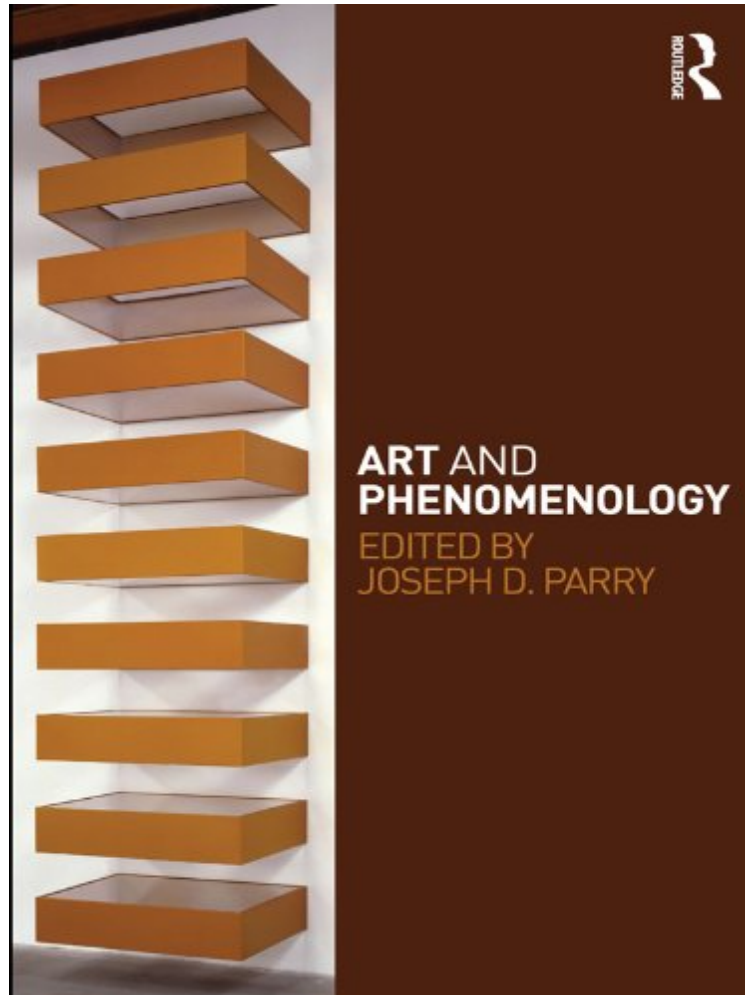




Art and Phenomenology

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From Routledge : Art and Phenomenology before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Art and Phenomenology:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Impressive collection of essays By Glenn Russell Back in college my exposure to phenomenology amounted to a professor's brief remarks and reading some Edmond Husserl as a prelude to studying existentialism. Although brief, I had a sense phenomenology offers much insight, especially when coupled with an investigation of art. So, forty years later, with a desire to expand my horizons via the study of both philosophy and art, I purchased a copy of Art and Phenomenology. I'm glad I did. I read each essay with great care. Here are seven quotes from the introduction by Joseph D. Parry (the book's editor) and Mark Wrathall:---"For Merleau-Ponty, our facticity cannot be understood apart from an understanding of our bodies. The body is the primordial situation of my being."---"For phenomenology insists that my consciousness - my awareness of myself, others, objects, all of the things that make up my world - is rooted in my experience in the world, and this experience, in turn, is rooted in my body."---" . . . phenomenology can explicitly reintroduce into aesthetics why art matters,

something that often seems to be missing from aesthetic studies."---" . . . what art does is philosophically significant. . . . Our approach to art is to treat it as a kind of phenomenology - which is not to say that art can be reduced to a discursive content, but rather that art can function as a way of directing us to important phenomena and helping us to understand them in their own terms."---"Merleau-Ponty sits at the feet of Cezanne to learn from him concerning what it means, as an embodied being, to take up the world that opens itself to us in perception."---" . . . we expect our writers (of philosophy) to say something about the world, to say something that helps us know how to think about our experience, whereas a painting opens up the possibility of having an experience with the world."---"This is a different kind of inquiry than that engaged in by traditional aesthetics or art-historical modes of studying artwork, because we take the work of art as performing an important role in teaching us to engage with the world."For me, here are the two overarching themes of the introduction as represented by these quotes: 1) For phenomenology, experience is rooted in the body. 2) Art exposes us and opens us to our world and helps us understand the phenomenon of the world on their own terms. Each of the 9 essays in the book explore and expand these themes in much depth. Many works of art are referred to throughout the book and 27 color plates are included. To provide a sampling and in the interest of space, I will focus on 2 of the 9 essays. In "The Phenomenological Relevance of Art," Mark Wrathall notes how such philosophers as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Nietzsche believe "that works of art at their best are capable of showing us the phenomena under consideration more directly, powerfully, and perspicuously than any philosophical prose could." To my eye, this is a key insight as I read through Wrathall's essay since he goes on to write, ". . . the highest aspiration of phenomenology is to resolve philosophical questions in and through an apprehension of the phenomenon in question." With these two statements we can see why art is so important for phenomenology--art is a powerful tool to solve and answer philosophical questions relating to phenomenon. To underscore the degree of power art contains, Wrathall continues, "The power of art in this regard, and its superiority over philosophy, is a product of the way it works on us affectively, thus not just altering our beliefs about the world, but more importantly, our dispositions through which we encounter and evaluate the world." Further on, the author highlights this idea more specifically when he cites, "Merleau-Ponty's central preoccupation is the lessons that art can teach us about the nature of our embodied perceptual engagement with the world. Art and only art is able to show us in full innocence the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body." Wrathall gives a fascinating account of how and why Leonardo Da Vinci viewed painting as a superior science. He then uses Leonardo as a point of contrast to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological position. The author concludes his essay with a study of the artist Paul Klee's thinking about the artist's body as a medium. Klee's reflections crystalize a connecting between art and perception that can, in turn, be used as a powerful case study for phenomenology. Here are several excerpts:--- Klee believed that artists are more keenly attuned to what we pick up in perception than most. If this is right, then we stand to learn something by studying artists and their work - not because seeing the world is like seeing a picture, but because creating a depiction demands that you be able to see the world."---" . . . creative fire has its source not in the spontaneous facility of the mind, but in a 'receptive' organ - the eye."---"It is in holding himself ready for the fire 'yet to come' that the artist is able to receive from the eye what is needed to awaken the fire."---"Artistic creation as Klee experienced it is a temporal process of finding a bodily attitude that will let the situation draw out a motor response."---"On Klee's account, then, to be an artist, one needs to become sensitized to one's own body in a special way." In this case study we can see why philosophers serious about phenomenology stand to learn a great deal from artists like Klee. Sean Dorrance Kelly writes on 'Representing the Real - A Merleau-Pontyan account of art and experience from the Renaissance to New Media'. This is a fascinating essay where the author touches on a number of intriguing aspects of painting. We are told, "Realist painting on this view is not so much about how real the images are . . . but rather about how perceptually forceful they are." Here we have painting as the power of perception. Further on Kelly observes, ". . . perhaps like the works of the analytical Cubists . . . is an attempt to present to the viewer what there is all at once, rather than to create in the viewer the everyday experience of the real." Kelly continues this line of thinking with a captivating discussion of how artists used mirrors in their work to capture their subject in 360 degree. In so doing, painters trumped sculptures as the viewer need not walk around the artwork to have a back view; rather, the viewer has the back view via the mirror within the painting! Kelly contrasts the attitude of being absorbed vs. the attitude of being detached. We read: "One can try to paint not just the young man who is absorbed in blowing the soap bubble, as Chardin did, but the young man's experience of the soap bubble when he is absorbed in blowing it." This hits on a major theme of phenomenology: our experience of objects vs. the objects themselves. Kelly picks up on other aspects of art to highlight the phenomenological approach, including how Impressionists focus on the lighting of objects, how Cezanne painted apples to be experienced as real things and how New Media artist Bill Viola plays with various speeds of film to "give us a whole new range of tools for exploring the nature of experience itself." All told, this essay is a true gem, providing a rich picture of what is involved in phenomenology and art. Again, these comments are but a sampling. Anybody interested in philosophy or art, or more specifically, art within the world of phenomenology, would be well to pick up a copy of this book. One last observation: Although Merleau-Ponty figures prominently in the material cited, he is not mentioned in 5 of the 9 essays. Rather, the philosophers Fichte, Husserl and Heidegger are referenced, to name three.

Philosophy of art is traditionally concerned with the definition, appreciation and value of art. Through a close examination of art from recent centuries, *Art and Phenomenology* is one of the first books to explore visual art as a mode of experiencing the world itself, showing how in the words of Merleau-Ponty 'Painting does not imitate the world, but is a world of its own';. An outstanding series of chapters by an international group of contributors examine the following questions: Paul Klee and the body in art colour and background in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of art self-consciousness and seventeenth-century painting Vermeer and Heidegger philosophy and the painting of Rothko embodiment in Renaissance art sculpture, dance and phenomenology. *Art and Phenomenology* is essential reading for anyone interested in phenomenology, aesthetics, and visual culture.

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