

Bodily (Im)positions

A Phenomenological Re-Casting of Space and Architecture



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CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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A Phenomenological Re-Casting of Space and Architecture

Abstract

Bodily (Im)positions explores the intersections between the body, space, architecture and the phenomenological ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Despite the seemingly pivotal role space plays in the understanding of architecture there is a paucity of material covering this issue. This thesis proposes that, by applying Merleau-Ponty's particular explanation of the body to architecture, a gap in the understanding of space and architecture will be filled. Phenomenology is a philosophy that avoids systemization. Therefore, the nature of this thesis is one that, while organized into specific chapters and sections, does not preclude the material from one section bleeding into another. Indeed, the reader will find many topics are outlined initially in earlier chapters and then recapitulated in later chapters where they can be properly re-examined and infused with new information.

The concept of the body is imposed onto a discourse of architecture and space that has shown an unwillingness to accept the intrinsic part the body plays in their configuration. In this way both space and architecture are recast, using the phenomenological body of Merleau-Ponty as the mould. This is, however, not a one-way or one-off rigid re-casting. It is also suggested here that the understanding of the body is re-cast by phenomenology. Hence, space and architecture are also re-cast in another way. They are 'cast again' as active players that in turn effect and affect the body. In this way it is demonstrated that, while the body reconfigures space and architecture, at the same time architecture and space reconfigure the body. The term casting implies another meaning, that of fishing or angling. This implication is also applicable to this thesis in terms of its casting out of a line of ideas. In this regard the body, space, architecture and phenomenology have been brought together simply to discover what implications might arise from their conjunction.

It is through the body that we are orientated in space and know it to be the world. It is also through the body and its associations with 'the flesh' of Merleau-Ponty that we can communicate with others. Indeed it is argued that it is only through the movement of the body, that space can exist. Further, it is demonstrated that, far from being a supplementary part to architecture, the body is the very reason architecture exists and has meaning. It is suggested here that only by living space with our body can we understand architecture.