

# Body Memory and the Unconscious

Thomas Fuchs  
Universität Heidelberg

Il n'y pas d'homme intérieur, l'homme est au monde  
et c'est dans le monde qu'il se connaît.  
*Maurice Merleau-Ponty*<sup>1</sup>

In traditional psychoanalysis the unconscious was conceived as a primary intra-psychic reality, hidden 'below consciousness' and only accessible to a 'depth psychology' based on metapsychological premises and concepts. In contrast to this *vertical* conception, the present paper presents a phenomenological approach to the unconscious as a *horizontal* dimension of the lived body, lived space and intercorporeality. This approach is based on a phenomenology of body memory which is defined as the totality of implicit dispositions of perception and behavior mediated by the body and sedimented in the course of earlier experiences.

What belongs to body memory, therefore, is what perseveres, not in the form of an explicit memory, but as a "style of existence" (Merleau-Ponty). This corporeal and intercorporeal unconscious "... is not to be sought in our innermost [psyche] behind the back of our 'consciousness', but before us, as the structure of our field" (Merleau-Ponty). Unconscious fixations are like restrictions in the spatial potentiality of a person, caused by a past which is implicit in the present and resists the progress of life; this includes traumatic experiences in particular. Their traces are not hidden in an interior psychic world, but manifest themselves - as in a figure-background relationship - in the form of "blind spots" or "empty spaces" in day-to-day living. They manifest themselves in behavior patterns into which a person repeatedly blunders, in actions that she avoids without being aware of it or in the opportunities offered by life which she does not dare to take or even to see. The unconscious of body memory is thus characterized by the absence of forgotten or repressed experiences, and at the same time by their corporeal and intercorporeal presence in the lived space and in the day-to-day life of a person.

## *Introduction: psychoanalysis and phenomenology*

Psychoanalysis and phenomenology, two theories<sup>2</sup> that arose at more or less the same time, 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 was a sort of mirror 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 but coded 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. Antagonistic as they may seem, 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 it 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 disintegrate. 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). Consciousness, therefore, as in classical thought, is considered the space for current ideas or representations. The unconscious is then the space which is conceived as 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. With this, of course, there is the threat of naturalizing subjectivity which could have a much more reifying effect than Freud's interpretation of man as "*homo natura*", criticized by Binswanger (1957).

Now, the dimension of *corporeality of the subject* which was increasingly brought to the fore by phenomenology as time went on, 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>3</sup>. The body also played a decisive role in psychoanalytical drive theory, since, after all, it 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 made an impact on psychoanalytic theory. For Freud, in the final analysis, drives are not phenomena of the lived body, but objective-somatic quantities; and their 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, so to speak, as a primary projection field for the psyche, which always had to be scrutinized for 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 pictures and memories of external reality. Introjected as "object-representations", "imagos" etc., they populated the various compartments of the psyche and there 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 pre-conscious as the latent and implicitly "previously 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 physical symptoms or *Freudian slips*, which appeared alien or meaningless to the Ego, and for another thing 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, took place at the cost of its having to take a problematic ambiguous position between subjective experiencing and objective processes (Waldenfels 2002, 294). In fact, in the final analysis, it had to be assigned to the objectivity of the psychological apparatus. Freud solves the paradox he discovered, 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) 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, one should not only bear in mind Husserl's objection to a motivation which is entirely alien to the subject. How, over and above this, should the subject be in the position to make such an alien meaning his own again unless, both in origin and in its latency, it was always *his own* meaning? Psychoanalytical therapy could then do no more than convey rational insights into the mechanisms of one's own inner life, and could not contribute to a genuine integration of the personality. The aim of therapy: "where

id was, ego shall be", would then remain a matter of explicit knowledge, not of appropriation.

The phenomenological critique of this concept now moved along various paths:

- Sartre saw the unconscious not as a circumstance imposing restrictions on the subject from outside, but as a basic modality of the subject's constitutive relationship to himself, namely, that of bad faith, "*mauvaise foi*" (Sartre 1962, 91ff.). 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.
- A comparable form of double consciousness may be found, as Bernet (1997) has undertaken to show, in Husserl's analyses of the perception of images, of the reproductive consciousness, of memory, and above all, of *imagination*: these forms of consciousness in each case entail a duplication of presence and absence so that the Ego lives in two worlds at the same time. In this way, they can also serve as paradigms for the relationship between conscious and unconscious.
- Another way of overcoming the dualism of conscious and unconscious consists of expanding the space of subjectivity *vertically* so to speak, so that it can include the phenomena of drive and urge as a basic stratum. This method of reinterpretation of Freud's metapsychological terms into an elementary activity of life which always precedes the conscious experience of oneself, was an approach partly adopted by Max Scheler (1928), and then, primarily, by Michel Henry (1992).
- Finally, there is the possibility of taking the ambiguity of the body, as understood by Merleau-Ponty, as the starting point, to extend subjectivity in the *horizontal* dimension and to encounter the unconscious in physical *behavior*, in *day-to-day living* and in the structures of the person's *lived space*. Body memory plays a special part here, insofar as it changes a person's corporeal and intercorporeal experiences into implicitly effective predisposi-

tions, which provide the mostly unconscious basis for day-to-day living.

This is the course which I will take in what follows (without rejecting the other possibilities mentioned). So the question will be how far the unconscious can be localized in the lived relationships and conduct of a person - in other words 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 this constitutes, and then ask about the structures of this field where the unconscious can take up its abode as it were.

### *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, sense, then body memory designates the totality of these bodily predispositions as they have developed 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, all 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 just as much at the basis of our customary behavior as of our unconscious *avoidance* of actions (Schacter 1999, Fuchs 2000c).

The body is thus the ensemble of organically developed predispositions and capacities to perceive, to act but also to desire and to communicate. Its experiences, anchored in body memory, blanket the environment like an invisible network which relates us to things and to people. It is, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "our permanent means of 'taking up attitudes' and thus constructing virtual presents", in other words to actualize our past and, with this, to make ourselves feel at

home in situations (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 181). Even more: in the bodily experience structures, the other is always already included, he is 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 2003, 256) forms an overriding, inter-subjective system in which, from childhood on, forms of bodily interaction are established and constantly updated anew. It comprises the self and the others, the conscious and the unconscious: "I do not need to look for the others elsewhere, I find them within my experience, they dwell in the niches which contain what is hidden from me but visible to them" (Merleau-Ponty 1974, 166).

### *Body memory and life space*

Body memory - like the body schema - thus forms not only an interior system restricted to the physical body. Rather, it constitutes a sensorimotoric, libidinous and interactive field in which we, as embodied beings, constantly move and conduct ourselves. The terminology of Kurt Lewin's field psychology (1969) offers itself here, particularly the concept of *life space*, and to link it with the structures of body memory, I want give a brief outline of this in what follows. – The life space is centered around the person and the person's body. According to Lewin, it is characterized by experienced *characteristics* such as closeness or distance, narrowness or breadth, connectedness or separateness, attainability or elusiveness, 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 tangible "*field forces*" or "*vectors*", in the first place those which attract and repel. Competing attracting or repelling 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.

A good example of conflicting field forces is offered by the situation of a small child who is torn back and forth between its bond to its mother and curiosity (cf. Stern 1991, 101). Its 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 it remains in her vicinity. The space thus acquires a gradient: the further the child moves away from its mother, the more empty, more 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 and the attractive charms of the environment loosen the child's tie to its 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 its 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 ties to his mother. Another proverbial example lies in the saying, "Once bitten, twice shy", which makes clear the aversive effect of body memory. A third example, finally, is given by the zones of prohibition which restrict the directions in which a child can move so that its spontaneous impulses interfere with parental imperatives, namely, inasmuch these have left a negative mark on its very life space.

Consequently, the life space - depending on the respective experiences, capabilities and motives 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, as, for instance, the taboo zones of obsessives and the avoidance zones of phobics, which are based on certain past experiences laid down 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 a topologically structured unconscious beyond consciousness – an independent 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 inviting characters and field structures of my environment. Such an unconscious would then, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "... be found not in our innermost sphere behind the back of 'consciousness', but before us as the structure of our field" (Merleau-Ponty 1986, 233). 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 Branntweinsäufer 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>4</sup> – While this humorous example relates only to a wish that was not 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. The experience field is, so to speak, interspersed with suppressed desire which becomes crystallized finally around certain perceptions - namely those which are sufficiently

vague while offering a certain similarity for the purpose: in this case the various chimes. The uncertain or ambiguous is the 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 mechanism of *displacement*. What is actually desired is fulfilled through something similar.

A comparable interference of expressed thematic and non-thematic 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. With mistakes in speaking, writing and in (mis)placing 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. In spontaneous bodily perceptions or actions which take place "of their own accord", the relevant latent intention breaks through - in a reversal or entanglement which is linguistically 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 pre-conscious 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, obviously have as their prerequisite that the inhibitive trends and their 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 cited above. In both cases, after all, we are dealing in particular with a duplicity of intentions, to which an additional repressive tendency is added only 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 field forces, we will easily find models for them in the bodily or 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 actually to think of the event. Avoidance behavior is thus incorporated into the implicit body memory. Moreover, I have already mentioned the *zones of prohibition* which face the child and operate against its approach through negative field forces as long as the child respects them "of its own accord". 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 behavior of others, like a negative curvature of the shared life space around what is prohibited. Taboos are most effective when the members of the community are not 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 ostracizing silence of the others.

In all these cases, experience and conduct are determined by negative - i.e. "repulsive" - field forces exercising their effect unconsciously since the subject, like the "bitten" person, has gradually extricated herself from the possible conflict. Avoidance has become an implicit, bodily pattern of behavior 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 experience 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 affective loading.

In the same way as in the case of a "slip", the dynamic unconscious puts up resistance to its becoming conscious. This resistance is of

course itself unconscious, nor is it pre-conscious, but on this account it is 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 the third person', since it itself selects what will be admitted to official existence, since it detours around thoughts and situations which we resist, and is thus not a *non-knowing* but rather an unacknowledged, unformulated knowledge that we do not wish to tolerate. In a still imprecise language, Freud is here in the process of discovering what others more correctly have called an *ambiguous perception*" (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 79).

We can understand this ambiguity of consciousness with the example of another defence mechanism, namely *projection*. Here the beam in one's own eye 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 effort of the subject herself, not of a mechanism outside her.

### *Trauma and reiteration*

Let us now turn to another phenomenon, namely, the unconscious effect of an emotional trauma which Merleau-Ponty set out to interpret in his "Phenomenology of Perception". What is repressed, he writes, is like a phantom limb for an amputee inasmuch as a bodily capacity continues in the latter which is no longer congruent with the present. Habitual and current body come into conflict with one another. Similarly, repression also creates an empty space in current subjectivity (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 87), as if the negative left by an experience which has not been dealt with interposes itself unnoticed before every new situation and thus imprisons the traumatized 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 latter spreads out in front of us, like a picture, a former experience, whereas this past which remains our true present [the trauma, T.F.] 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 and as a 'dated' moment; it is of its essence to survive only as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality" (ibid. 83).

This description assigns the repressed trauma to body memory: for this holds what is hidden "from sight" and goes on living in a general "style" of existence, not as an explicit memory. The injury has penetrated the body of the subject and has left behind a permanent responsiveness, a readiness to defend itself. The traumatized person becomes hypersensitive to threatening, shaming situations similar to the trauma in some manner, even if this similarity is not consciously known, 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 second world war. I have forgotten a great deal, especially places, dates and people's names, but nevertheless I feel that time in my entire body. Whenever it rains, when it is cold or stormy, I go back to the ghetto, to the camp or into the woods where I spent such a long time. Memory apparently has deep roots in the body." – "Everything that happened at that time has left its mark in the cells of my body. Not in my memory. The body's cells seem to remember better than the memory which is intended for this. For years after the war, I did not walk in the middle of the pavement or path, but always close to the wall, always in the shade, always in a hurry like someone fleeing. (...) Sometimes it is enough to smell food, to feel dampness in my shoes or hear a sudden noise to bring me back to the war (...) The war sits in all my bones." –

"(...) Hands, feet, back and knees know more than my memory. If I could dip into them, the pictures would just flood me" (Appelfeld 2005, 57, 95f., 8f.).

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 patterns of movement, such as the hunted walk close to the wall still imitates the behavior 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 behavior which it 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 development of the life movement. Second, the life space is permeated with similarities in which the trauma approaches the traumatized 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.

It is to this that the psychoanalytic concept of *repetition compulsion* relates. This is based on the clinical experience that patients continue to be drawn into the same, mostly damaging behavior 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 and violent relationships, this issue will determine also that person's later relationship patterns. The types of abuse may vary, but the implicit behavior 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, were, of course, seen by Freud 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 au-

thority 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 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 centre 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 they dwell in "... the niches which contain what is hidden from me but visible to them" (Merleau-Ponty 1974, 166).

### *Summary*

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. 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 reverse side of day-to-day living. It is an unconscious which is not to be found inside the individual but in his relationships to others.<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 recognized 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 outside itself, in the unconscious interior. Rather, it lies in the intercorporeal expression - in other words, it results from the meanings of the symptom in the interactive field, even if these meanings are not evident, but must be understood and interpreted.

The unconscious is thus absence in presence, the unperceived in the perceived (Merleau-Ponty 1986, 308f.). Like a figure blanks out the background from which it stands out, consciousness, perception and language conceal the reverse side of the unconscious, of the unperceived and of silence which are always bound up with them. This reverse side, however, does not remain fully concealed but expresses itself in reversals, chiasmic 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 as natural, embodied beings can always face our own instinctive and natural side. 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 skepticism, meant much too well with mankind in that he tried to relieve man's consciousness of this inherent conflict, and placed his opposing will in the space belonging to the unconscious - thus withdrawing this will from the subject's responsibility.



## References

- Appelfeld, A. (2005) *Geschichte eines Lebens*. Berlin: Rowohlt.
- Bernet, R. (1997) Husserls Begriff des Phantasiebewusstseins als Fundierung von Freuds Begriff des Unbewussten. In: C. Jamme (1997) *Grundlinien der Vernunftkritik*, S. 277-306. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
- Binswanger, L. (1957) Freuds Auffassung des Menschen im Lichte der Anthropologie. In: Ders., *Der Mensch in der Psychiatrie*. Pfullingen: Neske.
- Charbonneau, G. (1999) De quoi's'agit' l'inconscient phénoménologique? L'art du Comprendre: Herméneutique générale. *Anthropologie Philosophique. Anthropologie Phénoménologique. Daseinsanalyse* 8: 132-146.
- Eysenck H. J., Rachmann, S. (1972) *Neurosen – Ursachen and Heilmethoden*. Berlin: Deutscher Verlage der Wissenschaften.
- Freud, S. (1940a) Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse. GW Bd. 11. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Freud, S. (1940b) Das Ich and das Es. GW Bd. 13, S. 235-289. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Freud, S. (1940c) Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse. GW Bd. 15. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Freud, S. (1943) Einige Bemerkungen über den Begriff des Unbewussten in der Psychoanalyse, S. 429-439. GW Bd. 8, S. 429-439. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Freud, S. (1946) *Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten*. GW Bd. 10, S. 126-136. Frankfurt: Fischer 1946.
- Freud, S. (1957) *Studien über Hysterie* (mit J. Breuer). GW Bd. 1, S. 77-312. Frankfurt: Fischer 1952.
- Fuchs, T. (2000a) *Leib, Raum, Person. Entwurf einer phänomenologischen Anthropologie*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Fuchs, T. (2000b) *Psychopathologie von Leib and Raum. Phänomenologisch-empirische Untersuchungen zu depressiven and paranoiden Erkrankungen*. Darmstadt: Steinkopff.
- Fuchs, T. (2000c) Das Gedächtnis des Leibes. *Phänomenologische Forschungen* 5: 71-89.
- Fuchs, T. (2006a) Psychotherapie des "gelebten Raums". Eine phänomenologisch-ökologische Konzeption. *Psycho-Logik. Jahrbuch für Psychotherapie, Philosophie and Kultur* 1: 286-303.
- Fuchs, T. (2006b) Gibt eine leibliche Persönlichkeitsstruktur? Ein phänomenologisch-psychodynamischer Ansatz. *Psychodynamische Psychotherapie* (im Druck).
- Graumann, C. F. (1960) *Grundlagen einer Phänomenologie und Psychologie der Perspektivität*. De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Henry, M. (1992) *Radikale Lebensphänomenologie. Ausgewählte Studien zur Phänomenologie*, hrsg. R. Kühn. Freiburg München: Alber 1992.
- Husserl, E. (1952) *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. II. Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. Den Haag: Nijhoff.
- Kleist, H. v. (1984) *Sämtliche Erzählungen and andere Prosa*. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Lewin, K. (1969) *Grundzüge der topologischen Psychologie*. Bern: Huber.

- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of perception*. Transl. by Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1974) *Die Abenteuer der Dialektik*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1986) *Das Sichtbare und das Unsichtbare*. München: Fink.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2003) *Das Auge und der Geist. Philosophische Essays*. Meiner, Hamburg
- Plessner, H. (1975) *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Romanyshyn, R. D. (1977) Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Review* 64: 211-223.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1962) *Das Sein und das Nichts*. Reinbek/Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Schacter, D. L. (1999) *Wir sind Erinnerung. Gedächtnis und Persönlichkeit*. Reinbek/Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Scheler, M. (1983) *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1928). 10. Aufl. Bern München: Francke.
- Stern, D. N. (1991) *Tagebuch eines Babys. Was ein Kind sieht, spürt, fühlt und denkt*. München: Piper.
- Stern, D. N. (1998a) *Die Lebenserfahrungen des Säuglings*. 6. Aufl. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Fuchs  
 Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik  
 Voßstr. 4  
 D-69115 Heidelberg  
 e-mail: thomas\_fuchs@med.uni-heidelberg.de

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris 1945, S. V. – "... there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. " (Merleau-Ponty 1962, S. xi).
- <sup>2</sup> As is well known, both Husserl's "*Logische Untersuchungen*" and Freud's "*Traumdeutung*" appeared in 1900.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Freud 1940b, 253.
- <sup>4</sup> Kleist 1984. – The story is also cited by Graumann (1960, 151) as an illustration of the motivational basis of perspectivity.
- <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 " (Eysenk u. Rachmann 1972, 20).