

On Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* Now,
in Introduction to "Nests," "Shells,"
and "Intimate Immensity."

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by

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One comes away from reading Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* as one does from reading Christopher Alexander's *A Pattern Language* or Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*—as though waking from a dream. Not from any dream, but one of a world gone by, where children wore wool, people walked in rainy streets and closed gates behind them, where mechanisms gleamed, boxes were fragrant, and newspapers unfolded with a rustle.

This world lives in the imagination still and has value—indeed, a commercial value. Consider Universal or Pinewood Studios, where on film instead of the page an older generation's memories are gilded into a new generation's fantasies.¹ Or consider children's books, which, set in barnyards and villages, among hedgerows and forests or in cottages and castles populated by animals and secret places, remain stubbornly nostalgic to this day, keeping a five-hundred-year-long tradition of European place-making—a way of “building, dwelling, thinking” that, in fact, ended around 1945—in eternal suspended animation.

And look at how we live now. Most American families not living in older city centers change houses six or seven times in a lifetime and change workplaces more often than that. With toys spilling out of closets, a TV in every room, iPods, videogames, “social media,” and the internet in general, generations are growing up that don't read journals, magazines, or books (much less, poetry)—that know no solitude at a window, no boredom, no reverie. Who, today, picnics on a blanket and then, with only birdsong to entertain, falls asleep with their face in a fragrant hat? Who sabbaths by leaving the lights off at sunset to watch the gloom gather around the house, their eyes growing accustomed to the dark, until a distant streetlight begins to cast its improbable shadows across the floor? Chances are that our workplaces are bare and over-lit, that they're furnished in metal and wood-veneer, and that they have a tinted, sound-stopping, non-opening window (if they have a window at all) facing a patch of low-maintenance “landscape.” Chances are that we spend most of our waking hours looking at a computer monitor or smartphone screen, corresponding, “Tweeting,” or surfing the Web, that we listen to an iPod while we commute or shop or jog, that our children play with videogames in the back seat rather than watch the passing scenery or count poles, and that we go to sleep exhausted right after John Stewart or a *Netflix* movie and, oh yes, checking our email one last time.

My point is that we are not *here*. We live our lives more distractedly than ever in a physical environment that seems to know it: an environment designed and built, it would almost seem, with the aim of directing our time, money, and attention elsewhere. In the

1930s, building construction was over 4% of the GDP in the U.S. It is now below 2%, despite producing several times the number of square feet per annum.

Irony upon irony, it is the homeless who live in material space most intensely, to whom fire and nest, intimacy and shelter mean most. They are, perforce, still *here*.

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When Charles Moore taught at the Yale School of Architecture in the mid-1970s, *The Poetics of Space* was required reading. It was already becoming clear that modern architecture's vaunted spans, transparency, and blankness were, under the pretext of "creating space," creating emptiness. Far from making room(s) for lives freed from History, architects were building voids for the media to fill.

What were thoughtful architects to do? Coming out of the office of Louis Kahn—that most Romantic and historically inclined of modern architects—Robert Venturi and Charles Moore, writerly young architects both, knew that their response had somehow to include a sacralizing—by a kind of love—of the ordinary, even the ugly; it had to include a return to the ideas of type and archetype and include a revival of architectural history as an inspiration and example. The conceptual framework of architecture, moreover, would need to welcome impurity, lived experience, and phenomenology rather than insist on purity, rationality, and efficiency. Graffiti was almost OK. With other writer-architects like Alison and Peter Smithson, Michael Graves, Reyner Banham, Donlyn Lyndon, Christian Norberg-Shulz, Jane Jacobs (not an architect), Juhani Pallasmaa, Peter Zumthor, and again Christopher Alexander, resistance to the corporate, International Style juggernaut seemed possible, at least in the U.S. and Britain. People could be reawakened to their architectural rights, as it were, as citizens and dwellers. There was Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and later *Lila*, advocating for Quality, which blooms up from the universe to greet the close attention we give to any object, mechanism, or activity—today, we call it "mindfulness." There was planner Yi-fu Tuan's *Topophilia*; and there was my own (if I may be so bold) Zen-inspired *For an Architecture of Reality*. These books and many more addressed to architects tried to poetize authenticity, to "re-enchant" (Morris Berman's word) the physical world,² to resensitize our senses and to find meaning again in the act of building. Behind much of this was Heidegger's seminal essay *Building Dwelling Thinking* and, of course, *The Poetics of Space*—these two books traceable, in turn, to the thoughts of Henry David Thoreaux, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and a selection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Romantic poets.

By the 1990s, the dream of actually picking up architecture's historical evolution where it had left off around 1917 vanished. It vanished not only because of the money it would have taken to build that way again (not to mention because of the skills lost), but also because of what postmodern, star architects, backed by two decades of history-soaked "theory," actually delivered. Sea Ranch aside, what they delivered was not a wise but a winking architecture, not realness but symbolism, not a new generosity but a new cheapness, not buildings assembled stone by stone but buildings starched, dyed, and hung out to dry. This was followed by two decades of architecture—arches and pediments finally banished—emulating train wrecks, dropped ribbons, or lampshades.

Much better, we thought.

By 2000, Heidegger's star had set. Derrida's had risen and set too. Deleuze and Guattari's still shone here and there. Architects looking to philosophy found less and less to inspire them. Ordinary people stopped expecting to take pleasure in everyday architecture. Learning to ignore where they were, they "amused themselves to death" instead with movies, sports, and TV, as Neil Postman described it in 1986.³ Little did Postman know how much further down this road ordinary people would go with Apple's i-Everything and Electronic Arts' videogames. By 2000 too, computer aided design (CAD) had arrived in architecture schools with a vengeance: much twirling, no drawing, accompanied by lots of loose talk and cool diagrams treating buildings as "systems" that "worked with" nature (or better, with "natural systems"). For the most part, in architecture offices around the world, CAD merely sped up the design of practical buildings by cutting down the time for reflection and serendipity, for noise and chance, to enter the process.

As a result, at present, any architectural movement one might call "*humanistic*" remains a dream: I mean, architecture with a phenomenological-poetic motive, one that takes human consciousness as a starting point, that is made up of *rooms*, each one of which has a character (thus making up a "society of rooms," as Louis Kahn put it) rather than being made up of "spaces" (or worse, "areas"); buildings that complicated rather than "erased" the boundaries between indoors and out-; buildings the equivalent of Slow Food; buildings that would require effort and time to understand because of how much information had accumulated through patient design and typological evolution to become expressed in details that added pleasure and dignity to life.⁴ A Romantic view? Perhaps. But this is the kind of architecture that Bachelard would have advocated. And it would be quite, quite new today.

And what of the thousands of fine, pre-modern buildings world over that are still occupied and cared for?⁵ Movie location scouts know these buildings well, as do photographers and citizen lovers-of-their-neighborhoods and preservationists...and, oh yes, the people Paul Fussell calls "Old Money," who never fell for Modernism for *themselves* in the first place, or for Postmodernism (except maybe as practiced by Robert A. M. Stern), or for Deconstruction or New Modernism or Pragmatism because they know that *quality* has nothing to do with newness, efficiency, or disorientation.

Lesson? Older buildings of any quality should be saved and learned from even if they fall short of deserving historic landmark status. Expensive to build in their time, they should be adapted, not demolished. For as science fiction writer William Gibson acutely observes, the future does not arrive all at once everywhere.⁶ Old technologies remain useful in different pockets of the economy and in different parts of the world for hundreds of years after their purported obsolescence, interacting complexly with the new.⁷ Buildings are like that too, and so is nature. Thriving ecologies do not consist only of evolution's "latest models," but of a fantastic mix of ancient and recent species: ferns *and* roses, dragonflies *and* dogs. Thriving cities are similarly amalgams of old and new, the corroded and fresh, the labyrinthine and the straight, the traditional and the experimental. Who doesn't know that? But we seem not to know that it is how it *should* be. There is no need for architects to ally themselves so dominantly with the new, not even for financial reasons, for there is money to be made—not to say goodness to be done—negotiating the richness that comes with complexity and the complexity that comes with time.

In this light, it is unfortunate that for many *The Poetics of Space* has come to stand with some of the more conservative trends in architectural theory. There are readers who would find the critique I have offered of contemporary architecture precisely that: conservative, Romantic, and reactionary (if “phenomenological,” and thus *somewhat* cool). But Bachelard was at pains to point out that one cannot use one’s knowledge of history, or of the psyche for that matter, as a *way* to produce poetry. The poetic image cannot be synthesized. It springs out of nowhere and *then* resounds down the well of time. It starts at the surface, as it were, as a perturbation of consciousness, as a chance eddy in the wind of language (or, if you’re an architect, quiver of pencil), which *stirs up* the past. It surprises even its creator and, only then, comforts or discomforts.

And so, if Bachelard were alive today, we might be surprised at what struck him as newly poetic in the “art of space” that is architecture. It might not be the neo-Ruskinian cottages photographed in *Fine Homebuilding* or the aerial renderings and “transects” of New Urbanists. It might be a quite different spatial experience—say, high in OMA’s Seattle’s Public Library, looking vertiginously down through a reverse-inclined diagonal mesh of steel and glass at innocent, beetle-like cars negotiating the traffic intersection below, or working at a desk midway up the same firm’s improbably-structured CCTV building in Beijing and, looking across outdoor space at a worker in the same building but in a tower leaning in the other direction, seeing him or her as a passenger in a train heading the other way that always and never leaves the station. Still at the CCTV building: will those bold diagonal slashes on its façade remind anyone of Chinese traditional basketry? Will its yawning vertical void surrounded by—made by—heavy, conventional construction make us think of Taoism surrounded by—and also “made by”—Confucianism? And what of the sensation of walking on the glass floor of the linking section, some thirty floors over the void? In short, could the CCTV building—so clever and yet so crude—spin old daydreams, ignite emotion? Perhaps. Might the building itself be an act of “material imagination”—a poem? Let us grant that it is. Having encountered Bachelard, we have a way to discuss whether it is a good one.

One might also look to the movies, but, this time, to movies about the future. It seems to me that William Gibson, from whose imagination *Johnny Mnemonic* and *The Matrix* trilogy sprung, got it right: the past and the future are miscible; the world above and the world below are joined in dreams, likely mediated by mental technologies. And so did Philip K. Dick get it right, from whose stories we got *Blade Runner*, *The Minority Report*, and *Inception*. In the production design and art direction of all three, the old is repurposed, patina is critical, and our dreams are of escape to a greener world. From these movies and many others that veer close to dream logic (movies by David Lynch, for example), architects might learn to read *The Poetics of Space* with a new frame of mind. Can we have cellars and garrets, drawers, chests, and wardrobes, nests, shells, corners, miniatures, intimate immensity, outside, inside, and roundness again in new forms and old materials, old forms and new materials?⁸ The answer is yes. Might architects make buildings that have historical density *and* the latest technologies in their bones? Yes. Might architects of the future, unlike today’s pragmatists, pranksters and minimalists, learn to work in a cloud of benign stylistic agnosticism, in love with *all* characterful buildings and the varieties of life they support? We can hope so. It would be a truly new architecture.

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What follows introduces the next article in this volume of *CENTER*, which consists of three longish excerpts from *The Poetics of Space*—one each from the chapters “Nests,” “Shells,” and “Intimate Immensity.” These are reprinted by kind permission of Presses Universitaires de France and Random House Inc.

Why these chapters (and these excerpts)? It’s hard to say, except that they come from later regions in the book, which fewer readers get to. They also implicate three of the chief axioms of the modernist architectural project—namely, the dissolution of the distinction between inside and outside, the challenge to handcraft, and claims about “human scale.” Other chapters might have served almost as well. (For example, there is one titled “The Dialectics of Inside and Outside.”)

What can be said overall? Largely unparaphrase-able, every chapter of *The Poetics of Space* uses the same modus operandi: starting with a theme, stanzas from poems are sequentially presented, appreciated, and, in a way, explained. Personal reflections and even confessions alternate with painstaking categorizations and logical distinctions, and these are grouped into numbered meditations—philosophical “takes” much like the takes that make up a single scene in a movie (and which are often tried more than once). A single image guides each scene, one that fuses our innermost selves to the lineaments of reality. For Bachelard wants to demonstrate how the “material imagination” works philosophically—how, struck by a poetic image, it philosophizes simply by paying attention to the image’s echoes in the mind. Thus is a shape revealed that is simultaneously the world’s and the mind’s. There is an element of faith here: the imagination cannot be *wrong*. So this is not a systematic philosophy. Nor is it metaphysics, i.e., reasoning about what is really out there apart from human feelings, interests, and experiences. In Bachelard’s view (and let us recall that he was a philosopher of science for the first part of his career), the soul is moved by Nature if not the other way round, so that when we write about places poetically or make architecture with spatial (platial?) artifacts like arcades, courtyards, and cabinets, and do so poetically, we are giving evidence of our struggle to protect and free ourselves from nature’s moods on the one hand, and to win approval from her on the other.⁹ Infinity races away from everything to which we pay close attention, while the cosmic rushes in along the same lines. With Bachelard we are always inside, even when we are “out of doors.”¹⁰ He writes unhurriedly. He turns things over. He wants us to close our eyes. He does not mind us dozing off.

This modus operandi is common to all chapters of *The Poetics of Space*. The three chosen chapters differ, however, in the images that are allowed to take the lead. Each has contemporary architectural implications, a few of which I will try to suggest (that Bachelard does not).

“Nests” contains thoughts about birds as well as their nests: how a nest’s shape is an impression of the size and physique of the bird that makes it, how the majority of nests are abandoned so that coming across an *occupied* one—one with eggs laid out or a choir of chirps emerging—sends a thrill into the soul that sends waves into the environment like a stone thrown into a pond, and makes children of us again. Male birds will often own the whole tree, defending their nest as though it were a house or castle... We are not birds, of course, nor can we ascribe human emotions to them. But we know about nests from knowing our beds, our cradles, our rooms and homes—our trees.¹¹ We protect our young; we are tuned to the same exigencies of life.

Nests! How *organized* they are, and disorganized. How witless, and perfect. The woven nest, like some abstract expressionist painting or piece of Zen *raku* pottery, represents a balance of reason and spontaneity, assiduousness and carelessness, and permanence and impermanence that maddens the contemporary designer because it is so hard to achieve, even in “look.” One thinks, perhaps, of Mrs. Farnsworth fleeing to a nunnery in Italy, unable to nest in the curtain-less, floating glass house that Mies van der Rohe designed for her in Plano, Illinois. One thinks, by contrast, of Charles and Ray Eames’s house in Pacific Palisades, California, no less rational a building, but also a nest thoroughly feathered with furniture, carpets, fabrics, curios, art, toys, and bric-a-brac. The Eames occupied it for forty years, worked and raised children there.

One could argue that the phenomenology of nests has more to offer to a product- or interior designer than an architect. (The best interior design magazine ever in fact was called *Nest*.) When it comes to *shells*, however, the appeal to architecture is clear. Buildings are nothing if not shells, carapaces, armor. Rather like coral reefs, termite mounds, or caves, buildings create rigid cells to protect soft and vulnerable bodies—usually ours. With stone, steel, concrete, glass, and wood, buildings are made stiff, inert, hollow, all the more definitively to resist invasion by rain, sun, wind, hail, and other projectiles, not to mention wild humans and animals. We take the resoluteness of this resistance for granted. Let that resoluteness weaken, however, let the inward spiral of retreat become impossible, and the entire image of a building as protective shell becomes a source of anxiety, a disturbance.¹² A roof leak will do it.

Shells in nature are small. And there is difference between their meaning and the meaning of shells large enough to be humanly inhabited. An aircraft hangar is a shell so large that it disappears. An Airstream trailer is quite a different thing, beginning to share the phenomenology of a snail’s shell, a cigar tube, a goose egg. The vaults of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth—intimate in scale for a public building—follow the natural pattern: pearlescent inner surfaces, rougher exteriors, presented serially with ends shown like beach shells made into a collection.¹³ While Peter Zumthor’s St. Benedict Chapel in Sumvigt, Switzerland, presents an interior like a ship’s hull, which is a shell too, the museum and chapel both share in the shells’ shapes seeming to have been derived from a geometry textbook: the Logarithmic Spiral (nautilus), the Cycloid (Kimbell), the Pointed Ovoid (St. Benedict)... You cannot make shells any old shape, it seems: biology and mathematics forbid it.

Geometry aside, empty shells for Bachelard’s poets speak of mortality, the body exited of soul, like an office building at night, or an abandoned factory, or a country church on Tuesday. No wonder they sound like the wind, like distant ocean. And consider how often niches are treated as large, fossilized scallop-shells *pressed in* to the wall, rather than as recesses or scoopings-out of it. In result, whatever statue, fountain, or urn is placed in the niche becomes a pearl.¹⁴

Finally, to our third excerpt, “Intimate Immensity.”

The term “space” in architectural discourse is being used today as avidly as it has been for almost a hundred years. With Computer Aided Design packages like *Maya* and *Rhino* in hand, descriptors of space have become even more technical. Architects speak today of folds and splines, of translations, rotations, alignments, parameters, and “operations” on surfaces, just like the mechanical engineers for whom CAD packages were first developed...but knowing nothing of their real-world effects. For unlike

machine parts that impinge upon one another materially and mechanically, buildings act on people “through the air,” which is to say, softly, slowly, deeply, somewhat unpredictably, and with long-term outcomes. Architects speak confidently of “programming spaces” (or “areas”) for different “activities” and then of “supporting” these activities with “services.” They “comply with code,” they “capitalize” on this and that “opportunity,” they “structure” (that’s a verb, as in “structure interactions”)...unaware of the blindness brought on by this kind of language as *to what buildings actually do* to affect our happiness, and, yes, to affect “performance” (a word engineers and managers love above others, besotted by sport as they are). It’s enough to make one want to ban all talk of “space” and maybe switch to “place.” *Place* is what counts. It is the larger idea and actually the deeper one too.¹⁵

If Bachelard’s writing is antidote to this blindness, then nowhere is it more strongly so than in “Intimate Immensity,” the first of the final three chapters of *The Poetics of Space* that are themed, unlike the earlier chapters, on certain spatial emotions rather than on certain objects or places.

To start with the obvious, be it down at the dockyards next to an ocean liner or on a rocky ledge overlooking the Grand Canyon, be it gazing up at skyscrapers or contemplating our distance from the stars, humans have a penchant for experiencing immensity. These experiences are humbling, we like to say; they make us feel small and finite, which is a Good Thing in the religious view. Without taking on religion, Bachelard differs: we come away from experiences of immensity, he observes, *ourselves enlarged*, as though we knew that the world is neither small nor large without us to say so, that immensity is a sensation generated *within ourselves*. Motor activity keeps us knowing our size. Stop to gaze, meditate, or daydream, and the mind naturally expands: “(w)e return to the natural activity of...magnifying being.” (PoS, 184). Self-expansion is our purpose, not self-diminution, and a certain pride in *seeing*, seeing at all (PoS, 190).

The inner origin of immensity, however, does not fully explain the intimacy component of “intimate immensity,” which is Bachelard’s target. Nor does immensity’s *immediacy* explain it, as when, although we cannot see far, we feel lost in an old forest, or a maze, or an unfamiliar city. These places “accumulate infinity within their own boundaries” Bachelard writes (PoS, 186), and we are likely to speak instead of their *depth*. Depth is a unique, non-Cartesian dimension. Neither X, nor Y, nor Z in direction, depth is what goes downward, and inward, and away-from-all-boundaries at once. Travel in depth or think in depth and you experience the kind of immensity that comes from densification, lowering, penetration...accompanied either by uncertainty about the objective size of things or by the conviction that *size itself* is being endlessly manufactured at an unreachable point ahead, at the heart. In this dream of infinity, the universe must “logically” complete itself. How? Where? In the Ouroboros-like meeting of the very large and very small at the always-other antipode of a circle created in the dimension we call “depth.” In this dream, microscopes are telescopes and vice versa; the particular and the universal interpenetrate... .

Less mystically, depth sometimes meets immensity in the real experience. Bachelard cites adventurer Philippe Diolé’s experiences of both deep sea diving and crossing the desert. Both experiences generate feelings of immensity; both environments, though vast, press in—they oppress, in some way; touch the skin. Bachelard, were he writing later, might just as well have cited Alphonso Lingis’ remarkable essay “Rapture of the Deep” in his 1984 book *Excesses*, where the journey into the realm of underwater

life—biological life—is also a journey downward, inward, and backward in evolutionary time, into a sort of unbounded mother-body of free-floating, future-human viscera.¹⁶ Or he might have cited Arata Isozaki’s remarkable reading of the side chapel of Le Corbusier’s Monastery of La Tourette, which he reads as an underwater environment: the sloping floors, the sand-lodged rock altars, the swaying wall making the shafts of colored light from the surface overhead seem to dance, and the body feel currents.¹⁷

A poem, for Bachelard, is not a record of “impressions.” Impressions can be numbered and cataloged. So too can images be, like slides. But a poem, like a building, is meant to be *lived* in time, in Bergsonian *durée*. The *durée* that a poem makes is much longer than the time it takes to read; the *space* a poem makes is larger than the space it takes to print it. (What could be more “economical”?) The poem demonstrates how inner vastness can issue from the most intimate and solitary of activities: reading. The poem exemplifies what an oneiric *building* can be too. Be it epic in size or miniature, a good building, borrowing from dreams, slows time and expands space. Indeed, follow the White Rabbit of Bachelard’s presentation and will one cease to think it improper that fine architecture, wherever it is, should hint at *elsewhere*, other times and places. In a hot climate, should you not dream that you are somewhere cool; in a cold climate, that you are somewhere warm; in exile, that you are at home; at home, that you must soon leave for foreign parts (or have just come back)? This process may be integral to fine architecture’s “transporting” function, its very marvelousness. Now, I am not advocating overtly theatrical architecture for most buildings—a return to postmodern scenography. Bachelard would not advocate that either. But we *can*, I think, have an architecture that recreates long-forgotten, even unconscious archetypal places, places that we recognize like friends not seen in decades: interesting, critical of local norms. Think of the porch vaults of the Kimbell Art Museum. There’s nothing like them in Fort Worth, though they do what willows next to a stream do—willows that existed long before Fort Worth did. Contra modern architecture’s sterner proponents, then, buildings *can* look like something—stir memory—and not be childish. They can evoke ecologies, seasons, and eras other than our own. They can be thatchy in Arizona and glassy in Maine the way an Englishman wears a suit in Africa or an African wears a print shirt in London: in defiance, in transcendence, in ode to elsewhere. Alas, the current mood of environmentalism in architecture mitigates such thoughts. *Adaptation* is the new ideal.

But perhaps Bachelard’s lesson for architects (and for psychoanalysts) has nothing to do with either profession’s future practices. It may well be that what Bachelard teaches, indeed preaches, most importantly is greater *receptivity* to the physical environment, period. Consider: we live increasingly at a time when only productivity is rewarded, i.e., output per dollar or hour. Psychotherapists excepted, no one is *paid* to be receptive—to listen, to see, appreciate, reflect—unless it leads to greater productivity, i.e., more marketable output with less input, and the sooner the better. Indeed, one must generally *pay*—if not in money then in foregone earnings—to enter a state of receptivity away from the wheels of production.¹⁸ And ironically this applies to Bachelard’s efforts too: what good would his years of reading and thinking have done us had he not written *The Poetics of Space*? It was required by the contract that binds us in usefulness to each other that his memories, his insights, his moments of bliss not remain private or ends in themselves, but be fashioned and sent out again. I say “ironically,” because his later books take us to worlds and lifestyles where—and periods of our lives when—receptivity rules. Or did. I mean in early childhood, in the blush of young love or sincere student-hood, after narrow escapes, or in the vanishing ground-time between

work, socializing, consumption, and exercise. Ask yourself: Under what circumstances did I (or will I) read all of *The Poetics of Space*? OK, most of it. Or even this perhaps-too-long essay?

So perhaps the real challenge of Bachelard's writing is to remake our economy. It is to slow down our business, to educate us more deeply, to rebalance the distribution of wealth. Why? So that *all* can dwell as much in *receptivity* to art and to nature as in productive contribution to them. Certainly, the future will not improve without the capacity to appreciate the poetics of all our doings in the context of a world we understand as being, for the most part, anciently given. •

Notes

¹ I am thinking of Andrew Adamson and Vicki Jensen's *Shrek*, Terry Gilliam's *Time Bandits*, Chris Weitz's *Golden Compass*, Terence Malick's *The Tree of Life*, Martin Scorsese's *Hugo*...and one could add dozens of "period" or fairy-tale-based feature films, animated and "real," that depend on visual nostalgia.

² Morris Berman, *The Re-enchantment of the World* (Cornell University Press, 1981).

³ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin, 1986, revised 2005)

⁴ Some readers may wonder why I am not touting sustainability as the Next Big Thing for architects. It's because sustainability guarantees nothing that has to do with joy in inhabitation, or beauty.

⁵ E.g. in the U.S., the Bradbury building in Los Angeles, the Chrysler Building in New York, PSFS in Philadelphia, Battle Hall in Austin, the Crane Library in Quincy, Massachusetts.

⁶ He put it better in *The Economist* on December 4, 2003: "The future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed."

⁷ See especially William Gibson *Trust That Particular Flavor* (New York: Putnam, 2012).

⁸ The reader might recognize this list—a poem in its own right—as the chapter titles of *The Poetics of Space*.

⁹ This broaches the psychoanalytical realm. Bachelard's purpose in some way was to critique psychoanalysis for its narrowness—it's tendency to explain rather than luxuriate in, extrapolate, or grow-in-wisdom from watching the workings of the "material imagination." As Ellen Olson shows in her essay in this volume, however, several of Bachelard's contemporaries working in psychoanalytic tradition—notably Hans Leowald—showed deep respect for the imagination as a "higher organ."

¹⁰ A meditation by this author on the "interiorist" vs. "exteriorist" readings of the world can be found the article "Environmental Stoicism and Place Machismo: A Polemic," *Harvard Design Magazine* 16, Winter/Spring 2002, pp. 21–27.

¹¹ Worth examining phenomenologically, I think, is the use of one body to shelter another, as when a hen spreads her wings over her chicks or a street-beggar disposes her legs to form a playpen for her child, when we hug each other in grief or joy, or put ourselves physically between loved ones and danger. If the first architecture is the womb, the second is surely a mother's arms and head, and the third, a coat or blanket wrapped over oneself and another...

¹² Earlier in the book, Bachelard treats the home/house as a symbol of the self. The shell, similarly, has it uses as a metaphor for how the self protects itself. (People, we say, withdraw into their shells when attacked, like a tortoise; or they "clam up.") Bachelard is not interested, however, in studying space/dwelling imagery to

construct a helpful map of the human psyche—helpful to professional psychologists and psychiatrists, anyway—or even a map, really, with its own topo-logic and completeness. The latter is what Kurt Lewin attempted in 1936 in his *Principles of Topological Psychology*, and to some extent what contemporary neural mapping of the brain attempts too. I personally doubt that the topology/topography of the psyche, and even the brain, *functioning*, is usefully mappable into a Euclidean space of three dimensions (plus time) without profound, magical, CGI-like effects built in: asymmetries of direction, rescalings, non-commutativity, “worm-holes,” and the like.

¹³ Bachelard (PoS p. 117) reports an archeologist finding a grave with a “coffin that contained nearly three hundred snail shells placed around the skeleton...” One wonders: what was thought to reside in those shells?

¹⁴ Cylindrical (actually half-cylindrical) niches often received half-dome tops, which in turn created semi-circular arches on the wall. This half dome was often rendered sculpturally as a scallop shell, which had the additional affordance of creating a sort of halo around the head of any statue placed in it. In *The Birth of Venus*, Botticelli’s has Venus arise from just such shell. Platform, halo; earth-ocean, sky...the world as an open clamshell.

¹⁵ The distinction between “space” and “place” is not mine, of course. Many writers on architecture, landscape, and geography have brought it up for roughly the same reasons I have. The distinction actually goes back to Plato and Aristotle. The former defined space as the total of possible geometrical relationships among points. The latter defined space as the sum, or co-presence, of nearest surrounding/bounding surfaces—the places—of particular points or objects. Plato had no phenomenology of surroundingness or aroundness. The best introduction to these ideas is Max Jammer’s 1969 classic *Concepts of Space*. Architects’ eager adoption of the word “space” had everything to do with wanting to share in the aura of science, especially after Einstein. The two most influential books in this regard were Siegfried Gideon’s 1941 *Space Time and Architecture* (now in its fifth revised edition) and Bruno Zevi’s 1948 (translated 1957, revised 1974) *Architecture as Space*. Of course, Bachelard’s naming his book “The Poetics of *Space*,” fully avails itself of that word’s scientific mystique. In truth, there is a science of *place* too, but it is based on information theory, cognition, and ecological psychologies such as J. J. Gibson’s..

¹⁶ In Alphonso Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (State University of New York Press, 1984).

¹⁷ “Eros or the Sea,” introduction to *GA (Global Architecture): Le Corbusier Couvent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette*, (Tokyo: A.D.A. Edita, 1971). It can only strengthen Isozaki’s reading to know that Le Corbusier died by drowning; then to recall that Ronchamps too re-creates being under water: specifically, under the hull of a rowing boat, the sloping seabed floor, sparkling bars of light randomly penetrating the gloom, the snorkel-like apses reaching for air...

¹⁸ Some might argue that we are constantly receptive to things like gossip and advertising, and have plenty of time for engaging in non-productive activities like shopping, texting, watching movies, playing sport, going to the gym. All true. But look closely at these activities and you will find odd urgencies and hidden agendas, brashness and addiction, and everywhere *business*: social-systems-entire hard at work making livelihoods and profit for their workers and owners. None of our leisure activities are contemplative, appreciative; none require awakening of the senses to their inherent capacities or training them. All require production and consumption of goods and services in an expanding market system; all cost us our freedom simply to *be*, to think. One is led to the Marxist charge that the ideal of continuous work and improving productivity is championed to the poor mainly by capitalists, by the ruling and would-be ruling classes, and by the idle rich (as well as, ironically, Protestant ministry). For a kinder view that argues for the centrality of “unproductiveness,” see Josef Pieper, *Leisure: the Basis of Culture* (Random House, 1963 [1952]).