



Sexuality and meaning in Freud and Merleau-Ponty

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(Accepted for publication 23 September 2015)

This article analyzes the links between the conception of the body and of sexuality found in Freud and Merleau-Ponty. The French philosopher refers to Freud in various of his works, and performs a reading of Freud through which he rescues the meaning that the latter gives to sexuality as he integrates it into the totality of the person, without making it into a blind or merely instinctive force. As a consequence of this integration, the notions of the unconscious and of instinct or drive are interpreted in the light of the meaning or signification that they have in the person's behavior. Merleau-Ponty's notion of pre-reflective knowledge plays a decisive role in this understanding of meaning. In the same way, it allows important contemporary analysts to use these studies in their therapeutic work and also in psychological studies.

Keywords: corporality, sexuality, meaning, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, psychoanalysis

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze certain aspects common to Freud and Merleau-Ponty in light of their understanding of the body as a sexed being. We believe that both authors, with different nuances, are in opposition to the dominant currents of thought of the early 20th century and the years following, which view human corporeality and behavior, in general, from either a mechanistic or intellectualist perspective. The merely physical or physiological conception of the body, on the one hand, and the disjunction between corporeality and the so-called higher faculties (using classical language), on the other, are unable to explain real human behavior. Freud and Merleau-Ponty rescue the meaning given to sexuality as they integrate it into the totality of the person, without making it into a blind or merely instinctive force. Merleau-Ponty takes advantage of psychological experiences, in order to show that the criticized explanations actually reflect pathological behavior better than normal behavior. Merleau-Ponty sees that the theory of Freud is ideal for use in phenomenology, especially because of the latter's understanding of corporeality as an essential interpretative key for human existence.

We have structured our discussion of sexuality in Freud and Merleau-Ponty around two issues which make it possible to establish a dialogue between the two thinkers. First of all we will look at the integration of

erotic perception in the whole human existence. Secondly, we will investigate the topic of sexuality as bearing meaning in contrast with a vision of sexuality as a behavioral infrastructure. The notion of meaning illuminates, from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's thought, the Freudian understanding of both the unconscious as well as instinct. It also permits a precise delimitation of the points of contact between Freud and Merleau-Ponty. We will also, as a secondary objective, shed light on the influence of Merleau-Ponty on some contemporary psychoanalyst thought. This influence has been recognized by important analysts and theorists, who have created or shaped schools with disciples in various parts of the world. For example, Willy and Madelaine Baranger in South America, and Jaques Lacan in Europe.¹ More recently others have also gotten on the bandwagon: Winnicott (1954, 1994), Civitarese and Ferro (2012), Naf-fah (2013) and Lutereau (2011), among others. Merleau-Ponty contributed to overcome certain determinist or intellectualist understandings of Freud's metapsychology, with a better interpretation of his writings. Over the course of our article we will enter in detail into distinct aspects of this influence.

Merleau-Ponty focuses most directly on human sexuality in the chapter of *The phenomenology of perception* (2012) dedicated to the body as a sexed being. Both in this chapter and in various of his other works he refers to Freud while simultaneously performing a reading of his ideas that coincides with the centrality that Merleau-Ponty gives to the body, as well as with the importance of the link between pre-reflective forms of knowledge² and the unconscious.

We see an evolution that begins with his earliest writing, *The structure of behaviour* (1957), in which Merleau-Ponty criticizes Freud for his causalist explanations, in which the body is considered as the cause of effects that manifest themselves in a superior part of the person. This vision changes in later works, which reflect a better understanding of Freud's ideas.³ It is clear that Merleau-Ponty did not read Freud just once, but reread him, extracting the essence of his doctrine.⁴ One of the achievements that he attributes to Freud is that of giving sexuality a meaning, and to make it part of the biography of the person. This recognition goes hand in hand with an understanding of sexuality as a vital force that goes beyond genitality. Merleau-Ponty, in referring to the libido in particular, does not consider it to be an instinct, but rather:

¹We have opted to emphasize the work of the Barangers because Lacan's writings require an attention that exceeds the objectives of this article.

²Pintos Peñaranda has encountered references to Freud in 12 works by Merleau-Ponty, see 2009, p. 52.

³For a more complete vision of this evolution, see Pintos Peñaranda (2009) and Lutereau (2011, p. 284).

⁴Referring to the appropriate way to read Freud, he writes: "[we must] learn to read Freud as we would read a classic, that is, taking the words and their theoretical components which we find useful not in their lexical and common meaning, but rather according to the meaning that they acquire in the interior of the experience that they speak of, an experience which is much more within our power than we have supposed" (Merleau-Ponty, 2000, p. 283). Lutereau emphasizes that Merleau-Ponty stayed close to psychoanalysis: "There could be an agreement that M. Merleau-Ponty has been the philosopher from the phenomenologist tradition who most kept up a dialogue with psychoanalysis" (2011, p. 284).

[I]t is the subject's general power of adhering to different milieus, of determining himself through different experiences, and of acquiring structures of behavior: the libido is what ensures that a man has a history. If the sexual history of a man gives the key to his life, this is because his manner of being toward the world – that is, toward time and toward others – is projected in his sexuality.

(Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 161)

For his part, Freud also evolved in his conception of sexuality, beginning with his work *Project for a scientific psychology* (see 1950 [1895], pp. 281–294) where he proposed that the body, and in particular the nervous system, are the seat of mental processes. In this period, he understood mental functioning as a product of a sum of energy in motion. Later he developed the topographic model, according to which the psychic apparatus begins as a simple structure that must undergo a process of development in order to reach its definitive development. His research on the effects and products of originally repressed fantasies led him to later formulate the theory of psychosexual development and the corresponding theory of instincts.⁵

In the context of this understanding he defined sexuality as an instinct that organizes each stage of development in a successive manner. He labeled these stages 'oral', 'anal' and 'phallic', all of which preceded the definitive 'genital' organization that corresponded to adolescence. Each of these stages is defined biologically by the preponderance of the zone of the body that experiences pleasure. In his work *The ego and the id and other works*, Freud developed the so-called 'structural' model, where he describes the mind as being made up of three substructures: the id, the ego and the superego, which develop over the course of the first five or six years of life, the period at the end of which the mind culminates its constitution with the resolution of the Oedipus complex (see Freud, 1923a, pp. 3–63). These three psychic structures continually interact in a dynamic relationship, and the perceptions deriving from the body itself provide the substrate upon which these other structures are built. Freud's principal findings concerning sexuality were presented in *An outline of psycho-analysis and other works*, written during the last year of his life. Its principal findings are summarized as follows:

Sexual life does not begin only at puberty, but starts with plain manifestations soon after birth. It is necessary to distinguish sharply between the concepts of "sexual" and "genital": the former is the wider concept and includes many activities that have nothing to do with the genitals. Sexual life includes the function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body – a function which is subsequently brought into the service of reproduction. The two functions often fail to coincide completely.

Freud, (1937a, p. 151)

The evolution of Freud's thought in regards to these various theories follows a guiding thread: the integration of sexuality in the person as a whole. Merleau-Ponty incorporates this idea into his understanding of the body and human sexuality. It is not part of this paper, to judge if Merleau-

⁵We employ this translation of the Freudian concept of *Triebe*, following Strachey.

Ponty's interpretation of Freud's doctrine is correct or not. We will establish some of the coincidences between Freud and Merleau-Ponty in regards to this issue.

Erotic perception as linked to the totality of the person

In the *Phenomenology of perception* Merleau-Ponty has the central purpose of affirming the incarnation of consciousness and of the ego, thereby opposing the Cartesian model in which "consciousness is ego-centered and the body is a part of that universal machine that is the *res extensa*" (García, 2008, pp. 137–148). As a result, he emphasizes the idea of the "lived body" or "own body" and of its primordial unity, distinguishing it from the body as object: we do not live our bodies as biology, anatomy or physiology describe them, nor as a representation or an image. The body is a primordial unity that perceives as a whole: "But I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 151). There is no separation between the "somatic" and the "psychic", but rather there is the original unity of an organism which, insofar as it is a living being, perceives.

The affirmation of unity between mind and body runs through the entirety of Merleau-Ponty's thought. In an international conference held in Geneva in 1951 he was asked to summarize the progress made by philosophical investigation regarding the human being over the previous 50 years. His response, which he published in his article "Man and adversity", breaks down the differences between body and mind:

Our century has wiped out the dividing line between "body" and "mind", and sees human life as through and through mental and corporeal, always based upon the body and always (even in its most carnal modes) interested in relationships between persons. For many thinkers at the close of nineteenth century, the body was a bit of matter, a network of mechanisms. The twentieth century has restored and deepened the notion of flesh, that is, of animate body.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 226–227)⁶

In this context, sexuality is understood as integrated into the person as a complete entity. Our genital organs, which are an aspect of our sexuality, are not 'simply coordinated', because the connection between the parts of the body and its functions do not come about slowly and by accumulation, but rather with a signification: "our body is not an object for an 'I think': it is a totality of lived significations that moves toward its equilibrium" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 155) or towards a new reorganization of this equilibrium, because each new experience that is integrated into the body enriches its significations. Erotic perception, which is linked to life, looks more like a work of art in which it is not possible to distinguish the expression from that which is expressed. Both the body and the work of art manifest or radiate their signification without abandoning their temporal and spatial place (see Merleau-Ponty, 2012, pp. 152–153).

⁶In French Merleau-Ponty uses the word *esprit*, which in this context has been traditionally translated into English by *mind*.

This is an important point of coincidence between Merleau-Ponty and Freud, since neither reduces the person to his or her sexual structure, but rather they discover in this structure a form by which the body understands itself and becomes linked with others. Sexuality, as we have already mentioned, is a dimension that involves personal being in a way that goes beyond its merely genital function. In *Beyond the pleasure principle*, Freud clarifies the distinction between the genital and the sexual, a distinction having to do with affectivity in a broad sense: “The concept of sexuality, and at the same time of the sexual instinct, had, it is true, to be extended so as to cover many things which could not be classed under the reproductive function; and this caused no little hubbub in an austere, respectable or merely hypocritical world” (1920, p. 50; see also pp. 1–64). It also transcends the reproductive function, which is one of its meanings, because it expresses the entire person. Freud was not always understood when he gave sexuality such an importance in all human activities, as he indicates in the Prologue to the fourth edition of *Three essays on sexuality*:

It must also be remembered, however, that some of what this book contains – its insistence on the importance of sexuality in all human achievements and the attempt that it makes at enlarging the concept of sexuality – has from the first provided the strongest motives for the resistance against psychoanalysis. People have gone so far in their search for high-sounding catchwords as to talk of the pansexualism of psychoanalysis and to raise the senseless charge against it of explaining everything by sex.

(Freud, 1901, p. 133)

From a more general perspective, we see that corporeality plays an important part in the understanding of the person. Freud alludes to the idea of a “corporeal ego” in order to emphasize the importance of the body in the formation of the *ego*. But his theory of the libido is what expresses most clearly the role of sexuality in the complete person. He understands it as a basic vital force that, because of its omnipresence, extends the erogenous zones to the entire body. He affirms this in *The theory of instincts*:

There can be no question but that the libido has somatic sources, that it streams to the ego from various organs and parts of the body. This is most clearly seen in the case of that portion of the libido which, because of its instinctual goal, is described as sexual excitation. The most prominent of the parts of the body from which this libido arises are known by the name of “erotogenic zones”, though in fact the whole body is an erotogenic zone of this kind.

(Freud, 1937b, p. 150)

Freud, conscious of the rejection that this idea had received in his time, explained that “Moreover, what psycho-analysis called sexuality was by no means identical with the impulsion towards a union of the two sexes or towards producing a pleasurable sensation in the genitals; it had far more resemblance to the all-inclusive and all-preserving Eros of Plato’s *Symposium*” (Freud, 1923b, p. 217).

Merleau-Ponty agrees with this conception of the libido when he affirms that it should not be understood as a sexual entelechy [vital force], nor should it be seen as a single and totalizing cause; rather, it is an unavoidable dimension without which there would be nothing that was human, because there is nothing human that is incorporeal (see 1968a, p. 178). He also understood the broadening of the meaning of sexuality that Freud performed, and affirms that “we can no longer speak of the sexual organ taken as a localizable mechanism, or the body taken as a mass of matter, as an ultimate cause. Neither cause nor simply instruments or means, [sex and the body] are the vehicle, the fulcrum, and the steadying factor of our life” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 229).

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes two points of view in the Freudian conception of psychoanalysis that have a repercussion on the interpretation of sexuality, but which are not always distinguished by Freud himself or by his disciples. On the one hand we have a narrow or strict understanding, and on the other hand a broader view. In the first conception, adult behavior is based on the childhood prehistory that survives in the unconscious, and this infantile unconsciousness is of a sexual nature. On the other hand, within a broader view, this infantile prehistory does not remain inert in the adult, but rather becomes integrated with sexuality in a broad sense, without restricting it to the genital, even though it implies it. Merleau-Ponty holds that this second Freudian perspective shows that, rather than asserting a pansexualism, Freud wishes to generalize the notion of corporeality and incorporate a bodily consciousness that expresses itself particularly in relation to others. Sexuality, as Merleau-Ponty comments, can be considered as a principal case of our corporeality, as the mirror of our relationship with the body (see 2010, pp. 73–74). Once again we encounter the incorporation of sexuality within the person as a whole.

In the Freudian explanation of the libido as a vital force, a merely instinctive understanding of sexuality is overcome. Sexuality is, then, an energy that circulates, comes and goes, based on the plasticity of the instincts. The diverse pathways that it can take in expressing itself lead to the formation of a symptom or the creation of a work of art. This plasticity of the libido contrasts with the mechanistic perspective in Freud's early works, where he uses what he calls the hydraulic model.⁷ The libido is not an instinct, but rather is a general faculty that the psychophysical subject has for adhering to different mediums, to become ‘fixed’ through different experiences, to acquire structures of behavior. From this perspective, it is what provides a biographical character to the life of the person. One's sexual history is an interpretative key to one's personal life, because by way of sexuality we project a manner of being into the world, that is, a way of being that is relative to time and to other persons.

⁷See Freud (1950, pp. 283–294). The *hydraulic* concept has been used in a metaphorical manner in order to express the functioning of the nervous system and the mental apparatus in terms of a complex system of tubes through which something like fluids pass: a quantity of energy that moves, becomes excited and puts pressure on the system. The instinctive energies would suffer many vicissitudes along these pathways, but the quantity of energy would remain constant in the system. Freud used words like quantity, principle of inertia and blockages and applies them in order to understand how motor activity is proportional to the quantity of stimulation that the sense organs receive.

Thus, one can understand why Freud incorporated the sexual dimension into his theory of psychic development in early life. In *Three essays on sexuality* he shows that infantile amnesia converts childhood into a “prior” time, *prehistoric*, that prevents a person from knowing the beginnings of his or her sexual life (see 1901, pp. 123–246). In his work *The infantile genital organization: an interpolation into the theory of sexuality* he explains the differences between adult sexuality and that of children: only in the former is there a unification of partial instincts and their subordination to the primacy of genital instincts, because in the adult there is a culmination of a development that places sexuality at the service of reproduction (see 1923c, pp. 141–149). In Freud we see that the phenomenon of transference is an expression of the permanence of infancy in the present moment of adult life. In *The dynamics of transference* (1911a) he held that in their infancy all human beings acquire, by means of a combination of innate dispositions and received influences, a specific manner of living their love and sexual lives, a manner that remains impressed upon the subject and which repeats itself over the course of his or her life. Childhood thus makes itself present in a regulated manner, which is neither inert nor rigid, provided that external circumstances and the nature of the attainable objects of love permit it. The past does not remain immutable in the face of more recent impressions, but rather is a living past (see 1911a, pp. 97–109). In his *Lecture XXVII*, entitled *Transference*, Freud makes explicit the clear current presence of the past in the phenomenon of transference:

We overcome the transference by pointing out to the patient that his feelings do not arise from the present situation and do not apply to the person of the doctor, but that they are repeating something that happened to him earlier. In this way we oblige him to transform his repetition into memory. By that means the transference, which, whether affectionate or hostile seemed in every case to constitute the greatest threat to the treatment, becomes its best tool, by whose help the most secret compartments of mental life can be opened.

(Freud, 1917, pp. 442–443)

Merleau-Ponty also rescues these explanations of Freud, which together explain the experiences of the child and the adult. In the courses that he gave at the Sorbonne as Chair Professor of Psychology, when he dealt with the issue of infantile psychology, he explained that there is a communication between the adult and his or her own infancy, such that infantile prehistory does not remain inert within the adult individual, but rather his or her infancy is perpetually recreated in present-day attitudes and behaviors (see Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 73).

Another point of coincidence between Merleau-Ponty and Freud concerning the integration of sexuality in all the person is their recognition that erotic comprehension does not pertain to the order of understanding: “given that the understanding comprehends by seeing an experience under an idea whereas desire comprehends blindly by linking one body to another” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 159). As we have noted, the principal meaning of sexuality is in the relation of the subject with others, both of whom, as a result of desire, tend to union with other bodies. From this perspective, the sexed human body perceives and comprehends the world in a particular way, discovering meanings

that are only seen due to its sexed condition. The body of the other is not perceived as an object, but rather as inhabited by a secret perception, by a sexual schema that is strictly individual (see Merleau-Ponty, 2012, pp. 158–159).

In an analogous sense in *Totem and Taboo*, the father of psychoanalysis once again highlights the diffuse or general character of sexuality that is constantly present in us like an atmosphere (Freud, 1913, pp. 1–165). Merleau-Ponty expresses his agreement with Freud in speaking of sexuality as “a generalization of the notion of corporality” (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, pp. 73–74) and also, following Freud’s own idea, in affirming that sexuality “is continuously present in human life as an atmosphere” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 171). Erotic perception expresses the primordial unity between body and mind, a body that has mental functions and an incarnate mind: “With psychoanalysis mind passes into body as, inversely, body passes into mind” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 229). Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that the body is enigmatic, that it is connected with personal life and is like the habitat in which the human being seeks closeness and union with others and with their bodies (see 1964, p. 229). Sexuality displays itself in this relation with others, and with this we encounter a capacity to love that overcomes various obstacles in order to reach its maturity:

As we know, adult love, sustained by a trusting tenderness which does not constantly insist upon new proofs of absolute attachment but takes the other person as he is, at his distance and his autonomy, is for psychoanalysis won from an infantile “erotic attachment” [*“aimance”*] which demands everything at all times and is responsible for whatever devouring, impossible aspects may remain in any love”.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 288)

This analysis of the integration of sexuality in the totality of the person and in his or her relations with others will allow us to advance in investigating the points of agreement between the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and Freud’s thought. Next, we will analyze Merleau-Ponty’s application of the notion of meaning to sexuality and its impact both on the Freudian unconscious and Freud’s notion of instinct.

Meaning and sexuality

In this section we will dig deeper into the notion of meaning as applied to sexuality, which in the case of the person has a signification that is neither objective nor foundational. That is, there is no doubling between sexual life understood as an infrastructure or inner force and a higher existence understood as an epiphenomenon of an underlying sexuality. Merleau-Ponty agrees with Freud in rejecting this schema on the basis of the centrality of the life of the body, as well as the importance that he gives to a pre-reflective form of knowledge. Therefore, as part of our explanation of the notion of meaning we will explain the preeminence of ante-predicative or pre-reflective experience, which is a central idea of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. In this way we can better understand Merleau-Ponty’s understanding and interpretation of Freud’s notion of the unconscious and its link with mean-

ing. Finally, we will explain the notion of instinct, especially the sexual instinct that is linked with meaning.

Pre-reflective knowledge in Merleau-Ponty

As we have already pointed out, a central idea in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is the value of the experiences that the person has at a pre-reflective level, especially in perceptual life. For this reason corporeality is understood as our surface of contact with being, on the basis of which the person already has a kind of 'comprehension' of the world and of him/herself.⁸ This pre-reflective level determines or guides the various kinds of reflective knowledge, because it situates us in a spatio-temporal manner way with respect to the things of the world. The body, understood as a lived body, in contrast to a view of the body as object, maintains a communication with the world which is at the base of other forms of communication and comprehensions of reality. The body, by means of perception, becomes for Merleau-Ponty the place of meaning, indeed the giver of meaning, and not because of any prior convention, but "because of the eloquence of its own coexistence and configuration it implants a meaning into that which did not have it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, pp. 110–111; see Gordillo, 2002, p. 696). Merleau-Ponty affirms that: "We must live things in order to perceive them" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 340; see Barral, 1969). Merleau-Ponty states that perception can only be understood if we renounce all objectification: "If I can never say 'I' absolutely and if every act of reflection, every voluntary taking up of a position is established against the background and upon the proposition of a pre-personal life of consciousness" (2012, p. 216).⁹ Thus, the non- or pre-reflective is the starting point for his philosophy.

With these affirmations Merleau-Ponty distances himself from an intellectualist vision of perception and knowledge: "I live the unity of the subject and the inter-sensory unity of the thing, I do not conceive of them in the manner of reflective analysis and science" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 248). He characterizes this living of the body as an anonymous and general existence, a pre-personal adherence of the subject to the world. It is understood that with this generality he is referring to the biological configuration of the human organism that makes possible and predisposes us to perception, as well as to the factic character that our existential relation has with the world, which presents itself as the horizon of action:

More generally, there is a logic of the world that my entire body merges with and through which inter-sensory things become possible. My body, insofar as it is capable of synergy, knows what more or less of some color signifies for the totality of

⁸"Sensation, such as it is presented to us by experience, is no longer an indifferent matter and an abstract moment, but rather one of our surfaces of contact with being, or a structure of consciousness. Rather than presenting us with a unique space or a universal condition of all qualities, each sensation gives us a particular manner of being in space and, in a certain, sense of creating space" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 230).

⁹De Lattre (1974, p. 283) comments that for Merleau-Ponty there is a single a priori: that of incarnate and lived experience.

my experience, and my body immediately grasps the effect of this change in the presentation and in the sense of the object.

(Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 341)¹⁰

Perception itself, which the subject has consciousness of, is based on this synthesis created by the body at a general stage that is prior to perceptive consciousness. The meaning that the perceived object appears as bearing gestates in this original lived experience of the world: “A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its ‘world’, and to move one’s body is to aim at the things through it, or to allow one’s body to respond to their solicitation, which is exerted upon the body without any representation” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 140).¹¹ In commenting on this idea, Barbaras notes that there is an ontological family relationship between the body and the world, because of which consciousness is *about* or *of* the world. Merleau-Ponty deepens his analysis of this identity between the world and the flesh (*chair*) in his posthumous work *The visible and the invisible*, in which, in an expression taken from Husserl, he states that the thing is grasped “in person” and “in its flesh” (Barbaras, 1991, pp. 183–184).¹²

In the light of these central ideas of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, we can better understand that the role of sexuality should not be understood or explained as a cause of other phenomena or behaviors, but rather as the atmosphere that surrounds the existential relationships of the person with others. As has already been noted, the term *atmosphere* alludes to an influence that cannot be imprisoned by the parameters of our intellectual rationality, but rather only by means of experience and, more radically, perceptive experience, because “the world and consciousness pass by way of the body” (Gordillo, 2002, p. 694). We thus see that Merleau-Ponty has paid attention to Freud’s explanation of the unconscious and has found points of agreement with it.

The influence of Merleau-Ponty on contemporary psychoanalysis is clear on the field of integrating those forms of knowledge, of linkage with the environment and with other persons that cannot be understood in exclusively intellectual terms, or by a rationality that is, so to speak, structured. Ferro compares the artistic experience with the patient’s dreams in analysis. In both cases, the mind transforms the primitive sensorial experience into images (alpha elements) that later make up sequences of thoughts, storable in memory and able to be thought and dreamed of (cf. Civitarese and Ferro, 2012, p. 297). The importance that Merleau-Ponty grants to those kinds of knowledge that he calls pre-reflexive is clearly recognized by the Barangers in their notion of the “between realm”, or in what others (Bion)

¹⁰See also p. 102, where he notes that the body points or directs itself towards the world as the latent horizon of our experience: “as a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible”.

¹¹In the same text he links the comprehension of the body to motricity. The linkage of the subject with the world by means of perception attains its maximum expression in his posthumous work *Le visible et l’invisible*, especially in ch. 4. See also Carman (2007, ch. III).

¹²See Merleau-Ponty (1968b, p. 248): “That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world”. See also in the same work, pp. 269–271.

call the “protomental area” (Civitaresse and Ferro, 2012, p. 297). In psychoanalytic practice these notions are translated into the attention given to that which occurs *between* the patient and the analyst. Instead of understanding this situation from an exterior and objective perspective, the focus is placed on the zone of the *in between*. The Barangers – more clearly – have introduced, inspired by Merleau-Ponty,¹³ the notion of the psychoanalytic field:

the analytic situation should be formulated not only as the situation of one person who is confronted by an indefinite and neutral personage – in the end, of a person confronted by his or her own self – but as a situation between two persons who remain unavoidably connected and complementary as long as the situation obtains, and involved in a single dynamic process. In this situation, neither member of the couple can be understood without the other.

(Baranger and Baranger, 1961, p. 5; cf. also Ferro, 2012, p. 302)

The unconscious and meaning

The unconscious is a complex concept that Freud explains in different ways, a fact that permits us to understand the many different interpretations that it has been given (see Freud, 1914, pp. 159–209). We will note only the most relevant aspects that serve to highlight the points in common between Merleau-Ponty and Freud.

Freud distinguished in a descriptive sense the conscious and unconscious mind. From the topographic point of view he introduced the division of three systems, namely the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious. In his work *A note on the unconscious in psychoanalysis*, Freud proposed the existence of unconscious processes (see 1911b, pp. 255–267). The preconscious is a concept that when used as a noun refers to a totally different system than the unconscious and when used or understood as an adjective it refers to the operations and contents of the preconscious system. These are not present in the actual field of conscience and therefore they are unconscious in the descriptive sense of the concept, but they differ from the contents of the unconscious as a system because they are available to conscience (see Laplanche and Pontalis, 1981). The concept of unconscious in Freud has two senses: (1) a descriptive sense as referring to all that is not in the sphere of conscience and that includes Freud’s preconscious, and (2) a dynamic sense that does not designate latent ideas in general but especially those ideas that possess a dynamic character and that remain apart from conscience although their intensity and activity. The dynamic unconscious is related to an intrapsychic conflict between different antagonistic forces that prevents it from its access to conscience.

He uses the term ‘unconscious’ in three ways, that is, descriptively, dynamically, and systematically. In the text just mentioned, Freud explains that there are unconscious, unnoticed aspects in us that reveal themselves by way of signs that include the symptoms proper to neurotic syndromes. He states that “unconsciousness is a regular and inevitable phase in the processes con-

¹³Who in turn took this term from Gestalt psychology. Kurt Lewin uses it frequently in his works.

stituting our psychical activity, every psychic act begins as an unconscious one, and it may either remain so or go on developing into consciousness according to whether it meets with resistance or not” (1911b, p. 263). In another writing entitled *The unconscious*, Freud reveals that in order to explain a series of phenomena that he has observed he found himself obligated to posit the existence of the unconscious (see 1914, pp. 159–209).

This way of proceeding showed him that it is wrong to restrict our vision of the life of the soul only to conscious occurrences, since if we introduce this limitation it “disrupts psychical continuity and introduces unintelligible gaps into the chain of observed phenomena” (Freud, 1914, p. 161). The unconscious becomes known once it becomes conscious, and the work of the psychoanalyst shows that this translation is possible. Following Freud’s theory of representation, this translation sometimes has to undergo a process of creation between the analyst and the patient since the contents of the unconscious are weakly represented or not yet represented mental states (see Levine, 2012). In the case of contents that have been repressed and rejected by the conscious mind they can become available to the subject when he or she overcomes the resistances that initially converted it into something unconscious. Freud explains that not only is it the case that the activity of the unconscious becomes known upon treating the sick person and his or her symptoms: its presence is also found in the dreams of healthy people and their faulty actions. He affirms emphatically that:

... our most personal daily experience acquaints us with ideas that come into our heads we don’t know from where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we don’t know how. All these conscious acts remain disconnected and unintelligible if we insist upon claiming that every mental act that occurs in us must also necessarily be experienced by us through consciousness; on the other hand, they fall into a demonstrable connection if we interpolate between them the unconscious acts which we have inferred.

(Freud, 1914, pp. 165–166)

Would psychoanalysis then be a form of hyperrationalizing our actions, attempting to reduce the unconscious and thereby extending consciousness? Although this question is interesting, and some have formulated it as a part of a critique of psychoanalysis it must be noted that the psychoanalytic methodology does not cure the patient via rationalization or a rational understanding of causes, but rather via the transference between the analyst and the patient. Through this relationship the conflict that has hitherto remained unconscious as a result of resistances and repression is brought to the surface and resolved. In the therapeutic relation, the gaps of memory are resolved and filled in, and resistances are overcome:

The libido (whether wholly or in part) has entered on a regressive course and has revived the subject’s infantile imagos.¹⁴ The analytic treatment now proceeds to follow it; it seeks to track down the libido, to make it accessible to consciousness and,

¹⁴The term *imago* is used in the psychoanalytic vocabulary, beginning with Jung, in order to express the unconscious prototype of personas that orient the form in which the subject apprehends others. This imago develops on the basis of the first real and fantasized intersubjective relations in the family environment. See Laplanche and Pontalis (1981, pp. 191–192).

in the end, serviceable for reality. Where the investigations of analysis come upon the libido withdrawn into its hiding-place, a struggle is bound to break out; all the forces which have caused the libido to regress will rise up as 'resistances' against the work of analysis, in order to conserve the new state of things.

(Freud, 1911a, p. 101)¹⁵

In *Lecture XVII: The Sense of Symptoms* Freud proposes that symptoms, dreams and faulty operations reveal a meaning that is linked with the lived experience of the subject (see 1916, pp. 256–273). Sexuality acquires importance in the expression of meaning because it is the first corporeal relation that the human being has with the world. For this reason, its manifestations have a meaning, a signification that is expressed by means of symptoms, which are linked with the subjective life of the person. There is an origin that motivates these symptoms and explains the particular form that they assume, but both the origin and the finality they possess are generally unknown to the subject him or herself. The meaning of the symptoms, according to psychoanalysis, habitually have their origin in unconscious processes: “psycho-analysis takes matters up at precisely that point and has established in the first place the fact that symptoms have a sense and are related to the patient’s experiences” (1916, p. 256). On the other hand, in the course of his reflection on the lack of a unique explanation of the symptoms associated with sexuality, Merleau-Ponty indicates that “no human behavior is simply the result of some bodily mechanism, that in behavior there is not a mental center and a periphery of automatism, and that all our gestures in their fashion participate in that single activity of making explicit and signifying which is ourselves” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 228).

In light of this Freudian antecedent, Merleau-Ponty debates and accepts the notion of the *unconscious*. Indeed, on the one hand, he criticizes an understanding of the unconscious that sees it as a third-person explanation of these faulty or unrecognized acts. He rejects the existence of a structure underneath conscious life that would be like a second thinking subject whose explanations would simply be received by the first. It seems to Merleau-Ponty that, understood in this way, the unconscious is the tribute that Freud pays to the positivist and intellectualist psychology of his times (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968a, pp. 69 and 179; see also Lutereau, 2011, p. 287). This negative aspect of the Freudian explanation of the unconscious can cause one to lose sight of what is really interesting in Freud, that is, the symbolism of a “non-conventional thought” (see Politzer, 1994), which is related to the anonymous life of the body that others have called *ambiguous perception* (see Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 229–230). Merleau-Ponty assimilates the Freudian description of the oneiric consciousness to the perceptive consciousness because both follow a path that never reveals itself fully; rather, they proceed by way of implications or promiscuities (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968a, pp. 70–71).

The central idea that Merleau-Ponty sees as reflected in Freud’s doctrine of the unconscious, and which he makes his own, is that in the conscious

¹⁵For a study of the libido in Merleau-Ponty see Weiss (1981).

life of the person there is always something that escapes reflection, such that what is lived always goes beyond that which we are able to represent. The person is a totality, a primordial unity in which understanding and conscious rationality co-exist with an apparent unconscious irrationality. According to Merleau-Ponty, the essential point of Freudianism is not that it has demonstrated that underneath appearances there is a different reality, but rather that the analysis of behavior has many layers of signification, all of which are true, and that the plurality of possible interpretations is the discursive expression of a mixed life, in which every choice always has many meanings and where none of them can be said to be the only true one (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968a, pp. 69–71).

Merleau-Ponty links the unconscious with his own thought by making it analogous to that sensing which is not the intellectual possession of what is sensed, but rather the *non-possession* of our own selves, the opening to that which we need not think in order to recognize it. The double formula of the unconscious, ‘I have always known it’ and ‘I didn’t know’, corresponds to the openness discussed above and to the rejection as a secondary formation. The first would be a primordial unconscious that allows the world to be, that gives it an initial ‘yes’, thanks to which sensation is not distinguished from the world, but rather comes to be at the same time that the world itself occurs. In contrast, the unconscious of repression (rejection) would be a secondary formation. (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968a, p. 179).

For Freud, an important part of the life of our psyche is not conscious, and when the analyst studies these unconscious dynamics – which go beyond intellectual, rational comprehension – certain irrational behaviors will acquire a certain rationality, or even complete rationality. In contrast, if this analysis is not performed, this same behavior may seem to be completely lacking all rationality, intelligibility and meaning. Merleau-Ponty, for his part, holds that what is pre-sensed at an unconscious level is unknown to the subject at the level of *intellectual thought*, but is nevertheless not unconscious for other levels of life, such as, for instance, certain habitual behaviors.¹⁶ Freud and Merleau-Ponty agree that the meaning of a behavior, or of a fragment of one, especially in the cases of symptoms or irrational behaviors, demands “the possibility of a fragmented conscious life that does not possess a unique signification in all its moments” (Merleau-Ponty, 1957, p. 248).

At the same time, both thinkers agree that the unconscious is boundless, that the pre-reflective level of our psyche is greater than the reflective, and that we are always in a situation of ambiguity. For Merleau-Ponty there is a signification that is found precisely at this pre-reflective level: “there is a perceived signification that has no equivalent in the universe of the understanding, a perceptual milieu that is not yet the objective world, and a perceptual being that is not yet determinate being” (see Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 48; see also Daly, 1967, pp. 150–151).¹⁷ Thus, for him the notions of *am-*

¹⁶See Merleau-Ponty (2012), where he makes many reference to habit. Noteworthy passages include pp. 139, 143–148, 153. One example is the practice of typing, where the person integrates the space of the keyboard into his/her own bodily space. On this topic see Moya (2012).

¹⁷Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 48). See also Daly (1967, pp. 150–151).

biguity and *ambivalence* are more correct than that of unconsciousness for reflecting the form of knowledge or meaning that is present in the mutual linkage between the body and the world. The body, in a certain fashion, abandons itself to the world, and therefore there is no reflexive consciousness, but, at the same time, it takes from the world – via perception – a certain kind of latent knowledge that emerges in conscious acts. In his posthumous work *The visible and the invisible*, he uses the word *pregnancy* in order to express this fecundity or power that the body responds to in adapting itself to the world (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968b, pp. 208–209).

In an issue linked to the topic of the unconscious, Merleau-Ponty takes from Freud the archeological dimension that human life has, a dimension that, in some way, summarizes what we have discussed above. Freud demonstrated a strong interest in archeology and prehistory, seeking in them vestiges of the stages of human development, which are also expressed in myths and traditions that sometimes have even endured up through our time. He also relates the prehistory of humanity with unconscious contents and fears (see Freud, 1913, pp. 1–165). In Merleau-Ponty this dimension has to do directly with the pre-existence of pre-reflective knowledge and its significations. As Ralón writes, there is “an opaque reality that cannot be accessed by reflective consciousness” and which Merleau-Ponty links to the unconscious. This latent reality has the important role of providing meaning to that which we can understand and say. This is a new manner of understanding perception, no longer as representation, but rather as the obverse of the non-perceived, which we have spoken of above, when the body abandons itself to the world, when there takes place this reversibility between sensing and being sensed (Ralón de Walton, 2006, pp. 3–4).

As we have already noted, Merleau-Ponty works with the Freudian notion of unconscious, taking advantage of its openness to a variety of interpretations and meanings. From this perspective, the unconscious could be understood as similar to the Merleau-Pontian notion of ‘ambiguity’. The Barangers follow this inspiration with what they call the category of the ‘as if’, which they explain as follows: “It is essential for the analytical procedure that everything or every event in the field be at the same time something else. If this essential ambiguity is lost, analysis also disappears” (Baranger and Baranger, 1961, p. 8). This ambiguity is also present on the temporal plane, in which the present, past and future are mixed, permitting the patient to not only regain consciousness of his or her history, but also to modify it retroactively (cf. Baranger, 1961, p. 8).¹⁸ This temporal ambiguity is utilized by the Barangers to refute an interpretation of Freud that grants a preponderant role to regression, understanding it as a progressive overcoming of temporal layers. The principal reason for avoiding this methodological error is as follows:

What we have in front of us when we analyze a person is not a patient reconstructed by theory, but rather a living person. Of course, we know many general

¹⁸Although this aspects leads directly to the technical topic of transference and countertransference, we will not enter into a discussion of it in the present article.

things about his or her genesis and structure and of his or her disorders. But it is wise of us if we don't seek to make the person fit within general schemata, however valid they may be, or guide our practice by these pre-established schemata.

(Baranger and Baranger, 1961, p. 21; see also Lutereau and Krippner, 2012, p. 219)

It can be concluded that the Barangers thus avoid the dangers of intellectualization, a topic present throughout the oeuvre of Merleau-Ponty.

A new understanding of instinct

In his article 'Man and adversity' Merleau-Ponty explains the evolution of the conception of the body that Freud provided. In Freud, we pass from a separation between the body and the soul, proper to the medicine of the 19th century, to the contemporary concept of the lived body that enables us to understand instinct in a new way. According to Merleau-Ponty, a careful reading of Freud shows that, right from the beginning, the latter had a new understanding of instinct, especially the sexual instinct. It was thought that this instinct was a composition of forces beyond the reach of our consciousness, and which develops once and for all during infancy, with no involvement of human reason or any relationship with culture or with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 227).

What Merleau-Ponty finds in this re-reading of Freud is rather a *revolution* in the concept of instinct. In reality, then, instinct is a disposition "within the organism which with a minimum of use ensures certain responses adapted to certain characteristic situations of the species" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 227). Specifically, in the person there exists no "sexual instinct", but rather the individual must develop a normal sexual life, with difficulty, over the course of his or her life (see Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 227). The body is not an infrastructure that explains human life from the bottom-up, as some critics have believed that psychoanalysis proposes. This evolution has occurred because Freud wraps physiology and instincts together through consciousness and meaning (see Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp. 228–229). Against the traditional interpretation of Freud's doctrine, Merleau-Ponty advances the idea that there is nothing purely instinctive in human behavior, nor a spiritual center or automatic periphery. There isn't any kind of 'doubling' within the person, but rather everything is integrated in that which each person is. Merleau-Ponty holds that the Freudian libido is not an 'entelechy' of sex, nor is sex a single and totalizing cause, but rather is an ineluctable dimension [of the human being], outside of which nothing can remain (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968a, p. 178).

An idea of Merleau-Ponty that we have already mentioned is that physiology and instinct must undergo a development that is not predetermined. We wish to emphasize here that instinct can take various pathways and, above all, that its development is permeated by consciousness, or, given that Merleau-Ponty corrects himself in order to avoid the soul-body dichotomy, that it has a 'meaning', just as all human action does (see Merleau-Ponty, 2012, pp. 160–161). In the *Phenomenology of perception* he shows that despite the early declarations of Freud, what psychoanalysis has really demonstrated is that sexu-

ality is linked to consciousness and is integrated into the human being as a whole. From this perspective, psychoanalysis contributes to the phenomenological method, because it seeks to *understand* the occurrence and not to *explain* it via causal chains, but rather on the basis of a polymorphism or amorphism (see Merleau-Ponty, 1968b, pp. 269–270).¹⁹ This is the case of the interpretation of those symptoms that have many meanings, or, in the words of Freud, are ‘overdetermined’.²⁰ Referring more specifically to the development of the child, he shows that physical or biological dispositions flow together with the cultural environment in which the child is situated. Opposing determinist theories at all times, he understands this development as a dynamic totality (see Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 382).

These conclusions of Merleau-Ponty are coherent with the Freudian conception of instinct. In *Moses and monotheism* Freud indicates that human infancy is similar to that of animals, in that from its beginnings one observes that instinctive life brings with it, in a congenital manner, the experiences of its species (see Freud, 1937a, pp. 1–132). There is, then, an archaic inheritance of phylogenetic schemas that are shared with the instincts of animals. Nevertheless, in the case of the human person, the term ‘instinct’, in its classic sense, is not the only explanation of behavior. In his *An outline of psychoanalysis: The theory of instincts*, Freud discusses the possibility of a different understanding of instinct, because it permits indetermination (see 1937c, pp. 141–152). Instincts are of various types, but nonetheless can be derived from a smaller basic set. Here he refers to the fact that instincts can change and alter their goals (by displacement); they can also substitute for one another by passing the energy of one instinct onto another. The libido has the characteristic of being mobile, and Freud accepts that it has undeniable somatic sources, but it flows into the ego from various bodily organs. He concludes this text on instincts with the idea that “we have been able to form a picture of the way in which the sexual urge, which is destined to exercise a decisive influence on our life, gradually develops out of successive contributions from a number of component instincts, which represent particular erotogenic zones” (Freud, 1937b, p. 150). The diversity of the instincts, their alterations and their manifestation unlinked to any single bodily zone show that Freud understands instincts and complex instincts as not being reducible to a causal determinism.²¹

¹⁹Merleau-Ponty explains the Freudian concept of polymorphic childhood (the polymorphic perverse), showing that it refers to the state in which the child is not yet a self, nor an other either. For this reason the child’s maturation must be understood as a way of channeling this polymorphism (Merleau-Ponty, 1968b, pp. 269–270; see also 2010, p. 377).

²⁰“In his empirical studies, Freud himself leaves causal thought behind when he shows that symptoms always have several senses, or, as he puts it, are ‘overdetermined’. For this comes down to admitting that a symptom, at the moment it is established, always finds some *raison d’être* in the subject, such that no event in a life is strictly speaking determined from the outside. Freud compares the external accident to the foreign body, which is, for the oyster, merely the opportunity for secreting a pearl”. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 528, n. 5).

²¹Laplanche and Pontalis (1981, p. 198 and 324–347), explain that *instinct* is a term used by certain French psychoanalytic authors as a translation or equivalent for Freud’s term *Trieb*, for which, in a coherent terminology, it is appropriate to use the French term ‘pulsion’.

Conclusion

Having come to this point, it can be affirmed that both authors agree on important aspects of the sexuality of the human person. These areas of agreement reflect a close and repeated reading by Merleau-Ponty of Freud's writings, which allows him to reinterpret those topics which have caused Freud to be accused of determinism and pansexualism. The rereading that Merleau-Ponty makes of the unconscious and of instincts offers an opportunity to clarify these concepts in Freud's own thought, and to conclude that they evolved over the course of the latter's life until they achieved a plasticity that better reflects human behavior. It is also concluded that sexuality is a dimension that involves the personal being as a whole, rather than being limited to genitality. We have shown that for both authors sexuality has a biographical character, and follows a course of development that is neither fixed nor rigid. Sexual integration and maturation occur in time in a way that goes beyond mere physiological development, and are linked to affective life and our relation with others.

The meaning of sexuality is not of an intellectual order, or deduced on the basis of an underlying structure, but rather it pertains to the unconscious, pre-conscious, and pre-reflective stages of human behavior. This means that one's own body and those of others are not perceived as objects, nor as causes or instruments, but rather as expressions of personal life and of relation with others.²² The body is, in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the contact with the world that each person lives in a particular manner: "I can only understand the function of the living body by accomplishing it and to the extent that I am a body that rises up toward the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 78).

Therefore, the body is enigmatic, it is a pregnancy of possibles. If at any stage of his thought Freud understood it through a mechanistic lens, the broad sweep of his work agrees with this bodily indetermination which, as we have shown in this article, inclines one to speak rather of a sexual atmosphere and not of a relation of causal chains or any mere impulse. The Freudian understanding of instincts explains sexuality as a vital force and is fully consonant with Merleau-Ponty's way of conceiving the relation of the body with the world: "Thus, a thing is not actually *given* in perception, it is inwardly taken up by us, reconstituted and lived by us insofar as it is linked to a world whose fundamental structures we carry with ourselves and of which this thing is just one of several possible concretions" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 341; see Guenther, 2011, p. 24).

Terms such as *atmosphere* and *meaning*, associated with sexuality, require a non-conventional understanding, given that they escape the manner of proceeding characteristic of an absolute reason. Merleau-Ponty and Freud see in the unconscious, in libido and in instincts a corporeal way of appre-

²²Merleau-Ponty comments that Freud understood in his later years that sexuality, in its relation with others, was a "sexual-aggressive" relation, understanding this as an interpersonal link marked by our carnal reality: "Since sexuality is relationship to other persons, and not just to another body, it is going to weave the circular system of projections and introjections between other persons and myself" (1964, p. 230).

hending the world. We have aimed to show in this field some of the coincidences between Freud's psychoanalysis and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

Translations of summary

Sexualité et sens chez Freud et Merleau-Ponty. Dans cet article, l'auteur analyse les liens entre la conception du corps et celle de la sexualité chez Freud et Merleau-Ponty. Le philosophe français fait référence à Freud dans plusieurs de ses travaux et effectue une lecture de Freud à travers laquelle il restitue le sens que ce dernier donne à la sexualité en l'intégrant à l'individu dans sa totalité, sans la réduire à une simple force instinctuelle aveugle. Du fait de cette intégration, les notions d'inconscient et d'instinct ou de pulsion sont interprétées à la lumière du sens ou de la signification qu'elles revêtent dans le comportement de l'individu. La notion de connaissance préreflexive de Merleau-Ponty joue un rôle décisif dans la compréhension du sens. De la même manière, il permet aux analystes contemporains importants d'utiliser ces études dans leur travail thérapeutique et également dans les études psychologiques.

Sexualität und Bedeutung bei Freud und Merleau-Ponty. Dieser Beitrag analysiert die Verbindungen zwischen Freuds und Merleau-Pontys Verständnis des Körpers und der Sexualität. Der französische Philosoph hat in mehreren seiner Schriften auf Freud Bezug genommen. Er integriert die Sexualität in die Gesamtheit der Persönlichkeit, ohne sie in eine blinde oder lediglich instinktive Macht zu verwandeln, und vertritt so eine Lesart Freuds, in der die Bedeutung, die dieser der Sexualität beilegte, erhalten bleibt. Ausgehend von dieser Integration werden die Konzepte des Unbewussten und des Triebes im Licht der Bedeutung oder des Sinns interpretiert, die sie im Verhalten der Person besitzen. Merleau-Pontys Verständnis des prä-reflexiven Wissens spielt für dieses Bedeutungsverständnis eine maßgebliche Rolle. In gleicher Weise ermöglicht es wichtig, zeitgenössische Analysten diese Studien in ihrer therapeutischen Arbeit zu nutzen und auch in der psychologischen Studien.

Sessualità e significato in Freud e Merleau-Ponty. Questo articolo analizza i collegamenti tra la concezione del corpo e della sessualità che si possono trovare in Freud e in Merleau-Ponty. Il filosofo francese fa dei rimandi a Freud in molti dei suoi lavori e propone una lettura di Freud che gli permette di recuperare il significato che questi dà alla sessualità mentre la integra nella totalità della persona, evitando di trasformarla in una forza cieca o meramente istintuale. Come ricaduta di questa integrazione, i concetti di inconscio e di istinto o pulsione sono interpretati alla luce del senso o della significazione che hanno nel quadro del comportamento della persona. Il concetto di conoscenza pre-riflessiva di Merleau-Ponty gioca un ruolo decisivo in questa visione del significato. Allo stesso modo, consente importanti analisti contemporanei di utilizzare tali studi nel loro lavoro terapeutico e anche in studi psicologici.

Sexualidad y sentido en Freud y Merleau-Ponty. El artículo analiza los vínculos entre la concepción del cuerpo y de la sexualidad entre Freud y Merleau-Ponty. El filósofo francés ve en la teoría de Freud una coincidencia relevante para ser aprovechada por la fenomenología, particularmente para su comprensión de la corporalidad como clave interpretativa esencial de la existencia humana. Merleau-Ponty se refiere a Freud en varias de sus obras y hace una lectura del psiquiatra vienés en la que rescata el sentido que éste otorga a la sexualidad integrándola a la totalidad de la persona, sin hacer de ella una fuerza ciega o instintiva. Como consecuencia de dicha integración, las nociones de inconsciente y de instinto o pulsión se interpretan a la luz del sentido o significación que tienen en el comportamiento de la persona. La noción merleau-pontyana de conocimiento pre-reflexivo juega un papel decisivo en esta comprensión del sentido. Permite así mismo que importantes analistas contemporáneos utilicen estos estudios en su labor terapéutica y también en trabajos psicológicos

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