The Asymmetry Between Corporeity and Embodiment in Merleau-Ponty’s La Nature

I. Being John Malkovich

What is the relation between perception and embodiment? Of course we can have a sense of our perception or gaze as originating in our own body, and of ourselves as being the body we inhabit, or at least of ourselves as being present in those bodies. And of course we know what we look like when we see ourselves in the mirror. But how can we be sure that the body we inhabit is really ours? Or that the hands we see in front of us have anything to do with the consciousness originating with our gaze? The strange and compelling images of a certain film illustrates this question. Imagine that you one day find a secret entrance to a little tunnel in your room, which you decide to enter. In the tunnel, you are swept away by some magic force and the door shuts behind you.

When you wake up, you see in front of you a strange pair of hands. They perform duties according to somebody else’s will, and they touch a body which you know is not yours, and yet somehow it is, because you can feel the sensation of that body. Eventually you are placed in front of a mirror and a face is staring back at you: the face of John Malkovich. You are yourself placed inside the eyes of John, momentarily trapped in his body. A few minutes later, you are swept away and thrown out in a ditch by the highway. The film is Being John Malkovich, directed by Spike Jonze. It illustrates the problems of this article: the question of the relation between embodiment and perception.

The fact that we could even imagine gaze and body to be separate entities shows that perception and embodiment are not necessarily symmetrically correlated. In order to see the world, we have to be situated in it, and engage in it from a certain viewpoint which we cannot fully detach from our bodies. This is what I would like to call a situation of
embodiment. Perception cannot be detached from a particular situation of embodiment. But we cannot fully comprehend or perceive the situation of our own embodiment. There is a significant difference between the experience of the lived body of the embodied being, and the facticity of that body itself: an experience of an inescapable weight which Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls corporeity. Corporeity is the mass, the weight, or the flesh of the body, which we can infer from a situation of embodiment, but which lies beyond the limit of our own perception. The disjunction between the two shows itself not least through the fantasy figured in Being John Malkovich. We could actually imagine that we have another body. But in order to perceive a world at all, we have to be a gaze, a touch or a body inhabiting that world. We cannot imagine that we would altogether lack a certain corporeal mass if we are to experience things: be it in the form of a single eye, as in that which people talk about as extra-corporeal experiences when they ”see” themselves in a situation near death from above.

It seems to me as if Merleau-Ponty considers the difference between embodiment – even if he does not use that term himself – and corporeity to be quite an important one, not only in his earlier work on perception, and in Le Visible et L’invisible (1964) but also in La Nature (1994), a course which has been published posthumously in the form of notes. I will therefore try to develop this point and I will do so in two moves: first, I want to show that the relation between embodiment and corporeity is asymmetrical, and, more importantly perhaps, that the proposition is not just a banal statement. Secondly, I want to argue that this very asymmetry opens up for important questions concerning subjectivity in the field of psychoanalysis, even if Merleau-Ponty is ostensibly trying to move away from the notion of the subject. His discussions concern a form of perception which could be called ”pre-objectal” and ”pre-subjective”. But I would like to suggest that they could also affect discursive theories of subjectivity, such as they have been developed in psychoanalysis for instance. Even if we do not agree that meaning is lived in the same way that Merleau-Ponty believes, and even if we do not agree with the fact that embodiment constitutes a primary locus of meaning, Merleau-Ponty makes us aware of the fact that we speak from a position of lived embodiment. The fact that we inhabit a living body which constrains and limits us as well as affects and moves us cannot be disassociated from our use of language.

Only the last part of the course-notes in La Nature is written by
Merleau-Ponty himself. They concern the relation between body and logos. The focus is set on the human body in order to develop an ontology which proceeds from the interaction between human body and nature. The argument is similar to the discussion of the chiasm in *Le Visible et L’invisible*: the world is a structure of meanings which can only be thought from a situation of embodiment. In *La Nature*, however, Merleau-Ponty continues to discuss a notion of life which was only hinted at in his earlier work: the world is a structure of meanings determined above all by the life of the organisms that inhabit it. Passing through a range of positions that can make such a statement meaningful, Merleau-Ponty elaborates the role of nature in Schelling’s philosophy, the *élan vital* in Bergson, the *libido* in Freud and so on. I will give particular attention to the latter. His ideas on Freud seem strange at times, and have been criticized by psychoanalysts. But these shortcomings could perhaps be called productive misreadings rather than mere misunderstandings. Rather than simply being an erroneous account of the Freudian unconscious, Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on the ”pre-subjective” function of the *libido* gives an interesting twist to the structure of the psychoanalytic subject.

II. The Asymmetry Between Embodiment and Corporeity

The idea that the relation between embodiment and corporeity is asymmetrical is seen, to begin with, in Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserl. Husserl shows us that there is not simply a body and a self, but a body and a self which inhabits the body. Through my body I inhabit the world of meaning. The body could perhaps be conceivable without a self. But the self is a product of embodiment. There could not be any self without a body. It is this asymmetrical relation which can be perceived in Husserl as well as in Freud. The asymmetrical relation between body and self could not be rephrased in a symmetrical way. It does not concern, for instance, how the body can be both subject and object. The body itself is deprived of reflexive capacities. Instead it is a ”thing” through which we measure all other things.¹ In this way, the body could be said to be situated between nature and logos.² It is neither secondary nor primary to consciousness – there is a circular rather than a causal relation between the investments motivated by the body and their effects on consciousness.³

The embodied being in *La Nature* is not a subject, but a bundle of sensory experiences. Merleau-Ponty does not talk about these experiences
as a form of subjectivity but as an aesthesiology, which means: sensori-al human system in its integrity. We can only experience from an embodied position, and therefore, it is the function of the body which opens our access to the world. And yet the body does not simply constitute an organic part of nature of which it has knowledge. The fact that we can only relate to the world as embodied, living beings does not necessarily mean that our bodies become available to us as living structures in the same way that nature becomes available to us as a living structure. The enigmatic character of the body originates in the fact that it is situated between nature and language. As such it is a symbolism (fr. symbolisme), the very measure of all structures and not just a structure among other structures. For example, the structure of language as we know it through signs of communication can never be wholly detached from the function of the body. Before signifier and signified is put in place, the body communicates through “natural” language. For Merleau-Ponty gestures are forms of expression. A hand moving, waving, signalling, a body moving, twisting constitutes gestures that can underline, underscore or contradict what is being said. But ”natural” language can be considered at a level which is even more primordial. A sense organ like an eye or a hand is already a language because it fills the function of interrogation and/or response. What Merleau-Ponty calls interrogation, here, is movement, and the response is perception, which for Merleau-Ponty constitutes a response to movement. The body is, in other words, already in a situation where it communicates with itself: touching itself, responding to itself, as well as to other bodies. Through its senses, the body functions as a passage to an exterior world. Sensory experience inaugurates a relation to the outside. But at the same time, something remains intransparent. There is a shadow left, a point which never presents itself to the senses. The intransparent point is constituted by the mass or weight of the body itself, which we are unable to feel, touch or grasp through our senses, even though we may be vaguely aware of it. The asymmetrical relation between body as corporeity and embodiment would then lie in the fact that something remains opaque. The body has a double nature. It is an enigma, deriving from the fact that it is both open and closed. Open to the world: the others constitute “our flesh”. At the same time, it remains closed to itself.

These claims are suggestive and difficult to assess. What does it mean to say that ”the others constitute our flesh”, for instance? If we have read Merleau-Ponty’s text on the chiasm, we will recognise the argument
about the reversible relation between our gaze on the world and the gaze of the other. The other sees us seeing: but the fact that he sees our gaze confirms that there is a blind spot. We cannot perceive the point from which we see him seeing us, the origin of our own gaze remains unknown to us. At the same time, the world unfolds in the chiastic intertwining between my gaze and his. The unfolding of the world as space and depth, or as ”flesh” takes place between my gaze and his. While my body may be the measure of things, it can only acquire its own flesh through the gaze of the other. The weight of our bodies, the point which we are unable to assess, is not the same thing as that flesh. But in order for us to become flesh through the gaze of the other, our bodies need a mass, and our gaze need an origin. This mass or this origin constitutes our blind spot. At the same time, it exposes us, inescapably, to the world. That which is closed onto ourselves is open to others, makes us vulnerable. In *La Nature* the communication between bodies, between my body and his, or the relation of intercorporeity is not neutral. It is invested with desires, powers and fears, with ambiguity and aggressivity. The body is not just an instrument for perception, but for more ambiguous experiences as well. While the sensorial system of the body opens it to the world, the opaque spot is also that which makes it vulnerable to the investments and projections of others. The body is a symbolism not in the sense of representation, of being a sign for another. It is, rather, the expression of another: the libidinal introjection of another in me. In order to explore the ambiguity of intercorporeal relations, Merleau-Ponty resorts to Freud in the perhaps most exhaustive account that he has given of psychoanalysis so far.

### III. The Life of the Embodied Subject

Merleau-Ponty’s ”phenomenology of life” in *La Nature* discusses the vitalist philosophical tradition on the one hand, and on the other the life-sciences of his time, medicine and biology, and in particular theories of the development of the embryo and the human being. The embodied being, as the only possible being who could have any knowledge or experience of the world, is here, above all, a living organism. Merleau-Ponty describes the properties of life which in his own mind must or should affect philosophical discourse, and the task of philosophy itself – the situation of a lived and sensed embodiment is here a primary condition for the intertwining between body and *logos*. 
Life, in *La Nature*, is a "structure" rather than a flow or movement. With "structure" Merleau-Ponty does not mean simply spatial organisation, or *logos* – symbolic organisation. The biological being is both, i.e. both mass and "natural" language. *Logos* is determined by life itself, the field of meaning which we inhabit is a product of senses that are in the service of life itself. The human body, which senses the world, is structured according to the perpetuity of life. Merleau-Ponty wants to think the life of the embodied biological being as a development towards harmony and unity, a notion which he puts forward after having considered the development of the embryo, for instance, and its pre-disposition as a human being. In order to do this, he introduces his problematic but productive use of psychoanalysis.

Merleau-Ponty uses psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic notion of the drive in order to examine the "in-between" status of the notion of life-"structures". To this end, he employs the Freudian notion of the *libido*. The aesthesiological body – the body of the senses – needs to be completed with a study of the libidinal body. Unlike psychoanalysis, Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of the *libido* in pretty much the same way as desire. Desire, or the *libido*, constitutes the coming together of the flesh of my world with the flesh of the other: a proposal which tells us that the *libido* has a transcendental function in *La Nature* in the same way that perception has in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The body we inhabit is a libidinal body. The life-structures we inhabit are determined by libidinal investments. The *libido* constitutes a relation between world and body. As such it creates life-structures. Life-structures are the meaningful structures we inhabit, open not just to linguistic signification but to our senses:

"...the body as power to *Einfühlung* is already desire, *libido*, projection – introjection, identification – the aesthesiological structure of the human is therefore a libidinal structure, perception a mode of desire, related to being rather than knowledge".

Sensoriality is not just capacity to feel and react to the world. The sensorial system, our ways of touching and being touched, is invested with desire. The link between *libido* and desire lies in the body’s capacity to feel pleasure and displeasure. Pleasure constitutes a kind of "quale", its sensorial quality is impossible to break apart and analyse in any other terms. The *libido* being in search of pleasure, it makes the body into a polymorphous tool with its tentacles motivated by pleasure. Pleasure
“opens” our bodies to the experiences of the outside. But the pleasure principle is also “haunted” by the reality principle, Merleau-Ponty remarks. Here, he reminds us that Freud contrasted the pleasure principle with the reality principle, which puts a limit to the search for pleasure. In his discussion of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, Merleau-Ponty states, Freud found the basic principles that govern the corporeal schema. The corporeal schema, in turn, determines the libidinal character of life structures as such.

Merleau-Ponty has incorporated Freud’s notion of the libido into his work together with Klein’s notions of projection and introjection. The libido challenges a dual system: it mediates between sensoriality, or the turn towards the outside and corporeity, the return of the world through the senses of the body. The turn constitutes a form of projection, whereas the return is a kind of introjection. The libidinal life-structures could be said to constitute a form of desire. Desire implies a kind of intentional incorporation. Our desire is directed towards the body of the other. Merleau-Ponty speaks about intentionality as a mode of intercorporeity, rather than intersubjectivity. Here, he explicitly links his notion of the libidinal body with the psychoanalytic subject, or the psychoanalytic theory of the subject of desire. Who is this subject of desire, he asks, or who is the je or self which is desiring according to psychoanalysis? The answer to that question can only be: the body, and it is this body which he allows to explore even further than psychoanalysis has managed to do.

The libidinisation of the body in La Nature has its effect on the way Merleau-Ponty describes the reversible relation between self and others. Only through the visibility of the world is it possible to draw the conclusion of there being an invisible point through which it is seen: the perception of corporeal embodiment. In Le Visible et L’invisible, the intertwining between self and other is constituted through a reversible gaze. We orient ourselves in the world through the mutual crossing of the touched and the tangible, the visible and the invisible. Vision is always inhabited by a fundamental narcissism. The world around me is always inhabited by that gaze. The light of the visible world in which I myself can see and be seen has its source in this very gaze. ”The flesh” mediating the gaze gives shape, form, volume to the outside world, gives it weight and depth. The body is part of things, just as the world is a universal form of ”flesh”. The body is sensible to itself which means that it is a "difference without contradiction, that divergence (écart) between
the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret”. Being generates itself in an image resembling a self-birth: ”making of an embryo a newborn infant, of a visible a seer, and of a body a mind, or at least a flesh”. In a circular movement between embodiment and world, life itself produces the meaningful structures of the world which we experience.

In *La Nature*, that intertwinement has been redefined from being a gaze to becoming an intercorporeal relation of projection and introjection: it has become invested with desire and motivated by something else than the mere experience of the senses. The others constitute my exterior and I am their interior. They alienate me and I incorporate them. The circularity of gaze, touch, consciousness is therefore not merely directed by what is out there, in relation to ourselves, but of the libidinal investments over which I, myself, am never wholly the master. The body is vulnerable to the entrapments of the outside. Because it is the site of libidinal investments, the body is open to the outside, and also to the pleasures and pains, to the enjoyment and suffering which is caused by such a turn towards the outside. The libidinal investments also trap it. The open character of the body makes it vulnerable and prey to the seductions of the world.

Such a vulnerability or openness gives witness to the fact that there is an ecstatic relation between self and the sensorial experience of the outside world. One of the ambitions of *La Nature* is the exploration of motives behind the intercorporeal relations that are described. Psychoanalysis, in its exploration of the unconscious, can teach us what these motives are. But psychoanalysis has not itself understood the scope of its discoveries, and has a mistaken notion concerning the unconscious. Freud thinks of the unconscious as an internal ”picture”. But the real phenomenon of the unconscious, as Merleau-Ponty considers it, originates in the ecstatic relation between self and world. In other words, it is made up of the motives and desires which constitute the movements between projection and introjection. If psychoanalysis has any thing to teach us, it is precisely how these motives function. The most fruitful concept invented by psychoanalysis, therefore, is that of the *libido*.

**IV. Corporeity**

Merleau-Ponty assumes that the aim of all life is more life. Life strives towards production of differences and new life forms. But the body is
situated between language and nature and is not simply an integral part of organic life. Not sheer or raw nature, but a symbolism, which already gives it a certain foreign quality: it is the expression of an other. The body is not a presence but a trace, a statement which makes clear that the body is not just a living structure but also a symbol.24 This is why the monolithic position given to the life of the embodied subject is a problem, especially considered from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. The importance of the body, and the insistence of the body in our discursive practices, does not necessarily lie in the fact that it constitutes a form of life, at least not according to psychoanalysis. A Freudian quote from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* could be inserted: namely, that the aim of all life is death.

For Freud, the death-drive means that all life seems to want to return to an immanent immobility or passivity, a state of inertia, nonsensibility or death. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* refers to operations that are more primitive than the search for pleasure, and independant of consciousness. We all know about the little boy playing the game of *Fort-Da*; mastering anxiety through the symbolic staging of the return. The urge in organic life to return to the inert forces inscribes a trace, through a compulsion of repetition which makes symbolisation possible. So the drive which makes symbolisation possible is the deathdrive, and not the *libido*. The deathdrive is the repetition motivating the symbol in place of the absent thing. This process also represents a moment in which the body itself becomes an absence in relation to the sign, and foreign to itself in this respect. For Merleau-Ponty, symbolisation is inherent in the structures of life itself. Although he says that the body is never present to itself in any other form than as a trace, the trace is not placed there through an absence but through the structure of life itself. The corporeal object is nothing but a trace, the substitute for a passed moment, existing only in consciousness. The trace is the past, an *enjambement* (overflow) of a life that has passed.25 Merleau-Ponty likens the trace of the body to a fossile, which we can study and interpret. The body itself is never possible to understand in its actuality. The body as object is never actualised in the aesthetological experience of the world. It constitutes a kind of ”dumb” or hidden moment in the structures of life which it mediates.

One sees this also in the example of the touché-touchant in *Le Visible et L’invisible*: when one hand touches the other, there is a moment when the touched hand ceases to be touching and vice versa: ”la réciprocité éclate où elle va naître”26. One may consider this moment as if one hand
becomes a thing for the other. But the fact that the hand becomes thing does not stop it from participating in the touching. On the contrary, the reversibility shows that there is always an inescapable duplicity involved in the situation of embodiment: the body is both a vehicle in my apprehension of things and a thing onto itself. It constitutes a relation of the for-itself – à soi – which is per definition déchiré or torn.

Not only does my corporeal limitation make me perceive the object from a certain standpoint, it also makes my object into a potential thing for the other. The body can only catch itself from the outside. It is the weight or insistence of the phenomenon itself which makes the body into a kind of consciousness. Reflection originates in the body as being itself, the reversible move which Merleau-Ponty regards as the coming towards itself of being. It happens through sensation and touch.

But as we have seen, the fact that we cannot think subjectivity beyond a situation of embodiment does not necessarily give us many indications about what the libidinal body actually is. On the contrary. Being the very site of sensory experience, the body remains opaque to itself. It preconditions our involvement with the world, but as such, it is not available to any kind of knowledge which is not filtered through that involvement in turn. The body is situated in a field of introjectory and projectory investments, which for Merleau-Ponty designates a lived situation of embodiment. The libidinal body is only available to us as trace – cut out through the same life-structures that inhabits nature, but it is not knowable to us in the same way that nature is knowable to us, because it preconditions our perception of the structures of nature itself. It is perhaps for this reason as well that Merleau-Ponty says that the libido is in some way fantastic, which makes us think of Freud’s famous designation of the drives as the mythology of psychoanalysis. As a trace, the body is given a certain inescapable quality of a ”thing”. If there is an asymmetrical relation in the universe of Merleau-Ponty, then, it seems to me as if it is situated not between self and others – the reciprocal movement of projection and incorporation seems to belie that – but between self and body. To this extent, the ek-static model of the body which he works with resembles the psychoanalytic model of subjectivity. In this model, the other is introjected, projected, and these processes can take on a very somatic expression, affect the quality and investment of someone’s voice and so forth. The body is a symbolism. Not only a space that I inhabit, but an entity of libidinal investments for others. The body is a symbolism: the expression of another, and the expression of the libidinal intro-
jection of another in me. This situation contributes to make it not just an organ for inhabiting the world, but also into an entity which is split in itself.

V. Discursivity and Embodiment

The proposal that there is a disjunction between what it means to live as an embodied subjectivity and what it means to have a body is not just a banal statement. Many theories of discourse-analysis, for instance Lacan’s psychoanalytic discourse-analysis, disregards Merleau-Ponty’s views on embodiment because of its recourse to suggestions of ”natural” symbolism, rather than discursive tools. For Foucault, the body constitutes a kind of subjection, it is subjected to certain norms and expectations which it can do nothing but repeat and affirm. From such a point of view it is subjection, and not libidinal forces which forms sexuality. The reductive formula of such a position would be to say that the body is culturally determined. Another reduction would be the assumption that the subject is this culturally determined body, nothing beyond and nothing else than the discourse which has determined it. From such a position there is reason to be wary of accepting any elements of subjectivity that could be described as ”pre-linguistic”. These ”pre-discursive” areas are in fact determined by the discourses they claim to precede. Such a position excludes, naturally, the possibility of anything determining your identity that would be ”pre-personal”, such as Merleau-Ponty’s libidinal body, for instance. But in my view, the asymmetry between embodiment and corporeity posited by Merleau-Ponty shows that the notion of a ”pre-linguistic” domain is an important tool in determining the context in which our own spoken language is born, a context which is not merely discursive but also lived and felt.

Charles Taylor has considered the relation between identity and the pre-personal conditions of embodiment that Merleau-Ponty is describing in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Taylor is interested in the kind of ”pre-personal” and ”pre-discursive” conditions that Merleau-Ponty presents, proving on the one hand that the subject is engaged and active in the field of meaning to which he belongs, and on the other that he remains conditioned by that field. Taylor reads Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodied agency as above all an elaboration of epistemological pseudo-problems. For Taylor, Merleau-Ponty’s position on the embodied subject presents a kind of rectification in the same way that Kant did in his transcendental
deduction. In showing the phenomenological weight of the body to be a condition for all possible forms of knowledge, Merleau-Ponty avoids pseudo-problems such as skepticism, solipsism, idealism etc. The subject of knowledge is not just part of the world, it is interacting with the world. Perception is here a kind of action or praxis which can never be reduced to a passive stream of impressions. To be in the world means to be in a field of meanings. This means not only opening up onto the world as an unlimited space of possibilities, but also responding to actual limits and constraints. The embodied subject is an active respondent, an agent. There is no perception without interaction. There is no sheer presencing of the world in front of myself as a passive recipient of impressions of sense-data, only active interaction.

For Taylor, Merleau-Ponty poses questions of pre-discursive and pre-personal notions of identity and personhood, which have to be asked if we are not going to end up with a flat and uninteresting notion of agency. The body, here, has an ambiguous significance. From one point of view "it is integral to this identity, while on the other hand it constitutes a prepersonal background which contrasts with the directions and commitments of our truly personal life". From another point of view, the body is not just a condition for my projects, it presents a contrast to them. Taylor rightly sees that the coiling over which Merleau-Ponty describes between perceiving subject and perceived world has very little to do with narcissism. On the contrary, it brings with it a certain strangeness to ourselves. Our bodily situation can never be wholly reconciled with our identity, it constitutes a kind of surplus or remainder which makes us vulnerable to the gaze of the world. From this perspective, the world is not just open to us as embodied subjects, it is also a threat.

However, there is reason to ask if the asymmetry between corporeity and embodiment which is suggested is radical enough. Merleau-Ponty’s elaboration of the notion of the libido, for instance, suggests that desire is congruent with the sensitivity of the body. As we all know, however, this is not always the case. One such example would be, for instance, an experience of being trapped in somebody else’s body. This is the experience of a transsexual, for instance, who may have the desire of a woman, and the body of a man, or vice versa. The confusing situation of such a position consists, of course, in that you look at the world from a certain viewpoint, with the desire of a woman, while the world looks at you as if you are a man. Your own body is therefore radically foreign to you, and you experience your desire as being separated from your body, even
hostile to it. The disjunction between embodiment and corporeity does allow for considerations of why you feel so and so about your body, and why your sexuality is determined in such or such way.

Merleau-Ponty shows, I believe, why our subjectivity is necessarily conditioned by a situation of embodiment. The relation of asymmetry is not situated between me and the other, but between me and my body. It does not close the space of interaction with others, but rather opens it up at a level where we are, to a certain extent, strangers to ourselves. In my mind, this makes the demand for selfknowledge, where we are supposed to come up with some kind of identity, quite difficult, and perhaps not so pertinent. The question ”who am I” does not come across as the most important one. Instead, we are induced to ask: from which position do I speak? You can in principle try to imagine that you, or your consciousness, becomes transferred onto someone else´s body, which is what the film*Being John Malkovich* is about. But you cannot imagine that you would be able to grasp yourself behind the invisible point from which you experience the world. In other words, you cannot get behind the invisible point which constitutes the perspective of your own consciousness. In many theories of discourse-analysis, such as those of Laclau, Butler, Zizek, for instance, embodiment is often considered secondary or even irrelevant in relation to the symbolic position of the subject, in and as language. I do believe, however, that Merleau-Ponty´s notion of embodiment, and the asymmetrical position he gives to being a body on the one hand and having a body on the other, does posit a challenge to these theories of discourse which work with the notion of language as nothing but a system of signs, and makes the subject into its product, a position of subjection. Merleau-Ponty poses a challenge to these theories because he shows that our own embodiment represents an invisible limit which we cannot transcend. Therefore, it becomes important to become aware of the limits of subjectivity, without reducing it to the the function of signification.
Notes:

2 Ibid., p. 290.
3 The idea that the body is neither primary nor secondary is a quote taken from Beauvoir’s *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*. Ibid., p. 273.
4 Ibid., p. 278: "...le corps humain ne peut se comprendre que comme corps percevant [...] si la perception n’était qu’un *Je pense que*, la perception ne me donnerait pas *l’Ineinander* homme – son corps – la Nature.” In other words, the object of perception is intertwined with the point from which it is perceived.
5 Ibid., p. 273.
6 Ibid., p. 273.
7 Ibid., p. 281.
8 Ibid., p. 338.
9 Ibid., p. 272.
10 Ibid., p. 287.
11 "...le corps comme pouvoir d’Einfühlung est déjà désir, libido, projection – introjection, identification – la structure esthésiologique du corps human est donc une structure libidinale, la perception un mode de désir, un rapport d’être et non de connaissance.” Ibid., p. 272.
12 Ibid., p. 348.
13 Ibid., p. 281.
14 Ibid., p. 288.
15 Ibid., p. 272.
16 Ibid., p. 279
18 Ibid., p. 137
19 Ibid., pp. 135-36
20 Ibid., p. 147
21 Merleau-Ponty 1994, p. 346
22 Rather than being an internal "image" as the Freudian unconscious, Merleau-Ponty says. The idea that the Freudian unconscious is a picture is one example of a misreading which turns out to be productive in the end (1994, pp. 351-2). Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the unconscious up to *Le Visible et l’invisible* has been considered by Jean Pontalis and M.C. Dillon among others as the invisible horizon of perception. It is inaccessible, but lacks the distorting factors operating in Freud’s unconscious. As J.-B. Pontalis points out in "La position du prob-
It is absorbed into Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the pre-personal. Pontalis’ own position, however, is that a Merleau-Pontyan notion of the unconscious completes Freud’s objectification of it in his analysis of dreams, for instance. Merleau-Ponty’s idea of an intersubjective field of vision completes the Freudian analysis, rather than refuting it: such a field constitutes the origin of language and it organizes any subjective use of a linguistic structure. The unconscious becomes, from such a viewpoint, not a separate domain, but a domain intertwined with consciousness, not the “other scene” of our existence but its “other side” (ibid., p 102). M.C. Dillon has used Pontalis’ text in order to explain the organizing function of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the unconscious: “...it is not the case that an alien or demonic intelligence dwells in the depths of the psyche and deliberately (or mechanically) obscures its emissaries, it is rather the case that reflection, in its attempt to retrieve and explore an experience, tends to modify the mode of givenness of the experience” (Dillon, “The Unconscious”, in Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), pp. 69-83; cf. p 76). In other words, the Merleau-Pontyan unconscious is here considered as a background which makes perception possible but which never presents itself. Its influence on the perceiving process is that of direction, not of elaboration. As Rudolph Bernet has shown, however, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the invisible has a function which is more readily comparable to the unconscious, at least the way Lacan has presented it. The invisible does not only inform the perception, it has a transformative effect on the spectator. Caught in the images of a painting, for instance, the spectator is effectively caught in a gaze which is not merely a narcissistic reflection of his own looking at the painting, but a radical displacement of his own gaze (Bernet (1999), ”Voir et être vu”, in La Revue d’esthétique, nr 36/99 (Paris: Jean-Michel Place), p 37-49; cf. p 43).

The notion of the unconscious being a production of such an ek-static relation between self and the world is used, for instance in Laplanche’s elaboration of Freud’s text in Life and Death in Psychoanalysis. In a diagram of Freud’s Introduction to Narcissism Laplanche shows that the ego is constructed at the same time as the object in which it invests. The formation of the ego is dependent upon the object in which it invests: the formation being a construction in which the ec-static relation lies in its dependancy on the object. See ”Ego and Narcissism” in Jean Laplanche (1976): Life and Death in Psychoanalysis, trans. by J. Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), pp. 66-84.


Ibid., p. 343.
26 Ibid., p. 285.
27 Ibid., p. 340.
28 Ibid., p. 281.