

Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the personal institution.

Oedipus complex and the opening to new ways of sociability

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Abstract

The overcoming of the Oedipus complex is considered by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as an event proper to the human institution. This article will analyze the role that this complex plays in the work of the phenomenologist, to understand from there other events valued as instituting in the life of a subject. For this, the meaning that this sense-giving event has in some of his works (such as the courses about the institution and the Sorbonne courses) will be analyzed comparatively. I consider that the events described as instituting in the life of an individual would found a new sociability, as long as they would imply specific ways of relating to others. Insofar as instituting events in childhood and adolescence correspond to transformations in the relationships we establish with the world and with things, Merleau-Ponty will directly link the private history of a subject with the public history of a community, being the concept of institution the vector that runs through the life of an individual from its subjective organization to the very consolidation of the revolution.

Key Words

OEDIPUS COMPLEX – MERLEAU-PONTY – INSTITUTION – BODY SCHEMA – SOCIABILITY

Resumen

La superación del complejo de Edipo es considerada por Maurice Merleau-Ponty como un evento propio de la institución humana. En este artículo se analizará el rol que este complejo cumple en la obra del fenomenólogo, para comprender desde allí otros eventos valorados como instituyentes en la vida de un sujeto. Para ello, se analizará comparativamente el significado que este evento dador de sentido posee en algunas de sus obras, como los

cursos sobre la institución y los cursos de la Sorbonne. Considero que los eventos descriptos como instituyentes en la vida de un individuo fundarían una nueva sociabilidad, en tanto que implicarían formas determinadas de relacionarnos con los otros. En la medida en que los eventos instituyentes en la infancia y en la adolescencia se corresponden con transformaciones en las relaciones que establecemos con el mundo y con las cosas, Merleau-Ponty enlazará directamente la historia privada de un sujeto con la historia pública de una comunidad, siendo el concepto de institución el vector que recorre la vida de un individuo desde su organización subjetiva hasta la consolidación misma de la revolución.

Palabras clave

COMPLEJO DE EDIPO – MERLEAU-PONTY – INSTITUCIÓN – ESQUEMA CORPORAL - SOCIABILIDAD

1. Introduction

The idea of institution in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work enables us to correlate the genesis of the perceptual apparatus in the child with the dynamics that govern and subvert the very course of history. As the "establishment in an experience" of a "reference system" in relation to which "a whole set of other experiences will make sense and form a continuum" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 38), the institution is a "transformation that preserves and overcomes" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 58), an experience that settles in our lives with the full potency of a meaning-bestowing event. In light of this dynamic, the very person will be understood by Merleau-Ponty as a kind of institution, that is, a vehicle of significances that binds his or her personal life with public history, so that public and private domains become two symbolic systems that are bound with mutual sense: "private and public [are] bound, not by their commitment with the event, but by echoes, exchanges, symbolic accumulation" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 47).

The Oedipus complex will be one of the first events in the life of the child to be analyzed as an instituting experience capable of opening a future with a determinate significance. Merleau-Ponty will retrieve what Lacan considered essential about this phenomenon, namely, the power to determining subsequent developments in the individual. For Merleau-Ponty, during the Oedipus complex, an objectification of the child's world occurs for the first time, which helps him/her to conceive an exteriority that is different from him/her; as a result, his/her later life will depend on the way in which this primordial objectification takes place. In the course "The institution in the personal and public history" (2003, "L'Institution dans l'histoire personnelle et publique"), the question arises as to the genesis of those events which Merleau-Ponty identifies as instituting during a person's childhood: birth, the Oedipus complex or falling in love are described by the philosopher as singular events that draw the main features of personal institution.

After the courses about institution were published in 2003, the concept of *institution* has been addressed more than once in recent years (Duportail, 2013; Terzi, 2016; Gléonec, 2017; Morris, 2017; etc.). However, the Oedipus complex as an instituting event has been scarcely studied in the context of Merleau-Ponty's overall philosophy. For that reason, in this article, the role that the Oedipus complex plays within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will be examined to understand, in turn, other events considered as instituting of an individual's private life. To do this, the courses "Institution in Personal and Public History" (2003), "The child seen by the adult" (2001) and "Child relations with others" (1997, 2001) will be studied comparatively in order to elucidate the place that Oedipus occupies as an instituting event in each work. On the basis of the study that Merleau-Ponty performs on Oedipus as an inherently human form of institution, the instituting events in general could perhaps be understood not only as an

inaugural milestone in the bestowal of new meanings, but as an opening to new ways of relating to others. Hence, the personal institution would converge in an intersubjective fabric that gives rise to the public institution.

2. The institution: opening a course of experience and a past which does not cease

In “Institution in Personal and Public History” (2003), the individual is portrayed both as instituted and instituting, that is, as a plexus of possibilities confined to sense, but also opened to the vagueness that its inherent course proposes. The individual is understood as a field that opens to a future both as passivity and institution, oscillating between certain determinations of being placed within a situation and the possibility of placing as instituting, bestowing a sense that will permeate all of his/her experiences. For Merleau-Ponty, “[b]eing exposed” is the category that reveals this dichotomy, a dialectic pertaining to existence, the “inertia” of mere presence that will ignite a set of events. This is the individual as a “field of fields” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 35), as the place where everything will be (will take place, will come into its own). Institution, therefore,

[means] to settle in an experience (or in a constructed apparatus) of dimensions (in the Cartesian general meaning, system of reference) in relation with which, a whole set of other experiences will make sense and will form a continuum, a story. (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 38)

First, the institution is the “transformation that preserves and overcomes” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 58), an experience that settles in our lives with the force of a sense-bestowing event. However, what determines certain preservations of sense and how long they last? Could we identify the milestones of the institution itself? On this point, it is worth emphasizing the distinction made by Mariana Larison (2012) concerning the translation of the French term *institution*. Although it is simultaneously translated as *institution* and as *foundation*, it appears as though the latter meaning refers to a moment that partakes in the institution itself. Henceforth, I will adopt this interpretation in order to study the institution as a complex process that includes moments of development and consolidation.

In “Institution and life”¹, Merleau-Ponty (2003) distributes his explanation among the features of the organism, animality and vital institution and, in the end, the human institution. The philosopher emphasizes the continuum between these stages, blurring the boundaries between what is cultural and

¹ First part of *Institution in Personal and Public History*.

what is acquired through phylogenesis. As regards of the organism, what is instituted cannot be defined in contrast to what is innate, since “pure innate does not exist, pure endogenous maturation, pure inner environment, pure physiological” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 49). Merleau-Ponty claims that animality “will have echoes in mankind” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 52) and man will transform animal institution from the use that he/she makes of it. For this very reason, the behavior comes up as something that would emerge from the organism as a whole²: “it is something that is in advance in the functioning, that carries a reference to the future” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. 202).

On this basis, human institution is understood as a symbolic matrix, which not only generate immediate reactions but also determine a subsequent course of events or a specific kind of “search.” The notion of *symbolic matrix* appears as an event that covers the entire course of lived experiences with a meaning. The situation associated with a particular event finds in it a substitute and the impregnation of meaning makes it possible for the plexus of experience to be lived as a unity. In the “Courses about passivity”, for instance, the presence of the loved subject is replaced within a woman’s dream by the presence of another subject who is somehow related to that experience. They both share the attribute of having been her suitor, hence playing similar roles. In such a way, remembrance appears to be frozen in the proper becoming of experience, caught in a temporal plot that finds its unity in an event from which it radiates with a determinate meaning, coating all those events that are connected with it. What happens in the episode described by Merleau-Ponty is neither a “mechanical association” nor a “synthesis”, but the drama of a certain period in this woman’s life, which installs itself as a symbolic matrix, “commanding all perceptions” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 221). Hence, the generative power of the symbolic matrix resides, as with the habits of perception, into an invisibility or withdrawal. The matrix of sense functions as “a sort of principle of classification” on the basis of which a series of events are understood “without explicit thought,” “like the body that moves comprehends the distance without explicit calculation” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 223). In this regard, Duportail (2013) claims that “a contingent event vests in me a meaning and opens the possibility of a renewal to come, of a depth” (p. 138). Institution, therefore, is at the same time “restriction and opening” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 43), whereby the significance of the past merges into a new one significance that will succeed it. Throughout this process, there is never a pure overcoming of sense, which is maintained in an “oblique” way.

In “Institution in Personal and Public History” (2003), Merleau-Ponty

² This process is developed in depth in *La nature. Notes. Cours du Collège de France* (1995), specifically in the section about *animality*, in which the philosopher examines the works of Coghill and Gesell about the development of behavior, which “becomes a quasi-organic reality” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. 188), whereby the body is nothing but its conditions of possibility.

offers a theoretical construct capable of ranging across the whole of human experience, becoming a vector, at the same time, of changes in the historical evolution of a given community. From personal history to collective history, institution explains the inauguration of sense, of a course of experiences that commences with a founding event and stains with its halo of significances the experiences occurring afterwards. The anguish of Tsar Nicholas II intersects with the boiling point of a revolution that will alter the history of Russia and the entire world; the Tsar's decisions, closely tied to his determinations as a power figure, disrupt the balance, partaking in a new order of forces and facilitating the collapse of old forms (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Thinking about this oscillation between personal and universal history reminds us of the processes which Merleau-Ponty describes as milestones in the development of his theory of perception.

2.1. Falling in love and birth as intertwining of glances

For Merleau-Ponty, *falling in love* is one of the prime examples of institution, where there is an involuntary intermingling between my own self and somebody else's, which exceeds me, and which, nonetheless, I locate outside my consciousness. In "The Child's Relations with Others" (1997, 2001), love urges the adult to syncretic sociability, which was effectively left behind at the age of three. The boundaries between my subjectivity and somebody else's turn blurry during the act of falling in love. Considering this, love is identified by Merleau-Ponty as a "limit situation" which rearranges my intersubjective relations: in love, I appropriate somebody else's perspective and take ownership of it. This way, the experience of the other is for Merleau-Ponty an "alienating" experience, to the extent that it removes my own self and institutes a mix of the other and myself. Related to the latter, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty distinguishes true (or authentic) love from illusory love: true love "gathers all the resources from the subject and appeals to him/her in its entirety" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 434); it implies the grasping of my experience for the other, a subordination of my gaze to the gaze of the other: I am the loved subject and perceive through this feeling that is invoked by the very relation I establish with the world. In turn, fake feelings are defined by a certain incompleteness that must be filled from the outside; these feelings are lived "from the periphery of ourselves" through "values of situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 435) that condition us when faced with determinate circumstance. Falling in love revitalizes this state of indiscernibility and transforms the loved subject into a part of my *Umwelt*.

Birth is considered as well as another example of institution. This event is the "opening of a future" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 37), "an institution of a future-to-come" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 38) that opens a "new possibility of situations", to the extent that such event cannot be classified as a mere

objective fact among others, but rather, is linked to past as well as to future perspectives. This new gaze that opens up with birth is pure institution, since a new register of substitution impregnates with a determinate sense the course of experiences by the infant and their parents. *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) expresses the ambivalent character of this event and lets us appreciate the intermingling of subjects in the world, as well as the superimposition and resignification of personal stories. Birth is not only a sense-bestowing event for the subject who has arrived in the world, but also for all those subjects who partake in his or her domain of experience. In *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* (1995), the child is for Merleau-Ponty a “new field” of consciousness which does not emerge from the mother’s consciousness, but from the “disposition of a void” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. 271), which is not an effect by its predecessors, although – in principle – it depends on them. In birth, then, both the intersubjective character and the impersonal institution (which features an oscillation between activity and passivity) can be discerned (Duportail, 2013). In this way, the arrival into the world of a newborn is for the French philosopher an opening into a new experience and, at the same time, an opening of new courses of signification within the experience of others.

The fact that institution is considered neither as a content of consciousness nor as a concept allows us to characterize certain events (described by psychoanalysis as encrusted in the subconscious) as *institution*. The next two sections provide a comparative exposition of the treatment that the French philosopher grants to the Oedipus complex as an instituting event in “Institution in Personal and Public History” (2003), “The Adult’s View of the Child” (2001) and “Child relations with others” (2001). The aim of the analysis will be to determine not only the significance that this complex has within Merleau-Ponty’s theory, but also to understand the characteristics it has in common with other instituting events in the life of an individual. What is the common thread that links the Oedipus complex, birth and falling in love, beyond the very definition of instituting events?

3. The Oedipus complex as Institution in Personal and Public History

The Oedipus complex (defined as the incestuous attachment to the opposite sex parent) develops between the ages of four and seven and is retrieved from a phenomenological view as an event that occurs at the intersection of biology and culture. The relationship that boys and girls have with their parents is conceived by Merleau-Ponty as a behavior matrix, which will determine the trajectory of adult life. In “Institution in personal and public history” (2003), Oedipus appears as the event that serves to explicate human sexuality and draw a distinction with animality. However, why is the Oedipus complex portrayed as one of the first events that could potentially address the specific differences between human and animal institution?

During the Oedipus complex, “the child’s own body is perceived through his parents’ in a relationship of identification with their bodies” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 56). Castration, in this context, is a reduction of one’s own body to itself. Likewise, at the beginning of puberty, it is proven that adult history is not just a relaunching of the complex. The reality of puberty and final institution is based on a more primordial institution by which there is never an absolute beginning. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Prematurity and reactivation mean presence of universal in the first symbolic matrix and remanence of particular in the new institution. Institution [is therefore] advent of a sense which is oblique, and which is not pure overcoming, pure oblivion. (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 57)

For Merleau-Ponty, *prematurity* refers to the capacity of a child to live through certain conflicts or key episodes in his/her life before physical or intellectual powers become active. In the last paragraph, prematurity refers to the stages of pregenital sexuality (or autoerotism), which are reactivated during puberty when the displacement to a real object of desire takes place. The concept of prematurity is for Bimbenet (2002) a term which the philosopher uses to signal the strength with which children achieve a cultural world, before even developing the necessary capacities to cope with it. From the beginning, the child deals with a determinate culture, since he/she begins, at a very early stage, to relate to their peers through the intervention of cultural objects and institutions. The dream cycle (another phenomenon which is often classified as merely “natural” or biological) is nothing but the ordering of dreaming and waking periods at the core of a given culture (Merleau-Ponty, 1995). For Merleau-Ponty, the premature becomes mature, “when the behavior materials are truly capable of receiving an anticipated form: the institution is in the junction of an anticipation and a regression” (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 56). Regarding to this, in “Child relations with others” (1997), Merleau-Ponty describes an episode where a kid experiences a jealousy crisis due to the arrival of his younger brother. The feeling of jealousy in the child makes him behave as a jealous child; the older brother expresses a regression in speech and in certain sedimented habits. Often, these jealousy episodes are accompanied not only by a regression in language, but also by an involution in writing and a lack of sphincter control (after the behavior has been acquired). However, this happens at the stage where there is a “jealousy overcoming” (Merleau-Ponty, 1997, p. 166), where the jealous child manages to overcome the outline that bound him/her to the tortuous present and experiences an important linguistic progress whereby he/she is able to use different tenses in speech. Thus, the situation allows the child to “acquire new dimensions of existence (past, present, future)” (Merleau-Ponty, 1997, p.167). For this reason, according to Bimbenet (2002), prematurity is the counterpart of regression, which refers to a setback from adulthood to certain dynamics that are most proper of childhood. Hence, these two concepts represent the

proper swing of a subject's life, where no capacity is acquired once and for all and, at the same time, those capacities which have not been consolidated arise in the life of the youngest in a way that refers to the network within which we are immersed. According to Bimbenet (2002), child sexuality (and the plasticity it possesses), "exemplifies this anticipation of the future in the present of the child" (p.72). Therefore, prematurity directly relates to what Merleau-Ponty calls *polymorphism*.

The Oedipus complex is not a pure body or psychic event, but a "link of one over the other" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 56). This kind of maturity finds its origins in "social ways" (neither bodily nor psychological), where the complex is learned through fatherly care and mirror games played with the mother. However, these social ways do not acquire significance if they are not re-elaborated and continued by the child's body within the individual's own life. There are no predetermined ways but "an intrinsic possibility", "a past creating a question, placing it in reserve, producing a situation indefinitely opened" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 57). Institution prefigures as a "preserving transformation" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, p. 58), because we are never completely free or completely prefigured. With puberty, a new "search" comes about, a love story in which this never-ending premature stage will remain an echo that never fades out. Thus, in human institution the past is embedded within a new situation, a past experience is used as a substitute and a record of the institution is created. The Oedipus complex, therefore, appears as a first record of substitution, where the child abandons his/her parents' bodies and begins to experience the world from his or her own body schema.

4. The Oedipus complex in « Cours de Sorbonne »

Considering the previous section, we can state that the Oedipus complex is a sort of anticipation that carries the child to a psychological level higher than his age; it is like a "psychological puberty" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 333). The libido that circulates in different ways through the child's psychosexual development is not necessarily meant to acquire a sexual significance: libido indetermination (which will take a more specific path after castration) is one of the notes that could define the *interrogative openness* to a future nature that Merleau-Ponty describes³. There is no "metaphysics of libido", but an "absolute adherence capability of the child, capability of identifying with one of his parents and love the other" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 334).

³ Libido could be related to "the possible" described by Coghill, as a continual openness to a future. About this: "(...) Possible has two different meanings. On one hand, refers to later stages of the organism. In this case, present tends to a future but focused from the present and according to a synchronic cut, the present body is an end in itself, "it is completely what it is and not what is possible for it". On the other hand, for Coghill, possible expressed through early adaptations of the axolotl is nothing but one with its body, even in its embryo stage, cannot be conceived outside of a possible behaviour, as we said, "for axolotl, existing from the head to the tail and swimming, is one and the same thing". Organism development and the emergency of its behaviours cannot be separated" (Ralón, 2016, p. 12).

In “The child seen by the adult” (2001), Merleau-Ponty criticizes the idea developed by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (2011) according to which the Oedipus complex is a universal phenomenon. For Merleau-Ponty, there are societies where the complex is not found, like those with a matrilineal structure. In these societies, sexual repression is not absent, and incest is prohibited; however, the object of desire is not the mother, but the sister. Referencing a work from Malinowski⁴ about the family structure in Melanesia, Merleau-Ponty analyzes the role of women in the organization of the community. Pregnant women are celebrated with gifts and services during pregnancy, and the newborn baby, who lives only with his mother right after birth, enjoys some privileges and preferential treatment. Since children stay with their mothers, there is no rivalry with the father. Additionally, there is no male tyranny. Children do not know violence and there is no sexual repression, therefore, since from a very early stage, proofs of affection and sexual conducts are blended. This produces an almost “lineal” development of sexuality, without any detour characteristic of latency produced at the onset of sexual awakening in adolescence. In Western societies, the construction of parental ideal occurs between the ages of three and six, but in the said community it does not occur. Authority is delegated to the uncle on the mother’s side and there is no puberty crisis due to the lack of a fatherly role. In our society, the latency stage occurs from the age of six until adolescence, when the Oedipus complex weakens, and sexual interest arises. But in the case of the Trobriander children, this stage does not exist. What Malinowski notices is that, in the case of the above-mentioned community, there is no complex like the one identified by Freud, but rather an attraction to the figure of the sister and a strong hate towards the maternal uncle, who embodies the image of law and manly power. For Merleau-Ponty, the Trobriander complex is not similar to Oedipus, which comes from a “three party drama” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 128) where all antagonisms are linked together or where the relationship between two of them necessarily affects to the third part. For the Trobrianders, the sister and the uncle are not connected to one another; the attraction to the sister and the hate towards the uncle are two separate conflicts. For Malinowski, there is no causation between the psychological structure and civilization, as Freud claimed, but a sociological causation where the Oedipus complex would result from a given civilization. Thus, Merleau-Ponty concludes:

We could say that the identification of a father with his son is a construction, since it is not meant by destiny, but it constitutes a freedom decision. This does not mean it is an arbitrary decision: it is a human realization created for life in common. (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 107)

⁴ See *The child seen by the adult*, pp. 123-128.

Due to this displacement of the repressive authority figure, there are fewer conflicts between the father and the children. Also, Merleau-Ponty (2001) affirms that communities where the Oedipus complex does not exhibit the tripartite structure are “indolent, inactive” and the “degeneration of the fatherly role goes possibly with a cultural degeneration” (p. 107).

Moreover, in “Psycho-sociologie de l’enfant”, Merleau-Ponty (2001) describes a dialectical approach to child development, where the Oedipus complex is the paradigmatic example of this dynamic. As a result of this approach to the child’s development, new forms arise from, and are motivated by, the preceding stages; specifically, what becomes evident is an auto-transformation where “the movement modifies its own movement” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 249). Besides, there is a reciprocal action between the before and the after in which maturation and learning go hand-in-hand and become two correlative phenomena. These features could be observed in the approach Merleau-Ponty makes of the Oedipus complex: in the development of sexuality “there is auto-transformation, reciprocal action of the libido (“inner condition”) and the parental “environment”” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 249). In the Oedipus complex, an intrinsic relationship between the physiological and the psychological can be discerned, since there is “a self-transformation (of the individual) by himself” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 281). The passage from the pre-genital to the genital (“from aggressiveness to love for the other”) does not simply happen based on hormonal or genital maturity. The failure of the child in his loving quest (the realization of his love for his mother) produces a passage, an overcoming. The new role that the child will assume is promoted by “the cultural atmosphere where he lives” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 280), which facilitates his/her integration to a new vital role. As Merleau-Ponty clearly explains,

the individual is initiated in the social environment by the smallest experience of which he is object, since all gestures and all behaviors respond to a global system: the idea that parents and society are made of the child. He perceives the significance of the attitude we have towards him. (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 280)

Education is one of the factors that influences development, determining the precise places and the definite role that an individual occupies in his or her society. Pointing out the particularities of the time, Merleau-Ponty argues that girls, for example, are integrated into society as “future mother(s)” who will be devoted to child caring and for whom decency is a primary value. Hence, “in case the child chooses the path of Oedipus complex is because it was indicated by the entire surrounding cultural environment” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 280). In the complex, we could observe the link “between the individual and the inter-individual psychologies” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 280), resorting to an idea that

recalls the law of the development of higher mental functions formulated by Vigotsky⁵. On this topic, he states: “what is social is internal to what is individual, and what is individual is internal to what is social, because the individual past is the same interpsychological since birth” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 282). Therefore, there would not be for Merleau-Ponty a fact of individual psychology that would not be, at the same time, social. In the complex, the adult performs a role model in the interaction, since there is a “reciprocity relationship” between the child development and the behavior of the parents. Therefore, the crucial aspect of development is the “apparition of new relations” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 280). There are no precise paths along which development will take place, only “the presence of the parents around the child and culture what drives to him” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 282).

Considering these observations, we could understand why, in “*Les relations avec autrui chez l’enfant*” (1997, 2001), the relationship we establish with our parents will be “the matrix of our relations with others” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 331). In the Oedipus complex, “an objectification of the world for the child is made for the first time, helping him conceive an outer world, different from him” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 116). Later life will depend on the way this objectification is made. Thus, Oedipus is conceived in the *Cours de Sorbonne* as instituting not only in terms of determining the later developments of subjectivity, but also Merleau-Ponty considers this complex an “institution” related to a structure and to the better functioning of our society. In those societies where the Oedipus complex and paternal imago lose strength, the consequences are stagnation and degradation. “Is by overcoming the fixation to the mother and the tendency to death embodied in her, that man will be capable of advancing” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 117).

5. Conclusion

Within the framework of the psychophysical development of the individual, the Oedipus complex is a milestone in the organization of the child’s body schema consisting of a reduction of the body towards itself: the body of the child no longer identifies with the body of an adult caretaker. Instead, there is a relaunching of the child’s personal history that overcomes the complex; it is a restitution of the body to itself. Therefore, the dissolution of the Oedipus complex opens the child to a new way of sociability for the

⁵ See: Vigotsky, L. (1934). *Thinking and Speech*. Chapter 5. For Vigotsky, the psychological processes have an interpsychological origin to become intrapsychological later. For example, in the case of the act of pointing out, children try, at first, to grab the objects they wish to possess. Adults perform this action as the wish of the child for a determined object and they facilitate it to him. Little by Little, the attempt to grab the wished objects will become the act of pointing out, which origin is based in the interaction itself that the child has established with his surroundings.

first time, where his/her perceptual capacities will begin to re-generate from his own personal history. As Merleau-Ponty maintains, it is the matrix of our relationship with others and, therefore, the matrix of our being in the world. As he says in “Psycho-sociologie de l’enfant” (2001), “the essential thing of development is the restructuring by which a bodily situation is assumed in order to realize a new kind of life” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 279). Other events identified as instituting, like falling in love, imply for Merleau-Ponty a change in my relation to the world: in “The Child’s Relations with Others” (1997), the lover returns to that syncretic sociability typical of the child; he or she returns to view the world from the eyes of his beloved. The experience of the other “is necessarily an ‘alienating’ experience, as long as it removes my own self and institutes a mix between myself and the other” (Merleau-Ponty, 1997, p. 228). Likewise, the Oedipus complex represents the very form of lived time. In this complex, we can see the untimely advent of the future upon the child’s present, insofar as it anticipates a loving behavior that will appear with sexual significance during puberty. The child experiences within his/her body the sway of time, which seems to become invisible in adulthood (the past that remains as footprint, as sediment; and the future that appears as the possible, as what could ever be). Both dimensions of temporality become flesh during childhood, struggling to take a place in the space that is the body of the child.

The dialogue between the courses on institution and the *Cours de Sorbonne* emphasizes the public and private aspects of institution, and therefore, of the Oedipus complex. In both works, the link between personal and public histories becomes evident. In the *Cours de Sorbonne*, the complex ensures the progress of a given society from the reinforcement of an authoritarian and repressive symbolic image, i.e., that of the father. In the courses on institution, Oedipus’s importance is highlighted in terms of a body schema formation which constitutes the starting point for the subsequent relaunching and activation of sexual and social life by the individual – a product of objectification from the symbolic matrix (substitution record) of the Oedipus complex. However, the process itself takes on a different place in both works. In the courses about institution, the complex is institution if it is overcome, positing thus as retreat of the individual towards his or her own body. In the *Courses de Sorbonne*, the complex is institution within itself, the social organization structure of a community and a macrostructure that need to develop under certain conditions in order not to confine a society to stagnation.

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of Oedipus in *Cours de Sorbonne* constitutes a critique of a naturalistic view of this complex and of other milestones or processes considered as instituting in the life of an individual. Far from being a universal phenomenon, Oedipus receives a specific meaning by virtue of sedimented forms of upbringing and family organization, which assign the role of power and authority to the father

figure. A phenomenological analysis of this complex and of events such as, for example, menstruation (Merleau-Ponty, 2001, p. 278) manifests the mutual interference between the individual and the social aspect, showing how a fact whose significance seems to be universal (and even embedded in the biological), it is redefined within a specific social group that gives it a place and a precise meaning during development. This is how the analysis made by the phenomenologist in the light of sociology reveals the dialectic that underlies the development of an individual, which oscillates between the phylogenetic inheritance and the significance that it possesses within the life of a living being. This leap from phylogenesis to ontogenesis (which can be identified in Von Uexküll's ethological analyzes) acquires a notable value in Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology, constituting mainly a methodological warning: an event in the life of a subject cannot be understood from a fragmentary analysis. Instead, the vital environment that embraces it and gives it meaning must be investigated. The methodological holism inherited from Goldstein (and which is analyzed in the *Cours de Sorbonne*), appears again in the analysis of Oedipus, this time as the instantiation of a certain way of examining the life of a subject, which tries to recover the hidden and sedimented layers of meaning that make a fact into a meaning-giving event.

Despite the differences we could note in both works about the way Oedipus complex is described and the implications that it has for a determined society, overcoming Oedipus complex places itself as the opening to a new way of interacting with others, from our own body schema and from our own perception habits. The relaunch of new significations that implies human institution, specifies in the particular history of an individual a determined way of interacting with the environment: in falling in love, from the life of the individual who is object of our love; in birth (as the instituting event par excellence which goes through the lives of those who receive it), bringing up new significations amidst ordinariness; and, finally, Oedipus complex, as closure of the body of the careers and opening of a new vital history to which everything perceived would make sense.

The instituting events, then, imply the opening to the things and to the others from a new signification, from a new horizon, which replicates the operating senses but is always open to be touched by new significations. To the extent that the events that are considered instituting during a person's childhood and adolescence are aligned with transformations in the relations we establish with the world and the things in it, Merleau-Ponty will directly connect the private history of an individual with the public history of his/her community, that is, with the idea of institution as a vector that traverses the lives of individuals, from his/her psychophysical makeup to the consolidation of revolutions.

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