



# Species of Spaces and Other Pieces

*Georges Perec , John Sturrock (Translator)*

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George Perec produced some of the most entertaining and spirited essays of his age, and *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* is edited and translated from the French with an introduction by John Sturrock in Penguin Classics.

Georges Perec, author of *Life: A User's Manual*, was one of the most surprising and enjoyable of all modern French writers. The pieces in this volume show him to be at times playful, more serious at other, but writing always with the lightest of touches. He had the keenest of eyes for the 'infra-ordinary', the things we do every day - eating, sleeping, working - and the places we do them in without giving them a moment's thought. But behind the lightness and humour, there is also the sadness of a French Jewish boy who lost his parents in the Second World War and found comfort in the material world around him, and above all in writing.

This volume contains a selection of Georges Perec's non-fiction works, along with a charming short story, 'The Winter Journey'. It includes notes and an introduction describing Perec's life and career.

Georges Perec (1936-1982) was born in Paris, the son of Polish Jews. After his father was killed in the Army, and his mother deported to Auschwitz where she later died, Perec was adopted by his aunt and uncle. Working for most of his life as an archivist, Perec was one of the most important post-war French novelists. He is best remembered as the author of *Life, A User's Manual* and *The Void*, a novel which does not use the letter 'e'.

If you enjoyed *Species of Spaces*, you might also like Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, available in Penguin Modern Classics.

'One of the most significant literary personalities in the world'  
Italo Calvino

## Species of Spaces and Other Pieces Details

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(Translator)

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# From Reader Review *Species of Spaces* and Other Pieces for online ebook

## Chris\_P says

I think, in order to properly review *Species of Spaces* you have to be as genius as Perec was and I'm not. I don't think there's any point in talking about this little book. Just read it and let it make its way inside you the way it's meant to. It must also be quite an experience to read it under the influence of hallucinogenics, although, it can act like one by itself. Great stuff!

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## Comfortably says

Genius.. και καψιαρικό!

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## Quiver says

To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself.

Perec takes space apart item by item, list by list, observation by observation: his bed, his room, his apartment, his building, his neighbourhood, his city, his country, Europe, the World, Space. Then he reassembles it for you on the page. Whilst most authors tend of want to escape the confines of the page, and take the reader into the imagined realms beyond, I had the feeling that Perec was attempting the opposite: to confine space within the page. And he succeeds.

Perec's work feels ordered, mathematical, though clearly creative (he also liked to send word puzzles for his friends), which is unsurprising as he was a member of the Oulipo group that explored constrained writing techniques. And in that sense, Perec's forays into the species of space complement the distinctly lyrical and philosophical forays of Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space*.

Space melts like sand running through one's fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds:

To write: to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark or a few signs.

Perec enhances your perception of details. You might even fancy writing a few of them down.

(Perec's most famous standalone piece, also included in this collection, is *The Winter Journey*. Its Borgesian

quality is appropriately haunting and cooky.)

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## **Steven Godin says**

This is one of those books where you feel the world around you expand, it's an enlightening and stimulating experience, dynamic, inspirational even, it will open your mind to architecture, furniture, and space dynamics. It will have you thinking deeply of your dining table, your home, your garden, your street, your town, and beyond. Perec was simply one of kind. My personal view is that we were robbed of one of the geniuses of our time. Had he been around for longer, I am sure his work would have got better and better. Not that there was anything wrong with it in the first place. Perec pays close attention (when I say close attention, I REALLY mean close attention) to everything around him, zooming out from the page he writes on the whole of the space and its nature, along the way he observes things as simple as a man locking his car to go to the store, the number and types of places he has slept in, and what happens to the picture and the wall it's hung on, all in an inviting, welcoming voice. He feels like a friend, not just a writer. You don't want to leave his company. Part of this inviting friendliness comes from him inviting you to do the same as him. Simply Observe everything around you. Not just observation exercises, it goes deeper than that. In *Species*, Perec with a warm handshake entices you to look around your own city without boring you with actual full examples of exhaustive lists, making this work an enjoyable read rather than a trite and boring one. It's an eye-opener, and reading Perec certainly makes you feel truly alive, he will drag you out of a slumber, and give you a shot of Espresso with this book. He peels layers off the world around us like casually picking away at a piece of fruit. The bonus - a short story 'The Winter's Journey' is also included, which is pretty darn good as well!

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## **Noah Goats says**

There are times when Perec is interesting, insightful, or charming, and there are other times (and these are the majority) when he is ostentatiously dull. Take his essay, "Objects That Are On My Work Table." As you might have guessed from the title, the essay is a boring list of the boring objects on Perec's boring table. It also includes some of his commonplace observations about these objects: what purposes they serve, how they came to be on his table. Why he thought anyone would give a greasy slap on the ass about any of this I cannot imagine. Only an utter egomaniac could think anyone would want to hear such long and driveling descriptions of the lowest level minutiae of their lives.

Apparently there are those who do want to hear it, though, because this book seems pretty well reviewed here, but I suspect people take a look at Perec's delightfully wild hair and absurd goatee, read his tragic personal history on the back of the book, and then feel too bad to write that the bulk of his writing is amiably pretentious bunk.

And yet, I admire his willingness to experiment (and some of his experiments actually work) and there are some very good paragraphs here and there. He seems to operate best at paragraph length. He lacks the wit to deliver a sharply memorable sentence, and if you give him five pages he's going to pack in a lot of boring nonsense. But some of his paragraphs are very nice.

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## Marlies Rijneveld says

“Je hebt nog niks bekeken; je hebt alleen maar opgemerkt wat je lang geleden al had opgemerkt” (Voelt als een soort handleiding hoe de ruimte om je heen te zien) (ik ga ‘m nog een keer lezen, misschien morgen al.)

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## Sara Mazzoni says

Riflessioni sullo spazio dal piccolo al grande, dal nostro letto all’universo infinito. Perec le focalizza su casa, condominio e città. Alcuni spunti sono interessanti, con una buon indice di apertura mentale.

Complessivamente un po’ ozioso, ugualmente leggibile perché formato da capitoli brevissimi. Facile da interrompere, digeribile, si può leggere in autobus, al parco, in fila alle poste.

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## Adam Floridia says

### *Species of Spaces 5/5:*

Something about Perec’s originality just really gets me. His attention to detail, his ability to notice the everyday, but more so his taking the time to pay attention, to notice the everyday is some combination of the words “breathhtaking” and “touching” that I can’t pin down. It’s like he embodies those hackneyed saying “you’ve got to stop to smell the roses” or “Life move’s pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around, you might miss it” (thanks Ferris). Of course, Perec does it without the “hackney.” He explains how to see something intimately familiar for the first time: “Make an effort to exhaust the subject, even if that seems grotesque, or pointless, or stupid. You still haven’t looked at anything, you’ve merely picked out what you’ve long ago picked out” (50).

I’m not sure that makes much sense, so I’ll say that one other thing that I love about Perec is that he really does challenge me to *think* differently. It actually took me a while to wrap my head around the concept of “space.” Space is the nothingness, the void all around us, right? How could one write a book about that? After all, it’s impossible to think about or write about nothing, since, in doing so one would inherently be thinking about or writing about something. (Perec considers this type of space when he “tried to think of an apartment in which there would be a useless room, absolutely and intentionally useless...[but] language itself, seemingly, proved unsuited to describing this nothing, this void, as if we could only speak of what is full, useful, functional” [33].) So what “space” then? Well, first, it’s not “space” but “spaces.” That makes all the difference. Perec writes of the various spaces in which we live. It still took my mind sometime to come to terms with this use of “spaces”: why not “places,” “locations,” even “borders” since it really is the borders that define a space. However, “spaces” is the perfect term, for not all are places or locations, and the very ethereal and mutable nature of boarders makes that term inappropriate. So “spaces” it is. But how can they be divided into “species”?

### 1) The Book

Filled with nothing but idiosyncratic arrangements in horizontal lines of twenty-six phonetic symbols, ten numbers, and maybe eight punctuation marks, all in black. However, “filled” is inaccurate—there’s a lot of white “space” on each page. In the margins. Both left and right. Top and bottom. Small white gaps in-

between words. Larger ones in-between paragraphs.

- Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.7 x 7.8 inches
- Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces"

Yet in the limited space of a book, one could count himself the king of infinite space. I read. I travel to Paris. I travel to cafes and apartments and streets and metros and countrysides.

I travel back in time.

I travel, with limitless potential, through my own mind. This travel affects the book. Suddenly the white of the margins is overrun by “haha”s or “interesting thought”s or “?”s or ““s.

The book will find its place on a shelf, alphabetized (of course). But it may lie horizontally atop the other Perecs due to lack of space on the shelf.

## 2) The Couch

Where I finished reading the book. Although most of it was read in the bed, Perec does a chapter on the bed. Also, the couch has “extra” pillows on it, just as the bed does. So, the couch. The first thing that this space now makes me painfully aware of is my woefully limited vocabulary when it comes to colors. Green-ish is the best I can do. Three cushions. One white thread sticking out (note: will have to turn that one over, unless there is already a stain hiding on its reverse). Cloth type? Again woefully uninstructed. Soft-ish. Relatively clean, until one looks beneath or between the cushions. Then dog hair and various debris (pebbles?!) are plainly viewed. And one of those little Cadbury mini-eggs. I was eating those earlier—they are freakin’ delicious.

Speaking of eating, the couch is a space of much potential: eating, sleeping, sitting, resting, reclining (feet up on the couch or sliding off onto the floor—or even a footstool!), watching television, playing Playstation 3, thinking, drifting, snacking, screwing, talking, jumping (oh, when we were young), hiding money or other booty (not in this couch, but in *25th Hour* Ed Norton’s character hid his drugs and/or money in the couch and when the FBI guy came to arrest him, he sat on the couch and commented how the cushions felt because he already knew the money and/or drugs were in the cushions because someone had tipped him off), and reading.

This couch has been in two houses. It was once in my parents’ living room or possibly dining room. It was not there to be sat upon; rather, it was there to wait for the impending move into my house. We bought this couch at Bob’s Discount Furniture, from “The Pit” of course. I say “of course” because I am extremely frugal and love a good deal—and I’ll be damned if I care if the couch has a scratch on the back if it’ll save me \$250 dollars. Because of this, though, this couch necessitated many trips to “The Pit.” Because of the hit-or-miss inventory of said “Pit,” it is nearly impossible to find a full living room set in one trip. Thus, the matching chaise lounge was acquired later. Now the couch and chaise serve as the primary spaces on which one can sit (or lie etc.) in my living room.

Scout is allowed on the couch. That explains the dog hair beneath and in-between the cushions. I am in charge of vacuuming, which also explains the dog hair beneath and in-between the cushions of the couch.

I spend a lot of time on the couch. Probably more than in any other space except the bed. (Sad, what a sedentary life!) I am even on the couch this very moment at 5:39 PM on Saturday March 23, 2013. This makes me realize that I forgot one (and probably many more) more thing one can do on the couch: use a Dell netbook.

### 3) The Living Room

Here's where it's still occasionally hard for me to think of "spaces" without liming myself to "boundaries" or "borders." For example, a good portion of the living room is penned off. Quite literally. There is a large, plastic, interconnected set of grey gates, which we affectionately refer to as "The Cage." This is where we store our one year old son. (Even I just became aware of my then unconscious shift from first person singular to first person plural, as if I am trying to adulterate my own culpability.) "The Cage" is filled with...well too many toys, knickknacks, games, books, stuffed animals, whatsits, and other baubles, thingamajigs, and miscellany.

It's funny to think of the name "living room," as if that is the only room in which one actually lives, or perhaps the room in which one is most alive. Because televisions are common staples of living rooms, I would argue that it is quite the opposite: the living room may be the room where one is least alive—becoming a mindless "boob" watching his tube. That said, there is a 47" flat panel Samsung HD television residing atop the mantle of my living, as if it is the centerpiece, perhaps of the entire room. Relegated to the periphery are the bookshelves. One tall and wide (A-M), one short and wide (M-R), and one tall and thin (R-Z). These are each placed in one of the five corners of the room. Yes, I actually just counted five. The walls are yellow (a color I know!), in fact, I might even say light-yellow. This, I feel, brightens the room, enlivening it so that it lives up to its name. Artificial light beams in through one window that is actually in the living room and from two that are outside of this space. There are no doors, but there are, I suppose, what should be called "doorways." I like an open floor plan, especially in a small house. There are three lamps from a set—housewarming gifts from, I believe, my sister. There is one lamp with a mosaic of tiles depicting Testudo, The University of Maryland's noble mascot. (Testudo—a stuffed version—also stands gracefully atop the tall and wide bookshelf (A-M) along with other novelties: a Rubix cube with an all white face facing roomwise since that is the only side complete, a green visor that says "Las Vegas" on it in white lettering, a small globe, a stuffed Quinnipiac University mascot [Bobcat], a certificate affirming that Erin and I "rose above" by venturing in a hot air balloon above San Diego. In addition to books, there are also other items on the shelves, most of which are there so that, when freed of his cage, the one year old does not mangle them: glasses, a pocketwatch, numerous pens and bookmarks, flashcards—remnants from 2008's GRE cramming, a camera, a utilities bill, dust.)

Other items in the living room: stray coupons, pictures (of our wedding, our son, our niece, us at a wedding, us in a hot air balloon, a caricature of us at the San Diego Zoo, "paintings" purchased at Kohl's of Venetian canals), baby powder, diapers, a fake fireplace, candles, a coffee table with coasters and lamps and pictures on top and a whole heap of "miscellaneous" books beneath, un-put-away clothes, my work briefcase/bag, a cell phone charger, a pillow on the floor (Scout's), an i-pod touch, a basket of dog toys, and, at this very moment, a dog right up in my grill as I, also in the living room, sit on the couch typing.

In retrospect, I see that the description of this space was largely an inventory of items populating the space; however, how easily one can glean all sorts of things about life (my life) from that inventory. A living room, indeed. Sort of a collection of living, now in this room.

### 4) The House

### 5) The Neighborhood

### 6) The Town

### 7) The State

### 8) The Region

### 9) The Country

### 10) The World



AND THAT IS HOW THIS BOOK GOT ME >*THINKING*! If my wife, son, and dog didn't suddenly invade my space on the couch in the living room with my book, I might like to continue this activity. But, time is the enemy of space, and it has won this round.

#### **and Other Pieces 5/5:**

I initially planned to review each piece separately, but there are like 25 of them. Some better than others, but all worth reading for Perec fans.

#### **A Favorite Quotation**

- "Literature is indissolubly bound up with life, it is the necessary prolongation, the obvious culmination, the indispensable complement of experience. All experience opens on to literature and all literature on to experience, and the path that leads from one to the other, whether it be literary creation or reading, establishes this relationship between the fragmentary and the whole, this passage from the anecdotal to the historical, this interplay between the general and the particular, between what is felt and what is understood, which form the very tissue of our consciousness." (254)

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#### **aconeyisland says**

**Questo andar per luoghi (2)** Non cercare di trovare troppo rapidamente una definizione della città; non è cosa da poco, e ci sono molte probabilità di sbagliarsi.

Innanzitutto fare l'inventario di quanto si vede. Elencare ciò di cui si è sicuri. Stabilire distinzioni elementari; per esempio tra quello che è la città e quello che non è la città.

Interessarsi a ciò che separa la città da ciò che non è città. Osservare quello che succede quando finisce la città.

**Esercitazioni.** Osservare la strada, di tanto in tanto, magari con una cura un po' sistematica.

Applicarsi, fare tutto con calma.

Annotare il luogo: i tavolini di un caffè vicino all'incrocio Bac-Saint-Germain

l'ora: le sette di sera

la data: 15 maggio 1973

il tempo: bello stabile

Annotare quello che si vede. Quello che succede di notevole. Sappiamo vedere quello che è notevole? C'è qualcosa che ci colpisce?

Niente ci colpisce. Non sappiamo vedere.

Bisogna procedere più lentamente, quasi stupidamente.

Sforzarsi di scrivere cose prive d'interesse, quelle più ovvie, più comuni, più scialbe.

Costringersi a vedere più piattamente.

Percepire un ritmo.

Decifrare un pezzo di città. I suoi circuiti: perché gli autobus vanno da tale posto a tal altro? Chi sceglie gli itinerari e in funzione di cosa?

La gente nelle strade: da dove vengono? Dove vanno? Chi sono? Gente che ha fretta. Gente lenta. Pacchetti. Gente prudente che ha preso l'impermeabile. Cani: sono gli unici animali visibili.

Un cane, di una specie rara (levriero afgano? levriero africano?)

Una land-rover che sembra attrezzata per attraversare il Sahara (nostro malgrado, notiamo solo l'insolito, lo speciale, il miseramente eccezionale: è proprio il contrario che si dovrebbe fare).

Continuare.

Finché il luogo diventi improbabile, fino a provare, per un breve istante, l'impressione di essere in una città straniera, o meglio ancora, fino a non capire più che cosa succeda e che cosa non succeda, finché il luogo intero divenga estraneo, e non si sappia che tutto questo si chiama città, strada, palazzi, marciapiedi...

Far piovere piogge diluviali, rompere tutto, far crescere l'erba, sostituire la gente con delle mucche, veder apparire, cento metri al di sopra dei palazzi, King-Kong, o il topolino ingigantito di Tex Avery!

O anche: sforzarsi di immaginare il più precisamente possibile, sotto la rete stradale, il groviglio delle fognature, il passaggio delle linee del metrò, la proliferazione invisibile e sotterranea dei condotti (elettricità, gas, linee telefoniche, condutture dell'acqua, rete della posta pneumatica) senza la quale non ci sarebbe traccia di vita in superficie.

Sotto, proprio al di sotto, resuscitare l'eocene: il calcare da molare, le marne e il pietrisco, il gesso, le sabbie e le ligniti, l'argilla plastica, la creta.

**La mia città.** Abito a Parigi. E' la capitale della Francia. All'epoca in cui la Francia si chiamava Gallia, Parigi si chiamava Lutezia.

Mi piace camminare per Parigi. A volte, per interi pomeriggi, senza meta precisa, né proprio a casaccio, né all'avventura, ma cercando di lasciarmi portare. A volte prendo il primo autobus che si ferma (non si possono più prendere autobus al volo). Oppure preparo accuratamente, sistematicamente un itinerario. Mi piacerebbe ideare e risolvere problemi analoghi a quello dei ponti di Königsberg, o, per esempio, trovare un itinerario che, attraversando tutta Parigi, passi soltanto per strade che cominciano con la lettera C.

Mi piace la mia città, ma non saprei dire che cosa esattamente mi piace. Non credo che sia l'odore. Sono troppo abituato ai monumenti per aver voglia di guardarli. Mi piacciono certe luci, alcuni punti, i tavolini dei caffè. Mi piace molto passare in un posto che non vedevo da tempo.

**La campagna.** Non ho molto da dire a proposito della campagna; la campagna non esiste, è un'illusione.

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??? ?????? ?????? says

???? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? "????? ??????????" ???????? ???????? ??? ?????? ?????????

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**Eirini D says**

Πρ?τη φορ? διαβ?ζω Περ?κ και οι εντυπ?σεις που μου ?φησε ε?ναι πολ? καλ?ς. Δεν ξ?ρω π?σοι συγγραφε?ς ?χουν την ικαν?τητα να συλλογ?ζονται, να φαντ?ζονται και να δημιουργο?ν ?ργο, απ? απλ?, βαρετ? και ?σως φαινομενικ? ανο?σια πρ?γματα των ?σων μας περιβ?λλουν -στην πραγματικ?τητα το σκηνικ? που στ?νεται ?λη μας η ζω?: οι δρ?μοι, τα σπ?τια, οι ?νθρωποι που συναντ?με καθημεριν?...

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**Andrew says**

If you want a plot, or if you want a cohesive argument, then Perec isn't for you. If you want beautifully rendered belles-lettres about everything and nothing, then he should be right up your alley. In this slender volume of spatial meditations, lists, word games, and other odd ends, Perec as a person shines forth. In his

novels, he seemed to exist more as a method, a way of writing. Even in the autobiographical, *W* or the *Memory of Childhood*, the childhood reminiscences didn't give us a terribly good idea of Perec-the-adult. But in *Espèces d'Espace*, it really feels like he's chatting with the reader. OK, not chatting, but smoking a blunt and monologuing about all his clever takes on the world today. Normally, I don't like it when folks do that. But I like it when Georges Perec does.

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## Glenn Russell says

Georges Perec (1936-1982) - "What a marvellous invention man is! He can blow on his hands to warm them up, and blow on his soup to cool it down."

Georges Perec, age 45, told an interviewer how books by authors he loved when he was in his 20s were like pieces of a puzzle but there were still spaces between the pieces and those were the spaces where he could write. He went on to say how he would like to write everything in every way possible, including children's books, science fiction, detective novels, cartoons, comedy, drama and film scripts. He also said that at the end of his life he would like to have used all the words in the dictionary and create some of his own words. One can only imagine the many books Georges Perec would have written if he lived to be 86 instead of dying of lung cancer at 46.

Ah, Georges, language as celebration; language as game; language as play. As a way of reviewing this marvelous collection, I will cite a few quotes and offer brief comments on one essay, a 95 pager, where Perec writes about spaces moving from the micro to the macro, starting with *The Page*, *The Bed*, *The Bedroom*, *The Apartment*, *The Apartment Building*, *The Street*.

### The Page

"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 harbors, 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 texts. Is the aleph, that place in Borges from which the entire world is visible simultaneously, anything other than the alphabet?"----- Amazing. To view the Borgesian aleph, that all-seeing sphere, as the alphabet from which all words are created. And once words are created, is there any object or space, concept or material reality, large or small, gross or subtle, that cannot be labeled, marked, identified, described or categorized by words?

### The Bed

"We generally utilize the page in the larger of its two dimensions. The same goes for the bed. The bed (or, if you prefer, the page) is a rectangular space, longer than it is wide, in which, or on which, we normally lie longways." ----- Oh my goodness, to see the similarities between the page one writes on (or reads from) and the bed one sleeps on.

### The Bedroom

"The resurrected space of the bedroom is enough to bring back to life, to recall, to revive memories, the most fleeting and anodyne along with the most essential." ----- This is certainly true for me: I can't visualize the large upstairs attic bedroom of my youth without recalling emotions and feeling I had when a child: the fear of the shadows cast on the walls at night, the sense of wonder when the sun streamed through the windows in the morning, the unsettling feelings when looking at all those odd ceiling angles.

## The Apartment

“It takes a little more imagination no doubt to picture an apartment whose layout was based on the functioning of the senses. We can imagine well enough what a gustatorium might be, or an auditory, but one might wonder what a seery might look like, or a smellery or a feelery.” ----- Whimsy, fancy, vision, caprice, dream.

## The Street

“Observe the street, from time to time, with some concern, for system perhaps. Apply yourself. Take your time. . . . Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on. Do you know how to see what’s worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you? Nothing strikes you. You don’t know how to see. You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless.” ----- One could take the author’s words here as a mini-course in creative writing and creative seeing and living. As Georges Perec said in his interview, the empty spaces he leaves after his death are an invitation for others to continue the play and game of language and writing.

And in this essay he keeps on expanding: The Neighborhood, The Town, The Countryside, The Country, Europe, The World, Space. ----- Go for it. There’s plenty of space for everyone.

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## Ronald Morton says

*With these, the sense of the world’s concreteness, irreducible, immediate, tangible, of something clear and closer to us: of the world, no longer as a journey having constantly to be remade, not as a race without end, a challenge having constantly to be met, not as the one pretext for a despairing acquisitiveness, nor as the illusion of a conquest, but as the rediscovery of a meaning, the perceiving that the earth is a form of writing, a geography of which we had forgotten that we ourselves are the authors.*

I have confessed my love for Perec many times in many venues (example: [here](#)), but allow me to do so again. I love Perec so freakin’ much. And yet, there are still a handful of his books that I have not read. And I’m not really in any hurry to close that gap, as once I’m done then that’s it, there really isn’t any more. I’ll still re-read him – W, Life, and A Void are all due a re-read soon – but you only get that first read one time, and I’m just going to keep spacing those reads out.

This here collects a lot of Perec’s non-fiction writing. I don’t believe it is meant to be exhaustive; I wasn’t exactly clear from the introduction – thankfully it does include this short essay (Approaches To What), which I highly recommend you just go ahead and pop over and read if you haven’t before, as it is excellent. Outside of his semi-autobiographical fiction, I’ve read very little of Perec’s strictly non-fiction writings. Not surprisingly, Perec is still very much Perec even outside of the confines and restrictions of fiction. The titular piece (Species of Spaces) is a roughly 100 page rumination on the spaces one inhabits, how one can define and capture those spaces, and a general taxonomy of spaces. Which sounds a lot like much of Perec’s fiction – because it is – and in some small way provides a greater level of insight into the way Perec thought and how that thought directly acted on his writing.

What’s fascinating is that the rest of the book – gathered together from various sources and time periods –

could be said to explore the same theory of space and its occupation. It's easy to think of Perec within the restriction and confines of the OuLiPo group, but I think a strong argument could be made that Perec's mind was already defined by these confines and limitations, and that his structural approach to writing just happened to coincide with the OuLiPo group, as opposed to being influenced by it. Almost everything he writes is with precise mapping and structure in mind.

And yet, even with a view towards that precise mapping and structure – and even considering that Perec did not deviate from his self-imposed structures – there is always an overwhelming sense of Perec's *humanity* that is unmistakable in his writing. This is probably why I love Perec to the extent that I do – he presents a precision of structure and execution while still infusing the text with an overall “lightness” (to quote the introduction to this work). And I mean that as both an expression of weight and an expression of luminosity. [I will partially exclude W from this – it is by far his most achingly *human* work, but I would never describe it as “light”. It is – even over Life – my favorite of Perec's books]

So, to conclude, you should read this. You should read anything and everything Perec. He is a true joy to read.

*At this level, language and signs become decipherable once again. The world is no longer that chaos which words void of meaning despair of describing. It is a living, difficult reality that the power of words gradually overcomes. This is how literature begins, when, in and through language, the transformation begins - which is far from self-evident and far from immediate - that enables an individual to become aware, by expressing the world and by addressing others.*

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Xαρ? Z. says

First time reading Perec. It felt strange, real, dreamy and at times, too honest. I liked it. And i believe, the more time passes, the more i am into the book. Great stuff.

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