the mirror stage supplements Wallon's. Lacan does not interpret the mirror stage in terms of an intellectual development, but in terms of a transformation of affective personality. When the child recognizes her specular image or identifies herself with this image, this indicates that the child does not only feel her body as a confused reality, but that she learns that she can have a picture (*spectacle*) of herself, that there can be a viewpoint taken on her: "Through the acquisition of the specular image the child notices that she is *visible*, for herself and for others" (PrP: 136). Before the mirror stage was achieved, the child was not yet a real self or an *Ego*. Before the mirror stage, the child was only Id (*Ça*, AS: 319). Through the specular image the child develops a narcissistic attitude, which includes the possibility of observing oneself and subsequently of forming an ideal image of oneself which makes the constitution of a Super-ego possible (PrP: 136). According to Merleau-Ponty, the importance of this psychoanalytic interpretation lies in its stress on the achievement of a new attitude and function of the child. Narcissism provides the child with knowledge of herself, yet at the same time, it also "makes possible a sort of alienation", since the image that the child gets from herself disturbs the immediate feeling of her own body. Lacan, therefore, speaks of being "captured, caught up" by the spatial image (PrP: 136). Merleau-Ponty summarizes: "In this sense I am torn from myself, and the image in the mirror prepares me for a more serious alienation (*une aliénation encore plus grave*), which will be the alienation by others. For others have only an exterior image of me, which is analogous to the one seen in the mirror. Consequently others will tear me away from my immediate inwardness much more surely than the mirror" (PrP: 136, trans. mod. JS). If the world in which we live with others is determined as the visible world, it becomes clear why Lacan states that the mirror stage is "the threshold of the visible world".<sup>7</sup> The child has not yet entered the domain of the visible that is reigned over by what Lacan calls the "symbolic order", but she becomes prepared for it through the self-alienation provided by the mirror. The mirror stage opens up to a world which is shared with others.

The main conclusion that Merleau-Ponty draws from Lacan's view on the mirror stage is that the recognition of the specular image is not only based upon relations of knowledge or understanding (*connaissance*), as Wallon suggested, but more likely on relations of *being* with the world and with others (PrP:

137).<sup>8</sup> Whereas the psychology of Wallon interprets the mirror stage as an event that always achieves the completion of the body image, psychoanalysis stresses the incompleteness of childhood and the regression within adulthood, implying that the mirror stage is characteristic for human behavior in general. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty interprets the mirror stage in terms of a vital, concrete *Gestaltung* (AS: 320) or in other words, as a structure of behavior. He thus considers that the recognition of one's own specular image is essential for a certain way of existing. What the ontological status of this existence might be, can be explained if we leave the realm of child-psychology and consider the relation between the notions of flesh and mirror.

In his later work, Merleau-Ponty attempts to overcome the dualism between the act of seeing and the visible by introducing the principle of reversibility or mirroring which takes place within the flesh. A working note from May 1960 says: "The flesh is a *mirror phenomenon* and the mirror is an extension of my relation with my body" (VI: 255). Here the mirror must no longer be seen as the intermediary through which the child gains her personality. Rather, the mirror indicates the essence of the flesh. To avoid any confusion, Merleau-Ponty does not use the term flesh as a synonym for the body. Whereas the body can always be seen as a thing among other things, the flesh is neither a thing, matter, mind, nor substance. It is the principle of incarnation. To illuminate this principle, Merleau-Ponty rehabilitates the ancient meaning of the word *element*. The flesh is an element of Being (VI: 139). Elements like water, air, fire and earth are not beings themselves, but constitute the roots of beings. Besides the meaning of root or foundation, the element also expresses a kind of force, energy or vitality. Therefore, when it is said that the flesh is a mirror phenomenon, I would say that the mirror can also be seen as an instigator of carnal energy, or that it is the mirror that provides the principle of incarnation itself.

How this mirror works becomes clear if we consider the phenomenon of vision. Vision surrounds and inhabits the visible without fusing with it. Vision implies not only looking at something, but entails also a "seeing of seeing". Apparently there is always a kind of mirror involved in seeing. Every time I look at something, my vision is necessarily doubled "with a complementary vision or another vision" (VI: 134). Hence, the seer is not only seeing, but is also seen and therefore a part of the visible. The body simultaneously sees and is seen. Moreover, the seeing body is not only seen by others, but it is also seen by its own seeing: "That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking" (EM: 124).<sup>9</sup> The body sees itself seeing – *Il se voit voyant*. The 'perceiving subject' is no longer the center of vision. As such we are a part of the visible. Others can look at us. And we can even say, as Klee suggested, that the things are looking at us (EM: 129). So here we see that the mirror institutes a chiasm within the flesh by means of which the seer and the visible world intertwine. This mirror effect is possible because the seer and the visible are made of the same flesh. Still, the body of flesh does not coincide with the world of flesh,

and does not even coincide with itself. In order to explain this non-coincidence we have to look into the phenomenon of vision more closely.

Merleau-Ponty explains the reversibility in vision on the basis of the phenomenon of touch (VI: 133). It is also in touch that the structure of sensory reversibility becomes most clear. Let us recall here the example of the two touching hands; an example that was first used by Husserl in his *Ideas II* and which Merleau-Ponty time and again uses to illustrate the body's very own reflexivity. When my right hand is touching my left hand, the left hand is not merely touched but is also touching the right hand. However, I can never experience one hand as the realized *touchant-touché*. There is no coincidence between the touching and the being touched: "The very moment my touched hand becomes the touching hand, it is no longer being touched, reciprocity shatters at the moment it is about to come into being".<sup>10</sup> In the same way we have to understand the reversibility between seeing and being seen. This means that there will be no coincidence or overlap between seeing and being seen. The specular image of the seer (*voyant*) which is offered by the mirror of flesh is not a complete image. Or at least it is not an image in which the seer can recognize herself completely as the one who sees. There remains a difference, a gap (a distancing): an *écart*. We can say that the seer experiences herself as a self with a certain gap: "It is a self, not by transparency, like thought, which never thinks anything except by assimilating it, constituting it, transforming it into thought – but a self by confusion, narcissism, inherence of the seer in the seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt – a self, then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future" (EM: 124). In short, the reflection provided by the mirror of flesh is never realized in fact. This non-realization can be related to the mirror stage. Moreover, the narcissistic attitude, which plays a decisive role in the development of the child, here gets an ontological meaning. The fact that the seer is caught up in what she sees indicates a fundamental narcissism (VI: 139). It can be said that the incompleteness of vision, or its narcissism, accords with the self-alienation caused by the specular image. The very moment the child constitutes a visible self, she no longer coincides with her immediate desires (AS: 319).<sup>11</sup> Whereas the pure proprioceptive Id (*Ça*) was a satisfied "self", the self that obtains a visible outside by means of its specular image becomes a self that is longing. Like Narcissus, who could not coincide with his own specular image, it becomes a restless self that desires something that is not within reach. In short, it becomes an *ecstatic* self.

The mirror of flesh determines the body as a yearning, open being toward the world. The body thus constitutes its "self" according to a self-alienation in the visible world. The body is outside itself; it alienates itself. In my view, this mirror phenomenon determines the nature of the human body – human nature. This is not nature according to a naturalistic principle. On the contrary, the body refuses to coincide with its innate nature; it transcends its innate nature. I interpret this transcendence as the "intentionality of Nature". Nature, with human nature as its exemplary example, is not something enclosed in itself. Rather, it is the process

of the bestowal of sense. Since Nature is intentional it “produces” sense. What is at stake is a form of intentionality without thinking, and which for that matter is unconscious.<sup>12</sup> My claim is that the psychoanalysis of Nature bares this form of intentionality. To clarify this idea of unconscious intentionality I will now examine the relation between phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

### 3. *Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis*

Merleau-Ponty’s itinerary attests to an increasing interest in psychoanalysis. In general, three different approaches can be distinguished in his work. Firstly, in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty responded to psychoanalysis in a rather negative way and defined it as “a scientific or objectivistic ideology”.<sup>13</sup> Later, in the preface to Angelo Hesnard’s book on Freud,<sup>14</sup> Merleau-Ponty admits that the first impressions of Freudian psychoanalysis were fairly negative because of its “maniacal penchant for the sexual ... on the basis of their archaic forms”, because of its “interest of derisive puns” or more generally, because of the fact that psychoanalysis at first sight seems to describe human nature in a rigid “pan-sexualistic” language. However “... to the extent one read, that one related oneself to oneself, and that the years passed, a sort of evidence for psychoanalysis was inexplicably established and one came to live in peace with this pitiless hermeneutic” (Hes: 83).

Secondly, in *Phenomenology of Perception* and in several articles from the early fifties he developed another view. In these texts he uses psychoanalysis to shed light on the structure of bodily intentionality. The unconscious – which Merleau-Ponty at first sight considered incompatible with the notions of intentionality, freedom and rationality and therefore incompatible with phenomenology (and existential philosophy) – is stripped of its “archaic” meaning and re-interpreted as the pre-reflective.

Finally, in later work, especially in the Hesnard book and in notes from the course on *La Nature*, we see that Merleau-Ponty is not only able to connect phenomenology and psychoanalysis, but that he even considers phenomenology to be “the implicit philosophy of psychoanalysis itself” (Hes: 84). Phenomenology and psychoanalysis now turn out to have much more in common than was ever acknowledged before. “Phenomenology and psychoanalysis are not parallel; much better, they are both aiming toward the same *latency*” (Hes: 87).

This final overture to psychoanalysis can be understood as the integration of psychoanalysis within phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty situates Husserl’s usage of notions such as *Einfühlung*, *Ineinander*, *Introjektion*, *Tiefenleben* and the reference to the “soul of Heraclitus” (NC: 81)<sup>15</sup> within the psychoanalytic framework. This implies both a transformation of some phenomenological notions and a reinterpretation of some psychoanalytic notions. In a way, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological reading of psychoanalysis provides the



key for understanding “intentionality” within the perspective of the later ontology. It shows that expression, which is an “intentional act” has its origin in the flesh. Differently phrased, the phenomenological re-reading of Freud’s psychoanalysis sheds light on the relation between Nature and *Logos*. However, before I focus on this relation, I will briefly investigate how Merleau-Ponty’s idea of embodiment converges with Freudian theory.

In his article on the state of being of humanism entitled “Man and Adversity” (1951), Merleau-Ponty explores the way in which the “shameless humanism” of the previous century has changed in the first half of the 20th century. It is remarkable that he attempts to retrace this transformation of the “human situation” not so much within philosophy, but notably using the work of Freud, Valéry and Proust as examples. The most important tendency that can be traced in the work of these authors, and which thus marks a shift in the notion of *humanitas*, is the interest in the body, or more specifically, the attempt to efface the dividing line between “body” and “spirit” in order to re-describe the body beyond this traditional dichotomy in terms of the “animate body” or the “flesh”.<sup>16</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, the significance of Freud’s work lies not so much in the fact that he took the (sexualized) body as a point of departure, but rather in his “discovery” of the “osmosis” between the anonymous life of the body and the personal life. Freud thematized this “osmosis” by means of the notion of the unconscious (S: 229). This “osmosis” simultaneously indicates the spiritual function of the body and the incarnation of the spirit. I believe that the term “osmosis” is a somewhat unhappy metaphor here, since it indicates a one-way relation rather than a reversible relation. I think, however, that Merleau-Ponty uses this term to illustrate that there is a “natural exchange” between body and spirit. Despite the metaphor, he does consider this exchange as reciprocal. In this sense it is possible to interpret the usage of the term “osmosis” as a forerunner of the word “reversibility”.

It is not exaggerated to claim that if there is anything in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy that can count as the core of his project, it is precisely the endeavour to make understandable how language and culture are based upon and intertwined with the natural, pre-personal, anonymous life of the body. When his later work speaks of designing a new ontology which aims at reconciling Nature (*Physis*)-*Logos*-History (NC: 37), this project must be understood as an attempt to explain the transition between the human nature of the body and cultural institutions. Such a transition can only be comprehended if we assume that there is a kind of mutual exchange (or “mutual osmosis”) between the “natural” side of our existence of which we are only implicitly aware and the articulated, conscious part of life. Thus, the idea of an “osmosis” between the personal and anonymous life which is attributed to Freud, concords with a phenomenology that wants to reveal the origin of *Logos* in natural life. I would say that Merleau-Ponty’s psychoanalysis of Nature can be understood as a phenomenological reformulation of Freud’s analysis of the relation between the Id, the Ego and the Super-ego.<sup>17</sup> Freud shows that both the Ego and the Super-ego remain constantly indebted to the “drives” (*Triebe*) of the Id. The Ego can be called the subject of

perception, it is “foremost a bodily Ego”<sup>18</sup>, but since it remains attached to the passions of the Id, it is not possible to separate the Ego from the unconscious.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, Merleau-Ponty wants to show that the subject of *sentir* – the sensing subject – is always involved in unconscious drives or passions. In what follows, I would like to demonstrate that this driving force can be understood as desire and that it has its origin in a negativity that is given by Nature.

#### 4. Natural Negativity

It is especially in the last course on the theme of nature, “Nature et logos: le corps humain” (1959-1960), that Merleau-Ponty searches for the natural junction between Nature and *Logos*.<sup>20</sup> This last course provides an interpretation of the phenomenon of nature that is immediately connected to the ontology of the visible and the invisible (N: 270). As he suggests: “Ontology of Nature as the way that leads toward ontology [in general]”.<sup>21</sup> This ontology of Nature takes as its point of departure the being that has a “double nature”, that is the body. As we will see, this double nature of the body allows us to understand the body as the intersection of nature and culture.

It is through the bodily capacity of expression that the crossing-over between nature and culture can be thought. In other words, the “passage” from Nature to *Logos* is marked by expressing oneself. At the end of the previous course (1958-59), Merleau-Ponty announces the project of the ontology of Nature as follows: “We now have to study the human body as the root of symbolism, as the junction of *Physis* and *Logos*, for our aim is the series *Physis-Logos-History*”.<sup>22</sup> It would be quite naive to presume that this natural symbolism coincides with a sort of “body language” comparable to the dances of a bee. When Merleau-Ponty, in one of the working notes, writes that language is a “quasi-natural displacement” (VI: 235), we can read the “quasi” as a warning against any kind of naturalism that might easily emerge as soon as we talk about Nature and “natural language”. The expression of the body is natural, yet at the same time intentional. Expression sprouts from a body that opens itself toward the world.

To define the double nature of the body, Merleau-Ponty brings forward his idea of an *esthésiologie*, that is to say, “the study of this miracle which is an organ of the senses”.<sup>23</sup> Hence, *esthésiologie* can be understood as the logos of *aisthesis*, the logos of sensory perception: *aesthesiology*. The body is the organ of the senses. It is the *topos* of *aisthesis*. Its “miracle” seems to consist of the fact that it is both a sensing thing and the standard (*chose-étalon*) of things. Because of the body’s double nature, perception never provides a full presence. The body is not a pure subject, not an immobile point of view, but a moving thing among other things: it is not an immobile camera that can fixate a landscape in a snap shot. Therefore, “aesthesiology” does not so much concern a reception theory of the senses. But, as Merleau-Ponty says, “aesthesiology” exposes the “figuration of the invisible in the visible” (N: 271).

Saying that the body has this double nature is just another way of saying that bodily perception is based upon reversibility: the reversibility between the seeing and the seen or between the touching and the touched. I would even say that the principle of reversibility constitutes the very essence of *aisthèsis*. In accordance with this principle there is an *écart* or *bougé* (VI: 148) within the aesthesiological “act” itself. Hence, as already discussed, the reversibility between the seeing and the seen or between the touching and the touched always produces a “difference”. Indeed, reversibility is always impending or imminent (VI: 147). The touching and the touched never coincide. It is this difference or *écart* that is called the “natural negativity” (VI: 216); a negativity which is always and already given with the fact of *aisthèsis*; a negativity that marks the body as a *human* body, that constitutes “human nature”.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, the *écart* or *bougé* breaks open the circle or circuit of auto-affection. This disruption constitutes the bodily disclosure of the world. The deficit of reversibility, its incompleteness, establishes the duplicity or the double nature of the body as a being that is simultaneously a thing and the “vehicle of my relation to things” (N: 285). Through its openness, the body surpasses its closure and directs itself toward the world outside.<sup>25</sup> One could say that the moment the “aesthetic” body discovers itself as “aesthetic” corresponds with the moment that was called the “mirror stage”. Furthermore, this moment indicates that the sensing self is never self-satisfied. There always remains something wanting. This being said, it becomes clear why the structure of perception or *aisthèsis* corresponds to the structure of desire or Eros: “... the aesthesiological structure of the human body is thus a libidinal structure, perception is a mode of desire, it does not imply a relation of knowledge, but a relation of being”.<sup>26</sup> From this quotation and what has been said earlier I conclude that *aisthèsis* in essence is desire. It is well known that Lyotard has criticized Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy for overlooking the principle of desire. However, after a close examination of the phenomenon of sensory perception we must conclude that this critique is no longer justified. Merleau-Ponty does take into account that the event of *aisthèsis* only takes place through desire.<sup>27</sup>

I would like to stress here that the desire of the sensing subject is given immediately with the auto-affection of the sensing subject. It is not a form of desire that is given with the appearance of something else or someone else as it is the case in Lévinas’s philosophy. The desire of the intentional body is in the first place a desire for oneself. In fact it is the desire for the recuperation of the self that is alienated in the visible world. In this sense it is narcissistic. However, this desire is not “egoistic”. From the moment the desiring subject longs for something that is lacking, her desire is also projected to the world and to others. In that sense the libidinal structure of perception provides a natural foundation for the *pour autrui* (N: 272).<sup>28</sup> Thus, the natural negativity, which is given with my auto-affection, characterizes the other as an object of my desire. In this context we can situate Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of *Einfühlung*, introjection-projection and narcissism.

Libido or Eros must be comprehended as the intentional structure of the

body. The libidinal body transcends itself, creates a passage toward an outside of itself, and is able to incorporate: "Sensoriality (mainly by means of vision) intentionally implies incorporation, that is, the work of the body as the passage toward something outside it, through its 'orifices'".<sup>29</sup> With a reference to Melanie Klein, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the psychoanalytic discourse uses the notion of orifices or entrances not merely in a figurative way. On the contrary, they have to be understood as being anchored in the structure of the body (N: 347) with its cavities and relieves (N: 346).<sup>30</sup> This interpretation allows him to directly relate the psychoanalytic phases, which are based upon the figure of the anal and oral cavity, to the idea of the body image. Merleau-Ponty seems to maintain that the very possibilities of the bodily orifices – either "holding in" (*retenir*) or "letting go" (*donner*) – correspond to the possibilities of introjecting and projecting. Projection and introjection are relations of what Merleau-Ponty often calls the *Ineinander* (in-one-another), but what can also be understood as the reversibility within the flesh. These relations reveal "the libidinal dimension of the body image" (N: 281). Hence, *Einfühlung*, which constitutes the basis of both projection and introjection, is not just a feeling of empathy. Rather, it implies an openness toward the others and the world which is instigated by bodily desire. *Einfühlung* indicates the very possibility of reversibility.

To summarize, the natural negativity given with the structure of *aisthèsis* forms a lack that incites the body to introject or incorporate the world outside, and conversely, to project or externalize itself in this world. *Aisthèsis* thus interpreted performs according to a mirror of flesh. *Aisthèsis* is narcissistic in the most profound sense of the word.<sup>31</sup> The "aesthesiological" body is a narcissistic body, a body which simultaneously loses and gains its identity through the mirror, a body which, like Narcissus, alienates itself in the visible world and which through this alienation yearns for its never reachable alterity. I believe that this narcissistic desire may explain the genesis of expression. A body that has lost itself through self-alienation in a world that is shared with others, is an expressive body. Let me conclude this argument with an eloquent quote: "[M]ovement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labour of desire, begin the paradox of expression" (VI: 144). Expression is something paradoxical since it means simultaneously the institution of a new sense and the repetition of already instituted sense. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, in every expression there is always the spoken word (*parole parlée*) and the speaking word (*parole parlante*). A new meaning is instituted by the speaking word but this is only possible by retaking or repeating the spoken word. This means that expression cannot be seen as a creation *ex nihilo*. Nor is it just an imitation of what already existed. This paradoxical conception of expression can only be understood if the subject of expression is not a mere intellectual subject. But on the other hand, we should not exclude every form of agency. Indeed, what is at stake is the bestowal of sense, and this is only possible through intentionality. As discussed above, this form of intentionality – which is

neither total activity nor total passivity, neither completely conscious nor completely unconscious – is bodily desire. Hence, expression in its paradoxical appearance can only originate from bodily desire.

### 5. The Word of the Mother

According to the psychoanalysis of Nature, intentionality is desire or Eros. Eros is not something proper to consciousness. Erotic intentionality is unconscious. Yet, on the other hand, the unconscious should not be situated on the level of the secret and hidden wishes of the body. Rather – and this is a very crucial point – unconscious Eros inhabits the sensing or sensory perception (*sentir*) itself. Here I will quote again from the notes from the nature course. “The unconscious is sensory perception (*sentir*) itself, since sensory perception is not the intellectual possession of ‘what’ is sensed, but is the dis-possession of ourselves in favour of it, it is an opening to that which we do not have to think in order to recognize it”.<sup>32</sup> To emphasize the open, intentional structure of *sentir* in Merleau-Ponty’s later work, I translate this term by “sensory perception” and do not use the more common translation “feeling”.<sup>33</sup> Since *sentir* can have the meaning of an inner, immanent experience, it is possible to translate it by “feeling”. However, as I demonstrated above, in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy *sentir* refers to “comprehension” by the senses, to sensory awareness, i.e. it refers to *aisthèsis*. As we have seen, *aisthèsis* is based upon a never realized reversibility. This implies that there will not be an immanent evidence experienced, as is the case with “feelings”. The word “feeling” bears the risk of sliding back into the Cartesian conception of *sentir*.<sup>34</sup> Needless to say, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of sensory perception is above all a critique of the Cartesian intellectualization of perception.

As I have discussed, there will never be an identity of the sensing and the sensed. This means also that the perceptual consciousness can never grasp itself as fully conscious. The unconscious resides in this non-identity or *écart*. The unconscious is “the blind spot”, the *punctum caecum* of consciousness. In this sense, the unconscious accords with the *untouchable* of touching and the *invisible* of vision (VI: 254). As we saw above, the unconscious marks the difference or *écart* between the touching and the being touched, and between the seeing and the being seen. The negative “in” and “un” do not concern something relatively negative that refers to something positive somewhere else. On the contrary, the negative is a “true negativity” (VI: 254). It is “the other side or the reverse (or the other dimensionality) of sensible Being” (VI: 255). In this way, aesthesiology teaches us that the intentional, desiring body opens another dimension of Being. Here we see clearly that intentionality is no longer concerned with the *noèsis-noèma* structure as it was according to Husserl.<sup>35</sup> Intentionality is no longer limited to consciousness, or at least not to a consciousness that is separated from its repressed or unconscious parts.

The “sensing consciousness” entails its own unconscious. As Merleau-Ponty points out: “Consciousness can be ‘unconscious’ if it is not a spiritual adequation but a signifying or speaking subject”.<sup>36</sup> This form of intentionality implies the bestowal of sense without the horizon of adequation which is characteristic for thought. It is the intentionality of the sensing body. The “intention” of the body intends a being that withdraws from the *noësis-noëma* structure. The “intentional object” that appears to the body is not a sharply distinguished object, rather it is wild Being that thus appears. In my view, another term for this wild Being is Nature. Hence, the natural body, by means of its natural negativity, discloses Nature.

Since the body is itself a part of Nature we should thus say that Nature is unveiled by nature. However, Nature can only be unveiled by itself because it is not natural throughout, since it is not a closed system. The intentionality of the body that through its natural negativity culminates in desire, marks exactly the unnaturalness of Nature. Apparently, the body is both from the order of nature and from the order that surpasses nature. In this way the bodily intentionality constitutes the passage from or the intersection between *Physis* and *Logos*. Language or *Logos* is not so much something of a different order, it is not a “second” nature opposed to the “first” Nature. Rather *Logos* in its primordial sense accords with the expression from the natural body that yearns for communication with its world and others.

I have been arguing that “desire”, which can be found in the aesthesiological structure of the body, can be considered the natural origin of expression. Throughout Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy we find the intention to unveil a form of language or expression that is hidden beneath scientific and ordinary usage of language. He seeks to bring out the genetic moment of expression that normally remains concealed. In some texts, he characterizes his philosophy as the search for the “voices of silence” or the *Logos endiathetos*. We now see that the psychoanalysis of Nature is just another term for this search. It aims at the restoration of our contact with the forgotten “mother tongue”. Language is essentially “the word of the mother”.<sup>37</sup> As I see it, the figure of the mother represents the domain of the “primordial”, of the *Ursprung*, of the origin that leaps away from itself. While searching below the sediments of objectivated language, the psychoanalysis of Nature discovers this “leaping origin” as the “unconscious *Logos*”. The psychoanalysis of Nature shows that the genesis of cultural institutions takes place through the natural unnaturalness of the human body.

Jenny Slatman

#### NOTES

- 1 The first version of this paper was presented at the International Annual Conference of the Merleau-Ponty Circle in Wrexham, Wales, July 29-August 1, 1999. I am grateful for having received several useful and stimulating remarks on this occasion. In addition I would like to thank Renaud Barbaras, Karin de Boer and Hent

- de Vries for their critical comments on this text.
- 2 See the following passages from *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) (here abbreviated as VI): “Do (*faire*) a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother. A philosophy of the flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis remains anthropology” (VI: 267) and “Make (*faire*) not an existential psychoanalysis, but an *ontological* psychoanalysis” (VI: 270).
  - 3 See *Notes de Cours 1958-1961* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 37 (here abbreviated as NC).
  - 4 For a clear exposition on the relation between the conscious and the unconscious in Merleau-Ponty’s work see Renaud Barbaras, “Le conscient et l’inconscient” in *Notions de philosophie I*, sous la direction de Denis Kambouchner (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 489-548. According to Barbaras, the notion of the flesh in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy forms the most profound convergence between psychoanalysis and phenomenology. The flesh corresponds to what Freud called the process of cathexis (*Besetzung*), i.e. the inscription of the psychic in the body (538). In this sense, the notion of the flesh makes understandable the articulation of unconscious drives. In the flesh, the unconscious forms the heart of the conscious.
  - 5 An authorized summary of this course was published in *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1976). The detailed notes of this course were published recently in *La Nature* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), p. 263-352 (here abbreviated as N).
  - 6 Notice that there are two different versions of this course published. The entire course was published in *Bulletin de Psychologie*, and reprinted in *Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne* (Grenoble: Cynara: 1988), p. 302-396 (abbreviated as AS). A more extended version of only the first part of the course was released by “Le centre de documentation universitaire”, and reprinted in *Parcours* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1997), p. 147-229. Only the last version is translated into English and published in the volume *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 96-155 (abbreviated as PrP). The difference between the two versions is considerable. I refer to both the texts.
  - 7 “Le seuil du monde visible”, see “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je” (1949) in *Écrits I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 92.
  - 8 In this essay I will not discuss the relation between Lacan’s and Merleau-Ponty’s thought. It suffices here to comment that there was a reciprocal interest between these two thinkers and that they have mutually influenced each other. Lacan’s article on the mirror stage was of importance for Merleau-Ponty’s idea of intersubjectivity. Inversely, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of reversibility in vision was taken up in Lacan’s famous seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. For the resemblance concerning the phenomenon of vision see the article by Rudolf Bernet, “The Phenomenon of the Gaze in Merleau-Ponty and Lacan” in *Chiasmi International* (Paris/Milan/Memphis: Vrin, Mimesis, University of Memphis Press, 1999), p. 105-120. A more general confrontation between the two thinkers is provided by the article of James Phillips, “Lacan and Merleau-Ponty: The Confrontation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology” in D. Pettigrew and F. Raffoul *Disseminating Lacan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 69-106.
  - 9 In *Eye and Mind* (abbreviated EM). I refer to the translation by M. Smith which is published in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader, Philosophy and Painting* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 121-149.
  - 10 “Au moment où la main touchée devient touchante, elle cesse d’être touchée, la réciprocité éclate au moment où elle va naître” (N: 285, translation JS).
  - 11 “C’est toute une dimension d’expérience que l’enfant découvre avec l’image spéculaire. Il peut se contempler, s’observer soi-même. L’enfant se construit un moi visible: un sur moi, qui cesse d’être confondu avec ses désirs. L’enfant est tiré de sa réalité immédiate; son attention est captée par ce moi dont il trouve le premier symbole dans l’image spéculaire: fonction déréalisante du miroir. Ce jeu réalise déjà, avant l’intégration sociale, la transformation du JE. Il se produit une aliénation du moi

- immédiate au profit du moi du miroir" (AS: 319).
- 12 Merleau-Ponty understands Nature in the sense of *Physis*. This Greek word refers to the verb "to live", "the vegetal" and the Latin equivalent *nascor* refers also to "to come into being". These descriptions lead to the definition that Nature is the auto production of sense. See the following passage from the introduction of *La Nature*: "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" (N: 19).
  - 13 As we know now, this negative attitude toward Freudian psychoanalysis was commonly shared within existential philosophy in France in the thirties as for instance Simone de Beauvoir reported in her *La force de l'âge*. We may also assume that Merleau-Ponty's first account of psychoanalysis was mainly based upon a reading of Politzer's *Critique des fondements de la psychologie*, and not so much on a reading of Freud himself.
  - 14 A. Hesnard, *L'œuvre de Freud et son importance pour le monde moderne* (Paris: Payot, 1960), p. 5-10, translation by A.L. Fischer, reprinted in *Philosophy and the Sciences of Man*. (Abbreviated as Hes).
  - 15 The fragment Husserl refers to makes clear that if we understand subjectivity in terms of Heraclitus' soul (*phusè*), the subject or the consciousness can no longer be conceived as something that could be sharply distinguished and delineated. Fragment 45 reads as follows: "You could not in your going find the ends of the soul, though you travelled the whole way: so deep is its Law (*Logos*)" (English translation by K. Freeman).
  - 16 "Our century has wiped out the dividing line between 'body' and 'mind', and sees human life as through and through mental and corporeal, always based upon the body and always [...] interested in relationships between persons. For many thinkers at the close of the nineteenth century, the body was a bit of matter, a network of mechanisms. The twentieth century has restored and deepened the notion of flesh, that is, of animate body" In *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 226-27 (abbreviated as S).
  - 17 As is discussed notably in his essay "The Ego and the Id" (1923) in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Penguin Freud Library Volume 11 (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
  - 18 *Ibid.* p. 364.
  - 19 This was exactly the reason that Freud gave up his so called first topography of the mind: "conscious/preconscious/unconscious" and replaced it by the second topography: "Ego/Super-ego/Id". Whereas in his earlier work repression was seen as a "part" of the unconscious system and resistance as a "part" of the conscious system, in his later work Freud has to admit that the process of resistance, which is an activity of the Ego, is not always a conscious activity. Therefore, he could no longer maintain that the Ego coincides with the conscious. This led to the second topography of the mind as is elaborated in "The Ego and the Id".
  - 20 The notes on this course, which are published in *La Nature* (p. 263-352) consist of preparatory notes by Merleau-Ponty. The publication provides a short introduction and 8 different drafts or outlines (*ébauches*) in which we can find many repetitions. For my argument, I mainly use the introduction and draft 1, 2, 3 and 8.
  - 21 "L'ontologie de la Nature comme voie vers l'ontologie" (N: 265, translation JS).
  - 22 "Il nous reste à étudier le corps humain comme racine du symbolisme, comme jonction de la Physis et du Logos, car notre but est la série *Physis-Logos-Histoire*" (N: 259, translation JS).
  - 23 "l'étude de ce miracle qu'est un organe des sens" (N: 271, translation JS).
  - 24 "A human body is present when, between the seer and the visible, between touching and touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand a kind of crossover occurs, when the spark of the sensing/sensible is lit, when the fire starts to burn that will not cease until some accident befalls the body, undoing what no accident would have sufficed to do ..." (EM: 125).



- 25 "Les choses comme ce qui manque à mon corps pour fermer son circuit" (N: 281).
- 26 "... la structure esthésiologique du corps humain est donc une structure libidinale, la perception un mode de désir, un rapport d'être et non de connaissance" (N: 272, translation JS).
- 27 See Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) p. 21-22.
- 28 "[R]emarquons que le corps, comme schéma corporel, le corps esthésiologique, la chair nous ont déjà donné l'*Einführung* du corps avec l'être perçu et avec les autres corps. C'est à dire que le corps comme pouvoir d'*Einführung* est déjà désir, libido, projection – introjection ... Parallèlement à l'étude du corps esthésiologique, il faudrait une étude du corps libidinal, et montrer qu'il y a un enracinement naturel du pour autrui" (N: 272).
- 29 "La sensorialité (surtout par la vision) implique intentionnellement l'incorporation, i.e. un fonctionnement du corps comme passage à un dehors, par ses «orifices»" (N: 346, translation JS).
- 30 "Le concepts théoriques du 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, pouvoir global et universel d'incorporation" (N: 380).
- 31 "There is a fundamental narcissism of all vision [...] 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 a 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 and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (VI: 139).
- 32 "L'inconscient est le sentir lui-même, puisque le sentir n'est pas possession intellectuelle de «ce qui» est senti, mais dépossession de nous-mêmes à son profit, ouverture à ce que nous n'avons pas besoin de penser pour le reconnaître" (N: 380, translation JS).
- 33 See for instance the translations in *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France*, translation of *Résumés du cours* by John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1976).
- 34 Descartes determines *sentir* as a form of *cogitare* (see *Principles of Philosophy* §9). Thus understood, sensing is a mental activity that can be experienced as adequately evident in the experience of the "I think" (*Cogito*). As Richard Rorty shows clearly in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) it was by means of this Cartesian interpretation of perception that the mental got the status of an inner world that is strictly separated from the outside world. This conception of *sentir* caused the insoluble body-mind problem.
- 35 I have to add here immediately that Husserl's conception of intentionality cannot be restricted to the structure of *noësis-noëma*. In his philosophy we can also find a less intellectual form of intentionality. From a genetic point of view, his philosophy thematizes intentionality as intentional life; a life that is characterized by affections and drives. See for this interpretation of Husserl, Anne Montavont, *De la passivité dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: PUF épiméthée, 1999).
- 36 "La conscience peut être 'inconscient', si elle n'est pas adéquate spirituelle, mais sujet signifiant ou parlant" (NC: 151, translation JS).
- 37 See Merleau-Ponty's references to the figure of the mother: "Do (*faire*) a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother" (VI: 267) and "(... le langage est la parole de la mère). La mère n'est pas un individu, mais une catégorie (une «mammaité»)" (N: 347).

#### La psychanalyse de la Nature et la Nature de l'expression

Dans sa dernière œuvre, Merleau-Ponty introduit la notion de psychanalyse de la Nature. Mon article cherche à situer cette psychanalyse dans la perspective

fenomenologica che mira a svelare una forma di linguaggio o di espressione che resta abitualmente nascosta sotto i sedimenti del linguaggio scientifico e ordinario. Si potrebbe dire che la psicoanalisi della Natura cerca di analizzare l'inconscio nella genesi del linguaggio. In quanto tale, essa può essere compresa come la ricerca delle "voci del silenzio", o del "logos *endiathetos*". In termini più adeguati al discorso della psicoanalisi, direi che si tratta della ricerca della "parola della madre".

Per comprendere lo sviluppo di questa psicoanalisi fenomenologica nel pensiero di Merleau-Ponty, seguirò un va-et-vien tra le sue opere antiche e i suoi testi più recenti. Innanzitutto, stabilirò un collegamento tra la sua interpretazione dello stadio dello specchio, che sviluppò nei suoi corsi del 1951 su "Le relazioni con gli altri", e il principio di reversibilità, che viene in primo piano in *L'occhio e lo spirito* (1961) e *Il visibile e l'invisibile* (1964). Secondariamente, esplorerò il modo in cui il pensiero di Merleau-Ponty è stato imparentato con la psicoanalisi di Freud, e particolarmente con la sua nozione di inconscio. Da queste analisi concludo che ciò che la fenomenologia definisce come intenzionalità coincide in una certa misura con l'inconscio psicoanalitico. Credo che la psicoanalisi della Natura di Merleau-Ponty sveli l'intenzionalità come desiderio. Nella parte finale del mio saggio sviluppo la tesi che il desiderio formi l'origine dell'espressione e come tale colmi il divario tra Natura e Logos. Detto diversamente, il desiderio forma il vincolo tra la vita naturale della percezione e la vita culturale dell'espressione. Da questo punto di vista, la psicoanalisi della Natura di Merleau-Ponty sta per una fenomenologia che ricerca il "logos inconscio" nascosto all'interno della natura umana. Mostrerò che possiamo rintracciare questo Logos per mezzo di un'analisi "estesiologica" del corpo. Per questo argomento finale, utilizzo le note del corso "Le concept de nature, Nature et Logos: le corps humain" (1959-60) recentemente pubblicate.

#### La psicoanalisi della Natura e la natura dell'espressione

Nella sua ultima opera Merleau-Ponty introduce la nozione di una psicoanalisi della Natura. Il mio saggio cerca di situare questa psicoanalisi all'interno della prospettiva della fenomenologia che intende svelare una forma di linguaggio o di espressione che normalmente rimane nascosta al di sotto dei sedimenti del linguaggio scientifico e ordinario. Si potrebbe dire che la psicoanalisi della Natura cerca di analizzare l'inconscio nella genesi del linguaggio. Come tale, può essere intesa come la ricerca delle "voci del silenzio" o del "Logos *endiathetos*". In termini più propri al discorso della psicoanalisi, io dico che è la ricerca della "parola della madre".

Per comprendere lo sviluppo di tale psicoanalisi fenomenologica nel pensiero di Merleau-Ponty, andrò avanti e indietro tra la sua prima e la sua ultima opera. Innanzitutto, opererò un collegamento tra la sua interpretazione dello stadio dello specchio, come è sviluppata nel corso del 1951 su "Le relazioni del bambino con gli altri", ed il principio di reversibilità che viene alla ribalta in *L'occhio e lo spirito* (1961) e in *Il visibile e l'invisibile* (1964). Secondariamente, esplorerò il modo in cui il pensiero di Merleau-Ponty è stato imparentato con la psicoanalisi di Freud, e particolarmente con la sua nozione di inconscio. Da queste analisi concludo che ciò che la fenomenologia definisce come intenzionalità coincide in una certa misura con l'inconscio psicoanalitico. Credo che la psicoanalisi della Natura di Merleau-Ponty sveli l'intenzionalità come desiderio. Nella parte finale del mio saggio sviluppo la tesi che il desiderio formi l'origine dell'espressione e come tale colmi il divario tra Natura e Logos. Detto diversamente, il desiderio forma il vincolo tra la vita naturale della percezione e la vita culturale dell'espressione. Da questo punto di vista, la psicoanalisi della Natura di Merleau-Ponty sta per una fenomenologia che ricerca il "logos inconscio" nascosto all'interno della natura umana. Mostrerò che possiamo rintracciare questo Logos per mezzo di un'analisi "estesiologica" del corpo. Per questo argomento finale, utilizzo le note del corso "Le concept de nature, Nature et Logos: le corps humain" (1959-1960) recentemente pubblicate.