

Book Review*The New Time and Space*
by John Potts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

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The New Time and Space, by John Potts, boldly charts human perceptions of time and space through ancient civilisation, across indigenous cultures and religious practices, to myriad present day concepts of physical and virtual space. His study traces mythological interpretations of these ideas and maps the place of time/space in contemporary art and media communications. By considering early manifestations of the myths, philosophies and theories of time/space, Potts guides his reader towards the aggregated ways that human relationships with technology and media have altered the ontology of living in the anthropocentric world. The author is clearly alive to the ways that peers and Generation Y's access information: by jumping onto their tablets and googling the artists and theorists discussed. The book accordingly provides a wealth of bite-sized snippets that may be pursued by readers and/or students in their own time if their interest is piqued.

Potts' approach to the subject is agile with numerous humanities-based space/time methodologies analysed via a nimble media studies voice that draws on historical scholarship but also engages with the creative arts. This is Potts' own distinctive time-space continuum, where his writing inhabits a multi-dimension, interspersing theory with discussions of contemporary art. Seen in this way, the structure of the book makes sense—space/time history; space/time theory; space/time contemporary media; space/time art; network time; technological privacy as space; digital distribution; techno-sound and more video art. Given the potentially stratospheric dimensions of the project, the reliance on artworks, which act as case studies that are mostly nestled into the broader contexts of the book, is justified.

In his first chapter, 'A Brief History of Time and Space', Potts begins by articulating the time/space perceptions of the spirit-world and how these traditions continued through an oral story-telling bequest to subsequent generations. He refers to shamans and ancestor-spirits to engage with the ideas of real space and metaphysical space. This process is, of course, still delimited by his chronological and linear approach. Mapping the coordinates of geographical place is also discussed in the context of a move from Ancient Greek philosophical abstractions to early European cartography in the early centuries AD. Each

section or phase of this first section could be cantilevered out, should a reader develop a curiosity about any of its fragmented parts.

'Theorising Time and Space' is a weighty and ambitious task for a short second chapter. Here, Potts continues to marry up philosophical insights with artistic projects. For example, Bergson's theories of duration are slowly linked to Berlin-based artist Anri Sala's *Clocked Perspective* (Documenta 2012). Other theorists of space, Henri Lefebvre and Gaston Bachelard, are not overlooked, nor Frederic Jameson nor Paul Virilio, whose insights he charts to develop a narrative about how humans turn to time to make sense of the world. Scale, networks, convergence and technology all play a part in the rhythms of new media. We lose time, as it speeds up. We lose real space, as our virtual worlds expand. Our perception of the material world shifts, from observation to experience, in a media-soaked world.

Movement and networks collide in chapter three, "'No-One is where they are", Virtual Time and Space', as the focus is on the flow of information and travel in our lives, drawing upon the work of psychologist Sherry Turkle. Texting, mobile talking and GPS walking all create a strange fracturing of time, where moments are lost, in line with Virilio's picnolepsy or missed time. Potts says, 'The main motivation for media-fasting, however, is to reclaim time from the barrage of information coursing through mobile networks' (73).

The fourth chapter on artists, 'Space and Displacement in Contemporary Art', introduces some points about what we might label art after postmodernism with examples such as Gabriel Orozco, Thomas Hirschhorn, Allan Sekula and Bill Fontana, discussed briefly. In this chapter the discussion of displacement in contemporary art is compelling, however the complex ramifications of displacement's legacy needed to be tied into the concepts of new technology and media-frenzied living, already introduced in the preceding chapters, to avoid the risk of appearing too tangential. For example, the sub-section on 'colonial displacement' requires more than a page to really create a sufficiently nuanced context and allow for a true analysis.

Progress? At what cost? Nostalgia for moments lost and experiences that can never again be experienced are explored in chapter five, 'The Big Now and the Faraway Then: Present, Past and Future in Contemporary Culture', through the work of melancholic South African animator William Kentridge and German photographer Thomas Demand. Is it possible to create work that is free from sentiment? Potts asks: 'What would an un-nostalgic representation of the past look like?' (105).

Moving at break-neck speed from lost moments to lost privacy, the next chapter, 'Public Intimacy: The Shrinking Space of Privacy', considers the performance spectacle of Australian art duo Clark Beaumont who sat together on a small plinth for the duration of the 13 Rooms exhibition in Sydney in 2013 as part of Kaldor Art Projects. Here, Potts muses over private and public space. He notes that privacy is a recent invention (119)

and that reality TV and shared blog postings have diminished private space, whilst increasing paranoia.

As if paranoia were not enough, we move into schizophrenic territory in chapter eight, 'Schizochronia: Time in Digital Sound', as we are driven through the countryside of digital audio and visual sound. The visualisation of audio could have been developed through visual art case studies in this chapter but Potts moves swiftly onwards to his final chapter on video and performance art, 'Capsules of Time and Space: Video and Performance Art'. Again Potts' 'ranging writer' voice creates a heart-stopping ride but he is in peril of making too broad a sweep, as he briefly introduces an already vast area of art by sidestepping into another short discussion of narrative texts and a list of films that focus on creative interpretations of time-space. He then moves through the history of video and performance art from the 1960s to the present in nine short pages. Great works by Nam June Paik, Bill Viola, Shaun Gladwell, Daniel Crooks, Marina Abramović and Mike Parr would have benefited from deeper discussion.

While the specificity of this book is its coverage of contemporary media art works—installation, performance and video art—and the ways they are tied into different confluences of time and space, the risk, as always with aesthetic applications of theory, is that the artistic discussion remains merely an illustration or commentary, rather than augmenting the discourse and contributing to framing the arguments. The only way to avoid this intellectual quicksand is to elaborate the relevance of the artwork's discussion in each instance, which can be time consuming ... and Potts is in a hurry. The questions around how the creative concepts contribute to the book's thesis or how artworks can highlight problems that are difficult to face in isolation within political or social settings are not explored here.

Potts' approachable writing enjoins us to accompany him in his analysis of our contemporary phone-obsessed, social media-savvy lives. It is an engaging and personal writing style that incorporates anecdote and real life experience to soften the hefty conceptual content. The distinction of the book lies in its articulation of the character and materiality of contemporary technology-driven living, through his focus on artworks and cultural networks. More than once he cites Marshall McLuhan's point that artists are the 'antennae of society' (79): an early alarm system. This is probably because art can mediate the harsh realities of the world and also mitigate the 'catastrophe fatigue' we suffer in the 21st century. In constructing such arguments, Potts' nimble movement across different disciplines and periods of history is impressive. His versatile, comprehensive knowledge and clear exposition of the basics of media studies works well alongside this micro-encyclopaedia of artists and space time conceptions. The book functions like those old leather bound tomes that used to be locked in glass-fronted cabinets in our libraries. Thankfully for the students who will be reading this, unlike the old encyclopaedias, *The New Time and Space* is a slim volume, on the lower end of an average book length, but it offers a vivid glimpse into the mind of an author with an immense general knowledge and a gift for making new connections.

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