

Merleau-Ponty and the "Backward Flow" of Time: The Reversibility of Temporality and the Temporality of Reversibility

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In order to see in reflection a creative deed, a reconstruction of past thought which was not prefigured in it and which yet validly particularizes it, because it alone furnishes us with an idea of it and because the past in itself is for us as if it had never been—it would be necessary to develop an intuition of time to which the *Meditations* only contain a brief allusion. (PhP 44)

The work of Merleau-Ponty is not only an attempt to articulate a new understanding of the way in which we are embodied beings, to affirm the ambiguity of a nondualistic philosophy, to inaugurate an indirect ontology that uncovers "the flesh of the world" within which the oppositions of being and nonbeing, the one and the many, identity and difference are seen to be intertwinings, and to describe the place of language within an expressive context of perception, but it is also primarily an attempt to think through seriously the primordially of time as itself an ongoing becoming and not merely the containing structure of becoming. In this task, Merleau-Ponty carried further the project of his predecessor Henri Bergson in articulating the "within-timeness" of things. The notion of reversibility, which Merleau-Ponty articulated towards the end of his life, can only be fully understood if one understands its founding on Merleau-Ponty's radical understanding of time. Merleau-Ponty came to realize that it was the radical enmeshment of perception within temporality that was at the heart of the reversibility of perception, a theme imbedded within his work but not easily appreciated.¹ Merleau-Ponty also realized that time

itself was chiasmatic, was reversible, and it was only *as such* that it was *the heart* of the reversibility of perception. This insight, however, had been haunting the pages of Merleau-Ponty's text throughout his work. The notion of *Fundierung* which is central to Merleau-Ponty's description of perception and its possibilities for expression in the *Phenomenology* already contains within it, the seeds of the notion of reversibility. Not surprisingly, it also already casts a radical reconsideration of time that Merleau-Ponty is still working out even in his last "working notes," gathered and published in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

In the passage cited from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that Descartes' thought, that the omnipotent deceiver could never make it be the case that Descartes had never existed at this moment when his pronouncement makes him certain of his existence, contains an allusion to a notion of time that Descartes avoided exploring. It is that intuition of *experience within time* that provides the certainty that Descartes experiences in the cogito, but it is an intimation of a different sort of certainty than that which Descartes sought. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "Reflection is not absolutely transparent for itself, it is always given to itself in an *experience*" (PhP 42). It is that experience which provides our certainty as given by time: "The experience of the present is that of being assured of his existence once and for all" (PhP 44). Descartes interprets this certainty as lying in the "presentness of the present, which posits it in advance as an indubitable 'former present' in the series of recollections" (PhP 44). In other words, for Descartes, there is projected a reflective wresting of an essence from the ongoing temporal existence: a return from a vantage outside time to the lived experience that will yield the moment as a static and certain being. From the standpoint of mental substance, there is an intelligibility that can be rescued from the chaos of becoming that provides certainty. In quite the opposite manner, Merleau-Ponty discovers an understanding of time in which we find a certainty in the enveloping richness and indeterminacy of ongoing becoming. The moment gives itself as having-been-*originating* in the unfolding of time, as continually becoming an ineradicable source of later unfoldings and transformations, and this experience of temporality is at the heart of what Merleau-Ponty called "perceptual faith."

Descartes' assertion remains only an allusion to an "intuition of time," an intimation of a different type of certainty, since it is one of those instants in which Descartes is describing an *experience* that his own theoretical interpretation of this experience invalidates. The ex-

perience is of the "lived certainty" of perception in the becoming of time. It is this certainty that is the founding of a different sort of truth than Descartes sought, but which is Merleau-Ponty's starting and end point: "We are in the realm of truth and it is 'the experience of truth' which is self-evident" (PhP xvi). This experience is one in which the open indeterminacy of the moment has its own kind of certainty, its distinctive self-evidence, in its undeniable hold upon us as inseparable from its enrichment and transformation in time. This is why in this passage Merleau-Ponty calls reflection a "creative deed": it is a working with the unfolding of *sens* within the becoming of time which calls forth an understanding "which was not prefigured in it and which yet validly particularizes it" (PhP 44). The "reflected" was not simply "there," as static, but within time *becomes* with reflection. For Descartes, who sought a mathematical certainty that was clear and distinct, or in other words, determinate and transparent, this lived certainty within experience was discounted. Descartes sought to find a certainty outside of time, to wrench experience into a graspable *ur-experience* "beneath" or "outside" the flow of time, the flow of experience, that would provide a firm foundation. However, Merleau-Ponty saw there was no indubitable source of experience "beneath" experience. Experience has its own certainty: an indeterminate, open, evolving "thickness" that is undeniable in its ensnarement and relentless development and transformation.

The certainty of this moment for Merleau-Ponty is in the fact that the future will return to this moment to find it as it was and yet as it never had been until that moment. Merleau-Ponty wants to explicate the thickness of a temporality in which significant experiences, in their open indeterminacy, are fated to continually return to themselves in a never ending unfolding and enfolding. This temporal surge and return is the becoming of these significant experiences, which, from within the palpable presence of a haunting yet elliptical future, they never were and yet had always been. This is the *sens* of a perceptual life within a perceptible world in which the flux and flow of unfolding meaning derives from the temporality of the body, which itself participates in the same flux and flow so that it cannot completely show itself gathered into a point of intelligibility. The working out, which is always retrograde as well as progressive, is the flesh inaugurating a depth of weavings and returnings, so that the continuous movement opens "the circle of the touched and the touching . . . of the visible and the seeing" (VI 142). This encirclement of perception, I hope to show is the play of time, the circularity of time, returning to its depths. Equally significant, and perhaps more so, are the rare

moments in which the chiasm of time jolts forth, palpably transfiguring worlds: moments worthy of description as being the fever pitch of this always operative movement.

When one thinks in what sense perception could be thought of as reversible—that one is seen in seeing and that in this doubled movement lies the nascence of one's seeing, and equally that the seen is in some sense seeing in being seen—one tends to think the sense of this expression in spatial terms as vectors or directionalities going one way then another. Not only that, but the sense of space that one tends to employ is that of a grid of positions within a neutral containment housing discrete, determinate "objects"—a Cartesian space. If in thinking through Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, one slips into this way of thinking, then the notion of reversibility is either nonsensical or at best "poetically metaphoric." Only within the *becoming* of perception, thought, and speech, within the world's ceaseless "coming to be" does the sense of reversibility emerge. *

Reversibility is an achievement within time. Reversibility is an historical achievement. Cartesian mental substance as outside space and time could never be "caught" within reversibilities. When Cezanne points to a heightened sense of reversibility emerging between him, the painter, and Mount St. Victoire, the painted, in which he is now painting the mountain painting itself through him, seeing him as he sees it and seeing itself through his seeing it, there is a folding back on itself of an unfolding encounter within time. Reversibility is the temporality of the body as a 'working through' of its engagement with what is perceived within an enveloping world. Within the temporal thickness of acts of perception and expression a span is realized where there had been gaps, a span which reaches backward to transform the meaning of past gaps, which still remain, but are now electrified with the charge of later connections. Certainly, during ten years of painting that mountain, there are moments when Cezanne is lost to himself, become more mountain than man, his flesh rocklike within a strange resonance in which the perceiver is called as potentially perceptible in the same ways as the perceived. Such moments, and other moments of displacement that we will explore, become part of a temporal thickness which alters both previous and later moments of experienced disconnection, that otherwise might emerge as starkly non-reversible, but will instead resound with such deeper instants of resonant decenteredness essential to reversibility. The reversals of reversibility are temporal and spatial, or rather such a distinction itself is undermined by reversibility. Only when the sense of space is understood on the basis of radical temporality in the way Merleau-

Ponty understood it, and only when time itself is seen as reversible, is the reversibility of perception, of the flesh of the world, understandable.

The Reversibility of Temporality

In Merleau-Ponty's early descriptions of perception, he uncovered a different sense of depth that increasingly became the key to his understanding of his new "indirect ontology" as eventually expressed in *The Visible and the Invisible* and "Eye and Mind." As articulated in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, depth is:

This being simultaneously present in experiences which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one in the other, 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 envelop each other, whereas breadth and height are the dimensions in which they are juxtaposed (PhP 264-5).

Experiences which are mutually exclusive, which should open gaps in our experience, which considered logically should cause spaces and times to be juxtaposed in their separateness, are instead enveloping, enjamming, of one another in the thickness of a present (of depth). This "going together" of impossibles is the mutual envelopment despite difference in time and space which gives perception a primary depth out of which other dimensions emerge. By the time of the writing of the *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty has come to see the perceiver as perceiving "by dehiscence of fission of its own mass" (VI 146); furthermore, the perceived "is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being . . . but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open" (VI 132). The perceiver and perceived are "two vortexes . . . the one slightly decentered with respect to the other" (VI 138). Rather than being destructive to sense, this dispersion of perceiver and perceived as open and enveloping is sense's depth as reversible and chiasmatic. Like the strands of a chromosome that constitute its being in their encircling chiasm, their folding over one another, the decentering of the perceiver within the world and the world within the perceiver leaves both as a "turning about one another" (VI 264). This depth of perception in which perceiver and perceived are both gaping open, not totalizable, means one is seen in seeing and the seen comes to see. Depth, for Merleau-Ponty, arises within dehiscence, contralogically

across gaps, and these jostlings are not merely spatial, they are equally temporal.

In Merleau-Ponty's notes of the fall of 1960, where he understands "time as chiasm" (VI 267), he comes to see time as having a depth in which it "leaps" gaps in order to be one flow: "a point of time can be transmitted to the others without 'continuity' without 'conservation' " (VI 267). These flashings of time in which one moment comes to others "without continuity" suggest how moments of time can transform a past across gaps, as "sudden reversibilities." In addition to a temporality of reversibility in which the past keeps becoming itself through unfoldings which transform it, the temporal flow takes on an even greater depth in its own chiasmatic reversals, foldings back, which are of a more wild or brute sort. Husserl's sense of a flow of time consciousness that unfolds in its unity of protentional and retentional syntheses is rejected for a time more chiasmatic, more brute, more "tufted." When time is seen to be found within the unfolding of the body's perceptual explorations, one sees the ways in which, held within the landscapes, there are depths which cause the perceiver's time to burst, to reverse, to be released into the "straits gaping open" within things, landscapes, that hold us in holding them. Merleau-Ponty has moved from Husserl's analysis of progressive time to one "without fictitious 'support' in the psyche" (VI 267), to a time *lodged within the world* in its savage or brute being.

Merleau-Ponty, in opening the depth dimension of time, points to part of the phenomenon of time in which its overall flow is transfixed and transformed, irradiated from within by leaps and lateralizing flashes of *sens* which emerge at that moment in a manner different than the development which emerges from the conserved retentional significance in its continual unfolding. This jolting point of institution of a new meaning is one which transforms the entire previous developmental unfolding until this point is a chiasmatic one, in which time not only leaps up in transformation, but also reverses its flow. This is the temporality that Merleau-Ponty has sought throughout his work, inspired by Bergson but surpassing him, a temporality that functions according to what he now calls the "barbaric principle":

It is a question of finding in the present, the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an 'ever new' and an 'always the same'—A sort of time of sleep (which is Bergson's nascent duration, ever new and always the same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one into the other (VI 267).

At this point in his thought, Merleau-Ponty realized that there were differing dimensionalities within the upsurge of time. Time, itself,

was not unitary in its internal structurations, but rather its unity was seen to be the presumptive unity of "perceptual faith." This is the "unity in depth" of impossibles which nevertheless "go together." The past is itself present, not just through the latter's retentional reverberations or the former's protential reach, but also as a bursting of the world in tufts [*en touffe*]² outside the realm of intentionalities and acts. The present itself could be seen to be located within a past of lateralizing, flashing reversals that are part of the verticality of Being, the "passages from one into the other" between temporal ecstases that are leaps, "barbaric," and aside from the eidetic laws of unfolding phenomena.

For Merleau-Ponty, part of the understanding of how the seeing-seen, touching-touched, perceiving-perceived dichotomies had to be overcome in an autochthony in which "activity = passivity" (VI 265) is to see that the reversibility of the flesh is the reversibility of past and present: "Then past and present are *Ineinander*, each enveloping-enveloped—and that itself is the flesh" (VI 268). Although the sequential unfolding and resonating of time as articulated by earlier phenomenologies expressed part of the sense of the perceptual world as temporal, these characteristics were not exhaustive. Time, as the unfolding within one another of the perceiver-perceived, itself folds back across itself, *both* in sudden enfoldings, conflagrating "reversals," *and* within larger temporal rhythms of the becoming of becoming [which we will explore in the next section].

These moments when past and present flash forth in transformative bursts of enveloped-enveloping, are moments when what Merleau-Ponty had from the *Phenomenology* (PhP 70) through the *The Visible and the Invisible* (VI 194) called the "Memory of the World," comes to re-member us, taking us into its body as our body, opening depths of time. It is a heightened coming forth of the reversibility of the flesh:

That is, that the things have us, and that it's not we who have the things. That the being which has been cannot stop having been. The "Memory of the World." (VI 194)

We are brought back to ourselves, to the depths of our past, through being caught up in the sense of perception, the body's sense as a fold in the flesh of the world. The landscape, its things, are not mute: memory is "lodged" there, held, housed, kept, and in the "membering" openness of perceiving-perceived, where the landscape and its things become one's limbs or elongations, one is suddenly re-membered through the landscape to upheavals in time. These "burstings" of time, or "chiasmatic leaps," these "reversings" outside unfolding are of another possibility of time held within the landscape:

In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is not exterior to, and bound synthetically to . . . other moments of time and the past, but has them really *behind itself* in simultaneity, inside itself and not it and they side by side 'in' time (VI 267).

The depth of the landscape, its things and horizons, hold chiasmatic possibilities for sudden reversals which short-circuit the usual temporal unfolding.³

We can find some help in understanding Merleau-Ponty's conception of the reversibility of temporality in a fictive variation. If we look at Margaret Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*,⁴ we follow the journey of becoming of the narrator as she enters her abandoned childhood Canadian wilderness landscape in search of the sense of her life. From the first line of the novel, when she states, "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying" (9), in search of her missing father, until one of the last lines, after she has encountered what he has become for her and she states, "I am part of the landscape, I could be anything, a tree, a deer skeleton, a rock" (218), there is an exploration of embodied self refinding its depths in the perceptual world. The entire narrative hinges upon certain key instants of perception in which time crosses back upon itself to become something transformed with "new" depths of both past and present emerging from sudden reversibilities of perception within these chiasms of temporality as held by the landscape. These fevered moments occur as the narrator moves towards a heightened sense of being caught up in "the flesh of the world" of this Canadian landscape: "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (213).

The novel strikes even the casual reader with its intense sense of the bodily depths of thought, memory and imagination; its exploration of how the body is inseparable from its landscape; and its startling collapses of our sense of the sequential unfolding of time. The novel evokes a sense in which the meaning of the narrator's understanding of her life and her body is "held" or "buried" within the backwoods Canadian landscape, the abandoned cabin, the haunted garden, the dark lakes and the bloated corpse. Also within the recalcitrance of things, even old Indian things, like rock paintings, there is a key to a deeper time that suffers oblivion by the signifying power of the flow of events in a more progressive time. The temporal depths, still present within the layers of meaning of the landscape and within ancient and natural objects, are repressed by the sense of sequential time. However, the body opens a conflagration that undermines this effacing flow. Deep underwater, beneath her canoe, the narrator is

shattered by the open-eyed vision of death that is her father's corpse, that instantaneously is also the dead fetus scraped out of her womb years before, that simultaneously is also the death in the eyes of her mother in a Canadian wilderness: in this scorching moment time leaps, becomes lightening, past flares in overwhelming presentness and into other promiscuities, present fires out into a past at the heart of moments long gone out but always fated to burn in this instant of passing, agonized slippage. Time past, present and future will always be different for the narrator, yet these transforming reversals trail their own fragility, will themselves keep becoming for her.

Although such moments, such "tufts" of *sens* are rare, they are part of the power of the reversibility with the landscape, within temporality. The narrator describes how she imagines that for her father and now for her, there were things within this perceptual field, there were landscapes, that could suddenly alter the sense of one's world, one's history:

He had discovered new places, new oracles, they were things he was seeing the way I had seen; at the end, after the failure of logic. When it happened the first time he must have been terrified, it would be like stepping through a usual door and finding yourself in a different galaxy, purple trees and red moons and a green sun (171).

We may keep such heightened instants of chiasm and transformation at bay, but the barbaric principle is an originating depth within landscapes. The reader of Merleau-Ponty who then reads Atwood is not surprised that in the novel a temporal slippage is entwined with a slippage in perception and being between the narrator and a forbidding Canadian landscape. At such openings of the sense of one's enmeshment, which is time, the reversibility of the landscape does become palpable, and the narrator sees that "the forest leaps upward, enormous . . . everything is made of water, even the rocks . . . I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning" (212). In time's shattering transfigurations, its reversing and lateralizing, the sense of the world that the narrator sees, has become seen through the narrator's becoming seen within her depths. These depths had long been rendered invisible. Lodged within the night of her repression, she was not a woman who had ever suffered an abortion, nor was she the student cast aside by her professor-seducer. She had been the divorced woman who had left a child somewhere, somehow. In this moment of vision, she becomes what she had always been in the depths of those past (repressed) moments, which might have never come to be without the power of the landscape to blaze this instant of time's chiasm. Caught

up with the fabric of this world, the narrator has seen aspects of herself that were uniquely evoked by standing within the vision embedded in this landscape and its objects that she came to see and did finally get to see. Seeing it, she has become seen. Seeing it, she has entered a new time. She has become. The past has become. This is what Merleau-Ponty meant by "the flesh" and its "reversibility."

It is not surprising that Merleau-Ponty abandoned the Husserlian analysis of temporality for several reasons central to his notion of flesh and its reversibility. Merleau-Ponty noted that "Husserl's error is to have described the [temporal] interlocking starting from a *Präsensfeld* considered without thickness, as immanent consciousness" (VI 173). Husserl failed to articulate the "time of the body." For Merleau-Ponty, the missing "thickness" of Husserl's understanding of time is inseparable from his retreat into immanence and his sense of the "interlocking" nature of time-consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "Mythology of a self-consciousness to which the word 'consciousness' would refer—There are only *differences* between significations" (VI 171). We will not get beyond the traditional dichotomies, nor articulate the worldly character of the phenomena until we cease to think of consciousness and its "acts," reject the notion of subject, and think the "promiscuity with Being and the world" (VI 239). Merleau-Ponty decentered and detotalized the emergence of significance from a consciousness of syntheses to one within a fluctuating but equilibrating world: the correlative notion of time had to be altered too.

The Temporality of Reversibility

Within the world seen in its verticality, there is not an exhaustive space or a time that is spread out before us and behind us, but rather we find things which speak to us, which touch us, which strain to become visible just as we are seen within an interplay of divergences and dehiscences, joinings and couplings, which always pulls us into the depths of what the things in our world have come to mean. For example, I may be taken up within the thickness of how that particular sofa in its blue, broken-legged, paisley, puffiness has become a particular manifestation of the failure of a relationship in my life as well as my naive hopes which were its space and time. The *sens* of this constellation of hope, failure and pain is still only vaguely present in its self-contradictory moments of present meaning, and was always becoming so in a past that came to be what it was, and in

certain moments flared up and forward through the present and its new projections into the past to become that history, although even then, still never quite being so determinately.

The recognition of the perceptual field, as this jostling, bustling summons to see, touch, perceive the *sens* of one's life, as the voices of these many things, seducing one's body into their vortices of significances, coming together in the midst of their difference, is itself the becoming of the play of time, and leads Merleau-Ponty to replace Husserl's diagram of temporality:

The structure of the visual field, with its near-bys, its far-offs, its horizon, is indispensable for there to be *transcendence*, the model of every transcendence. Apply to the perception of space what I said about the perception of time (in Husserl): Husserl's diagram as a *positivist* projection of the vortex of temporal differentiation. And the *intentional* analysis that tries to compose the field with intentional threads does not see that the threads are emanations and idealizations of one fabric, differentiations of the fabric. (VI 231)

We are in the world in which both, myself and world, are at depths, at interplays, which come together in their impossibility in the enlacement of time. I come back to myself from the world, whether from the river outside my window, the blue sofa, the Bach violin concerto filling the space of my apartment: "That is, that the things have us, and that it is not we who have the things" (VI 194). As held within the depths of things, one finds one's past in jolts and foldings, weavings and tears, that render time a tufted, chiasmic implosion and interlacing, as well as an unfolding.

It is in thinking of how radically one is within the field of Being "dotted with lacunae and the imaginary" instead of within a flux of unfolding experiences that Merleau-Ponty takes up Husserl's notion of "rays of time and of the world" (VI 240). He realizes, however, this more radical sense of depth dictates a more radical approach: "The ray of the world does not admit of a noema-noesis analysis" (VI 242). How and what we are towards things can shift and jostle, explode or implode so dehiscently, yet still be fated to burrow into the heart of *what has been* so inexorably, that the radicality of the *sens* of emergent time must be savored in its tufted, reversingly transformative ebbing as well as in its larger progressive flow.

For Merleau-Ponty, there is no present in time, as we have commonly represented it:

... the new present is itself transcendent: one knows that it is not there, that it was just there, one never coincides with it—It is not a

segment of time with defined contours that would come and set itself in place. It is a cycle defined by a central and dominant region and with indecisive contours . . . (VI 184)

The sense of the present is that there are cycles, circularities turning towards themselves in their elongations: this is the rhythm of perception, and it is the movement of time. My body is in things, at their depths. Things do not rend themselves open as unfurling announcements of transparent formulaic significations. They do not transform themselves as frictionless, weightless, diaphanous meanings. They hold me, haunt me, hunt me, as the one who may slowly yield parts of their meaning always heard in echo and endlessly improvising on their origins. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty must recast Husserl's sense of the present:

. . . the present, also is ungraspable from close-up, in the forceps of attention, it is an encompassing. Study exactly the *Erfüllung* of the present: the danger of this metaphor: it makes me think that there is a *certain void* that has *its own* dimensions and that is filled by a defined quantity of the present (VI 195-6).

The present never fills what was somehow "missing" but impending in time. The past was always there as itself indeterminate, as cyclic. It dances away from itself in other rhythms that echo and blend, distend and distort, as what was to come in the next leap of the improvised jazz line. The present isn't necessarily held to a debt of time; it is not enslaved to past promises; it renders not the past's due, but gives the past the present of itself, allowing the past to become itself, in new depths.

One ongoing metaphor for the reversibility of perception that runs throughout *The Visible and the Invisible* is the example of two hands touching. Sartre had also used this metaphor for the impossibility of ever bridging the ontological gap of the for-itself and in-itself, of the subject confronting an object. For Merleau-Ponty, it is true that there is a divergence at any one instant between the hand touching and the hand touched; reversibility does not mean coincidence:

To begin with, we spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasize that it is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching things, but I never reach coincidence (VI 147).

This never quite overlapping is itself the basis for reversibility. There is always a gap, but one which is shifting, which is almost overcome at moments, which leaves a vector inscribed, which in its reversals is

slipping now to one side then to another, which, in the becoming of time, becomes itself a "shifting," a "spreading," a "spanning" which itself is the "tissue" of the "flesh of the world." The "almosts," the divergences, the blurrings, the many varieties of the indeterminacies of even such simple instants have themselves a positive significance, a weight, a force, a *sens*, which tokens reversibility within the reversibility of time. What comes back in time to the past as a transforming power itself is a gaping openness, which nevertheless has this transformative power—vortices circling one another. The earlier moments arrived at deeper meaning in that they always had in themselves to be through the later moments which led back to them despite their open shifting. The later instants found themselves rendered in being shifted with the flash of earlier moments now come round to round off these later meanings.

The body is always a "taking back into" no matter how far it reaches out, as is the world as a larger body of which we let ourselves be in this touching-touched. Time and meaning as emerging within the body, time as itself of the body, mean that gaps are the giving to time its play of reversibility in order for there to be manifestation, not as laying out progressively, but as reversing back to continually become. Gaps do not indicate the damning break in a totality: the "hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching . . . is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body and by that of the world . . ." (VI 148). Within the world as a becoming, there is the movement around vortices of significances, none of which is complete, but rather in its open face of incompleteness has an expressivity taken up into the larger interplay. The crossing and crisscrossing are not between solids in a space that would be removed from time, but are the ebbs and pulsations of passage of an ongoing verticality of time, comprised of circles meeting within the tracking of other circles, meandering about in their windings.

Retrograde Temporality within the Circularity of Becoming

In its reversibility, time circles inside of itself and becomes what it now had to always have been in order to produce this new meaning. In the point of reversibility in which time itself becomes a chiasm, there flares up the sense that "things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world . . ." (VI 255). This *sens* is always there flooding the body and the world. However, there are moments in which special flarings become emblematic and found a deeper sense of the dimensionalities of reversibility, yet as always

having been there, while still as the new gift of the reversibility of time.

For a moment, let us enter the flux of a consciousness returning to such enlaced and impacted moments that have once opened in a highlighted flare such prolongations and reversibilities, and now are still coming to do so in a further chiasmatic leap of time sixteen years later in the small hours of an imagined June 16, 1904 in a bedroom on Eccles street in Dublin, Ireland. Molly Bloom, the character who enters Joyce's *Ulysses* in its last chapter in such a way as to make the reader reexperience the sense of all the preceding chapters in light of this final, rich internal monologue, lies in bed and also within the landscape of her childhood environs of Gibraltar:

... and O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens yes and all the queer little streets and the pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower . . .⁵

As Molly Bloom lies sleepless, she is the landscape of Gibraltar, its flowers, hills, streets and houses as she is caressed by them as she caressed them, with her hands, with her eyes, and with her body rolling on a hill later with Leopold Bloom, for both these times and others have wound into a time for Molly, a time in which the yes goes back and forth, shuttlelike from Molly to landscape, from Bloom to Molly, from now to Gibraltar, to another time on a hill, and further into other interlacings of things and Molly, within a time itself a chiasm. Here is a fever pitch of the manifestation of reversibility, but that is Molly's genius. Here, after more than ten years of estrangement from Poldy in their grief over their dead son, today in going to bed with Blazes Boylan, and in the new developments with Leopold, most notably his demand that in reversing their decade's custom she should bring him breakfast, that might further develop, Molly has been led back to a time or rather ahead to a time that was the time of Gibraltar. The time of Gibraltar of her youth has been made to become again what it was to be in this night of crisis and promise.

Merleau-Ponty's richer description of time allows us to understand how some phenomena might not be simply unfolding and gradually receding in the passage of time. Many aspects of the world so

appear and take their place within the background of the world and our personal lives. However, there are also quantum leaps in time's passage: rendings, riftings, that are also radical shiftings, birthing transformations. They are not upsurges of creation *ex nihilo*. Time doesn't only "move ahead" in its flow. It circles back. This flow is a risk of time, its play with itself that is a gamble as well as a gambol. In going back, time will surely lose itself and become something else. The present not only transforms, but the past enters the circle of becoming. Molly is a woman able to give voice to haltings, discontinuities, to circularities, to the urgings and openings of the body alive to the world and itself. At least on this night, when the reader gets to know her thoughts, Molly is able to enter and articulate what Merleau-Ponty called in *Eye and Mind* the "deflagration of Being" [*deflagration d l'Etre*] (PrP 180). Time burns itself up in the phoenix fire of its renewal and becoming. Its kindling is the bodily enmeshment in things, in the landscape, in the life lived with others as gestural, embodied beings. Molly, the renowned singer, on this night of June 16, 1904, takes up language to exercise its power to sing the world's being, as Merleau-Ponty had put it.⁶ In her fine attunement to her body and the body of her *mater* country she is able to sing time's rondeau: its circular chorus that always returns to begin later refrains, as new but always found in the old and as old echoes but always transformed.

Molly's time of the past which in crisis has become her future promise, which she has already started to become on this eventful day is lodged within Gibraltar, but only what Gibraltar comes to be. Gibraltar ever unfolds the rich overripeness of its caressing offer to Molly in her then young body, which she now comes to be after many years of dormant waiting. This Gibraltar is not in Cartesian space as a collection of objects which could be totalized. Gibraltar for Molly has always been a region of pain and abandonment, by an absent mother, a distant father, and a place of soft, enveloping smells and colors that race with promise and sensuality and beauty and the spirit of resurgence, and the longing regard for which Molly has been a magnet in her lush body and powerful voice and overflowing thought patterns, her way of savoring the nuance. These lush qualities of Molly, in their meaning and style, are the meaning and style of a Gibraltar in its soft night air and scent, its figtree-ed, flowered, winding, sunset-bathed, interlaced streets that insinuate the body's textured affirmation of flowering, of Molly, the flower, and Bloom, the flower, and their coming together, Yes. The time of nos has now become a later path fated to return to the earliest time of Yes, of yes flickering, beckoned, gone, but always possible as where she goes, Yes.

Notes

1. The "common sense" reading often espoused that Heidegger was interested in articulating phenomena from the perspective of time and Merleau-Ponty from that of space. However, this is a misreading of Merleau-Ponty's project.

2. From the introductory paragraph on the section about the nature of the chiasm: "Seeing, speaking, even thinking (with certain reservations, for as soon as we distinguish thought from speaking absolutely we are already in the order of reflection), are experiences of this kind, both irrecusable and enigmatic. They have a name in all languages, but a name which conveys signification in tufts, thickets of proper meanings and figurative meanings, so that, unlike those of science, not one of these names clarifies by attributing to what is named a circumscribed signification. Rather, they are a repeated index, the insistent reminder of a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity" (VI 130).

3. The quoted passage lies in the "working notes" right after the enunciation of the "barbaric principle" of time within the flesh of the world, and right before Merleau-Ponty speaks of understanding "time as chiasm."

4. Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (New York: Popular Library, 1976), pp. 166-8. Further references within this essay to this text will be indicated by the page number placed within parentheses.

5. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1986), pp. 643-4.

6. "... if we took up the emotional content of the word, which we have called above its 'gestural' sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example, It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of 'singing' the world..." (PhP 187).