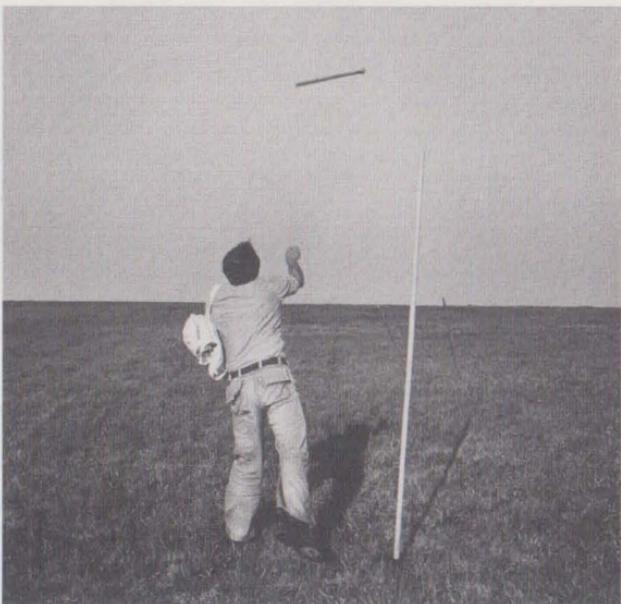


O. F. Bollnow
Human space

Translated by Christine Shuttleworth
Edited by Joseph Kohlmaier



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To Dr Ortrud Bollnow, née Bürger

11 September 1963

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Editorial note

We have aimed for an edition that opens Bollnow's discussion to the English-language reader, while also respecting the character of the original book. Among the decisions taken we note the following.

Bollnow used an elaborate system of numbering sections and sub-sections, which we have simplified somewhat. In the contents pages at the start of the book we have retained the original edition's full display of section and sub-section headings. We have added an index of proper names at the end of the book.

In the original work references to literature were given in footnotes. These references we have moved to the end of the book, keeping just Bollnow's discursive notes at the foot of pages. In these end-notes we have given a full description of a book or article at its first occurrence in each part, and have used abbreviated author and title descriptions subsequently for the rest of the part. Bollnow was often quite casual in his manner of referring to sources and, where feasible, we have done some tidying.

For the literature from which Bollnow quotes and to which he refers, we have where possible found existing English-language translations and used those English-language versions in giving titles, and have given page references to those editions. Our editorial interventions in the text or in the notes have been put in square brackets.

A recurring issue in the translation of Bollnow's text should be mentioned: how to translate 'Mensch' (already there in the title of the book), 'er', 'sein' and other words that have purely masculine referents in English? We felt that 'he or she' and 'his or hers' would seem too cumbersome over the course of the book. So where possible we have phrased to avoid the problem and elsewhere have used just 'he' and 'his'. This is at least consistent with usage at the time Bollnow wrote.

Introduction

On the history of the question

The problem of time in human existence has preoccupied philosophers to such an extraordinary degree over recent decades that one could almost describe it as the fundamental problem of contemporary philosophy. Bergson was probably the first to formulate it convincingly as that of 'durée', concretely experienced as opposed to objectively measurable, and soon afterwards Simmel introduced this question to Germany. Later Heidegger, in the course of his existential ontology, decisively placed the question of the temporality of human existence at the centre of his entire philosophy, thus making it visible for the first time in its full significance. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in their turn took up these ideas and disseminated them in France. But the same problem, starting from this impulse, has also proved extremely productive in the individual sciences, and has provoked a very extensive discussion, rich in new questions and results, in psychology and psychopathology as much as in the history of literature and the other disciplines of the arts and humanities. Here we will merely refer, among the extensive and complex literature, to the seminal work of Minkowski on 'temps vécu' [lived time].¹

The problem of the spatial condition of human existence or, to put it more simply, of the concrete space experienced and lived by humans, has in contrast remained very much in the background, which is surprising when one considers the traditional, almost proverbial, link between the questions of time and space. Admittedly, as early as the 1930s, in psychology and psychopathology the question of experienced space was vigorously taken up, evidently under the strong influence of Heidegger, in close connection with the simultaneous research into time. Dürckheim, in his *Untersuchungen zum gelebten Raum* [Investigations into experienced space],² was probably the first to develop this question in the German-speaking area. At about the same time Minkowski, in the book on 'temps vécu' already mentioned, also introduced the concepts of 'distance vécue' and 'espace vécu', which he soon afterwards developed further in *Vers une cosmologie*.³ Out of the

psychopathological literature we will mention only the work of Straus⁴ and Binswanger,⁵ to which we will repeatedly return in the course of our observations. But these very interesting approaches did not impinge on the narrower area of philosophy and seem in fact soon to have been forgotten outside medical circles. Compared to time, which concerns the innermost centre of humanity, space seemed philosophically less rewarding, because it seemed to belong only to the outer environment of mankind.

From a totally different direction, Cassirer encountered a related question in his extensive *Philosophy of symbolic forms*.⁶ In his pursuit of the development of human thought from its magical-mystical beginnings up to the formation of the modern scientific consciousness, he also had necessarily to occupy himself with the development of the concepts of space and time. He worked his way through an enormous amount of evidence from the fields of ethnology, history of religion, linguistics and the various individual human sciences, with rewarding results for systematic philosophical questioning. It is particularly interesting for our purposes to see how he explored the initially unfamiliar and incomprehensible structure of mythical space. He did admittedly perceive mythical space as a bygone stage in human development, overtaken by today's scientific concept of space. Conditioned by the direction of his question, he did not see the problem of experienced space as it is still present in the minds of humans today, and therefore did not ask to what extent spatial structures analogous to mythical views of space may have a more general significance, still valid for people living today, or at least how the mythical forms may be made rewarding for the understanding of experienced space. In addition, because of his emigration, Cassirer's work came to be largely forgotten in Germany and therefore did not exercise the influence on later development that was its due.

Since then, in the domain of philosophy, Lassen, himself under the influence of Cassirer, was probably the only one, in the context of his special question, namely a phenomenology of experience, to emphasize the basic importance of spatiality for the structure of human existence by comparison with the priority of temporality represented by Heidegger.⁷ His work too, however, seems to have met with little attention.

Only in more recent times has the question of experienced space come more strongly to the fore. On the one hand, in the yearbook *Situation*⁸ (of which unfortunately only the first volume was published), the circle of Buytendijk collected, from the point of view of phenomenological psychology, a series of important works on the development of concrete experienced space, to which we will also need to refer in detail. On the other hand, Bachelard, after a series of books, profuse with ideas, on the four elements,⁹ had developed a systematic 'poetics of space'.¹⁰ Thus the general acceptance of this question seems to have been achieved from a philosophical perspective too. The problem of the spatial element of human existence takes its place with a weight and question of its own beside that of temporality. In any event it seems idle to speculate in advance about the possible precedence of one question over another. It might be more rewarding to tackle the new problem of experienced space as impartially as possible and see what comes of it. But all previous approaches have only been in the form of individual contributions from home or abroad, originating from various disciplines, and dealing with the problem from their own particular point of view. What has been missing so far is an approach to a coherent systematic interpretation. This is what will be attempted here.

Contrast with mathematical space

For a start we will try to outline a little more precisely the guiding question. Even though it will soon become evident that the problem of experienced space cannot be developed simply as a counterpart to that of experienced time, the first steps can still be taken following the process successfully adopted with the latter. Just as, with reference to time, the abstract mathematical time to be measured with clocks has been differentiated from time specifically experienced by the living human being, so one can also differentiate in the case of space between the abstract space of the mathematician and physicist and specifically experienced human space. If, in everyday life, we speak without further consideration of space, we are usually thinking of mathematical space – space that can be measured in three dimensions, in metres and centimetres – as we have come to know it at school and which provides the basic system of reference when measuring spatial relationships in everyday life: for example,

if we are thinking about how to furnish a new apartment with our old, perhaps generously sized furniture. Rarely, on the other hand, do we become aware that this is only a certain aspect of space, and that concrete space, directly experienced in life, by no means coincides with this abstract mathematical space. We live so naturally in this environment that its singularity does not surprise us, and we give it no further thought. Investigating it is for this reason a special philosophical task, which takes for granted a reversal of the way of looking at it that has become almost self-evident to us, and a return to the basic principles of life which are as a rule disregarded.

Just as Bergson explained 'durée', the time actually lived by humans, by opposing it to the more familiar mathematical time, we can also best visualize the singularity of experienced space, at first still difficult to grasp, by contrasting it with the more familiar mathematical space. In doing so, for the sake of simplicity, we will confine ourselves to the well-known three-dimensional Euclidean space, and base it on an orthogonal system of axes.

The decisive quality of mathematical space is its homogeneity. This means: *in keinem Gradenkreis der Werte*

1. No point is distinguished above any other. The coordinates in this space have no natural origin, and for reasons of practicality one can make any point as required the origin of a coordinate system by means of a simple shift.
2. Likewise, no direction is distinguished above any other. By means of a simple turn, any direction in space can be made into an axis of a chosen coordinate system.

Space is unstructured in itself, and regular throughout, and in this way extends in all directions into infinity.

However these qualifications do not apply to experienced space.

1. It has a distinct centre, which is in some way, as will be discussed in more detail, given in the location of the experiencing human being in the space.
2. It has a distinct system of axes, which is connected with the human body and its upright posture, opposed to the force of gravity.

In anticipation, we can immediately expand on this with some further qualifications:

3. Areas and locations in it have qualitative differences. Based on their relationships, a structure of experienced space is built

up, rich in content, for which there is no analogy in mathematical space.

4. At the same time there are not only flowing transitions from one area to another, but also sharp demarcations. Experienced space manifests pronounced instabilities.
5. The problem of infinity too becomes considerably more complicated. Experienced space is first given as a closed finite space, and only through subsequent experience does it open up to an infinite extent.
6. As a whole, experienced space is not an area of neutral values. It is related to the human being by vital relationships, both supportive and obstructive in nature. Whether supportive or obstructive, it is the field of human conduct of life.
7. Every location in experienced space has its significance for human beings. Thus it is the categories used in the humanities that we must employ in order to describe experienced space.
8. It is not a question of a reality released from a specific reference to humanity, but of space as it is present for humanity, and accordingly of the human relationship to this space; for it is impossible to separate one from the other.

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The concept of experienced space

Let us formulate these relationships as concepts. When we refer to experienced space, we mean space as it is manifested in concrete human life. Dürckheim, in the work cited above, instead speaks of a lived space, and Minkowski uses the same term in this context, 'espace vécu'. This term is in some ways more apt than that of experienced space, because the latter can too easily be understood in a subjective sense, as the way in which a space is experienced by humans, which as such is already independent of the manner of its being experienced – in other words where the qualification 'experienced' applies only to the subjective colouring which is imposed on the space. The term 'experienced space' can therefore easily be understood as meaning the same as 'experience of space' in the sense of a merely psychological reality. By contrast, the term 'lived space' is preferable as it expresses no psychological meaning, but refers to space itself and, in so far as humans live in it and with it, to space as medium of human life.

Nevertheless I hesitate to use this factually much less ambiguous term; for 'living' is an intransitive verb. 'Living' means being alive, as opposed to being dead. It can also be modified by adverbial elements. One can live well or badly, but the word cannot be combined with an object in the accusative. One may say, at most, that one lives one's life, as the poet says: 'I live my life in widening circles,'¹¹ or in the same way one may speak of a 'life unlived'. But one cannot say that man lives *something*, such as space or time, and therefore one cannot describe space or time as 'lived'.¹² Thus, despite all my reservations, I will stay with the term that is linguistically correct, although factually less apt and more easily misunderstood, 'experienced space' [erlebter Raum]; for it seems to me inadmissible to infringe the laws of language, even for the sake of greater clarity. I will at most speak occasionally, where it seems more appropriate for the sake of clarification, at the same time of 'experienced and lived' space.

One might perhaps also have been able to speak of 'Lebensraum' as the space available for the expansion of life, if this word had not entered the German language in another, narrower sense. To avoid confusion, we had better do without this term and instead speak of experienced space. But this experienced space is not, as should be explicitly stressed to avoid misunderstanding, anything psychological, anything merely experienced or pictured or even imagined: it is the actual concrete space in which our life takes place.

Factually we are here in total agreement with the way that Dürckheim and Minkowski, at the very beginning of this question, framed their concept of experienced space. When Minkowski, for example, in the final chapter of his profound work extends his observations on 'temps vécu' to 'espace vécu', he begins by contrasting the latter with the mathematical concept of space. 'Space,' he writes here, 'cannot be reduced to geometric relations, relations which we establish as if, reduced to the simple role of curious spectators or scientists, we were ourselves outside space. We live and act in space, and our personal lives, as well as the social life of humanity, unfolds in space.'¹³

And Dürckheim, from the start, formulated the problem in such an apt and comprehensive way that his remarks can be placed here, at the beginning of our own observations. 'Lived space', he

says, 'is for the self the medium of physical realization, counter-form or extension, threatener or preserver, place of passage or resting-place, home or abroad, material, place of fulfilment and possibility of development, resistance and borderline, organ and opponent of this self in its immediate reality of being and life'.¹⁴ In these formulations, it is important to note the typically repeated contrasting terms: 'threatener or preserver', 'organ and opponent', etc. Space is, as has already been profoundly perceived here, given to humanity in a double manner, as supportive and as obstructive, in fact even more profoundly, as something that belongs to humanity like a limb, and then again as something which faces us from the outside as hostile or at least as foreign.

In this double definition, as 'possibility of development' and as 'resistance', space is for Dürckheim not a neutral, unchanging medium, but full of meanings in the references to life that have opposing effects, and these meanings again change according to the various locations and areas of space. These meanings too are not to be attributed to merely subjective feelings, but they are genuine characters of lived space itself. Thus Dürckheim stresses: 'The concrete space of the developed human being is to be taken seriously in the entire fullness of the significances experienced by him, for in the singularity of its qualities, structures and orderings it is the form of expression, test and realization of the subject living in it, experiencing it and reacting to it'.¹⁵

How strongly this space is linked as a correlative to the human being living in it again emerges from the fact that it is not only different for different individuals, but also changes for the individual according to his specific state of mind and mood. Every change in the human being entails a change to his lived space. Dürckheim stresses: 'Concrete space is different according to the being whose space it is, and according to the life that takes place in it. It changes with the person who conducts himself in it, changes with the topicality of certain attitudes and orientations which – more or less immediately – dominate the whole self'.¹⁶

Here we must also differentiate against the term which Bachelard has recently used to sum up his significant contribution to the philosophy of concrete experienced space, namely that of a 'poetics of space'; for this term may be too cautious and therefore finally inappropriate to be applied to what he has so brilliantly

expounded in individual analyses about the house and the universe, about lofts and cellars, chests and cupboards, about the whole experienced human world of space. This is certainly understandable in view of Bachelard's philosophical background. It originates from the philosophy of the natural sciences and a concept of realization oriented on this. Seen from this point of view, experiences in experienced space seem to him to contain no objective realization. He therefore interprets them as something merely subjective, that is, as the work of the poetic power of imagination.

On the other hand, however, he sees within the frame of his expanding metaphysical world view which he himself, in connection with Novalis, once described as 'magical idealism'¹⁷, in this power of imagination an achievement that goes well beyond what is normally understood by this name. For him it has, as a human creation that finds its expression in language, as 'imagination parlée', only to dream along with the 'dream of things', the 'imagination matérielle' or 'imagination de la matière' which itself produces reality.¹⁸ As a result, creative writing acquires for him a particular dignity: it is 'not a game, but a power of nature. It illuminates the dream of things.'¹⁹ Therefore he sees philosophy as dependent on the achievement of poets which precedes it: 'How much the philosophers would learn, if they would consent to read the poets!'²⁰ Accordingly, in his own method, which, in reference to Minkowski, he describes as phenomenology, the interpretation of poetic images takes up a broad space; for 'poets and painters', to use the phrase he borrows from Van den Berg, 'are born phenomenologists'.²¹ In this deeply formulated sense of poetic power of imagination we will, even without examining this concept in detail, easily be able to include the results of his analyses of poetic space in our investigations of concrete experienced space.

The spatiality of human life

Even though we have refused to regard experienced space, in the sense of mere experience of space, as something merely psychological, it is on the other hand not an object removed from the subject. As we have stressed from the start, it is a question of the relationship between the human being and his space, and thus also of the structure of human existence itself, insofar as this is

determined by his relationship with space. It is in this sense that we speak of the spatiality of human existence. This term does not imply that life – or human existence [Dasein] – is itself something spatially extended, but that it is what it is only with reference to a space, that it needs space in order to develop within it.

It is in this sense that Heidegger in *Being and time* very clearly worked out the question of the spatiality of human existence, even if he could not develop it more detail in the general context of that work. Just as, according to him, one must distinguish between temporality as a structural form of human existence and time as an objective process, so we must also distinguish between space – whether it is experienced or mathematical space is irrelevant to this question – and spatiality. Spatiality is a definition of the essence of human existence. This is the meaning of Heidegger's statement: 'The subject (Dasein), if well understood ontologically, is spatial.'²² That it is spatial does not therefore mean that the human being occupies a certain space with his body, in the same way as any other mass, and also occasionally – like the proverbial camel at the eye of a needle – is prevented from slipping through openings that are too narrow. It means that the human being is always and necessarily conditioned in his life by his behaviour in relation to a surrounding space.

This is also what Minkowski has in mind when he stresses: 'Life spreads out into space without having a geometric extension in the proper sense of the word. We have need of expansion, of perspective, in order to live. Space is as indispensable as time to the development of life'.²³

At the same time we are still expressing ourselves carelessly if we say that life takes place 'in space'. Human beings are not present in space as an object, let us say, is present in a box, and they are not related to space as though in the first place there could be anything like a subject without space. Rather, life consists originally in this relationship with space and can therefore not be separated from it even in thought. It is basically the same problematic of 'being-in' that Heidegger develops with reference to 'Being-in-the-world', when he stresses: 'Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein's Being; it is an *existentialia*'. So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) "in" an entity which is present-at-hand ... Being-in is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its existential structure'.²⁴

The question of space is thus a question as to the transcendental nature of humanity. This on the other hand does not mean that space is simply there, independent of the human being. There is space only insofar as man is a spatial being, that is, a being that forms space and, as it were, spreads out space around itself. And this again is the well-understood meaning of the Kantian thesis of the 'transcendental ideality' of space. Nevertheless, space is more than a mere form of human experience. Here the Kantian approach must be extended by the inclusion of full life with its multiplicity of vital relations. Space then becomes the general form of human living behaviour. Meanwhile mathematical space results from experienced space, when one disregards the various concrete vital relations and reduces life to a mere subject of understanding.

As this space-forming and space-spreading being, man is however necessarily not only the origin, but also the lasting centre of his space. This again should however not be understood in a coarsened manner, as though man carried his space around with him as the snail does its shell. Rather, it makes total sense when one, without thinking too hard about it, says that man moves 'in' his space, where, therefore, space is something fixed in relation to man, within which human movements take place. And so we can probably also understand the other Kantian thesis, that space has 'empirical reality'. How these two definitions can be reconciled even with an extended method of observation still remains an open question, which we must see here from the very start as a guiding perspective, but for the time being put aside; for it cannot be dealt with before concrete analysis, or independently of it.

The spatiality of human life and the space experienced by the human being thus correspond to each other in a strict correlative. Every statement about the one at the same time contains a corresponding statement about the other. At the same time the path of investigation necessarily starts from the exploration of experienced space, and then draws conclusions on the structure of human spatiality. For the analysis of experienced space produces a wealth of definitions of content and a multiplicity of questions, such as would not have sufficiently come into view with a direct approach to the structure of spatiality. For this reason we will deliberately put aside the question of human spatiality and will attempt for a start, as impartially as possible, to approach the analysis of space experienced and lived by the human being.

The present investigation aims to make evident, in an initial, preparatory manner, the importance and the productiveness of the question of experienced space. In order to take a view of the multiplicity of the questions that thrust themselves forward, one must first look around on all sides in order to gather together from a philosophical point of view what is made available for this purpose as a contribution by the individual sciences, and see to what extent it can be assembled into a uniform picture. The collection of this complex material must therefore be accorded a wide space, and inevitably digressions in various directions will sometimes threaten to break through the uniform path of representation. Only in the great number of the perspectives that come together here can the productiveness of the guiding question be preserved.

Completeness, of course, cannot be achieved here. It must suffice to bring together suitable examples according to the various directions. In particular, two groups of questions have been deliberately eliminated, because their problematic, leading to entirely new connections, would have broken through the circle of these first, elementary reflections. These are, first, the question of conscious construction of space in the visual arts, and second, the transition from directly experienced to mathematical-physical space.*

* A discussion of the detailed description of this development given by Cassirer in the third volume of *Philosophy of symbolic forms* would be outside the scope of the present work. For the development of the mathematical-physical concept of space, see the excellent account by M. Jammer, *Concepts of space* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1954).