

the
poetics
of space

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Translated from the French by Maria Jolas

Foreword by Etienne Gilson

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8

intimate immensity

*Le monde est grand, mais en nous
il est profond comme la mer.*

R. M. RILKE

(The world is large, but in us
it is deep as the sea.)

L'espace m'a toujours rendu silencieux

(JULES VALLÈS, *L'enfant*, p. 238)

(Space has always reduced me to silence.)

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity.

Far from the immensities of sea and land, merely through memory, we can recapture, by means of meditation, the resonances of this contemplation of grandeur. But is this really memory? Isn't imagination alone able to enlarge indefinitely the images of immensity? In point of fact, daydreaming, from the very first second, is an entirely constituted state. We do not see it start, and yet it always starts

the same way, that is, it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of *elsewhere*.¹

When this *elsewhere* is in *natural* surroundings, that is, when it is not lodged in the houses of the past, it is immense. And one might say that daydream is *original contemplation*.

If we could analyze impressions and images of immensity, or what immensity contributes to an image, we should soon enter into a region of the purest sort of phenomenology—a phenomenology without phenomena; or, stated less paradoxically, one that, in order to know the productive flow of images, need not wait for the phenomena of the imagination to take form and become stabilized in completed images. In other words, since immense is not an object, a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness. In analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination. It then becomes clear that works of art are the *by-products* of this existentialism of the imagining being. In this direction of daydreams of immensity, the real *product* is consciousness of enlargement. We feel that we have been promoted to the dignity of the admiring being.

This being the case, in this meditation, we are not “cast into the world,” since we open the world, as it were, by transcending the world seen as it is, or as it was, before we started dreaming. And even if we are aware of our own paltry selves—through the effects of harsh dialectics—we become aware of grandeur. We then return to the natural activity of our magnifying being.

Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man. It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming.

¹ Cf. Supervielle, *L'escalier*, p. 124. “Distance bears me along in its mobile exile.”

And since we are learning philosophy from poets, here is a lesson in three lines, by Pierre Albert-Bireau:¹

Et je me crée d'un trait de plume

Maître du Monde

Homme illimité.

(And with a stroke of the pen I name myself

Master of the World

Unlimited man.)

II

However paradoxical this may seem, it is often this *inner immensity* that gives their real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world. To take a precise example, we might make a detailed examination of what is meant by the *immensity of the forest*. For this "immensity" originates in a body of impressions which, in reality, have little connection with geographical information. We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the always rather anxious impression of "going deeper and deeper" into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are. It would be easy to furnish literary documents that would be so many variations on the theme of this limitless world, which is a primary attribute of the forest. But the following passage, marked with rare psychological depth, from Marcault and Thérèse Brosse's excellent work,² will help us to determine the main theme: "Forests, especially, with the mystery of their space prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of tree-trunks and leaves, space that is veiled for our eyes, but transparent to action, are veritable psychological transcendent."³ I myself should have hesitated to use the term psychological transcendent. But at least it is a good indicator for directing phenomenological research towards

¹ Pierre Albert-Bireau, *Les amusements naturels*, p. 192.

² Marcault and Thérèse Brosse, *L'éducation de demain*, p. 255.

³ "A characteristic of forests is to be closed and, at the same time, open on every side." A. Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Le lis de mer*, 1956, p. 57.

the transcendencies of present-day psychology. It would be difficult to express better that here the functions of description—psychological as well as objective—are ineffective. One feels that there is *something else* to be expressed besides what is offered for objective expression. What should be expressed is hidden grandeur, depth. And so far from indulging in prolixity of expression, or losing oneself in the detail of light and shade, one feels that one is in the presence of an “essential” impression seeking expression; in short, in line with what our authors call a “psychological transcendent.” If one wants to “experience the forest,” this is an excellent way of saying that one is in the presence of *immediate immensity*, of the immediate immensity of its depth. Poets feel this immediate immensity of old forests:¹

Forêt pieuse, forêt brisée où l'on n'enlève pas les morts
Infiniment fermée, serrée de vieilles tiges droites roses
Infiniment resserrée en plus vieux et gris fardés
Sur la couche de mousse énorme et profonde en cri de velours

(Pious forest, shattered forest, where the dead are left lying
 Infinitely closed, dense with pinkish straight old stems
 Infinitely serried, older and grayed
 On the vast, deep, mossy bed, a velvet cry.)

Here the poet does not describe. He knows that his is a greater task. The pious forest is shattered, closed, serried. It accumulates its infinity within its own boundaries. Farther on in the poem he will speak of the symphony of an “eternal” wind that lives in the movement of the tree-tops.

Thus, Pierre-Jean Jouve’s “forest” is *immediately sacred*, sacred by virtue of the tradition of its nature, far from all history of men. Before the gods existed, the woods were sacred, and the gods came to dwell in these sacred woods. All they did was to add human, all too human, characteristics to the great law of forest reverie.

But even when a poet gives a geographical dimension, he knows instinctively that this dimension can be deter-

¹ Pierre-Jean Jouve, *Lyrique*, p. 13. Mercure de France, Paris.

mined on the spot, for the reason that it is rooted in a particular oneiric value. Thus, when Pierre Guéguen speaks of "the deep forest" (the forest of Broceliande),¹ he adds a dimension; but it is not the dimension that gives the image its intensity. And when he says that the deep forest is also called "the quiet earth, because of its immense silence curdled in thirty leagues of green," Guéguen bids us participate in transcendent quiet and silence. Because the forest rustles, the "curdled" quiet trembles and shudders, it comes to life with countless lives. But these sounds and these movements do not disturb the silence and quietude of the forest. When we read this passage of Guéguen's book we sense that this poet has calmed all anxiety. Forest peace for him is inner peace. It is an inner state.

Poets know this, and some reveal it in one line as, for instance, Jules Supervielle, who knows that in our peaceful moments we are

Habitants délicats des forêts de nous-mêmes.

(Sensitive inhabitants of the forests of ourselves.)

Others, who are more logical, such as René Ménard, present us with a beautiful album devoted to trees, in which each tree is associated with a poet. Here is Ménard's own *intimate forest*: "Now I am traversed by bridle paths, under the seal of sun and shade . . . I live in great density . . . Shelter lures me. I slump down into the thick foliage . . . In the forest, I am my entire self. Everything is possible in my heart just as it is in the hiding places in ravines. Thickly wooded distance separates me from moral codes and cities."² But one should read this whole prose-poem which, as the poet says, is actuated by "reverent apprehension of the Imagination of Creation."

In the domains of poetic phenomenology under consideration, there is one adjective of which a metaphysician of the imagination must beware, and that is, the adjective

¹ Pierre Guéguen, *La Bretagne*, p. 71.

² René Ménard, *Le livre des arbres*, pp. 6 and 7. Arts et Métiers Graphiques, Paris, 1956.

ancestral. For there is a corresponding valorization to this adjective which is too rapid, often entirely verbal, and never well supervised, with the result that the direct nature of depth imagination and of depth psychology, generally, is lacking. Here the “ancestral” forest becomes a “psychological transcendent” at small cost, it is an image suited to children’s books. And if there exists a phenomenological problem with regard to this image, it is to find out for what *actual* reason, by virtue of what active value of the imagination, such an image charms and speaks to us. The hypothesis, according to which it is due to remote permeation from infinite ages, is a psychologically gratuitous one. Indeed, if it were to be taken into consideration by a phenomenologist, such an hypothesis would be an invitation to lazy thinking. And, for myself, I feel obliged to establish the actuality of archetypes. In any event, the word *ancestral*, as a value of the imagination, is one that needs explaining; it is not a word that explains.

But who knows the temporal dimensions of the forest? History is not enough. We should have to know how the forest experiences its great age; why, in the reign of the imagination, there are no young forests. I myself can only meditate upon things in my own country, having learned the dialectics of fields and woods from my unforgettable friend, Gaston Roupnel.¹ In the vast world of the non-I, the non-I of fields is not the same as the non-I of forests. The forest is a before-me, before-us, whereas for fields and meadows, my dreams and recollections accompany all the different phases of tilling and harvesting. When the dialectics of the I and the non-I grow more flexible, I feel that fields and meadows are with me, in the with-me, with-us. But forests reign in the past. I know, for instance, that my grandfather got lost in a certain wood. I was told this, and I have not forgotten it. It happened in a past before I was born. My oldest memories, therefore, are a hundred years old, or perhaps a bit more.

¹ Gaston Roupnel, *La campagne française*, see the chapter entitled *La Forêt*, p. 75 and after. Club des Libraires de France, Paris.

This, then, is my ancestral forest. And all the rest is fiction.

III

When such daydreams as these take hold of meditating man, details grow dim and all picturesqueness fades. The very hours pass unnoticed and space stretches out interminably. Indeed, daydreams of this kind may well be called daydreams of infinity. With these images of the "deep" forest, I have just outlined the power of immensity that is revealed in a value. But one can follow the opposite course. In the presence of such obvious immensity as the immensity of night, a poet can point the way to intimate depth. A passage in Milosz's *L'amoureuse initiation* (p. 64) will serve as a center where we can sense the concordance of world immensity with intimate depth of being.

"As I stood in contemplation of the garden of the wonders of space," Milosz writes, "I had the feeling that I was looking into the ultimate depths, the most secret regions of my own being; and I smiled, because it had never occurred to me that I could be so pure, so great, so fair! My heart burst into singing with the song of grace of the universe. All these constellations are yours, they exist in you; outside your love they have no reality! How terrible the world seems to those who do not know themselves! When you felt so alone and abandoned in the presence of the sea, imagine what solitude the waters must have felt in the night, or the night's own solitude in a universe without end!" And the poet continues this love duet between dreamer and world, making man and the world into two wedded creatures that are paradoxically united in the dialogue of their solitude.

Elsewhere in this same work (p. 151), in a sort of meditation-exaltation which unites the two movements that concentrate and dilate, Milosz writes: "Oh, space, you who separate the waters; my joyful friend, with what love I sense you! Here I am like the flowering nettle in the gentle sunlight of ruins, like the pebble on the spring's edge, or the

serpent in the warm grass! Is this instant really eternity? Is eternity really this instant?" And the passage goes on, linking infinitesimal with immense, the white nettle with the blue sky. All these sharp contradictions, the thin edge of the pebble and the clear spring, are now assimilated and destroyed, the dreaming being having transcended the contradiction of small and large. This exaltation of space goes beyond all frontiers (p. 155). "Away with boundaries, those enemies of horizons! Let genuine distance appear!" And further (p. 168): "Everything was bathed in light, gentleness and wisdom; in the unreal air, distance beckoned to distance. My love enveloped the universe."

Of course, if it were my aim to study images of immensity objectively, I should have to start a voluminous file, for immensity is an inexhaustible poetic theme. I touched on this in an earlier work,¹ in which I insisted upon the desire for confrontation that exists in man meditating upon an infinite universe. I also spoke of a spectacle complex in which pride of seeing is the core of the consciousness of a being in contemplation. But the problem under consideration in this present work is that of a more relaxed participation in images of immensity, a more intimate relationship between small and large. I should like to liquidate, as it were, the spectacle complex, which could harden certain values of poetic contemplation.

IV

When a relaxed spirit meditates and dreams, immensity seems to expect images of immensity. The mind sees and continues to see objects, while the spirit finds the nest of immensity in an object. We shall have various proofs of this if we follow the daydreams that the single word *vast* inspired in Baudelaire. Indeed, *vast* is one of the most Baudelairean of words, the word that marks most naturally, for this poet, infinity of intimate space.

No doubt, pages could be found in his work in which the

¹ Cf. *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté*, chapter XII, § VII, "La terre immense."

word vast has merely its ordinary geometrically objective meaning: "Around a vast oval table . . ." is from a description in *Curiosités esthétiques* (p. 390). But when one has become hypersensitive to this word, one sees that it denotes attraction for felicitous amplitude. Moreover, if we were to count the different usages of the word vast in Baudelaire's writings, we should be struck by the fact that examples of its positive, objective use are rare compared with the instances when the word has more intimate resonances.¹

Despite the fact that Baudelaire consciously avoided words used by force of habit, and took particular pains not to let his adjectives be dictated by his nouns, he did not keep a close eye on his use of the word *vast*. Whenever a thing, a thought or a daydream was touched by grandeur, this word became indispensable to him. I should like to give a few examples of the astonishing variety of uses to which he put it.

The opium-eater must have "a vast amount of leisure"² to derive benefit from his soothing daydreams. Daydreaming is encouraged by "the vast silence of the country."³ The "moral world opens up vast perspectives filled with new clarities."⁴ Certain dreams are laid "on the vast canvas of memory." And elsewhere, Baudelaire speaks of a man who was "the prey of great projects, oppressed by vast thoughts."

Describing a nation, he wrote, "Nations . . . (are) vast animals whose organization is adequate to their environment"; and returning later to the same subject,⁵ "Nations (are) vast collective creatures." Here there is no doubt that the word *vast* increases the tonality of the metaphor; in fact, without this word, to which he attached importance, he would have perhaps hesitated because of the indigence of the image. But the word *vast* saves everything and Bau-

¹ The word *vast* is not included, however, in the excellent index to *Fusées et journaux intimes*, edited by Jacques Crépet (Mercure de France) Paris.

² Baudelaire, *Le mangeur d'opium*, p. 181.

³ Baudelaire, *Les paradis artificiels*, p. 325.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p.p. 169, 172, 183.

⁵ Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthétiques*, p. 221.

delaire adds that readers will understand this comparison if they are at all familiar with "these vast subjects of contemplation."

It is no exaggeration to say that, for Baudelaire, the word vast is a metaphysical argument by means of which the vast world and vast thoughts are united. But actually this grandeur is most active in the realm of intimate space. For this grandeur does not come from the spectacle witnessed, but from the unfathomable depths of vast thoughts. In his *Journaux intimes* (*loc. cit.*, p. 29) Baudelaire writes: "In certain almost supernatural inner states, the depth of life is entirely revealed in the spectacle, however ordinary, that we have before our eyes, and which becomes the symbol of it." Here we have a passage that designates the phenomenological direction I myself pursue. The exterior spectacle helps intimate grandeur unfold.

The word vast, for Baudelaire, is also the word that expresses the highest degree of synthesis. In order to learn the difference between the discursive ventures of the mind and the powers of the spirit, we must meditate upon the following thought,¹ "the lyrical spirit takes strides that are as vast as synthesis while the novelist's mind delights in analysis."

Thus, under the banner of the word *vast*, the spirit finds its synthetic being. The word *vast* reconciles contraries.

"As vast as night and light." In a poem about hashish,² we find some elements of this famous line that haunts the memory of all Baudelaire's admirers: "The moral world opens up vast perspectives, filled with new clarities." And so it is the "moral" nature, the "moral" temple that conveys grandeur in its pristine state. Throughout this poet's work, one can follow the action of a "vast unity" that is always ready to unite dislocated riches. The philosophical mind goes in for endless discussion on the relation of the one to the many, while Baudelaire's meditations, which are very typically poetic, find a deep, somber unity in the very power of the synthesis through which the different impres-

¹ Baudelaire, *L'art romantique*, p. 369.

² Baudelaire, *Les paradis artificiels*, p. 169.

sions of the senses enter into correspondence. Often these “correspondences” have been examined too empirically as being the effects of sensibility. However, the range of sensibility from one dreamer to the other rarely coincides. Except for the delight that it affords every reader’s ear, myrrh is not given to all of us. But from the very first chords of the sonnet *Correspondances*, the synthesizing action of the lyrical spirit is at work. Even though poetic sensibility enjoys countless variations on the theme of “correspondences,” we must acknowledge that the theme itself is also eminently enjoyable. And Baudelaire says, in fact, that at such moments “the sense of existence is immensely increased.”¹ Here we discover that immensity in the intimate domain is intensity, an intensity of being, the intensity of a being evolving in a vast perspective of intimate immensity. It is the principle of “correspondences” to receive the immensity of the world, which they transform into intensity of our intimate being. They institute transactions between two kinds of grandeur. We cannot forget that Baudelaire experienced these transactions.

Movement itself has, so to speak, a favorable volume, and because of its harmony, Baudelaire included it in the esthetic category of vastness. Writing about the movement of a ship, he said, “The poetic idea that emanates from this operation of movement inside the lines is the hypothesis of a vast, immense creature, complicated but eurhythmic, an animal endowed with genius, suffering and sighing every sigh and every human ambition.” Thus, the ship, beautiful volume resting on the waters, contains the infinite of the word *vast*, which is a word that does not describe, but gives primal being to everything that must be described. For Baudelaire, the word *vast* contains a complex of images that deepen one another because they grow on a vast being.

At the risk of my demonstration becoming diffuse, I have tried to indicate the places in Baudelaire’s work where this strange adjective appears; strange because it confers grandeur upon impressions that have nothing in common.

But in order to give my demonstration greater unity, I

¹ Baudelaire, *Journaux intimes*, p. 28.

shall follow a line of images, or values, which will show that, for Baudelaire, immensity is an intimate dimension.

A rarely felicitous expression of the intimate nature of the notion of immensity may be found in the pages Baudelaire devoted to Richard Wagner,¹ and in which he lists, so to speak, three states of this impression of immensity. He begins by quoting the program of the concert at which the Prelude to *Lohengrin* was played (*loc. cit.* p. 212). "From the very first measures, the spirit of the pious recluse who awaits the sacred cup, is *plunged into infinite space*. Little by little, he sees a strange apparition assuming form. As this apparition becomes clearer, the *marvellous band of angels*, bearing in their midst the sacred goblet, passes. The holy procession approaches, little by little the heart of God's elect is uplifted; it swells and expands, stirred by ineffable aspirations; *it yields to increasing bliss*, and as it comes nearer the *luminous apparition*, when at last the Holy Grail itself appears in the midst of the procession, *it sinks into ecstatic adoration as though the whole world had suddenly disappeared.*" All the underlinings in this passage were made by Baudelaire himself. They make us sense clearly the progressive expansion of the daydream up to the ultimate point when immensity that is born intimately, in a feeling of ecstasy, dissolves and absorbs, as it were, the perceptible world.

The second state of what we might call an increase of being is furnished by a few lines by Liszt. These lines permit us to participate in mystic space (p. 213) born of musical meditation. "Vaporous ether . . . overspreads a broad dormant sheet of melody." In the rest of this text by Liszt, metaphors of light help us to grasp this extension of a transparent musical world.

But these texts only prepare Baudelaire's own note on the subject, in which the "correspondences" appear to be intensifications of the senses, each enlargement of an image enlarging the grandeur of another image, as immensity develops. Here Baudelaire, who is now entirely immersed in the oneirism of the music, has, as he says, "one of those

¹ Baudelaire, *L'art romantique* § X.

impressions of happiness that nearly all imaginative men have experienced in their sleeping dreams. I felt freed from *the powers of gravity*, and, through memory, succeeded in recapturing the extraordinary *voluptuousness* that pervades *high places*. Involuntarily I pictured to myself the delightful state of a man in the grip of a long daydream, in absolute solitude, but a solitude with an *immense horizon* and widely diffused light; in other words, immensity with no other setting than itself."

In the text that follows, any number of factors may be found that could be used for a phenomenology of extension, expansion and ecstasy. But after having been lengthily prepared by Baudelaire, we have now come upon the formula that must be put in the center of our phenomenological observations: "immensity with no other setting than itself." Concerning this immensity, Baudelaire has just told us in detail, that it is a conquest of intimacy. Grandeur progresses in the world in proportion to the deepening of intimacy. Baudelaire's daydream does not take shape in contemplation of a universe. He pursues it—as he tells us—with closed eyes. He does not live on memories, and his poetic ecstasy has become, little by little, an eventless life. The angels whose wings had once shown blue in the sky have blended into a universal blue. Slowly, immensity becomes a primal value, a primal, intimate value: When the dreamer really experiences the word *immense*, he sees himself liberated from his cares and thoughts, even from his dreams. He is no longer shut up in his weight, the prisoner of his own being.

If we were to study these fragments by Baudelaire according to the normal methods of psychology, we might conclude that when the poet left behind him the settings of the world, to experience the single "setting" of immensity, he could only have knowledge of an "abstraction come true." Intimate space elaborated in this way by a poet, would be merely the pendant of the outside space of geometricians, who seek infinite space with no other sign than infinity itself. But such a conclusion would fail to recognize the concrete ventures of long daydreaming. Here

every time daydream abandons a too picturesque feature, it gains further extension of intimate being. Without even having the privilege of hearing *Tannhäuser*, the reader who reflects on these pages by Baudelaire, while recalling the successive states of the poet's daydream, cannot fail to realize that in rejecting metaphors that are too facile, he is marked for an ontology of human depth.

For Baudelaire, man's poetic fate is to be the mirror of immensity; or even more exactly, immensity becomes conscious of itself, through man. Man for Baudelaire is a vast being.

Thus, I believe that I have proved in many ways that in Baudelaire's poetics, the word *vast* does not really belong to the objective world. I should like to add one more phenomenological nuance, however, which belongs to the phenomenology of the word.

In my opinion, for Baudelaire, the word *vast* is a vocal value. It is a word that is *pronounced*, never only read, never only seen in the objects to which it is attached. It is one of those words that a writer always speaks softly while he is writing it. Whether in verse or in prose, it has a poetic effect, which is also an effect of vocal poetry. This word immediately stands out from the words that surround it, from the images, and perhaps, even, from the thought. It is a "power of the word."¹ Indeed, whenever we read this word in the measure of one of Baudelaire's verses, or in the periods of his prose poems, we have the impression that he forces us to pronounce it. The word *vast*, then, is a vocable of breath. It is placed on our breathing, which must be slow and calm.² And the fact is that always, in Baudelaire's poetics, the word *vast* evokes calm, peace and serenity. It expresses a vital, intimate conviction. It transmits to our

¹ Cf. Edgar Allan Poe, La puissance de la parole, *apud*. *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, translated into French by Ch. Baudelaire, p. 238.

² For Victor Hugo the wind is vast. The wind says: *I am the great passer-by, vast, invincible and vain.* (*Dieu*, p. 5). In the three last words we hardly move our lips to pronounce the *v* sounds.

ears the echo of the secret recesses of our being. For this word bears the mark of gravity, it is the enemy of turmoil, opposed to the vocal exaggerations of declamation. In diction enslaved to strict measure, it would be shattered. The word *vast* must reign over the peaceful silence of being.

If I were a psychiatrist, I should advise my patients who suffer from “anguish” to read this poem of Baudelaire’s whenever an attack seems imminent. Very gently, they should pronounce Baudelaire’s key word, *vast*. For it is a word that brings calm and unity; it opens up unlimited space. It also teaches us to breathe with the air that rests on the horizon, far from the walls of the chimerical prisons that are the cause of our anguish. It has a vocal excellence that is effective on the very threshold of our vocal powers. The French baritone, Charles Panzera, who is sensitive to poetry, once told me that, according to certain experimental psychologists, it is impossible to think the vowel sound *ah* without a tautening of the vocal chords. In other words, we read *ah* and the voice is ready to sing. The letter *a*, which is the main body of the word *vast*, stands aloof in its delicacy, an anacoluthon of spoken sensibility.

The numerous commentaries that have been made on Baudelaire’s “correspondences” seem to have forgotten this sixth sense that seeks to model and modulate the voice. This delicate little Aeolian harp that nature has set at the entrance to our breathing is really a sixth sense, which followed and surpassed the others. It quivers at the merest movement of metaphor; it permits human thought to sing. And when I let my nonconformist philosopher’s daydreams go unchecked, I begin to think that the vowel *a* is the vowel of immensity. It is a sound area that starts with a sigh and extends beyond all limits.

In the word *vast*, the vowel *a* retains all the virtues of an enlarging vocal agent. Considered vocally, therefore, this word is no longer merely dimensional. Like some soft substance, it receives the balsamic powers of infinite calm. With it, we take infinity into our lungs, and through it, we breathe cosmically, far from human anguish. Some may find these minor considerations. But no factor, however

slight, should be neglected in the estimation of poetic values. And indeed, everything that contributes to giving poetry its decisive psychic action should be included in a philosophy of the dynamic imagination. Sometimes, the most varied, most delicate perceptive values relay one another, in order to dynamize and expand a poem. Long research devoted to Baudelaire's correspondences should elucidate the correspondence of each sense with the spoken word.

At times the sound of a vocable, or the force of a letter, reveals and defines the real thought attached to a word. In this connection, it is interesting to recall what Max Picard wrote on the subject, in his excellent work, *Der Mensch und das Wort*: "*Das W in Welle bewegt die Welle im Wort mit, das H in Hauch lässt den Hauch aufsteigen, das t in fest und hart, macht fest und hart.*"¹ With these remarks, the philosopher of the *Welt des Schweigens* brings us to the points of extreme sensibility at which, language having achieved complete nobility, phonetic phenomena and phenomena of the logos harmonize. But we should have to learn how to meditate very slowly, to experience the inner poetry of the word, the inner immensity of a word. All important words, all the words marked for grandeur by a poet, are keys to the universe, to the dual universe of the Cosmos and the depths of the human spirit.

v

Thus, it seems to me to have been proven that in the work of a great poet like Baudelaire an intimate call of immensity may be heard, even more than an echo from the outside world. In the language of philosophy, we could say, then, that immensity is a "category" of the poetic imagination, and not merely a generality formulated dur-

¹ Max Picard, *Der Mensch und das Wort*, Eugen Rentsch Verlag, Zürich, 1955, p. 15. It goes without saying that such a sentence as this should not be translated, since it obliges us to listen to the vocalicity of the German language. Every language has its words of great vocal value.

ing contemplation of grandiose spectacles. By way of contrast, and in order to give an example of “empirical” immensity, I should like to consider a passage from Taine’s *Voyage aux Pyrénées* (p. 96).¹ Here we shall see bad literature and not poetry in action, the kind of bad literature that aims at pictorial expression at all cost, even at the expense of the fundamental images.

“The first time I saw the sea,” writes Taine, “I was most disagreeably disillusioned . . . I seemed to see one of those long stretches of beet-fields that one sees in the country near Paris, intersected by patches of green cabbage, and strips of russet barley. The distant sails looked like homing pigeons and even the outlook seemed narrow to me; painters had represented the sea as being much larger. It was three days before I recaptured the feeling of immensity.”

Beets, barley, cabbages and pigeons in a perfectly artificial association! To bring them together in one “image” could only be a slip in the conversation of someone who is trying to be “original.” For it is hard to believe that in the presence of the sea, anyone could be so obsessed by beet fields.

A phenomenologist would be interested to know how, after three days of privation, this philosopher recaptured his “feeling of immensity,” and how, on his return to the sea that had been looked at so naïvely, he finally saw its grandeur.

After this interlude, let us come back to our poets.

VI

Poets will help us to discover within ourselves such joy in looking that sometimes, in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space. Let us listen to Rilke for instance, give its existence of immensity to a tree he is looking at.²

¹ Hippolyte Taine, French philosopher, historian and critic (1828-1893).

² *Poème* dated June 1924, translated into French by Claude Vigée, published in the review *Les Lettres*, 4th year, Nos. 14, 15, 16, p. 13.

*L'espace, hors de nous, gagne et traduit les choses:
 Si tu veux réussir l'existence d'un arbre,
 Investis-le d'espace interne, cet espace
 Qui a son être en toi. Cerne-le de contraintes.
 Il est sans borne, et ne devient vraiment un arbre
 Que s'il s'ordonne au sein de ton renoncement.*

(Space, outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:
 If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,
 Invest it with inner space, this space
 That has its being in you. Surround it with compulsions,
 It knows no bounds, and only really becomes a tree
 If it takes its place in the heart of your renunciation.)

In the two last lines, a Mallarmé-like obscurity forces the reader to stop and reflect. The poet has set him a nice problem for the imagination. The advice to “surround the tree with compulsions” would first be an obligation to draw it, to invest it with limitations in *outside* space. In this case, we should obey the simple rules of perception, we should be “objective,” cease imagining. But the tree, like every genuine living thing, is taken in its being that “knows no bounds.” Its limits are mere accidents. Against the accident of limits, the tree needs you to give it your superabundant images, nurtured in your intimate space, in “this space that has its being in you.” Then, together, the tree and its dreamer, take their places, grow tall. Never, in the dream world, does a tree appear as a completed being. According to a poem by Jules Supervielle, it seeks its soul:¹

*Azur vivace d'un espace
 Où chaque arbre se hausse au dénouement des palmes
 A la recherche de son âme.*

(Vivid blue of a space
 In which each tree rises to foliation of palms
 In search of its soul.)

¹ Jules Supervielle, *L'escalier*, p. 106.

But when a poet knows that a living thing in the world is in search of its soul, this means that he is in search of his own. "A tall shuddering tree always moves the soul."¹

Restored to the powers of the imagination, and invested with our inner space, trees accompany us in an emulation of grandeur. In another poem dated August 1914 (*loc. cit.*, p. 11) Rilke wrote:

*. . . . A travers nous s'envolent
Les oiseaux en silence. O, moi qui veux grandir
Je regarde au dehors, et l'arbre en moi grandit.*

(. . . Silently the birds
Fly through us. O, I, who long to grow,
I look outside myself, and the tree inside me grows.)

Thus a tree is always destined for grandeur, and, in fact, it propagates this destiny by magnifying everything that surrounds it. In a letter reproduced in Claire Goll's very human little book, *Rilke et les femmes* (p. 63), Rilke wrote: "These trees are magnificent, but even more magnificent is the sublime and moving space between them, as though with their growth it too increased."

The two kinds of space, intimate space and exterior space, keep encouraging each other, as it were, in their growth. To designate space that has been experienced as affective space, which psychologists do very rightly, does not, however, go to the root of space dreams. The poet goes deeper when he uncovers a poetic space that does not enclose us in affectivity. Indeed, whatever the affectivity that colors a given space, whether sad or ponderous, once it is poetically expressed, the sadness is diminished, the ponderousness lightened. Poetic space, because it is expressed, assumes values of expansion. It belongs to the phenomenology of those words that begin with "ex." At least, this is the thesis that I shall insist upon, and to which I plan to return in a future volume. Just in passing, here is a proof: When

¹ Henri Bosco, *Antonin*, p. 13.

a poet tells me that he “knows a type of sadness that smells of pineapple,”¹ I myself feel less sad, I feel gently sad.

In this activity of poetic spatiality that goes from deep intimacy to infinite extent, united in an identical expansion, one feels grandeur welling up. As Rilke said: “Through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world . . .”

Here space seems to the poet to be the subject of the verbs “to open up,” or “to grow.” And whenever space is a value—there is no greater value than intimacy—it has magnifying properties. Valorized space is a verb, and never, either inside or outside us, is grandeur an “object.”

To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space. For the sake of homogeneity, I shall recall how Joë Bousquet expressed the intimate space of a tree:² “Space is nowhere. Space is inside it like honey in a hive.” In the realm of images, honey in a hive does not conform to the elementary dialectics of contained and container. Metaphorical honey will not be shut up, and here, in the intimate space of a tree, honey is anything but a form of marrow. It is the “honey of the tree” that will give perfume to the flower. It is also the inner sun of the tree. And the dreamer who dreams of honey knows that it is a force that concentrates and radiates, by turns. If the interior space of a tree is a form of honey, it gives the tree “expansion of infinite things.”

Of course, we can read this line of Joë Bousquet’s without tarrying over the image. But if one likes to go to the ultimate depths of an image, what dreams it can set astir! Even a philosopher of space starts to dream. And if we like words of composed metaphysics, one might say that here Joë Bousquet has shown us a space-substance, honey-space or space-honey. May all matter be given its individual place, all sub-stances their ex-stance. And may all matter achieve conquest of its space, its power of expansion over

¹ Jules Supervielle, *L'escalier*, p. 123.

² Joë Bousquet, *La neige d'un autre âge*, p. 92.

and beyond the surfaces by means of which a geometrician would like to define it.

It would seem, then, that it is through their "immensity" that these two kinds of space—the space of intimacy and world space—blend. When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical. In one of Rilke's letters, we see him straining toward "the unlimited solitude that makes a lifetime of each day, toward communion with the universe, in a word, space, the invisible space that man can live in nevertheless, and which surrounds him with countless presences."

This coexistence of things in a space to which we add consciousness of our own existence, is a very concrete thing. Leibnitz's theme of space as a place inhabited by coexistants has found its poet in Rilke. In this coexistentialism every object invested with intimate space becomes the center of all space. For each object, distance is the present, the horizon exists as much as the center.

VII

In the realm of images, there can be no contradiction, and two spirits that are identically sensitive can sensitize the dialectics of center and horizon in different ways. In this connection a sort of *plains test* could be used that would bring out different types of reactions to infinity.

At one end of the test, we should set what Rilke said briefly and superbly: "The plain is the sentiment that exalts us." This theorem of esthetic anthropology is so clearly stated that it suggests a correlative theorem which could be expressed in the following terms: any sentiment that exalts us makes our situation in the world smoother.

Then, at the other end of the "plains" test, we could set this passage from Henri Bosco's *Hyacinthe*, (p. 18). "On the plains I am always elsewhere, in an elsewhere that is floating, fluid. Being for a long time absent from myself, and nowhere present, I am too inclined to attribute the inconsistency of my daydreams to the wide open spaces that induce them."

Many a nuance could be found between these two poles of domination and dispersion if the dreamer's mood, the seasons and the wind were taken into consideration. There would always be nuances, too, between dreamers who are calmed by plain country and those who are made uneasy by it, nuances that are all the more interesting to study since the plains are often thought of as representing a simplified world. One of the charms of the phenomenology of the poetic imagination is to be able to experience a fresh nuance in the presence of a spectacle that calls for uniformity, and can be summarized in a single idea. If the nuance is sincerely experienced by the poet, the phenomenologist is sure to obtain an image at its inception.

In a more elaborate inquiry than ours, one would have to show how all these nuances are integrated in the grandeur of the plain or the plateau, and tell, for instance, why a plateau daydream is never a daydream of the plains. This analysis is difficult because sometimes, a writer wants to describe, sometimes he knows already, in square miles, the extent of his solitude. In this case, we dream over a map, like a geographer. There is the example of Loti writing in the shade of a tree in Dakar, which was his home port: "Our eyes turned toward the interior of the country, we questioned the immense horizon of sand."¹ But this immense horizon of sand is a schoolboy's desert, the Sahara to be found in every school atlas.

The images of the desert in Philippe Diolé's excellent book, *Le plus beau désert du monde!*² are much more valuable to a phenomenologist. For here the immensity of a desert that has been experienced is expressed through inner intensity. As Philippe Diolé says—and he is a dream-haunted traveler—the desert must be lived "the way it is reflected in the wanderer." And Diolé invites us to a type of meditation in which, through a synthesis of opposites, we can experience *concentration of wandering*. For this writer, "these mountains in shreds, these dunes and dead rivers, these stones and this merciless sun," all the universe

¹ Pierre Loti, *Un jeune officier pauvre*, p. 85.

² Philippe Diolé, *Le plus beau désert du monde*, Albin Michel, p. 178.

that bears the mark of the desert, is “annexed to inner space.” And through this annexation, the diversity of the images is unified in the depths of “inner space.”¹ This is a conclusive formula for the demonstration I want to make on the correspondence between the immensity of world space and the depth of “inner space.”

In Diolé’s work, however, this interiorization of the desert does not correspond to a sense of inner emptiness. On the contrary, Diolé makes us experience a drama of images, the fundamental drama of the material images of water and drought. In fact, his “inner space” is an adherence to an inner substance. As it happens, he has had long, delightful experience of deep-sea diving and, for him, the ocean has become a form of “space.” At a little over 125 feet under the surface of the water, he discovered “absolute depth,” depth that is beyond measuring, and would give no greater powers of dream and thought if it were doubled or even tripled. By means, then, of his diving experiences Diolé *really entered into the volume of the water*. And when we have read his earlier books and shared with him this conquest of the intimacy of water, we come to a point where we recognize in this space-substance, a one-dimensional space. One substance, one dimension. And we are so remote from the earth and life on earth, that this dimension of water bears the mark of limitlessness. To try and find high, low, right or left in a world that is so well unified by its substance, is thinking, not living—thinking as formerly we did in life on earth; but it is not living in the new world conquered by diving. As for myself, before

¹ Henri Bosco has also written on this subject, (*L’antiquaire*, p. 228): “In the hidden desert that each one of us bears within himself, and to which the desert of sand and stone has penetrated, the expanse of the spirit is lost in the infinite, uninhabited expanse that is the desolation of earth’s place of solitude.” See also p. 227.

Elsewhere on a bare plateau, on the plain that touches the sky, this great dreamer gives profound expression to the analogies between the desert on earth and the desert of the spirit. “Once more emptiness stretched out inside me and I was a desert within a desert.” The meditation ends on this note: “My spirit had left me.” (Henri Bosco, *Hyacinthe*, pp. 33, 34) .

I read Diolé's books, I did not imagine that limitlessness could be attained so easily. It suffices to dream of pure depth which needs no measuring, to exist.

But then, we ask, why did Diolé, who is a psychologist as well as an ontologist of under-seas human life, go into the desert? As a result of what cruel dialectics did he decide to leave limitless water for infinite sand? Diolé answers these questions as a poet would. He knows that each new contact with the cosmos renews our inner being, and that every new cosmos is open to us when we have freed ourselves from the ties of a former sensitivity. At the beginning of his book (*loc. cit.*, p. 12), Diolé tells us that he had wanted to "terminate in the desert the magical operation that, in deep water, allows the diver to loosen the ordinary ties of time and space and make life resemble an obscure, inner poem."

At the end of his book, Diolé concludes (p. 178) that "to go down into the water, or to wander in the desert, is to change space," and by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities, one enters into communication with a space that is psychically innovating. "Neither in the desert nor on the bottom of the sea does one's spirit remain sealed and indivisible." This change of *concrete* space can no longer be a mere mental operation that could be compared with consciousness of geometrical relativity. For we do not change place, we change our nature.

But since these problems of the fusion of being in highly qualitative, concrete space are interesting for a phenomenology of the imagination—for one has to imagine very actively to experience new space—let us examine the hold that fundamental images have on this author. While in the desert, Diolé does not detach himself from the ocean and, in fact, desert space, far from contradicting deep-sea space, is expressed in Diolé's dreams in terms of water. Here we have a veritable drama of the material imagination born of the conflict of two such hostile elements as arid desert sand and water assured of its mass, without any compromise with pastiness or mud. Indeed, this passage of Diolé's

shows such sincerity of imagination that I have left it uncut (*loc. cit.* p. 118).

"I once wrote that a man who was familiar with the deep sea could never be like other men again. Such moments as this (in the midst of the desert) prove my statement. Because I realize that, as I walked along, my mind filled the desert landscape with water! In my imagination I flooded the space around me while walking through it. I lived in a sort of invented immersion in which I moved about in the heart of a fluid, luminous, beneficent, dense matter, which was sea water, or rather the memory of sea water. This artifice sufficed to humanize for me a world that was dishearteningly dry, reconciling me with its rocks, its silence, its solitude, its sheet of sun gold hanging from the sky. Even my weariness was lessened by it. I dreamed that my bodily weight reposed on this imaginary water.

"I realize that this is not the first time that unconsciously, I have had recourse to this psychological defense. The silence and the slow progress I made in the Sahara awakened my memories of diving. My inner images were bathed then in a sort of gentleness, and in the passage thus reflected by dream, water appeared quite naturally. As I walked along, I bore within me gleaming reflections, and a translucent density, which were none other than memories of the deep sea."

Here Philippe Diolé gives us a psychological technique which permits us to be elsewhere, in an absolute elsewhere that bars the way to the forces that hold us imprisoned in the "here." This is not merely an escape into a space that is open to adventure on every side. With none of the machinery of screens and mirrors installed in the box that carried Cyrano to the Sun Empires, Diolé transports us to the elsewhere of another world. He does this, one might say, merely by means of a psychological machinery that brings into play the surest, the most powerful psychological laws. In fact, his only resources are the great, lasting realities that correspond to fundamental, material images; those that are at the basis of all imagination. Nothing, in other words, that is either chimerical or illusory.

Here both time and space are under the domination of the image. Elsewhere and formerly are stronger than the *hic et nunc*. The *being-here* is maintained by a being from elsewhere. Space, vast space, is the friend of being.

How much philosophers would learn, if they would consent to read the poets!

VIII

Since I have just taken two heroic images for discussion, the diving image and the image of the desert, both of which I can only experience in imagination, without ever being able to enrich them with any concrete experience, I shall close this chapter with an image that is nearer to me, one that I shall provide with all my memories of the plain. We shall see how a very special image can command and impose its law on space.

Faced with a quiet world, on a soothing plain, mankind can enjoy peace and repose. But in an imagined world, the sights of the plain often produce only the most commonplace effects. To restore their action to these sights, it is therefore necessary to supply a new image. An unexpected literary image can so move the spirit that it will follow the induction of tranquility. In fact, the literary image can make the spirit sufficiently sensitive to receive unbelievably fine impressions. Thus, in a remarkable passage, d'Annunzio¹ makes us see the look in the eyes of a trembling hare which, in one torment-free instant, projects peace over the entire autumnal world. He writes: "Did you ever see a hare in the morning, leave the freshly ploughed furrows, run a few seconds over the silvery frost, then stop in the silence, sit down on its hind legs, prick up its ears and look at the horizon? Its gaze seems to confer peace upon the entire universe. And it would be hard to think of a surer sign of deep peace than this motionless hare which, having declared a truce with its eternal disquiet, sits observing the steaming countryside. At this moment, it is a sacred animal, one that should be worshipped." The source of

¹ Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Le feu*, French translation, p. 261.

the calm that is going to cover the plain is clearly indicated: "Its gaze seems to confer peace upon the entire universe." The dreamer who lets his musings follow this line of vision will experience immensity of outspread fields in a higher key.

Such a passage in itself, is a good test of rhetorical sensitivity. It faces the critical slaughter of apoetic minds with lamb-like calm. It is also very typical of d'Annunzio, and can be used as an example of this writer's cumbersome metaphors. It would be so simple, positivist minds object, to describe pastoral peace *directly!* Why choose a contemplative hare as go-between? But a poet disregards this reasoning. He wants to give all the degrees of growing contemplation, all the instants of the image, and to begin with, the instant when animal peace becomes identified with world peace. Here we are made aware of the function of a seeing eye that, having nothing to do, has ceased to look at anything in particular, and is looking *at the world*. We should not have been so radically thrown back into primitiveness if the poet had told us something of his own contemplation. This, however, would be merely repetition of a philosophical theme. But d'Annunzio's animal is freed from its reflexes for an instant: its eye is no longer on the look-out, no longer a rivet of the animal machine; its eye does not command flight. Yes, this look, in an animal that is all fear, is the sacred instant of contemplation.

A few lines earlier, pursuing an inversion that expresses the dualism of observer—observed, this poet had seen in the hare's fine, large, tranquil eyes the aquatic nature of the gaze of a vegetarian animal: "These large, moist eyes . . . , are as beautiful as ponds on summer evenings, with their rushes bathing in water that mirrors and transfigures the entire sky." In my book entitled *L'eau et les rêves*, I collected many other literary images in which the pond is the very eye of the landscape, the reflection in water the first view that the universe has of itself, and the heightened beauty of a reflected landscape presented as the very root of cosmic narcissism. In *Walden*, Thoreau followed this

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.

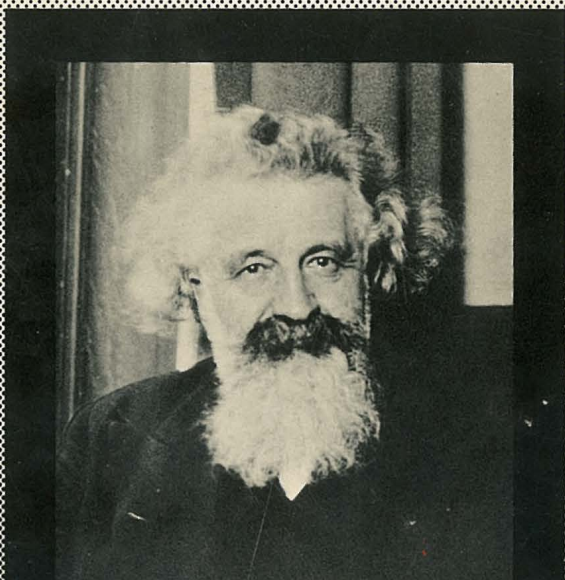
A contemporary poet uses more restraint, but he says quite as much as in this line by Jean Lescure:

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*.



gaston bachelard

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