

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1994. Print

Gaston Bachelard

the poetics of space

Translated from the French by Maria Jolas

With a new Foreword by John R. Stilgoe

Beacon Press, Boston

Beacon Press
25 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108-2892

Beacon Press books
are published under the auspices of
the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

First published in French under the title *La poétique de l'espace*,
© 1958 by Presses Universitaires de France

Translation © 1964 by The Orion Press, Inc.

First published as a Beacon paperback in 1969
by arrangement with Grossman Publishers, Inc.

Foreword to the 1994 Edition © 1994 by John R. Stilgoe

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Printed in the United States of America

04 12

Text design by Wladislaw Finne

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bachelard, Gaston, 1884–1962.

[Poétique de l'espace. English]

The poetics of space / Gaston Bachelard ; translated from the
French by Maria Jolas, with a new foreword by John R. Stilgoe.

p. cm.

Originally published: New York : Orion Press, 1964. Translation
of: *La poétique de l'espace*.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8070-6473-4

1. Space and time. 2. Imagination. 3. Poetry. I. Jolas, M.

II. Title.

B2430.B253P6313 1994

114—dc20 93-27874

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enlargement of images quite naturally. "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."¹

And, once more, the dialectics of immensity and depth is revived. It is hard to say where the two hyperboles begin; the one of the too sharp eye, and the other of the landscape that sees itself confusedly under the heavy lids of its stagnant water. But any doctrine of the imaginary is necessarily a philosophy of excess, and all images are destined to be enlarged.

A contemporary poet uses more restraint, but he says quite as much as in this line by Jean Lescure:

J'habite la tranquillité des feuilles, l'été grandit

(I live in the tranquility of leaves, summer is growing)

Tranquil foliage that really is lived in, a tranquil gaze discovered in the humblest of eyes, are the artisans of immensity. These images make the world grow, and the summer too. At certain hours poetry gives out waves of calm. From being imagined, calm becomes an emergence of being. It is like a value that dominates, in spite of minor states of being, in spite of a disturbed world. Immensity has been magnified through contemplation. And the contemplative attitude is such a great human value that it confers immensity upon an impression that a psychologist would have every reason to declare ephemeral and special. But poems are human realities; it is not enough to resort to "impressions" in order to explain them. They must be lived in their poetic immensity.

¹ Thoreau, *Walden*.

9

the dialectics of outside and inside

Les géographies solennelles des limites humaines . . .

(PAUL ELUARD,
Les Yeux Fertiles, p. 42)

(The solemn geographies of human limits)

Car nous sommes où nous ne sommes pas.

(PIERRE-JEAN JOUVE,
Lyrique, p. 59)

(For we are where we are not.)

*Une des maximes d'éducation pratique qui
ont régi mon enfance: "Ne mange pas la
bouche ouverte."*

(COLETTE,
Prisons et Paradis, p. 79)

(One of the maxims of practical education
that governed my childhood: "Don't eat
with your mouth open.")

I

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative. Logicians draw circles that overlap or exclude each other, and all their

rules immediately become clear. Philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being. Thus profound metaphysics is rooted in an implicit geometry which—whether we will or no—confers spatiality upon thought; if a metaphysician could not draw, what would he think? Open and closed, for him, are thoughts. They are metaphors that he attaches to everything, even to his systems. In a lecture given by Jean Hyppolite on the subtle structure of denegation (which is quite different from the simple structure of negation) Hyppolite spoke¹ of “a first myth of outside and inside.” And he added: “you feel the full significance of this myth of outside and inside in alienation, which is founded on these two terms. Beyond what is expressed in their formal opposition lie alienation and hostility between the two.” And so, simple geometrical opposition becomes tinged with aggressivity. Formal opposition is incapable of remaining calm. It is obsessed by the myth. But this action of the myth throughout the immense domain of imagination and expression should not be studied by attributing to it the false light of geometrical intuitions.²

“This side” and “beyond” are faint repetitions of the dialectics of inside and outside: everything takes form, even infinity. We seek to determine being and, in so doing, transcend all situations, to give a situation of all situations. Man’s being is confronted with the world’s being, as though primitivity could be easily arrived at. The dialectics of *here* and *there* has been promoted to the rank of an absolutism according to which these unfortunate adverbs of place are endowed with unsupervised powers of ontological determination. Many metaphysical systems would need mapping. But in philosophy, all short-cuts are costly, and philosophical knowledge cannot advance from schematized experiments.

¹ Jean Hyppolite, Spoken commentary on the *Verneinung* (negation) of Freud. See *La Psychanalyse*, No. 1, 1956, p. 35.

² Hyppolite brings out the deep psychological inversion of negation in denegation. Later, I plan to give examples of this inversion, on the simple level of images.

II

I should like to examine a little more closely, this geometrical cancerization of the linguistic tissue of contemporary philosophy.

For it does indeed seem as though an artificial syntax welded adverbs and verbs together in such a way as to form excrescences. By multiplying hyphens, this syntax obtains words that are sentences in themselves, in which the outside features blend with the inside. Philosophical language is becoming a language of agglutination.

Sometimes, on the contrary, instead of becoming welded together, words loosen their intimate ties. Prefixes and suffixes—especially prefixes—become unwelded: they want to think for themselves. Because of this, words are occasionally thrown out of balance. Where is the main stress, for instance, in *being-there* (*être-là*): on *being*, or on *there*? In *there*—which it would be better to call *here*—shall I first look for my being? Or am I going to find, in my being, above all, certainty of my fixation in a *there*? In any case, one of these terms always weakens the other. Often the *there* is spoken so forcefully that the ontological aspects of the problems under consideration are sharply summarized in a geometrical fixation. The result is dogmatization of philosophemes as soon as they are expressed. In the tonal quality of the French language, the *là* (there) is so forceful, that to designate being (*l'être*) by *être-là* is to point an energetic forefinger that might easily relegate intimate being to an exteriorized place.

But why be in such a hurry to make these first designations? One has the impression that metaphysicians have stopped taking time to think. To make a study of being, in my opinion, it is preferable to follow all the ontological deviations of the various experiences of being. For, in reality, the experiences of being that might justify “geometrical” expression are among the most indigent . . . In French, one should think twice before speaking of *l'être-là*. Entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it. And when we are hardly outside of being, we always

have to go back into it. Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a chaplet of sojournings, a refrain with endless verses.

But what a spiral man's being represents!¹ And what a number of invertible dynamisms there are in this spiral! One no longer knows *right away* whether one is running toward the center or escaping. Poets are well acquainted with the existence of this hesitation of being, as exemplified in this poem by Jean Tardieu:

*Pour avancer je tourne sur moi-même
Cyclone par l'immobile habité.*

(JEAN TARDIEU,
Les Témoins invisibles, p. 36)

(In order to advance, I walk the treadmill of myself
Cyclone inhabited by immobility.)

Mais au-dedans, plus de frontières!

(But within, no more boundaries!)

Thus, the spiraled being who, from outside, appears to be a well-invested center, will never reach his center. The being of man is an unsettled being which all expression unsettles. In the reign of the imagination, an expression is hardly *proposed*, before being needs another expression, before it must be the being of another expression.

In my opinion, verbal conglomerates should be avoided. There is no advantage to metaphysics for its thinking to be cast in the molds of linguistic fossils. On the contrary, it should benefit by the extreme mobility of modern languages and, at the same time, remain in the homogeneity of a mother tongue; which is what real poets have always done.

To benefit by all the lessons of modern psychology and all that has been learned about man's being through psychoanalysis, metaphysics should therefore be resolutely discursive. It should beware of the privileges of evidence

¹ Spiral? If we banish geometry from philosophical intuitions, it reappears almost immediately.

that are the property of geometrical intuition. Sight says too many things at one time. Being does not see itself. Perhaps it listens to itself. It does not stand out, it is not *bordered* by nothingness: one is never sure of finding it, or of finding it solid, when one approaches a center of being. And if we want to determine man's being, we are never sure of being closer to ourselves if we "withdraw" into ourselves, if we move toward the center of the spiral; for often it is in the heart of being that being is errancy. Sometimes, it is in being outside itself that being tests consistencies. Sometimes, too, it is closed in, as it were, on the outside. Later, I shall give a poetic text in which the prison is on the outside.

If we multiplied images, taking them in the domains of lights and sounds, of heat and cold, we should prepare a slower ontology, but doubtless one that is more certain than the ontology that reposes upon geometrical images.

I have wanted to make these general remarks because, from the point of view of geometrical expressions, the dialectics of outside and inside is supported by a reinforced geometrism, in which limits are barriers. We must be free as regards all *definitive* intuitions—and geometrism records definitive intuitions—if we are to follow the daring of poets (as we shall do later) who invite us to the finesses of experience of intimacy, to "escapades" of imagination.

First of all, it must be noted that the two terms "outside" and "inside" pose problems of metaphysical anthropology that are not symmetrical. To make inside concrete and outside vast is the first task, the first problem, it would seem, of an anthropology of the imagination. But between concrete and vast, the opposition is not a true one. At the slightest touch, asymmetry appears. And it is always like that: inside and outside do not receive in the same way the qualifying epithets that are the measure of our adherence. Nor can one *live* the qualifying epithets attached to inside and outside in the same way. Everything, even size, is a human value, and we have already shown, in a preceding chapter, that miniature can accumulate size. It is *vast* in its way.

In any case, inside and outside, as experienced by the imagination, can no longer be taken in their simple reciprocity; consequently, by omitting geometrical references when we speak of the first expressions of being, by choosing more concrete, more phenomenologically exact inceptions, we shall come to realize that the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances.

Pursuing my usual method, I should like to discuss my thesis on the basis of an example of concrete poetics, for which I shall ask a poet to provide an image that is sufficiently new in its *nuance of being* to furnish a lesson in ontological amplification. Through the newness of the image and through its amplification, we shall be sure to reverberate above, or on the margin of reasonable certainties.

III

In a prose-poem entitled: *L'espace aux ombres* Henri Michaux writes:¹

L'espace, mais vous ne pouvez concevoir, cet horrible en dedans -en dehors qu'est le vrai espace.

Certaines (ombres) surtout se bandant une dernière fois, font un effort désespéré pour "être dans leur seule unité." Mal leur en prend. J'en rencontrai une.

Détruite par châtement, elle n'était plus qu'un bruit, mais énorme.

Un monde immense l'entendait encore, mais elle n'était plus, devenue seulement et uniquement un bruit, qui allait rouler encore des siècles mais destiné à s'éteindre complètement, comme si elle n'avait jamais été.

SHADE-HAUNTED SPACE

(Space, but you cannot even conceive the horrible inside-outside that real space is.

Certain (shades) especially, girding their loins one last time,

¹ Henri Michaux, *Nouvelles de l'étranger*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1952.

make a desperate effort to "exist as a single unity." But they rue the day. I met one of them.

Destroyed by punishment, it was reduced to a noise, a thunderous noise.

An immense world still heard it, but it no longer existed, having become simply and solely a noise, which was to rumble on for centuries longer, but was fated to die out *completely*, as though it had never existed.)

If we examine closely the lesson in philosophy the poet gives us, we shall find in this passage a spirit that has lost its "being-there" (*être-là*), one that has so declined as to fall from *the being of its shade* and mingle with the rumors of being, in the form of meaningless noise, of a confused hum that *cannot be located*. It once was. But wasn't it merely the noise that it has become? Isn't its punishment the fact of having become the mere echo of the meaningless, useless noise it once was? Wasn't it formerly what it is now: a sonorous echo from the vaults of hell? It is condemned to repeat the word of its evil intention, a word which, being imprinted in being, has overthrown being.¹ And we are in hell, and a part of us is always in hell, walled-up, as we are, in the world of evil intentions. Through what naïve intuition do we locate evil, which is boundless, in a hell? This spirit, this shade, this noise of a shade which, the poet tells us, desires its unity, may be heard on the outside without it being possible to be sure that it is inside. In this "horrible inside-outside" of unuttered words and unfulfilled intentions, within itself, being is slowly digesting its nothingness. The process of its reduction to nothing will last "for centuries." The hum of the being of rumors continues both in time and in space. In vain the spirit gathers its remaining strength. It has become the backwash of expiring being. Being is alternately condensation that disperses with a burst, and dispersion that flows back to a center. Outside and inside are both intimate

¹ Another poet writes: "To think that a mere word, a name, suffices to make the dividing walls of your strength come tumbling down." Pierre Reverdy, *Risques et Périls*, p. 23.

—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides. When we experience this passage by Henri Michaux, we absorb a mixture of being and nothingness. The center of “being-there” wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility.

In this drama of intimate geometry, where should one live? The philosopher’s advice to withdraw into oneself in order to take one’s place in existence, loses its value, and even its significance, when the supplest image of “being-there” has just been experienced through the ontological nightmare of this poet. Let us observe, however, that this nightmare is not visually frightening. The fear does not come from the outside. Nor is it composed of old memories. It has no past, no physiology. Nothing in common, either, with having one’s breath taken away. Here fear is being itself. Where can one flee, where find refuge? In what shelter can one take refuge? Space is nothing but a “horrible outside-inside.”

And the nightmare is simple, because it is radical. It would be intellectualizing the experience if we were to say that the nightmare is the result of a sudden doubt as to the certainty of inside and the distinctness of outside. What Michaux gives us as an *a priori* of being is the entire space-time of ambiguous being. In this ambiguous space, the mind has lost its geometrical homeland and the spirit is drifting.

Undoubtedly, we do not have to pass through the narrow gate of such a poem. The philosophies of anguish want principles that are less simplified. They do not turn their attention to the activity of an ephemeral imagination, for the reason that they inscribed anguish in the heart of being long before images had given it reality. Philosophers treat themselves to anguish, and all they see in the images are manifestations of its causality. They are not at all concerned with living the being of the image. Phenomenology

of the imagination must assume the task of seizing this ephemeral being. In fact, phenomenology can learn from the very brevity of the image. What strikes us here is that the metaphysical aspect originates on the very level of the image, on the level of an image which disturbs the notions of a spatiality commonly considered to be able to reduce these disturbances and restore the mind to a statute of indifference to space that does not have to localize dramatic events.

Personally, I welcome this poet’s image as a little piece of experimental folly, like a virtual grain of hashish without which it is impossible to enter into the reign of the imagination. And how should one receive an exaggerated image, if not by exaggerating it a little more, by personalizing the exaggeration? The phenomenological gain appears right away: in prolonging *exaggeration*, we may have the good fortune to avoid the habits of *reduction*. With space images, we are in a region where reduction is easy, commonplace. There will always be someone who will do away with all complications and oblige us to leave as soon as there is mention of space—whether figurative or not—or of the opposition of outside and inside. But if reduction is easy, exaggeration is all the more interesting, from the standpoint of phenomenology. This problem is very favorable, it seems to me, for marking the opposition between reflexive reduction and pure imagination. However, the direction of psychoanalytical interpretation—which is more liberal than classical literary criticism—follows the diagram of reduction. Only phenomenology makes it a principle to examine and test the psychological being of an image, before any reduction is undertaken. The dialectics of the dynamisms of reduction and exaggeration can throw light on the dialectics of psychoanalysis and phenomenology. It is, of course, phenomenology which gives us the psychic positivity of the image. Let us therefore transform our amazement into admiration. We can even begin by admiring. Then, later, we shall see whether or not it will be necessary to organize our disappointment through criticism and reduction. To benefit from this active, immediate admiration, one has only

to follow the positive impulse of exaggeration. Here I read Michaux's poem over and over, and I accept it as a phobia of inner space, as though hostile remoteness had already become oppressive in the tiny cell represented by inner space. With this poem, Henri Michaux has juxtaposed in us claustrophobia and agoraphobia; he has aggravated the line of demarcation between outside and inside. But in doing so, from the psychological standpoint, he has demolished the lazy certainties of the geometrical intuitions by means of which psychologists sought to govern the space of intimacy. Even figuratively, nothing that concerns intimacy can be shut in, nor is it possible to fit into one another, for purposes of designating depth, impressions that continue to *surge up*. A fine example of phenomenological notation may be seen in the following simple line by a symbolist poet: "The pansy took on new life when it became a corolla . . ." ¹

A philosopher of the imagination, therefore, should follow the poet to the ultimate extremity of his images, without ever reducing this extremism, which is the specific phenomenon of the poetic impulse. In a letter to Clara Rilke, Rilke wrote: "Works of art always spring from those who have faced the danger, gone to the very end of an experience, to the point beyond which no human being can go. The further one dares to go, the more decent, the more personal, the more unique a life becomes."² But is it necessary to go and look for "danger" other than the danger of writing, of expressing oneself? Doesn't the poet put language in danger? Doesn't he utter words that are dangerous? Hasn't the fact that, for so long, poetry has been the echo of heartache, given it a pure dramatic tonality? When we really live a poetic image, we learn to know, in one of its tiny fibres, a becoming of being that is an awareness of the *being's inner disturbance*. Here being is so sensitive that it is upset by a word. In the same letter,

¹ André Fontainas, *L'ornement de la solitude*, Mercure de France, 1899, p. 22.

² *Lettres*, Stock, Paris; p. 167.

Rilke adds: "This sort of derangement, which is peculiar to us, must go into our work."

Exaggeration of images is in fact so *natural* that however original a poet may be, one often finds the same impulse in another poet. Certain images used by Jules Supervielle, for instance, may be compared with the Michaux image we have just been studying. Supervielle also juxtaposes claustrophobia and agoraphobia when he writes: "*Trop d'espace nous étouffe beaucoup plus que s'il n'y en avait pas assez.*"¹ (Too much space smothers us much more than if there were not enough).

Supervielle is also familiar with "exterior dizziness" (*loc. cit.*, p. 21). And elsewhere he speaks of "interior immensity." Thus the two spaces of inside and outside exchange their dizziness.

In another text by Supervielle, which Christian Sénéchal points out in his book on Supervielle, *the prison is outside*. After endless rides on the South American pampas, Supervielle wrote: "Precisely because of too much riding and too much freedom, and of the unchanging horizon, in spite of our desperate galloping, the pampa assumed the aspect of a prison for me, a prison that was bigger than the others."

IV

If, through poetry, we restore to the activity of language its free field of expression, we are obliged to supervise the use of fossilized metaphors. For instance, when open and closed are to play a metaphorical rôle, shall we harden or soften the metaphor? Shall we repeat with the logicians that a door must be open or closed? And shall we find in this maxim an instrument that is really effective for analyzing human passions? In any case, such tools for analysis should be sharpened each time they are used. Each metaphor must be restored to its surface nature; it must be brought up out of habit of expression to actuality of ex-

¹ Jules Supervielle, *Gravitations*, p. 19.

pression. For it is dangerous, in expressing oneself, to be "all roots."

The phenomenology of the poetic imagination allows us to explore the being of man considered as the being of a *surface*, of the surface that separates the region of the same from the region of the other. It should not be forgotten that in this zone of sensitized surface, before being, one must speak, if not to others, at least to oneself. And advance always. In this orientation, the universe of speech governs all the phenomena of being, that is, the new phenomena. By means of poetic language, waves of newness flow over the surface of being. And language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through *meaning* it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up.

It would be contrary to the nature of my inquiries to summarize them by means of radical formulas, by defining the being of man, for instance, as the being of an ambiguity. I only know how to work with a philosophy of detail. Then, on the surface of being, in that region where being *wants* to be both visible and hidden, the movements of opening and closing are so numerous, so frequently inverted, and so charged with hesitation, that we could conclude on the following formula: man is half-open being.

v

But how many daydreams we should have to analyze under the simple heading of Doors! For the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open. In fact, it is one of its primal images, the very origin of a daydream that accumulates desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings. The door schematizes two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open.

But then come the hours of greater imagining sensibility. On May nights, when so many doors are closed, there is one that is just barely ajar. We have only to give it a very

slight push! The hinges have been well oiled. And our fate becomes visible.

And how many doors were doors of hesitation! In *La Romance du Retour*, by Jean Pellerin, this tender, delicate poet wrote:¹

La porte me flaire, elle hésite.

(The door scents me, it hesitates.)

In this verse, so much psychism is transferred to the object that a reader who attaches importance to objectivity will see in it mere brain-play. If such a document had its source in some remote mythology, we should find it more readily acceptable. But why not take the poet's verse as a small element of spontaneous mythology? Why not sense that, incarnated in the door, there is a little threshold god? And there is no need to return to a distant past, a past that is no longer our own, to find sacred properties attributed to the threshold. In the third century, Porphyry wrote: "A threshold is a sacred thing."² But even if erudition did not permit us to refer to such a sacralization, why should we not react to sacralization through poetry, through a poem of our own time, tinged with fantasy, perhaps, but which is in harmony with primal values.

Another poet, with no thought of Zeus, discovered the majesty of the threshold within himself and wrote the following:

*Je me surprends à définir le seuil
Comme étant le lieu géométrique
Des arrivées et des départs
Dans la Maison du Père.³*

(I find myself defining threshold
As being the geometrical place
Of the comings and goings
In my Father's House.)

¹ Jean Pellerin, *La Romance du Retour*, N.R.F. 1921, p. 18.

² Porphyry: *The Nymph's Cave* § 27.

³ Michel Barrault, *Dominicale*, I, p. 11.

And what of all the doors of mere curiosity, that have tempted being for nothing, for emptiness, for an unknown that is not even imagined?

Is there one of us who hasn't in his memories a Blue-beard chamber that should not have been opened, even half-way? Or—which is the same thing for a philosophy that believes in the primacy of the imagination—that should not even have been imagined open, or capable of opening half-way?

How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.

But is he who opens a door and he who closes it the same being? The gestures that make us conscious of security or freedom are rooted in a profound depth of being. Indeed, it is because of this "depth" that they become so normally symbolical. Thus René Char takes as the theme of one of his poems this sentence by Albert the Great: "In Germany there once lived twins, one of whom opened doors by touching them with his right arm, and the other who closed them by touching them with his left arm." A legend like this, treated by a poet, is naturally not a mere reference. It helps the poet sensitize the world at hand, and refine the symbols of everyday life. The old legend becomes quite new when the poet makes it his own. He knows that there are two "beings" in a door, that a door awakens in us a two-way dream, that it is doubly symbolical.

And then, onto what, toward what, do doors open? Do they open for the world of men, or for the world of solitude? Ramon Gomez de la Serna wrote: "Doors that open on the countryside seem to confer freedom behind the world's back."¹

¹ Ramon Gomez de la Serna, *Echantillons*, p. 167, Grasset, Paris.

VI

As soon as the word *in* appears in an expression, people are inclined not to take literally the *reality of the expression*, and they translate what they believe to be figurative language into reasonable language. It is not easy for me, indeed it seems futile, to follow, for instance, the poet—I shall furnish documentation on the subject—who says that the house of the past is alive in his own head. I immediately interpret: the poet simply wants to say that an old memory has been preserved *in* his mind. The exaggerated nature of the image that seeks to upset the relationship of contained to container makes us shrink in the presence of what can appear to be mental derangement of images. We should be more indulgent if we were reading a fever chart. By following the labyrinth of fever that runs through the body, by exploring the "seats of fever," or the pains that inhabit a hollow tooth, we should learn that the imagination localizes suffering and creates and recreates imaginary anatomies. But I shall not use in this work the numerous documents that psychiatry provides. I prefer to underline my break with causalism by rejecting all organic causality. For my problem is to discuss the images of a pure, free imagination, a liberating imagination that has no connection with organic incitements.

These documents of absolute poetics exist. The poet does not shrink before reversals of dovetailings. Without even thinking that he is scandalizing reasonable men, contrary to the most ordinary common sense, he actually experiences reversal of dimensions or inversion of the perspective of inside and outside.

The abnormal nature of the image does not mean that it is artificially produced, for the imagination is the most natural of faculties. No doubt the images I plan to examine could not figure in a psychology of projects, even of *imaginary projects*. For every project is a contexture of images and thoughts that supposes a grasp of reality. We need not consider it, consequently, in a doctrine of pure

imagination. It is even useless to *continue* an image, or to *maintain* it. All we want is for it to exist.

Let us study then, in all phenomenological simplicity, the documents furnished by poets.

In his book: *Où boivent les loups*, Tristan Tzara writes (p. 24):

*Une lente humilité pénètre dans la chambre
Qui habite en moi dans la paume du repos*

(A slow humility penetrates the room
That dwells in me in the palm of repose.)

In order to derive benefit from the oneirism of such an image, one must no doubt first place oneself "in the palm of repose," that is, withdraw into oneself, and condense oneself in the being of a repose, which is the asset one has most easily "at hand." Then the great stream of simple humility that is in the silent room flows into ourselves. The intimacy of the room becomes our intimacy. And correlatively, intimate space has become so quiet, so simple, that all the quietude of the room is localized and centralized in it. The room is very deeply our room, it is in us. We no longer *see* it. It no longer *limits* us, because we are in the very ultimate depth of its repose, in the repose that it has conferred upon us. And all our former rooms come and fit into this one. How simple everything is!

In another passage, which is even more enigmatic for the reasonable mind, but quite as clear for anyone who senses the topoanalytical inversions of images, Tzara writes:

*Le marché du soleil est entré dans la chambre
Et la chambre dans la tête bourdonnante.*

(The market of the sun has come into my room
And the room into my buzzing head.)

In order to accept and hear this image, one must experience the strange whirl of the sun as it comes into a room in which one is alone, for it is a fact that the first ray *strikes*

the wall. These sounds will be heard also—over and beyond the fact—by those who know that every one of the sun's rays carries with it bees. Then everything starts buzzing and one's head is a hive, the hive of the sounds of the sun.

To begin with, Tzara's image was overcharged with surrealism. But if we overcharge it still more, if we increase the charge of image, if we go beyond the barriers set up by criticism, then we really enter into the surrealistic action of a pure image. And the exaggerated nature of the image is thus proved to be active and communicable, this means that it started well: the sunny room is buzzing *in* the head of the dreamer.

A psychologist will say that all my analysis does is to relate daring, too daring, "associations." And a psychoanalyst will agree perhaps to "analyze" this daring; he is accustomed to doing this. Both of them, if they take the image as symptomatic, will try to find reasons and causes for it. A phenomenologist has a different approach. He takes the image just as it is, just as the poet created it, and tries to make it his own, to feed on this rare fruit. He brings the image to the very limit of what he is able to imagine. However far from being a poet he himself may be, he tries to repeat its creation for himself and, if possible, continue its exaggeration. Here association ceases to be fortuitous, but is sought after, willed. It is a poetic, specifically poetic, constitution. It is sublimation that is entirely rid of the organic or psychic weights from which one wanted to be free. In other words, it corresponds to pure sublimation.

Of course, such an image is not received in the same way every day. Psychically speaking, it is never objective. Other commentaries could renew it. Also, to receive it properly, one should be in the felicitous mood of super-imagination.

Once we have been touched by the grace of super-imagination, we feel it in the presence of the simpler images through which the exterior world deposits virtual elements

of highly-colored space in the heart of our being. The image with which Pierre-Jean Jouve *constitutes* his secret being is one of these. He places it in his most intimate cell:

*La cellule de moi-même emplit d'étonnement
La muraille peinte à la chaux de mon secret.*

(*Les Noces*, p. 50)

(The cell of myself fills with wonder
The white-washed wall of my secret.)

The room in which the poet pursues such a dream as this is probably not "white-washed." But this room in which he is writing is so quiet, that it really deserves its name, which is, the "solitary" room! It is inhabited thanks to the image, just as one inhabits an image which is "in the imagination." Here the poet inhabits the cellular image. This image does not transpose a reality. It would be ridiculous, in fact, to ask the dreamer its dimensions. It does not lend itself to geometrical intuition, but is a solid framework for secret being. And secret being feels that it is guarded more by the whiteness of the lime-wash than by the strong walls. The cell of the secret is white. A single value suffices to coordinate any number of dreams. And it is always like that, the poetic image is under the domination of a heightened quality. The whiteness of the walls, alone, protects the dreamer's *cell*. It is stronger than all geometry. It is a part of the cell of intimacy.

Such images lack stability. As soon as we depart from expression as it is, as the author gives it, in all spontaneity, we risk relapsing into literal meaning. We also risk being bored by writing that is incapable of condensing the intimacy of the image. And we have to withdraw deep into ourselves, for instance, to read this fragment by Maurice Blanchot in the tonality of being in which it was written: "About this room, which was plunged in utter darkness, I knew everything, I had entered into it, I bore it within me, I made it live, with a life that is not life, but which is stronger than life, and which no force in the world can

vanquish."¹ One feels in these repetitions, or to be more exact, in this constant strengthening of an image into which one has entered (and not of a room into which one has entered, a room which the author bears within himself, and which he has made live with a life that does not exist in life) one feels, as I said, that it is not the writer's intention merely to describe his *familiar* abode. Memory would *encumber* this image by stocking it with *composite memories* from several periods of time. Here everything is simpler, more radically simple. Blanchot's room is an abode of intimate space, it is his inner room. We share the writer's image, thanks to what we are obliged to call a *general image*, that is, an image which participation keeps us from confusing with a *generality*. We individualize this general image right away. We live in it, we enter into it the way Blanchot enters into his. Neither word nor idea suffices, the writer must help us to reverse space, and shun description, in order to have a more valid experience of the hierarchy of repose.

Often it is from the very fact of concentration in the most restricted intimate space that the dialectics of inside and outside draws its strength. One feels this elasticity in the following passage by Rilke:² "And there is almost no space here; and you feel almost calm at the thought that it is impossible for anything very large to hold in this narrowness." There is consolation in knowing that one is in an atmosphere of calm, in a narrow space. Rilke achieved this narrowness intimately, in inner space where everything is commensurate with inner being. Then, in the next sentence, the text continues dialectically: "But outside, everything is immeasurable. And when the level rises outside, it also rises in you, not in the vessels that are partially controlled by you, or in the phlegm of your most unimpressionable organs: but it grows in the capillary veins, drawn upward into the furthestmost branches of your infinitely ramified existence. This is where it rises, where it overflows from you, higher than your respiration, and,

¹ Maurice Blanchot, *L'arrêt de mort*, p. 124.

² Rilke, French translation, p. 106, of *Les Cahiers*.

as a final resort, you take refuge, as though on the tip of your breath. Ah! where, where next? Your heart banishes you from yourself, your heart pursues you, and you are already almost beside yourself, and you can't stand it any longer. Like a beetle that has been stepped on, you flow from yourself, and your lack of hardness or elasticity means nothing any more.

"Oh night without objects. Oh window muffled on the outside, oh, doors carefully closed; customs that have come down from times long past, transmitted, verified, never entirely understood. Oh silence in the stair-well, silence in the adjoining rooms, silence up there, on the ceiling. Oh mother, oh one and only you, who faced all this silence, when I was a child."

I have given this long passage without cuts for the reason that it has dynamic continuity. Inside and outside are not abandoned to their geometrical opposition. From what overflow of a ramified interior does the substance of being run, does the outside call? Isn't the exterior an old intimacy lost in the shadow of memory? In what silence does the stair-well resound? In this silence there are soft foot-steps: the mother comes back to watch over her child, as she once did. She restores to all these confused, unreal sounds their concrete, familiar meaning. Limitless night ceases to be empty space. This passage by Rilke, which is assailed by such frights, finds its peace. But by what a long, circuitous route! In order to experience it in the reality of the images, one would have to remain the contemporary of an osmosis between intimate and undetermined space.

I have presented texts that were as varied as possible, in order to show that there exists a play of values, which makes everything in the category of simple determinations fall into second place. The opposition of outside and inside ceases to have as coefficient its geometrical evidence.

To conclude this chapter, I shall consider a fragment in which Balzac defines determined opposition in the face of

affronted space. This text is all the more interesting in that Balzac felt obliged to correct it.

In an early version of *Louis Lambert*, we read: "When he used his entire strength, he grew unaware, as it were, of his physical life, and only existed through the all-powerful play of his interior organs, the range of which he constantly maintained and, according to his own admirable expression, he made *space withdraw before his advance*."¹

In the final version, we read simply: "He left space, as he said, behind him."

What a difference between these two movements of expression! What decline of power of being faced with space, between the first and second forms! In fact, one is puzzled that Balzac should have made such a correction. He returned, in other words, to "indifferent space." In a meditation on the subject of being, one usually puts space between parentheses, in other words, one leaves space "behind one." As a sign of the lost "tonalization" of being, it should be noted that "admiration" subsided. The second mode of expression is no longer, according to the author's own admission, *admirable*. Because it really was admirable, this power to make *space withdraw*, to put space, all space, outside, in order that meditating being might be free to think.

¹ Ed. Jean Pommier, *Corti*, p. 19.