

Investigative Spaces in the Poetry of Pierre Reverdy, Jules Supervielle, and Henri Michaux

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**Abstract:** In his paper, "Investigative Spaces in the Poetry of Pierre Reverdy, Jules Supervielle, and Henri Michaux," Hugo Azérad revisits the notion of poetic space and tries to re-examine it in a novel light. In so doing, Azérad re-adapts phenomenology, which tells us that space outreaches itself in the shape of an horizon of perception. But can we posit a space which would progressively do away with perceiver and perceived alike, a space which poetry (art?) can help establish? Azérad attempts to approach poetic space as if it were a utopian place of encounter, different from the physical or psychological dimensions found usually in studies offered on the subject. Poetic space would be a threshold where the poet, the poem, and reality annihilate themselves by using images which are Benjaminian in nature, in order to create/prepare -- i.e., *poème préparé* similar to Cage's *piano préparé* -- the ground for an experience/encounter to happen. Azérad exemplifies his notions about poetic space with texts by Supervielle, Reverdy, Michaux, Mondrian, and Malevich, and decomposes the categories of subject-object, inside-outside for the sake of a "not yet" created dimension: a vital terrain of elective experience.

## Hugo AZÉRAD

### Investigative Spaces in the Poetry of Pierre Reverdy, Jules Supervielle, and Henri Michaux

"Vous ne pouvez concevoir cet horrible en dedans-en dehors qu'est le vrai espace" / "you cannot imagine that horrifying inside-outside which is true space," Michaux tells us in "l'Espace aux ombres" (Face aux Verrous). He then warns us in *Passages*: "Préparons-nous à entendre l'espace crier" / "Let us prepare ourselves to hear space shriek" (Michaux 12; my translation). But what does Michaux mean by this espace? Can we associate it simply with the now traditional notion of poetic space, a vague and rather unsatisfactory way of naming something which is neither completely physical, nor "psychic," to use Briony Fer's word in her splendid *On Abstract Art* (4). Is Michaux trying to describe a strange internal feuding between external space and our sensory and psychological perception of it, a surreal inner struggle synthesized in George Bataille's entry on space in *Documents* as "space can become a fish which eats another"? (41). Perhaps these notions of poetic space and of the abject space of Bataille where subject and object ingest, "swallow" one another, indicate the double bind created by our desire to fixate the dimension of space, either in the work of art or in our perception of it as a spectator. We are, however, accustomed to the notion of poetic space, of the spacialization of writing, in "figures." As Genette observes in his 1976 *Figures*: "metaphor is space; space is metaphor" (106). Michel Collot's phenomenological approach to poetic space, in turn, allows us to put emphasis on the notion of "passage" in poetry -- passage as the locus of a cognitive encounter -- and less on the notion of "horizon"; the poem as an opening structure which enacts the solidarity existing between the subject and the object, between the visible and the invisible. And with regard to the interrelationship of the arts, we can assume that poetry and painting are in constant dialogue as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it: "The arts are not only, essentially mimetic (of nature, of beauty, or of poesis, or of all of these at once): they must also be mimetic of one another" (*The Birth to Presence* 385). To describe Pierre Reverdy's poetry in terms of Cubist painting would not only contradict his famous statement that "Cubist poetry does not exist" (*Nord-Sud* 16), it would also preclude the possibility of showing how they communicate with one another and adumbrate a common fear/fascination for space, if one understands space as a purely physical/passive dimension reproduced or denied within the work of art.

What I would like to redefine in this paper is the notion of poetic space. I would like to do so by paying more attention to some statements made by painters such as Mondrian and poets such as Reverdy, Supervielle, and Michaux. By putting aside the debates about mimesis (understood as the passive imitation of the already illusory present) and poesis (understood as the transformative act of making present that which is absent, in a process of creation/fabrication) we could catch a glimpse of another event which happens during our interaction with a poem or a painting. This event is one where nothing happens but an interaction, the brief moment of recognition between the spectator/reader and the work of art, as illuminated by Walter Benjamin who calls it "shock experience" with regard to Baudelaire's poetry (*Illuminations* 159). This event of recognition is not induced solely by the work of art but results from the encounter which leaves us with a certitude that we are lucky or receptive enough to have entered a zone, akin to Tarkovsky's forbidden zone or Reverdy's interland: a place in-between time and space, neither outside nor inside time and space, where both the poem and the reader metaphorically "step out" (*ek-stase*) of themselves, of their own respective passive dimensions, to meet and join in a dialogue. In this context, I put the hypothesis forward as follows. The space of poetry is not the space of perception, and is not space represented, but it is a space leading to another place: this "cognitive" space is made possible by the concreteness of traditional space, but is not subservient to it. The abstract quality of this state of the in-between is anchored in the concrete conditions (the dimensions of space and time as we know it and as they are used in representation and perception) which make it possible. Nevertheless, the notion of struggle still remains: poetry faces space the same way the reader faces poetry, with a feeling of being in touch with something strangely familiar but also infinitely remote, a territory which opens up before her/him, which lets itself be invaded, but which also infiltrates the reader's mind, controls it and dislodges it from its own comfortable position. There is the promise

of a struggle, a struggle with an ambiguous angel, as all true angels are, whether they be Benjamin's angel of history or Jacob's angel of God. The notion of struggle is also another name for the event of an encounter/interaction, and is perhaps the sole cognitive encounter made possible in art.

Two of the premises of the title of my paper are, first, that poetry seems irremediably linked to the dimension of space, which is a plural and autonomous dimension endowed with almost active powers, going beyond the notion of reverie established by Bachelard. This omnipotent presence we will have to investigate, leading us to redefine poetic space; second, that a family of poets exists, in France in particular, which would comprise Pierre Reverdy, Jules Supervielle, and Henri Michaux, but could easily be extended to others like Eluard, Char, Jouve, and American poets such as Crane, Williams, and Stevens. As in every family, what unites them is also what divides them but there are touchstones in their respective imaginary, recurrent themes, obsessions, and dreams. The way Supervielle, Reverdy, and Michaux lived and created, in the margins of Surrealism, draws our attention to what Wittgenstein called family resemblances in his *Philosophical Investigations* (32e).

The very notion of margin, of threshold, of being neither inside nor outside, is constitutive of their own universes, of their own poetics. I do not aim here to prove an unnecessary influence, something Blanchot decried in his book *Henri Michaux*: "One of the tasks of the critic should be to make all comparison impossible ... the playful activity of comparing should only lead to the impossibility of comparing" (73). However, in poetry, true influence is, before all, the homage a poet pays to another. Supervielle was Michaux's mentor and both of them could only feel close to Reverdy's theory of the image, his radical view of what poetry should be, as well as his solitary existence near the monastery of Solesmes. What unites these poets is the sense of an essential solitude which suffuses the space of their poetry, in which, as Blanchot said, no one seems to be present, which is not inhabited so to speak, except by space itself. To understand the qualities of this essential solitude of poetic space is one of my queries, as well as to show that this solitude forces the artist and the reader to redefine poetic space as a place where connections are established, a space where communication, the experience of knowledge, might occur.

In contrast to the Surrealists with whom they share the belief in the Orphic powers of poetry (the intrinsic and almost magic power of words to create a sense of communion between the object and the subject, the world and the word), these three poets remain more cautious as regards the revolutionary role of poetry, although, as we will see, their aesthetics are more revolutionary than the Surrealists' creeds. They are more suspicious of the world and of its objects and remain anchored in the Hermetic school of poetry (to use Gerald Bruns's distinction in his *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*). The Mallarmean notion of nothingness that only the purest poetical language could show or reach finds strong echoes in their own conceptions of poetry as Reverdy states, "poetry is in what is not. In what we lack ... poetry is the link between us and absent reality" (qtd. in Rees 601).

I suggest that Reverdy, Supervielle, and Michaux are advocating a new role for poetry and set new challenges and in this the dimension of space in particular becomes prominent and merges with their poetics, shapes it, becomes a colonizing force which even supersedes the self's vantage point. Since Joseph Frank's article on the spatialization of time in modernist aesthetics (*The Widening Gyre*), but also with critics like Blanchot and his *Literary Space*, and Genette in his *Figures*, we have become more aware of the inherent spatial dimension of writing. Lessing's legacy marred a proper understanding of modernist poetry in particular: space seemed only the preserve of the visual arts, while time was the domain of narrative. However, even before Einstein, the Newtonian absolutes were merged if not shattered in music, but also in poetry -- in Wagner and in Novalis. As W.J.T. Mitchell pointed out, "we cannot experience a spatial form except in time; we cannot talk about our temporal experiment without invoking spatial measures" (qtd. in Reynolds 53) or, in Baudelairean fashion: "music, but also more or less all the arts give us the idea of space: since they are numbers, and that number is a translation from space" (qtd. in Reynolds 53). Whenever there is rhythm, time and space can be found closely linked.

It is in fact erroneous to say that space overcomes time, or to proclaim, as Marinetti in his manifestoes, that "time and space died yesterday" (see Chipp 286). If we want a proper estimate of the role of space in Modernist writing, which more or less includes Reverdy, Supervielle, and Michaux, it is more in Mondrian, Kandinsky, the Cubists, and their theoreticians that we will find it. Not only did they make space the object but also the subject of their explorations, space becoming an active creative drive as well as the passive dimension of a projecting ego. According to Dee Reynolds, in her *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art*, pictorial space undergoes the same treatment as language did in Mallarmé. Painting reintroduces time in the space of the canvas via rhythm, via the use of colors and their specific vibrations. We also find other ways of suppressing depth and volume, by using superimposition, in the elimination of planes, in the equivalence of opposites. These techniques are used to attain a pure pictorial language which could, for the Cubists, express the object, or more crucially for Mondrian and Kandinsky, a "new reality," which would dissolve subject, objects, time and space alike. As in music, from Webern's Quartets to Stockhausen's Gruppen, painting wages war against naturalistic space, beyond Mallarmé's wildest dreams. This destructive element, the energy of negativity which drives all the great modern artists according to Hugo Friedrich in his *Structures of Modern Poetry*, in fact hides a will to redefine the coordinates of reality by strictly following artistic imperatives: by saying that art is its own reality, art in fact puts its own reality in the driving seat, making it the absolute creative subject whose object would be the old human self with its obsolete views on the real. Whatever recalls the human -- human space and time -- is emptied out, and replaced by new categories. This dehumanizing drive, conceptualized by Ortega y Gasset, appears whenever "style deforms the human, stylization becomes a dehumanizing force...artistic jouissance is proportionate to the degree of triumph over the human" (Friedrich 241-42). Reverdy and Michaux, and in a less avowed way, Supervielle, are at the forefront of such a tendency.

According to Reverdy, "the poet does not copy any subject. He devours himself " (qtd. in Caws 212) and Michaux urges that "true poetry will always belong to those who were looking for something beyond the human, who strove to dominate and overtake it ... it will belong to the great scientists, the mystics" (968). As with Mondrian, the aim is not the sheer ecstasy of destruction of human dimensions. These dimensions are simply shown to be deceptive ways of perceiving the world: "in Painting, the empty canvas is an expression of naturalistic space, in sculpture, the statue as a whole is a filled-up naturalistic self-expression...both expressions have to be destroyed in order to reach abstract expression...consequently, not the construction of space, but the destruction of it is what abstract art requires" (Reynolds 158). However, it seems that what motivates this wind of destruction is not a morbid taste for the inhuman, but the will to create a new aesthetic space, to show a new space where, as Michaux said "in the world of his poetry, the poet makes habitable the uninhabitable ... the poet shows his humanity by using his own ways, which are often perceived as inhuman" (Passages 969; my translation).

References to abstract art are necessary if we want to understand the new directions staked out by the poetry of Michaux, Reverdy, and Supervielle, as the poetic image is the clue which could help us unravel the mysterious new role attributed to space. The fact is that Reverdy was an art critic, Michaux an outstanding painter, and Supervielle, an art lover. What happens to pictorial space cannot be dissociated from the textual and imaginary spaces of poetry: in the same way that dehumanization implies a redefinition of the human, an extension of the knowledge of the human, the destruction of the real brings about the birth of a new real. This means abolishing the boundaries between the human and the inhuman, between the surrounding space and the artistic space. Mondrian again: "moving the picture into our surroundings, by giving it real existence, has been my ideal ever since I came to abstract painting ... In this way, the painting annihilates the volume and becomes more real" (qtd. in Reynolds 158). Behind the veneer of objective or abstract space, lies a desire to create a liberating space. What is abolished is the illusion of humanity which is found in directly representational arts: the secret ideology of passivity and enslavement which would accompany traditional mimesis.

This does not mean that the apparent void of abstraction is uninhabited. On the contrary, abstract space, in painting and poetry, is the true locus of artistic freedom, which also liberates the

human from the old chains of representation. As Hugo Friedrich observes in his *Structures of Modern Poetry*: "the dehumanization of all affective contents is the outcome of the unlimited omnipotence the creative spirit bestows on the work of art. The artist annihilates his own nature, expels it from the world, and finally expels the latter to satisfy his own desire for freedom" (241-42). For Friedrich, the objects exposed in modern poetry and art appear in a light cast by no human being, in a mysterious inhuman world. This may seem true when one looks at Reverdy's poems for the first time, or Kandinsky's or Klee's paintings. But Friedrich assesses this "unreal and inhuman world," by the yardstick of his nostalgic desire for a mimetic world which would reinstate some sort of Leibnizian "preestablished harmony," whilst modern art actually is referring to another form of harmony. This new form of harmony is redolent of what Benjamin called "non sensuous" mimesis (*Selected Writings* 696), an imitation which enacts the rift between language and the world. It also means that an evacuation of the sensuous in abstract art might well disguise an actual return of it, under a new garb (this return of representation is often linked to the abject (Kristeva) or formless (Krauss and Dubois), which still tend to pin space down).

The term abstract in abstract art or abstract poetry is a well known misnomer: what Kasimir Malevich called "non-objective art" (*The Non-Objective World* 61), seems in contradiction with the sense of pure objectivity emanating from his white canvases. This purification of representation which seems to suppress feelings along with recognizable objects, would actually express subjectivity in a new, purer light. Abstract art aims at reinstating the sensuous within objectivity, and the non-sensuous within subjectivity. I would suggest that it operates a reconciliation between categories of knowledge deemed opposite. In other words, objectivity and subjectivity are reconciled in the realm of expression, feeling. The coldness of abstract painting, once properly recognized, turns into the most intense feeling of warmth. This warmth derives from our sense of being finally included into a world of pure concreteness, of being an active part of a very (supra?) human real. The rehumanizing force of abstraction finds echoes in the repopulation of the world enacted by poetry: by abstracting itself from the unreal poetry reveals the real, thus becoming the birthplace of the real.

Put into a paradoxical "nutshell," the world disclosed by modern art is not unreal, although it exposes the unreality of the real: Michaux's poetical imaginary which is deemed by Friedrich to be unreal and desolate is actually teeming with life, with a myriad possible lives. In Michaux and Supervielle the most important words would be "Naissances, Births or berths," neither land nor sea, but the transitional state between the potential and the actual, as at a pure, sacred, threshold. The apparent void brought about with the process of abstraction is alive: Reverdy's poems recreate life out of the inanimate, Michaux's inhuman teratogony is also a liberated and exorcising human cosmogony. In fact, this teeming life is in a state of kinetics, as movement can always be perceived within the apparent static form of the poem, contrary to what happens in Cubism. Something is moving: *ça bouge, ça émeut*.

If Mondrian's own pictorial universe provides him with a privileged access to, what he calls "pure, universal reality, divested of any particulars," his conception of space evinces all the paradoxes inherent in it: "Empty space is unbearable ... plastic art is not the expression of space but of life in space" (see Reynolds 181). Emptiness is fullness, silence leads to exhilarating pure music; atonality by suppressing melody unearths previously unheard supreme harmonies; the closed rectangle or closed space is not a prison but is more like the Heideggerian glade in the obscure forest (the forest which is so present in Klee but also in Reverdy, Supervielle, Michaux); absence, or the pure vibrating emanation of presence (Blanchot).

We can see that the space of painting or poetry is uncompromisingly paradoxical. Neither closed nor open, empty nor full, human nor inhuman, static nor dynamic, and, even more crucially, neither internal nor external. The *Space Within*, Michaux's title for a collection of his poems, is not an inner space, a secret inner world, in the same way that textual space is not just self-referential, and pictorial space tautological. In modern art, these opposite terms nourish each other, aim at a serene equilibrium amidst pure chaos, and thus doing, create a space of unresolved tension. The title *The Space Within* indicates direction, a perpetual fall, a penetration, "I write to traverse myself" Michaux says in *Passages* (93). But there is no vantage (reference) point from

which to start falling: falling is indeed a state of being, or I should say, existence. Such a title indicates a mode of being which would be between stasis and kinetics, a state of the in-between. This state, or space is clearly vertiginous, infinite, and dangerously so, for the poet and for the reader, both being inextricably linked in the fate of the work of art. This state of vertiginous fall, of radical loss, is at the crossroads where the poetics of Supervielle, Reverdy and Michaux meet. This crossroads is evoked in a poem by Reverdy appropriately called "Carrefour": "S'arrêter devant le soleil / Après la chute ou le réveil / Quitter la cuirasse du temps / Se reposer sur un nuage blanc / Et boire au cristal transparent / De l'air / De la lumière / Un rayon sur le bord du verre / Ma main déçue n'attrape rien / Enfin tout seul j'aurai vécu / Jusqu'au dernier matin // Sans qu'un mot m'indiquât quel fut le bon chemin." // "(Crossroads) // To stop in front of the sun / After the fall or the waking up / Shed the armor of time / Take a white cloud for a bed / And drink from transparent crystal / Air / And light / A gleam on the edge of the glass where / Nothing fills my disappointed hand / So I'll have lived all alone / To the dawn of the final day // Without a word to tell me which was the right way" (trans. in Caws 76-77). The matter itself which is evoked (air, light, gleam, white cloud) is mere transience and befits the ethereal spacing of words which dislodges any possible center. There is a sense of stasis, of resolute and tragic quietness suggested by the four verbs in the infinitive, active and passive (the pronominal form throws us back to a seemingly absent subject but also exposes the absent objects, being intransitive). The observer desires to be outside time as is indicated by the line "shed the armor of time," ("armor" is used as if time itself were made of matter, triggering the fall) but he also is in a temporality which irrigates the stretched canvas, with the use of the time indicators "Après" "Enfin" (ambiguous here: in the end, or, more ironically, at last), "dernier matin"; "réveil," with the future anterior which makes a past (vécu/lived), out of the future (j'aurai/I'll have). Space is not where it seems to be: it is between the lines, between the acts and gestures, as if it had become the medium in which language coagulates, and the words are creeping close to the lines as birds perched on the bars of a cage (the airy calligraphic shape alludes to a bird). The medium is expanded to its maximum expressiveness, and corresponds to the medium dreamed of by Mondrian: "situated between painting and music ... because space and time are only different expressions of the same thing, in the Neo-Plastic conception, music is plastic (expression in space) and the plastic is possible in time" (Reynolds 212).

In "Crossroads" we find ourselves at the crossroads between time and space, lightness and heaviness, but the sense of loss, of emptiness and disillusion revealed in the last line of the poem, is offset by its perfect shape, the classical alexandrine, with its full pair of hemistiches. The hand, fragment of the body which has become the whole body is Reverdy's signature left as a mark in almost all of his poems. It is akin to the hand of a pianist, of a violinist, as in his poem "Les Poètes," it is a container without contents, a truncated synecdoche of the poet who finds himself in the very same canvas he is painting. Here, poetic space is the space created by and between the lines. This space has become undecipherable for the poet himself, who is detached from it. But what is lost in external space is found again and multiplied in the enigmatic space of the poem. At the crossroads between painting and poetry, no direction also means an infinity of choices; this poem opens the door to Reverdy's interland, but also exposes the more vital aspect of the notion of poetic space, which is more than either real or imaginary, but is what provides an access to poetic knowledge, to the possibility of experiencing knowledge, to use the term favored by pragmatists such as Dewey. Poetic space is the place of exchange and struggle, the nodal point of interaction, a passage where loss is converted into gift, where forgetfulness becomes fertile, where communication truly occurs. Poetic space might be what Michaux would call the magic place of exorcism, of poetic transfiguration (The Space Within 968).

But some questions must be raised: how can we possibly define this enigmatic space? Is this space what Blanchot called the Neutral? Or is it not more corporeal, more vibrant? In any case, there cannot be any dialectics, because no encounter is ever dialectic: this space is solitary, as every exploration always is. This space would be an infinite passage, to refer to Mary Ann Caws's book *Metapoetics of the Passage*, but also to Benjamin's arcades project and Michaux's *Passages*. The notion of passage is closely linked to what Benjamin called *Schwelkenkunde*, a science of

thresholds: the threshold is a zone. And in fact a zone of passage (Übergang), transformation, passage, flux, etc., all are contained in the word threshold: we have become quite poor as far as threshold experiences go (Smith 19); we live in (or as) a name; it is that which corresponds to, a locus of identity, a configuration of experience, a connecting space, a passage (Smith 15). Benjamin's dialectical image at a standstill recalls Reverdy's theory of the image, and for both the Passage and le Passant/Passeur become privileged examples of the dialectical image (see Buck-Morss 219). Reverdy, as much as Aragon, could have been a fertile example of a passant/passeur roaming the arcades of modern Paris, using metaphors and montage as cognitive tools to decipher and recompose these Tableaux parisiens. In his *Poetry as Experience*, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe expands on the notion of poetic language as threshold, as the place of encounter (Begegnung) where language undoes itself, where poetry hollows itself out to let poetic space live as a place of exchange via alterity and estrangement: poetry could be defined as a passage which is the privileged place of encounters, a space where knowledge occurs and can only be in perpetual discovery of itself, and what is to be discovered is not yet known, not yet born, but is dying to be born.

A passage is the privileged place of encounters, a space where knowledge occurs and can only be in perpetual discovery of itself, and what is to be discovered is not yet known, not yet born, but is dying to be born. When in Nord-Sud Reverdy suggests that art can only be static, this stasis, like in Michaux and Supervielle, is an abscess ready to burst: "the role of the poet should be to be the first one to open a new window, to perforate an abscess in the subconscious" (Michaux, *The Space Within* 970). This state is a space where neither language nor the world, the self nor the other is allowed to predominate but where they are kept in perpetual tension. This tension creates an opacity, a density, an apparent order on the verge of chaos. This stasis is a state of equilibrium between an inside and an outside which suddenly dissolve and collapse into the void of this in-between, a collapse which is always the crux, the moment of revelation in the poetry of Michaux, Reverdy and Supervielle. Reverdy's definition of the image in Nord-Sud is seminal: "The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born of a comparison, but only from the bringing together of two more or less distant realities ... The more distant and apposite the relationships between the two realities, the stronger the image will be, and the more emotive power and poetic reality it will have" (1918). It indicates that distance is what reveals closeness and that this rhetoric of the image is also a definition of poetic space. The image is this poetic space, located between the two distant and apposite realities of the inner world and the external world. In this "in-between," strictly speaking inexistent because virtual -- as the invisible middle term of a metaphor -- a real world takes shape, a world where expression is perception, where the visible coincides with the invisible. The rhetoric of this passage indicates a construction of space, by an act of will where the will is soon abolished. We could say that the image creates poetic space, articulating it, breathing life into it. In the image, space becomes truly independent -- without origins, free.

If the image is not a metaphor, as no comparison is established, it is also a pure metaphor, a metaphor which would have forgotten its tenor and its vehicle, and which would have been set free, leaving only the wake of itself. This explains why the poetic language of these three poets is different from that of the Surrealists who fetishized language by pretending to deny its inertia and by having this Utopian belief that they could renew language and life via automatic writing, as if they could be transfigured by miracle in the spring of the unconscious. In Surrealism, the poetic image oscillates between the two shores of the subject and the object, fixed time and space, the internal and the external, and it is always left stranded on either side. It does not really transcend itself. In brief it remains artificial, even if beautifully so. Its beauty is repetitive, it is a repetition which does not renew itself in a necessary process of distancing, of creating the distance which always keeps the two shores apart, and allows some sort of amyotic space (the link with Kristeva's semiotic space seems obvious but would require further "investigation") to fill in this in-between. It is not a pure space of knowledge, for the Surrealist encounters are, *pace* Breton, always rigged. This is what Michaux and Supervielle rejected: a theory which would rig the cognitive power of images while the aim is to make of the image an independent cognitive tool, what I called, in my title, an investigative space. Supervielle tells us in his "En songeant à un art poétique":



I strain until the supernatural becomes natural and flows naturally (or seems to). I see to it that the ineffable becomes familiar at the same time as it guards its fabulous origins...the poet has two pedals at his disposal, one clear permitting him to attain transparency, the other obscure ending in opaqueness ... The image is the magic lantern which lights up the poets in the darkness. It is also the illuminated surface as the poet approaches that mysterious center where the very heart of poetry beats. But images are not all. There are passages from one image to the other which must also be poetry...Inspiration manifests itself in me by the feeling that I am everywhere at once, in space as well as in the diverse regions of the heart and mind. The state of poetry comes to me...from a kind of magical confusion where the ideas and images begin to live and abandon their lines of intersection, either to make advances to other images -- in this nearby domain nothing is really distant -- or to undergo profound metamorphoses which render them unrecognizable. However for the mind confused with dreams opposites no longer exist; affirmation and negation become the same thing as do past and future ... I give myself the illusion of assisting obscurity in its efforts. Toward light while the moving images rise to the surface of the paper, calling out in the depths. After that I know a little better where I am with myself; I have created dangerous forces and I have exorcised them; I have made allies out of them (563; my translation).

This exorcising power of poetry is what drew Michaux to him. But if Reverdy was keen on maintaining the greatest distance possible between the image or poetic space, and himself, Supervielle was all too keen on maintaining the smallest distance possible, keeping the image at hand, as it were, in case it would separate him too much from himself. Nevertheless, through either radical distance or intimate closeness, the poet seems always reluctant to allow himself to disappear in the image he has created. Narcissus is the closest ally but also the closest enemy of the poet, as if the poet were always threatened by the power of fascination, so well defined in Blanchot, by the desire for fascination which is desire itself. To allow himself to give in to fascination, would mean for the poet to deny the image its ultimate independence, its surface being obscured by his own reflection. Before Orpheus, Narcissus was the true founder of poetic space, but no sooner had he recognized the absolute otherness of the image formed in the watery surface, than this otherness disappeared into his own self: his image had replaced the image. Narcissus, forever prisoner of his own sirenes, would not allow the water to be disturbed. This mythical aside leads us back to Michaux, the poet who most exploits the dangers of poetic space, unremittingly making sure that nothing escapes it or escapes from it, and incessantly throwing himself and the world back into this void. As he tells us in his book *Passages*: "A writer is someone who knows how to keep a close contact, who stays closely united with his own trouble, with his vicious and never appeased region. It alone sustains him" (96; my translation) and "I write to traverse myself. To paint, to compose, to write: to traverse myself. There can be found the adventure of being alive" (93; my translation).

By saying "Elle le porte," Michaux puts the emphasis on "Elle," "It," and the pure passivity or disponibilité of the poet, also is an invisible form of control. The poets, to use Supervielle's image, ride the imaginary horses of poetic space, or, to use Paul Klee's image (see Chipp 183), the poet walks the line, as a somnambulist lost in a dream of lucidity. But the contact with the line has to be kept. And what creates the contact is the body, which is the source of energy which activates poetic space. This energy is clearly visible in the flurry of movements in Michaux's poems: these movements embody space, preventing poetic space from being totally abstract, that is, inert and blocked up (bouché, as he describes some of Klee's less successful paintings). By liberating movement from the prison of the body, Michaux reaches out for the pure and ritualistic rhythms, the other temporality, the tempo of space. This emptying out of the body is the movement of this space-time which constitutes poetic space: "I wish I could paint man when out of himself, paint his space" / "j'aimerais peindre l'homme en dehors de lui, peindre son espace" (*Passages* 67). Michaux's poetic space is the place where the staging of these movements occur, where the body-object, to use Merleau-Ponty's terminology, operates a geometric translation, in order to become a body-subject, however terrifying this newly formed independent subject may be for the poet's original body and mind. Merleau-Ponty explains: "can't you see that, we too, can only find that space if we accept to relinquish our space, our blinkered point of view ... no, space not more immutable, more intractable, more ungraspable than any other gods ... it is a frog awaiting to be operated on by our terrifying and subtle instruments" (48).

The notion of structure d'horizon, developed by Merleau-Ponty and more recently by Michel Collot, however insightful, does not help resolve the intrinsic nature of poetic space. It does bring

forward the inherent spatiality of poetry, a spatiality which can be defined as a horizon of perception in which categories such as the visible and the invisible, the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans* are removed. This idéalité d'horizon (Merleau-Ponty in his *Le Visible et l'invisible* 200) assumes that "space is meaningful only because it is always part of the horizon of a subject, who, while emerging among things, give meaning to them, by the sheer orientation of his body, his gaze, of his ek-sistenc ... this gift of meaning depends on the bringing together of subject and object, but also of things themselves" (Collot, *La Poésie moderne* 212). I will retain the idea of "passage/rapport/exchange" but it seems that for phenomenologists, space is still subservient to the notion of horizon, that is, to the horizon of the subject or of the object. Is there any room left for an escape from this horizon, for a bursting of its limits? According to Blanchot, Rilke intuited that "space translates things" but can this space stop being part of a horizon, the subject's or the object's (Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* 183)? Could it become truly independent? Truly creative? I might be stretching the notion of space too far, but if phenomenology puts us in the right direction, it seems to stop short of letting poetic space acquire its independence, and could be misinterpreting some obvious signs left at the surface of the poem. Perhaps the very notions of struggle, of violence, of tearing apart of the inside and the outside, so present in Michaux, but also present under the quiet surface of Reverdy's poetry, have been forgotten by phenomenology.

The notion of horizon might obfuscate what it is meant to enlighten: the true structure of the poem|or what is spoken by the poem, which invites us to step inside its own dimension. Ek-stasis would mean to step outside, but before stepping into another inside. The notion of horizon is a necessary prerequisite to let the poem speak to us, to understand its discourse, but we need to add, that this discourse does not belong to the poet or us. The poem speaks about itself as well as about the poet or us. We are included in this poetic discourse but the poem does not address anyone in particular. It stands as alone as Baudelaire's sphinx: it also makes itself available to us. This discursive universe constitutes a literary space. Blanchot situated this literary space outside any reference to the existing world: writing would wrench itself from the sphere of the visible. This would corroborate the notion of poetic space as "Other." Poetic space is created in the work of art, as a form of passage. It is different from the space we know, but becomes an aesthetic space. The space of the poem is not space represented or perceived, it is the space that the poem and us enter to communicate. Pure discourse, pure imaginary, it is truly Other. This "other place," is not far from the notion of the "other" in Levinas and Blanchot. In this place of exchange, we do meet the other as other: we could, thanks to this "passage" made possible by the artist and our horizon of perception, truly engage with the other. Aesthetic space, the name I would choose to call this space of encounter, knowledge, creation, is the refuge, a shelter, a cabin, isolated high in the mountains) of the other. In it, poet and reader alike can engage with the other. Aesthetic space is created to enable such access.

If we return to the aesthetic space bodied forth in the poems seen above, we can see how alive it is, how truly endowed with a creative tension that only occurs in our encounter with the work itself, and as it is set up by the poet. As with Reverdy and Supervielle, in the beginning is movement, the movements which open Michaux's book *Face aux Verrous*, and with movement the body translates itself into images into a corporeal poetic/aesthetic space. With the poetic gesture, the cut hands of Reverdy, the scattered bones of Supervielle, the myriad shapes of Michaux have found a new body. It is, perhaps, this body which is described in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*: "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system" (203). The perceptual horizon of the body would be constitutive of poetic space: it is not sufficient but it is necessary. This poetic body, which Supervielle called a Tragic Body, engenders poetic space and makes it a space of knowledge. This space is gaping. Sexually gaping as Luce Irigaray would say. The term "inwardly" still seems to determine such a knowledge. This "inwardly" describes a falling horizon which also recalls Baudelaire's *Le Voyage* "to plunge to the bottom of the chasm, Hell or Heaven, what does it matter? to the depths of the Unknown to find something new" (in Rees 168). For Michaux, too, "the means themselves already are paradises" an ironic line from a poet who wrote in *Connaissance par les gouffres* that "We are not a century of paradises"

(9). But as Michaux reminds us, this "Knowledge through the Chasms" -- through darkness -- finds poetic space and is founded by it, insofar as it is not a method or a pursued object. Poetic space might be gaping and threatening, but it is this dangerous tension which makes it a neutral place where encounters can happen, between the two infinite extremities of the Passage, the infinite poetic lines which recede in the distance but never fuse. In poetic space, knowledge speaks in riddles: "Une ligne rencontre une ligne ... Une ligne pour le plaisir d'être une ligne, d'aller, ligne. Points. Poudre de points. Une ligne rêve. On n'avait jusque-là jamais laissé rêver une ligne ... Une ligne attend. Une ligne espère. Une ligne repense un visage ... je m'arrête. Paul Klee ne devait pas aimer qu'on déraile ... Pour entrer dans ses tableaux ... il suffit d'avoir gardé soi-même la conscience de vivre dans un monde d'énigmes, duquel c'est en énigme qu'il convient le mieux de répondre (115-17) / "a line meets a line ... A line for the pleasure of being a line, of going, line. Dots. Dust of dots. A dream line. Up to now, nobody had ever allowed a line to have dreams. A line awaits. A line hopes. A line thinks again of a face ... I stop there. Paul Klee would not have liked to see anyone go off the rails ... To enter his pictures, it is enough to have remained aware that we live in a world of riddles, to which one should only answer by means of riddles" (my translation).

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