IMAGE: FOR THE EYE AND IN MIND[1]

What is an image? In *Eye and Mind* (Merleau-Ponty 1964), the last text Merleau-Ponty published before he died, he seeks – amongst other things[2] – to answer this question. Merleau-Ponty argues against a dominant view of images that tries to account for them by appealing to the causal workings of the visual system, and offers his own account. According to him, images 'are the inside of the outside, and the outside of the inside' (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 164). My aim in this paper is to try to make sense of this mysterious claim. I will begin by outlining the usual conception of an image, thereby providing an initial statement of what needs to be explained. After this, I will briefly present the account to which Merleau-Ponty objects, before describing some problems with it. The bulk of the discussion will then focus on Merleau-Ponty's positive account of images.

Images

It is usual to divide images into two basic categories: images for the eye (material images that can be perceived – Merleau-Ponty is particularly interested in art works), and images 'in mind' (mental images).

It is clear that images are *of* things – they are intentional items. A widely accepted thesis, endorsed by Merleau-Ponty, is that intentionality is essentially connected with subjectivity. It is primarily consciousness that is intentionally related to things. Inanimate items, such as words on a page, paintings, road signs, and so on, are only intentional because they have been produced and/or used as intentional items by conscious beings.

However, whilst all images are intentional, not all intentional items are images. Consider material images first. The relation between a material image and its object is different from the relation between other intentional items and their objects. Names, for example, are of their bearers. 'Komarine Romdenh-Romluc' is the name of a particular person: me. The relation between names and their bearers does not seem to be like the relation between images and the things they are of. The association between a particular name and the item that bears it is arbitrary – the same entity could have been given a different name – but this does not appear to be the case for the relation between images and things. Of course, there can be conventions dictating what a material image should look like in order to be of a particular thing. A halo – a light around a figure's head – is, for example, conventionally used in certain traditions of Christian art to show that the person depicted is holy. The existence of a convention implies some degree of arbitrariness. For instance, it makes no sense to say that we *conventionally* boil water by heating it to 100 degrees centigrade. The reason this is nonsense is because there is nothing arbitrary about our doing so. Water boils at this temperature, so if we want boiling water, *that* is the temperature to which we must

[1] I would like to thank Sara Heinämaa and Michael Gillan Peckitt for kindly reading an earlier draft and making very helpful suggestions.

[2] *Eye and Mind* is an extraordinarily rich text, containing in distilled form, the essence of Merleau-Ponty's thinking on a number of the topics that interested him throughout his life. These include (but are not restricted to): the nature of embodiment; our relations with others; a critique of Cartesian thinking; a critical history of art; the perceived world. The text also anticipates the ideas that would be posthumously published as *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty 1969).

heat it. It is, in contrast, perfectly sensible to claim that the British conventionally drink tea with milk. There is no reason why we must drink milky tea; the custom of drinking tea with lemon, or just on its own, could easily have developed. It is true that a conventional way of doings things can only exist in cases where there are alternative ways of getting those things done, and so the existence of a convention indicates that the phenomenon in question admits of some degree of arbitrariness. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the conventional element to some material images means that the association between images and things is completely arbitrary in the same way as the relation between names and their bearers.

Material images are not just of their objects; they are also likenesses of them. But not just any likeness of an object will count as an image. Accidental likenesses are ruled out by the fact that images are intentional, and it is only items produced and/or used by consciousness that are candidate bearers of intentionality. A crack in the rock that bears some resemblance to a crow, for example, cannot be classed as an image. Moreover, an image of something is not an exact replica or a clone of it. A British stamp is an image of the Queen. A second British stamp is a likeness of the first as it is an exact replica of it – they are qualitatively identical. But it makes no sense to say that one stamp is an image of the other. Instead, an image somehow 'translates' its object into a different medium. A portrait of the Queen translates Her Majesty into canvas and paint. The fact that images are *translations* of their objects raises the question of how – or in what sense – they are likenesses of them. It is tempting to think that two things are alike if they share a sufficient number of properties. However, whilst images will no doubt share some properties with their objects, the fact that they are rendered in a different medium from their objects means that they will not share a sufficiently large number for this to be the sense in which they are like their objects. A portrait of the Queen may be flat, black and white, and made from canvas and paint. But the Queen herself is a multi-hued, flesh and blood being who is not flat, but occupies a person-shaped portion of space. Instead, it seems that material images are likenesses of objects insofar as they *look* like those objects to perceivers. Thus a portrait of the Queen is a likeness of Her Majesty in virtue of the fact that perceivers immediately see it as a likeness of the Queen. An account of images must explain what it is for a material image to be perceived as a likeness of its object.

Mental images, as the name indicates, are not material parts of the world. They instead belong to consciousness. The phrase 'mental image' suggests a private, subjective counterpart to a material image. However, whilst mental images are sometimes understood in this way, it is not mandatory. Mental images are associated with a type of conscious activity: perceptual imagining. They are generally held to be intentional, conscious, quasi-perceptual experiences. They can pertain to past perceptual experience, or perceptions that the subject could have if the world were to be a certain way. It is this connection with perception that distinguishes mental images from other intentional mental phenomena. They differ from other quasi-perceptual phenomena like afterimages – and, indeed, from perception itself – in that they are held to be under the subject's direct control and can be immediately brought about by an act of will. Afterimages also lack intentionality. An account of images must explain what mental images are,

capturing their quasi-perceptual nature.

An account of images – eyes and optics

Merleau-Ponty develops his account of the image by contrasting it with an influential view that he discusses and rejects. The theory in question tries to account for images by appealing to a scientific account of visual perception.

We see objects because light is reflected off them and into our eyes. Objects absorb and reflect light in a particular pattern. For example, objects that appear blue to us are those that reflect the blue part of the spectrum whilst absorbing the other components of it. The light reflected by the object enters the eye through the pupil, passing through the lens, which concentrates it on the retina. The retina is light sensitive, and records the pattern of light hitting it. The pattern of light recorded by the retina is the same as (some of) that reflected by the object. (Only some of the reflected light is recorded by the retina because the object also reflects kinds of light that the retina cannot detect, such as ultra-violet light. Moreover, light bounces off the object in all directions, but it is only light reflected by the surfaces facing the perceiver that can enter the eye.) In this respect, the retinal effect is a likeness of the object. We can therefore think of the retinal effect as an *image*. Retinal images can then be treated as paradigmatic. Other putative images will count as such to the extent that they are like retinal images, and – the theory claims – thereby recreate a visual perception of the object. Those putative images that most resemble retinal images will be the best likenesses of their objects. On this view, producing a material image involves using paint or other such substances to 'organiz[e] an illusion or an objectless perception whose perfection consists in simulating an empirical vision to the maximum degree' (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 181).

It is often thought that perspective drawings are like retinal images and so recreate a visual perception of the object. Merleau-Ponty speaks of Renaissance theoreticians who thought 'a *perspectiva artificialis* capable of founding an exact construction [of visual experience]' (1964, 174). Light travels in a straight line between two points. When light bounces off an object, it is only light bouncing off an object in the direction of the eye that can enter it. The way in which light bounces off an object and into the perceiver's eye means that objects that are further away cast a smaller image on the retina. Thus parallel lines receding into the distance, such as train tracks, or the sides of a building, look as though they are converging. The reason for this is because the light rays bouncing off the object cross over at the point where they enter the eye – the pupil. Beyond the pupil, inside the eye, the rays splay out again, as each continues on its original path. The spread of light rays hits the retina, creating the retinal image. (Imagine holding a bundle of straight sticks, where the sticks each sit at a different angle, crossing over one another in one's hand. The angled spread of sticks above one's hand mirrors the angled spread below where one is holding them.) When an object is closer to the perceiver, the reflected light that can reach the eye is relatively spread out – that reflected from the edges of the object comes into the eye at a wider angle than when the object is further away. The light rays are subsequently more spread out when they hit the retina, and the retinal image created is larger. When the same object is further away, the light reflected off it is less spread out – that reflected from the edges comes into the eye at a narrower angle than when the object is

closer by. The light rays are thus less spread out when they hit the retina, and so the retinal image is smaller. This happens when one looks at parallel lines – the portion of the lines closest to one will cast a bigger image on the retina, whilst the retinal image of those further away will be smaller, creating the appearance of convergence. Perspective drawings mimic this effect, thus showing what the perceiver would see from a particular location in space. The simplest sort has one 'vanishing point' – a geometric point that represents the perceiver's point of view, and where all the would-be parallel lines in the drawing are shown to converge. But there are other techniques for recreating perspective along these lines. The similarities between perspective drawings and retinal images mean that we can class the former as images too.

A second sort of object that is often taken to be very much like a retinal image is the photograph, which is again assumed to be a faithful reproduction of what a perceiver would see. Cameras produce photographs in a way that parallels the workings of the visual system. Light is reflected off the scene in front of the camera and into the lens, which bends the light concentrating it onto light sensitive material within the camera (the film in analogue cameras). The film (or its digital equivalent) records the pattern of light just as the retina does, thereby producing a picture. The parallel between the workings of the camera and the eye means that photographs can be classed as images. Indeed, they seem to be more like retinal images than perspective drawings are.

It is not clear that any particular theory of mental images is implied by this account. It is perhaps natural to suppose that mental images should be identified with retinal images, since these occur within the subject. However, there are various reasons why the two should not be identified. First, one can have mental images of things one is not currently seeing, one has never seen, and things one could never see, for example, non-existent entities such as unicorns and centaurs. But one can only have retinal images of things one currently sees. Second, mental imagery is conscious. Whilst visual perceptions are usually conscious, and retinal images play an important role in the perceptual process, it is not clear that the subject is conscious of her retinal images *per se*. Third, and most importantly, retinal images occur as part of the perceptual process. But whilst mental images are quasi-perceptual, they are *not* part of perception. One can only see an object if one is located in the right place at the right time, but there are no such constraints on when one can have a mental image. Visual perceptions are only indirectly under the subject's control – if she wants to see something in particular, she can bring this about by going to the right worldly location, but she cannot bring it about that she has the visual perception she desires through an immediate act of will. In contrast, mental images are held to be directly under the subject's control. One can bring it about that one has a certain mental image via a direct act of will.

A common view, and one that Merleau-Ponty treats as part and parcel of the account he rejects, holds that mental images are just like material images, except they are contained within the mind. '[W]e have thoughtlessly believed that a design [an image] was a tracing, a copy, a second thing, and the mental image was such a design, belonging among our private bric-a-brac' (1964, 164). On this view, mental images are perception-like pictures in the mind.

Merleau-Ponty's objections

Throughout his work, Merleau-Ponty seeks to show us that causal scientific explanations are inadequate for capturing conscious phenomena. They invariably distort those phenomena, failing to accurately describe them (a failure that Merleau-Ponty attributes to fundamental difficulties with science's world view). The scientific account of the image outlined above is no exception. Merleau-Ponty (1964) presents many objections to it. Space prevents me from presenting all of them here, but I will say a little to show why this view is flawed.

Consider first, the idea that for some putative image, the closer it is to a retinal image, the more like its object it is. As we saw above, photographs are very like retinal images, given the parallel ways in which the two are produced. Thus it seems that a photograph is the best likeness of an object that we can currently produce. However, as Merleau-Ponty points out, a photograph is inadequate as a likeness of a body in motion. Consider a person running. Her posture cycles through a series of fluid changes as she moves through space. But since a photograph is created by the light bouncing off an object at a single instant, it can only capture a momentary posture of the runner. The photographic image of the runner thus gives the impression of a static being frozen in time – 'the instantaneous glimpses... petrify the movement, as is shown by so many photographs in which an athlete-in-motion is forever frozen' (1964, 185). Moreover, simply adding further photographs does not help – '[w]e could not thaw him out by multiplying the glimpses' (1964, 185). Many artists have grappled with the question of how to create an image – an unmoving object – of motion. Merleau-Ponty cites Rodin, who describes how he created a sense of movement in his sculptures. His method applies equally to two-dimensional images such as paintings and sketches. Each portion of the body should be presented in a pose it held at a different moment in time. The overall posture of the body is thus a composite, and impossible for a body to really take up. A sense of tension is created by the impossible posture of the body, which suggests motion. 'Movement is given, says Rodin, by an image in which the arms, the legs, the trunk, and the head are each taken at a different instant, the image which therefore portrays the body in an attitude which it never at any instant really held... The picture makes movement visible by its internal discordance' (1964, 185). Since the depicted posture of the body is not one that the body was really in at any point, it is not a posture that could be captured by an unaltered photograph. It follows that a photograph is not the best image of motion.

In the case of perspective drawings, whilst it is tempting to think that they are very like retinal images and so mimic what a perceiver would see if they were to look at the scene, it is not clear that this is exactly the case.[3] '[T]he painters... knew from experience that no technique of perspective is an exact solution and that there is no projection of the existing world which respects it in all aspects and deserves to become the fundamental law of painting' (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 174). It is well-known that perspective drawings that have been correctly constructed according to the relevant geometric principles can nevertheless look distorted. For example, tiles at the edges of a tiled floor in a painting do not look square but elongated, even though the picture has been constructed so that they should look

[3] Merleau-Ponty does not deny that perspective drawings are like their objects; he takes issue with the claim that they are faithful recreations of visual experiences that mimic retinal images.

square, and one would see square tiles on a *real* floor as square. However, there is disagreement concerning the source of these distortions. One line of reasoning takes them to be due to the content of the perspective drawings – on this interpretation, such drawings fail to completely capture visual perspective, whilst an opposing theory holds that they result from the conditions of observation – the perceiver needs to look at a perspective drawing from the right angle for the drawing to look correct. (See Todorović 2009 for an account of these disputes.) If the latter theory is right, one can maintain that perspective drawings are like retinal images and thus recreate visual perception.

Nevertheless, we do not need to settle this controversy here because there is a deeper issue. The account we are considering claims that perspective drawings are very like retinal images. However, we should ask in what sense this is so. In the case of a photograph, we have an answer to this question. A photograph is like a retinal image because they are produced in very similar ways. But this answer is not available in the case of perspective drawings. Perspective drawings are held to be very like retinal images because they mimic the way that parallel lines appear to converge. The problem is that claiming perspective drawings *mimic* retinal images just says that they are *like* them. The account is thus circular as it says that perspective drawings are like retinal images in virtue of being like them.[4]

Merleau-Ponty's account of images

A theory of images needs to account for both mental and material images. Both are of things. Material images are likenesses of their objects. They are not replicas of objects, but 'translate' them into a different medium. They are likenesses of their objects insofar as they look alike to perceivers. Mental images are conscious, intentional, quasi-perceptual phenomena that are under the subject's control. An account of images needs to explain what it is for a material image to look like its object. It also needs to explain the nature of mental images, accounting for the features identified above.

The connections between images and perception mean that an account of the former requires a theory of the latter. Merleau-Ponty's account of perception is inspired by the work of the early *Gestalt* psychologists. He holds that the perceiver is not presented with an unstructured mass of sensory qualities. Rather, perceptual experience has a *Gestalt* structure. In other words, we perceive things that are immediately presented as having a certain form. *Gestalten* are unified wholes that are irreducible to their parts. To understand what Merleau-Ponty has in mind here, consider this passage:

> If I walk along a shore towards a ship which has run aground, and the funnel or masts merge into the forest bordering on the sand dune, there will be a moment when these details suddenly become part of the ship, and indissolubly fused with it... I merely felt that the look of the object was on the point of altering... Suddenly, the sight before me was recast in a manner satisfying to my vague expectation (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 17).

Here, Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of what is commonly known as a

[4] Merleau-Ponty also argues that even perception itself cannot be understood just in terms of the causal workings of the visual system. See, for example, Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964).

Gestalt switch. First one sees what are in fact ship masts as trees, then the meaning of the perceptual scene abruptly alters and one sees them as parts of the ship. When this happens, the components of the scene do not change. One sees the same configuration of vertical elements throughout these perceptions. It is the *Gestalt* form that changes. Thus although the scene's *Gestalt* form as either trees or masts is nothing over and above the elements of the scene – take away the vertical structures and no trees or masts remain – it cannot simply be reduced to those components, since they remain the same throughout the switch in perceptual meaning. In this way, the whole is more than a simple sum of its parts.

Merleau-Ponty explains these two features of *Gestalt* forms – the fact that they are (i) nothing more than, yet (ii) irreducible to, the elements that compose them – in the following way. They are nothing more than their component elements because they are always essentially realised in some sensuous matter. Without this matter, the perceived form does not exist. Merleau-Ponty takes the matter in which perceived *Gestalten* are realised to simply be the matter of the world itself. The *Gestalt* form taken by that matter in perception is nothing over and above the matter – just like the 'look' of the trees or the masts is nothing over and above the vertical structures in front of me. Yet *Gestalten* are not reducible to the matter in which they are realised because *Gestalt* forms are not something the worldly matter possesses in-itself, independently from consciousness. The world takes on *Gestalt* forms as a result of being perceived. However, it would be wrong to think of the perceiver as creating *Gestalten* and imposing them on worldly matter. Instead, the perceiver *finds* a pattern or form in that matter.

The *Gestalt* forms taken by worldly objects in perception are ones that refer to the perceiver's capacities for action. The perceiver experiences the world as offering her opportunities to engage with it in different ways. For example, she does not perceive a cup of coffee on her desk as an entity of a particular size and shape, located at a particular point in space. She experiences it as a vessel of drinkable liquid that is within reach, and which requires her to move in a certain way to pick it up. The way in which perception presents the subject with opportunities for action explains how perceptual experience can be right or wrong, even though the world-in-itself does not contain *Gestalten*. It is right if the pattern or form picked out by the perceiver is appropriate, and wrong where it is inappropriate. It will be appropriate if the opportunities for action it offers are ones that the perceiver can really take up, and inappropriate if they are not.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the capacity to experience the world as inviting one to interact with it is bound up with the perceiver's motor skills or what he calls 'habits' (1962, 143). Motor skills are built up through practice, which is the body's familiarising itself with the relevant form of behaviour. At first, when one learns a new skill, the bodily movements it requires will feel strange and awkward. One's performance of them will often be clumsy and graceless. Engaging in the behaviour will require more effort. Gradually, as one practices, the movements will come to feel familiar, and one will be able to perform them more fluidly. Engaging in the activity becomes easier, and requires less effort. Consider what it is like to learn to play the accordion. The first time one picks up the instrument, one will be unused to its weight in one's hands. The position of one's fingers will feel uncomfortable. One will find it difficult to move one's fingers whilst moving the bellows in and out. As

one practises, one will become accustomed to the weight of the instrument, and the finger movements required to play the keys will become second nature. It will be easy to co-ordinate the movement of the bellows and one's fingers.

When one acquires a motor skill, one does not only gain a new way of moving one's body; one also acquires a new way of perceiving the world. To engage in any form of behaviour, one must be situated in the right sort of environment. For example, I can only play tennis if I am in a part of the world that contains a tennis ball, a racket, a net, a reasonably flat surface, and a tennis partner. It is impossible for me to exercise my skill of playing tennis if I am alone in my kitchen. Moreover, successfully exercising any skill requires a grasp of how one should move one's body to execute the appropriate actions. To return my partner's serve, I must know which bodily movements are required for my racket to make contact with the ball, and send it back over the net (there may be a range of different movements that will accomplish this goal). Thus, possessing any motor skill involves both the capacity to identify those parts of the world where it can be exercised, and the ability to select the bodily movements required to exercise it successfully in that particular environment. Merleau-Ponty holds that these abilities are constituted by perception of one's environment as offering an opportunity to exercise a particular skill by performing a particular set of movements. I see the ball as requiring me to run to *this* spot on the court, hold my racket at *this* angle, and hit it in *this* direction to send it back over the net.

Merleau-Ponty develops the claim about the connection between perception and action through his account of something that is variously called the 'body image' or 'body schema'. The body image/schema is, very roughly speaking, the body's 'grasp' of itself – the capacities it possesses, its perceptible properties, emotional attitudes the subject has towards her body, beliefs she holds about it, cultural ideas about the body that she has absorbed, and so on. The notion of the body image/schema is contested. It is understood in many different ways. Much discussion in the recent literature is influenced by Gallagher (see, for example, Gallagher 1986, 2005, 2009), who argues that the conceptual landscape is muddled. He draws a distinction between the body image and the body schema. He understands the body schema to be 'a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring', whilst the body image 'consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body' (2005: 24). The body schema is non-conscious and operates at the subpersonal level, whilst the body image is available to consciousness, and a personal level phenomenon.

Whilst Gallagher's distinction has been influential, it is not universally accepted. For example, de Vignemont (2006) points out that neither the body image nor the body schema, as defined by Gallagher, are unitary phenomena. Gallagher lumps together perceptions of the body, concepts of it, and emotional attitudes towards it as parts of the body image, but these can come apart. Similarly, it is unclear whether the sensory-motor capacities that together form the body schema are unified so that we can really speak of a single body schema. She also suggests that one could argue there are *four* body images/schemata. Indeed, Head and Holmes (1911), who first introduced the concept of the body schema, talked of the plural *schemata*, and Schilder (1950), whose work in this area greatly influenced

Merleau-Ponty, also suggested that each person may have several body images.

Merleau-Ponty tended to speak of the body schema – *schéma corporel* – rather than the body image, and he understood it in terms of action. However, it's not clear that his notion properly maps on to Gallagher's – or, indeed, any of the other notions available in the literature. Having noted these important controversies, we can set them aside, since we do not need to settle them for our purposes here. Neither do we need a complete account of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema, and the relations it bears to other such notions to understand those of his claims that are relevant for our discussion. In what follows, I will use the term 'body schema' to refer to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the thing at issue, since this is his preferred terminology.

Merleau-Ponty thinks of the body schema as the body's 'grasp' of itself. As such, it is a sort of primitive sense of self. My use of 'grasp' should not be taken to imply that the body schema is cognitive, consisting in thoughts one has about one's body, although thought may affect the body schema. Similarly, whilst I am using the word 'sense' here, I do not mean to imply that it is a perceptual phenomenon, although it is related to perception, as I will explain below. For Merleau-Ponty, the body schema is not something that is wholly available to consciousness, although some aspects of it may be, and the body schema in general has *effects* that are so available. It has two components: a relatively stable sense of oneself as an enduring being of a certain sort, and a continuously changing sense of one's posture and the configuration of one's limbs. Both of these components are cross-modal, comprising information from different sensory sources. The stable sense of oneself as an enduring being of a certain sort (partly) consists in the body's grasp of its own possibilities for action. The body's sense that it has a right hand, for example, consists in its grasp of the possibilities for action conferred on it by having a right hand, such as being able to touch and grasp objects a certain distance to one's right, the ability to pick up objects of a certain range of sizes and weights, the capacity to point to things in a certain portion of the perceptual field, and so on. The possibilities for action possessed by different body parts are co-ordinated with one another to generate further possibilities for action. The power of lifting possessed by both hands together is greater – one can lift a larger range of objects – than the power possessed by just one hand on its own. The body's grasp of its own possibilities for action is extended when one learns a new skill.

The notion of the body schema allows for a deeper understanding of Merleau-Ponty's claim that the subject's perceptions of the world are linked to her capacities for action. The objects I encounter in the world are each correlated with a particular set of possibilities for action. A tennis ball, for example, allows for a certain range of holding, throwing, and kicking actions. Since the body schema is the body's grasp of its own possibilities for action – its motor capacities – we can say that objects in the world are each correlated with a particular configuration of the body schema. Perceiving an object involves using a certain set of one's motor capacities: those that can be used to interact with the object. Thus perceiving an object involves using the relevant configuration of one's body schema.

Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception grounds his account of images, which is encapsulated by his claim that they are 'the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside' (1964, 164).

Let us consider mental images first. Mental images are associated with perceptual imagining. They are quasi-perceptual, conscious, intentional experiences that are under the subject's immediate control. It is tempting to think – and, in fact, many people have thought – that mental images are private, subjective counterparts to material images. However, Merleau-Ponty utterly rejects the notion of a private Cartesian realm and all that goes with it, including private mental items. He thus offers us a conception of mental images that is radically different from the way they are usually understood. Indeed, it is not obvious that anything in his framework exactly maps onto the concept. However, Merleau-Ponty himself does identify mental images with an element of his framework, and since he intends to capture the phenomenon to which the usual concept points, it is worth retaining this terminology. He writes, '[T]he word "image" is in bad repute because we have thoughtlessly believed that a design was a tracing, a copy, a second thing, and that the mental image was such a design... [but] they are the inside of the outside...' (1964, 164). Merleau-Ponty offers the following account of mental images. According to his theory of perception, each object corresponds to a configuration of the body schema. Merleau-Ponty takes this to mean that 'things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence' (1964, 164). The internal equivalent of a thing consists in the set of possibilities for action it offers me, i.e., the corresponding configuration of the body schema. Merleau-Ponty identifies the configuration of the body schema (inside the subject) that corresponds to a worldly object (outside the subject) with a mental image of that object. In this way, mental images are 'the inside of the outside'.

The usual conception holds that mental images are conscious, quasi-perceptual, intentional phenomena that are under the subject's direct control. Configurations of the body schema are intentional in that they are *of* the objects to which they correspond. However, Merleau-Ponty's account as it has been expounded so far does not address the latter three features of mental imagery. Configurations of the body schema are not conscious. One might think that there is an obvious connection between mental images and perception on Merleau-Ponty's account. A mental image of an object is the set of motor skills that can be used to interact with it, which together form a particular configuration of the body schema. This configuration of the body schema is used in perceiving the object. However, this does not explain the sense in which mental images are quasi-perceptual. Finally, whilst the subject's motor skills – and so the configurations of her body schema that correspond to objects – are under her control, it is control of the conscious, quasi-perceptual experiences that is at issue here. To understand these features of mental imagery, we must turn to Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual imagining.

The configurations of the body schema that Merleau-Ponty identifies with mental images do not become conscious until they are put to use in perceptual imagining. When one uses one's motor capacities to perceive an object, one thereby has a perceptual experience of it: one experiences the object as being present. Merleau-Ponty holds that in imagining, one uses one's motor capacities in such a way that one experiences the object as having a pseudo-presence, which is similar to perception, yet crucially different, since the object itself is not present. To see what is being suggested here, let us consider Merleau-Ponty's analysis of a particular case.

When I imagine Peter absent, I am not aware of contemplating an image of Peter numerically distinct from Peter himself. However far away he is, I visualize him in the world, and my power of imagining is nothing but the persistence of my world around me. To say that I imagine Peter is to say that I bring about the pseudo-presence of Peter by putting into operation the 'Peter-behaviour-pattern' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 181).

Here, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting the following. My friend Peter is someone with whom I have interacted several times (if I had not done so, I could not call him my friend). My repeated interactions with Peter mean that I have developed habitual ways of interacting with him – I am skilled at interacting with Peter. These 'Peter skills' constitute a configuration of my body schema that corresponds to Peter. Just like my other motor capacities, my 'Peter skills' comprise behavioural and perceptual components. I behave in relaxed, friendly, trusting ways with Peter, and I perceive him as familiar, likeable, and someone for whom certain sorts of friendly trusting behaviour are appropriate. I use these skills in perception to experience Peter – a particular familiar, likeable, trustworthy being – as present. But Merleau-Ponty also holds that I can exercise these skills in Peter's absence. In the perceptual case, I use these skills to perceive the entity that is Peter as requiring certain forms of behaviour. When Peter is not present, I use my Peter skills to summon up the demands for action that he would make on me if he were really in front of me. By so doing, I conjure up the pseudo-presence of Peter. The experience is quasi-perceptual and conscious. Since the subject can engage in perceptual imagining at will, it is also under the subject's control.

An objection can be raised at this point. One can have mental images of things one has never perceived, including non-existent entities. But on Merleau-Ponty's account, it seems that one can only have mental images of things one has perceived. However, Merleau-Ponty can respond to this objection. He holds that we are able to use our motor skills in creative and flexible ways. When it comes to perception and action, the subject's exercise of a particular motor skill is not rigidly tied to the environment – or type of environments – in which she first gained the skill. The subject can adapt it to new environments. Merleau-Ponty (1962) gives the example of a church organist who has learnt to play on one particular instrument. She only needs a little practice to be able to play organs with different arrangements of pedals and stops. In such cases, the subject is able to both perceive the new environment as calling for the exercise of her skill, and to actually exercise it. The flexibility inherent in the subject's motor skills means that she can also use them to conjure up the pseudo-presence of things she has never seen, even those that do not exist. For example, her skills of interacting with humans and horses can be used to conjure up the pseudo-presence of a centaur. Merleau-Ponty's account does imply that there is a limit to the sorts of mental images one can have – one can only have mental images of things that are sufficiently close to objects one has perceived (what counts as 'sufficiently close' is an open question). I take it, though, that this is not a problem, but in fact accurately reflects our capacity for mental imagery.

Merleau-Ponty then offers an account of material images – those images that are in the world, and unlike mental images, can be perceived. He writes, 'Why shouldn't these [correspondences] in their turn give rise to some [external] visible

shape in which anyone else would recognise these motifs which support his own inspection of the world?' (1964, 164). The suggestion is that the 'internal equivalent of things' – the configuration of the body schema that corresponds to some particular worldly entity – can be made manifest in the world, creating a new object (or giving new meaning to an existing one), which is such that others can recognise it as being *of,* or alluding to, the worldly entity to which the configuration of the body schema corresponds. In this way, what is 'inside' (the configuration of the body schema) gains an 'outside' (the new object in which it is made manifest) – material images are thus 'the outside of the inside'.

What is it for a configuration of the body schema to be made manifest in the world, thereby creating an image of the worldly object to which that configuration corresponds? Merleau-Ponty's explanation draws on his account of perception. As we saw earlier, a configuration of the body schema consists in a set of abilities to act – those that correspond to a particular object. On Merleau-Ponty's account, a capacity for action is connected with perception in the following way. Being able to do x involves being able to identify opportunities to do x. (For example, one does not know how to open doors if one continually tries to open empty space. Being able to open doors essentially involves being able to identify doors that are in need of opening. The same general point is true for all motor skills.) The identification of an opportunity to do x consists in a *perception* of the relevant object as inviting one to do x. A particular object offers a particular set of possibilities for action. To perceive something as an object of that type is to perceive it as offering those opportunities to act that are typical for things of that sort.

Merleau-Ponty holds that experience has a *Gestalt* structure. One is not confronted with a chaotic flux; instead, worldly objects are presented in perception as having a *Gestalt* form – one that refers to the perceiver's capacities for action. The world-in-itself does not contain *Gestalten*. It takes on *Gestalt* forms as a result of being perceived. But the perceiver does not create *Gestalten* out of nothing. She finds *Gestalt* forms in the world. Although the world-in-itself does not contain *Gestalten*, perceptual experience can still be veridical or non-veridical. It is veridical if the *Gestalt* form picked out by the perceiver is appropriate, and the form is appropriate if the opportunities for action it offers can really be taken up by the perceiver. For example, I perceive my dog as having a canine *Gestalt* form, which includes the invitation to stroke him. My perception is veridical because I can take up this invitation – he really is strokeable. Merleau-Ponty holds that the perceiver's surroundings 'suggest' to her that in them, she can perform certain sorts of actions. The perceiver takes up this suggestion, identifying her surroundings as suitable for performing those actions, and thereby perceives her surroundings as inviting her to do so.

In perception, the perceiver aims to pick out *Gestalt* forms that follow the contours of the world, as it were – she aims to find *Gestalten* in the world's matter that are appropriate; those whose invitations for action can really be taken up. However, it is also possible for the human subject to pick out *Gestalt* forms in a playful or imaginative way, where this activity does not aim to reveal the world's contours. Imagine looking at heavily ornamented wallpaper. One may see a cat in the ornaments – one sees the wallpaper ornaments as having a cat-ish *Gestalt* form. Whilst in ordinary perception, one experiences the world as really having the *Gestalt*

form it exhibits – the invitations for action can really be taken up – in imaginative seeing, one does *not* experience the world as *really* having that form. Instead, one imaginatively sees the *Gestalt* as 'laid over' the world's real form. When I perceive the small creature who lives next door as a cat, I experience him as really being a cat. But when I see the wallpaper ornaments as having a cat *Gestalt,* I do not experience it as really being a cat. I never cease to perceive it as wallpaper. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which both imaginative seeing and ordinary perception involve picking out a *Gestalt* form in the world, rather than creating one from nothing; in both cases the perceiver *finds* the form in the world. Just as the small feline who lives next door 'suggests' a cat *Gestalt* to me so that I perceive him as a cat, so too the wallpaper ornaments 'suggest' a cat-ish form to me. But the 'prompt' from the world in imaginative seeing is more ambiguous than in ordinary perception, and so it requires more creativity to take it up. Imaginative seeing differs from ordinary perception in that what the perceiver makes of the world's 'suggestions' has more to do with her than with the nature of the world.

The same motor capacities – the same configurations of the body schema – are involved in both ordinary perception and imaginative seeing. It is the subject's ability to do x that makes her sensitive to places in the world where x can be done. Her ability to do x allows her to pick up the world's suggestions and perceive appropriate places as suitable for doing x. It is also her ability to do x that allows her to creatively respond to ambiguous suggestions from the world, and imaginatively see an opportunity to do x as overlaying the world's real form. As we noted earlier, each type of object corresponds to a certain set of possibilities for action. Perceiving a worldly entity as an object of that sort involves perceiving it as offering the possibilities for action that are typical for objects of that kind. Similarly, imaginatively seeing part of the world as an object of that sort involves imaginatively seeing it as offering the possibilities for action that are typical for such objects. For example, cats are entities for which certain kinds of behaviour are appropriate. They can be picked up, held, stroked, teased with balls of string, etc. Perceiving an object as a cat involves experiencing it as offering (some) of the typical possibilities for action associated with cats. Imaginatively seeing an object as a cat also involves experiencing it as offering (some) of the possibilities for action that are typical of cats.

Whilst both ordinary perception and imaginative seeing involve experiencing some part of the world as offering possibilities for action, these possibilities are experienced differently. An imaginatively seen *Gestalt* form – such as the cat seen in the wallpaper ornaments – is experienced as 'laid over' the world's real nature. One does not stop perceiving the world as really being a certain way, when one imaginatively sees a *Gestalt* form as laid over it. We can understand this in the following way. In imaginative seeing, the perceiver experiences exactly the same part of the world as offering her conflicting possibilities for action. She perceives opportunities to act in accordance with the world's real nature, and conflicting possibilities for action that constitute the *Gestalt* form that is 'laid over' the world. The wallpapered surface invites the perceiver to lean on it in a certain way, whilst the cat she imaginatively sees in the ornaments invites her to stroke it. The real possibilities for action she perceives are more numerous than those that are imaginatively seen. The perceiver experiences the cat imaginatively seen in the

wallpaper ornaments as offering fewer action possibilities than a real cat – it does not look as though it can be picked up or fed. Whereas she experiences the wallpapered surface as offering her a good number of the usual possibilities for action associated with such entities. The perceived object thus has a fullness that imaginatively seen entities lack. In this way, imaginatively seen entities are not presented to the perceiver as real parts of the world. Merleau-Ponty writes, '[t]hey are not there in the same way as [real objects]. But they are not *elsewhere*... I do not look at [an imaginatively seen entity] as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its place' (1964, 164).

The perceiver can imaginatively see *Gestalt* forms superimposed on what she experiences as the world's real form. Her body schema is what allows her to do this. It is also possible for the perceiver to alter the world, so that others can imaginatively see what she does. I once visited Avalon, a village in Eastern France. Walking round the village one evening, I came across a wall, covered in charcoal drawings of human faces and other creatures. The drawings picked out fissures and cracks in the wall, tracing its features, adding just a little more detail, to produce the images. It was clear that someone had imaginatively seen the faces and creatures in the wall, then altered the world, emphasising the relevant features of the wall with charcoal, so that others could imaginatively see them too. One does not need to imaginatively see something in the world before one can alter it to produce an image. One can alter the world so as to imaginatively see something – this is what the artist does when she produces something like a sketch. But in both cases, it is a configuration of the perceiver's body schema that allows her to imaginatively see. The image that is produced by altering the world thus manifests this configuration.

Conclusion

Images are of two basic sorts: mental images and material images. Both sorts are intentional – they are *of* things. Material images look like their objects, but they are not simply replicas of them – they 'translate' their objects into a different medium. Mental images are quasi-perceptual, intentional, conscious, and under the subject's control. An influential line of thought tries to account for both sorts by appealing to the causal workings of the visual system. Merleau-Ponty rejects this approach as inadequate and offers his own account, captured by his mysterious claim that images are 'the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside'. I have offered a reading of this claim. Perception is bound up with the subject's capacities for action, which together constitute her body schema. Each worldly object corresponds to a set of motor skills – those that can be used to interact with it. The set of motor skills constitute a particular configuration of the subject's body schema. Merleau-Ponty identifies the configuration of the body schema with a mental image of the relevant object. The skills can be used to conjure up the pseudo-presence of the object. A configuration of the body schema can also be translated into some publicly perceivable material. This is what Merleau-Ponty takes a material image to be. The artist shapes the world so that perceivers can imaginatively see a *Gestalt* form in it. There is, no doubt, much more that can be said about Merleau-Ponty's account of the image. But by presenting an interpretation of his account, I hope to pave the way for further research into this aspect of his philosophy.

References

de Vignemont, F. 2006. "A Review of Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*". *Psyche* 12 (1). http://psyche.cs.monash.edu.au/

Gallagher, S. 1986. "Body Image and Body Schema: A Conceptual Clarification". *Journal of Mind and Behavior* 7: 541—554.

Gallagher, S. 2005. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gallagher, S. 2009. "Body Image/Body Schema". In T. Bayne, A. Cleeremans, and P. Wilken (eds.) *Oxford Companion to Consciousness.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 117—19.

Head, H., Holmes, G. 1911. "Sensory Disturbances in Cerebral Lesions". *Brain* 34: 102—254.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London: Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964. "Eye and Mind". Translated by Carleton Dallery. In his *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1969. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Schilder, P. 1950. *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body.* London: Routledge.

Todorović, D. 2009. "The Effect of the Observer Vantage Point on Perceived Distortions in Linear Perspective Images". *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics* 71 (1), 183—193.