

## Duquesne University Duquesne Scholarship Collection

---

Phenomenology Center Annual Symposium

Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center

---

3-14-2018

# Body Memory and the Unconscious

Thomas Fuchs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/phenomenology-symposium>

 Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fuchs, T. (2018). Body Memory and the Unconscious. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/phenomenology-symposium/18>

This Lecture is brought to you for free and open access by the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Phenomenology Center Annual Symposium by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact [phillipsg@duq.edu](mailto:phillipsg@duq.edu).

## Body Memory and the Unconscious

---

Thomas Fuchs

### Introduction: psychoanalysis and phenomenology

Psychoanalysis and phenomenology, two theories that arose at more or less the same time<sup>1</sup>, both considering themselves basic sciences of subjectivity, have nevertheless remained foreign to one another. The grounds for this are probably to be found primarily in their conflicting views of the role played by consciousness. To psychoanalysis, consciousness appeared only as a shimmering varnish concealing psychological forces and processes in unfathomable depths which are what is actually effective. For phenomenology, on the other hand, consciousness rather was the medium or the light through which all phenomena come to be seen in the first place, and appear as such. Consciousness as the sphere of mere *semblance* (*Schein*) or of *manifestation* (*Erscheinung*) – is a pointed distinction that could be made between the two.

Accordingly, they held contrasting views also of the unconscious: either it was considered the actual source of the psyche's life, the hidden meaningful structure and driving force, which made its way by various means, even in opposition to the conscious intentions of the subject. Or the unconscious had to be viewed as restricted to an implicit awareness that remained potentially accessible to consciousness or reflection, and, in any case, could not basically be foreign to the subject. In Husserl's words:

"What I do not 'know', what in my experience, my imagining, thinking, doing, is not present to me as perceived, remembered, thought, etc., will not 'influence' my mind. And what is not in my experience, be it ignored or implicitly-intentionally decided, does not motivate me even unconsciously" (Husserl 1952, 231).

These two views seem hardly reconcilable. However, on closer analysis, psychoanalysis and phenomenology do in fact have a common starting point: it is in the Cartesian view of consciousness as "clear and distinct perception", the assumption that consciousness is transparent to itself insofar as its own contents are concerned. For Husserl, the "cogito" is the present evidence, the necessary "appresentation" of all contents in the observing consciousness, without which they would melt or escape into the unreality of past or future. All memories, all ideas, all the possibilities of consciousness, must cling, as it were, to this evident present so as not to vanish.

But Freud's view of consciousness is not much different: conscious is only "... the idea that is present in our consciousness and which we perceive" in each case (Freud 1943, 29). Thus, consciousness is considered the space for current ideas or representations. The unconscious is then the space containing all the other ideas which are not present at a particular moment. Freud rejects an ambiguous knowing-unknowing consciousness for "... a consciousness of which one knows nothing seems to me many times more absurd than a psychic unconscious" (Freud 1940b, 243). Consciousness must be transparent to itself or it is not consciousness at all.

Psychoanalysis thus rebelled against the classical philosophy of consciousness, and not only failed to overcome it but, without being aware of it, even adopted its premises. The situation is similar to that in today's conflict between neurobiology and classical philosophy: The sovereign, autonomous conscious subject that neurobiology believes it must dethrone is itself merely a dualistic construct. Separated from its body and its life, restricted to present "mental states", the bodiless, and to this extent powerless, "ego" becomes easy prey to neurobiological reductionism, and the role of the unconscious as the actually powerful substrate is now taken over by the material brain.

Now the dimension of *embodiment of the subject* was increasingly brought to the fore by phenomenology as time went on, and it could just as easily have become the core of psychoanalysis. Freud, as is well known, did not only see the origin of the Ego in the body<sup>2</sup>. The body also played a decisive role in psychoanalytical drive theory, since this theory assumed a step-by-

step development of partial drives, which are dominated by certain regions of the body, and whose "destinies" permanently affect the development of the individual. Nevertheless, despite this concept, the dualism of body and mind had a crucial impact also on psychoanalytic theory. For Freud, in the final analysis, drives are not phenomena of the lived body, but objective-somatic quantities; and their so-called representations do not belong to a libidinous body of the subject but are already part of the psyche as an inner, hidden apparatus where drive derivatives and drive energies are converted into one another and distributed to various levels of the psyche – an apparatus which can only be decoded on the basis of external signs such as body-language or by way of speech. In the end, the body thus remained interesting only as the seat of symbolic or imagined meanings, as a primary projection field for the psyche, so to speak, which always had to be scrutinized for its hidden meanings. That mental phenomena could at the same time be bodily as well was not imaginable in the dualistic paradigm.

With the idea of the "psychic apparatus", which doubtlessly goes back to Freud's own early brain theory, an entity had also been created that served as a sort of inner container for images and memories of external reality. Introjected as "object-representations", "imagos" etc., they populated the various compartments of the psyche and developed a life of their own with the help of the drive energies. In this way, the Ego remained separated from important parts of these compartments through radical ignorance: the topologically structured, dynamic unconscious, according to Freud, is basically different from the preconscious as the latent and implicitly known (Freud 1940c, 77f.). Between the *pre-conscious* and the *unconscious* stands the economical mechanism of repression, and both what is repressed and the repressing mechanism – i.e. the motivation for repression – elude consciousness. As evidence for this concept, Freud could point to bodily symptoms or to *Freudian slips*, which appeared alien or meaningless to the Ego, furthermore to the difference between manifest and latent *dream content* which is attributable to an unconscious censor, and, last but not least, to the *resistance* shown by the patient during analysis to becoming aware of what has been repressed.

This radical separation of the unconscious, however, came at a high cost, for now it had to be assigned to the objectivity of the psychological

apparatus. Freud had discovered a paradox, namely that one "knows something that one simultaneously does not know" and that "one is struck with blindness while the eyes see" (Freud 1957, 175 note). He was only able to solve this paradox by the splitting of the psyche into two parts. As a consequence, the unconscious turns into an "internal foreign country", (Freud 1940c, 62), in other words to something external within oneself, whose meaning and effect are alien to the subject.

At this point, however, we should remember Husserl's objection to a motivation which is *entirely* alien to the subject. Moreover, how should the subject be in the position to re-appropriate such an alien meaning, unless it was always *his own* meaning? Psychoanalytical therapy could then do no more than convey rational insights into the mechanisms of one's foreign inner life, and could not contribute to a *genuine* integration of one's personality. The classical aim of psychoanalysis: "where id was, ego shall be", would then remain only a matter of explicit knowledge, not of actual self-appropriation.

The phenomenological critique of this concept moved along various paths, of which I will only mention two:

- Sartre saw the unconscious not as a circumstance imposing restrictions on the subject from outside, but as a basic modality of the subject's relationship to himself, namely, that of bad faith, "*mauvaise foi*" (Sartre 1958, 47ff.). The subject assumes an ambivalent relationship to himself, he allows himself, so to speak, to slide into an "intentional inattention": one doesn't know something *and doesn't want* to know it; one doesn't see something *and doesn't want* to see it, and in this way becomes the deceived and the deceiver in one.
- Second, there is the possibility of taking the ambiguity of the lived body as the starting point, that means, its shifting between remaining tacit and becoming aware, as conceived by Plessner as well as Merleau-Ponty. Then it becomes possible to encounter the unconscious in bodily behaviour, in day-to-day living and in the structures of the person's lived space. This would not be an unconscious in some unknown depths of the psyche, but unconscious in the

horizontal dimension, so-to-speak. *Body memory* plays a special part here, insofar as it turns a person's bodily and inter-bodily experiences into implicitly effective dispositions, which provide the mostly unconscious basis for day-to-day living.

The latter is the course which I will take in what follows. So the question will be: Can the unconscious be localized in the lived relationships and conduct of a person, in the *horizontal* dimension of the lived body and intercorporeality? How far can such a concept reflect elements of Freud's unconscious? – In what follows, I first want to develop the concept of body memory and the relational field that it constitutes, and then look for the structures of this field where the unconscious can, as it were, take up its abode.

### **Body memory**

If, following Merleau-Ponty, we view the body not as the visible, touchable and sentient physical body but first and foremost as our *capacity* to see, touch, and sense, then body memory designates the totality of these bodily dispositions as they have formed in the course of our development – in other words, in their historical dimension. In body memory, the situations and actions experienced in the past are, as it were, fused together without any of them standing out individually. Through the repetition and superimposition of experiences, a habit structure has been formed: well-practiced motion sequences, repeatedly perceived *Gestalten*, forms of actions and interactions have become an implicit bodily knowledge and skill. Body memory does not take one back to the past, but conveys an implicit effectiveness of the past in the present. This approach converges with the results of recent memory research on the central significance of *implicit* memory which is to some extent equivalent to body memory, though, as we will see, the latter comprises much more phenomena.

The body is thus the ensemble of acquired and organically developed predispositions and capacities to perceive, to act, but also to desire and to communicate. Its experiences, anchored in body memory, cover the environment like an invisible network which relates us to things and to

other people. It is our permanent means to actualise our past and, with this, to make ourselves feel at home in situations. It is important to note that what is mediated and enabled by body memory is mostly forgotten in terms of explicit memory. An example may be seen in the capacity of typewriting which is a memory “in the fingers” unavailable for explicit knowledge (illustration: “keyboard”).

Moreover, in the bodily experience structures, the others are always already included, they are pre-reflectively understood in expression and intended in desire. Before I can reflect on what I am communicating through my gestures or speech, my body always already creates the feeling of being-with; it expresses itself through attitude and gestures, and at the same time reacts to the impressions of others. This "intercorporeality" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 168) forms a superordinate, intersubjective system in which, from childhood on, forms of bodily interaction are established and constantly re-actualized. It comprises the self and the others, the conscious and the unconscious: "I do not have to search very far for others: I find them in my experience, lodged in the hollows that show what they see and what I fail to see (...) We are in no way locked inside ourselves" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 138f.).

### **Body memory and life space**

Body memory thus forms not only an interior system restricted to the physical body. It also constitutes a sensorimotor, emotional and interactive field in which we, as embodied beings, constantly move and conduct ourselves; thus, it may also be regarded as the historical dimension of the *body schema* which is always already related to the environment too. What offers itself here is the terminology of Kurt Lewin's field psychology (1936), particularly the concept of the *life space* with its center in the lived body. In order to link it with the structures of body memory, I want to give a brief outline of this.

As I mentioned, the life space is centred around the person and the person's body. According to Lewin, it is characterised by experienced characteristics

such as closeness or distance, narrowness or breadth, connectedness or separateness, attainability etc., and it is structured by physical or symbolic *boundaries* which offer resistance to movement. This produces more or less clearly bounded *sectors* such as the peripersonal space around one's own body, claimed territories (property, home), the sphere of influence which emanates from someone, but also prohibited or taboo zones. The lived space is further permeated by felt "*field forces*" or "*vectors*", in the first place those which attract and repel. Competing attractive or repulsive forces in the life space lead to typical conflicts such as attraction *versus* aversion, attraction *versus* attraction etc. They can be considered as conflicting directions of movement or possibilities which are offered to a person in a given situation. Moreover, the life space is characterized by effects of „gravitation“, „radiation“, or by „curvatures of space“.

A good example of conflicting field forces and curvatures is offered by the situation of a small child who is torn back and forth between his bond to his mother and curiosity (cf. Stern 1991, 101). The mother is first of all the "safe haven", the centre of gravity, so to speak, which curves the child's experienced space in such a way that he remains in her vicinity. The space thus acquires a gradient: the further the child moves away from the mother, the more empty or lonely the space becomes. While it condenses again around other, i.e. strange, people, the child rather makes a detour around them: the space curvature near them is "negative". Little by little, the child's exploratory drive looses his tie to his mother, so that it becomes possible to increase the distance against the gradient – only until the bond is stretched too much, and the child runs back to his mother in the end.

This example is also a good illustration of the fact that the respective field structures are based on body memory, in this case, the history of the experiences the child has had in closeness and security with his mother – attachment research has shown this in detail. From birth on, body memory incorporates an extract of typical experiences with others, thus acquiring dyadic patterns of interaction or “schemes of being-with” (Stern 1985), or an “implicit relational knowing” (Stern, Lyons-Ruth 1998).

Another proverbial example of body memory lies in the saying, “A burnt child dreads the fire” (German proverb), or "Once bitten, twice shy", which



illustrate the negative or *aversive* effect of body memory, in this case, of pain memory. A third example, finally, is given by the zones of prohibition which restrict the child's movements so that his spontaneous impulses interfere with parental imperatives, namely, inasmuch these have left a negative mark and a negative gradient on his very life space.

Consequently, the life space – depending on the respective experiences of a person – can bear varying significances, relevances or valences. In analogy to a physical field, "gravitational effects", invisible "curvatures" of space, or barriers can appear which restrict or prevent spontaneous movements. Particularly in psychopathology, we encounter various deformations of the lived space (Fuchs 2007), as, for instance, the implicit avoidance zones of phobic patients or the taboo zones of obsessive patients, which are based on certain past experiences sedimented in body memory.

### **On the phenomenology of the unconscious**

With this, I have made a brief sketch of an approach and a terminology which permit the question of the unconscious to be put and answered in a different way.

If we reject Freud's idea of a topological unconscious beyond subjectivity – a separate intra-psychic process which impacts on the experiencing subject from outside, so to speak – then we may ask whether the unconscious might not be considered another mode of experiencing that manifests itself in the *horizontal* dimension of the lived body and the lived space. The paradigm for this would be the ambiguity of the body itself which, while seeing, always remains unseen, and of whose dispositions I often remain unaware, which in fact come to meet me from outside, namely in the form of the attractive or repelling objects, the affordances and field structures of my environment. Such an unconscious would then, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "... be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our 'consciousness', but in front of us, as articulation of our field" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 180). It would be the unrecognized reverse side of our experience and conduct, or its other, hidden meaning.

As our starting point, let us first consider the field structure of a repressed wish. In his short story "*Der Brantweinsäufer und die Berliner Glocken*" (The brandy drinker and Berlin's bells), Heinrich von Kleist recounts the story of an alcoholic soldier who, after insistent preaching and punishment, has resolved to become abstinent but was found drunk after only three days. Asked how this relapse could have happened after all his good resolutions, the soldier justified himself by saying that the devil must have had his hand in it because while walking through the town he suddenly heard the names of various brandies in the tolling of the bells - for example "*Kümmel! Kümmel!*" in the ringing of the town hall bell, "*Pommeranzen, Pommeranzen*" in the ringing cathedral bell and so on. In the end, he could not help being defeated by these insidious sounds.<sup>3</sup>

While this humorous example relates only to a wish that was not actually *repressed* but merely *suppressed* by an act of will, it gives a fine illustration of the indirect way in which contrary bodily impulses or drives can get their way, namely from outside. This hidden role of the lived body may also be grasped in Polanyi's (1967) terms: The lived body and its desires are the proximal component of the perceptual or affective field, and the perceived situation is the distal component; but the proximal component recedes from awareness in favour of the distal. We perceive the situation through the medium of the body.

The experiential field is thus, so to speak, interspersed with a suppressed desire which becomes crystallised finally around certain perceptions – namely those which are sufficiently vague while offering a certain similarity for the purpose: in Kleist's case the various chimes. The uncertain or *ambiguous* is a particular place where a latent or hidden significance can take shape. The drive or the wish that was not satisfied breaks through circuitously and from outside so that, in principle, we can already recognize the defence mechanism of *displacement*. What is actually desired is fulfilled through something similar but less prohibited.

A comparable interference of explicit intentions and implicit directions of meaning is also found in the various types of "*Freudian slips*". Freud himself says that "...slips are the result of two different intentions which

interfere with one another, of which one can be called the disturbed and the other the disturbing intention" (Freud 1940a, 56). Mishearing is most like the example of Kleist's soldier: a latently desired meaning is "interpreted" from a similar sequence of sounds. To take another example: She asks: "What would you like—bread and butter, or cake?", while he understands: "Bed and butter", thus manifesting his latent sexual intention.

Similarly, with slips of the tongue, or of the pen, and with mislaying and losing things, another intention interferes with the explicitly intended action, so that "the right hand – literally – does not know what the left hand is doing". Finally, with *forgetting*, an originally made but unpleasant intention is blanked out and replaced by others, for example, routine processes. Thus, in spontaneous bodily perceptions or actions which take place "of their own accord", the relevant latent intention wins through in spontaneous bodily enaction – in a reversal or a chiasm which is expressed by the prefix "mis-".

The producer of the slip can now either immediately or after some brief thought recognise its significance and ascribe it to himself, or he finds it "senseless", in other words, alien to himself. For example, Freud writes the following concerning "misspeaking":

"If later we present it [the intention on which the misspeaking was based] to the speaker, he may either acknowledge it as something familiar, so that it was only temporarily unconscious, or he may deny it as alien to himself, which means that it was permanently unconscious" (Freud 1940c, 77).

It is on this difference, amongst other things, that Freud bases his categorical distinction between the preconscious and the true dynamic unconscious which is excluded or repressed from consciousness "by living forces" (Freud 1943, 436). The defence mechanism and the corresponding resistance to the latent meaning are based on the assumption that the inhibition and its motives are themselves excluded from consciousness. However, the question is whether this justifies establishing a special intrapsychic space for the dynamic unconscious. Against this, there is the merely gradual difference between a temporary and a permanent unconscious in the Freud quotation which I cited. In both cases, after all, we

are dealing mainly with a duplicity of intentions, to which only an additional repressive tendency is added in the second case. But if we do not assign the "living forces" of repression of which Freud speaks to an intrapsychic mechanism beyond consciousness, but see them rather as dynamic field forces, we will easily find models for them in the lived body and life space.

The first thing that comes to mind would be the *relieving posture* adopted after sustaining an injury: spontaneously one avoids putting the injured limb at risk from dangerous objects and holds it back without having still to think of the event. Avoidance behaviour is thus incorporated into body memory. Moreover, I have already mentioned the *zones of prohibition* which face the child and operate against its approach through negative field forces until the child respects them automatically. We come one step closer to the dynamic unconscious with zones or objects which are *taboo*. For, unlike prohibition, the taboo has a special structure and effect in that it is not expressly formulated but is generated by the avoidance behaviour of others, like a negative curvature of the shared life space around what is prohibited. Taboos are most effective when they are not declared, and the members of the community are not even aware of them. The infringement of taboos is not necessarily punished with open penalties, but automatically generates feelings of shame, guilt or abhorrence in the offender, reinforced by the contempt and the ostracising silence of the others.

In all these cases, experience and conduct are determined by negative or "repulsive" field forces exercising their effect unconsciously since the subject, like the "once bitten" person, has gradually extricated herself from the possible conflict. Avoidance has become an implicit, bodily pattern of behaviour so that what is potentially threatening in the environment is no longer consciously experienced. Nevertheless, repelling forces do not appear to consciousness as coming from outside but, in Hegel's terms, as "its own otherness". They remain co-extensive with the experiential field but as its negative. The manifest feelings of fear, guilt or shame which arise on stepping beyond the barriers in the life space were already latently present before, endowing these barriers with their unpleasant affective loading.

In the same way, in the case of a "slip", the dynamic unconscious puts up resistance to its becoming conscious. This resistance is itself not conscious, nor is it implicitly or preconscious, and yet on this account it is still not altogether outside consciousness. It is rather an *ambiguity or duplicity of consciousness itself*; in such a way that the subject, if she hits on the manifestation of the hidden meaning, at least has an inkling that it is asking her a *question*, namely about her own otherness. The unconscious, writes Merleau-Ponty,

"... cannot be a process 'in third person', since it is the unconscious which chooses what aspect of us will be admitted to official existence, which avoids the thoughts or situation we are resisting, and which is therefore not an *un-knowledge* but rather a non-recognized and unformulated knowledge that we do not want to take up. In an approximative language, Freud is on the point of discovering what other thinkers have more appropriately named *ambiguous perception*" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 194).

We can understand this ambiguity of consciousness with the example of another defence mechanism, namely *projection*. Here the beam in one's own eye proverbially becomes the splinter in another's eye; in other words, one perceives in others the impulses and motives against which one has built defences in oneself. Naturally, this perception is also ambiguous, since the excessive zeal with which the impulses in others are disapproved derives its energy precisely from the efforts one has to make to neutralize one's own impulses. The blind spot in self-awareness – and here Freud is doubtlessly right – does not result from a mere "overlooking", but from active and emotionally charged repression. Nevertheless, this repression remains the work and the latent effort of the subject herself, not of a subpersonal mechanism outside her. What originally was one's own has been excluded and now appears in the outside as alien or repulsive, but the alien is actually nothing else but one's own otherness.

### **Trauma and reiteration**

Let us now turn to another phenomenon, namely, the unconscious effect of an emotional trauma which Merleau-Ponty sets out to interpret in his "Phe-

nomenology of Perception". What is repressed, he writes, is generally like a phantom limb for an amputee inasmuch as a capacity or disposition continues in the body which is no longer congruent with the present. Habitual and current body come into conflict with one another. In a similar manner, repression creates an "empty space" in the current subjectivity (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 87), for the "negative" left by an experience which has not been dealt with interposes itself unnoticed before every new situation and thus imprisons the traumatised person in a past which is still present.

"...(T)his fixation does not merge into memory; it even excludes memory in so far as ... [the trauma] does not leave us but remains constantly hidden behind our gaze instead being displayed before it. The traumatic experience does not survive as a representation in the mode of objective consciousness ... [but] as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality" (ibid. 83).

This description assigns the repressed trauma not to explicit but to body memory, which holds what is hidden "from sight" and goes on in a general manner or "style" of existence.<sup>4</sup> The injury or violence has penetrated the body of the subject and has left behind a permanent sensitivity, a readiness to defend oneself. The traumatised person becomes hypersensitive to threatening, shaming situations similar to the trauma, even if this similarity is not consciously recognized, and tries to circumvent them. "The resistance is directed to a certain area of experience, a certain category, a certain type of memory" (ibid. 194). All the same, at every step, the victim may encounter something that reawakens the trauma in her. Often it happens that a permanent predisposition develops to react with fear and nervousness, to become alarmed every time the doorbell rings, a feeling of being followed or observed by unknown people.

An impressive description is to be found in the memoirs of the Jewish writer Aharon Appelfeld, who from his seventh to his thirteenth year of age experienced the Second World War hiding in the woods of the Ukraine:

"More than fifty years have passed since the end of the war. I have forgotten much, even things that were very close to me – places in

particular, dates, and the names of people – and yet I can still sense those days in every part of my body. Whenever it rains, it's cold, or a fierce wind is blowing, I am taken back to the ghetto, to the camp, or to the forests where I spent many days. Memory, it seems, has deep roots in the body." – "The cells of my body apparently remember more than my mind which is supposed to remember. For years after the war, I would walk neither in the middle of the sidewalk nor in the middle of the road. I always clung to the walls, always staying in the shade, and always walking rapidly, as if I were slipping away. (...). Sometimes, just the aroma of a certain dish, or the dampness of shoes or a sudden noise is enough to take me back in the middle of the war (...). The war has infiltrated my bones." – "... the palms of one's hands, the soles of one's feet, one's back, and one's knees remember more than memory. Had I drawn from them, I would have been overwhelmed with what I have seen (Appelfeld 2009, p. 50, 90, vii).

Here it is not a particular episode, but an entire segment of his life that has left its mark on the body, more deeply and permanently, of course, than the autobiographic memory could have done: Proprioception, touch, smell, hearing, even certain kinds of weather can suddenly allow the past to come to life again, and even bodily pattern of movement, such as the hunted walk close to the wall, still imitates the behaviour of the fugitive.

The effect of the trauma on the person can thus be viewed, first, as a specific deformation of her lived space corresponding to an unconscious avoidance behaviour which he or she adopts towards the anxiety-provoking or "*repelling zones*". The lived space around these zones is to a certain extent negatively curved and prevents the free movement of life. Second, the life space is permeated with similarities in which the trauma approaches the traumatised person from outside, so that it is impossible to avoid it. For in one's attitude, one's stance, and in one's perceptive predispositions, one carries the trauma into one's world over and over again.

We may finally relate this to the psychoanalytic concept of *repetition compulsion*. This concept is based on the clinical experience that patients continue to be drawn into the same, mostly damaging behaviour or relationship patterns even if they try to prevent this at the conscious level.

Their lived space is so to speak "positively curved" around these regions – in other words, these exercise an unnoticed *attraction*. If, for example, a person's early experiences were characterized by abusive relationships, this issue will determine also that person's later relationship patterns. The types of abuse may vary, but the implicit behaviour patterns deposited in body memory will have the effect of fulfilling her expectations and bring about the familiar type of relationship. These unconscious enactments, as they are called today, may also become tangible in the psychotherapeutic relation, where Freud, of course, regarded them as a form of transference. As he writes, we must

"... say in analysis that the analysand *remembers* nothing at all of what has been forgotten and repressed, but he *acts it out*. He does not reproduce it as a memory but as action, he *repeats* it, naturally without realizing that he is repeating it. For example, the analysand does not say that he remembers being defiant and incredulous towards the authority of his parents, but he behaves in this manner towards the doctor" (Freud 1946, 129).

The unconscious pre-history of intersubjective relations is re-enacted through the intercorporeal body memory. However, this means that the unconscious is not a hidden chamber of the psyche any more, but is interwoven in the life style, in the bodily conduct of a person, as a sub-structure which remains hidden from her personally, but becomes visible to others because, in the final analysis, it is always implicitly directed to those others themselves. The "blind spot" in the center of consciousness can also be viewed as the other side of the intersubjective relationship, in which our own being-with-others must necessarily remain hidden from us, so that this dark side of ourselves can only be illuminated in our communication with others. For in my world the others dwell "... in the hollows that show what they see and what I fail to see" (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 138f.).

## **Conclusion**

From the point of view of a phenomenology of the lived body, the unconscious is not an intrapsychic reality residing in the depths "below consciousness". Rather, it surrounds and permeates conscious life, just as in



picture puzzles the figure hidden in the background surrounds the foreground, and just as the lived body conceals itself while functioning as a medium of being-towards-the-world. It is an unconscious which is not located in the *vertical* dimension of the psyche but rather in the *horizontal* dimension of lived space, most of all lodging in the intercorporeality of dealings with others, as the hidden or reverse side of day-to-day living. It is an unconscious which is not to be found deep inside the individual but in his or her relationships to others, as an unnoticed interbodily field.<sup>5</sup>

Unconscious fixations are like certain restrictions in a person's space of potentialities produced by an implicit but ever-present past which declines to take part in the continuing progress of life. Their traces, however, are not hidden in an inner psychic world but manifest themselves rather as "blind spots", "empty spaces" or curvatures in the lived space: in the "slips" in speech and action; in the relationship patterns into which a person repeatedly blunders, in the actions which are avoided without being aware of it; in the spaces which are not entered, the opportunities offered by life which one does not take, and even does not dare to see. Such traces may be recognised as "negatives" so to speak, in the form of inhibitions or omissions which are characteristic of a person. They can also become symbolically or physically present in neurotic or psychosomatic symptoms. The symptom is to this extent neither meaningless nor a defective habit – as learning theory assumed<sup>6</sup> – nor is its meaning to be found beyond itself, in the unconscious interior. Rather, it lies in the intercorporeal expression, in the interactive field, even if this meaning is not evident, but must be understood and interpreted.

The unconscious is thus absence in presence, the unperceived in the perceived (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 245f.). Like a figure blanks out the ground from which it stands out, thus consciousness, perception and language conceal their reverse side, namely the unconscious, the unperceived, and the silence, which are always bound up with them. This reverse side, however, does not remain fully concealed but expresses itself in reversals, chiasmatic entanglements, in an ambiguity of consciousness: One does not know something *and* does not want to know it; one does not see something *and* does not want to see it – in other words, one looks past it intentionally-

unintentionally. Consciousness is not fully transparent to itself because it hides itself from itself.

This duplicity of consciousness corresponds to the ambiguity of the body whose modes of appearing fluctuate between the thematic and the unthematic, between the physical (*Körper*) and the lived body (*Leib*). But it also corresponds to the ambivalent, conflict-prone nature of our existence itself where we, precisely as natural, embodied beings, can always confront our own instinctive and natural side as well. This is what constitutes the contradictoriness or, to speak with Plessner (1975), the "eccentricity" of the way we relate to ourselves, the constant conflict between spontaneity and reflectivity, "body" and "soul", nature and nurture, conscious and unconscious. One could then accuse Freud that even he, for all his scepticism, was too generous to humankind in that he tried to relieve our consciousness of this inherent conflict by placing our opposing will in a separate space belonging to the unconscious – thus withdrawing this will from our own responsibility.

---

<sup>1</sup> As is well known, both Husserl's "*Logische Untersuchungen*" and Freud's "*Traumdeutung*" appeared in 1900.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Freud 1940b, 253.

<sup>3</sup> Kleist 1984. – The story is also cited by Graumann (1960, 151) as an illustration of the motivational basis of perspectivity.

<sup>4</sup> „comme un style d'être“, in the French original (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 98).

<sup>5</sup> "(...) the latency of psychoanalysis is an unconscious that is *beneath* conscious life and *within* the individual, an *intrapsychic* reality that leads to a psychology of depth in the *vertical* dimension. (...) the latency of phenomenology is an unconscious which *surrounds* conscious life, an unconsciousness in the world, *between us*, an *ontological* theme that leads to a psychology of depth in the *lateral* dimension" (Romanyshyn 1977).

<sup>6</sup> "Learning theory assumes no 'unconscious' causes whatsoever but views neurotic symptoms simply as learned habits. There is no neurosis at the bottom of the symptom, only the symptom itself" (Eysenck & Rachmann 1972, 20).