Review of:

Patricia M. Locke and Rachel McCann, Eds. *Merleau-Ponty: Space, Place, Architecture*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015. 294 pages.

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In a well-known passage from “Eye and Mind,” Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that “I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; *I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it*. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me” (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye” 178). What this means for him is that articulating space and light is no more “a question of speaking of space and light; the question is to make space and light, which are there, speak to us” (178). This is precisely what the papers collected in *Merleau-Ponty: Space, Place, Architecture* accomplish. By exploring Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of space in its relation to place, art, and architecture, each paper aims to “draw [us] back from the forgetfulness that makes us take being alive for granted, [and] reopen thought about human perception of and relation to how we remake and occupy the world around us” (Locke 1). By analyzing Merleau-Ponty’s notions of depth, temporality, memory, and the flesh in their relation to architecture and lived experience, the authors unpack “the experience and expression of space on multiple levels” (1).

The editors divide their book into three sections: liminal space, temporal space, and shared space. These chapters can be read as stand-alone contributions, but it is also fruitful to read the book as a whole. Although they each grapple with different concepts, problems, and themes, most of the contributions can be read as encroaching upon one another, together opening up space for the dialogue desired by the editors. As Patricia M. Locke puts it, the anthology comes to a close not as a mere compilation of individual, self-contained pieces, but “as a *conversation* among the authors, with different interior worlds opening onto this book” (15, my emphasis). Reading this volume as a conversation helps us to better gasp the “integrated understanding of spatiality” sought by the editors. That is, an understanding that the temporal, spatial, and intercorporeal dimensions of our lives are intrinsically bound up with one another, together structuring the way that depth opens us up to a world.

The first section of the book, “Liminal Space,” draws “attention to borders regions or boundaries” (8) that open onto meaningful fields of experience, and that can allow us to recognize how we experience time and space (8). In “Harkening to the Night for the Heart of Depth, Space, and Dwelling,” Glen A. Mazis does this through an examination of the notion of primordial depth, which underpins Merleau-Ponty’s indirect ontology. For Merleau-Ponty, we cannot capture depth by flattening out our perceptions and plotting them onto a grid, because depth, as Mazis puts it, is a “dehiscent inclusiveness”—it emerges via a temporal coming together of impossibles. This means that space is not a homogeneous plane, but is a teeming matrix emergent through a diacritical configuration of intrinsic relations. Via depth, our body *inhabits* the world in a way that is constantly dynamic and open-ended. Mazis fleshes out these insights through an exploration of darkness, shadows, and the night. Drawing on the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he points out that the depth of night, by enveloping us, brings us face-to-face with our contingency. As darkness overcomes structures and transgresses boundaries, the night (*pure depth*) reveals that there is a “lack of rational foundation” (36) grounding existence. Mazis suggests that to render space as lived, an architect must capture the remainders of the night in her “sculpted spaces” (30), since “[b]uildings that express a sense of fragility, of hazard, of idiosyncrasy and yet given modern materials are secure in their structure, *are expressive of the depths of our existence*” (38).

This focus on darkness and the play of light continues in “Depth of Space and Depth of World: Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Rembrandt’s *Nightwatch* on a Modern Baroque,” in which Galen A. Johnson traces the development of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of spatial depth from the *Phenomenology of Perception* to his later work. He is interested in exploring how the spatial depth we see in the *Phenomenology* comes to be radicalized into an *ontological depth*: a depth “as a rivalry between things that is ‘flaying our glance with their edges’ and a *baroque ‘world’*” (48, my emphasis). Throughout the paper, Johnson provides a helpful, insightful analysis of this baroque world. He notes that, for Merleau-Ponty, the sense of the word “baroque” goes beyond a period of artistic style. Capturing emotions that are “discordant yet held in a simultaneous unity” (50), the *baroque world* is the only way of expressing “the *upheaval of Being in general*” (Merleau-Ponty quoted in 51). That is, it “designates one of the ways in which Being, space, and depth show themselves within the ‘modern’ in philosophy, science, and art as *ambiguous and unfinished*” (52, my emphasis). Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy on depth, like Rembrandt’s *Nightwatch*, returns us to the liminal space—the play of shadows and light—that both structures and exceeds our experience.

It is important to note that for depth to be born before my gaze—for there to be a coming “together of impossibles” (24)—our lived spaces must be structured by “gaps, fissures, and borders—in short, by edges” (66). Indeed, as Edward S. Casey tells us, edges are pervasive: “*there is no sensed surface without its own external or internal edges* [since] ... edges ... give to these surfaces their shape and limit” (81). In “Finding Architectural Edge in the Wake of Merleau-Ponty,” Casey focuses on “the ingreience of edges in *architecture*” (65). Via a rigorous phenomenology of the Parthenon, he uncovers a series of paired terms, such as phenomenality/epiphenomenality, perception/apperception, decoration/ornament, and necessary for/necessary to. Casey claims that we should see these pairs as divisive dichotomies, since they are in fact “coeval complements” (76): they solicit and require one another. He argues that these incongruent counterparts are drawn together via the *flesh of the world*: the multilayered but unbounded intertwining of divergent spatialities folding back upon themselves and one another. Casey stresses that just as flesh provides a ground for coeval complements, “so it is *le fil conducteur* of three great disparate domains, rendering them one-in-many, many-in-one: many bodies, many buildings, many landscapes, all in one continuously modulating flesh that takes in and gives out edges of every imaginable sort” (88).

The final paper of this section is Randall Johnson’s “Liquid Space of Matrixial Flesh: Reading Merleau-Ponty and Bracha L. Ettinger Poolside.” In this paper, Johnson seeks to thematize—via Merleau-Ponty and the artist and psychoanalytical and feminist philosopher Ettinger—the “liminality of liquid space” (91), which he takes to be an “instance of matrixial flesh” (92). This thinking poolside—in contrast to high altitude thinking, which Johnson argues institutes the ideas of “space-without-time” and “space-without-affect” (93)—“opens ourselves to an affectivity, a felt sensibility, of our very corporeal inherence *as* space” (90). Johnson also suggests that uncovering the liquid space of matrixial flesh (i.e., the borderspace) can reveal to us that spatiality is inherently excessive and uncanny, thus complementing Mazis’ insights on primordial depth and Galan Johnson’s understanding of the baroque world. He also explicitly extends Merleau-Ponty’s thought to the realm of feminist philosophy, reminding us that spatiality is not neutral, but inherently gendered.

What underlies each paper from “Liminal Space” is the idea that “*depth* is born before” the perceivers’ gaze (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 274) as an expression of temporality. As Mazis puts it, as the coming together of impossibles (or Casey’s coeval compliments), “depth in Merleau-Ponty’s sense is equally about time” (Locke 24). For Merleau-Ponty, we cannot think of space and time separately, since we are only spatially oriented through a past that anchors us to the present, and opens us to a future. Part two of this book, “Temporal Space,” fleshes out

this temporal dimension of space, focusing on the ways in which temporality structures how we experience space—either through granting us continuity, or by throwing us off-kilter.

David Morris opens this section with his chapter “Spatiality, Temporality, and Architecture as a Place of Memory.” He argues that in his passivity lectures, Merleau-Ponty “undermines the presence of [the] past-present difference, dislocating it from an already given present” (114). The past is not a “passive recording of a past that is in a passive spatial receptacle” (113), or a “past actively constructed in a faculty spatially alongside other faculties” (113). Rather, the past-present difference is a *temporal difference* whereby the weight of the past balances my present. What is important here is that the past only lends sense to the present “by not being all-active in the present” (117). The body, “as harboring the weight of the past, is a *forgetfulness* that preserves” (118), which means the presence of the past in an *absence*. Morris argues that this memorial passivity is not simply in our personal memory, but is in the “body ... as moving through processional place” (118). Memory is dispersed throughout the *places* that we inhabit—it is “harbored in the things that we move with and that keep an ‘I can’ going” (119). This means that architecture is the art of “articulating temporality in place” (121): in cultivating the places from which we dwell, architecture also cultivates memory. This complements—and adds temporal depth to—Casey’s insight that architecture “belongs intrinsically to the flesh of the world” (86).

Dorothea E. Olkowski’s “Search of Lost Time: Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Time of Objects” argues that by situating Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology between Bergson and Husserl, we can better understand how temporality grounds our spatial relations, and brings together Being-for-itself and Being-in-the-world. Olkowski argues that what we learn from these three thinkers is that “there must be for space ... a general field within which the perception of spatial entities takes place, a field that will orient our perception and give *meaning* to spatial phenomenon” (140). And what Merleau-Ponty learns from Bergson and Husserl is that “this general field is time” (140). This means that a body is only spatially situated insofar as it emerges from a matrix of temporal relations. I am only able to orient myself through space because I carry with me a *past* that gives me a certain way of approaching my surroundings. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: “spatial perception is a structural phenomenon and is only understood from a perceptual field” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 293)—a perceptual field that is structured precisely through the way “we are anchored through our commitments past, present, and future” (Locke 141).

Olkowski highlights what she sees as the primordially of temporality by noting that when there is a *collapse of time*, there is also a

“loss of the ability to act” (142). That is, when the present is no longer orientated by the past, “the individual is alienated from spatial relations and from action, and even the daytime becomes an eternal night, contingent and unreal” (142). But what happens when time *is* experienced as out of joint? When pathological or restrictive spaces cause a disruption in the spatiotemporal field that structures one’s existence?

These are precisely the questions that Lisa Guenther addresses in her chapter “Inhabiting the House That Herman Built: Merleau-Ponty and the Pathological Space of Solitary Confinement,” where she draws on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to shed light on the ontological effects of solitary confinement. She notes that since it is through one’s body that one is geared into the world, perception is *inexhaustible*: it is an “opening of the dimension of depth” (156). It is through this depth that I am *affectively* moved by things, that I am “open to the way some aspects of the world leap out at me and seize me, while others recede into the background” (157). However, prolonged solitary confinement “threatens to exhaust the otherwise inexhaustible horizons of [perception]” (160). This drains the prisoner’s life of meaning, leaving her to feel “like she is dead within life, no longer *of* space but merely *in* it” (160). This pathological constricting of space can lead prisoners to become *unhinged*, developing hallucinations, cognitive impairment, and paranoia. Because of this, Guenther argues that supermax confinement should *not* be seen as a “solution to the problem of finding a place to keep ‘the worst of the worst’ from harming others” (160), since it is really a *technology* for producing illness. This leads her to the powerful conclusion that our personal freedom—if it is only secured via this “punitive isolation of others” (164)—is a “sham and shameful kind of freedom” (164).

David R. Koukal, in his chapter “Stolen Space: The Perverse Architecture of Torture,” also picks up on the way that architecture—namely the architecture of torture—can constrict a person’s sense of space by violently foreclosing her field of possibilities. He argues that if we think phenomenologically about torture, we can recognize that torture goes beyond “its mere physical effect on the human body” (171) by causing lasting damages on the subject at an *ontological level*. In a move similar to Guenther, Koukal argues that torture is a technique that *dismantles* a subject’s lived world by “radically despatializing” her (171). The tortured body is forced into a spatiotemporal field that is not of her making: torture strips the subject of her freedom by constricting her of her motility, degrading her perception and restricting her horizons of possibility (175). For Koukal, what is most tragic about torture is that it *exploits* the *ambiguity* intrinsic to the lived body. The “tortured is condemned to live his or her ‘double-sidedness,’ at once object and consciousness ... and the subject, through the body, is in effect a correlative source of his or her own torment” (178).

What Guenther's and Koukal's papers drive home is the fact that architecture, while it can "support human flourishing" (2), can also structure space in a way that *hinders* it. This reminds us of the ethical dimensions of architecture, and also sheds light on the ethical potential of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of space. This theme is carried over in the third section of the book, "Shared Space," which focuses on "the relations between human beings and their joining in societal spaces" (13). The section makes explicit that the ways in which we encounter others play a significant role in how we experience space and/or place.

The first chapter of this section explores Merleau-Ponty's metaphors of the Flesh to underscore their "spatial potential" (189). Rachel McCann argues that as readers, we should aim to "imaginatively *inhabit*" (189) the images Merleau-Ponty uses to capture the intersubjective or intercorporeal dimensions of the Flesh. This is because "[a]s we step through the thresholds opened up by his descriptive phrases and begin imaginatively to experience their extended spatial character, we understand more fully—*because we are experiencing it bodily*—the character of Flesh" (190, my emphasis). Through McCann's paper we gain a more nuanced insight into Merleau-Ponty's images of, e.g., intertwining, the metaphor of the sea and the strand, and his description of Flesh as "a straits ever gaping open between interior and exterior horizons" (Merleau-Ponty, quoted in 196). We learn that "just as ... two opposing boundaries of a straits are meaningless when considered separately, so are the two opposing horizons of our own sensing and thinking selves and the sensuous world with which we interact and from which we take our measure" (196). This paper is an excellent starting point for those readers who are not as familiar with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the Flesh and it serves as an access point into some of the more technical papers of the volume.

In "Sheltering Spaces, Dynamics of Retreat, and Other Hiding Places in Merleau-Ponty's Thought," Suzanne Cataldi Laba considers whether Merleau-Ponty's ontology leaves room for *sheltering* spaces, that is "chiasmically 'in-between' spaces" (208) or interiors that open up zones for security, comfort, stability and relief from public life. Cataldi Laba suggest that Merleau-Ponty's insights on chiasmic intertwining, withdrawal, and democratic pluralism provide us with a framework from which we can rethink shelters in a way that is more inclusive of "alternate dwelling places" (208). However, Cataldi Laba suggests that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology does not go far enough. She argues that for an ontology to accommodate a worldly sense of interior, "there [must be] (some) room-making aspect that is always already there, before we are, to 'slip' that spatial or other meaning(s) into" (208-9). According to her, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh leaves no room for "worldly spatial interiors that [are] not ... necessarily of our own making" (208): he

renders the fissures of the world subjective. Because of this, Cataldi Laba suggests that we supplement Merleau-Ponty via Heidegger's notions of *Ab-grund* and care. Her chapter thus provides an alternative reading of Merleau-Ponty's ontology to earlier papers in this volume (especially Mazis and Johnson), which see him as resisting the subjectivization of nature when he emphasizes the baroque, wild being, and the non-human element in things.

While this paper stresses the importance of a "worldly sense of interior space" (14), Nancy Barta-Smith, in her paper "Dimensions of the Flesh in a Case of Twins with Which I am Familiar," stresses the importance of *shared intentional space*. She argues that "[a]t present, we are taught to eschew imitation, to prize originality, and to seek self-actualization" (231). The problem is that this often leads to a subject/object dualism, where "the other too easily becomes only the tool of actualization, functionally an object rather than an opening of the 'for another'" (240). Barta-Smith finds in Merleau-Ponty an alternative to this individualism, namely the space for *mutual flourishing*. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in *Signs*, others are "my *twins* or the flesh of my flesh. Certainly I do not live their life; they are definitively absent from me and I from them. *But that distance becomes a strange proximity as soon as one comes back home to the perceptible world*" (Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* 15, my emphasis). Throughout the paper, Barta-Smith fleshes out the implications of this strange proximity via a phenomenology of her experience of being a twin. She worries that readings of Merleau-Ponty that privilege his notion of divergence at the expense of spatial proximity run the risk of obscuring his insights on syncretism (adualism) and spatial coexistence. Ultimately, she wants to argue that we become the selves whom we are via empathy and affective attunement to others.

The volume comes to a close with Helen A. Fielding's "Dwelling and Public Art: Serra and Bourgeois," a chapter that brings us back to the opening claims of the introduction, namely that "[a]rchitecture is a place to question ... [that can] draw [us] back from the forgetfulness that makes us take being alive for granted" (Locke 1). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray, she phenomenologically explores Richard Serra's *Tilted Spheres* and Louise Bourgeois' *Maman*, suggesting that the sculptures "both install a location and work to open up embodied being to creatively reveal how we encounter our world and others" (258). She argues that the planimetric perspective that pervades our conceptions of space is one that, by "objectifying reality according to mathematically precise rules" (263), eliminates the difference between fairness and nearness. This disconnects us from our embodied situatedness and from the relations that structure it. *Tilted Spheres*, though, upsets the planimetric perspective: it makes explicit the impossibles that underlie our perception, and calls on its audience to reflect *phenomenologically* about how they perceive their

surroundings. Fielding suggests that this can reveal to the observer “the spatial aspects of dwelling as *relational*” (267, my emphasis). Similarly, *Maman* works to disrupt our prejudices about the world, namely that objectivity or shared space is neutral. The sculpture reminds us that “[o]ur mothers/parents provide the first public world, giving us the first objective world that is one that we internalize” (278). Thus, to be able to understand the “objectivity of the public world,” we must recognize that public space is constituted of individuals who “dwell in *different* worlds” (278, my emphasis).

Overall, *Merleau-Ponty: Space, Place, Architecture* is an exciting collection, one that not simply provides helpful and original explications of Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of depth, spatiality, and temporality, but also reminds us that architecture—and the way that we *share* and cultivate lived spaces/places—has a significant influence on how we inhabit our spatiotemporal fields, and how we interact with one another. The emphasis on the intercorporeal dimension of space in this anthology sheds light on the sociopolitical implications of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. We are reminded that when architecture sculpts space, it also structures the way that depth opens us to the world in a way that can either *facilitate* or *hinder* human flourishing. This book will be most valuable to scholars familiar with Merleau-Ponty, to architects and artists who are phenomenologically oriented, and to those who are interested in thinking about the resources that he has to offer to feminist, political, and ethical theory.

Works Cited

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