

# Chapter 3

## Heidegger and Sloterdijk on the concept of “inner space” in Rilke

Maurício Fernando Pitta<sup>1</sup>

José Fernandes Weber<sup>2</sup>

“With all its eyes, gazes the Creature / into the Open.” (RILKE, 1989, p. 185, our translation). The puzzling line opens the eighth of the *Duino Elegies*, of the Prager poet Rainer Maria Rilke, written between 1912 and 1922 during a period marked by pikes of elegiac effervescence. The relationship of animal, man and angels to the open (*das Offene*), the inapprehensible and incommensurable, was an idiosyncratic theme of late Rilkean poetry, taken as one of its main enter keys to his poetic work. In the same elegy, one learns that, between the opening and the nothing that death presents to beings, there is a fundamental confluence (*ibid.*). From Maurice Blanchot, accordingly, one derives that this dimension of pure opening to which belongs death has its positivity in its constant contemporaneity with life, pregnant in all its presence of its own exhaustion (1987, p. 131). To Rilke, men, differently from beasts and deities, live together with death as a distant relative that they never see, but that, often and without acknowledgment, waves at distance, despite the few and rare moments of vague glimpse – in childhood or behind the lover or in the animal’s gaze. Apart from that, open is kept on the inscrutable limits, ‘and again, comes world’ (RILKE, 1989, p. 187, our translation).

These words pronounced by Rilke raise memory of one of his most prominent readers: Martin Heidegger, philosopher to whom death finds itself as an always anticipated possibility, and covert at the same time, of this being that we ourselves are. In the same way, that which pervades the manifestation of reality and which, not being confused with totality itself, provides measure to it, is also the same

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1 Graduate student, Department of Philosophy, State University of Londrina, mauriciopitta@hotmail.com

2 Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, State University of Londrina, advisor.

that, from start and most of the time, retract itself – that is, Being in its constant retraction in relation to the manifested world of beings (cf. HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 39). No wonder is Rilke to its contemporary, Heidegger, the ‘poet in destitute times’ (*id.* 2002, p. 314) par excellence. It is him who, in times of total darkening of the primeval dimension of Being in favor of the technological presentification of all reality, manifested as operativity due to the feedback of operativity itself (*ibid.* p. 316), more could, in a poetic manner, evoke mankind situation in face of a represented world that seals the ownmost manifestation of the open (*ibid.* pp. 366-367)

However, caution is necessary in dealing with the approximation of Heidegger and Rilke. To the former, the poet of *Sonnets to Orpheus* is still ‘metaphysical’, or in other words, for being stuck to the inescapable language in which abides, is someone who does not has words that permit him escape to the ‘human condition’ that he himself denounce in his poems. In this sense, situated at the summit of the history of Being’s oblivion, carried out since the Greek times and responsible for Western metaphysics, Rilke is the poet that, along with Friedrich Nietzsche in Philosophy, according to the Heideggerian reading, promotes the final touches on the consummation of metaphysics (*ibid.* p. 329). Thus, the Rilkean open cannot be taken unreservedly as the ‘open’ that alludes Heidegger (*ibid.* p. 326), without yet fixing it in a concept, by putting himself inside this history, and that better characterizes what the philosopher intends with his thinking of waiting Being’s plea.

In this work, one intends to resort to the Heideggerian reading of what would be Rilke’s open, a notion upon which, for Heidegger, there is a deep equivocality: in the one hand, it represents precisely a complementar dimension to the same subjectivity that is present in human being while turning his back to the open, sharing as a negative, therefore, the same metaphysical logic that subjectivity itself (*ibid.* pp. 327-329); in the other hand, in another context than that of the *Eighth Elegy* and in a more referential than explicit, as ‘another name to the open’ (*ibid.* p. 352), it is pointed out as a more fundamental dimension, ‘inner space of the heart’, in a close relation to what Heidegger would come to understand as the ownmost of human existence and, as a manifestation-retraction of Being, would be under its guard (*ibid.*). This same approach was raised by the contemporary philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, to whom the Heideggerian being-in-the-world and the Rilkean ‘inner space’ share characteristics as two similar ways of ontological dwelling (2008, pp. 212-213). There would be a fundamental difference that would characterize the dissidence in the Sloterdijkian project, which is indebt of the phenomenological formulations of Heidegger, permitting Sloterdijk to come to a critical view regarding the Heideggerian work (*ibid.*). Therefore, one intends to essay an initial approximation between Rilkean poetry and Heideggerian ontology in order to better understand the criterious reception of Heidegger by Sloterdijk,

as to open space to another philosophical interpretation of Rilke that, passing through Heidegger, escapes from the intentions of the Heideggerian ontological project, in the footsteps of non-Heideggerian interpretations of Nietzsche, as occurs with Sloterdijk.

Thus, it is necessary to resume briefly the Heidegger’s text that makes references to the concept of open in Rilke: *What are Poets for?* (2002), member of the selection of texts *Off the Beaten Track*. In this text, one sees Heidegger questioning if Rilke is a poet of Hölderlinian type, that is, a poet ‘in destitute times’ (*ibid.* p. 314). To Heidegger, Rilke dances on the edge of the abyss, looking at it more than the average man and taking the risk of destitution – that is why he is a poet in an age of poverty of Being (*ibid.* pp. 314-316). But also, as a poet in destitute times, Rilke, as Nietzsche, according to Heidegger, gives voice to metaphysics without, however, overcoming it (*ibid.* p. 329). Hence, to the philosopher, the Rilkean notion of open works reversally related to what he himself proposes as originary, that is, open as *alétheia*, in the dynamic of covering and uncovering of Being and beings (*ibid.* p. 327).

The first meaning of the Rilkean open already becomes evident in the *Eighth Elegy*: ‘With all its eyes, gazes the Creature [*die Kreatur*] / into the Open. Just ours seem / inversed and wrapped around / like a trap face to its free outlet’ (RILKE, 1989, p. 185, our translation). Rilke’s animal (*die Kreatur*) has access to the open, while as to man, world is made, that is, interposed, through a conscience, mediator wall of representations to the open, making it an object. Animal, in this sense, finds itself unconsciously ‘in the world’, dragged by the flow of irrational sheavess of nature’s will while man finds himself ‘before the world’, untied of it by his degree of consciousness (HEIDEGGER, 2002, p. 329). The open, here, appears, then, by the one hand, as hidden face of that which represents human reason, as ‘totality of everything that isn’t restricted’ (*ibid.* p. 326, our translation), that is as the pure space of representations’ restrictive objectifications, and by the other, as ‘totality of unlimited nexus of pure connexion’ (*ibid.*), from which man is aparted and to which just the animal responds, as by a process of unconscious disinhibition.

Heidegger deals with a reversal of the elegy – or he rearranges the already Rilkean reversal, as claims Giorgio Agamben (2002, p. 61): Heideggerian open is just where human being finds itself from start, open to Being in its retraction-donation movement, while animal finds itself faced with blindness in relation with beings in general, short of its revealing (*ibid.* pp. 60-61). Rilke thinks the open precisely as opposed to Heidegger because, according to the latter (2002), the former finds himself, together with Nietzsche, in a diametrical oposed moment in relation to the Greeks, who assumed the open in its originary sense (*ibid.* p. 316). The historical situation of the poet is further to the creation of *cogito* and

of subjectivity, as well as of the vitalist metaphysics of Will; hence, Rilke's representation of man is, like Nietzsche's, representation of the representator being par excellence, as that who puts world in front of himself and has it for an object, instrument and value (*ibid.* p. 327). Although suffering the poet from nostalgia of the lost open, just accessible to animals, he thinks this open just as the negative of the representational world of man: open is the unlimited formal that allows restriction of representation and, at the same time, is the totality of will that constrains beings in general into a ceaseless movement of will by itself (*ibid.* p. 326) – will that, in the Heideggerian eisegesis of Nietzsche, would become “will of will”, as the proper way of being at the end of metaphysics (*id.* 2001, p. 70).

Nonetheless, as already said, in the same text in which Heidegger makes these observations, he understands that Rilke, by another route, alludes to a notion of open more closely related to his own intents. This other form of open appears in the middle of some improvised verses by Rilke, without title, made in 1924 in a letter to Mrs. Clara Rilke, in occasion of talking about the risk of being exposed to Nature (that is, to open as conceived in the *Eighth Elegy*) (*apud id.* 2002, p. 318, our translation): ‘[...] what, at last, shelter us / is our destitution, which / we thus turn to the open, seeing it threaten us [...]’. Coming back to exactly these verses (*ibid.* p. 344), Heidegger compares them to the famous fragment of *Patmos*, of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin: ‘But where lives danger / also is salvation.’ (1991, p. 181, our translation) The risk of the open, which threatens the poet exposed to the storm, it is the risk of the place of consummation of metaphysics, place where lives danger and where, also, dwells what saves (HEIDEGGER, 2002, p. 340).

Heidegger's thesis in the text as a whole is that poet is that who, in destitute times, more deeply gazes into abyss and, thus risking himself, prepares the rescue for the forthcoming (*ibid.* p. 365). The poet, the most destitute and the most exposed to the storms of Being, is who possesses shelter, harbor, dwelling the world in the most proper way. In an intricate argumentative chain, the philosopher claims that the reversal of destitution to the open is also deepening into another dimension of the open, as reversal of the departure of man in relation to the open in assuming, one could say, a ‘more originary’ open, more essential, that is, more close of its provenience (*ibid.* p. 351). This reversal, that approaches enormously Rilke and Heidegger, is for the latter the negation of the ‘logic of the conscience’, that aims at the subjective interior of representations in departure from the ‘open’ as the exterior of ‘things in themselves’ and which takes world as calculus, and the assumption of a ‘logic of the heart’<sup>3</sup> (1989, p. 351, our translation), unextensive, uncalculable and now ready to receive open in a proper way, in a more essential way and closely

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3 Just for the note, Heidegger is making allusion here to the contraposition between René Descartes and Blaise Pascal, respectively.

connected to the Heideggerian open, dwelling in it. To this logic, that the last verse of the *Ninth Elegy* foretells (‘[...] an incommensurable existence [*Dasein*] / blossom me in my heart.’ in RILKE, 1989, p. 197, our translation), corresponds a more inner space than that of the interior of consciousness, ‘inner space of the heart’ (HEIDEGGER, 2002, p. 352, our translation), that Rilke calls ‘inner space of world’ (*Weltinnenraum*) in *All things, or almost, make signs to our senses* (*id.* in 2008 [1914]).

From this poem, it deserves mention the five verses below, quoted by Sloterdijk in *In the inner space of capital* (*ibid.* our translation):

Through all beings passes the *one* space:  
 Inner space of world. Calm birds  
 Run through us. O, how I want to grow,  
 I stare out-there and *in* me grows the tree.

In me is the care, in me, the house.

By Heidegger’s interpretation, it is poets (like Rilke) who, destituted, harbor themselves in the inner space of world, dwelling in it by returning to language, univocal space and universal medium, its original plan – and, in this text as in *Letter on Humanism* (2008, p. 326), language is the ‘house of Being’ (*id.* 2002, p. 356, our translation), place of originary donation of a people’s historical mensuration. The poet, Orphean singer, is that who risks language and, hence, prepares the return of Being by sheltering himself in language (and by harboring it, cultivating it and nourishing it without trying to calculate it and reduce it to an instrument) (*ibid.*). That is why Rilke says, in the third of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*: “singing is existence [*Dasein*]” (1989, p. 25) – or, for Heidegger, singing is “there-being” (2002, p. 363, our translation), *Da-sein*, that is, to exist in language.

Sloterdijk, by its turn, rescue Rilkean *Weltinnenraum* in a different context than Heidegger’s, in an unusual approach with Adam Smith’s writings on the running of market in the grand interior of capitalist contemporary world. Before making this encounter, the philosopher of *Spheres* discourses briefly on the Rilkean notion of inner space and compares it to Heidegger’s (2008, pp. 212-213):

*We should point out that the poet trust to the preposition ‘in’ the uncommon assignement of confirming the I [emphasis added] as integral container or universal place – in direct opposition to the Heidegger analysis in Being in time, 1927, where ‘in’ is presented as expression of ek-sistence, that is, of being-held in the exterior facing the open. We could mark this opposition with the help of the expressions ‘en-stasis’ and ‘ek-stasis’.*

On this quote, two things must be explained: first, Sloterdijk interprets Rilkean *Weltinnenraum* in a similar way as Heideggerian being-in-the-world – it is necessary yet to disregard the ‘I’ emphasized in the quotation. Not entering the quarrels between ‘former’ and ‘later’ Heidegger, it is worth noticing that the ‘dwelling’ concept remains thorough Heidegger’s work in an essential and originary relationship with Being, perverted in the history of tradition by the way of the forgetting of Being (on this, check “Building, dwelling, thinking” in 2001, pp. 125-141). Therefore, both *Being and time*’s being-in-the-world and the being that dwells language of the latter work resemble this being that, more than posited indistinguishably in an abstract space, dwells and lingers in a place (world, language) that is familiar and hodiernal to him, in a fundamental relationship with his own Being and with Being in general – Martin Kusch (1989), by instance, claims that Heidegger’s language is ‘universal medium’, in a very similar way to Sloterdijk’s reference to *Weltinnenraum*.

The opposition to which Sloterdijk makes reference, a second aspect to be shown here – considering now the emphasis on the ‘I’ of the quotation – refers to the tension between interior and exterior on the relation between Heidegger and Rilke. The latter thinks ‘I’ as the ‘house’ and, thus, only in the interior of this ‘I’ one dwells in the world like a *Dasein*, a proper existence or a, one would be inclined to say, ‘being-in-the-inner-space-of-the-world’ – and, therefore, taking from the Heideggerian meaning of open only the sense of open as an inhabited place; still, on the extreme opposite, the Heideggerian being-in-the-world is he who also is invested on the full opening of Being, in a gleam that, even not being confused with the pure exteriority of abstract extensionality, is still a ‘house’ as huge as a historical world, a language.

What is the problem with this? For Sloterdijk, the notion of dwelling that he took from Heidegger (sounding like Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s and Gaston Bachelard’s; cf. 2008, pp. 120, 213) is always an interior notion. One dwells in a customary space, within limits, a ‘house’. The problem in Heidegger is that, having been emptied all forms of interiority by the critique of metaphysics, ‘house of Being’ as world/language is a gigantic exterior (*id.* 2014a, p. 560) that does not admit interiority – but it cannot be confounded without reservations with Rilkean *Weltinnenraum* of the ‘self’. On the exterior, ‘the difference between dwelling and exploration is not clear anymore.’ (*id.* 2008, p. 121, our translation). From which follows that, against the absolute exterior of Being, there is no more censure with the possibility of everything becoming resource to be explore, planner impersonality, a totality of subjective representations or scientific image of world (*ibid.*); it becomes almost inescapable, as occurs with Heidegger’s own history of metaphysics, pregnant with nihilism. In face of Being immensity, only what is left is a reactive posture, according to Sloterdijk, that is, the provincialism, the solitude

and the passivity of Heideggerian *Dasein*, self-absorbed against the immeasurable (*ibid.* p. 122).

That is why Sloterdijk (2014a, pp. 305-312) advocate to retake the paragraphs previous to §24 of *Being and time* (HEIDEGGER, 2012), when the investigation on spaciality of *Dasein* still hadn't stumbled on the phenomenon of the impersonal Other (*das Man*), which is not 'a cohabitant of a common sphere [...], of a "culture" or of a shared life, but an undifferentiated element of successful or unsuccessful *external circumstances*' (SLOTERDIJK, 2008, p. 121, our translation) and, hence, potential suspect or enemy. Heidegger's own position regarding the way of being of contemporary technology (*Gestell*) would derive from this 'stumble'.

Thus, Sloterdijk uses the dwelling notion of Heidegger, but supported by a Nietzschean background regarding the animality that precedes man: in an analogous way as Nietzsche's (2008), for whom man is not much more than an animal that, flawed in his animality, develops gregarious strategies – language among them – to survive and isolate himself from the absolute exterior; in the same manner, Sloterdijkian man has firstly to exit his prehuman, animal, stage, to progressively and between others of his kind build himself by autogeny devices until the point in which he makes what we know today as 'human culture' (SLOTERDIJK, 2011, p. 114, our translation).

In view of the observation that the exterior 'open' is too risky to an flawed animal<sup>4</sup>, being-in-the-world concept, besides situating the dwelling question, becomes problematic as such (*ibid.* p. 113). There must be, according to Sloterdijk, something between the animal's environmental world (*Umwelt*), restricted to the set of disinhibitions, as the same time as 'blind' against them, previous to the manifestation of Being, and the exterior of Being's clearing; a intermedial dimension that is interior but, also, not individual, since human being can only be an autogenous product in his gregariousness (*ibid.*).

It is just for this that the philosopher articulates the concept of 'sphere', and in this the notion of 'en-stasis' comes in handy as a model – inasmuch as undertook a proper understanding of the 'self' of the poem in a different manner than as a individual subject aparted from world. For Sloterdijk (2008, p. 213), is Bachelard, who in *The poetics of space* (1993), best clarifies the more proper characteristics of Rilkean inner space, in articulating a phenomenology of the primaeval poetic experiences of intimacy of what he considers to be the true 'house of Being' (*maison d'être*), previous even to language (*ibid.* pp. 72-73).

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4 But maybe not to the animals represented by Rilke's poems, in which, coated with an environmental world (*Umwelt*) as a 'natural cage', they could keep themselves sheltered by their own disinhibitions against the exterior weather. On the (theoretical and factual) relationship between the creator of *Umwelt* concept and the poet, check WINTHROP-YOUNG in UEXKÜLL, 2010, pp. 229-235.

Intimacy in the space of the house indicates not the asepsis of a theoretical or contemplative state in a homogeneous and disqualified space, but, instead, the proper notion of meaning reverberation and attraction between the poles of the house – Bachelard names the analysis of such poles as ‘topofilia’ and by it he thinks the spaces, objects or persons that abide the house and that work as affective and mnemonic motives. The formation of sense of self pass through the formation of sense of house, that is, of intimacy space, and this happens even before gaining form by a given language (*ibid.* p. 31).

Regarding *Weltinnenraum*, Bachelard assigns to it the experience of immensity, in the conjugation of inner space and world space, as surrounding space. The ‘I’ of the poem cannot be the singular subject, devoid of place, because the interior to which refers the ‘I’ is the house itself, that is, the intimacy itself (*ibid.* p. 207). In the wake of this interpretation, Sloterdijk assign to Rilkean en-stasis the ‘mode of world experience typical of primary “narcissism”’ (2008, p. 212, our translation), not as self-reference, but as the first experience of the fetus in face of the another who still is not objective, who conforms the fetus in the uterus (on this, check *Spheres I*, 2014a, chap. 5) and who, transposed to context later than birth (as in the literal house of childhood), molds ‘the present environment and its imaginary extension [...] from the experiences of heat and on the semantical presuppositions of an agile, exalted and undifferentiated spirit.’ (*id.* 2008, p. 212, our translation). What happens, then, with *Weltinnenraum*’s feeling of ‘oceanic coherence’ (*ibid.*) is the ‘repetition of the fetal sensation in an exterior scene.’ (*ibid.*)

Well, the microspherological analysis of *Spheres I* (2014a), which lay the basic categories of the Sloterdijkian concept of sphere is precisely, as quoted above, the analysis of the uterine space, in which occurs the triple resonance of a basic, modular sphere, as medium par excellence of human dwelling: ‘the living together of something with something in something’ (*ibid.* p. 487, our translation) – the fetus with the placenta in the maternal womb, ‘inner space of the absolute mother’ (*ibid.* p. 485, our translation) as model of immanence of all its ‘post childbirth metaphorizations’ (*ibid.* p. 486, our translation). Every sphere, according to Sloterdijk, can be defined in this way. Sphere, therefore, is always an immunological *topos* of resonance of two or more poles (one can read: ‘intimacy’) – the cell analogy works well, with its semipermeable membrane. Thus, one does not talk here in the subject involved in his monadic globe of representations, but isolated from the thing in itself; one is in an individual sphere, but in a sphere of strong relations, in the transit between microspheres (as the womb or the house) and macrospheres (as language, a community or a country), in relation of pressure and osmosis with the exterior (*ibid.*). Ultimately, one transmutes the being-in-the-world, that throws the inhabitant in the immense (*ibid.* p. 561), in being-in-spheres, changing into the proper immunologies of intimacies experiences (*ibid.* p. 487).



One can see that, in a different way compared to Heidegger's, Sloterdijk considers not an analogy with being-in-the-world in Rilke's inner experience, flawed only by its debts with a kind of Nietzschean metaphysics – especially because Nietzsche's considerations on man and animal are decisive, even if not always explicit, on Sloterdijk's argumentative building. For Sloterdijk, poetics of space owes great debts to Rilke (*ibid.* p. 70), and it is possible to suppose an hermeneutic key of reading Rilke that, passing through Heidegger, can be selective to some of his interpretations – either by the immanence of his questions or by the interpretation that he does of Rilke in light of the *sui generis* interpretation he does of Nietzsche. With such a proceeding, some of Rilke's important questions, like the ontological status of animal in front of the open, could be retake from his more canonic readings in all its positivity, at the same time as associated and articulated with some ontological notions of the German thinker on existence, dwelling, Being and death, that seems to complement the poet ones.

Besides, it seems necessary, at last, to point out some things in a marginal fashion, although with the paper at its final breathes. They arise around the hypothesis that the Heideggerian reading of Rilke could be spotted by its interpretation of the Nietzschean *opus* as corollary of the consummation of metaphysics. We could formulate on this a question to be thought: couldn't the open of the *Eighth Elegy* arise as facet of the same 'only space' of the *Weltinnenraum*? Actually, the question arises to highlight the problem of human animality. The open appears precisely as that which is accessible through animal gaze, and frequently is present in a mayfly form in the intensity of the flow of lovers or in the ignoble innocence of a kid. In Heidegger, human animality is lowered for the proximity of man regarding Being – regarding the gods. However, some interpretations point to a proximity between animals and gods (and angels) in the Rilkean poetry, while man, opposing world to itself, would be removed even from the gods (cf. p.ex. MAROVICH, 2014, pp. 134-145). Rilkean nostalgia regarding the 'lost heaven' of the open would resemble that with 'inner space', as a kind of immanence in which seems to be part of both Sloterdijk (2014a), Agamben (2015) and Gilles Deleuze (2002), resambling precisely the Nietzschean conception of man as a creative animal by its flawed animality. Would look like, from Rilke and Nietzsche, one could think in a strong tie between animality and immanence that would permit to think human being's immanence linked to his own animality, and this would make the investigation, regarding important questions of contemporaneity, gain great importance.<sup>5</sup>

5 As example of the confluence between contemporaneity and animality, besides the work of Agamben, Deleuze and Sloterdijk, thinking problems that concerns capitalism, democracy, exclusion, control, biopolitics and so on, check the paper of Paul Beatriz Preciado, published in 2014 under the title 'Feminism is not an humanism', paper that questions humanism from 'animalism', 'an enlarged and non-anthropocentric feminism.' (2014)

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