

CTSP, ed. AA

# Gaston Bachelard

1884-1962

Bachelard's remark, "Forces are manifested in poems that do not pass through the circuits of knowledge," epitomizes his point of view. He was interested in "poetic reverie" and wished to develop a criticism that would not "intellectualize" the poetic image; he wanted to be true to the "poetic logos." The ultimately important point is for the poetic image to invade the reader without the mediation of rational inquiry or any sort of analysis. It would appear that in order to keep this intersubjectivity alive, the critic must make a poem of his criticism, else the chain of imagery is broken and the whole matter falls into intellectualization and analysis. Once reason was thought to lift man from the slavery of ignorance and passion, but for Bachelard the poetic image in its primitiveness releases man into freedom from rational law. According to Bachelard, both psychology and psychoanalysis *translate* the poetic image and *intellectualize* it, thus destroying its power. The reader must take the image "in its being"; by doing so he becomes one with it, is invaded by it, and invades it in turn.

Bachelard's affinities are with the phenomenological critics of France and Switzerland. His influence on younger critics of the Geneva School, especially Jean-Pierre Richard, has been profound.

Works of Bachelard available in English are *The Poetics of Space* (tr. 1964), *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (tr. 1964), *The Philosophy of No* (tr. 1968), *The Poetics of Reverie* (tr. 1969), *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie* (tr. 1971), *The Right to Dream* (tr. 1971), and *The New Scientific Spirit* (tr. 1984). See Mary Ann Caws, *Surrealism and Imagination* (1966); Dominique Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology* (tr. 1975); Roch C. Smith, *Gaston Bachelard* (1982); and Mary Teles, *Bachelard, Science and Objectivity* (1984).

## The Poetics of Space

From

### Introduction

#### I

A philosopher who has evolved his entire thinking from the fundamental themes of the philosophy of science, and fol-

lowed the main line of the active, growing rationalism of contemporary science as closely as he could, must forget his learning and break with all his habits of philosophical research, if he wants to study the problems posed by the poetic imagination. For here the cultural past doesn't count. The long day-in, day-out effort of putting together and constructing his thoughts is ineffectual. One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears: if there be a philosophy of poetry, it must appear and reappear through a significant verse, in total adherence to an isolated image; to be exact, in the very ecstasy of the newness of the image. The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche, the lesser psychological causes of which have not been sufficiently investigated. Nor can anything general and coordinated serve as a basis for a philosophy of poetry. The

THE POETICS OF SPACE. Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* was first published in 1958. The text is from *The Poetics of Space* translated by Maria Jolas. Copyright © 1958 by Presses Universitaires de France, translation © 1964 by The Orion Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc.

idea of principle or "basis" in this case would be disastrous, for it would interfere with the essential psychic actuality, the essential novelty of the poem. And whereas philosophical reflection applied to scientific thinking elaborated over a long period of time requires any new idea to become integrated in a body of tested ideas, even though this body of ideas be subjected to profound change by the new idea (as is the case in all the revolutions of contemporary science), the philosophy of poetry must acknowledge that the poetic act has no past, at least no recent past, in which its preparation and appearance could be followed.

Later, when I shall have occasion to mention the relation of a new poetic image to an archetype lying dormant in the depths of the unconscious, I shall have to make it understood that this relation is not, properly speaking, a *causal* one. The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away. Because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct *ontology*. This ontology is what I plan to study.

Very often, then, it is in the opposite of causality, that is, in *reverberation*, which has been so subtly analyzed by Minkowski,<sup>1</sup> that I think we find the real measure of the being of a poetic image. In this reverberation, the poetic image will have a sonority of being. The poet speaks on the threshold of being. Therefore, in order to determine the being of an image, we shall have to experience its reverberation in the manner of Minkowski's phenomenology.

To say that the poetic image is independent of causality is to make a rather serious statement. But the causes cited by psychologists and psychoanalysts can never really explain the wholly unexpected nature of the new image, any more than they can explain the attraction it holds for a mind that is foreign to the process of its creation. The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, and yet his image immediately takes root in me. The communicability of an unusual image is a fact of great ontological significance. We shall return to this question of communion through brief, isolated, rapid actions. Images excite us—afterwards—but they are not the phenomena of an excitement. In all psychological research, we can, of course, bear in mind psychoanalytical methods for determining the personality of a poet, and thus find a measure of the pressures—but above all of the oppressions—that a poet has been subjected to in the course of his life. But the poetic act itself, the sudden image, the flare-up

of being in the imagination, are inaccessible to such investigations. In order to clarify the problem of the poetic image philosophically, we shall have to have recourse to a phenomenology of the imagination. By this should be understood a study of the phenomenon of the poetic image when it emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul and being of man, apprehended in his actuality.

## II

I shall perhaps be asked why, departing from my former point of view, I now seek a phenomenological determination of images. In my earlier works on the subject of the imagination, I did, in fact, consider it preferable to maintain as objective a position as possible with regard to the images of the four material elements, the four principles of the intuitive cosmogonies, and, faithful to my habits as a philosopher of science, I tried to consider images without attempting personal interpretation. Little by little, this method, which has in its favor scientific prudence, seemed to me to be an insufficient basis on which to found a metaphysics of the imagination. The "prudent" attitude itself is a refusal to obey the immediate dynamics of the image. I have come to realize how difficult it is to break away from this "prudence." To say that one has left certain intellectual habits behind is easy enough, but how is it to be achieved? For a rationalist, this constitutes a minor daily crisis, a sort of split in one's thinking which, even though its object be partial—a mere image—has nonetheless great psychic repercussions. However, this minor cultural crisis, this crisis on the simple level of a new image, contains the entire paradox of a phenomenology of the imagination, which is: how can an image, at times very unusual, appear to be a concentration of the entire psyche? How—with no preparation—can this singular, short-lived event constituted by the appearance of an unusual poetic image, react on other minds and in other hearts, despite all the barriers of common sense, all the disciplined schools of thought, content in their immobility?

It seemed to me, then, that this transsubjectivity of the image could not be understood, in its essence, through the habits of subjective reference alone. Only phenomenology—that is to say, consideration of the *onset of the image* in an individual consciousness—can help us to restore the subjectivity of images and to measure their fullness, their strength and their transsubjectivity. These subjectivities and transsubjectivities cannot be determined once and for all, for the poetic image is essentially *variational*, and not, as in the case of the concept, *constitutive*. No doubt, it is an arduous task—as well as a monotonous one—to isolate the transforming action of the poetic imagination in the detail of the variations

of the images. For a reaction that bears the name of a doctrine that bears the name of phenomenology risks falling short of all doctrine, this is asked to consider an image as the substitute for an object. For this, the act of the creation is automatically associated with the consciousness, the poetic image, the duality of suffering, unceasingly acting of the creation of the poetic image, if one dare to say so. As a result, this phenomenon is elementary. In this union of short-lived subjectivity, the image finally reaches its final condition: a field for countless experiments that can be exact because they "have no consequence" thought, which is always simple, has no need of naive consciousness; in language. The poet, in the origin of language. To study the image can be before thought, we should being a phenomenology of the soul. We should then the subject of the *dream*

The language of creation and even more so, psychology of the words soul as somewhat deaf to certain German philosophy, in mind and soul (*der Geist und* philosophy of poetry in vocabulary, it should not such a philosophy, mind by taking them as such, available texts, we distort do the archeologists of the image word. In certain poems image born of our breath.<sup>2</sup> The should arrest the attention. The word *soul* can, in fact

<sup>1</sup>[Bachelard] Cf. Eugène Minkowski, *Vers une cosmologie*, Chapter 9.

<sup>2</sup>[Bachelard] Charles Nodier, *Les saies* (Paris, 1828), p. 46. "If all peoples, are just so many breaths of breathing."

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of the images. For a reader of poems, therefore, an appeal to  
 a doctrine that bears the frequently misunderstood name of  
 phenomenology risks falling on deaf ears. And yet, independ-  
 ent of all doctrine, this appeal is clear: the reader of poems  
 is asked to consider an image not as an object and even less  
 as the substitute for an object, but to seize its specific reality.  
 For this, the act of the creative consciousness must be syste-  
 matically associated with the most fleeting product of that  
 consciousness, the poetic image. At the level of the poetic  
 image, the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shim-  
 mering, unceasingly active in its inversions. In this domain  
 of the creation of the poetic image by the poet, phenomenol-  
 ogy, if one dare to say so, is a microscopic phenomenology.  
 As a result, this phenomenology will probably be strictly ele-  
 mentary. In this union, through the image of a pure but  
 short-lived subjectivity and a reality which will not neces-  
 sarily reach its final constitution, the phenomenologist finds  
 a field for countless experiments; he profits by observations  
 that can be exact because they are simple, because they  
 "have no consequences" as is the case with scientific  
 thought, which is always relaxed thought. The image, in its  
 simplicity, has no need of scholarship. It is the property of a  
 naive consciousness; in its expression, it is youthful lan-  
 guage. The poet, in the novelty of his images, is always the  
 origin of language. To specify exactly what a phenomenol-  
 ogy of the image can be, to specify that the image comes  
*before* thought, we should have to say that poetry, rather than  
 being a phenomenology of the mind, is a phenomenology of  
 the soul. We should then have to collect documentation on  
 the subject of the *dreaming consciousness*.

The language of contemporary French philosophy—  
 and even more so, psychology—hardly uses the dual mean-  
 ing of the words soul and mind. As a result, they are both  
 somewhat deaf to certain themes that are very numerous in  
 German philosophy, in which the distinction between mind  
 and soul (*der Geist und die Seele*) is so clear. But since a  
 philosophy of poetry must be given the entire force of the  
 vocabulary, it should not simplify, not harden anything. For  
 such a philosophy, mind and soul are not synonymous, and  
 by taking them as such, we bar translation of certain inval-  
 uable texts, we distort documents brought to light thanks to  
 the archeologists of the image. The word *soul* is an immortal  
 word. In certain poems it cannot be effaced, for it is a word  
 born of our breath.<sup>2</sup> The vocal importance alone of a word  
 should arrest the attention of a phenomenologist of poetry.  
 The word *soul* can, in fact, be poetically spoken with such

<sup>2</sup>[Bachelard] Charles Nodier, *Dictionnaire raisonné des onomatopées fran-  
 çaises* (Paris, 1828), p. 46. "The different names for the soul, among nearly  
 all peoples, are just so many breath variations, and onomatopoeic expressions  
 of breathing."

conviction that it constitutes a commitment for the entire  
 poem. The poetic register that corresponds to the soul must  
 therefore remain open to our phenomenological inves-  
 tigations.

In the domain of painting, in which realization seems to  
 imply decisions that derive from the mind, and rejoin obli-  
 gations of the world of perception, the phenomenology of  
 the soul can reveal the first commitment of an oeuvre. René  
 Huyghe, in his very fine preface for the exhibition of  
 Georges Rouault's works in Albi, wrote: "If we wanted to  
 find out wherein Rouault explodes definitions . . . we should  
 perhaps have to call upon a word that has become rather out-  
 moded, which is the word *soul*." He goes on to show that in  
 order to understand, to sense and to love Rouault's work, we  
 must "start from the center, at the very heart of the circle  
 from where the whole thing derives its source and meaning;  
 and here we come back again to that forgotten, outcast word,  
 the soul." Indeed, the soul—as Rouault's painting proves—  
 possesses an inner light, the light that an inner vision knows  
 and expresses in the world of brilliant colors, in the world of  
 sunlight, so that a veritable reversal of psychological per-  
 spectives is demanded of those who seek to understand, at  
 the same time that they love Rouault's painting. They must  
 participate in an inner light which is not a reflection of a light  
 from the outside world. No doubt there are many facile  
 claims to the expressions *inner vision* and *inner light*. But  
 here it is a painter speaking, a producer of lights. He knows  
 from what heat source the light comes. He experiences the  
 intimate meaning of the passion for red. At the core of such  
 painting, there is a soul in combat—the fauvism, the wild-  
 ness, is interior. Painting like this is therefore a phenomenon  
 of the soul. The oeuvre must redeem an impassioned soul.

These pages by René Huyghe corroborate my idea that  
 it is reasonable to speak of a phenomenology of the soul. In  
 many circumstances we are obliged to acknowledge that po-  
 etry is a commitment of the soul. A consciousness associated  
 with the soul is more relaxed, less intentionalized than a con-  
 sciousness associated with the phenomena of the mind. Forces  
 are manifested in poems that do not pass through the  
 circuits of knowledge. The dialectics of inspiration and tal-  
 ent become clear if we consider their two poles: the soul and  
 the mind. In my opinion, soul and mind are indispensable for  
 studying the phenomena of the poetic image in their various  
 nuances, above all, for following the evolution of poetic im-  
 ages from the original state of reverie to that of execution. In  
 fact, in a future work, I plan to concentrate particularly on  
 poetic reverie as a phenomenology of the soul. In itself, rev-  
 ery constitutes a psychic condition that is too frequently con-  
 fused with dream. But when it is a question of poetic reverie,  
 of reverie that derives pleasure not only from itself, but also  
 prepares poetic pleasure for the other souls, one realizes that

one is no longer drifting into somnolence. The mind is able to relax, but in poetic reverie the soul keeps watch, with no tension, calmed and active. To compose a finished well-constructed poem, the mind is obliged to make projects that prefigure it. But for a simple poetic image, there is no project; a flicker of the soul is all that is needed.

And this is how a poet poses the phenomenological problem of the soul in all clarity. Pierre-Jean Jouve writes: "Poetry is a soul inaugurating a form."<sup>3</sup> The soul inaugurates. Here it is the supreme power. It is human dignity. Even if the "form" was already well-known, previously discovered, carved from "commonplaces," before the interior poetic light was turned upon it, it was a mere object for the mind. But the soul comes and inaugurates the form, dwells in it, takes pleasure in it. Pierre-Jean Jouve's statement can therefore be taken as a clear maxim of a phenomenology of the soul.

### III

Since a phenomenological inquiry on poetry aspires to go so far and so deep, because of methodological obligations, it must go beyond the sentimental resonances with which we receive (more or less richly—whether this richness be within ourselves or within the poem) a work of art. This is where the phenomenological doublet of resonances and repercussions must be sensitized. The resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence. In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet's being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberations' unity of being. Or, to put it more simply, this is an impression that all impassioned poetry lovers know well: the poem possesses us entirely. This grip that poetry acquires on our very being bears a phenomenological mark that is unmistakable. The exuberance and depth of a poem are always phenomena of the resonance-reverberation doublet. It is as though the poem, through its exuberance, awakened new depths in us. In order to ascertain the psychological action of a poem, we should therefore have to follow the two perspectives of phenomenological analysis, towards the outpourings of the mind and towards the profundities of the soul.

Needless to say, the reverberation, in spite of its derivative name, has a simple phenomenological nature in the domain of poetic imagination. For it involves bringing about a veritable awakening of poetic creation, even in the soul of the reader, through the reverberations of a single poetic image. By its novelty, a poetic image sets in motion the entire linguistic mechanism. The poetic image places us at the origin of the speaking being.

Through this reverberation, by going *immediately* beyond all psychology or psychoanalysis, we feel a poetic power rising naively within us. After the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past. But the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface. And this is also true of a simple experience of reading. The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being.

This last remark defines the level of the ontology towards which I am working. As a general thesis I believe that everything specifically human in man is *logos*. One would not be able to meditate in a zone that preceded language. But even if this thesis appears to reject an ontological depth, it should be granted, at least as a working hypothesis appropriate to the subject of the poetic imagination.

Thus the poetic image, which stems from the *logos*, is personally innovating. We cease to consider it as an "object" but feel that the "objective" critical attitude stifles the "reverberation" and rejects on principle the depth at which the original poetic phenomenon starts. As for the psychologist, being deafened by the resonances, he keeps trying to *describe* his feelings. And the psychoanalyst, victim of his method, inevitably intellectualizes the image, losing the reverberations in his effort to untangle the skein of his interpretations. He understands the image more deeply than the psychologist. But that's just the point, he "understands" it. For the psychoanalyst, the poetic image always has a context. When he interprets it, however, he translates it into a language that is different from the poetic *logos*. Never, in fact, was "*traduttore, traditore*"<sup>4</sup> more justifiably applicable.

When I receive a new poetic image, I experience its quality of intersubjectivity. I know that I am going to repeat

it in order to communicate in transmission from one to another that a poetic image eludes causality, such as psychoanalysis, can hardly be poetic. For nothing prefigures it, in the literary sense, in the psychological sense.

I always come then to the originality of the poetic speaking being's creative imagining consciousness purely, an origin. In a study of the poetic image, I bring out this quality of origin.

By thus limiting my inquiry to the level of the poetic image, proceeding from pure image to the *composition* of the numerous images. Into this phenomenological complex elements with actual literary ideal phenomenology would not be so extensive a project in the phenomenological order that I should like to present. It is a point to be systematic. It seems to me that in reading powers, which must be with the image he has received. Indeed, it would be a lack of personally a reading power of organized, complex its entirety. But there is an ethical phenomenology where, as certain psychoanalysts have shown on the level of detached "reverberating" phenomena.

Precisely this touch of the reader's pride that thrives on the unmistakable mark of the poem with the literary critic noted, judges a work that to believe certain facile to create. A literary critic is by turning inside out like

<sup>3</sup>[Bachelard] Pierre-Jean Jouve, *En miroir* (Mercure de France), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>"To translate is to betray."

it in order to communicate my enthusiasm. When considered in transmission from one soul to another, it becomes evident that a poetic image eludes causality. Doctrines that are timidly causal, such as psychology, or strongly causal, such as psychoanalysis, can hardly determine the ontology of what is poetic. For nothing prepares a poetic image, especially not culture, in the literary sense, and especially not perception, in the psychological sense.

I always come then to the same conclusion: the essential newness of the poetic image poses the problem of the speaking being's creativeness. Through this creativeness the imagining consciousness proves to be, very simply but very purely, an origin. In a study of the imagination, a phenomenology of the poetic imagination must concentrate on bringing out this quality of origin in various poetic images.

#### IV

By thus limiting my inquiry to the poetic image at its origin, proceeding from pure imagination, I leave aside the problem of the *composition* of the poem as a grouping together of numerous images. Into this composition enter certain psychologically complex elements that associate earlier cultures with actual literary ideals—components which a complete phenomenology would no doubt be obliged to consider. But so extensive a project might be prejudicial to the purity of the phenomenological observations, however elementary, that I should like to present. The real phenomenologist must make it a point to be systematically modest. This being the case, it seems to me that merely to refer to phenomenological reading powers, which make of the reader a poet on a level with the image he has read, shows already a taint of pride. Indeed, it would be a lack of modesty on my part to assume personally a reading power that could match and relive the power of organized, complete creation implied by a poem in its entirety. But there is even less hope of attaining to a synthetic phenomenology which would dominate an entire oeuvre, as certain psychoanalysts believe they can do. It is therefore on the level of detached images that I shall succeed in "reverberating" phenomenologically.

Precisely this touch of pride, this lesser pride, this mere reader's pride that thrives in the solitude of reading, bears the unmistakable mark of phenomenology, if its simplicity is maintained. Here the phenomenologist has nothing in common with the literary critic who, as has frequently been noted, judges a work that he could not create and, if we are to believe certain facile condemnations, would not want to create. A literary critic is a reader who is necessarily severe. By turning inside out like a glove an overworked complex

that has become debased to the point of being part of the vocabulary of statesmen, we might say that the literary critic and the professor of rhetoric, who know all and judge all, readily go in for a simplex of superiority. As for me, being an addict of felicitous reading, I only read and reread what I like, with a bit of reader's pride mixed in with much enthusiasm. But whereas pride usually develops into a massive sentiment that weighs upon the entire psyche, the touch of pride that is born of adherence to the felicity of an image, remains secret and unobtrusive. It is within us, mere readers that we are, it is for us, and for us alone. It is a homely sort of pride. Nobody knows that in reading we are reliving our temptations to be a poet. All readers who have a certain passion for reading, nurture and repress, through reading, the desire to become a writer. When the page we have just read is too near perfection, our modesty suppresses this desire. But it reappears, nevertheless. In any case, every reader who rereads a work that he likes, knows that its pages *concern* him. In Jean-Pierre Richard's excellent collection of essays entitled *Poésie et profondeur* (Poetry and Depth), there is one devoted to Baudelaire and one to Verlaine. Emphasis is laid on Baudelaire, however, since, as the author says, his work "concerns us." There is great difference of tone between the two essays. Unlike Baudelaire, Verlaine does not attract complete phenomenological attention. And this is always the case. In certain types of reading with which we are in deep sympathy, in the very expression itself, we are the "beneficiaries." Jean-Paul Richter, in *Titan*, gives the following description of his hero: "He read eulogies of great men with as much pleasure as though he himself had been the object of these panegyrics."<sup>5</sup> In any case, harmony in reading is inseparable from admiration. We can admire more or less, but a sincere impulse, a little impulse toward admiration, is always necessary if we are to receive the phenomenological benefit of a poetic image. The slightest critical consideration arrests this impulse by putting the mind in second position, destroying the primitivity of the imagination. In this admiration, which goes beyond the passivity of contemplative attitudes, the joy of reading appears to be the reflection of the joy of writing, as though the reader were the writer's ghost. At least the reader participates in the joy of creation that, for Bergson, is the sign of creation.<sup>6</sup> Here, creation takes place on the tenuous thread of the sentence, in the fleeting life of an expression. But this poetic expression, although it has no vital necessity, has a bracing effect on our

<sup>5</sup>[Bachelard] Jean-Paul Richter, *Le Titan*. French translation by Philarette-Charles (1878), Vol. I, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>[Bachelard] Henri Bergson, *L'Énergie spirituelle*, p. 23.

lives, for all that. To speak well is part of living well. The poetic image is an emergence from language, it is always a little above the language of signification. By living the poems we read, we have then the salutary experience of emerging. This, no doubt, is emerging at short range. But these acts of emergence are repeated; poetry puts language in a state of emergence, in which life becomes manifest through its vivacity. These linguistic impulses, which stand out from the ordinary rank of pragmatic language, are miniatures of the vital impulse. A micro-Bergsonism that abandoned the thesis of language-as-instrument in favor of the thesis of language-as-reality would find in poetry numerous documents on the intense life of language.

Thus, along with considerations on the life of words, as it appears in the evolution of language across the centuries, the poetic image, as a mathematician would say, presents us with a sort of differential of this evolution. A great verse can have a great influence on the soul of a language. It awakens images that had been effaced, at the same time that it confirms the unforeseeable nature of speech. And if we render speech unforeseeable, is this not an apprenticeship to freedom? What delight the poetic imagination takes in making game of censors! Time was when the poetic arts codified the licenses to be permitted. Contemporary poetry, however, has introduced freedom in the very body of the language. As a result, poetry appears as a phenomenon of freedom.

## V

Even at the level of an isolated poetic image, if only in the progression of expression constituted by the verse, the phenomenological reverberation can appear; and in its extreme simplicity, it gives us mastery of our tongue. Here we are in the presence of a minuscule phenomenon of the shimmering consciousness. The poetic image is certainly the psychic event that has the least importance. To seek justification of it in terms of perceptible reality, to determine its place and role in the poem's composition, are two tasks that do not need to be undertaken until later. In the first phenomenological inquiry of the poetic imagination, the isolated image, the phrase that carries it forward, the verse, or occasionally the stanza in which the poetic image radiates, form *language areas* that should be studied by means of topo-analysis. J. B. Pontalis, for instance, presents Michel Leiris as a "lonely prospector in the galleries of words,"<sup>7</sup> which describes ex-

tremely well this fibered space traversed by the simple impetus of words that have been experienced. The atomism of conceptual language demands reasons for fixation, forces of centralization. But the verse always has a movement, the image flows into the line of the verse, carrying the imagination along with it, as though the imagination created a nerve fiber. Pontalis adds the following (p. 932), which deserves to be remembered as a sure index for a phenomenology of expression: "The speaking subject is the entire subject." And it no longer seems paradoxical to say that the speaking subject exists in his entirety in a poetic image, because unless he abandons himself to it without reservations, he does not enter into the poetic space of the image. Very clearly, the poetic image furnishes one of the simplest experiences of language that has been lived. And if, as I propose to do, it is considered as an origin of consciousness, it points to a phenomenology.

Also, if we had to name a "school" of phenomenology, it would no doubt be in connection with the poetic phenomenon that we should find the clearest, the really elementary, lessons. In a recent book, J. H. Van den Berg writes: "Poets and painters are born phenomenologists."<sup>8</sup> And noting that things "speak" to us and that, as a result of this fact, if we give this language its full value, we have a contact with things, Van den Berg adds: "We are continually living a solution of problems that reflection cannot hope to solve." The philosopher whose investigations are centered on the speaking being will find encouragement in these lines by this learned Dutch phenomenologist.

## VI

The phenomenological situation with regard to psychoanalytical investigation will perhaps be more precisely stated if, in connection with poetic images, we are able to isolate a sphere of *pure sublimation*; of a sublimation which sublimates nothing, which is relieved of the burden of passion, and freed from the pressure of desire. By thus giving to the poetic image at its peak an absolute of sublimation, I place heavy stakes on a simple nuance. It seems to me, however, that poetry gives abundant proof of this absolute sublimation, as will be seen frequently in the course of this work. When psychologists and psychoanalysts are furnished this proof, they cease to see anything in the poetic image but a

simple game, a short-lived particular, have no significant standpoint of the psychoanalysis. It does not matter that such images of poetry are there with its through which the creative domain.

For a phenomenologist to an image, when image, is a sign of inveterate let us take the poetic image: consciousness is so wholly on the language, above and speaks with the poetic image between past and present:

The examples I shall mention and sentiment will the poetic image is understood:

This new being is happy in speech, the psychoanalyst's mirror him, is nothing but a flight. And right away, the biological investigation of man. He sees and points explains the flower by the

The phenomenologist image is there, the word to him. There is no need sufferings in order to see the poet—a felicity that in poetry towers above unhappy soul. For it is a of its own, however great to illustrate.

Pure sublimation, a method for, needless to regard the deep psychological sublimation that have been analysis. His task is that to images which have not does not prepare, but which has not been lived, and language. There exist a few Pierre-Jean Jouve, in which found. Indeed, I know of on psychoanalytical method ever, here and there, his

<sup>7</sup>[Bachelard] J. B. Pontalis, *Michel Leiris ou la psychanalyse indéterminable* in *Les Temps modernes* (December 1955), p. 931.

<sup>8</sup>[Bachelard] J. H. Van den Berg, *The Phenomenological Approach in Psychology*. An introduction to recent phenomenological psychopathology (Charles C Thomas, Publisher, Springfield, Illinois, 1955, p. 61).



rsed by the simple im-  
 enced. The atomism of  
 is for fixation, forces of  
 has a movement, the  
 , carrying the imagina-  
 gination created a nerve  
 932), which deserves to  
 phenomenology of ex-  
 ne entire subject." And  
 / that the speaking sub-  
 image, because unless  
 servations, he does not  
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 implest experiences of  
 as I propose to do, it is  
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ol" of phenomenology,  
 with the poetic phenom-  
 t, the really elementary,  
 len Berg writes: "Poets  
 gists."<sup>8</sup> And noting that  
 result of this fact, if we  
 ve have a contact with  
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h regard to psychoana-  
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 chological psychopathology  
 ino, 1955, p. 61).

simple game, a short-lived, totally vain game. Images, in particular, have no significance for them—neither from the standpoint of the passions, nor from that of psychology or psychoanalysis. It does not occur to them that the significance of such images is precisely a poetic significance. But poetry is there with its countless surging images, images through which the creative imagination comes to live in its own domain.

For a phenomenologist, the attempt to attribute antecedents to an image, when we are in the very existence of the image, is a sign of inveterate psychologism. On the contrary, let us take the poetic image in its being. For the poetic consciousness is so wholly absorbed by the image that appears on the language, above customary language; the language it speaks with the poetic image is so new that correlations between past and present can no longer be usefully considered.

The examples I shall give of breaks in significance, sensation and sentiment will oblige the reader to grant me that the poetic image is under the sign of a new being.

This new being is happy man.

Happy in speech, therefore unhappy in reality, will be the psychoanalyst's immediate objection. Sublimation, for him, is nothing but a vertical compensation, a flight upwards, exactly in the same way that compensation is a lateral flight. And right away, the psychoanalyst will abandon ontological investigation of the image, to dig into the past of man. He sees and points out the poet's secret sufferings. He explains the flower by the fertilizer.

The phenomenologist does not go that far. For him, the image is there, the word speaks, the word of the poet speaks to him. There is no need to have lived through the poet's sufferings in order to seize the felicity of speech offered by the poet—a felicity that dominates tragedy itself. Sublimation in poetry towers above the psychology of the mundanely unhappy soul. For it is a fact that poetry possesses a felicity of its own, however great the tragedy it may be called upon to illustrate.

Pure sublimation, as I see it, poses a serious problem of method for, needless to say, the phenomenologist cannot disregard the deep psychological reality of the processes of sublimation that have been so lengthily examined by psychoanalysis. His task is that of proceeding phenomenologically to images which have not been experienced, and which life does not prepare, but which the poet creates; of living what has not been lived, and being receptive to an overture of language. There exist a few poems, such as certain poems by Pierre-Jean Jouve, in which experiences of this kind may be found. Indeed, I know of no oeuvre that has been nourished on psychoanalytical meditation more than Jouve's. However, here and there, his poetry passes through flames of such

intensity that we no longer need live at its original source. He himself has said: "Poetry constantly surpasses its origins, and because it suffers more deeply in ecstasy or in sorrow, it retains greater freedom."<sup>9</sup> Again, on page 112: "The further I advanced in time, the more the plunge was controlled, removed from the contributory cause, directed toward the pure form of language." I cannot say whether or not Pierre-Jean Jouve would agree to consider the causes divulged by psychoanalysis as "contributory." But in the region of "the pure form of language" the psychoanalyst's causes do not allow us to predict the poetic image in its newness. They are, at the very most, opportunities for liberation. And in the poetic age in which we live, it is in this that poetry is specifically "surprising." Its images are therefore unpredictable. Most literary critics are insufficiently aware of this unpredictability, which is precisely what upsets the plans of the usual psychological explanations. But the poet states clearly: "Poetry, especially in its present endeavors, (can) only correspond to attentive thought that is enamored of something unknown, and essentially receptive to becoming." Later, on page 170: "Consequently, a new definition of a poet is in view, which is: he who knows, that is to say, who transcends, and names what he knows." Lastly, (p. 10): "There is no poetry without absolute creation."

Such poetry is rare.<sup>10</sup> The great mass of poetry is more mixed with passion, more psychologized. Here, however, rarity and exception do not confirm the rule, but contradict it and set up a new regime. Without the region of absolute sublimation—however restrained and elevated it may be, and even though it may seem to lie beyond the reach of psychologists or psychoanalysts, who, after all, have no reason to examine pure poetry—poetry's exact polarity cannot be revealed.

We may hesitate in determining the exact level of disruption, we may also remain for a long time in the domain of the confusing passions that *perturb* poetry. Moreover, the height at which we encounter pure sublimation is doubtless not the same for all souls. But at least the necessity of separating a sublimation examined by a psychoanalyst from one examined by a phenomenologist of poetry is a necessity of method. A psychoanalyst can of course study the human character of poets but, as a result of his own sojourn in the region of the passions, he is not prepared to study poetic images in their exalting reality. C. G. Jung said this, in fact,

<sup>8</sup>[Bachelard] Pierre-Jean Jouve, *En miroir* (Mercure de France), p. 109. Andrée Chédid has also written: "A poem remains free. We shall never enclose its fate in our own." The poet knows well that "his breath will carry him farther than his desire." (*Terre et poésie*, G. L.M. §§ 14 and 25.)

<sup>10</sup>[Bachelard] Pierre-Jean Jouve, *loc. cit.*, p. 9: "La poésie est rare."

very clearly: by persisting in the habits of judgment inherent in psychoanalysis,

interest is diverted from the work of art and loses itself in the inextricable chaos of psychological antecedents; the poet becomes a "clinical case," an example, to which is given a certain number in the *psychopathia sexualis*. Thus the psychoanalysis of a work of art moves away from its object and carries the discussion into a domain of general human interest, which is not in the least peculiar to the artist and, particularly, has no importance for his art.<sup>11</sup>

Merely with a view to summarizing this discussion, I should like to make a polemical remark, although indulging in polemics is not one of my habits.

A Roman said to a shoemaker who had directed his gaze too high: "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*."<sup>12</sup>

Every time there is a question of pure sublimation, when the very being of poetry must be determined, shouldn't the phenomenologist say to the psychoanalyst: "*Ne psu chor ultra uterum*."<sup>13</sup>

## VII

In other words, as soon as an art has become autonomous, it makes a fresh start. It is therefore salient to consider this start as a sort of phenomenology. On principle, phenomenology liquidates the past and confronts what is new. Even in an art like painting, which bears witness to a skill, the important successes take place independently of skill. In a study of the painting of Charles Lapicque, by Jean Lescure, we read:

Although his work gives evidence of wide culture and knowledge of all the dynamic expressions of space, they are not applied, they are not made into recipes. . . . Knowing must therefore be accompanied by an equal capacity to forget knowing. Nonknowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult transcendence of knowledge. This is the price that must be paid for an oeuvre to be, at all times, a sort of pure beginning, which makes its creation an exercise in freedom.<sup>14</sup>

These lines are of essential importance for us, in that they may be transposed immediately into a phenomenology of the poetic. In poetry, nonknowing is a primal condition; if there exists a skill in the writing of poetry, it is in the minor task of associating images. But the entire life of the image is in its dazzling splendor, in the fact that an image is a transcending of all the premises of sensibility.

It becomes evident, then, that a man's work stands out from life to such an extent that life cannot explain it. Jean Lescure says of the painter (*loc. cit.*, p. 132): "Lapicque demands of the creative act that it should offer him as much surprise as life itself." Art, then, is an increase of life, a sort of competition of surprises that stimulates our consciousness and keeps it from becoming somnolent. In a quotation of Lapicque himself (given by Lescure, p. 132) we read:

If, for instance, I want to paint horses taking the water hurdle at the Auteuil racecourse, I expect my painting to give me as much that is unexpected, although of another kind, as the actual race I witnessed gave me. Not for a second can there be any question of reproducing exactly a spectacle that is already in the past. But I have to relive it entirely, in a manner that is new and, this time, from the standpoint of painting. By doing this, I create for myself the possibility of a fresh impact.

And Lescure concludes: "An artist does not create the way he lives, he lives the way he creates."

Thus, contemporary painters no longer consider the image as a simple substitute for a perceptible reality. Proust said already of roses painted by Elstir that they were "a new variety with which this painter, like some clever horticulturist, had enriched the rose family."<sup>15</sup>

## VIII

Academic psychology hardly deals with the subject of the poetic image, which is often mistaken for simple metaphor. Generally, in fact, the word *image*, in the works of psychologists, is surrounded with confusion: we see images, we reproduce images, we retain images in our memory. The image is everything except a direct product of the imagination. In Bergson's *Matière et mémoire (Matter and Memory)*, in

which the image concept one reference (on p. 198) production remains, there has no relation to the great philosophy. In this short the "play of fantasy" a from it as "so many liberties." But these liberties: being; they do not add to of its utilitarian role. The deed, the imagination has lectures. In this domain well this side of Proust. Its nature do not really desig

I propose, on the one as a major power of hum ing to be gained by sayin of producing images. But tue of putting an end memories.

By the swiftness of rates us from the past a future. To the *function c* past, as it is defined by added a *function of unre* tried to show in certain c

<sup>11</sup>On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry, p. 785

<sup>12</sup>"Let the cobbler stick to his last."

<sup>13</sup>"Let the psychiatrist stick to his womb."

<sup>14</sup>[Bachelard] Jean Lescure, *Lapicque* (Galanis, Paris), p. 78.

<sup>15</sup>[Bachelard] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. V; *Sodom and Gomorrah*.



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of Things Past, Vol. V; Sodom

which the image concept is very widely treated, there is only one reference (on p. 198) to the *productive* imagination. This production remains, therefore, an act of lesser freedom, that has no relation to the great free acts stressed by Bergsonian philosophy. In this short passage, the philosopher refers to the "play of fantasy" and the various images that derive from it as "so many liberties that the mind takes with nature." But these liberties, in the plural, do not commit our being; they do not add to the language nor do they take it out of its utilitarian role. They really are so much "play." Indeed, the imagination hardly lends iridescence to our recollections. In this domain of poeticized memory, Bergson is well this side of Proust. The liberties that the mind takes with nature do not really designate the nature of the mind.

I propose, on the contrary, to consider the imagination as a major power of human nature. To be sure, there is nothing to be gained by saying that the imagination is the faculty of producing images. But this tautology has at least the virtue of putting an end to comparisons of images with memories.

By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future. To the *function of reality*, wise in experience of the past, as it is defined by traditional psychology, should be added a *function of unreality*, which is equally positive, as I tried to show in certain of my earlier works. Any weakness

in the function of unreality will hamper the productive psyche. If we cannot imagine, we cannot foresee.

But to touch more simply upon the problems of the poetic imagination, it is impossible to receive the psychic benefit of poetry unless these two functions of the human psyche—the function of the real and the function of the unreal—are made to cooperate. We are offered a veritable cure of rhythm-analysis through the poem, which interweaves real and unreal, and gives dynamism to language by means of the dual activity of signification and poetry. And in poetry, the commitment of the imagining being is such that it is no longer merely the subject of the verb *to adapt oneself*. Actual conditions are no longer determinant. With poetry, the imagination takes its place on the margin, exactly where the function of unreality comes to charm or to disturb—always to awaken—the sleeping being lost in its automatisms. The most insidious of these automatisms, the automatism of language, ceases to function when we enter into the domain of pure sublimation. Seen from this height of pure sublimation, reproductive imagination ceases to be of much importance. To quote Jean-Paul Richter: "Reproductive imagination is the prose of productive imagination."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>[Bachelard] Jean-Paul Richter, *Poétique ou introduction à l'esthétique*, translated (1862), Vol. I, p. 145.