

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

TEMPLE, TALMUD, AND MERLEAU-PONTY

Zachary Braiterman

When philosophers take an interest in non-philosophy (religion, art, politics), it is presupposed that philosophy does not stand apart from and to the side of that which is other to it, that philosophical problems are best approached from points both inside and outside their own formal parameters. Once subjected to an extra-philosophical competence, philosophical judgment is as good as the most current scholarship guiding it. The claim in this essay—that rabbinic Judaism provides a platform from which to explore spatial motility, religious iconicity, and non-realist, plastic expression—is itself only a recent scholarly possibility with which to stretch philosophy. Our attention goes in particular to holy space, though not for any religious reason per se. God will make no appearance, nor will any of God's surrogates in recent postmodern theology (event, gift, the face of the Other). Without recourse to any point of absolute transcendence, holiness will be understood as the phenomenal space opened out by special rules negotiating the difference between inside/outside, pure/impure. These rules define a Temple-system, which after the destruction of its physical site by the Romans in 70 CE retains its status as a pseudo-place in rabbinic memory and imagination. Talmud brings to philosophical phenomenology and to the phenomenology of religion an "architecture" based on bent space and movement, an embodied presence in a world that is no longer present at hand.

The cliché regarding Judaism in contemporary theoretical circles (from Adorno through Lyotard and Derrida to Žižek and Badiou) assumes that "the law" is hostile to plastic representation and to all representation tout court. The Judaism upon which this cliché rests is not without Jewish support, just as Kant construed his anti-Judaism on the good authority of Spinoza and Mendelssohn. As observed by Kalman Bland in *The Artless Jew*, the notion that Judaism is aniconic was a conceit, embraced warmly by Jewish thinkers imbued

with the intellectual élan of German Idealism. One finds it expressed by the eminent historian Heinrich Graetz in the nineteenth century and by the Marburg neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen at the start of the twentieth. The counter-image of Judaic law that I will offer in this essay belongs more to plastic art and to late twentieth century scholar-theorists at work in pre-modern Jewish source material.¹ It draws on Leviticus and ritual more than prophecy and revelation. Fixed upon bodies that are at once concrete and imaginal, this analysis runs alongside Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of perception. My aim is to pull Jewish philosophy and the philosophy of religion away from Levinasian Judaism and the new apophatic theology, to tug them back into the platonic cave, what Baudrillard called "the seductions of space."²

The difference between Jewish and Christian iconicity lie in form as well as in content. Christian icons are luminous, self-centered shapes. For Jean-Luc Marion, they comprise a physical presence "saturated" by an infinite meaning that is surplus to it. Viewed more prosaically, the Christian icon is a physical copy of a copy of a copy. Icons of Jesus, Mary, and the saints proliferate. There is no one single original image, apart from the Son, i.e., the image of the Father. In contrast, Judaism suggests a model of iconicity without icons. By this I mean the organization of being around a specialized, spatial configuration with no visible image, object, or person position at its center. Preceding the figure of Jesus Christ, the Tabernacle and the first and second Temple (first qua physical site, then qua image) constitute this configuration in classical Judaism. Not the figure of God, not the image of God, not God as an "object of worship," it is rather the architectural frame, a three-dimensional "place of worship," that constitutes the icon which first draws the eye.³ The Order of Holy Things in Mishna and Talmud provides one such example. The staged scene set out on the en-

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

SPRING 2006

92

graved frontispiece of the Amsterdam Haggadah (1695) provides another. Moses and Aaron stand before two draped pillars, an allusion to Jerusalem and to the Temple gates. They frame the space behind the curtain, leading the reader into the Passover text. In nineteenth century Palestine, traditional Jewish artists took the Western Wall and Temple Mount as their chief subject in crafting tourist memorabilia: a flat, naive surface surrounded by turrets and other architectural structures.

Our own philosophical conceptualization of the space embedding the Order of Holy Things is informed by the larger problematic of human intentionality and the kinetic approach to spatial existence cued by Merleau-Ponty. Perhaps more than any topic in rabbinic law, space-making and spatial objects occupy the center of so-called ceremonial statute as it unfolds in the transmission of Jewish textual practice. From Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, we learn to see its space as it opens out to an “outside,” a world of meanings and objects of thought.⁴ For the rabbi, as for Merleau-Ponty, space is neither a real, empirical object nor an abstract condition or effect of constituting thought. It takes shape as a relation between object and background mediated by the “phenomenal body.” By this, is meant an open “system of possible actions” by which I am borne into new spatial configurations (PP, 250, cf. 232). Against Husserl, the identity and unity of experience is not guaranteed by a universal thought or intending consciousness. Instead, the embodied subject projects worlds around “a sensible nucleus, however small, and it is in the sensible that its verification and its fullness are found” (PP, 293). In this conception, the sensible nucleus gives way to myths, dreams, illusion and other types of unreal space thanks to the basic ambiguity between the apparent and the real (PP, 293–94).

As a meta-consciousness, Torah bears little resemblance to the constituted subject posited in empiricism or to the constituting consciousness in idealism. In the particular case at hand, the “phenomenal body” that constitutes the Talmud and Temple remains fundamentally incomplete, its future configurations invisible to the naked eye of Scripture. As mapped out and figured in the Bible, it forms a bare nucleus that projects out into new configurations on the

talmudic page. Like the phenomenal body in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Torah and the Tabernacle-Temple generated by it are both already constituted and always still constituting themselves. They too are sites of multiple perspectives. Referring to the “double sensation” of one hand touching the other, Merleau-Ponty will later observe how each hand is simultaneously perceiving subject and perceived object.⁵ Torah and the Temple in the Talmud share the same dual characteristic as constituting subject and constituted object, interpretation and interpretant.

The rigidity ascribed to Judaism by Kant and Hegel did not allow them to account for the chiasmic overlap between the perceiving subject that is the object of law and the perceived object that is its subject. In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, statutory law is presented as pure exteriority, a sensibility with no intelligible sense. The discussion of the second commandment in the *Critique of Judgment* is far more giving. Kant calls it “pure and elevating,” although even here it is read according to the most superficial surface intention of a single verse. The biblical text reads, “You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to serve them” (Ex. 20:4–5). Kant looks to the first sentence, the verse banning all visual representation, divorced from the following verse, limiting the ban to the worship of images. For Kant, the law constitutes both confining heteronomy and immense distance. A similar ambivalence attends Hegel’s perception of Judaism in the *Lectures on Religion*, whereas in the *Lectures on Fine Art* the form of Hebrew poetry takes the place of law; but there too, the natural world in all its phenomenal glory is said to stand ultimately nihilated before the divine magnificence. For Hegel, no less than Kant, an unbridgeable abyss separates the perceiving subject apart from law, qua sensible object. At best, the law and its sublime are abstract and immobile, poetic time immobilized into the static electricity of pure vision.

Reading Merleau-Ponty in conjunction with Talmud brings philosophical discourse on Judaism back to earth and sets its law into motion. At its most basic level, the Tabernacle and Temple are composed of three levels: 1) a

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

courtyard with the altar where animals-offerings are offered and their blood is thrown; 2) a main sanctuary-building inside the courtyard (the Tent of Meeting in Leviticus, the *Heichal* in later Temple traditions); and 3) the Holy of Holies inside the sanctuary as the place of the ark and God's presence. By itself, this simple layout in Scripture is stretched out by the consideration of infinite possibilities that drive the rabbis in their discussion of it. For Merleau-Ponty, paintings by Cézanne show the emergence of a world of undergirding structures and spatial relations out of a chaos of color. In Talmud, the rabbis envision the emergence of a world out of a chaos of possibilities, the emergence of holiness out of activity in and around imaginal architecture. My contention is that the combination of Merleau-Ponty and rabbinic texts allows the contemporary reader to understand that Talmud and Temple, law and holiness are body schema inaugurated by the projects and projections that determine them.

I

Philosophically, the significance of this nexus first comes to the fore with Heidegger's destruction of a Cartesian classicism based upon the division between clear and distinct ideas from geometrical, extended space. The non-metaphysical character of the Talmud and Heideggerian ontology disrupt the distinction between subject and object by including "in-hood" and "world-hood" as integral features of human being. Law and ritual are spatial configurations made possible by "equipment" (in our case, the pegs, bowls, cups, knives, hooks, and logs that are the basic equipment of the Temple service) that is either "ready" or "present at hand." As presented in the first division of *Being and Time*, objects and signs that are "ready to hand" are objects of manipulation and utilitarian use. Inauthentic being-in-the-world is absorbed in references and assignments that constitute the readiness to hand of a totality of equipment. These assignments indicate the "wherein" of one's concern. And yet, the conversation with Heidegger goes only so far. In *Being and Time* it is the unusable thing, a broken tool or instrument no longer serviceable to human ends, which reveals a more fundamental "presence at hand." Authentic

Dasein aims at an ultimate telos that is not an involvement.

Being and Time provides an important but flawed first place from which to consider Talmud and Temple space. For all the attention paid by Heidegger to space and spatial things, their position remains static. While human Dasein has no being apart from equipment, it never moves or goes to the object. As its environment expands, remoteness is vanquished. Dasein simply sits there as it brings the object "close to hand" as an object of concern. While Dasein might move pieces of equipment around in space, it itself is never shown to move in space, not even from the position of inauthentic being into which it is thrown.⁶ It only flees from itself, from the turbulence and movement characteristic of human inauthenticity (BT, 223). The principle motion that defines existential authenticity in *Being and Time* is temporal, not spatial. Authentic Dasein moves, not through space towards the other, transforming *das Man* into a fellow-person, but rather in time towards a death that is uniquely its own. While Heidegger maintains that human Dasein cannot be disassociated from its spatial locus, the emphasis placed upon temporality in division II of *Being and Time* creates a different effect. Heideggerian *ekstasis* spirals back and forth from future to past to present, but always towards the ontological horizon set by the unique being-towards-death that is always only and foremost my own being-in-the-world.

This is not the model upon which the Temple system operates in the rabbinic imaginary. With its focus on death, Heidegger's existential analysis is unable to account for the circulation of excess blood, the blood not used in the rite and which consequently does not form a part of the law. This circulation performs a more complex movement than the movement towards death at the altar. As we learn towards the end of tractate *Yoma*, after the completion of all the procedures of atonement for Yom Kippur, the extra blood is poured off at the base of the altar. From there it is funneled through connecting channels back out into the valley outside the city wall to be collected and sold for fertilizer. Blood carries life, the Temple's most precious material. The system recycles it back into soil, crop, and livestock, which is then brought back to the Temple. In the law of

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

forgiveness and repentance, life circulates back into life through death (whereas for Heidegger death circulates back into death through life).

The advantage of Heidegger's later work on art and poetry over *Being and Time* lies in the lighter hand played in them by time in relation to space. They cast a more pronounced light upon the ontological significance of spatial thing-hood, especially in the work of art. In a work of art, a thing becomes unfamiliar by calling attention to the mystery that it is. A work of art or architecture (a painting by Van Gogh, a bridge, a Greek temple) projects "earth" (things that are hidden and undisclosed) into a "world" (open and disclosed). In moving earth into the open world, art lets earth be earthy, mysterious and closed. Human Dasein is no longer the sole, fixed point of existential analysis. The ontic thing in its ontological significance is now perceived as an uncanny interchange at which sky, earth, the gods, and mortal beings gather into a "four-fold" interface. This gathering is drawn as "clearing," "draft," the wholeness of beings. In these writings on art and poetry, the reader is led into a profound meditation upon Being, the uncanny alien, death and the divine, the inhuman stillness of things.⁷ All things stop in the letting-be-of Being.

These meditations reflect well off the quiet stillness that marks the space inside the Holy of Holies as that point at the center of Tabernacle-Temple space. At the same time, a static deadness clinging to this invocation of Being lends itself to critical misgivings. Human Dasein is moved into and out of a clearing. The reader is left standing transfixed within Being, the wholeness of Being, the four-fold, the extraordinary awesomeness of truth happening in the work (PLT, 67–68). For Heidegger, the German word *Bauen* means to dwell, to remain, to stay in place, the manner in which we are (PLT, 146–47). Transposing his analysis to Leviticus and Talmud allows one to see that "truth happens" inside (PLT, 56). Heidegger leaves the thing to its own presence. But nothing happens once the reader is called and brought inside. The stillness circles around death and disfiguration, not life and transformation. No such stillness marks Tabernacle-Temple space, which sustains a busy, elliptical motion between two points, between inside

and outside, between the Holy of Holies inside the main building and the altar outside in the courtyard. The physical stuff of atonement is the blood set aside and thrown on the altar; blood channeled outside into earth, and meat transformed into smoke and food. In classical Judaism, holiness is the space in which solid material existence is not left alone, but rather transformed into something liquid and vaporous, at which point the cycle is restored.

Not the fundamental ontology of Heidegger, but the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty provides the better key with which to interpret the Temple apparatus. Fewer claims are made regarding the truth of Being and the Being of beings; no distinction is drawn between the Being and beings, ontological and ontic, authenticity and inauthenticity. Merleau-Ponty tends more to the body and to the types of motion peculiar to it. Furthermore, no privilege is ascribed to time over space. Merleau-Ponty ascribes more lived, kinetic quality to human existence and to physical phenomena, especially as this motion sets the individual person in relation to objects and to other people. In part I of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty's magnum opus, the "phenomenal body" is presented as a body-schema, not as an object-like datum of empirical intuition or human consciousness. It takes shape as a mediating network of projections that are spatial and motile, allowing it to appear as sexual being, expression, gesture, and speech. In Part II, this body schema is passed on to the sensible world in its pre-reflective condition, proceeding out from sense experience to space and to spatial things in the natural world and to other persons in the human world. In Part III, the reader is given to understand (against Sartre) that the freedom of the conscious cogito is based on commitments, that the cogito which "from the start [is] outside [itself] and open to the world" is a cogito which wills freedom for all (PP, 456).

Merleau-Ponty's account of perception is rooted in physical perspective but not limited to it. Perception is not and can never be determinate and self-evident since the visual field is always indeterminate and relational, open and incomplete. Perception is composed of objects that are both given and hidden, ambiguous and shifting. "To see is to enter a universe of beings which *display themselves*, and they would not

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

do this if they could not be hidden behind each other or behind me." The front of my lamp displays itself to me. The back of the lamp shows itself to the chimney (PP, 68). One will continue to perceive worlds that are no longer before the optical eye. Not limited to actual physical stimuli, the visible field always includes that which is invisible to it, that which is behind my back, around the corner, behind a screen. In the case of a phantom legs or the death of a friend, Merleau-Ponty notes that one remains committed to a world without their absence (PP, 81). The phantom leg is not a recollection, but a "quasi-presence." It "appears to haunt the present body" as a "former present which cannot decide to recede into the past" (PP, 85).

For Merleau-Ponty, the body cannot be an object of consciousness, given the inherently incomplete mode of our comprehension of it. Objects, after all, can be laid out and manipulated, turned this way and that, their every facet frontally displayed before the discerning eye. But my view of my own body is always incomplete. I cannot array my body parts before me. They do not sit side by side each other, but are enveloped within each other in such a way as to preclude total vision (PP, 98). The body image is consequently more integral than the physical body per se. It is conceived not as a bundled synthesis of associated parts, but as a total awareness of my body, even hidden parts, as situated in relation to tasks. And it is action, the body set in motion, which brings the spatiality of my body into being (PP, 98–102). For Merleau-Ponty, motion does not reflect the movement of discrete bodies, but rather shifting transitions in a visible field (PP, 277). Recalling his own movement through his apartment, he knows without thinking that to walk to the bathroom is to walk near the bedroom, that to look out the window is to be to the right of the fireplace, that "each gesture, each perception is immediately located in relation to a great number of possible co-ordinates" (PP, 129–30). Intentional threads connect the body and the space it inhabits. The different views in his apartment and their synthesis are made possible by the unity of the body as it moves through the apartment (PP, 203). Walking through a strange apartment towards its owner, I entrust myself to a knowledge that I do not

possess. The lighting directs my gaze as I move through its space (PP, 310).

The chapter on speech that concludes the exploration of the body in part I of the *Phenomenology of Perception* marks a highpoint in the text. Speech is revealed as revelation, the formation of something new out of nothing, the human body in all its gesticular motility, as speech, as praise of the world. Speech builds up a world transcending and transfiguring the body's "natural" powers according to the organization and re-organization of patterns into new form (192–93). Merleau-Ponty calls this new initiating gesture "miraculous" (PP, 194), the "miracle of expression" (PP, 197). The obscurity as to our own body extends or "spreads" to the entire perceived world. The sensor-subject and the sensible object are not radically sundered. Their relation is transactional. Apart from the sensor's intentional act, the sensible object, insofar as it has "a sacramental value," excites a vague beckoning towards which I must reply. Sensation is "directed and has significance beyond itself" (PP, 213). The sacramental value of a sensible datum such as the color blue of the sky is its power to cast a spell over its sensor, who is called to enter into it. Sensation is compared to a form of communion, not just to an operation of Grace, but causes the real presence of God as it occupies a fragment of space (PP, 214, 212).

The sacramental character of this phenomenological stance is more fully brought out by the figure of "flesh" developed in *The Visible and the Invisible*. As all of Merleau-Ponty's critics have observed, *Phenomenology of Perception* remains caught up in Husserlian topoi of intentionality and consciousness, the privilege accorded to speech and language, and the gap between subject and object.⁸ As developed in the fourth chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*, flesh is the thickness filling in the space between subject and object. This allows Merleau-Ponty to pose the relation between subject and object as the relation between seer and seen, touching and touched, and the chiasm that constitutes the body of their communication prior to any intentional activity (VI, 135). Flesh is not a material substance, but rather a "concrete emblem of a general manner of being" (VI, 147), an imminent reversibility. It is the "hiatus between

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

my right touched and my right hand touching," the gap between one moment of my tactile life and the next one "spanned by the total being of my body and [the total being] of the world," "the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another" (VI, 147, 148). In a working note to *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty concedes that the flesh of the world is not self-sensing, as is the physical flesh of the lived body. It is sensible, not sentient. Merleau-Ponty nonetheless calls it flesh in order to evoke "a pregnancy of possibles" (VI, 250).

II

Merleau-Ponty's analysis allows us to look upon Talmud and Temple as a kind of flesh, an architectural flesh filling in the space between the priest and the altar, the space between the High Priest and the Holy of Holies. There is very little standing still. At night, the priests might sleep, but the watchmen make their rounds. Daytime motion is constant. The altar excites a vague beckoning that grows more and more precise, drawing those who called to it into its service. So too the Holy of Holies, once a year on Yom Kippur. Temple-flesh no longer refers to the material flesh consumed by the pyre and around the courtyard, although it continues to refer back to it. In time, it comes to refer instead to transactional relation between its memory and a superintending exegetical body, i.e., the rabbinic interpreter. The holiness that happens here has less to do with an object or entity confronting a subject, but rather the second space between subject and object. Having once entered the courtyard, the severe gap between subject and object disappears. Subjects and objects still stand apart, but the distance between them, between the human person and the altar, the human person and the Holy of Holies is traversed by a series of carefully mediated transitions. The subject can reach out into and touch the flesh it shares with the objects most central to its rejuvenation.

The Temple system does not work without the movement that brings it into being. There is no holiness apart from the walk through the complex. In the Temple hierarchy, priests are the main actors. They walk into the courtyard through gates and chambers built along the courtyard perimeter. They walk to the altar and

around its base, up the ramp, over a small gap separating the ramp from the altar's upper rim, and around the top of the altar along a ledge. They walk back down. Facing north, they do not need to reflect to know that the *Heichal* stands to the west. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest will traverse the courtyard in a north-south direction, performing tasks to prepare him for the rites of the day. He will walk east into an antechamber through the *Heichal*, around the showbread display-tables placed in the north opposite the eight-branched menorah in the south, and though the curtains into the Holy of Holies where they stand before the ark, and then back out, back out and around an incense altar inside the *Heichal*, and then back out into the courtyard. They do so pursuing tasks.

As per Merleau-Ponty, the rabbis are committed to a world without the absence of Temple. The Tabernacle-Temple is the phantom leg or dead friend of rabbinic discourse. Space that was once concrete is no longer concrete, no longer given to hand. It has been transformed by history and memory into an imaginary space detached from the purely physical mooring, back to which it continues to refer and from which it extends out into new worlds of rabbinic Judaism. The Temple has become an "imaginal body," a web of intentions, flesh, a pregnancy of possibilities.⁹ For the rabbis, the validity or invalidity of an offering is determined by the ritual status of the body of the animal offering (is it blemished or unblemished?) and the body of the person performing the rite (is the person qualified or unqualified, pure or impure?). It is also determined by the spatial position of these bodies relative to the altar and sanctuary and by the intentions brought to bear vis-à-vis a particular offering (is it intended for a higher or lighter order of holiness? is it intended for consumption outside its proper time and place?). The rabbis, however, introduce a pronounced ambiguity complicating any simple determination as to who or what is "inside" and who and what are "outside."

In its physical construction, the Temple as re-conceived by the rabbis is open, not hermetically sealed. What does this mean and how do we know it? Unlike *kodshei kodashim* (the most holy of holy-offerings), which are slaughtered only at the north side of the altar

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

and eaten only by priests in the courtyard, the sanctity of peace offerings (*shelamim*) is of a “lighter” grade. They belong to the class of offerings designated *kodashim kalim* (light holy-offerings). According to a mishna in tractate *Zebahim* (55a), these can be slaughtered anywhere in the courtyard and eaten anywhere in the city of Jerusalem by anyone, priest or non-priest. The biblical prooftexts for the first leniency are taken from three verses in the third chapter of Leviticus (“And he shall slaughter it at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” [Lev. 3: 2]; “And he shall slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting” [Lev 3:8, 3:13]). According to several sources, “at the entrance (*petah*)” teaches that for *shelamim* to be valid, the door to the Temple must be “open” (*patuah*). The problem faced by the rabbis is that, according to Scripture, there is only one door into the Temple sanctuary, at the east. But *shelamim* can be slaughtered and *kodshei kodashim* can be eaten all around the courtyard. How then can an offering slaughtered in the north, south, or west be said to have been slaughtered and how can *kodshei kodashim* said to have been eaten “at the entrance”? According to one source, minor doors were placed at two additional cornered points facing north, south, and west, permitting slaughter around the entire building. At the westernmost wall of the main building directly behind the Holy of Holies, the rabbis place a small hole from which it is possible to see into the shrine (*Zeb. 55b*).

Rabbinic “architecture” demonstrates how super-literal devotion to “the letter of the law” can stretch out enclosed structures, opening doors left invisible by merely literalist readings. The picture of a building perforated by small doors and a hole in the back solves a textual problem. Constantly alert to redundancy in biblical phraseology, the rabbis explain the repetition in Leviticus 3 (“entrance” “in front of” “in front of”) to mean that *kodashim kalim* be slaughtered and *kodshei kodashim* eaten anywhere in the courtyard, not just in the north. Except now, “in front of the Tent of Meeting” means that there is no single front, no single place or direction. While north, south, east, and west retain their meaning (although even here the precise meaning of what areas constitute “north” of the altar is not transparently clear to the rabbis) “in front” includes all points in the courtyard around the Tent of

Meeting/Temple building. Described in Exodus and Leviticus as that most closed and intimate of spaces, open only to the High Priest once a year on Yom Kippur, the Holy of Holies has been opened out in the back.

The perimeter that defines the Temple complex and separates the Temple from the rest of the city is likewise left open. The line separating the holy (inside the Temple courtyard) from the less holy (outside the courtyard) is retained while rendered ambiguous. In Exodus, screens enclose the Tabernacle, delineating God’s camp from the camp of the surrounding Levites. Only one entrance opens into it. For their part, the rabbis account for a more open space, for windows and doors, the inside of which enjoy the courtyard sanctity. A priest is therefore liable for entering into these spaces in a state of ritual impurity (*tumah*). More interesting are the chambers that line the outside of the courtyard. Although they are built in unconsecrated space, they open into the consecrated space of the courtyard. The rabbis briefly consider the possibility that, according to biblical law, these rooms are not holy, but according to the less exacting standards of rabbinic law, they are holy. But even if their sanctity is biblical in origin, they do not enjoy the same status as the space outside in the courtyard. While one can eat *kodshei kodashim* there, it is forbidden to sacrifice *kodashim kalim* and a priest is not liable for entering it when ritually impure since he is not technically inside the courtyard (*Zeb. 56a*).

The rabbis stretch the lines and the rules, which they simultaneously seek to preserve between inside and outside. Their system of interpretation is based upon an ever-expanding field of contingent possibility.

E.g.: The four basic acts constituting a proper sacrifice are 1) slaughtering, 2) receiving the blood in a service vessel, 3) bringing the blood to the altar, 4) throwing the blood on the altar. Of these, only the last three are counted as a “service” (i.e., performed by a priest) since anyone can slaughter. We know that *kodshei kodashim* are slaughtered in the north and their blood must be received in a service vessel in the north. What then about a person who stands in the south and slaughters an animal placed in the north? The slaughter is valid, but the reception is invalid. We know this from Scripture, which requires that only

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

“it” (the offering) must be slaughtered at the side of the altar (Lev. 1:11), allowing the person performing the slaughter to stand anywhere inside the courtyard. And we also know from a midrashic reading of Scripture that, unlike the act of slaughter, receiving the blood of *kodshei kodashim* counts technically as a “service” (i.e., an act which can only a priest can perform standing in the north where “it” is slaughtered) (Lev. 7:2). If the priest’s head and most of his or her body are in the north, it is “as if” he is in the north, and the reception is therefore valid. A slaughtered animal convulses, staggering from north to south to north. The offering is valid, but the same principle does not extend to an animal staggering outside and back inside the courtyard (since leaving the courtyard leaves it no longer “at the front of the Tent of Meeting”). *Kodashim kalim* are slaughtered and their blood received anywhere inside courtyard. If one is outside the courtyard and brings his arm inside, then the slaughter is valid, but the reception is invalid. Even if his head and most of his body are inside, it is “as if” he never entered (Zeb. 26a, cf. 49a).

E.g.: Only priests can receive, convey, and throw sacrificial blood, but anyone, man or woman, can “slaughter” the animal, as long as it is brought to the north of the altar inside the courtyard. But not everyone is allowed inside the courtyard. How then can a *tamei* (ritually impure) person slaughter? One rabbi pictures a (very) long knife. In this view, a person can stand outside the courtyard while still slaughtering the offered animal situated in the middle of the courtyard north of the altar. The solution to the problem is of course fantastic, provided by an imaginary object, a knife stretched completely out of realistic and realist shape. As an actual solution to a technical problem, the solution is impractical. It suggests a kind of art and artful image that is unique to the rabbis, an absurdist visual register suggested, perhaps, by Paul Klee or Salvador Dali (Zeb. 32a).

E.g.: In what appears to be a farcical debate, Shmuel’s father has posed the following possible positions to his son. Each time Shmuel proffers an answer, which his father rejects. His father insists that when the animal being offered is suspended in air, the offering is in fact invalid since the slaughter must be conducted “at the side” of the altar. If the person performing the slaughter is suspended in air,

the offering is valid since only the slaughtered object must be at the side of altar, but not the subject who slaughters. But if the person who receives the blood is suspended in the air, the reception is invalid since “such is not the proper manner of service.” If the offering was suspended, the reception is valid since only the slaughter, but not the reception must be done at the side of altar. This is one opinion. According to Abaye, all of the possible positions mentioned by Shmuel’s father are invalid with respect to *kodshei kodashim*, except for the person who slaughters while hanging in the air. Regarding *kodashim kalim*, they are all valid except for the person who receives blood while suspended. Rava on the other hand objects that in the case of *kodashim kalim*, Abaye ruled these valid, implying that the airspace of the courtyard shares the same status as the courtyard itself. He should therefore agree that the airspace of the north is like the airspace of the north and conclude that all the *kodshei kodashim* and *kodashim kalim* are valid, except for suspending the animal for slaughter or suspending the priest who receives the blood (Zeb. 26a).

In each of these cases, the rabbis complicate the space between north and south, inside and outside, on the ground and in the air. Knives extend across the courtyard’s length. Animals stagger back and forth. Partial entry equals full entry. Priests and animals are suspended in the air like puppets. The possible space of holiness is made to expand within the material confines given to it. Sometimes the rabbis succeed and sometimes they do not.

To what end? An offering is offered for the sake of six things: for the sake of the offering itself (e.g., one offers a burnt offering for the sake of a burnt offering, a sin offering for a sin offering), for the sake of the person offering it, for the sake of God, for the sake of the fires (i.e., in the case of an offering meant to be completely consumed by the altar fire), for the sake of aroma, for the sake of pleasing God. The mishna goes on to cite R. Yose who states that even if the sacrifice was performed without specific intent, the offering is valid (Zeb. 46b). The vast majority of tractate *Zebahim* is devoted to improper intentions by which an offering is rendered invalid (a priest’s intention to consume an offering outside its proper time and place, the confusion of certain types of of-

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

ferings with other types of offering). And yet, the rabbis make it clear in the opening pages of this tractate that it is always better to offer an offering without designating specific intent, lest there be any confusion on the part of the person who brings the offering or on the part of the officiating priest, which might invalidate the procedure (Zeb. 2a).

Talmud and Temple space is slack, not rigid. Despite the intense concern delineating the valid from the invalid, the system as it appears in the Talmud is non-fanatic. Allowance is made for miscommunication and error. What to do with invalid offerings once brought up on the altar? The altar sanctifies that which is normally fit for it, even in the eventuality that invalid offerings are brought to it. Once brought up to the altar, they are not brought down. According to one source, even invalid offerings that pop off the altar due to the great heat of the pyre are returned to it up until midnight. According to R. Yose Haglili, whatever touches the altar is sanctified assuming that it was fit prior to its invalidation (83a-b). Invalidated offerings that stay up on the altar include those which had been left overnight, or taken outside courtyard after its being slaughtered, that which became ritually impure (*tamei*), or slaughtered with intent to be consumed beyond its time or outside its place, or disqualified people received its blood and threw it on the altar. Excluded are those invalidated outside the courtyard (e.g., an animal that had sodomized a person or was sodomized by a person, or that was designated for and/or worshiped in idolatrous service, is of mixed breed or unkosher, born of caesarean section or blemished). The proof-text comes from Leviticus 6:2: "This is the law of the *olah* (burnt offering), it is the one that goes up (*oleh*) on the pyre." The phrase "the law of the burnt offering (*olah*)" means the law for all offerings that go up (*oleh*) the altar, that go up and don't come down. In the view of R. Shimon, the principle of inclusion/exclusion is not moral per se, but rather spatial, based on a loose logic of inside/outside. Unlike animals that have been rendered blemished outside the courtyard, animals that are blemished once inside the courtyard enjoy greater latitude given the sanctifying power of the altar (84a-b). This same power is extended to the service vessels, which can sanctify ritually contaminated flu-

ids and solids, and to priestly vestments, especially the *tzitz*, the headband worn by the High Priest, which can sanctify ritually impure blood brought to the altar.

The rabbis recognize that these discussions have no pragmatic or practical application after the destruction of the Temple. According to Deuteronomy, Jews cannot offer sacrifices outside "the place while I will show you," understood to mean the Temple in Jerusalem. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans, Jewish law prohibits Jews from offering sacrifices anywhere. Yet Reish Lakish would not hold one liable for offerings outside the camp today since, according to him, the initial sanctification (*kedusha risohona*) of the Temple site sanctified only for the time the Temple stood but not for all times. It is a position countered by R. Yohanan, who argues that the initial sanctification sanctifies for all time. According to Reish Lakish, after the *Hurban*, sacrifices outside the Temple are either acceptable after the fact or do not make one liable to *karet* (a grave punishment from God cutting the offender off from the community). In general, the rabbis follow R. Yohanan and hold one liable for offering after the destruction of the Temple (Zeb. 109a). But here again, animals not subject to this prohibition include sodomized animals, the hire of prostitutes, etc. The text returns to the principle that whatever is not fit to come to the Tent of Meeting does not render one liable (Zeb. 112a-b).

No such restrictions apply to gentiles, who even today are permitted by the law to do as they please and offer at non-consecrated altars (*bamot*). Regarding the prohibition against slaughtering outside the Tabernacle-Temple, the Torah reads, "Speak to the children of Israel" (Lev 17:2)—speak to the Jews not to non-Jews. Any [gentile] person can build an altar and offer whatever he or she wishes. And while one sage argues that Jews are not allowed to help them or act as their agents, Rabbah argues that it is permitted to instruct them. The text then cites a story of Ifra Hurmiz, the mother of King Shapur of Persia sending an offering to Rava to offer for the sake of Heaven. Rava has his disciples scout out a site, build an altar according to specifications laid out in the Torah, and sacrifice (Zeb. 116b). Similar conclusions conclude tractate *Menahot* of the Babylonian Talmud (a sister tractate to *Zebahim*) in which

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

the chief concern is grain-offerings. While there is disagreement, the rabbis in general acknowledge that the Onias cult in Egypt was modeled on the Temple in Jerusalem and devoted to God, not idolatry. Again, the rabbis are caught up with the question of place as they turn to discuss the laws regarding the status of offerings and priests that were offered and who served at Onias. The discussion concludes on the universal spread of monotheism. The prophet Malachi provides the prooftext, "Great is My name among the nations" (Mal. 1:11) (Men. 109a–10a).

The Temple has been made unreal, loosed from its original locus. Although the rabbis tend to look inwards, away from the world and into the text, both tractates *Zebahim* and *Menahot* contain concluding universal notes that open out the entire system. Like an icon of Jesus and Mary, the altar built for Ifra Hurmiz and the Onias Temple are simulacral. They no longer depend upon the existence of an original referent for their operation. The Temple and its equipment are now subject to copy. Non-Jews do not have to wait for the messiah and go to Jerusalem to sacrifice at the Temple space. As long as Jews do not participate directly, gentiles can, by Jewish law, replicate that space anywhere at any time in whatever number. Rabbah and Rava do not seem particularly bothered by the prospect.

The figure of the Temple in tractates *Zebahim* and *Menahot* is non-messianic and non-legal. This point is made clear following an abstruse debate as to whether an offering consumed by the altar inside the *Heichal* is or is not rendered invalid by an improper intention uttered outside the *Heichal*. The *halakha* (law) is explicitly stated in support, but Rava objects, "This is a *halakha* for the age of the messiah." Abaye counters, there is then no reason to study any of tractate *Zebahim* since their laws only apply to messianic times, not to the here and now. His suggestion is to "study and receive reward" despite the absence of any practical application (Zeb. 45a). As for the verse from Malachi cited by the rabbis at the end of tractate *Menahot*, the biblical verse continues, "and in every place incense is offered in My name, a pure oblation (*minha*)." According to the rabbis, Torah scholars are regarded as if they were burning and presenting sacrifices in God's name when they study the laws that

comprise the Order of Holy Things (Men. 110a). In doing this, the rabbis extend the system's life-space by textualizing it. They had no choice, given historical exigencies. Except now, in violation of the law, sacrifices now happen, as it were, everywhere insofar as the rules that open out its image and space can be studied anywhere.

III

Towards the end of his discussion of space in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty insists that there is no perception apart from the subject's own background. He continues to suggest that this background sits in conjunction with "some more occult act by which we elaborate our environment" (PP, 281). The reference here is to mescaline, to the night, to dreams and mythic space. Not unlike in wakeful states, "in dreaming as in myth we learn *where* the phenomenon is to be found, by feeling that towards which our desire goes out, what our heart dreads, on what our life depends" (PP, 285). The clear, impartial space in which all objects are equally important is surrounded by and permeated by a second space thrown into relief in its deviation from the normal. This second space is "ceaselessly composed" by "our own way of projecting the world" (PP, 287). Merleau-Ponty asks, "Are the spaces belonging to dreams, myths, and schizophrenia genuine spaces?" Or do they presuppose and depend on the geometrical space of empiricism and the pure constituting consciousness of idealism? He concedes that any attempt to assert a thematic or explicit meaning to such types of space falls apart under the close scrutiny of objective thought (PP, 288). But the experience of second space is not simply private and subjective and therefore without being or significance (PP, 292–93). Truth depends upon the confidence placed upon one's hold on and place in the world. I perceive something correctly when my body has "a precise hold on the spectacle." No matter how incomplete and corrigible this hold, "I place my confidence in the world. Perceiving is pinning one's faith, at a stroke, in a whole future of experiences, and doing so in a present which never strictly guarantees the future" (297, 296–97).

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

Ritual space, especially as it leaves empirical space and enters more and more into religious imaginaries is a second space in no way inferior to the experience of mescaline or dreams. It is a fleshy super-medium in which religious consciousness encrusts itself and upon which it performs its confident hold in the world. In the simple design sketched out in Scripture, the Tabernacle remains geometric, each component part neatly aligned one next to and inside the other. At the hands of the rabbis, that clear space turns into a dream space by way of the unfolding elaboration it is forced to undergo. The Temple in the Talmud is both genuine and unreal. It does not exist in time and space. It does not refer directly to a physical body, although it did so once in a historical form about which historians can only guess. It might exist in some future time and place, entailing a geo-political consequence of an apoc-

alypse from which any sane person must recoil in horror. Talmud and Temple are theoretical constructs, body schema based on distant historical memory and fantastical possibilities played out in exegesis. Practically, this unfolding exegesis re-secures and extends for the rabbis a place in and a hold upon a world, from which and into which they have been exiled by history. By entering this imaginary space, a second space, the rabbis walk through the system of their own thought. Philosophically naïve, they preserve the phenomenality of things without losing their way in the face of the Other and kindred theological apophatics. They maintain their hold upon a phenomenal world, to which they remain true. With unreal precision, the rabbis stretch the limits that mark their world between inside/outside, north/south, upside/down.

ENDNOTES

1. Kalman Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 532–50; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also Moshe Barasch, *Icon: The History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), chapter 1. Recent work in Jewish Studies regarding visual experience in rabbinic and medieval Jewish thought further undermines aniconic readings of the second commandment. See Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
2. My sympathies in this essay are in line with Janicaud's critique of the theological turn in French phenomenology after Levinas. For Janicaud, phenomenology and the phenomenological *epoché* allow for no recourse to "pure unconditioned givenness." Janicaud fears the radicalization of the Heideggerian project, the "disaster of catastrophe—of abandoning the phenomena." Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology," in Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press 2000), 30.
3. The distinction between an "object of worship" and the "place of worship" is from Jennifer Klein, an architecture student at Syracuse University in a paper for me on Hermann Cohen.
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge, 1962), 293–94. Henceforth, all references will be designated as PP followed by the page number inside the main body of the text.
5. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort and trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), chapter 4. Henceforth, notes to *The Visible and the Invisible* appear in the text as VI. The image of the hand appears earlier in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), xvii, and also in *Phenomenology of Perception*, 93.
6. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 95–148. Henceforth, notes to *Being and Time* appear in the text as BT.
7. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971). Cf. 207, 226. Henceforth, notes to *Poetry, Language, Thought* appear in the text as PLT.
8. For example, Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2004), see especially 38, 174–75. Barbaras argues that for Merleau-Ponty, the incarnation of perception resolves the dichotomy between subject and object, fact and essence. This resolution builds upon a basic trust foreign to Plato and the Western philosophical

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

- tradition. Whether or not Merleau-Ponty succeeds or even sought to succeed in the impossible reconciliation of the irreconcilable (identity and difference, fusion and separation) (38), I will leave to readers more preoccupied by ontological problems.
9. The term “imaginal body” is a reference to the figure of divine embodiment in Judaism as coined by Elliot Wolfson in “The Imaginal Body of God,” in Tikva

Krymer-Kensky et al., eds., *Judaism in Christian Terms* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 239–53. A scholar of kabbalah, Wolfson’s debt to Merleau-Ponty is pronounced in his most recent *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics And Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

Department of Religion, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244–1170

STRETCHED FLESH-SPACE

103