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GEORGES PEREC

Species of Spaces  
and Other Pieces

*Edited and translated by* JOHN STURROCK

PENGUIN BOOKS

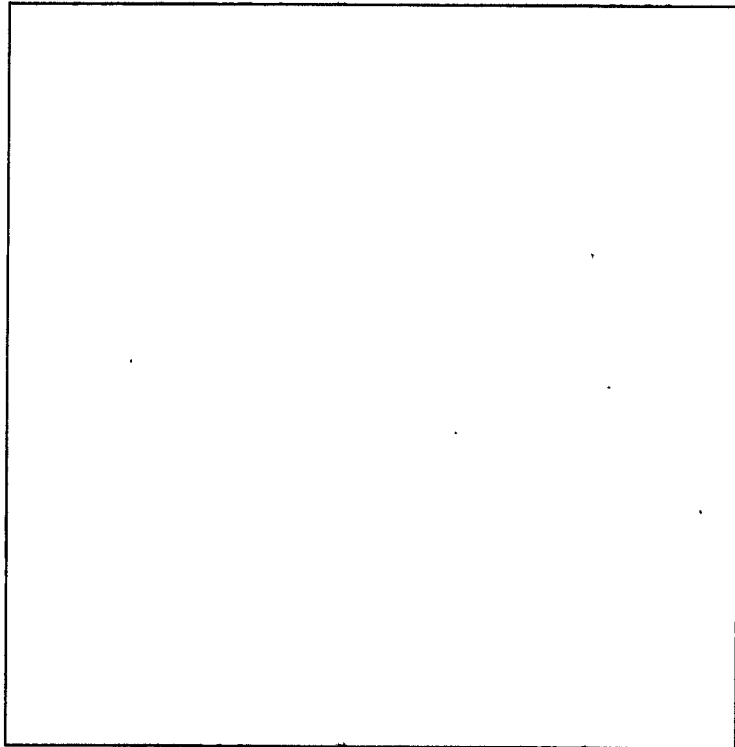


Figure 1: Map of the Ocean  
(taken from Lewis Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark*)

SPACE  
OPEN SPACE  
ENCLOSED SPACE  
OUTER SPACE  
SPACE SUIT  
SPACE AGE  
LIVING SPACE  
PROJECTIVE SPACE  
SPACE CAPSULE  
LACK OF SPACE  
SPACE BAND  
SPACE HEATER  
DEEP SPACE  
SPACE ODYSSEY  
SPACE SALESMAN  
EUCLIDEAN SPACE  
SPACE CADET  
SPACE STATION  
BLANK SPACE  
SPACE OUT  
PARKING SPACE  
SPACE INVADERS  
SPACE WALK  
SPACE TIME CONTINUUM  
SPACE BAR  
LOST IN SPACE  
STARING INTO SPACE  
WATCH THIS SPACE  
SPACE CURVE  
SPACE LATTICE  
SPACE OPERA  
CATCHER SPACE  
SPACE SICKNESS  
BUNCHER SPACE  
THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE  
HAIR SPACE  
SPACE RACE  
NULL SPACE

LEAVE A SPACE  
SPACE OF A MOMENT  
INTERCOSTAL SPACE  
AVAILABLE SPACE  
SPACE NEEDLE  
POSITION IN SPACE  
EDGES OF SPACE  
SPACE WRITER  
WIDE OPEN SPACES  
LACK OF SPACE  
SPACE SAVING  
ENCLOSED SPACE  
SPACE FILLER  
WASTED SPACE

## Foreword

The subject of this book is not the void exactly, but rather what there is round about or inside it (cf Fig. 1). To start with, then, there isn't very much: nothingness, the impalpable, the virtually immaterial; extension, the external, what is external to us, what we move about in the midst of, our ambient milieu, the space around us.

Space. Not so much those infinite spaces, whose mutism is so prolonged that it ends by triggering off something akin to fear, nor the already almost domesticated interplanetary, intersidereal or intergalactic spaces, but spaces that are much closer to hand, in principle anyway: towns, for example, or the countryside, or the corridors of the Paris Métro, or a public park.

We live in space, in these spaces, these towns, this countryside, these corridors, these parks. That seems obvious to us. Perhaps indeed it should be obvious. But it isn't obvious, not just a matter of course. It's real, obviously, and as a consequence most likely rational. We can touch: We can even allow ourselves to dream. There's nothing, for example, to stop us from imagining things that are neither towns nor countryside (nor suburbs), or Métro corridors that are at the same time public parks. Nor anything to forbid us imagining a Métro in the heart of the countryside [*campagne*] (I've even before now seen an advertisement to that effect, but it was — how shall I put it? — a publicity campaign [*campagne*]).

What's certain, in any case, is that at a time too remote no doubt for any of us to have retained anything like a precise memory of it, there was none of all this: neither corridors, nor parks, nor towns, nor countryside. The problem isn't so much to find out how we have reached this point, but simply to recognize that we have reached it, that we are here. There isn't one space, a beautiful space, a beautiful space round about, a beautiful space all around

us, there's a whole lot of small bits of space, and one of these bits is a Métro corridor, and another of them is a public park. Another — and here we suddenly enter into much more particularized spaces — originally quite modest in size, has attained fairly colossal dimensions and has become Paris, whereas a space near by, not necessarily any less well endowed to begin with, has been content to remain Pontoise. Still another space, much larger and vaguely hexagonal, has been surrounded by a broad dotted line (innumerable events, some of them particularly weighty, had as their sole purpose the tracing out of this dotted line) and it has been decided that everything found *inside* this dotted line should be coloured violet and be called France, while everything found *outside* this dotted line should be in a different colour (although, outside the aforesaid hexagon, they weren't in the least anxious to be of a uniform colour: one bit of space wanted its colour and another bit its, whence the famous problem in topology of the four colours, unresolved to this day) and have a different name (in point of fact and for quite a few years, there was a strong insistence on colouring violet — and thereby calling France — bits of space that didn't belong to the aforesaid hexagon, but were often far distant from it, but, generally speaking, that didn't last half so well).

In short, spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself.

or, if you prefer:

#### ACT ONE

A voice (off):

To the North, nothing.

To the South, nothing.

To the East, nothing.

To the West, nothing.

In the centre, nothing.

The curtain falls. End of Act One.

#### ACT TWO

A voice (off):

To the North, nothing.

To the South, nothing.

To the East, nothing.

To the West, nothing.

In the centre, a tent.

The curtain falls. End of Act Two.

#### ACT THREE AND LAST

A voice (off):

To the North, nothing.

To the South, nothing.

To the East, nothing.

To the West, nothing.

In the centre, a tent,

and,

in front of the tent,

an orderly busy polishing a pair  
of boots

with 'LION NOIR' boot polish!

The curtain falls. End of Act Three and Last.

(Author unknown. Learnt around 1947, recalled in 1973.)

Or again:

*In Paris, there is a street;  
in that street, there is a house;  
in that house, there is a staircase;  
on that staircase, there is a room;  
in that room, there is a table;  
on that table, there is a cloth;  
on that cloth, there is a cage;  
in that cage, there is a nest;  
in that nest, there is an egg;  
in that egg, there is a bird.*

*The bird knocked the egg over;  
the egg knocked the nest over;  
the nest knocked the cage over;  
the cage knocked the cloth over;  
the cloth knocked the table over;  
the table knocked the room over;  
the room knocked the staircase over;  
the staircase knocked the house over;  
the house knocked the street over;  
the street knocked the town of Paris over.*

Children's song from Les Deux-Sèvres  
(Paul Eluard, *Poésie involontaire  
et poésie intentionnelle*)

## *The Page*

'I write in order to peruse myself'

Henri Michaux

1

I write . . .

I write: I write . . .

I write: 'I write . . .'

I write that I write . . .

etc.

I write: I trace words on a page.

Letter by letter, a text forms, affirms itself, is confirmed, is frozen,  
is fixed:

a fairly strictly h

o  
r  
i  
z  
o  
n  
t  
a  
l

line is set down on the blank sheet of  
paper, blackens the virgin space, gives it a direction, vectorizes it:  
from left to right

f  
r  
o  
m

t  
o  
p  
t  
o  
b  
o  
t  
t  
o  
m

Before, there was nothing, or almost nothing; afterwards, there isn't much, a few signs, but which are enough for there to be a top and a bottom, a beginning and an end, a right and a left, a recto and a verso.

## 2

The space of a sheet of paper (regulation international size, as used in Government departments, on sale at all stationers) measures 623.7 sq. cm. You have to write a little over sixteen pages to take up one square metre. Assuming the average format of a book to be 21 by 29.7 cm, you could, if you were to pull apart all the printed books kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale and spread the pages carefully out one beside the other, cover the whole, either of the island of St Helena or of Lake Trasimeno.

You could also work out the number of hectares of forest that have had to be felled in order to produce the paper needed to print the works of Alexandre Dumas (*père*), who, it will be remembered, had a tower built each stone of which had the title of one of his books engraved on it.

## 3

I write: I inhabit my sheet of paper, I invest it, I travel across it.

I incite *blanks, spaces* (jumps in the meaning: discontinuities, transitions, changes of key).

I write  
in the  
margin

I start a new  
paragraph. I refer to a footnote<sup>1</sup>

I go to a new sheet of paper.

1. I am very fond of footnotes at the bottom of the page, even if I don't have anything in particular to clarify there.

## 4

There are few events which don't leave a written trace at least. At one time or another, almost everything passes through a sheet of paper, the page of a notebook, or of a diary, or some other chance support (a Métro ticket, the margin of a newspaper, a cigarette packet, the back of an envelope etc.) on which, at varying speeds and by a different technique depending on the place, time or mood, one or another of the miscellaneous elements that comprise the everydayness of life comes to be inscribed. Where I'm concerned (but I'm no doubt too choice an example, writing being in fact one of my principal activities), this goes from an address caught in passing, an appointment noted down in haste, or the writing-out of a cheque, an envelope or a package, to the laborious drafting of an official letter, the tedious filling-in of a form (tax return, sickness note, direct debit for gas and electricity bills, subscription form, contract, lease, endorsement, receipt etc.), to a list of urgently needed supplies (coffee, sugar, cat litter, Baudrillard book, 75-watt bulb, batteries, underwear etc.), from the sometimes rather tricky solution to a Robert Scipion crossword to the fair copy of a finally completed text, from notes taken at some lecture or other to the instant scribbling-down of some device that may come in useful (verbal play, verbal ploy, play on letters, or what's commonly known as an 'idea'), from a piece of literary 'work' (writing, yes, sitting down at the table and writing, sitting at the typewriter and writing, writing right through the day, or right through the night, roughing out a plan, putting down capital *Is* and small *as*, drawing sketches, putting one word next to another, looking in a dictionary, recopying, rereading, crossing-out, throwing away, rewriting, sorting, rediscovering, waiting for it to come, trying to extract something that might resemble a text from something that continues to look like an insubstantial scrawl, getting there, not getting there, smiling (sometimes), etc.) to work full stop (elementary, alimentary): i.e. to ticking, in a journal containing a summary of almost all the others in the field of the life sciences, the titles that may be of interest to the research-

workers whose bibliographical documentation I am supposed to provide, filling in index-cards, assembling references, correcting proofs, etc.

Et cetera.

## 5

This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page. To describe space: to name it, to trace it, like those portolano-makers who saturated the coastlines with the names of harbours, the names of capes, the names of inlets, until in the end the land was only separated from the sea by a continuous ribbon of text. Is the aleph, that place in Borges from which the entire world is visible simultaneously, anything other than an alphabet?

Space as inventory, space as invention. Space begins with that model map in the old editions of the *Petit Larousse Illustré*, which used to represent something like 65 geographical terms in 60 sq. cm., miraculously brought together, deliberately abstract. Here is the desert, with its oasis, its wadi and its salt lake, here are the spring and the stream, the mountain torrent, the canal, the confluence, the river, the estuary, the river-mouth and the delta, here is the sea with its islands, its archipelago, its islets, its reefs, its shoals, its rocks, its offshore bar, and here are the strait, the isthmus and the peninsula, the bight and the narrows, and the gulf and the bay, and the cape and the inlet, and the head, and the promontory, here are the lagoon and the cliff, here are the dunes, here are the beach, and the saltwater lakes, and the marshes, here is the lake, and here are the mountains, the peak, the glacier, the volcano, the spur, the slope, the col, the gorge, here are the plain and the plateau, and the hillside and the hill, here is the town and its anchorage, and its harbour and its lighthouse . . .

Virtual space, a simple pretext for a nomenclature. But you don't even need to close your eyes for the space evoked by these words, a dictionary space only, a paper space, to become alive, to be

populated, to be filled: a long goods train drawn by a steam locomotive passes over a viaduct; barges laden with gravel ply the canals; small sailing boats manoeuvre on the lake; a big liner escorted by tugs enters the anchorage; children play ball on the beach; an Arab wearing a big straw hat trots down the shady paths of the oasis on his donkey . . .

The streets of the town are full of cars. A turbaned housewife is beating a carpet at her window. In small suburban plots, dozens of nurserymen are pruning fruit trees. A detachment of soldiers presents arms as an official wearing a tricolour sash unveils the statue of a general.

There are cows in the pasture, winegrowers in the vineyards, lumberjacks in the forests, climbers roped together in the mountains. A postman on his bicycle pedals laboriously up the hairpin bends of a lane. There are washerwomen beside the river, roadmenders beside the roads, and farmers' wives feeding the hens. Rows of children are coming out in twos into the school yard. A *fin-de-siècle* villa stands all on its own surrounded by tall glass buildings. There are little gingham curtains in the windows, drinkers on the terraces of the cafés, a cat warming itself in the sun, a lady weighed down by parcels hailing a taxi, a sentry mounting guard in front of a public building. There are garbage-collectors filling refuse trucks, decorators putting up scaffolding. There are nannies in the squares, second-hand booksellers along the quays; there's a queue in front of the bakery, one gentleman walking his dog, another reading his newspaper sitting on a bench, another watching workmen demolishing a block of houses. There's a policeman controlling the traffic. There are birds in the trees, sailors on the river, fishermen on the embankment. There's a woman raising the iron shutter of her haberdashery. There are chestnut-vendors, sewer-men, newspaper-sellers. There are people doing their shopping.

Studios readers are reading in the libraries. Teachers are giving their lessons. Students are taking notes. Accountants are lining up

columns of figures. Apprentice pastry cooks are stuffing cream into rows of cream puffs. Pianists are playing their scales. Sitting deep in thought at their tables, writers are forming lines of words.

An idealized scene. Space as reassurance.



## *The Apartment*

1

For two years, I had a very old neighbour. She had lived in the building for seventy years, had been a widow for sixty. In the last years of her life, after she had broken the neck of her femur, she never went further than the landing on her own floor. The concierge, or a young boy from the building, ran her errands. Several times she stopped me on the stairs to ask me what day it was. One day I went to get her a slice of ham. She offered me an apple and invited me in. She lived surrounded by exceedingly gloomy furniture that she spent her time rubbing.

2

A few years ago, one of my friends had the idea of living for a whole month in an international airport, without ever leaving it (unless, all international airports being by definition identical, to catch a plane that would have taken him to another international airport). To my knowledge, he has never realized this project, but it's hard to see what, objectively, there might be to prevent him. The activities essential to life, and most social activities, can be carried out without difficulty within the confines of an international airport: there are deep armchairs and bench seats that aren't too uncomfortable, and often restrooms even, in which passengers in transit can take a nap. You've got toilets, baths and showers, and often saunas and Turkish baths. You've got hairdressers, pedicurists, nurses, masseurs and physiotherapists, bootblacks, dry cleaners who are equally happy to mend heels and make duplicate keys, watchmakers and opticians. You've got restaurants, bars and cafeterias, leather shops and perfumeries,

florists, bookshops, record shops, tobacconists and sweet shops, shops selling pens and photographers. You've got food shops, cinemas, a post office, flying secretarial services and, naturally, a whole host of banks (since it's practically impossible, in this day and age, to live without having dealings with a bank).

The interest of such an undertaking would lie above all in its exoticism: a displacement, more apparent than real, of our habits and rhythms, and minor problems of adaptation. It would quite soon become tedious no doubt. All told, it would be too easy and, as a consequence, not very testing. Seen in this light, an airport is no more than a sort of shopping mall, a simulated urban neighbourhood. Give or take a few things, it offers the same benefits as a hotel. So we could hardly draw any practical conclusion from such an undertaking, by way of either subversion or acclimatization. At most, we might use it as the subject-matter for a piece of reportage, or as the point of departure for an umpteenth comic screenplay.

3

A bedroom is a room in which there is a bed; a dining-room is a room in which there are a table and chairs, and often a sideboard; a sitting-room is a room in which there are armchairs and a couch; a kitchen is a room in which there is a cooker and a water inlet; a bathroom is a room in which there is a water inlet above a bathtub; when there is only a shower, it is known as a shower-room; when there is only a wash-basin it is known as a cloakroom; an entrance-hall is a room in which at least one of the doors leads outside the apartment; in addition, you may find a coat-rack in there; a child's bedroom is a room into which you put a child; a broom closet is a room into which you put brooms and the vacuum cleaner; a maid's bedroom is a room that you let to a student.

From this list, which might easily be extended, two elementary conclusions may be drawn that I offer by way of definitions:

1. Every apartment consists of a variable, but finite, number of rooms.
2. Each room has a particular function.

It would seem difficult, or rather it would seem derisory, to question these self-evident facts. Apartments are built by architects who have very precise ideas of what an entrance-hall, a sitting-room (living-room, reception room), a parents' bedroom, a child's room, a maid's room, a box-room, a kitchen, and a bathroom ought to be like. To start with, however, all rooms are alike, more or less, and it is no good their trying to impress us with stuff about modules and other nonsense; they're never anything more than a sort of cube, or let's say rectangular parallelepiped. They always have at least one door and also, quite often, a window. They're heated, let's say by a radiator, and fitted with one or two power points (very rarely more, but if I start in on the niggardliness of building contractors, I shall never stop). In sum, a room is a fairly malleable space.

I don't know, and don't want to know, where functionality begins or ends. It seems to me, in any case, that in the ideal dividing-up of today's apartments functionality functions in accordance with a procedure that is unequivocal, sequential and nycthemeral.<sup>1</sup> The activities of the day correspond to slices of time, and to each slice of time there corresponds one room of the apartment. The following model is hardly a caricature:

07.00	The mother gets up and goes to get breakfast in the	KITCHEN
07.15	The child gets up and goes into the	BATHROOM
07.30	The father gets up and goes into the	BATHROOM
07.45	The father and the child, have their breakfast in the	KITCHEN
08.00	The child takes his coat from the	ENTRANCE-HALL

1. This is the best phrase in the whole book!

	and goes off to school	
08.15	The father takes his coat from the	ENTRANCE-HALL
	and goes off to his office	
08.30	The mother performs her toilet in the	BATHROOM
08.45	The mother takes the vacuum cleaner from the and does the housework (she then goes through all the rooms of the apartment but I forbear from listing them)	BROOM CLOSET
09.30	The mother fetches her shopping basket from the and her coat from the and goes to do the shopping	KITCHEN ENTRANCE-HALL
10.30	The mother returns from shopping and puts her coat back in the	ENTRANCE-HALL
10.45	The mother prepares lunch in the	KITCHEN
12.15	The father returns from the office and hangs his coat up in the	ENTRANCE-HALL
12.30	The father and the mother have lunch in the (the child is a day boarder)	DINING-ROOM
13.15	The father takes his coat from the and leaves again for his office	ENTRANCE-HALL
13.30	The mother does the dishes in the	KITCHEN
14.00	The mother takes her coat from the and goes out for a walk or	ENTRANCE-HALL