

10. MERLEAU-PONTY: THE DEPTH OF MEMORY
AS THE DEPTH OF THE WORLD

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Truth does not "inhabit" only
"the inner man," or more
accurately, there is no inner
man, man is in the world, and
only in the world does he know
himself.-Phenomenology of
Perception

I. Decentering and Re-membering: Depth qua Memory

Merleau-Ponty came to see depth as the key not only to an adequate phenomenology of perception, but also the key to articulating a new ontology that could allow for the coming to be of truth, of the sens of the world, the meaning of history, the power of art, and ultimately of that strange intertwining of human being within time, ambiguity, materiality and language. For Merleau-Ponty, depth became the primary dimension of experience to be interrogated, "the dimension of dimensions" (EM, p. 185).¹ The importance of depth to understanding Merleau-Ponty's use of the term "flesh" and as central to the import of both The Visible and the Invisible and "Eye and Mind" has yet to be fathomed. Without radicalizing the notion of depth as thoroughly as Merleau-Ponty, it is not possible to subvert the subjectivistic approach to human being, the mentalistic approach to subjectivity qua consciousness, or the dualistic, reifying, conceptions of the natural, historical, cultural world.

Seen traditionally, depth is a "derivative" dimension, constructed from the "simple given" of spatial location

["primary"], its subsequent linkage via the subject into breadth ["secondary"], and its final "projection" into distances, as that "third" dimension of experience (EM, p. 185). For Merleau-Ponty, however, depth was not to be described as the "projection" of the subject: it is itself that richness of the "life world" which evokes intention and unfolds in apprehension, action, and articulation. Depth is of the world--a world laden with meaning lodged within landscapes. As Merleau-Ponty announced in the Phenomenology of Perception, to see this depth is to restructure our understanding of world:

"More directly than other dimensions of space, depth forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs" (p. 256).

For Merleau-Ponty, the primordial experience was one of meaning, of auto-organized wholes, gestalten, from which person and world then emerged. He realized that from a basis of mutually indifferent, meaningless sensations, no world, no person could emerge. However, with a radical view of space as the space of one's lived body, discovering itself as summoned to depths of perceptual, cultural, idiosyncratic, and historical sediments, then one finds "an indissoluble link between things and myself": "By rediscovering the vision of depth, that is to say, of a depth which is not objectified and made up of mutually external points, we shall once more outrun the traditional alternatives and elucidate the relationship between subject and object" (p. 256). It was the traditionally overlooked depth of experience that reveals the unity of self, world and others that Merleau-Ponty sought to articulate in the Phenomenology of Perception.

The major achievement of Merleau-Ponty's early work, however, was to equally radicalize the role of time in

constituting depth. Traditionally, the fact was acknowledged that in order for there to be a depth, there must be present either a synthesis or a co-presence of various temporal moments for the possibility of the appearance of the "spannedness" of breadth "projected into a distance" or "at a breadth from itself." However, there is nothing unique to depth about such foundational or transcendental aspects of time. For Merleau-Ponty, this was a mistake. Time is not the synthesizing ground of depth. Time emerges within depth, "the dimension of dimensions." Rather than reconstructing time as a condition for the possibility of experience or as an unquestionable given, Merleau-Ponty discovers time in the depth of embodiment, which becomes increasingly revealed as the intertwining of perception, imagination, emotion and memory. For Merleau-Ponty, time is "in" the world, not "without" as some "container" for events, any more than space can be seen as such a "container." Rather time is within the depth of a non-logocentric push and pull of a discontinuous, yet historicizing, unfolding of significance.

Merleau-Ponty began with the project of describing a world in which self, others, nature, culture and history are always "coming to be." As unfolding, turning back on itself, elongating, and contracting, the human being in the world, as an embodied "working through," is radically temporalizing, in a way in which categorical approaches can never be, since they center on "all or none" phenomena, taking experience as established, as schematizable. In always being provisional, played out within improvisations, through restructuring constellations of meaning, the time of the world is enjambed--is "thick" in folding back on itself--in other words, is depthful.

In contrast to explanatory approaches, the depth of time, memory, in the work of Merleau-Ponty is articulated in being "re-membered," given over to embodiment, which is intertwined in its landscapes. As his thought moves from the early to later works, culminating in the notion of "the

flesh" [la chair], Merleau-Ponty becomes increasingly able to articulate the ways in which human being is "of the world," how the Western notion of subject has been misleading and needs to be "decentered," and depth is the key to that decentering. The described decentering emerges within a dispersal which still links up with itself as both "re-mindful" and "re-remembering" in the temporality of a memory set free from its subjectivistic confines. In other words, in moving from the thought of the early work to that of the last works of Merleau-Ponty, there is a sense in which the gaps and intertwinings of significance as fluctuating, unfolding, dispersing and dovetailing within conflict give a primacy to the time of depth over against the traditional "common sense" notion of the primacy of the space of depth. For this reason, this paper will attempt to think through Merleau-Ponty's gradual articulation of the depth of memory as a key to understanding the radical nature of depth in his gradual overcoming of a subjectivistic, mentalistic, dualistic and logocentric ontology. The Phenomenology of Perception indicates a direction to be followed in the articulation of depth that becomes almost a leitmotif running throughout the unfinished last writings and "working notes" published in The Visible and the Invisible.²

II. The Phenomenology: Phenomenal Field and the Haunting Depth of Time.

The movement that begins the Phenomenology of Perception is a turn away from the idea of sensations (that are then associated) towards the notion of "the phenomenal field," and this itself is a turn towards rediscovering the depth of experience. The notion of "phenomenal field" moves away from interpreting the world as states of affairs that are already constituted and externally related "within" a containing space towards a notion of a primary depth from which an unfolding vision emerges prior to the confrontation of subject and object: "there is then a depth which does not

yet operate between objects, which, a fortiori, does not yet assess the distance between them, and which is simply the opening of perception upon some ghost thing as yet scarcely qualified" (p. 266). From the outset, therefore, Merleau-Ponty identifies his reconsideration of perception with the uncovering of an enriched notion of depth. Furthermore, he has identified two characteristics of experience which must be appreciated in order to allow this depth to show itself: a spontaneity that is prior to an "activity/passivity" distinction, and in addition, the always ambiguous, incipient character of perception. In terms of the first point, there is a happening, a manifesting, which is not the work of an agent nor the operation of an objectified world impinging upon a recipient. In terms of the second emphasis, there is a "ghost thing" and a "scarcely qualified opening of perception" whose identities are to emerge together, but never completely, always open to further revision. This departure point also has a temporal significance which casts the depth of time: there is never an absolute present, any more than an absolute perceiver or perceived, for this "opening" always hearkens to beginnings and endings destined to be in the moment, but never fully so, never to be "closed," but rather always trailing off into horizons that can burst forth into foreground again. The notion of "phenomenal field" of the Phenomenology of Perception evokes a dispersion of spaces, times, perceptual unfoldings, shades, significances, future avenues of explorations and the haunting of past explorations that stand "behind" one another, "within" one another, like Chinese toy boxes, which inaugurates Merleau-Ponty's articulation of a richer sense of the depth of world.

However, the depth of world, the depth of time, in the spontaneity and ongoing fluctuating ambiguity of experience could not be articulated without Merleau-Ponty's acute understanding of the founding role of embodiment. The body remains the key to the Phenomenology of Perception in regard to the treatment of depth and the depth of memory as with that of other phenomena. It is this third facet of

Merleau-Ponty's treatment of depth which transforms its conception into a notion far more radical and far-reaching. There is only an embodied spontaneity, a kinaesthetic intention, that literally "works" things out, moves across its field, has been places, whose hand and step have become wary of slippery gravel or having become proficient at shooting a basketball or having become now unaccustomed and therefore vulnerable to the hard city streets once walked incessantly. As an embodied being, the impersonal one of the Phenomenology is dispersed within the historical task of an ongoing exploration and inhabitation of emerging norms and sedimented significances. As this embodied task, one "finds" oneself at depths: "thus depth cannot be understood as belonging to the thought of an acosmic subject, but as a possibility of a subject involved in the world" (p. 267). The body is not "in" space, but is spatial as a "being in the distance": as a field spanning the "here/there" dimension as well as the "past/present/future" dimension. Rather, to be more precise, both these spatial and temporal dimensions, as equally of the world and of my body, play off one another as one phenomenon, and it is this "coming together" or "interplaying" which is the depth of situatedness.

The Phenomenology of Perception is at pains to articulate "the situation" as a depth of mutually unfolding psyche and world. Not only is a new understanding of depth a key to articulating Merleau-Ponty's notion of "the phenomenal field" and the full import of the lived body, but also Merleau-Ponty is acute enough to recognize that the inadequacies of the main currents of the Western philosophical tradition are woefully apparent in their overlooking of depth. As Merleau-Ponty aptly phrased it, "For God, who is everywhere, breadth is immediately equivalent to depth" (p. 255). God as eternal, self-transparent, and omnipresent would not be a being of depth. He or She would be infinite, and for that reason would be shallow, infinitely shallow! This, too, is precisely the mistake of the categorical thinking of idealism and realism, who equate depth with breadth "seen from the

side": as a result of their static, constructed schemata of experience, "they tell us what God might think about it" (p. 255). However, God's vision is inaccurate to the world human beings inhabit. For example, God can't locate himself at my window and strain to see that woman emerging from the distance. He is her and all points in Creation. Of course, the human being is also beyond itself in Creation, as Merleau-Ponty is at pains to articulate, and for example, if I am at the window, I am also that woman in the distance in some way too. I synaesthetically feel the dirt under her feet as I see her legs, feel the sweat trickling down her body as she climbs the hill in the bright sun, and smell the odor of the honeysuckle that I notice she is passing. However, I am this woman within a fleeting instant in a rather unGodly way: open to further disclosure, always kept at an irretrievable distance that synaesthesia gaps, but never erases, no matter how close she comes, and in general, always incomplete in my experience of the landscape about me and of myself called to watch and participate in it. Nor is the temporal dimension of this depth any more accessible to God. For example, God can't be "summoned back" by the depth of time, the plays of indeterminacies, to the painful memory of the scene at Calvary. However, I can be so summoned by seeing the woman's hand bleed as she is cut by a bramble bush on the side of the road. For a moment, the present "leaks" into that past scene, as I am re-called to it, when my ex-wife cut her hand at the oceanside. God can't enter these shiftings, since as all time, as fully present, He is fully at Calvary and also fully in this moment, as He is all moments simultaneously. God enjoys full presence; humans do not. Limited, embodied, human being is cast into depth, is a depth whose limit, whose gaps are transmuted into meaning, the richness of meaning. For God, there can be no "pull" or "tug" or "drift" to moments absent in some sense, but present in another, and mutually transforming in this tension, that is the depth of experience qua temporal [for human being]. Merleau-Ponty realized that with their Godlike reconstruction

of "reality," idealism and realism had legislated against an appreciation of depth, its primary sense.

A fourth contribution of the Phenomenology of Perception to an understanding of depth, and specifically to depth as essentially temporal, memorial, is the characterization of the "how" of the progressive, embodied articulation of meanings and norms within the phenomenal field: it is seen not as a smooth, step building progression, but rather as an uneven, often retrogressive, conflicted, and incommensurate with its constituents "coming together of that which is never unified." These "imperfections" of the process of evolving significances are seen by Merleau-Ponty as that which insures the play of meaning--the depth of the phenomena. In other words, appearance is not the perfection cast by the second order reconstructions of traditional explanatory schemata. One's explorations are not meaningful because they arrive at certainties with absolute answers, but rather they are meaningful because they arrive at that which is always questionable, can always "be pushed further,"--or even sometimes, because they arrive at that which contradicts other apprehensions, dispositions or interpretations, and thereby have even a greater depth of significance. In exploring the richness of the uncertainty of perception and articulation of the lived body in the Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty arrives at a suggestive formulation of the nature of depth, that I will take as rendering correctly what depth is:

This being simultaneously present in experiences which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one another, this contraction into one perceptual act of a whole possible process constitute the originality of depth. It is the dimension in which things or elements of things envelope each other, whereas breadth and height are the

dimensions in which they are juxtaposed (pp. 264-5).

For Merleau-Ponty, depth is an envelopment, a mutual implication of elements that considered abstractly should be mutually exclusive, and an enjambling of moments that also considered abstractly should constitute a temporal span. Depth envelopes that which is whole by the gestalt formation of seemingly disparate parts, whose very fissures define their unity, which is unshakeable as a whole, but always requiring reachivement. The depth of time that comes forth in memory is not the result of an "additive" unification "across" succession, but rather is the interplay within tensions of differing temporal regions contracted within a field.

The Phenomenology of Perception is best known for its detailing the auto-organized achievement of perceptual unities, and yet some of its most striking passages describe how this unity is fraught with conflict and this conflict is what gives the world its sense:

Music is not in visible space, but it besieges, undermines, displaces that space so that soon these overdressed listeners who take on a judicial air and exchange remarks or smiles, unaware that the floor is trembling beneath their feet, are like a ship's crew buffeted about on the surface of a tempestuous sea. The two spaces are distinguishable only against a background of a common world, and can compete with each other because they lay claim to its total being. They are united at the very instant in which they clash (p. 225).

For Merleau-Ponty, perceptual unities link within tensions, within the clash of competing claims, and this is their sens, their depth. The clash is not local, circumscribed, but is rather "total" in its conflicting claims, but does not undermine significance. The emphasis on meaning as emerging in fissures, in dispersions, in deformations, in the play of presence and absence, in dislocations, and in gaping temporalities, has not yet come to the foreground as in Merleau-Ponty's last writings, but the tendencies towards this later radicalized ontology have been already sketched.

The descriptions of the dispersion of elements within the "coming to be" of sens with the Phenomenology is inextricably a recasting of the depth of time manifested in memory. The Phenomenology describes in much detail how the body as "lived body" is memory embodied within the central tensions of the "phenomenal field": the habitual body is the body of past experience understanding its way through the present conflicting and ambiguous, but inviting and evocative, elements of the perceptual field. The body dispersed in the depths of perception is the body called to dispersal in time: "to sum up, the ambiguity of being in the world is translated by that of the body, and this is understood through that of time" (p. 45). This dispersal within time, this body of the past called forth from within the phenomenal field to be bound up in its further unfoldings is the depth of time, the memorial call of the world in perception: "And that again is of the essence of time: there would be no present, that is to say, no sensible world with its thickness and inexhaustible richness, if perception . . . did not retain a past in the depth of the present, and did not contract that past into that depth" (p. 240). The continuity of time consciousness detailed by Husserl is founded in perception, but it is a unity that is presumptive: it is taken by perceptual faith as a way of dwelling within a horizon that is besieged by conflicting claims, splinters, discontinuities, and gaps which form a whole within their very disarray. The depth of experience is the history of such constellations, such

gestalten: the phenomenal field as "the world in which one knows one's way about" is the horizon of memory, the field of re-memberment.

Despite the achievement of detailing the depth of memory in its inscription within the phenomenal field, Merleau-Ponty's account in the Phenomenology of the depth of memory as the depth of the world remains flawed. One strand of memory has been described: the impersonal, kinaesthetic, inhabited grasp on a repeatable past. This operative working through of the past that gives one a present, and that thrusts one into the future of action, yields a depth of time which is the basis of an ongoing interrogation. This description allows us to see the life of memory as essential to present experience, its depth. These descriptions are sorely needed supplements to mentalistic accounts of memory qua "recollection" of that which has receded into the absence of the no longer present--a sense of pastness that would have no meaning without a sustained sense of the past as still ongoing. However, this needed corrective of the Phenomenology leaves one between the Scylla of the [nonintelligible] recollection of the absent and the Charybdis of the past habitually, impersonally present. The middle ground of memory as an interplay of presence and absence, of idiosyncrasy and impersonality, of perception, imagination and emotion, and of the other intertwinings of world and psyche within the twisting paths of memory remains to be articulated in the last writings of Merleau-Ponty, particularly The Visible and the Invisible. As Merleau-Ponty later realized, his use of the traditional philosophical language in the Phenomenology implied the very dichotomies that he sought to overcome in his phenomenological descriptions (VI, p. 200). Only when these dichotomies are surpassed in the new language and style of interrogation of the last writings, do these intertwinings, these hauntingly powerful indirect voices of the depth of time speak with their true middle-voiced siren's invocation.

III. Flesh as the Re-memberment of Things Past

In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty claims that to speak, to paint, to register that the things and oneself are coming to be, is to point to "a voluminosity we express in a word when we say a thing is there" (p. 185). For things to come to be, they emerge within a depth, in which "we must seek space and its content together" (p. 185). The trajectory that takes the understanding of existence into a depth of landscape is also a trajectory into a timescape, however, since "these 'grips' upon space are also ways of taking hold of time [la duree]" (p. 185). The leitmotif of Merleau-Ponty's later work is a return to depth, to "the dimension of dimensions." This depth is the haunting of time, the peculiar way in which perception proceeds by regression to earlier significations, and confusions with other modes of apprehension, in order to add, to gain, a depth of experience, of sens. In order to appreciate this leitmotif, however, it is necessary to highlight its ground in the analyses of how sens "comes to be" within the writings of The Visible and the Invisible.

In articulating the notion of "the flesh" in The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty seeks to articulate the "in-between" left out by traditional philosophical dichotomies. As the intertwining of body and world, past and present, logical and emotional, perceptual and imaginary, personal and impersonal, among other interstices, flesh is that depth of experience re-called and re-membered in memory. It is for that reason that Merleau-Ponty comments in the "working notes" that "It is hence because of depth that things have a flesh" (p. 219). Although Merleau-Ponty states in one of his projected plans in the notes (p. 183)³ that he must first work out the new role given to the imaginary and to memory in order to give a sense of how the world and truth "come to be," it is not in the [incomplete] text, but only in the latest notes that we find some of his most provocative statements on memory itself. In order to fully grasp their

significance, however, it is first necessary to see some of the other themes previously articulated in terms of the notion of "the flesh."

In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty sought to highlight the difference within identity, the discontinuities lodged within perceptual unfolding, the tensions among various modes of apprehension even as they formed a whole, and the unsettled quality of the overlapping of the impersonal and the idiosyncratic: characteristics that led to seeing perception as "reversible," and as reverberating from depths of time and meaning lodged within the world. This was the "countermovement" to the work of the Phenomenology that established the unity of the field as self-organizing. In Heideggerian terms, the projects sketched and outlined in the writings gathered in The Visible and the Invisible are the next "turn" or "spiral" in the hermeneutic circle, cast in a new speaking that allows Merleau-Ponty to go beyond the confines of the Phenomenology. All the themes needed to recast perception, and to reveal the depth of the world as the depth of memory are present in the following description of the "red of a dress" from the Visible and the Invisible, and we can use it as a key to understanding how Merleau-Ponty now makes possible a new understanding of depth and memory:

The red dress a fortiori holds all with its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto the fabric of the invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or Madagascar, it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, bishops and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornments and that of

uniforms. And its red literally is not the same as it appears in the constellation or in the other, as the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917 precipitates in it or that of the eternal feminine, or that of the public prosecutor, or that of the gypsies dressed like hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs-Élysées. A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from imaginary worlds (p. 132).

The perception of a red is seen by Merleau-Ponty at this point as a "gaping open" among horizons, among regions, in which there is nothing present, but rather there is something tenuous, something latent, something of gaps, that is a vortex into which one is drawn and situated. The red of the dress is an interplay between now and an event of twenty five years ago, between the hard red seen on roofs at specific times and habitually, between the difference of the sight of this texture of fuzzy red and the soft, flakey red of the clay soil near Aix, between perceived reds and imagined ones, and between so many other themes of apprehension. These dislocations and jarrings which nevertheless cash themselves out in one's present perception and constitute its depth are all dislocations in time. There are "leakages" from personally significant past events [the red gown one wore at a particular graduation], habitually encountered [past] significances [the authoritative red of the bishop during the years one was involved with the church], impersonally historical overtones [the red essence of the Revolution of 1917], personally encountered historical significances [the red of the costumes of those particular gypsies of twenty-five years ago, in whose case one took such an interest], habitual [past] imaginings [the devouring, red flames of hell evoked during the years in church], personally significant or singularly performed past imaginings [the red of her lipstick that one dreamed of smearing in a passionate kiss during a

certain yearning night], habitual [past] perceptions [the red clay fields glanced at daily for years on the way home], singular past sensory experiences of various sorts [the red of the blood of the horrible accident one witnessed], amidst other "leakages" of past, present and future significances. These tensions are not "in one's head": they are within the world, sediments of a landscape of which one is part. As responding to a world, one responds to a chorus of voices of the past lodged in things, starting with the most simple thing, the mere red of someone's dress, which are interplays in the vortex of "the present," and to which one can hearken more explicitly or find oneself drawn to in those siren songs in what we call "memory proper."

Within the interplay of these discontinuities, neither the perceived nor the perceiver can be localized within space, within time. With this notion of being caught up in a "winding element"--the flesh--which is neither matter, nor mind, which is "midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea" (p. 139), Merleau-Ponty rejects the notion of the spatio-temporal "field" of the *Phenomenology* (p. 239).⁴ With no "chunk of absolutely hard indivisible being" (p. 132), as Merleau-Ponty originally denied of the red of the dress, nor any indivisibly hard vantage point either, as Merleau-Ponty saw in stating that "the intentional 'encroachments' are irreducible" (p. 239) and that the perceiver is "a being of depths" (p. 136), then the subject-object dichotomy which prevented the description of the "in between" of memory in the *Phenomenology* has been surpassed in the writings of *The Visible and the Invisible*. As Merleau-Ponty states in the notes, this is not an annihilation of the traditional subject, but a "decentering" (p. 193).

The recognition of the prolongation of the traditional "subject" into diverse regions and times of its landscape, and the prolongation of the landscape or "object" into various places and times of its perceiver--"the return of the visible upon itself" (p. 142) throws "the mental" into the

world and situates the depths of the world in the lived body, leading Merleau-Ponty to articulate the notion of "reversibility": "To touch is to touch oneself. To be understood as: the things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world, through it the world surrounds me" (p. 147). One sees the red of the dress, one sees oneself [not necessarily explicitly] within the red, as the wearer of a red graduation gown, as the person who walked by red terrains, as the person interested in those gypsies, as a being at depths of memory that are lodged within the landscape, which itself is an ongoing interplay of jarring, but interweaving significances. Conversely, all that is seen, touched, imagined, recalled, is played out among vortices. The thing is not so much the equilibration of internal and external horizons situated in a field of inhabitation, as articulated in The Phenomenology, but rather appears in the gaping interplays of everywhere and nowhere, presence and absence, or lines of force which are a "tissue" or "latency." Both the body and the visible are called a "tour de force." They are pulled together as a sleight of hand, like the card which appears in the hand by magic, but the magic here is so profound that the magician is equally played with and uncertain. In January 1959, Merleau-Ponty writes in the notes: "There are only differences between significations" (p. 171). In other words, there are only openings into depths, into leakages which are neither proper or improper.

With this thesis of the "reversibility" of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty can finally do justice to memory. The "general thing" or "element," the "flesh," consists of interplays of presence and absence whose terms resonate and jar within the span or fold that includes the history of one's being dispersed into depths. The past, the depth of experiences, happens in becoming manifest through that which calls and resounds within any present experience. The past re-members itself, finds again the body which is neither "mine" or the "world's," becomes again the flesh, and in the present shock

of recognition of a past reincarnated leads into a twisting path open to recall. Freud and Nietzsche, too, realized that the present perception is only a gateway on a crooked twisting path in which we find ourselves as past, as passed, within the most unlikely things, and the things have their voices echoing with the past only by speaking through our present self-awareness. Merleau-Ponty increasingly listened to those indirect voices of which he had earlier spoken: "It is not we who perceive, it is the thing that perceived itself yonder--it is not we who speak, it is the truth which speaks itself at the depths of speech . . ." (p. 185). He has destroyed any "mentalistic" thesis of memory and returned the past to the past of the world: "That is, that the things have us, and that it is not we have the things. That the being that has been cannot stop having been. The 'Memory of the World.' The language has us and that it is not we who have language. That it is the being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being" [p. 194]. This reversibility awakens in one the speech of voices which are not one's own, but rather perhaps the roar of hell within those flames in the campfire which speaks to one of old guilt, or awakens the vision which is not my own, but rather perhaps that of a stretch of red soil that returns to one the sight of a little boy dawdling on the way home from school.

This reversibility of the perceiver and perceived is not to be understood in terms solely of a phenomenology of perception, as Merleau-Ponty had originally set out to accomplish. The notion of the flesh led Merleau-Ponty towards a phenomenology of experience that articulated the intertwining of not only perception with memory, but also with imagination. This "vertical dimension" of depth that emerges in dislocations which are nonetheless interplayed within the sens of situations is "not made of a multitude of memories, images, judgements, it is one sole movement that one can coin out in judgements, in memories, but that holds them in one sole cluster . . ." (p. 236). Perceptions, imagination, memory, reflection are emergences from a thicker

adhesion to the tissue of experience, the depth of the flesh. They can be coined out distinctly only because they envelope one another, which gives to each the depth of their sens. For a being who could register "sensations" without being thrown into these interplays, without the intertwining of imagination and kinaesthesia, there would not be the same memorial depth to experience: there might be no sudden crossover into a past of echoes, images, quasi-presences. However, for human being, as Merleau-Ponty notes in 1960, the imaginary is also an "element" (p. 267) in the original sense of that term, a strand of that vortex to which one is given.

For the Merleau-Ponty of the last writings, perception has been decentered into a play of presence and absence in which there is neither pure presence nor a purely present: "One has to understand that it is visibility itself that involves a non-visibility--In the very measure that I see, I do not know what I see (a familiar person is not defined), which does not mean that there would be nothing there, but that the *Wesen* in question is like a ray of the world tacitly touched" (p. 247). The tacit touch is the touch in which there is the least distinction between touching and being touched, in which the interplay of differences is most like a vortex in which there is only a whirling positionality which somehow takes a stand within the decentered center of ongoing movement. The *Wesen* of red then is played out "in the red like the memory of the high school building in its odor--Understand this active *Wesen* coming from the red itself, perhaps as an articulation of the red upon other colors or under lighting . . . not a change of red into 'another color'; it is the modification of the red by its own duration" (p. 247). There is not "another red" here, the "red" of the high school, or in words, there is not a separate "association": the red perceived is itself this dance of significances. If one then explicitly takes up one of these dispersions [which will only lead to another such vortex] by remembering for a moment the red of one's high school, then one has as much been remembered by the red in its play of

depths, as having remembered it. Within the vector or "ray" of this red, one has also become re-membered by taking up explicitly the past of one's lived body.

For Merleau-Ponty in these last writings, there is no sense in which memory can be taken as some sort of "interior monologue." One does not see one's past "in one's head." One looks into the world to find one's past. Memory discovers the past within an "openness upon general configurations or constellations, rays of the past and rays of the world at the end of which, through many 'memory screens' dotted with lacunae and with the imaginary, pulsate some almost sensible structures, some individual memories" (p. 240). As one gazes, one is taken into the flesh, re-membered: the vortex of significations constellates a sense which will continually evolve and transform, and one is taken up into the interplay of juxtapositions, and into the crystalization of a memory, a meaning, which itself is held of a piece with imagination and perception. Merleau-Ponty gives an example of how there are juxtapositions of depths in the world that elicit memory by citing an example from Freud of the memories of a yellow-striped butterfly, yellow-streaked pears, and the maid, Grusha, whose name is recalled in saying the Russian name for pear. The memories are elicited by the kind of interplays that Merleau-Ponty means to indicate by the notion "flesh":

There are not here three memories: the butterfly--the pear--the maid of the same name associated! There is a certain play of the butterfly in the colored field, a certain (verbal) *Wesen* of the butterfly and of the pear--which communicate with the language *Wesen* Grusha (in virtue of the incarnation of language)--There are three *Wesen* connected by their center, belonging to the same ray of being. The analysis shows in addition

that the maid spread open her legs like the butterfly its wings, Hence there is overdetermination . . . i.e. symbolic matrices (p. 240).

The past suddenly comes to one, because in the depth of the present moment, which is only quasi-present, there can be lateral transfers of significance which awaken other foci in the tissue of the meaning one is experiencing. Each "presence" contains resonances, dissonances, that are the dynamism of the flesh. Memory plays itself out through these dispersions, at times enfolding one into its depths. The Memory of the World interlaces the landscape, whose prolongations in one's apprehensions always contain echoes and whispered invitations. The rays of the world are not substances, but onrushing, enveloping significances to which one opens oneself.

This final radicalization of the depth of memory can be seen in Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Husserl's diagram of time consciousness in the notes of May, 1959 (pp. 193-7)--a rejection that was not part of a similar discussion in the *Phenomenology*. Here, Merleau-Ponty states of Husserl's diagram that "the flow is faulty." For Merleau-Ponty, at this stage of his thinking, the lines and points, even understood as recast in a "field notion" do not represent radically enough the "ungraspability" of the present, the radically "partial" nature of syntheses, and the tensions of "centers of forces." The problem of memory is inseparable from that of forgetting. For the Merleau-Ponty of the spring of 1959, Bergson, Husserl, Sartre, and he himself in his early writings, failed to evoke the sens of forgetting "as a manner of being to . . . in turning away from . . ." (p. 196). He sees this as a failure to see memory in its interplay with present consciousness, and to understand the nature of both. In looking at Husserl's work at this point, Merleau-Ponty realizes that it must be corrected in order to emphasize that the present is never fully present or "now": it is a gaping

openness, an only partial coming together, a slipping, and a going together of what is separated. If the present is such a riddled "grasp" on the world, the shiftings into memory can't be eliminated from the possibility of being able to perceive the present, as a playing off of those very same shiftings. Hence, the nature of both present perception and memory are tied in a radical way, and are to be understood in the same movement.

This "deepened" way of thinking of time and perception that Merleau-Ponty stated he was seeking the previous winter (p. 168), also makes understandable how forgetting can be:

It is in better understanding perception (and hence imperception)--i.e.: understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as undifferentiation. The fact that one no longer sees the memory = not a destruction of a psychic material which be the sensible, but its disarticulation which makes there be no longer a separation (écart), a relief. This is the night of forgetting. Understand that "to be conscious" = to have a figure on a ground, and that it disappears by disarticulation--the figure-ground distinction introduces a third term between the "subject" and the "object." It is that separation (écart) first of all that is the perceptual meaning (p. 197).

Forgetting occurs when the tensions between that which is mutually implicated despite being mutually exclusive [Merleau-Ponty's original definition of depth in the *Phenomenology*] are no longer brought into relief. The present thus loses its depth, the depth which is that of the past remembered. For memory is opened through these tensions which are

highlighted in "perception as differentiation." It is striking how Merleau-Ponty came to highlight that which was only implicit in his original appreciation of "the gestalt" in the Phenomenology: now what he sees as most significant in the gestalt is the separation, the dispersion, the tension of going together within difference, that gives the gestalt a sens--"perception as a divergence (écart)" (p. 201). The memorial depth of the gestalt is this divergence which beckons from the daylight of there being things apprehended within differentiation.

Through his later writings, Merleau-Ponty came to articulate a more radical notion of depth and memory. The flesh is a depth which provides the missing "in-between" of traditional dichotomies that Merleau-Ponty could not yet articulate in the Phenomenology of Perception, which would not allow an adequate description of memory at that point. In the last writings, however, Merleau-Ponty articulated the way in which one is re-membered by the world in remembering, put back into the body of the world, as flesh, as depth, since being present itself is itself a transformation of one into all the various depths of the world in their interplay. Memory, then, is no longer a "mental activity," nor are memories "mental contents." The depth of the past is not "in one's head." The tissue of the flesh, of the interlacing and also discontinuous play of meaning, is in the landscape of which one is part. Articulating this decentering of Being, Merleau-Ponty was able to discard the mentalistic bias that has plagued Western philosophy and rediscover the "Memory of the World."

NOTES

¹All references in this paper will be made to the English translation: "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery in The Primacy of Perception, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) [a translation of "L'Oeil et l'esprit," Les Temps Modernes, 17: 184-5, 1961]. After this, all references to this work will be included in the body of the text in parentheses, or in cases in which the work cited is not obvious by the context, with parentheses and the identification "EM" preceding the page number.

Also, all references in this paper will be made to the English translation: Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962) [a translation of Phénoménologie de la perception (Paris: Gallimard, 1945)]. After this, all references to this work will be included in the body of the text in parentheses, or in cases in which the work cited is not obvious by the context, with parentheses and the identification "PP" preceding the page number.

In addition, all references in this paper will be made to the English translation: The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) [a translation of Le visible et l'invisible (Paris: Gallimard, 1964)]. After this, all references to this work will be included in the body of the text in parentheses, or in cases in which the work cited is not obvious by the context, with parentheses and the identification "VI" preceding the page number.

²In order to meet the limitations of this volume, I have edited out the portion of this paper as originally delivered at the Seventh Annual Merleau-Ponty Circle Meetings [Binghamton, New York, 1982] which compared the later work of Merleau-Ponty with several parallel themes in the

work of Gaston Bachelard. This comparison with Bachelard will appear now as a separate study.

3" In OR after analyses of the psychophysical body pass to analyses of memory and the imaginary--of temporality and from there to the Cogito and intersubjectivity" (p. 173).

4" The decisive step is to recognize that in fact a consciousness is intentionality without acts . . . that the 'objects' of consciousness are not something positive in front of us, but nuclei of signification about which the transcendental life pivots, specified voids-- . . . that the chiasm, the 'intentional encroachments' are irreducible, which leads to the rejecting of the notion of subject, or to the defining of the subject as a field, as a hierarchized system of structures opened by an inaugural there is" (VI, p. 239).