

## THE SPACE OF LITERATURE (1955)

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trans. Ann Smock

### The Outside, the Night

In the night, everything has disappeared. This is the first night. Here absence approaches -- silence, repose, night. Here death blots out Alexander's picture; here the sleeper does not know he sleeps, and he who dies goes to meet real dying. Here language completes and fulfills itself in the silent profundity which vouches for it as its meaning.

But when everything has disappeared in the night, "everything has disappeared" appears. This is the *other* night. Night is this apparition: "everything has disappeared." It is what we sense when dreams replace sleep, when the dead pass into the deep of the night, when night's deep appears in those who have disappeared. Apparitions, phantoms, and dreams are an allusion to this empty night. It is the night of Young, where the dark does not seem dark enough, or death ever dead enough. What appears in the night is the night that appears. And this eeriness does not simply come from something invisible, which would reveal itself under cover of dark and at the shadows' summons. Here the invisible is what one cannot cease to see; it is the incessant making itself seen. The "phantom" is meant to hide, to appease the phantom night. Those who think they see ghosts are those who do not want to see the night. They crowd it with the terror of little images, they occupy and distract it by immobilizing it -- stopping the oscillation of eternal starting over. It is empty, it is not; but we dress it up as a kind of being; we enclose it, if possible, in a name, a story and a resemblance; we say, like Rilke at Duino, "It is Raimondine and Polyxène."

The first night is welcoming. Novalis addresses hymns to it. Of it one can say, *in* the night, as if it had an intimacy. We enter into the night and we rest there, sleeping and dying. [...]

*In* the night one can die; we reach oblivion. But this *other* night is the death no one dies, the forgetfulness which gets forgotten. In the heart of oblivion it is memory without rest.

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### The Dream

Night, the essence of night, does not let us sleep. In the night no refuge is to be found in sleep. And if you fail sleep, exhaustion finally sickens you, and this sickness prevents sleeping; it is expressed by insomnia, by the impossibility of making sleep a free zone, a clear and true resolution. In the night one cannot sleep.

One does not proceed from day to night. Whoever follows this route finds only sleep -- sleep which ends the day but in order to make the next day possible; sleep which is the downward bending that verifies the rising curve; sleep which is, granted, a lack, a silence, but one imbued with intentions and through which duties, goals, and real action speak for us. In this sense the dream is closer than sleep to the nocturnal region. If day survives itself in the night, if it exceeds its term, if it becomes that which cannot be interrupted, then already it is no longer the day. It is the uninterrupted and the incessant. Notwithstanding events that seem to belong to time, and even though it is peopled with beings that seem to be those of the world, this interminable "day" is the approach of time's absence, the threat of the outside where the world lacks.

The dream is the reawakening of the interminable. It is an allusion at least, and something like a dangerous call -- through the persistence of what cannot finish -- to the neutrality that presses up behind the beginning. Hence the fact that the dream seems to bring up in each of us the being of earliest times -- and not only the child, but still further back, the most remote, the mythic, the emptiness and vagueness of the anterior. He who dreams sleeps, but already he who dreams is he who sleeps no longer. He is not another, some other person, but the premonition of the other, of that which cannot say "I" any more, which recognizes itself neither in itself nor in others. Doubtless the force of vigilant existence and the fidelity of sleep, and still more the interpretation that gives meaning to a semblance of meaning, safeguard the outlines and forms of a personal reality: that which becomes other is reincarnated in another, the double is still somebody. The dreamer believes he knows that he is dreaming



and that he is asleep, precisely at the moment when the schism between the two is effected. He dreams that he is dreaming. And this flight from the dream which plunges him back into the dream, into the dream which is an eternal fall into the same dream -- this repetition whereby personal truth wanting to rescue itself loses itself more and more, and which is like the return of the same dreams or the unspeakable harassment of a reality which always escapes and which one cannot escape -- all this is like a dream of the night, a dream where the form of the dream becomes its sole content. Perhaps one could say that the dream is all the more nocturnal in that it turns around itself, that it dreams itself, that it has for its content its possibility. [...]

The dream touches the region where pure resemblance reigns. Everything there is similar; each figure is another one, is similar to another and to yet another, and this last to still another. One seeks the original model, wanting to be referred to a point of departure, an initial revelation, but there is none. The dream is the likeness that refers eternally to likeness.

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#### The Cadaverous Resemblance

When this moment has come, the corpse appears in the strangeness of its solitude as that which has disdainfully withdrawn from us. Then the feeling of a relation between humans is destroyed, and our mourning, the care we take of the dead and all the prerogatives of our former passions, since they can no longer know their direction, fall back upon us, return toward us. It is striking that at this very moment, when the cadaverous presence is the presence of the unknown before us, the mourned deceased begins to *resemble himself*.

Himself: is this not an ill-chosen expression? Shouldn't we say: the deceased resembles the person he was when he was alive? "Resembles himself" is, however, correct. "Himself" designates the impersonal being, distant and inaccessible, which resemblance, that it might be someone's, draws toward the day. Yes, it is he, the dear living person, but all the same it is more than he. He is more beautiful, more imposing; he is already monumental and so absolutely himself that it is as if he were *doubled*

by himself, joined to his solemn impersonality by resemblance and by the image. This magnified being, imposing and proud, which impresses the living as the appearance of the original never perceived until now -- this sentence of the last judgment inscribed deep within being and triumphantly expressing itself with the aid of the remote -- this grandeur, through its appearance of supreme authority, may well bring to mind the great images of classical art. If this connection is justified, the question of classical art's idealism will seem rather vain. And we might bear in mind the thought that idealism has, finally, no guarantee other than a corpse. For this indicates to what extent the apparent intellectual refinement, the pure virginity of the image is originally linked to the elemental strangeness and to the formless weight of being, present in absence.

Let us look again at this splendid being from which beauty streams: he is, I see this, perfectly like himself: he resembles *himself*. The cadaver is its own image. It no longer entertains any relation with this world, where it still appears, except that of an image, an obscure possibility, a shadow ever present behind the living form which now, far from separating itself from this form, transforms it entirely into shadow. The corpse is a reflection becoming master of the life it reflects -- absorbing it, identifying substantively with it by moving it from its use value and from its truth value to something incredible -- something neutral which there is no getting used to. And if the cadaver is so similar, it is because it is, at a certain moment, similarity *par excellence*: altogether similarity, and also nothing more. It is the likeness, like to an absolute degree, overwhelming and marvelous. But what is it like? Nothing.