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Image and ontology in Merleau-Ponty

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Abstract Although better known for his phenomenology of perception and the perceived world, Merleau-Ponty's writings also contain the outlines of a rich and unique account of the imagination and the imaginary. In this paper, I explicate the phenomenology of the image that Merleau-Ponty develops throughout his work. I show how Merleau-Ponty develops this account of the image in critical response to Sartre and in a way that follows from his own descriptions of what painters do when they paint and of what we experience when we look at their paintings. The investigation of the particular mode of being of images leads to a consideration of the body and Merleau-Ponty's later ontology.

Keywords Merleau-Ponty · Sartre · Image · Ontology · Phenomenology · Philosophy of art

1 Introduction

In 1946, referring to his recently published *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty self-critically states: "On the basis of what I have said, one might think that I hold that man lives in the realm of the real. But we also live in the imaginary, also in the world of ideality. Thus, it is necessary to develop a theory of imaginary existence and of ideal existence."[1] In the years following this assertion, Merleau-Ponty regularly addresses the theme of the imaginary in his lecture-courses—almost always while criticizing Sartre's early works on the intentional act of imagining and

[1] Merleau-Ponty (1964c, p. 40; 1996a, p. 99). For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of ideality and ideal objects, see Besmer (2007).

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on the intentional correlate of this act, the imaginary or the image.[2] Then, in the last years of his life, Merleau-Ponty takes significant steps towards developing a novel account of imaginary existence in the chapter drafts posthumously published as *The Visible and the Invisible* and in his working notes. However, what can be found in these chapter drafts concerning the imaginary is mostly promissory.[3] And while the working notes from this time contain many highly suggestive indications for how an account of the imaginary would correspond to and complement Merleau-Ponty's later ontology of the flesh, these notes are not developed enough to stand on their own as a full expression of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the imaginary.[4]

But, as I aim to show in the following, when these lectures, chapter drafts, and working notes are read in conjunction with "Eye and Mind," the last work published during Merleau-Ponty's lifetime, one can discern a genuine, novel account of imaginary existence. For it is "Eye and Mind" that contains Merleau-Ponty's most developed and focused, though still brief and suggestive, account of the imaginary in the context of a discussion of fine art. While his earlier essays devoted to fine art—"Cézanne's Doubt" and "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence"—do not explicitly deal with the question of the imaginary or images, Merleau-Ponty recuperates the concept of image in "Eye and Mind" by redefining it in such a way that it accords with his descriptions of what painters do when they paint and of what we experience when we look at these paintings. In this way, although Merleau-Ponty asserts that "the word 'image' has a bad reputation," he also seems to hold that a proper phenomenology of the art of painting can lead to its rehabilitation.[5]

Specifically, based on his prolonged study of the work of Cézanne and others, Merleau-Ponty suggests that what appears when we look at paintings has not been sufficiently accounted for. That is, although the objects that appear when we look at one of Cézanne's still life paintings, for example, are not simply present in the way that the things we perceive are present, they are also not simply absent (or even absent objects that presently appear *as absent*, as Sartre argues).[6] And further,

[2] Sartre (1962, 2004, 2005, 2007). For examples of Merleau-Ponty's critical discussions of Sartre's account of the imagination and the imaginary in his lectures, see especially: Merleau-Ponty's 1947–1948 course at the École normale supérieure (2001, p. 46; 2002b, p. 29); his 1954–1955 courses at the Collège de France (2003, pp. 193–199; 2010, pp. 146–155); his 1958–1959 and 1960–1961 courses at the Collège de France (1996b, p. 106, 124, 173); and his 1961 course at the Sorbonne (2000, pp. 74–77; 1964c, pp. 59–60). See also Colonna (2003, p. 115n16).

[3] For example, in "Reflection and Interrogation," Merleau-Ponty writes that after vision and feeling (*sentir*), "The imaginary will be submitted to a parallel analysis" (1964a, p. 49; 1968, p. 29). And in "Interrogation and Dialectic," Merleau-Ponty writes that: "there is no thing fully observable, no inspection of the thing that would be without gaps and that would be total […] Conversely, the imaginary is not an absolute inobservable: it finds in the body analogues of itself that incarnate it. *This distinction, like the others, has to be reconsidered* and is not reducible to that between the full and the void" (1964a, p. 107; 1968, p. 77, my emphasis).

[4] See, for example, Merleau-Ponty (1964a, pp. 310, 314; 1968, pp. 262, 266).

[5] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 126, translation modified).

[6] In his recent book, *La chair des images: Merleau-Ponty entre peinture et cinéma*, Mauro Carbone clearly differentiates between the presentification of absent objects and the way that images make present to us what "had never been present before"—namely, the relief and the depth of the visible (2011, p. 11, translation mine).

although what appears when we gaze at a painting is not taken to be real in the way that a thing that is perceived is taken to be real, it is also not simply taken to be irreal or a nothingness (again, as Sartre argues). Rather, what appears when we look at a painting, according to Merleau-Ponty, is somehow both present and absent, real and unreal, and visible and invisible at the same time. But this is not to say that what appears when we look at a painting is *ambivalent* or that what appears somehow wavers between the mutually exclusive poles of presence and absence, reality and unreality, and visibility and invisibility. Rather, what appears when we look at a painting, according to Merleau-Ponty, is *ambiguous* insofar as presence and absence, reality and unreality, and visibility and invisibility inherently participate with or are implied in one another.[7] Merleau-Ponty describes this participation or implication of the supposed contraries of visibility and invisibility in an often cited working note: "the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an inner framework [*membrure*], and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it."[8]

Aiming to capture this ambiguity, Merleau-Ponty characterizes the mode of being of what appears when we look at works of art as a "quasi-presence and imminent visibility."[9] And it is accounting for this quasi-presence and imminent visibility of what appears when we look at paintings that comes to make up what Merleau-Ponty describes as "the whole problem of the imaginary."[10] That is, the ambiguous mode of being of what appears when we look at paintings and other artworks serves as the exemplar of the mode of being of images as such. Thus, the task and challenge of formulating a Merleau-Pontian account of imaginary existence primarily consists in describing the image's ambiguous manner of appearing as quasi-present and imminently visible without claiming that the image is either just a real thing that appears as present or that it is just an unreal nothing through which something absent presently appears as such.

Before elaborating whether and how Merleau-Ponty succeeds in accounting for the interplay of presence and absence, reality and unreality, and visibility and invisibility in the appearance of an image, it is worth mentioning that the very attempt to do so challenges some prominent accounts of the ontology of artworks. For example, the idea that what appears when we look at a painting is neither simply real, nor unreal challenges two rival ways that the artwork has been understood in contemporary philosophy of art. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's account questions any theory according to which artworks like paintings are just physical

[7] In 1951, appealing to a distinction that Melanie Klein makes between ambivalence and ambiguity, Merleau-Ponty states: "When I speak of ambiguity, this does not mean a wavering thought which passes from white to black, affirming first the black and then the white. I want to speak of a thought that discerns different relations between things, the interior movement that makes them participate in their contraries" (2000, p. 340; 2007, p. 217). See also Merleau-Ponty's distinction between "bad ambiguity" and "good ambiguity" in 1964c, p. 11; 2000, p. 48.

[8] Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 269; 1968, p. 215).

[9] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 23; 1993, p. 126).

[10] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 23; 1993, p. 126).

objects.[11] On the other hand, however, claiming that what appears when we look at the artwork is only quasi-present and quasi-real is also not the same as saying that the artwork is just the "imaginative activity" of the artist or the spectator.[12] Thus, if one accepts his descriptions, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of painting provides the means to formulate a novel ontology of the artwork and the image that could perhaps overcome some of the difficulties and problems that have beset other accounts.[13]

However, the implications of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of painting are not limited to the philosophy of art alone. As Merleau-Ponty states, "every theory of painting is a metaphysics."[14] For one thing, if the images that appear when we look at pictures and paintings have a mode of existence that is somehow partway between that of a real, physical thing and that of an irreal object, then the existence of the image also presents a challenge to any philosophy like Sartre's that maintains a strong distinction between what is real and what is irreal. That is, if the image has a quasi-presence and partakes in a degree of reality, then the imaginary cannot completely exclude the real in the way that Sartre claims that it does. Further, as we will see, Merleau-Ponty's mostly implicit criticism of Sartre's account of painting and of the distinction between the imaginary and the real itself already entails a more general rejection of Sartre's dual ontology of the in-itself and the for-itself. As Merleau-Ponty himself asserts, paintings (and, by extension, images) are "beings that are not of the in-itself and that are not nothing."[15] In this way, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of painting and the image is intimately related to his ontology. As Pierre Rodrigo has recently written, "This determination of the mode of appearing of the image constitutes one of the keystones of the Merleau-Pontian conception of the overlapping of the visible and the invisible or, in other words, of his conception of the topology of being as 'chiasm.'"[16]

The general aim of this article is to explicate the features of the artwork and the image that Merleau-Ponty alludes to in order to open the way for an investigation into the broader ontological presuppositions and implications of this conception. To that end, in section one, I present Sartre's early account of the image and the artwork in order to be able to show how Merleau-Ponty responds to this account. In section two and three, I show how Merleau-Ponty's account of painting is a direct, but implicit challenge and response to Sartre's account of images. Then, in section four, I show how the quasi-presence and imminent visibility of the image that Merleau-Ponty points to has to do with the fact that imagining, like perceiving, is an inherently bodily activity. Specifically, spelling out something that is suggested by Merleau-Ponty, I argue that images would not be accessible to us if we did not have

[11] For an inconclusive discussion of the "physical object hypothesis," see Wollheim (1980).

[12] For the idea that the artwork consists in an imaginative activity of the artist, see, for example, Collingwood (1958).

[13] The difficulties with and challenges that have been raised to both previously mentioned accounts are outlined in Thomasson (2008).

[14] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 42; 1993, p. 132).

[15] Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 174, translation mine).

[16] Rodrigo (2009, p. 154, translation mine).

a body or, less trivially stated, that drawings, paintings, and sculptures can only be given to us *as images* in bodily experience.[17]

2 Sartre and the nothingness of the image

Applying the basic phenomenological insight that all consciousness is consciousness of something, Sartre argues in his early books *The Imagination* and *The Imaginary* that imagining is nothing more than a specific way of being conscious of an absent or non-existent object. Thus, when we imagine some absent friend, according to Sartre, we are not conscious of a picture that somehow exists 'in' our mind; we are conscious of our friend who is not there. Similarly, when we look at a photograph or a painting of a friend, we are not merely conscious of a thing that exists in the world in the same way that things exist. Rather, when we see a photograph or a painting *as an image* of a friend, we are conscious of our friend who is not there *through* the photograph or the painting. That is, we are intentionally directed at our friend through some material thing that gives itself as analogous to that friend. In both cases, according to Sartre, the image is only this peculiar way that someone or something absent presently appears to consciousness.

Focusing only on the experience of things like photographs, drawings, paintings, and sculptures, and thus leaving aside the important question of the phenomenological difference between imagining or phantasizing an absent friend and looking at a picture of that friend, the first thing that should be noted is the way that the consciousness of an image differs from straightforward perception.[18] Unlike straightforward perception, in which we are just directed at the object that is perceived, there are different objects involved in the consciousness of images like photographs and paintings. In distinguishing between these objects, Sartre primarily relies on Husserl's brief descriptions of image-consciousness in *Ideas I*.[19]

[17] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's statement concerning the "musical ideas" described by Proust: "the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us […] they could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience" (1964a, p. 194; 1968, p. 150).

[18] For an account of Husserl's dissociation of image consciousness and phantasy, see Bernet (2002). For an account of Husserl's phenomenology of image consciousness in particular, see de Warren (2009). For a critique of Sartre's classification of both 'mental' images and pictures as "so many species of the same genus" that is inspired by Husserl's dissociation of image consciousness and phantasy, see Stawarska (2001).

[19] According to Sartre, "Husserl blazed the trail, and no study of images can afford to ignore the wealth of insights he provided" (Sartre 1962, p. 143; 2007, p. 158). In a passage that Sartre refers to in both *The Imagination* and *The Imaginary*, Husserl writes: "Let us suppose we are considering Dürer's engraving, 'Knight, Death, and the Devil.' In the first place, let us distinguish the normal perceiving, the correlate of which is the *physical thing*, '*engraved print*,' this print in the portfolio. In the second place, we distinguish the perceptive consciousness in which, within the black, colorless lines, there appear to us the figures of 'the knight on his horse,' 'death,' and the 'devil.' We do not advert to these in aesthetic contemplation as Objects; we rather advert to the realities presented 'in the picture'—more precisely, to the '*depictured*' realities, to the flesh and blood knight, etc." (1976, p. 226; 1998, p. 261). For Husserl's more detailed posthumously published reflections of the consciousness of images, see Husserl (1980, 2005).

Specifically, my consciousness of a painting as an image of an absent friend involves the absent depicted subject that I am intentionally directed towards in addition to the present pigment stained canvas that gives itself as a representative of that absent subject. As Sartre writes: "The image is an act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or nonexistent object, through a physical […] content that is given not as itself but in the capacity of 'analogical *representative*' of the object aimed at."[20]

So, when, for example, we direct our attention to a portrait, what appears, strictly speaking, is neither just the pigment stained canvas nor is it the flesh and blood person who is depicted in the portrait—although both of these are necessarily and closely involved in the consciousness of a depictive image. Rather, when we direct our attention to a portrait, something presently appears with a specific size and shape (what Husserl terms the "image object"). Sartre describes what appears when we look at the portrait as "a *quasi-person*, with a *quasi-face*, etc."[21] So, looking at a portrait of Charles VIII in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Sartre describes how the face of Charles presently appears when he looks at the portrait on the wall: "those sinuous and sensual lips, that narrow and stubborn forehead, directly provoke in me a certain affective impression, and this impression directs itself to *these lips*, as they are in the picture."[22]

However, as Sartre is keen to emphasize, the appearing image object appears in a distinctive way: what presently appears when I direct my attention to a portrait is not taken as being real. That is, the "sinuous and sensual lips" that Sartre so much admires in the portrait of Charles are not taken for *real* lips despite the fact that they presently appear *as* lips. Although it is obviously possible that a portrait be mistaken for a real person in the same way that a mannequin in a store window can briefly be mistaken for a real person, this is not the kind of experience that we have when we are conscious of an image. Unlike a misperception, as long as I admire the portrait of my friend *as a portrait*, there is no danger of confusing the portrait for my friend himself—in Husserl's language, I have a "consciousness of difference."[23]

Pointing to this peculiar way that the image has of presently appearing as unreal, Sartre characterizes the appearing image as a trompe-l'oeil. Specifically, according to Sartre, what appears when we look at the portrait of Charles VIII is "a trompe-l'oeil, because the colored spots on the picture give themselves to the eyes as a forehead, as lips."[24] When Sartre characterizes the image object as a trompe-l'oeil, what he indicates is precisely this specific way in which the image appears and continues to appear although we "know" that it is not real. Perhaps the most elegant demonstration of this phenomenon is Magritte's felicitously titled painting "The Betrayal of Images [*La trahison des images*]" in which we continue to "see" a pipe despite Magritte's reminder that "Ceci n'est pas une pipe."

Thus, although the experience of an image is similar to perception insofar as in both experiences something appears, the difference in the *way* that the image and

[20] Sartre (1962, p. 46; 2005, p. 20).

[21] Sartre (1962, p. 49; 2005, p. 22).

[22] Sartre (1962, p. 52; 2005, p. 23).

[23] Husserl (1980, p. 20; 2005, p. 22).

[24] Sartre (1962, p. 52; 2005, p. 23).

the thing appear reveals a fundamental distinction between what is perceived and what we are conscious of as an image. In straightforward perception, the object that I perceive appears as actually there "in the flesh," so to speak, here and now. On the other hand, while I am conscious of an image, an object also presently appears. However, as Sartre writes, "the *flesh* of the object is not the same in the image as in perception."[25] The image object is presently given, but is given as not actually existing. In this sense, Sartre argues that the appearing image object is given as "irreal." The irreality of the image that appears has to do with the fact that in the consciousness of an image, one does not stop, so to speak, at the image object that appears. As Sartre repeatedly emphasizes, the image necessarily has the function of depicting something absent (what Husserl calls the "image subject") and I aim at this absent subject *through* the image that appears. As Sartre clearly states: "the picture is nothing more than a way for Pierre to appear to me as absent."[26]

Thus, like a sign, the image points beyond itself to something else. However, whereas the relation between the sign and the object that is signified is extrinsic insofar as there is no necessary relation between the marks on the wall and the object these marks refer to, the portrait has an intrinsic relation to the person depicted. That is, whereas the sign points beyond itself in a way that is indifferent to what is signified, the image exhibits an object *through* itself. Sartre illustrates the difference between the sign and the image by pointing out that unlike the sign in the train station that designates the "Assistant Manager's Office," which obviously does not resemble the object that it signifies, the appearing image object exhibits the depicted image subject by means of itself. Even if I resist, I continue to experience the painting as an image of a depicted subject. That is, it remains the case that "the person in the painting solicits me gently to take him for a man."[27]

However, although it almost seems as if the image object that appears attempts to pass itself off as the depicted subject, we do not for that matter believe the subject to be present. There is a second sense in which we have a consciousness of difference or conflict when faced with the appearing image object—that is, the image that appears *exhibits* my friend, although it gives him as not being there.[28] Thus, the lips that Sartre admires continue to give themselves as lips, but, nevertheless, they also "refer to the real lips, long since turned to dust, and derive their meaning only from them."[29] The depicted image subject is, thus, exhibited through the appearing image object and in this sense is not simply not present. As Sartre writes, the characteristic of the image "is not to be non-intuitive, as one might be tempted to believe, but to be 'intuitive-absent,' given as absent to intuition. In this sense, one can say that the image envelops a certain nothingness."[30]

[25] Sartre (1962, p. 38; 2005, p. 16).

[26] Sartre (1962, p. 54; 2005, p. 24).

[27] Sartre (1962, p. 50; 2005, p. 23).

[28] For an explication of the double sense in which the image object is in conflict for Husserl, see Husserl (1980, p. 51; 2005, p. 55).

[29] Sartre (1962, p. 53; 2005, p. 23).

[30] Sartre (1962, p. 34; 2005, p. 14, translation modified).

Taken together, we see the peculiar double way that the depictive image has of not being for Sartre: the image gives an absent subject through an inactual, but presently appearing object. More specifically, I 'see' the lips as present while I know they are not real and I 'see' the lips as Charles's although I know that he is not there.

The irreal character of the depicting image shows in which sense the image that appears must be distinguished from the material support that serves as analogical representative of the absent subject—in this case, the physical pigment stained canvas (what Husserl calls the "image thing"). According to Sartre, the canvas is like the other things I perceive insofar as I posit that what I perceive is real. On the other hand, as we have just seen, according to Sartre, the image that appears can only be constituted by a specific act of negation in which an object that appears is posited as *irreal*. In this way, for Sartre, we can only say that the portrait is something we perceive, in the strict sense, insofar as we consider it to be a physical thing making up part of the real world, a thing made of canvas that can be hung askew, illuminated poorly, damaged, etc. On the other hand, however, as soon as we consider the portrait of Charles as a *portrait* of Charles, Sartre argues that we immediately "cease to consider the picture as making up part of the real world."[31]

In the last section of the conclusion to *The Imaginary* titled "The Work of Art," Sartre states that all works of art, not just photographs and portraits, are "an irreality."[32] Referring to abstract paintings, Sartre argues that even though cubist paintings, for example, might not *imitate* the real, they should not consequently be mistaken for real things. Even abstract paintings, Sartre argues, conform to the scheme that I have explained in terms of the distinction between image object, image subject, and image thing; only, in this case, the depicted image subject does not exist. Sartre writes: "It is simply that what is manifested through it [the abstract painting] is an irreal ensemble of *new things*, of objects that I have never seen nor will ever see but that are nonetheless irreal objects, objects that do not exist in the painting, nor anywhere else in the world, but that are manifested through the canvas and that have seized it by a kind of possession."[33]

According to Sartre, what appears when we look at works of art does not appear in the way real things do for the simple reason that it is not given to a realizing consciousness. A consciousness of an image depends on a double nihilation in

[31] Sartre (1962, p. 351; 2005, p. 183).

[32] Sartre (1962, p. 363; 2005, p. 189). Sartre's characterization of all works of art as images accords with Husserl's preliminary identification of all artworks as images. In his 1904–1905 lectures on phantasy and image consciousness, Husserl writes: "Image consciousness [….] is the essential foundation for the possibility of aesthetic feeling in fine art. Without an image, there is no fine art." Husserl (1980, p. 41; 2005, p. 44). I should note, however, that in 1918 Husserl revises this view and specifically rescinds the claim that all fine art is depictive. As he writes: "Earlier, I believed that it belonged to the essence of fine art to present in an image, and I understood this presenting to be depicting [*Abbilden*]. Looked at more closely, however, this is not correct." Husserl (1980, p. 515; 2005, p. 616). Husserl goes on to suggest that when watching a theatrical performance, for example, we "live in a world of perceptual phantasy [*perzeptive Phantasie*]" or "immediate imagination [*unmittelbare Imagination*]" that is not at all depictive; instead, he suggests, in this case, "we live in neutrality" or "do not carry out any positing with respect to what is intuited." Husserl (1980, pp. 514–516; 2005, pp. 616–618).

[33] Sartre (1962, p. 366; 2005, p. 190).

which consciousness denies the reality of the painting, which is to deny the reality of the world in positing the image. That is, the painting by Picasso is only given as image once consciousness "effecting a radical conversion that requires the nihilation of the world, constitutes itself as imaging."[34] According to Sartre, strictly speaking, what is real "are the results of the brush strokes, the impasting of the canvas, its grain, the varnish spread over the colors."[35] That is, according to Sartre, the apprehension of a painting as a work of art depends on an act of negation concerning the reality of what appears in relation to the real world, which is to say an act of negation of the real in positing the image.

In this way, Sartre argues, perceiving and imaging are diametrically opposed and conflicting activities that concern two essentially different kinds of objects. According to Sartre, we only perceive what is real in the sense that we only perceive what is posited as present and actually existent; the world of perception consists then only in natural objects. On the other hand, for Sartre, the imaginary and works of art are entirely different in that what we experience there is inactual and absent—it is literally nothing. As Sartre writes: "the image and the perception […] represent the two great irreducible attitudes of consciousness. It follows that they exclude one another."[36]

3 Art is expression, not representation

In "Cézanne's Doubt" and "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," Merleau-Ponty explicitly rejects the notion that the work of art of painting is about the depiction or representation of absent or nonexistent objects. In this way, although he does not explicitly discuss Sartre's work or the concept of image in these texts, Merleau-Ponty directly calls Sartre's identification of the artwork and the depictive image into question. The rejection of this identification and Merleau-Ponty's corresponding characterization of the artwork is significant for the purposes of this article insofar as it sets the stage for Merleau-Ponty's subsequent redefinition of the image as such.

Alluding to Sartre's claim that the image is a trompe-l'oeil insofar as it "gives its object as not being," Merleau-Ponty continually asserts that the painting is not a trompe-l'oeil.[37] He makes the point most clearly in a lecture that he gave on French national radio in 1948 while distinguishing the image from the sign:

> Is the painting not comparable to the arrows in stations that have no other function than to point us towards the exit or the platform? […] If this were the case, then the goal of the painting would be to be a trompe-l'oeil and the

[34] Sartre (1962, p. 363; 2005, p. 189). On the double nihilation involved in the consciousness of the image, see also Sartre (1962, p. 352; 2005, p. 183) and Breeur (2005, pp. 145–150, pp. 265–271).

[35] Sartre (1962, p. 363; 2005, p. 189).

[36] Sartre (1962, p. 231; 2005, p. 120).

[37] Sartre, (1962, p. 34; 2005, p. 14). See, for example, Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 68, p. 126; 1996c, p. 23).

> meaning [*signification*] of the painting would be entirely beyond the canvas in the objects it signifies, in its *subject*. Yet, it is precisely against this conception that all valuable painting has come into being.[38]

That is, a painting is not like a sign, according to Merleau-Ponty, and thus not a trompe-l'oeil, since paintings do not refer to absent or non-existent objects. Although, as we have seen, Sartre distinguishes paintings (and all images) from signs insofar as they refer to their objects differently, Sartre also presupposes an essential similarity between signs and paintings and argues that they both refer beyond themselves to some absent or nonexistent object and derive their meaning only from that object. It is exactly this similarity that Merleau-Ponty here rejects.

To be clear, to state that the meaning of the painting does not lie in some absent or nonexistent subject is not to claim, as Husserl sometimes does, that although a portrait *normally* functions as a representation of an absent or nonexistent object, it need not do so *exclusively* insofar as in aesthetic contemplation we can focus on the object that appears in addition to the depicted image subject.[39] Rather, by arguing that paintings are not at all like signs insofar as their meaning does not lie in some external depicted subject, Merleau-Ponty makes the stronger claim here that at least what he calls "valuable" paintings are *never* about making absent or nonexistent objects present in their absence. Essentially, this amounts to a plea for the dissociation of fine art and representation. Although it may seem gratuitous today to argue that the art of painting is not about the representation of absent or non-existent objects, the question is: if even figurative painters like Cézanne do not produce depictions of absent objects, what is it that they do?

According to Merleau-Ponty, "Art is not imitation […]. It is a process of expression."[40] At first glance this claim that art is a process of expression and that paintings are expressive of something might seem straightforward. However, Merleau-Ponty also regularly refers to the act of expression as enigmatic and paradoxical. The paradoxical nature of expression can be understood by considering how expression differs from a simple imitation. While what is imitated is usually thought to pre-exist its imitation, like repetition presupposes something to be repeated, what is expressed, according to Merleau-Ponty, does not pre-exist its expression except in the most confused way. On the other hand, insofar as expression is always an expression *of something*, expression also cannot be an act of spontaneous creation. That is, one can only express what is able to be expressed, just as one can only see what is able to be seen. Thus, paradoxically, the act of expression seems to presuppose something that comes before it, but also to bring that something into being. As Bernhard Waldenfels explains: "If *something*

[38] Merleau-Ponty (2002a, p. 55; 2004, p. 95, translation modified).

[39] For example, Husserl states in his 1904–1905 lectures on phantasy and image consciousness that in the case of "aesthetic contemplation," we do not aim "*exclusively*" at the depicted subject, but instead "an interest […] fastens onto the image object." If I am absorbed in the "aesthetic effect of the marble" or "the bold brushwork" of the artist, Husserl continues, the experience that I have of the object is "entirely different from what it is, say, in the case of a photograph that we do not look at aesthetically, but as the picture of a friend, of a great man, and the like." Husserl (1980, p. 52; 2005, p. 55).

[40] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 67; 1996c, p. 23).

preceded it, like a prior phase or a fundamental strata of experience, the event of expression would again be reduced to something that it is not. The paradox of expression means that the event of expression precedes *itself*, that it is younger and older than itself."[41]

Thus, on the one hand, to characterize the act of painting as a process of expression is to say that the painter does not simply render some actually pre-existing thing visible for a second time. And, again contradicting Sartre's claim that the portrait refers to the image subject and derives its meaning only from that subject, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The meaning of what the artist is going to say *does not exist* anywhere."[42] However, on the other hand, insofar as the artist is charged with "expressing what *exists*" or "expressing the world," according to Merleau-Ponty, painting is also not an unbridled, spontaneous creation that flows in one direction, so to speak, from the painter to the world.[43] Paradoxically, it seems that the painter paints something that was already there, but that what the painter paints only exists insofar as it is painted.

In "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty characterizes the expressive activity of the painter as a suspension of natural perception and as a kind of inversion of the natural movement of consciousness. While in perception we most often ignore the appearance of things and focus solely on the things that are given *through* the appearances, it is exactly this overlooked appearing of what appears, according to Merleau-Ponty, that painters make their explicit theme. He writes: "We forgetting the viscous, equivocal appearances, go through them straight to the things they present. The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things."[44] Thus, according to this early text, rather than simply depicting something absent or nonexistent, painters and paintings render visible or convert into visible objects something that is invisible in every appearance: the manner of appearing of things.

In his descriptions of the attitude of the painter who succeeds in thematizing this appearing (and who succeeds in rendering it visible for others in a painting), Merleau-Ponty characterizes painting in almost the same way that he elsewhere characterizes the phenomenological reduction. Like the phenomenologist does not turn away from the world, according to Merleau-Ponty, but rather "loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world" so as to bring these points of attachment to our notice, the painter is said to transform the world into "a spectacle, to make *visible* how the world *touches* us."[45] But how does Cézanne—undoubtedly the most phenomenological painter for Merleau-Ponty—actually render visible in

[41] Waldenfels (2006, p. 293).

[42] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 69; 1996c, p. 25).

[43] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 65; 1996c, p. 21).

[44] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 68; 1996c, p. 23).

[45] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 14; 1993, p. 70; 1996c, p. 25, 2012, p. lxxvii). Recently, Rudolf Bernet has shown that despite the similarities of the phenomenological attitude and the aesthetic attitude, the phenomenologist and the painter must suspend different sorts of prejudices. Thus, he distinguishes between a phenomenological epoché and a "pictorial epoché." See Bernet (2012).

paintings our attachments to the world or how the world touches us? In other words, what do we learn about the sensible world from Cézanne's paintings? Further, what does this have to do with expression?

First of all, in "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty describes how, by remaining faithful to the appearances, Cézanne's paintings show that "the lived perspective that we actually perceive is not a geometric or photographic one."[46] That is, the objects that appear in Cézanne's paintings are not governed by classical rules of perspective. For example, the cups and saucers on the table in a Cézanne still life are not perfectly elliptical in the way a circle seen from the side 'should be.' However, the way that objects appear in Cézanne's work is also not haphazard and follows a specific logic. Merleau-Ponty describes, for example, how the table in the 1895–1896 portrait of Gustave Geffroy stretches into the bottom of the picture. Although this is not how a table would appear in a photograph or from a point in three dimensional geometric space, Cézanne's painting shows how a large surface in our visual field appears warped due to the fact that it is seen from different points of view as we move our eyes, turn our head, or reposition our bodies.

But Cézanne does not only bring to visibility the shifting appearances and perspectival distortions that can be explained by the fact that the body—one's organ of perception and zero-point of orientation—moves around in the world that it perceives. According to Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne's paintings render things visible that would be invisible if vision only involved the experience of extended color patches. For example, Cézanne brings to visibility the qualities of objects normally attributed to the sense modalities other than vision (e.g. touch, smell, hearing). That is, we do not just see patches of color that subsequently suggest or evoke the thought of some tactile sensation, a taste, or an odor. In "Cézanne's Doubt," Merleau-Ponty writes: "We *see* the depth, the smoothness, the hardness of objects; Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor."[47] This is possible because, according to Merleau-Ponty, our perception of the world is originally and essentially synesthetic.[48] Sensitive to this original aspect of our experience, Cézanne does not just try to suggest the roughness of a piece of fabric or the fuzziness and weight of a peach. Rather, if his paintings are successful, these qualities will be as immediately given as the colors and shapes painted on the canvas.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that even simple sensations are never given as independent units that are separated from the other sense modalities or from the situation and movement of one's own body. Rather, drawing support from Kurt Goldstein's experiments on the effect of color stimuli on muscle tension, Merleau-Ponty argues that even the basic sensation of a uniform patch of color always involves a specific behavioral attitude or posture of the living body.[49] The perception of red and the perception of green are shown to involve

[46] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 64; 1996c, p. 19).

[47] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 65; 1996c, p. 20). Similarly, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes: "We see the weight of a block of cast iron that sinks in the sand, the fluidity of the water, and the viscosity of the syrup" (1945, p. 276; 2012, p. 238).

[48] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 275; 2012, p. 237).

[49] See, for example, Goldstein (1995, pp. 209–215).

different bodily behaviors and different nascent bodily movements. The regularity of the observed response patterns is attributed to the fact that colors, like other sensible qualities, have a motor, living significance for the perceiving subject. Again, this living significance is as much a part of my perception of the world as the vision of colors and shapes and thus must be included in the painting if it is to express what exists or to make visible the way the world touches us.

Goldstein's experiments show that this behavioral attitude toward every sense stimulation is adopted independently of the will and even before one is conscious of the quality that is perceived.[50] Sensible qualities are then not imposed on a distant observer who takes note of them and subsequently responds in some way. Rather, according to Goldstein and Merleau-Ponty, qualities like color are specific modes of behavior suggested to the body from some point in space. To have a sensation of a color is to adopt the attitude that corresponds to that color: "Blue is what solicits a certain way of looking from me, it is what allows itself to be palpated by a specific movement of my gaze."[51] For this reason, Merleau-Ponty even suggests that voluntarily adopting the bodily behavior associated with a certain color in its absence brings about the quasi-experience or what we can call the *imagination* of that color. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "this is why I obtain a quasi-presence of blue from the moment my body adopts the blue attitude."[52]

This communication of the living body and the sensible world suggests a synchronization or sympathy of the sensor and the sensible. Objects do not simply act on the body to produce sensations and the subject does not simply project qualities into the world. Before I have a sensation of some sound or color, according to Merleau-Ponty, I must open myself to it by adopting the appropriate attitude in anticipation of the sensation. As he writes, "I must find the attitude that *will* provide it with the means to become determinate […]; I must find the response to a poorly formulated question."[53] On the other hand, however, one can only be successful in this when one is responding to something that calls from outside oneself. The quasi-presence of blue that corresponds to the bodily attitude of blue will never be mistaken for the actual experience of a blue object. Thus, one's bodily attitude must anticipate the sensation but can only be successful when it responds to an obscurely expressed beckoning of the sensible. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "The sensible gives back to me what I had lent it, but I received it from the sensible in the first place."[54]

In this way, the relation between the sensor and the sensible is the same as that between painting and what is painted. Both perception and painting are processes of expression. Merleau-Ponty himself writes: "All perception, all action which presupposes it, and in short every human use of the body is already *primordial*

[50] Merleau-Ponty describes how this can be tested by employing stimuli that are either too weak or of too short a duration to be noticed. Goldstein even describes how this effect also holds for "light stimulation of the skin in general" accompanied by the exclusion of all optical influences (1995, p. 211).

[51] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 255; 2012, p. 218).

[52] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 256; 2012, p. 219).

[53] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 259; 2012, p. 222).

[54] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 259; 2012, p. 222).

expression."[55] And further, "It is the expressive operation of the body, begun by the least perception, that develops into painting and art."[56] Therefore, in response to the question of what the painting expresses, we see that, for Merleau-Ponty, painting makes visible the expression that occurs in even the most minimal perception and the painter expresses her communion with the world.

We can thus also understand Merleau-Ponty's claim that paintings are not *imitations* of natural mundane things and that the "meaning" of paintings does not lie in the absent subjects that they represent. For, although Cézanne painted landscapes and still life scenes, for example, his paintings do not simply depict the absent Montagne Sainte-Victoire and they do not merely imitate absent apples (otherwise, we might wonder why he painted these same things over and over again). Rather, Cézanne's paintings show *that* these things appear to us and render visible *how* they do so in such a way that depends on a synchronization of the perceiver and the perceived world.

Thus, the experience of a painting is misconceived when it is thought to be about the experience of irreal objects. Rather, the painter has a privileged access to what is real, but unnoticed, and exactly has the task of rendering this visible. As we have seen, Sartre argues that the world of perception only encompasses natural physical objects. Based on his notion of sense experience, Merleau-Ponty already argues that the world of perception encompasses much more and that painting can make this visible. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, rather than a negation of perception, paintings expand our natural perception by bringing to visibility the manner of appearing of objects from the lived perspective of my body. But in what way is what is rendered visible in paintings present and what is the ontological status of these paintings themselves? Further, how does this relate to the question of images?

4 The quasi-presence and quasi-reality of the image

In a note to his 1954–1955 lecture course on "Passivity," Merleau-Ponty clearly describes what he finds to be a critical deficiency of Sartre's theory of the image as it is presented in *The Imaginary*. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty also indicates what becomes the central focus in his own account, not just of artworks, but of images in general. According to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre failed to adequately describe what is distinctive about the appearing image because he was preoccupied with showing that we do not experience the image in the same what that we experience presently appearing real things. Merleau-Ponty writes: "Error of *The Imaginary*: describing imagining consciousness as nihilation [*néantisation*]; it is always a circumscribed nothingness, a nothingness of this or that, and this is why Sartre did not describe in *The Imaginary what is imagined in the image*; he demonstrated in what way it is not a real or a true presence; he did not demonstrate in what way it is an imaginary presence or a quasi-presence."[57] Indeed, although Sartre clearly

[55] Merleau-Ponty (1960, p. 108; 1993, p. 104).

[56] Merleau-Ponty (1960, p. 112; 1993, p. 106).

[57] Merleau-Ponty (2003, p. 163; 2010, p. 234, translation modified).

acknowledges that when we look at pictures and paintings something presently appears, he is primarily concerned with showing that the appearing image is the object of an act of image consciousness and not present and real in the same way that things are.

In his 1958–1959 course entitled "Philosophy Today," Merleau-Ponty restates his criticism that Sartre overemphasizes the absence and irreality of the appearing image. He asks: "Where is the painting of Van Gogh? On the canvas? Outside the canvas as meaning? […] Sartre concludes: it is in the imaginary, forgetting the *analogon*, forgetting that it 'appears' as a phantom."[58] Thus, again, we see that Merleau-Ponty does not claim that Sartre had somehow failed to notice the fact that something presently appears when we gaze at objects like pictures and paintings, or that Sartre was insensitive to the unique, almost magical, mode of being of images.[59] However, according to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre does not pay sufficient attention to this appearing image object and therefore is not able to account for the specific presence and existence of what appears when we look at objects like pictures and paintings. One might say that although Sartre has described very well what the appearing image is not, he has not described what it is about the image that resists being reduced to nothing. As Daniel Giovannangeli has recently written, Sartre's account "hides the true difficulty: the positivity and fascinating plenitude of the image."[60]

Rather than conceiving of what appears when we look at paintings as exhausted by its representational function, Merleau-Ponty persistently points to the depth and inexhaustible richness of the appearing of what appears when we gaze at certain works of art. Calling into question Sartre's claim that what appears when we look at a painting is not observable in the way that things are observable insofar as we can't help but go through the painting, so to speak, to the depicted subject,[61] Merleau-Ponty describes how the objects that appear in certain still-life paintings resist our tendency to go through them, how they "hold our gaze" and seem to "interrogate it."[62] Merleau-Ponty even suggests that insofar as they are successful, Cézanne's paintings give things with "the presence, the unsurpassable plenitude which for us is the definition of the real."[63]

However, to be sure, although Merleau-Ponty consistently argues that painting is not about the representation of absent or nonexistent objects as absent and even sometimes suggests that when we look at a painting what appears is as full and as present as the real things we perceive, Merleau-Ponty does not for that matter conflate the "quasi-presence" of the object that appears when I look at a painting

[58] Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 106, translation mine).

[59] Sartre describes the relation between the portrait and its subject as "magical" and argues that this relation explains certain practices of "black magic." Sartre (1962, p. 53; 2005, pp. 23–24).

[60] Giovannangeli (2007, p. 150, translation mine).

[61] To be clear, Sartre does explicitly state that we *observe* the picture and the portrait (while there is only ever "quasi-observation" of mental images). However, he immediately adds that when observing a portrait of Pierre, "each detail is perceived, but not for itself, not as a spot of color on a canvas: it straight away incorporates itself in the object, which is to say in Pierre." Sartre (1962, p. 51; 2005, p. 23).

[62] Merleau-Ponty (2002a, p. 53; 2004, p. 93, translation modified).

[63] Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 65; 1996c, p. 21).

and the actual presence of things that are perceived or confuse the liminal reality of the appearing image for the actual reality of things in the world. That is, although Merleau-Ponty implicitly challenges Sartre's claim that artworks represent absent or non-existent subjects through an irreal but presently appearing object, he does not thereby contradict Sartre's assertion that the work of art is not a mere thing or simply cast aside the entire phenomenology of images. Rather, Merleau-Ponty aims to formulate a new definition of images that, on the one hand, does justice to its quasi-present and quasi-real character without reducing it to a thing and that, on the other hand, does justice to its quasi-absent and quasi-irreal character without reducing it to a nothing.

So, for example, in "Eye and Mind," referring to the Paleolithic cave paintings discovered in 1940 in southwestern France, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The animals painted on the walls of Lascaux are not there in the same way as are the fissures and the limestone formations. Nor are they *elsewhere*. […] I would be hard pressed to say *where* the painting is I am looking at. For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place."[64] That is, although what appears when we look at paintings may be characterized by a certain vivacity and inexhaustibility that likens it to the real things that presently appear, what appears when we look at a painting is not therefore taken to be present in the same way that the real pigment-stained canvas is. However arresting or mesmerizing a Cézanne still life or cave painting in Lascaux may be, my gaze does not remain with what appears when I look at the painting. That is, although paintings are not, according to Merleau-Ponty, just a vehicle for the appearance of an absent subject in its absence, something more is given in the painting than just what is thought to appear in the prosaic sense. As Merleau-Ponty continues, "Rather than seeing [the painting], I see according to, or with it."[65] Merleau-Ponty makes the same point in a working note dated May 13, 1960, just weeks before writing "Eye and Mind."[66] This note is significant for our purposes here insofar as, while reflecting on Cézanne's paintings, Merleau-Ponty explicitly considers the status of the *Bild* (image). Merleau-Ponty writes: "Cézanne's watercolors. What is a *Bild*? It is obvious that *Bild* is not gazed upon as we gaze upon an *object*. We gaze *according to the Bild*, we gaze at *it* only in order to explain (so we think) the means of expression."[67]

When we look at a painting by Cézanne, for example, we do not see just another *thing*, we are not aware of an *irreality*, and we are certainly not aware of *some other* reality. Rather, for Merleau-Ponty, when we look at the painting, we see this very same world, but we see it in a way that we were not aware of being able to see before. We see the world *according to* what is made visible in the painting. Thus, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre agree that what appears when I look at an image like a painting is not simply a thing and that what appears when I look at the image is not there in the same way that the pigment-stained canvas is. However, from this basic

[64] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 126).

[65] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 126).

[66] The title of the working note is "Painting ([Chastel])" and refers to André Chastel, the editor of *Art de France*, the journal that "Eye and Mind" was written for.

[67] Merleau-Ponty (2007, p. 440).

phenomenological insight, Merleau-Ponty will not then go on to say that the image that appears is thus simply a nothing.

Rather, in his descriptions of both the activity of painting and looking at paintings, Merleau-Ponty suggests that what appears when we gaze at a painting has a mode of existence that is between that of a mere thing and that of a translucent appearance that opens out like a window onto the depicted.[68] In other words, insofar as paintings do not just represent absent objects through an inactual or irreal appearance, but rather have the function of rendering something visible about being and the world beyond them, what appears in the painting, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not present and real in the way that an in-itself is supposed to be. However, what appears in the painting is also not simply absent in the way that Pierre always seems to be. The question is: what, according to Merleau-Ponty, accounts for this peculiar quasi-presence and liminal reality of what appears when we look at a painting and images more generally understood?

5 The imaginary and the body

In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty states that if we don't understand what drawings and paintings are and specifically understand how they depend on the reflexivity and reversibility of the body, we will not be able to understand the "quasi-presence and imminent visibility that makes up the whole problem of the imaginary."[69] Thus, although Merleau-Ponty does not characterize artworks like paintings as images in his earlier works, in "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty builds on his account of painting and the reflexivity of the body to re-conceive images as such. That is, rather than deny that paintings are images because paintings do not do what Sartre argues images do, Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that by starting from an understanding of what paintings are and what painters do, we can arrive at a better account of images. But in what sense can a reflection on the body—specifically, what Merleau-Ponty calls the "working, actual body" or "that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement"—provide a foundation for an account of the quasi-presence and imminent visibility of paintings and images?[70]

When he refers to the intertwining of vision and movement in "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty refers to the fact that our vision of the world depends on or is tied to the movement of our bodies (the movements of the eyes, head, neck, torso, etc.).[71] However, when Merleau-Ponty speaks of the dependence of vision on movement, he means more than just that in order to look at something I have to move and position my body in a certain way to see it properly. That is, in order to see, according to Merleau-Ponty, more needs to happen than just an unfolding of appearances in coordination with my bodily movements. Otherwise, Merleau-Ponty

[68] Cf. Eugen Fink's discussion of the "*Fensterhaftigkeit*" of the image. Fink (1966, p. 77).

[69] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 23; 1993, p. 126).

[70] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 16; 1993, p. 124).

[71] Merleau-Ponty writes that vision "is tied to movement, movement that cannot be blind, where it is prefigured." Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 173, translation mine).

asks, "how could the movement of the eyes not blur things if movement were blind? If it were only a reflex? If it did not have its antenna, its clairvoyance? If vision were not prefigured [*se précédait*] in it?"[72]

That is, although it is obvious that in some sense our vision of things is dependent on the series of bodily movements that enable that vision, it is also the case that our vision is not simply given with the mere occurrence of those movements since, Merleau-Ponty suggests, what we see reflects our specific bodily capabilities and is "prefigured" in the movements of our body. Merleau-Ponty explains this prefiguration of the visible in the body by comparing it to the sense of touch, of which he asserts vision is only a special variant. Specifically, he writes that when we touch something in order to feel its texture, we move our hands across the object in precisely the way that will allow us to feel it—as if by means of some secret kinship we had already known what we would find on the surface that we are touching.[73] For example, when we expect to touch something smooth, we touch the thing in the way that allows its smoothness to become manifest.

And this approach to the things that we touch, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not peripheral to the experience of touching; it is only by approaching things *as something* that they can then show themselves as what they are. As Merleau-Ponty writes, it is only in veiling things in this way that we are able to unveil them. And just as in the case of touch, what we see is anticipated in the movements of the body that allow us to discover what there is to see. As he writes in *The Visible and the Invisible*: "The look […] envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them, before knowing them."[74] To be clear, this is not to say that we cannot be mistaken or that we can always feel or see whatever we want. However, if we are wrong and, for example, the smooth looking thing turns out to be rough, we will need to adapt our touch to allow for the sensation of roughness to become manifest.

In this way, we see that the relation of the seeing and the seen is again characterized as a kind of expression. Just as Merleau-Ponty claims in *Phenomenology of Perception* that in order to see the color blue one must find the attitude that will provide it with the means of becoming determinate, he writes in *The Visible and the Invisible* that one can only touch and see what is anticipated and prefigured in the movements of one's body. That is, what is perceived can only appear if it is prefigured by the body, but it can only be perceived because it was there to begin with. Merleau-Ponty points to the paradoxical manner in which what is expressed both precedes and follows the event of expression in "Eye and Mind": "Quality,

[72] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 17; 1993, p. 124).

[73] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's description of touch: "How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of smooth and rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world" (1964a, p. 173; 1968, p. 133).

[74] Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 173; 1968, p. 133).

light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because our body welcomes them."[75]

And just as Merleau-Ponty's investigation of sense-experience in *Phenomenology of Perception* leads him to conclude that the sensing body inheres in and is synchronized with the sensible world, in "Eye and Mind" and *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty suggests that this pre-figuration or pre-possession of the touched in the touching and the seen in the seeing suggests that there is a fundamental ontological kinship of the perceiver and the perceived world. That is, based on the interdependence of vision and movement, Merleau-Ponty argues that my living and moving body makes up a part of the visible world and this world is at the same time included or prefigured in the movements of my body.[76] Thus, like being able to touch presupposes that one can be touched, being able to see presupposes that one can be seen, and, in general, to perceive is to be part of and open to the perceived world.[77]

For Merleau-Ponty, this kinship of the see-er and the seen ultimately means that vision comes about in the perceived world. And, correspondingly, since, as we have seen, things are only able to be seen insofar as they are prefigured or anticipated in the movements of the body, the things that we see "have an internal equivalent in me."[78] In this way, Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is a reversal or an overlapping of the inside and the outside in perception. And concerning this crisscrossing of the one who sees and what is seen, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Once this strange system of exchanges is given, we find before us all the problems of painting."[79] But what can the reversibility of the one who sees and what is seen have to do with painting and with appreciating paintings? According to Merleau-Ponty, the living moving body is necessary for both painting and the appreciation of paintings because the painting is just this "internal equivalent" or "echo" of the "secret visibility" of things in the body that is "rendered visible again."[80] That is, what paintings do, according to Merleau-Ponty, is render visible the internal equivalent of things that is prefigured in the movements of the body. In this way, paintings bring to visible expression the searching and welcoming anticipation of the body that is normally itself invisible insofar as it is what brings a world to visibility.

In this sense, Merleau-Ponty states that paintings "are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feeling [*le sentir*] makes

[75] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 125).

[76] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's statement: "To see and to move [are] two faces of the same phenomenon: my body counts in the visible world and the visible world is included in the 'reach' of my body." Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 173, translation mine).

[77] Merleau-Ponty says that the crisscrossing of the touching and the tangible (i.e. the fact that the movements of the touching incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate), is "no different for vision—except, it is said, that here the exploration and the information it gathers do not belong 'to the same sense.' But this delimitation of the senses is crude." Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 174; 1968, p. 133). Or as Barbaras states: "What holds true for touch also holds true for vision, thanks to the unity of one's own body." Barbaras (2004, p. 156).

[78] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 126).

[79] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 21; 1993, p. 125).

[80] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 126).

possible."[81] That is, paintings are the inside of the outside insofar as they bring to visible expression what in the body (inside) allows it to bring a world to appearance (outside). Conversely, since paintings are more than just anticipating and oriented sensori-motor projects that bring things to visibility (inside) insofar as they are rendered visible again (outside), Merleau-Ponty can say that paintings are the outside of the inside. As Merleau-Ponty writes, a painting is "the internal double of things descending into them, vision turned around."[82] And since the painting has originated in or is the expression of our carnal existence, it is not only the case that only a body can paint; it is also the case that only a body can appreciate what, according to Merleau-Ponty, is rendered visible in the painting.

It is also this duplicity of feeling that Merleau-Ponty says will allow us to understand that quasi-presence and imminent visibility of the imaginary. That is, on the basis of this account of the reversibility of the body and painting, Merleau-Ponty makes a more general suggestion for a philosophy of images and the relation of the imaginary and the real. Alluding to Sartre's treatment of everything from drawings and paintings to Franconay's impersonation of Maurice Chevalier as images, Merleau-Ponty writes: "the picture, the actor's mimicry—these are not devices borrowed from the real world in order to refer to prosaic things which are absent. For the imaginary is much nearer to, and much further from the actual."[83] That is, the image does not simply represent an absent or nonexistent subject through a presently appearing irreal or inactual object for at least two reasons.

On the one hand, the enigmatic, fleeting, quasi-presence of the image that appears when I look at a painting or watch someone doing an impersonation, according to Merleau-Ponty, is closer to the presence of a real thing than an irreality that merely refers to an absent or non-existent subject insofar as what appears (whether I am looking at an actually present object, a picture, a painting, or an actor) appears in a way that reflects the capabilities of one's living moving body. In a working note from May, 1960, Merleau-Ponty writes that "the perceived world (*like the painting*) is the ensemble of my body's routes."[84] So whether I am looking at the actual Montagne Sainte Victoire or at one of Cézanne's paintings of the same mountain, in both cases, what is seen, according to Merleau-Ponty, must be virtually prefigured or anticipated in the movements and possible actions of the living body. Calling to mind Sartre's claim that the flesh of perceptions and the flesh of images are different, Merleau-Ponty even asserts that there is a "flesh of the imaginary" that should not be overlooked.[85]

Thus, the image is not simply an absence that is not observable for itself since it reflects the capabilities, movements, and anticipations of the body that make all perception possible. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Visible and the Invisible*: "the imaginary is not an absolute inobservable: it finds in the body analogues of itself

[81] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 22; 1993, p. 126).

[82] Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 174, translation mine).

[83] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 23; 1993, p. 126).

[84] Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 295; 1968, p. 247, translation modified).

[85] Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 174, translation mine).

that incarnate it."[86] That is, when we look at images, understood in the Merleau-Pontian sense, we are not confronted with a ghostlike presence that intrinsically refers to something that is absent or nonexistent. Rather, when we look at images, we can learn to see the one true world in a new way. To illustrate this, Merleau-Ponty quotes Giacometti's statement: "What interests me in all paintings is resemblance—that is, what resemblance is for me: something that makes me discover the external world a little."[87]

On the other hand, however, the imaginary is also even less like a material thing that is taken as a representative of an absent subject than an irreality that represents an object in its absence since, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "the painting is an analogue or likeness only according to the body."[88] That is, although what I see when I gaze at a painting has a peculiar kind of quasi-presence due to its resonance with my body, the painting of a mountain is not a real mountain and I cannot look at the painting and the mountain in the same way because the painting only renders visible the conditions of perception, so to speak. Thus, although Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is a "flesh of the imaginary," he is clearly not advocating a return to the empiricist doctrine that Sartre criticized in the early pages of *The Imaginary* according to which there is no essential difference between the "flesh of perceptions" and the "flesh of the images."[89] That is, although Merleau-Ponty questions Sartre's strong distinction between the imaginary and the real and even suggests that paintings "scramble" the categories of the imaginary and the real, he does not claim that the imaginary and the real are therefore indistinguishable or interchangeable.[90] Rather, what the phenomenology of painting reveals is that rather than being simply distinct from one another or completely confused with one another, the imaginary and the real always *involve* one another or participate with their contrary. That is, there is a quasi-reality of the image and a quasi-imaginary or "imaginary texture" of the real.[91]

Nevertheless, even if Merleau-Ponty does not suggest that Sartre's distinction between the imaginary and the real would be completely confused, his account of paintings as objects that imply a mutual participation of presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, and the imaginary and the real eventually presents a challenge to Sartre's ontology of the in-itself and the for-itself. If paintings and images are, as we have seen Merleau-Ponty claims they are, "beings that are not of the in-itself and that are not nothing," then a phenomenology of painting calls for a new ontology that can accommodate these objects and the mode of existence proper

[86] Merleau-Ponty (1964a, p. 107; 1968, p. 77).

[87] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 24; 1993, p. 126, translation modified).

[88] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 24; 1993, p. 126).

[89] Sartre writes that according to this theory the image that appears is less vivid and clear than a perception, but "in all other respects like it in the flesh." Sartre (1962, p. 38; 2005, p. 16).

[90] Merleau-Ponty writes: "Consider as Sartre did […] the smile of a long-dead monarch which keeps producing and reproducing itself on the surface of a canvas. It is too little to say that it is there as an image or essence; it is there as itself, as that which was always most alive about it, the moment I look at the painting. […] Essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible, painting scrambles all our categories." Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 35; 1993, p. 130).

[91] Merleau-Ponty (1964b, p. 24; 1993, p. 126).

to the imaginary.[92] And this ontology is precisely Merleau-Ponty's later ontology of the flesh.

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[92] Merleau-Ponty (1996b, p. 174, translation mine).

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